

Lehrstuhl für Betriebswirtschaftslehre,  
insbesondere Organisation, Personal- und Informationsmanagement  
**Univ.-Prof. Dr. Chr. Scholz**

Christian Scholz/Tanja Bollendorf/Uwe Eisenbeis

**Consumer Interest in Media Content  
as a Function of Mental Scope**

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Universität des Saarlandes

Im Stadtwald, Gebäude 15

D-66041 Saarbrücken

Telefon (0681) 302-4120

Telefax (0681) 302-3702

E-mail: [scholz@orga.uni-sb.de](mailto:scholz@orga.uni-sb.de)

<http://www.orga.uni-sb.de>

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## Abstract

*Media can be distinguished according to the geographical scope of their news coverage and contents of news coverage. These are the two dimensions along which media companies can position themselves. Not much research has been dedicated yet to consumer needs with regard to a combination of these two dimensions. Our study provides first insights in the complex relationship of consumers regional identities and information needs. It extends classical news factor research by consumer needs and their relationship with regional identities and raises questions for further research which might prove relevant for media companies' strategic orientation.\**

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## 1 Need for research

Media companies have to manage the balance act between competitive and profit-maximizing media production on the one side, and media sales in the consumer and advertisement markets on the other hand. To improve competitiveness, many media companies go global and engage in internationalization strategies. Saturated home markets and shifting demands from the advertisement market are the driving forces behind the process of internationalization or transnationalization (e.g. *Hafstrand*, 1995). However, there is a broad range of strategies for the opening of new markets abroad. The study of microeconomic environments and influential factors with regard to a company's choice of an internationalization strategy are therefore among the most commonly used approaches to study the strategies of transnational media companies. (*Hollifield*, 2001: 135).

Depending on the market-entry-strategy, the company's presence in a country as well as its media products and services are affected in different ways. Internationalization strategies differ in the extend the multi-nationally distributed media products are standardized and they reach from internationally standardized products to diversified products, that are adapted to national, regional or local markets. *Pathania-Jain* (2001: 185) compared the benefits of regionalized media coverage between companies profiting from a global parent company, and companies engaging in collaborative alliances with local companies. She notices a clear "split between the creative aspects of cultural production, including the creative products themselves on one side, and other aspects of industrial practice and structure such as marketing and distribution on the other".

Standardized media present the least common denominator of consumers with diverse cultural backgrounds, and they target a user group which is locally dispersed across different countries, but nevertheless shares the same demand for a specific kind of information or entertainment (*Hafstrand*, 1995: 10). Companies following this strategy can profit from large economies of scale. However, the journalist's or advertiser's discovery of topics which appeal to people from every side of the border(s) can be comparable to the famous search for a needle in a haystack, if interests are too diverse. The failure of international media like *The European* (a former trans-European daily journal, see *Preston*, 2004) or the high subventions of existing multinational media like ARTE (a trans-European TV channel) show how difficult it is to drive international media to success.

Internationalization by strategic alliances or foundation of subsidiaries does not inevitably lead to standardized products. Strategies adapted to national or regional markets lead to media that are exclusively produced for a specific market or contain a standardized core besides a high proportion of locally produced editorial content. This second strategy is based on the transfer of media formula and managerial skills. "In some cases, the internationalization of a unique concept can be combined with the advantage of having a strong, internationally known brand. (...) Also, the sheer size of a company makes it easier to absorb costs for vital functions such as research and development" (*Hafstrand*, 1995: 10).



There is some evidence that, regardless of the level of internationalization, success of media companies depends of their anchorage in certain regions, that means from the company's local environment, its infrastructure, the surrounding companies and from local market conditions. *Scholz, Stein, Eisenbeis (2001)* and *Scholz, Bollendorf, Eisenbeis (2005)* found in an analysis of media regions that proximity to markets is, amongst others, a crucial factor for economic success of media companies. Case studies of German media companies conducted by *Sjurts (2004)* revealed that strategies of media groups are increasingly international, but the whole production process and markets stay rooted in regions.

Some research has been dedicated to the environmental factors influencing internationalization strategies. In saturated markets, the trend goes towards regional strategies of international media companies. *Jain (1989)* argues that the presence of competition favors regionalized products. *Shrinkhande (2001: 164)* found also evidence for this in a case study about the strategy of CNNI and BBC World in Asia: As competition increased, they both increased their financial commitment in Asia and spent more on personnel, planning and regionalized programming, achieved by subtitling and dubbing. Nevertheless, their strategies differed in that CNNI engaged in a broad regionalization, whereas BBC undertook less regionalization and focused its efforts of India.

As far as media markets get saturated, research should shift its focus from a company and strategy centered view to a market perspective. *Wilke (1994)* argues that in liberal media systems, media strategies have to be strongly oriented towards user needs.

The questions here are, with regard to a saturated market, what are the information needs of local residents and to what extent is regional, national and international information demanded if media users have them all at their disposition? The objective of this contribution is to find out, from a consumer orientated perspective, in which regional scope of news coverage media users are interested.



## 2 Assumptions about user needs

There have been controversies about how far media standardization can go from a user perspective. There is some evidence that domestic media are preferred over international media, because of their cultural proximity. If regional, national and international media are available, John Q. Public chooses one of the first two, what is especially true for information media (Kotler, 1986; Tracey, 1988, according to Shrikhande, 2001; Straubhaar, 1991). Hence, some researchers are clearly favoring regionalization of media contents (Bae, 1999). Clausen (2004: 41) calls it a "competitive edge".

A way to analyze media users' regional information needs is content analysis of media products or market analysis. Schwiesau and Ohler (2003: 68-69) found that regional and even local reporting is becoming increasingly important for media companies, especially in the journal and radio sectors. For Germany this is reflected in a high degree of regionalization in media industry. From about 250 private radio programs in Germany, only 18 can be received on a national level (ALM, 2003). An increasing number of supra-regional newspapers publish regional editions. This assures that journalism is close to markets and able to react to consumer needs. For U.S. media companies Utley (1997: 2) found that between 1988 and 1998, the time allocated to foreign news in the three major news broadcasting networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) has been reduced to less than a half. This corresponds with the observation that 75 out of the 100 biggest U.S. newspapers don't have correspondents abroad.

The International Foreign News Study (Stevenson, 1995) provides insights in geographic news focus in different countries. It resorts on international data which were collected by research teams in the respective countries and analyzed media contents with regard to regions. Data display country-specific preferences. For Germany, most editorial space was allocated to Germany and the European Union, to a lesser degree to other European countries (EU non-members), and the USA. All further, extra-European countries ranked very low in German news coverage (Wilke, 1998).

Wilke (1998) compared this International Foreign News Study with a "Foreign Image" study conducted by Sreberny-Mohammadi *et al.* (1980) and found that regionalism is an important constant in news coverage in general. That means that news are to a high degree dedicated to the region or "country compound" in which a media company is located. A similar pattern has already been found by Schenk (1987: 60). After a review of research dedicated to this topic, he comes to the conclusion that foreign news coverage is region centered. Interest in neighboring countries is followed by interest in greater entities which structure relationships between countries. He interprets the data as follows: economical and political interests of a country towards other countries function as a filter for international news coverage, followed by a more general interest for conflicts and crisis. Cohen *et al.* (1997) found in an international analysis that domestic news are always preferred to international news.

Further evidence of the assumption of a reverse relationship between distance and need for information is provided by analyses of so called news factors from a content producer perspective. A news factor is a factor determining the potential of an information to find its way into the journals or television news. It is driven by journalists' hy-



potheses about whether a certain event seems interesting and therefore "newsworthy" for the targeted audience. News factor theory is based on a news factor catalogue developed by Schulz (1976), which draws back on a former catalogue by Galtung and Ruge (1965). It is – besides the gate keeper model (Shoemaker, 1991) and the news bias model (Hackett, 1984) – the central concept to the idea of journalistic news selection and media contents. Proximity according to this model is seen as an important news factor, raising the probability that an event will be reported by the media.

There is also the contradictory position, stating that information needs are rather global or that at least a weighting of news according to their geographical distance from a certain audience does not take place. Studies which can be attributed to this line of research assume that other factors like perceived similarity between countries is a better predictor of a country's appearance in the news. In this line of research, Kamps (1998a) found for example that in German news coverage, not more editorial space is dedicated to the direct neighbor countries of Germany than to other European countries. Geographic distance to other countries alone does not lead to a higher consideration of those countries in news coverage. In a general model, Kamps (1998b: 283) distinguishes three strategies of news coverage, centralism, communication magnetism, and regionalism. Centralism refers to a news coverage strongly focused on the own country or nation. Communication magnetism describes a system in which an insider group of countries are mutually addressed in news coverage while other countries are always neglected. Regionalism is a strategy focused on a certain region of countries, which are geographically or culturally related or are similar to each other with respect to political system or economy.

With respect to these competing positions, we formulate our first hypotheses with regard to user needs in regional news coverage:

*Hypothesis 1a: Media recipients are mainly interested in news coverage concerning their own region.*

*Hypothesis 1b: Media recipients are mainly interested in world news.*

Especially the last presented model, assuming cultural similarity as a crucial factor, raises the question about regional identities. Social psychologists refer to identities in terms of self-categorization (e.g. Döring 2005), which means that persons assign identities to themselves and to others by categorizing them into groups. This categorization is based on salient characteristics of persons and a search for similarities, and identification is based on self-categorization into a group of people which are considered similar. According to Hofstede (1994) each culture has its own symbols, heroes, rituals and values, whereby symbols and heroes are the most obvious and perceivable cultural characteristics. Heroes present "prototypes" of a certain culture. In fact, researchers in the field of intercultural media communication doubt about international standardization of media highly focused on persons, like conventional news presentation..

Schulz (1976: 33, 41-42) extends the concept of proximity, stating that it is not necessarily expressed by geographical distance, but rather by cultural distance, comprising



geographical, political and cultural dimensions. *Staab* (1990: 120) adds an economic dimension to those of *Schulz. Schwiesau and Ohler* (2003: 55) emphasize the emotional proximity of regions, which determines how strong audiences are affected by news from other regions. The degree of cultural distance or proximity, and therefore shared identities, is determined by congruency of structural features like national character, language, nonverbal communication patterns or values, to quote only some of them (see *Maletzke*, 1996).

Hypothesis 2 refers to the concept of identity as explaining interest in news coverage about different regions.

*Hypothesis 2: Media recipients are only interested in news about regions with which they strongly identify.*

The content of regional news has not yet been addressed in our research review. Nevertheless, a differentiation according to topics can be assumed. There is some evidence that the regional scope of news coverage relevant for media users and their making use of it in daily life, differs and is dependent of the topic in question.

*Kamps* (1998a: 38) states for example with regard to politics, that consumers can expect regional targeted news selection, which is orientated towards their personal and societal needs. He develops a model of news geography that tries to overcome the limitations of former models, exclusively focusing on geographical distance, by integrating as a further dimension topic variance (*Kamps*, 1998b: 292). He distinguishes between four news foci: so called news centers are countries which are constantly in focus of news reporting, and cover a broad range of topics. News neighbors are countries, which are included in news reporting with some regularity and thematic variance. Thematic news neighbors are included in news reporting with some regularity, but they are much more restricted in their topics than the second group. This category comprises countries which are periodically in the news because of long-term developments of interest or with regard to events which raise short-term level of interest in them. News periphery comprises countries which are only punctual and hazardous of interest for news journalists. This group shows neither permanence nor thematic constancy in news reporting.

A study by *Hess* (1996: 119) found that in U.S. foreign news coverage, most editorial space is dedicated to combat (27,6%), human rights (17,3%) and domestic government (13,3%). Considered least were sports (1,5%) culture (1,6%) and accident/disaster (4,2%). Foreign news about topics not related to the own country do not encounter U.S. market needs and acceptance, which is true as well for television as for print media. From 135 articles published between 1986 and 1994, at least 30% appeared interesting to U.S. citizens and only 9 of those judged as interesting had no relation to USA.

Hypothesis 3 focuses therefore of the combination of geographic distance and topic-inherent characteristics on a general level.

*Hypothesis 3: The geographical scope of the news demand depends on the news subject.*



However, the reported findings of news topics and their geographical origin are based on content analyses. As far as we know, no research has been dedicated to a consumer centered research, combining the topic-centered perspective with the view of consistently expanding concentric rings of news coverage with decreasing potential to arouse interest, and their analysis from a user perspective. That means to the idea that geographical interest and topic variety decrease to the same extend with increasing distance from a media user's regions of residence. Our own analysis will therefore be based on a user-centered approach.

### 3 Methodology

To analyze from which geographical scope, relative to media users' place of residence, media users demand information in saturated markets, we chose a special research setting. The regional information demand can best be analyzed in an environment where a broad range of media with different scope in news coverage are available, from local to regional, national, international and even transnational reporting. Especially the last point is noteworthy, because it goes beyond internationally distributed "international" or "standardized" news and concerns news originally designed for a foreign target group and therefore presenting a real window to another country and country-specific views. To reach this goal we conducted our study in a cross-border region with a trilateral sample.

Border regions can be considered as test laboratories for consumer needs and internationalization strategies of media companies, because they are geographically limited, easy to conceive and the number of critical cultural variables can be more easily assessed than on a global level. Besides they comprise culturally similar regions, which has been identified as potential news factor in the previous chapter. Cultural similarity is due to a shared history, more active intercultural exchange by common projects and "border crossers" as well as politics that promote transborder cooperation, as is the case at least within the European Union.

The European Union funds transnational projects in its so called greater regions, which means regions along national borders, covering an area of some thousand square kilometers. In general the financial supply is supposed to function as a kind of seed capital that compensates the risk linked to transnational cooperation. Among the funded projects are for example transnational implantation areas, research networks, product development, multilingual internet platforms or transborder road construction. Many projects are political and economic in nature, but some also affect daily life, for example in the domain of school exchange, tourism and culture. Since European politics tries to enforce these projects especially in transborder regions, this should lead to multifaceted identities on the one hand and to information needs beyond borders on the other hand.

The research presented in this paper was part of a larger research project, analyzing interdependencies between location factors and synchronization potentials in a European greater region called SaarLorLux. The name SaarLorLux is composed of three parts that designate its constituents, regions in three European countries sharing common borders: Germany, France and Luxembourg. Saarland ("Saar") is one of the 16 Federal States of Germany with about one million inhabitants and a size of 2.500 square kilometers. Lorraine ("Lor") is one of 10 French regions with 2.3 million inhabitants and 23.500 square kilometers. Saarland and Lorraine both have vast political and economical decision making power. The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg ("Lux") is an autonomous country, but comprising only about the same size as the Saarland region and less than half of its inhabitants (about 452.000).

The official languages are German (Saarland), French (Lorraine) and German and French (Luxembourg). Nevertheless, Saarland and parts of Lorraine have regional dia-



lects which are different from the official German and French languages and are even similar, and Luxembourg has its own language which is different from German and French, but not used as an official language. People from Luxembourg are all polyglot, in contrary to Saarland and Lorraine, where only a relatively small amount of people is really multilingual and where the language barrier in journalism is therefore higher.

Transborder cooperation in SaarLorLux started in the 1950s and has lead to many bi- and trilateral agreements, supra-regional political and economical institutions, facilitation of trade connections and reduction of bureaucracy in transborder concerns. Thanks to this long tradition of cooperation, SaarLorLux has more border crossers than every other greater region into the European Union, that means people who live and work in different countries and cross the border every day to go to their workplace.

SaarLorLux was chosen as research reasons for two reasons. On the one hand, the research project was conducted at the University of Saarland which is located in this greater region. On the other hand, SaarLorLux is especially representative because of its position in the heart of Europe, an eventful interconnected history and long tradition of transborder cooperation, with the first common projects dating back to the 1950s. In former times, borders moved always for some hundred kilometers in one or the other direction as a consequence of wars or referendum, so that people living in the Saarland alternately had German or French nationalities or have been an independent status. Culturally heterogeneity of the SaarLorLux region can also be assumed, because a part of this greater region, Luxembourg, does accommodate institutions of the European Union.

The results presented in this paper recur on quantitative data from three questionnaires distributed in German and French versions in Saarland, Lorraine and Luxembourg. Our sample comprises 630 respondents from Saarland, 78 from Lorraine and 62 from Luxembourg, which cover all age groups, levels of education and professional categories.

## 4 Research region

The media economies of all three constituting regions are predominantly coined by small and medium sized regional media companies without national coverage nor transborder reach. Only Luxembourg has some important international companies like RTL group and SES Astra, thanks to a liberal media politics initiated in times when the whole broadcasting market in Europe was highly regulated. However, these companies don't offer inter-regional products or services especially designed for the SaarLorLux region, but either regional, national or global ones. Saarland and, to a lesser degree, Lorraine are characterized by the presence of one dominant company each in the broadcast and the journal sector, which unite extraordinary parts of the market shares in the regional reporting and along with whom smaller companies struggle for survival.

All in all, the SaarLorLux region comprises 2,089 media companies of different sub-branches. Table 1 presents a short overview over media companies by sub-region:

	Number of companies		
	Saarland	Lorraine	Luxembourg
Publishing Sector	69	189	108
Motion Picture and Video Activities (production, distribution, projection)	10	83	152
Radio and Television Activities	56	48	46
Advertising	364	424	323
News Agencies Activities	55	87	75
<b>total</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>831</b>	<b>704</b>

**Table 1: Number of media companies in the SaarLorLux region**

Compared to other media regions, concentration of media companies is quite low with only 0.08 media companies per square kilometers (to compare: 11.6 companies/square kilometers in Munich and its surrounding areas, 7 companies/square kilometres in Hamburg). Consequently, the regional media don't offer great employment chances. Table 2 shows the number of employees in media companies by branches.

	Number of employees		
	Saarland	Lorraine	Luxembourg
Publishing Sector	1.000	2.462	1.170
Motion Picture and Video Activities (production, distribution, projection)	157	528	320
Radio and Television Activities	1.183	295	608
Advertising	627	2.870	962
News Agencies Activities	136	77	66
<b>total</b>	<b>3.103</b>	<b>6.232</b>	<b>3.126</b>

**Table 2: Number of employees in the SaarLorLux media industry**

Transborder media cooperations take place predominantly in information exchange between journalists. However, they stay in the background and are not obvious for the media user. A considerable part of journalists is organized in a regional association



called Interregional Press. Members know each other and therefore facilitate access to news from the neighboring regions or exchange information. Interregional media products and services do not exist, except a little number of multilingual SaarLorLux-related internet platforms which are mainly sponsored by the European Union. Indeed, a look in history makes clear that past attempts to enforce and extend interregional media cooperation, for example in the exchange of ready made TV programs or the establishment of transborder media, all failed. There are also bilateral and even bilingual programs in regional TV and radio, but these are nearly exclusively conducted by public stations that consider it as a kind of obligation to raise intercultural awareness.

Although besides the regional media, international media are available through satellite, regional media from the neighbor regions are not easy to receive, because of a lack of interregional distribution structures and infrastructure. Regional print media don't have interregional distribution channels, nor have broadcast media. It is more by hazard than by purpose that households very close to the frontier can receive TV and radio programs from the neighbor regions. And although Luxembourg is an autonomous country and all kind of international press can be bought at kiosks in the Saarland, no one from Luxembourg will be found in the outlay.

Media politics are differently prioritized in the SaarLorLux region. Luxembourg not only enforces liberalization and deregulation in the broadcasting sector, but also highly subsidizes the production of international movies, mainly to raise its recognition in the world and to ameliorate its image. Aids of some million Dollar each year are possible because of Luxembourg's wealth stemming mainly from the banking sector. As to Saarland, media economy is considered an attractive growth sector from which the region should profit, but the dominant position of two media companies and a lack of money for implementation subventions, movie funding or amelioration of the infrastructure makes it impossible to seriously compete with established media regions in Germany. Lorraine does not focus on media politics at all, except from a cultural perspective. For example, movies which refer to the Lorraine region and stabilize the regional identity are funded, but money is to be made with other branches.

In a nutshell, the result of our analysis of the whole media region SaarLorLux, of which the here presented results are a small part, was that a crossborder harmonization of media location factors within the SaarLorLux region would be very difficult to attain, because of different political priorities, varying budgets, diverse infrastructure and technical conditions and absence of a shared vision among the key players. Although it turned out that some location factors could be synchronized quite easily across borders, the location factors which were identified to be the most central ones for an economically successful media region, would be most difficult to synchronize.

We found that special emphasis have to be granted on markets, since cooperation and business models within SaarLorLux would have to be market driven. Identification of sufficient huge markets in the transnational domain can incite investments in crossborder infrastructure and raise political awareness for interregional political harmonization, for example concerning the creation of transregional radio frequencies. However, crossborder market research up to this time has been quasi inexistent in the SaarLorLux region, both in advertisement and media usage.

In this context we analyzed interest in transnational news coverage and identities. 770 persons were ready to participate in the study. They were asked to indicate how interested they are in news coverage from different regionally defined entities, like own place of residence, SaarLorLux region or Europe. All Items were measured with five-point rating scales. The results can be related to findings about the local media infrastructure and implications for transborder strategies of regional media companies can be discussed.



## 5 Empirical results

Hypothesis 1a and 1b stated that media users are mainly interested in either regional news or global news. We therefore presented to respondents to a questionnaire in Saarland, Lorraine and Luxembourg different regional entities and asked them to estimate on a general level their interest in what happens in these entities. Respondents expressed their level of interest on a five-point rating scale. The regions were graded with regard to distance from their own place of living and geographical entities. The results clearly favor the regionalization hypothesis: Interest in one's own sub-region turned out to be strongest. Nevertheless, interest did not decrease with increasing distance from one's own region. According to our expected continuum of interest as a function of distance, information about SaarLorLux should clearly be favored compared to information about Europe and the world. In our study, interest in the direct European neighbor regions is always lower than interest in the European Union in general and even interest in extra European countries (Table 3).

Respondents stem from:	Saarland (n = 630)	Lorraine (n = 78)	Luxembourg (n = 62)
Interest in what happens in...			
... Saarland	<b>4.23</b>	2.11	2.31
... Lorraine	2.25	<b>3.99</b>	1.89
... Luxembourg	2.33	2.11	<b>4.78</b>
... neighbor country	2.63	2.00	2.54
... European Union	3.51	3.14	4.06
... extra European countries	3.19	2.46	3.57

**Table 3: Level of interest in news covering from different regions within SaarLorLux**

Building a ranking according to the means we found, we get a pattern which is shown in Table 4.

Saarland	Lorraine	Luxembourg
1. own region	1. own region	1. own region
2. European Union	2. European Union	2. European Union
3. Extra-European countries	3. Extra-European countries	3. Extra-European countries
4. neighbor country (France)	4. Saarland and Lorraine	4. Neighbor country (Belgium)
5. Luxembourg	5. neighbor country (Germany)	5. Saarland
6. Lorraine		6. Lorraine

**Table 4: Ranking of news scopes preferred by media users in Saarland, Lorraine and Luxembourg**

This pattern shows that on the one hand, information interest is regional, but on the other hand, clearly orientated along national borders on a supra-regional level. In all three regions, interest in the own region is followed by interest in countries of the European Union in general and interest in extra-European countries. Interest in a concrete European country is lesser than interest in Europe in general, even if the country is



geographically very close. Nevertheless, on a national level, neighboring countries appear more interesting than on a regional level.

We analyzed this pattern within the framework of regional identities. Respondents were asked to assess, again on a five-point scale (1 = very low to 5 = very strong), how strong they identify with different regional entities: their own place of residence, their own sub-region within SaarLorLux (Saarland, Lorraine or Luxembourg), the greater region SaarLorLux, their own country and Europe (please note that for Luxembourg, sub-region and country are identical, because the whole Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is a part of the greater region SaarLorLux). The means are displayed in Table 5.

Respondents stem from:	Saarland (n = 630)	Lorraine (n = 78)	Luxembourg (n = 62)
Intensity of identification with...			
... own sub-region	<b>4.04</b>	3.93	<b>4.70</b>
... greater region	2.47	2.03	2.12
... the own country	3.94	<b>4.15</b>	<b>4.70</b>
... Europe	3.70	3.11	3.96

**Table 5: Intensity of identification within different regional entities within SaarLorLux**

The results show a similar pattern as with regard to regional news interests. Identification has been strongest with one's own region and one's country (whereby the ranking order of both is different in Saarland and Lorraine). Europe ranks third in each sample and the greater region SaarLorLux, although being the entity most proximate to one's own region is ranked last. The differences between Saarland and Lorraine concerning identification with region and country are not surprising and go back to different political, economical and cultural traditions between the two countries. While Saarland is one of the autonomous federal states of the decentralized Federal Republic of Germany, France is a much more centralized country and French regions are much more dependent on their Parisian government. Nevertheless the overall pattern ranking different national before European identities, and interregional identities being least pronounced, resembles strongly to the pattern found in regional news coverage interests.

To test hypothesis 2 (media users are only interested in reporting about regions to which they feel strongly tied), we correlated identities with regional interests. Correlations were conducted separately for the three different samples. Results here are not so easy interpretable, since they revealed different patterns for the three national samples.

As to the Saarland sample (Table 6) we found correlations significant at 0.01 level for a series of identities and regional interests. The most strong correlations were found for identification with the Saarland region and interest in news covering about Saarland ( $r = 0,488^{**}$ ) and for identification with the greater region SaarLorLux and interest in news coverage about the neighboring regions Lorraine and Luxembourg ( $r = 0,565^{**}$  and  $r = 0,505^{**}$  respectively) and the European Union. To a lesser degree but nevertheless significant, identification with Saarland correlated also positively with general interest in Lorraine and Luxembourg ( $r = 0,154^{**}$  and  $r = 0,119^{**}$ ), slightly negative with general



interest in the European Union ( $r = -0,063$ ) and significantly negatively with general interest in extra European countries ( $r = -0,084^{**}$ ). Identification with Germany only correlates significantly positive with the smaller unit within Germany (Saarland,  $r = 0,095^{*}$ ), but not with other, supranational or interregional entities. Identification with Europe correlates significantly with interest in each of the proposed regions and can be seen as a bracket comprising interest in what happens in smaller national and regional as well as larger entities (the world).

Intensity of identification with:	Saarland	SaarLorLux	Germany	Europe
Interest in what happens in...				
... Saarland	0.488** (n = 601)	0.341** (n = 582)	0.095* (n = 602)	0.081* (n = 591)
... Lorraine	0.154** (n = 590)	0.565** (n = 577)	-0.024 (n = 590)	0.152** (n = 585)
... Luxembourg	0.119** (n = 590)	0.505** (n = 578)	-0.017 (n = 590)	0.162** (n = 585)
... European Union	-0.063 (n = 596)	0.106* (n = 580)	0.012 (n = 597)	0.434** (n = 589)
... extra European countries	-0.084* (n = 590)	0.020 (n = 576)	-0.018 (n = 591)	0.304** (n = 585)

\* correlation is significant on a 0.05 level; \*\* correlation is significant on a 0.01 level

**Table 6: Correlation between intensity of identification with different regions and regionally shaped interest in news coverage in the Saarland sample**

As in the Saarland sample, in Lorraine we also found a strong correlation between identification with Lorraine and need for news coverage about the region at 0.001 level ( $r = 0,520^{**}$ ). However this identity did not correlate with further geographical entities. Identification with SaarLorLux correlated with interest in news coverage about Lorraine ( $r = 0,288^{*}$ ) and Luxembourg ( $r = 0,249^{*}$ ), but not with Saarland. Identification with France correlated with neither of our proposed regions, not even with regional news coverage about Lorraine, and a strong European identity correlated only with European information needs ( $r = 0,400^{**}$ ) and interest in World news ( $r = 0,394$ ). The results are displayed in Table 7.

Intensity of identification with:	Lorraine	SaarLorLux	France	Europe
Interest in what happens in...				
... Saarland	-0.031 (n = 68)	0.110 (n = 68)	-0.184 (n = 67)	0.133 (n = 70)
... Lorraine	0.520** (n = 70)	0.288* (n = 67)	0.202 (n = 69)	0.049 (n = 72)
... Luxembourg	0.144 (n = 69)	0.249* (n = 68)	-0.098 (n = 68)	0.036 (n = 7771)
... European Union	-0.165 (n = 69)	0.074 (n = 67)	0.001 (n = 68)	0.400** (n = 70)
... extra European countries	-0.137 (n = 68)	0.017 (n = 67)	0.180 (n = 67)	0.394** (n = 70)

\* correlation is significant on a 0.05 level; \*\* correlation is significant on a 0.01 level

**Table 7: Correlation between intensity of identification with different regions and regionally shaped interest in news coverage in the Lorraine sample**

In Luxembourg, the relationships between regional identities and information needs were least pronounced. A strong Luxembourg identity did not even correlate significantly with information behavior directed towards Luxembourg. A strong European identity was significantly correlated with interest in what happens in European as well as extra-European countries ( $r = 0,438^{**}$  and  $r = 0,492$  respectively). Identification with SaarLorLux correlated at least with interest in Saarland ( $r = 0,424$ ).

Intensity of identification with:	Luxembourg	SaarLorLux	Europe
Interest in what happens in...			
... Saarland	0.122 (n = 49)	0.424** (n = 48)	0.018 (n = 49)
... Lorraine	-0.027 (n = 49)	0.261 (n = 48)	-0.172 (n = 49)
... Luxembourg	0.164 (n = 49)	0.063 (n = 48)	-0.075 (n = 49)
... European Union	0.131 (n = 49)	0.064 (n = 48)	0.438** (n = 49)
... extra European countries	-0.012 (n = 49)	0.034 (n = 48)	0.492** (n = 49)

\* correlation is significant on a 0.05 level; \*\* correlation is significant on a 0.01 level

**Table 8: Correlation between intensity of identification with different regions and regionally shaped interest in news coverage in the Luxembourg sample**



The results presented in the former sections, showed that neither interest in nor identification with neighboring regions, belonging to different national entities, are very distinct. The remarkable result is that they are higher both for smaller and for larger entities, forming a part of a nation (place of residence, region) or aggregating many nations (Europe, the world). Interregional awareness is very weak, despite a huge amount of political attempt to create a sense of community and to enforce mutual understanding and exchange within the SaarLorLux region.

Interest in a special topic correlates significantly with information behavior, which means active search for information about this specific topic. Respondents were asked if they actively searched information about a topic within last week, within last month or earlier. Correlations have been conducted (Spearman's Rho) for the Saarland sample, and each of them was significant.

To test hypothesis 3 (the potential to face the media users demands depends of a combination of topic and geographical scope of news coverage), we asked respondents how strong they feel that they would need more information from four different regions, thereby distinguishing between different news groups or topics. Again, we analyzed results for our three samples separately. Table 9 shows the results of the Saarland sample.

Sample Saarland (%)	Interest for own region	Interest for greater region SaarLorLux	Interest for own country	Interest for world
Politics	<b>33.2</b>	5.2	18.1	21.3
Economy/Finances	<b>28.6</b>	3.3	19.7	20.0
Companies	<b>28.3</b>	4.0	15.7	12.4
Society	<b>21.9</b>	3.2	18.6	19.5
Sports	18.6	1.6	15.1	<b>22.7</b>
Literature	12.9	2.1	17.3	<b>21.6</b>
Art	15.2	1.7	12.1	<b>20.5</b>
Theatre	<b>24.0</b>	1.7	12.9	10.2
Music	18.4	2.5	14.8	<b>24.4</b>
Technology	14.9	2.4	15.1	<b>23.0</b>
Science	<b>26.7</b>	3.5	18.1	18.7
Consumer information	<b>23.0</b>	2.2	17.3	8.3
Celebrities	15.6	1.4	12.5	<b>20.0</b>
Events and festivals	<b>35.9</b>	4.6	13.3	7.0
<b>average</b>	<b>22.7</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>15.8</b>	<b>17.8</b>

**Table 9: Amount of a desired increase in news coverage per region in the Saarland sample**

Information about Saarland are highly required by media users from the Saarland region, but in combination with news from the neighboring regions, demand is strongly reduced. The highest amount of news is required either on a regional or international level. A similar pattern is found in the Lorraine sample (Table 10).

Sample Lorraine (%)	Interest for own region	Interest for greater region SaarLorLux	Interest for own Country	Interest for world
Politics	28.2	6.6	30.3	30.8
Economy/Finances	25.6	5.3	22.4	24.4
Companies	29.5	7.9	19.7	10.3
Society	25.6	11.8	23.7	20.5
Sports	14.1	3.9	19.7	28.2
Literature	15.4	2.6	19.7	20.5
Art	17.9	3.9	19.7	21.8
Theatre	19.2	2.6	21.1	11.5
Music	15.4	6.6	18.4	30.8
Technology	19.2	5.3	19.7	28.2
Science	17.9	3.9	19.7	16.7
Consumer information	20.5	3.9	25.0	12.8
Celebrities	15.4	6.6	19.7	25.6
Events and festivals	26.9	9.2	15.8	15.4
average	20.8	5.7	21.0	21.3

**Table 10: Amount of a desired increase in news coverage per region in the Lorraine sample**

As to Luxembourg, results for own region and country are based on the same ratings, since no distinction could be made. The results are shown in Table 11.

Sample Luxembourg (%)	Interest for own region/country	Interest for greater region SaarLorLux	Interest for world
Politics	38.7	0.0	38.7
Economy/Finances	37.1	1.6	29.0
Companies	43.5	1.6	12.9
Society	35.5	0.0	22.6
Sports	19.4	1.6	45.2
Literature	21.0	0.0	35.5
Art	25.8	0.0	33.9
Theatre	35.5	3.2	16.1
Music	27.4	1.6	38.7
Technology	19.4	0.0	35.5
Science	35.5	0.0	35.5
Consumer information	38.7	0.0	19.4
Celebrities	25.8	0.0	32.3
Events and festivals	41.9	1.6	12.9
average	31.8	0.8	29.2

**Table 11: Amount of a desired increase in news coverage per region in the Luxembourg sample**



## 6 Discussion

To summarize, hypothesis one and two have been partly confirmed. Interest in regional news coverage does decrease consistently with increasing distance from the market for which it is presented. A model of concentric circles of decreasing interest or a reversed relationship between distance and general interest in news coverage can be assumed, but only within national and supra-national entities. Interregional entities like greater regions within the European Union can not be integrated into this model. Very few interest is accorded to news coverage focused exclusively on particular regions within other countries, be they also geographically very close to one's own place of living.

Regional identifications turned out to be a good predictor of geographically delimited regions at least in the German sample. The generalizability of this finding has to be put into question, since this pattern was weaker for the Lorraine and weakest for the Luxembourg sample. A possible explanation of this finding is a multicultural society which is most pronounced in Luxembourg. The whole Luxembourg society is multilingual thanks to the specificities of the cultural and education system and EU institutions located in Luxembourg. It seems to be the case for people growing up in a naturally multicultural environment, that a strong European identity is developed, which is completely disconnected from smaller, sub-national entities, even if they are also culturally heterogeneous and easy available. In the multicultural Luxembourg population we found a strong European identity and a weak interregional identity.

This would mean, that a differentiation takes place with regard to the own country, which leads to multiple identities within a country (place of residence – region – country), but as to foreign countries, a differentiation in sub-cultures is badly conceivable. Inhabitants of the Saarland region perceive themselves as being German and having a regional identity as well, which is partly different from the German one, but Inhabitants of Lorraine are perceived as French only. This is strongly reflected by results of our further analysis. Future research therefore has to put greater emphasis of the factors influencing cultural identities.

Hypothesis three has been confirmed. We analyzed which scope of regional news covering is most wanted from media users in three regions belonging to different nations. Results reflected also the patterns found in testing hypotheses one and two, in so far as topics referring to interregional reporting appealed least to regional media users and information about the own region is generally preferred to information about one's own country. The remaining two geographic entities are one's own region and the world, which polarize topics most strongly. The pattern of results in all samples has been widely the same and culture-independent: interest for politics, economy/finance, companies, societies, theatre, consumer information as well as events/festivals is strongly regional (measured as interest for "own region"). Interest in information about sports, literature, art, music, technology and celebrities is rather international (measured as interest for "world").

The results of the test of hypothesis 3 can be interpreted in the light of the "information value model" used by news factor researchers: This model (see *Schwiesau* and *Ohler*,

2003: 50-58) distinguishes between "knowledge and orientation value", "utility value" and "conversation and entertainment value". Knowledge and orientation value refers to information needed for media user's orientation and formation of opinion. It shapes perceptions of reality and thinking schemes. Utility value designates "news to use" from which recipients profit and which can have a direct impact of actions. Conversation and entertainment news don't affect media user's daily life, but provide topics for dialogues.

The subjects addressed in our analysis of hypothesis 3 can each be assigned to one of the three values of the information value model. Politics, economics/finance, companies and society can be assigned to the category of knowledge and orientation value. Theatre, consumer information and events/festivals are "news to use" and therefore belong to the category of information with utility value. Sports, literature, art, music, technology and celebrities are topics with social relevance (conversation and entertainment).



## 7 Limitations

The results presented in this paper are based on data from one single region within the European Union, which surely has special characteristics as pointed out in chapter 4. Although the pattern of results proved quite similar for data collected in each of the three, to different nation states belonging regions, their generalizability has to be confirmed in further analyses.

We also did not have a closer look at the identities of respondents in the three analyzed regions. We saw in the analysis of our data that people in SaarLorLux have multiple identities and that the factors influencing those multiple identities seem to be very complex. When referring to identities in a transborder European region, factors as language skills, distance of a person's place of residence, age or education should be considered, and analyzed in their influence of the shaping of identities and media needs. This would allow a better targeting of user groups or even a classification of media users with respect to geographical scope of news coverage and topics. Future research should consider these factors and their implications for transborder media products.

As further limitation, the inhomogeneous sizes of our samples could be seen, comprising 630 from Saarland and only 78 for Lorraine and 62 from Luxembourg. However this does not affect the explanatory power of our results. Despite the smaller samples in two regions, the results from the main sample could be mirrored and showed the same pattern.

## 8 Conclusion

In this paper, we addressed current insights from news factor research and geographical scope of news covering, but analyzed them from a purely user-centered view. We provided some new insights with regard to transnational news coverage and topic specific geographical news coverage. The results of our study provide for an extension of the information value model by specifying contents of the three model components: knowledge and orientation value are only region centered, as well as utility values. Conversation and entertainment values are world centered.

The results provide first insights for media companies with regard to their strategic adjustment in regional targeting of user groups and topic selection in relation to geographic targeting. The fields of cultural identity, contents and geographical targeting should be combined in further research to analyze influential factors of the detected relationships and make the results generalizable across regions.



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