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Critical media literacy in action: improved interest and knowledge in intercultural context

ABSTRACT: The goal of the paper is to present the effects of the course development resulting in changes in critical media literacy. The first part of the paper outlines the academic sources supporting the course development of media studies in the context of intercultural teaching. After this section, details of perceptual feedback research and its mixed methodology are available. According to the findings, critical media literacy of students has been improved due to the academic social media sources in

analysis, regional case studies in an intercultural context, and fact check techniques in news consumption. The ultimate result was a deeper understanding of the values behind media freedom. Moreover, the level of knowledge in historical and political fields has increased, and the ethnocentric perspective has collapsed as the intercultural environment. The closing section of the paper summarizes the key findings and the contribution to the course developments with recommendations. The main message of the study is the importance of the case study based on the intercultural and historical approach in media studies to improve critical media literacy in higher education.

KEYWORDS: critical media literacy, Central Eastern Europe, media freedom, historical background, social media, fake news, media consumption, intercultural teaching

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1. INTRODUCTION

The authors had the great opportunity to be invited to participate in an international team focused on developing two unique media courses at Masaryk University in the Czech Republic. The titles of the courses were "Media and Political Systems" as a bachelor's course and "Post-communist Media" as a master's course. The goal was to present the media trends of Central-Eastern Europe (CEE) in regional and historical context with case studies. With the words of the course objectives, the purpose was "to improve critical thinking about how media communicates and how it is consumed in the era of new media." Students were engaged in the course and expressed interest in a critical approach to media and politics, freedom of speech,

and fact-checking in a historical and comparative context. The reason behind the engagement was the intercultural team of lecturers and professors (hereinafter referred to as "lecturers" as a category) having various perspectives and case studies. They presented their insight into media and politics with the historical backgroundoflocal scholars from different countries. The historical or current case studies were memorable for the students. The discussions, studentpresentations, roundtables, and case study analysis facilitate effective learning. These pedagogical methods supported the evaluation of the teaching process (Lakkala et al., 2018). Additionally, the lecturers offered online and offline academic resources for students to study in preparation for the discussions. This methodology supported the higher level of critical media literacy understanding of the diversity in the region in the intercultural context.

The Masaryk University invited students to enroll in the optional courses in the framework of an Erasmus+ program and the local bachelor or master programs. Due to the Erasmus program, student participants arrived from different countries inside and outside the CEE region. The international seminars comprised participants in 81 percent from Europe and 19 percent from Asia, Africa, and America. Course leaders arrived from Europe and Asia, such as Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Georgia, and South Korea. All of them had a strong focus on media studies but with different points of view from public service media to social media. The language of the courses was English. The lecturers and the students had various cultural backgrounds. Obviously, the course leaders and the students represented two different generations with different experiences with media consumption.

Having the course development and intercultural cooperation resolved, the course leaders set a goal to doa research project about the impact of the curriculum. The main question was what had changed during the courses regarding the knowledge and interest in the context of media and politics. Additional questions were available about the warranty of media freedom and the practice of fact-checking. The feedback research supported a deep insight.

This paper will present the research methodology in detail and the findings of the quantitative and qualitative parts of the investigation. Before these sections, an academic overview introduces the considered dimensions of the research study. At the end of the paper, recommendations will be formulated to support future course developments.

2. CRITERIA OF COURSE DEVELOPMENTS AND THEIR ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

Regarding the developed courses, the team of lecturers considered two branches of criteria for the course developments. The first branch of criteria belonged to the cultural-generational dimension, such as the intercultural context due to the cultural diversity in the classroom, and also, the generation gap between the lecturers and students in terms of media knowledge, media consumption, and political interest. The second branch of the criteria highlighted the dimensions of the courses, such

as media literacy, media, and politics, and also, the history in the context of media. The latter assumes different levels of knowledge in the classroom due to the various backgrounds of the students.

2.1. Dimensions of culture and generation

The first branch of the criteria of course developments contains the regional-intercultural context of course developments. Internationalization and interculturalism in education give students a chance to encounter various, often competing, points of view and ways of perceiving the world (Leask, 2020). People of other nationalities or different cultures are a positive challenge, an opportunity to discuss values, behaviors, or norms (Portera, 2017). Intercultural education is also a mission because it introduces a new approach to identity and cultural diversity for growth instead of being a threat (Portera, 2017). In groups of culturally differentiated and ethnically limited intercultural interactions, there may be a fear that the lack of common knowledge or experience, as well as a varied level of language proficiency, may underestimate the level of achievement (Leask, 2020. Effectively addressing these challenges and taking advantage of the opportunities of intercultural education requires creating conditions in which students will be able to make use of their benefits.

Beyond the crucial issue of integration (Spencer-Oatey& Dauber, 2019), intercultural theoreticians also talk about the necessity of overcoming obstacles, experiencing strenuous situations, and leaving the comfort zone to develop intercultural skills. One of the opportunities for "stretching" is the cosmopolitan example of how lecturers can change students' points of view (Spencer-Oatey& Dauber, 2019). Lecturers must create an environment conducive to the creation of bridges between different cultures and encourage students to exchange internationally and inter-culturally (Leask, 2020), also by adapting teaching methods to the group diversity and building an open lecturer-student relationship (Jackson, 2015). Their task is to point to the valuable resources of intercultural knowledge in the group and in the society and to provide students with their experiences using different perspectives and knowledge sources (Leask, 2020. With regard to intercultural education concerning only one specific region, namely the region of CEE, issues concerning the system transformation and history of the communist era are becoming an important element. This particular type of knowledge and experience allows for the creation of bridges that are not so much of an intercultural nature (though undoubtedly an important element), but rather of the historical context of two different eras in the history of this region: totalitarianism and democracy. The history of CEE countries has remained largely unknown to many other nations. This gap of knowledge is a severeimpediment in disseminating more comprehensive information about CEE for the younger generation. Even students with roots in the CEE countries are not aware of the own region's past. The Internet is full of opinions and personal views about everything. However, it does not indicate credibility. The students do not use sources beyond the Internet. Therefore, they are lost and overloaded (Richardson, 2017). Consequently, developing courses in an intercultural context and with a diversity of case studies

is crucial in media and politics. The diversity results in a complex perspective with a critical approach. Further considerations are available in chapter 2.2. regarding critical media literacy.

The generation gap is another challenge in most cases of the learning process in higher education.However, the generation gap assumes two extra layers in the context of media and politics. The first one presupposes different kinds of new media consumption; namely, the lecturers follow both old and new media while students prefer online sources. Both generations are capable of transferring knowledge from this view. The second one assumes different media experiences in the region with different attitudes. The younger generation has a dual attitude toward political systems and their media representations. First of all, mainstream politics and voting engage them less compared to the alternatives means for finding their own voice within digitally networked actions in a democratic context (Sloam, 2014; Banaji & Cammaerts, 2014; Van Biezen et al., 2012). The reason behind this generational attitude is the socialization occurring within social networks (Loader et al., 2014). In contrast, the older generation has built their political interest and identity in family, schoolwork, or mainstream media. When these different generations with different attitudes meet in a classroom, both generations can learn from each other to improve their critical thinking in media literacy, especially by case studies. Illustrating with an example, the mutual knowledgetransfer supports the understanding of fake news, conspiracy theories, propaganda, and further media phenomena. Critical thinking is particularly important in the case of social networks. These networks primarily spread misinformation (Nelson & Taneja, 2018). Finally, intergenerational critical thinking results in not only a higher level of media literacy (Craft et al., 2017), but it also provides healthy future citizens (Lindell & Sartoretto, 2017) with high levels of critical media literacy and social values. In conclusion, university studies support media literacy for both generations. Therefore, media literacy is not only a narrow, pedagogical field, but it is also a field of collaboration across different knowledge and disciplines (Bulger & Davison, 2018) and a chance to understand the importance of critical thinking in the context of media and politics.

To summarize, generational differences and intercultural contexts determine the outputs of a course. Considering this approach, it is a critical point that the lecturers prepare and manage the course development responsibly and with an understanding of this intercultural and intergenerational power dynamic.

2.2. Media literacy: politics, history, and fake news

The second branch of the criteria is focused on critical media literacy connected to politics and history. According to the summary of critical media literacy, it is aprocess of understanding how the media construct knowledge about the world in a complex social-cultural-political context (Alvermann et al., 1999). It is worth mentioning that media literacy is an important skill in contemporary societies and one of the most effective tools for counteracting fake news and maintain independent, pluralistic media and information systems (United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2013;Kuś& Barczyszyn-Madziarz, 2020). The list of competencies in media literacy created by UNESCO (2013) concentrates around three general: access, evaluation, and creation (Trültzsch-Wijnen et al., 2017).The case of fake news can be related to terms like propaganda and manipulation. Thus, we can consider this issue in the context of the historical experiences of the CEE countries. For countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015), the end of the Second World War did not mean liberation. The Soviet Union defeated Nazi Germany but brought up the next totalitarianism. Countries of the region remained in the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union (USSR). As Łukasz Kamiński (2014, p. 380) points out, the Soviets gained control over the country; the communist party took charge. They exercised control over the administration, the economy, the media, education, and all other domains of social life. They used terror and propaganda (Kamiński, 2014, p. 380 to seize power. The Cold War and arms race gradually reduced the resources of the Soviet Union. Political transitions in the region began in Poland in 1980. However, USSR in the late 80s was in a state of permanent crisis. We can quote Paweł Stachowiak (2016), "The Solidarity (oppositional movement) won the first semi-free elections in Poland in 1989." (p. 195), Poland gained in 1989 its first non-communist government with Tadeusz Mazowiecki as a prime minister. As Andrzej Friszke (2011) wrote, "The model of Polish transformation became an impulse which stimulated the freedom movements in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, although not all are willing to admit it today." Spring of nations (1990/1991) changed the world. Many enslaved Soviet countries come to the road of freedom and democracy. The political system of the People's Republic of Poland had been rapidly changed by a new, democratic government.

A profound relationship exists between the political and media systemsthat areprofoundly related to the critical media literacy competencies and skills. Journalists' autonomy and professionalisation influence the whole system. Moreover is connected with students of journalism and communication formation. Direct reference may be made to Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini's (2004)classification of media systems, which assumes that the state is important in shaping a country's media system. Hallin and Mancini observed that a basic form of state influence hadbeen public media. In Western Europe, public media has long operated on the principles governing public monopolies, while in the former Soviet bloc countries, they have functioned as state media. The authorities in various countries, as the media's legislators and funders, could exploit the public media for political ends. In the 1980s, ongoing technological developments changed this situation markedly. Decision-makers had to allow commercial entities to enter the market, which led both to a shrinking of the broadcasters' audience and to commercialization.

Over the years, various researchers have made use of Hallin and Mancini's classification, taking further the research results, which they published in 2004 (Aalberg et al., 2010; Benson et al., 2012; Esser et al., 2012; Voltmer, 2013). Hallin and Mancini's classification has been broadened, widely discussed, and also frequently criticized, if only for its initial mission of the countries of the post-communist bloc (Castro-Her-

rera et al., 2017). Hallin and Mancini's approach of media systems wasmarked by variables such as the level of media market development in a particular country, its level of print media readership, the extent of political parallelism, the degree of journalistic professionalism, and the extent and nature of state intervention. The countries of the former eastern bloc have been compared to the Italian model, where both political affiliations and commercialization in the public media are strong (Peruško et al., 2013,Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012; Hallin & Mancini, 2013, 2017; Wyka, 2007). The level of political and commercial affiliations directly affectsthe skills and competencies of citizens or even journalists in media literacy. Dobek-Ostrowska (2015), among CEE countries, created a more comprehensive classification of media systems. She divided the CEE countries' media systems into four types: hybrid liberal, politicized media, media in transition, and authoritarian(Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015). The knowledge about the past of this region, particularly among the younger generation, is a crucial element of education on the academic level. The CEE countries' experience could be the lesson as well for the younger generation as the other nations in the area of propaganda and manipulation in media.

The great challenge facing today's media is to serve an individualized, post-industrial society. We may observe the slow transformation from channels into platforms with content collected from various sources. These platforms work or will work in a personalized manner in a non-linear, interactive Internet environment. Of course, changes in areas such as the reception and distribution of media are taking place in stages, but fairly quickly all the same. From these changes arise both positive phenomena and certain threats. The term fake news has recently become very popular. We can define this phenomenon as a wide range of disinformation and misinformation circulating online and in the media (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, pp. 44; Fletcher et al., 2018).

3. METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS, SAMPLING, AND RESEARCH LIMITS

The research goal is to have feedback on the course development based on students' perceptions. The focus is on the changes comparing the inputs and outputs. To measure the changes, a questionnaire was produced, and it included both quantitative and qualitative parts. The research hypotheses and the research question converged toeach other to measure the results, to provide deep insight, and to compare the obtained results.

The sampling was immediately completed after the courses for perceptual feedback research. The method allows collecting students' short summaries about the studies without any stress or expectation. After the assessment, it was not risky for them to answer the questions in the questionnaire.

All students of the courses, namely, 27 volunteers as anonymous participants, filled the questionnaire. The majority of the students had master studies, and a minority of them were atbachelor level.As to their nationality, Czech, Slovak, and further European students were primarily represented. However, a quarter of the stu-

dents also hailed from the Middle East, South America, and Africa. Most of them described wanting to be a journalist, PR officer, or marketing expert. These orientations matched their studies of media and journalism, political science, and marketing or PR. Besides, the students were representative of the younger generation who isdigital natives or "native speakers" of the digital language on the Internet and social networks. They were engaged to contribute to the research.

Regarding the number of participants, universal consequences are not be deduced. Considering the similar carrier goal of the students and regarding the small number of participants, the results were not separated or clustered as the level of studies or nationalities. However, measurable changes and thoughtful results have become available. To define the scope, the focus was on the media interest and knowledge to measure the changing dimensions of critical media literacy from media consumption to fact check.Considering this scope, the research hypotheses were formulated as follows:

> » RH1 The knowledge and interest in media literacy increase measurably due to the course development
> » RH2 The media consumption and practice of fact-checking change partly due to the studies
> » RH3 The approach of media freedom becomes more crucial in the case of critical media literacy

To test the hypotheses, the research questionnaire applied close-ended questions and questions with a Likertscale. Both of the question types tested the hypotheses in several ways. Due to the number of participants, only the frequencies were highlighted in the results. The research outputs are available in the chapter "Findings."

Qualitative research is inherently subjective, marked by opinions and the personality of a researcher (Creswell, 2013). This part of the research applies open-ended questions of the survey. The main goal of qualitative research is to extend the knowledge gained in quantitative scrutiny. It allows confronting the knowledge of students about media and the history of CEE before and after the courses to enable self-reflection, which may result in valuable conclusions concerning media systems and politics. The following research questions were posed:

> » RQ1 Have the fact-checking competences of students increased after the course in the perspectives of diversification of sources and the intercultural nature of the lecturer team?
> » RQ2 Have the critical attitudes of students been raised after the course due to the intercultural character of the courses?
> » RQ3 Have the knowledge of history and politics increased after the course in the context of media freedom?

To receive answers to these research questions, the open-ended questions were put in the focus. The students formulated the changes in their own words, sentences, and texts as their perception. The results were summarized in tag clouds in the next chapter.

The research limit was the number of students. The main reason for this was special cooperation with the course leaders who had developed the curriculum for the unique project. An option for extension was not available. Nevertheless, the results are usable as they highlight the advantages of similar projects. If intercultural course developments are available in related fields with the same goal, the research is repeatable.

4. FINDINGS

The feedback questionnaire operated with quantitative and qualitative parts as well. The goal was to measure the changes precisely. Additionally, gaining deeper insight was also the aim.

The student participants were engaged in the course. They were interested in taking a critical approach to the post-communist media, media and politics, freedom of speech, propaganda, and fake news in historical context via case studies and comparative discussions. The reason behind the engagement was the intercultural team of lecturers who presented case studies from their culture. It was a fundamental point because certain case studies are available only in the original language of the source. Moreover, these case studies are not deeply understandable without local embeddedness. Lecturers interpreted their native case studies in English and with background information based on local news and academic sources of the Central-Eastern European region. The historical and current case studies were memorable for the students. The majority of the participants were reading about public life and politics both in their mother tongue and English. Their sources were the Internet and social media as their choice. Old media with a broadcasting model or with newspapers were not relevant for this generation. The results as they relate to the hypothesis will be presented in the next section.

4.1. Quantitative findings

According to the research hypotheses, three main changes were expected, such as interest in critical media literacy, the practice of media consumption and fact-checking, and also the importance of media freedom. These are closely related fields interacting with each other. For instance, if students learn techniques of media critics, they will be more aware of their media consumption or media freedom.

Testing the first hypothesis and the main scope, levels of interest and knowledge in media studies have been measured as their inputs and outputs on a scale of 1 to 10. Regarding this hypothesis, four aspects were revealed in detail: 1) general interest; 2) knowledge about the media, 3) level of knowledge about media manipulation, and 4) knowledge of media history. According to the students' perception, every aspect changed measurably during the courses (see Figure 1). Therefore, the first hypothesis was verified. More than ten percent growth was the achievement in all four dimensions in a single semester on a scale of 1 to 10. The level of knowledge and interest increased slightly less. Besides, the level of knowledge in media manipulation rose

a little bit more. Consequently, the developed courses were not only successful for them, but their positive impact needs to be highlighted. The greatest growth was in the case of knowledge about media history with a total of fifteen percent. The latter result is noticeable considering the importance of this field on media literacy. In case of repetition of the research, it would be necessary to examine previous studies on media history in the literature. It is possible that former studies just partially included media history and the complex course development highlighted the importance of it with different dimensions. Based on this result, the first recommendation is to interpret the media phenomena in the context of media history and relevant historical events.
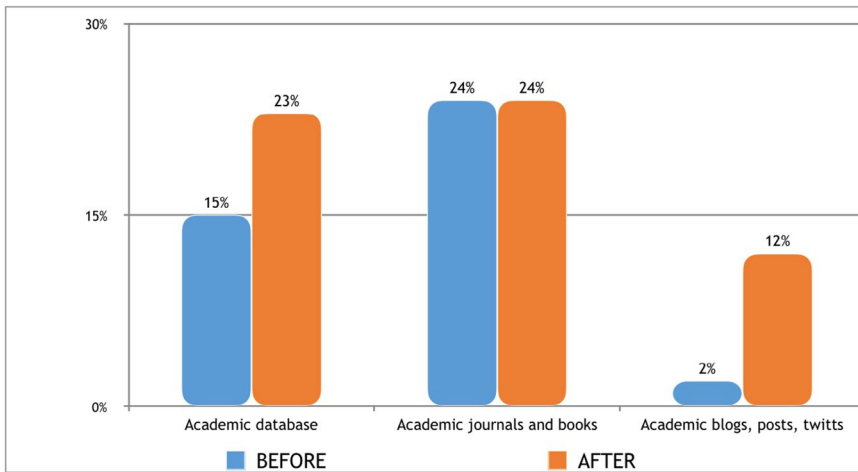

Figure 1. Level of interest and knowledge about media on a scale of 1-10.

According to the second research hypothesis, the media consumption and practice of fact check change partly due to the course development. This hypothesis was tested, and one related change showed a clearly relevant difference, namely, the habit of news reading. In the background, one of the most important parts of the course development facilitates the critical approach of media contents. Due to this, a direct consequence was the change of news consumption as the students' perception. Based on the results of quantitative research, the most measurable difference was between the headline reading and the full article reading (Figure 2). Before the semester, the only-headline reading was considerable mainly. This proportion decreased by nine percent, while the entire article reading increased by five percent. In other words, the change is fourteen percent in the case of news reading vs. headline reading. This result draws attention to the fact that the importance of deeper news consumption can be thought. In parallel, the second part of the hypothesis with fact check has not been proved. According to the quantitative results, there was no further meas-

urable change. However, the qualitative research detected changes in specific and diverse techniques of fact check to ignore fake news. The most common solution was using more sources to compare the information. Proper choice of media type was also a typical strategy of the students to filter misinformation. The minority of students tried to find evidence by photos and videos, or they asked professionals or fact-checking services on the Internet about the news. Further details are available in the section below about the qualitative results.
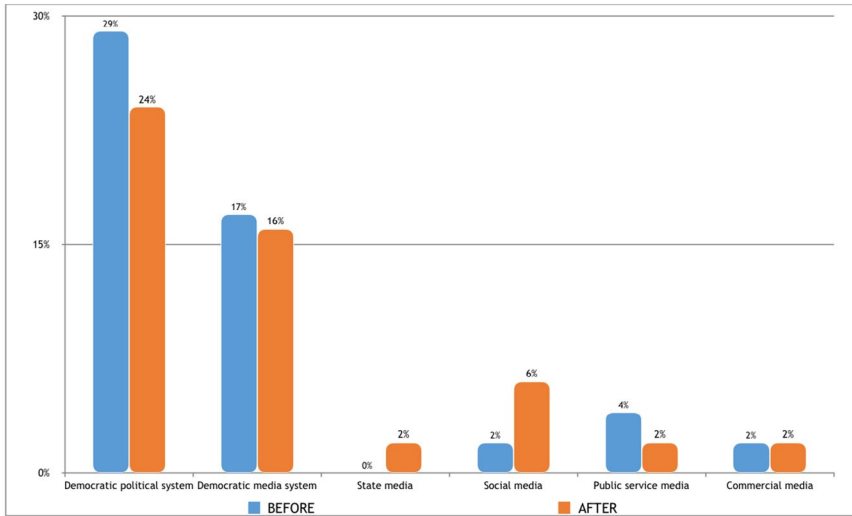

Figure 2. Changing practice of news reading

Indirectly belongs to the second hypothesis, an unexpected result regarding the academic sources. Students were open to usinga wide range of academic sources to their interpretations if those were available online. These sources facilitated their critical approach via neutral and independent analysis in the context of media and politics. Along with it, they understand how the media systems operate. The most noticeable growth has become available with academic blogs, posts, and tweets (Figure 3). In other words, they have found their online sources for critical thinking to media content due to the course development. This finding confirms the results of the first hypothesis as well. Not only the interest increased but also the knowledge due to the actively used online academic sources. As it was mentioned in the Introduction, it was a fundamental part to support the students with online academic sources. According to the findings, it was comfortable and useful for them. The recommendation is, in this case, to engage the students inthe online academic database and the academic social media content.
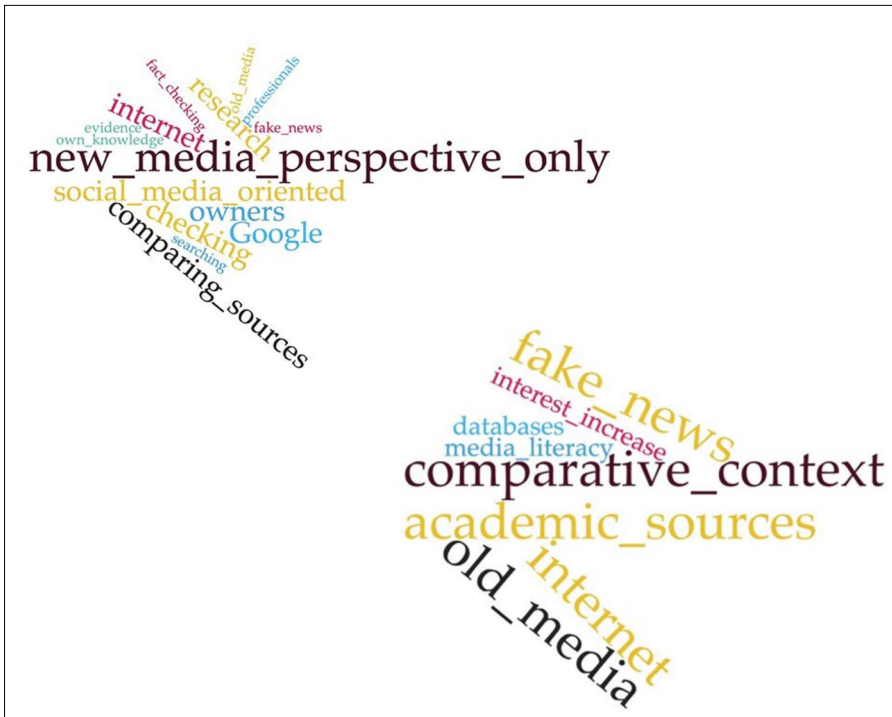
Figure 3. Changing attitude to use academic sources

Testing the third hypothesis, it was declared that the most fundamental principle was the freedom of speech and media freedom for the students. They were focusing on the democratic political systems even before the course. This result assumes a complex change in media literacy and critical thinking. Mainly the perspective has changed as students' perception regarding the guarantee of media freedom (see Figure 4). Although the democratic political system was the crucial point for them, along with the courses, this focus decreased, and the participants began to attach greater importance to the role of social media (Figure 2). This result is unexpected because social media produces diverse news and fake news as well. Moreover, fake news spreads mainly on social media (Clayton et al., 2019). However, the above-mentioned academic literature underscores how important it is for this generation to find their own voice via digital networks and how socialization is shaped by social networks intensively (Loader et al., 2014; Sloam, 2014; Banaji & Cammaerts, 2014; Van Biezen et al., 2012).

Based on the feedback during the seminars, this result belongs to the case studies. The lecturers and also the students presented case studies as their national and cultural background to provide interpretative discussions. This methodology supported an insight for the students to understand how media or media freedom operates in

a political context. The lecturers have also had their own experiences similar to these cases sharing authentic examples with the students. The intercultural perspective contributed to a panorama about the region, and the cases of democratic or non-democratic movements with historical backgrounds highlighted the diverse landscape of democracy. In short, it was presumed that students relied on social media more after these seminars. This output may be related to the practice of controlling resources for their media consumption. Their generational traits were enhanced by the course. Due to this finding, it is highly recommended to present the role of media freedom within its diversity and to interpret the role of social media in this context.
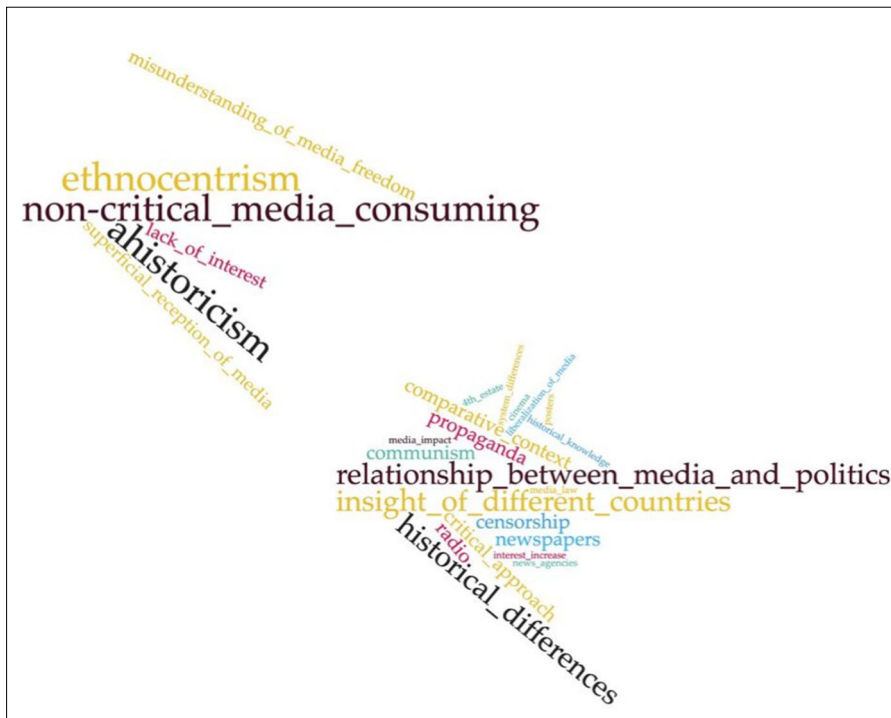

Figure 4. Approach to guarantee of media freedom

4.2. Qualitative findings

The qualitative part of the survey provided deep insight intothe quantitative research results. To present this insight, the tag clouds below reflect the minority and majority of answers related to the above-mentioned problems. In our examination, we divided the presentation of outcome into two charts below (Figure 5-6.)

According to the qualitative findings, students' knowledge about the relevant sources of information increased as their perception (RQ1). It is interesting as well that the knowledge presented during the course allowed respondents to gain new

and deeper perspectives about social, historical, and geopolitical problems (RQ3). What is more, that is related to the intergenerational character of the courses. Therefore, they are able to filter the information on higher levels (RQ1 and RQ2). The intercultural nature of the course was an extremely crucial factor (RQ1)

In qualitative answers, students underlined the importance of an intercultural team of lecturers. It is worth quoting one of the participant's answers:

> "They have offered different insights from each of their home countries. Good for comparison.
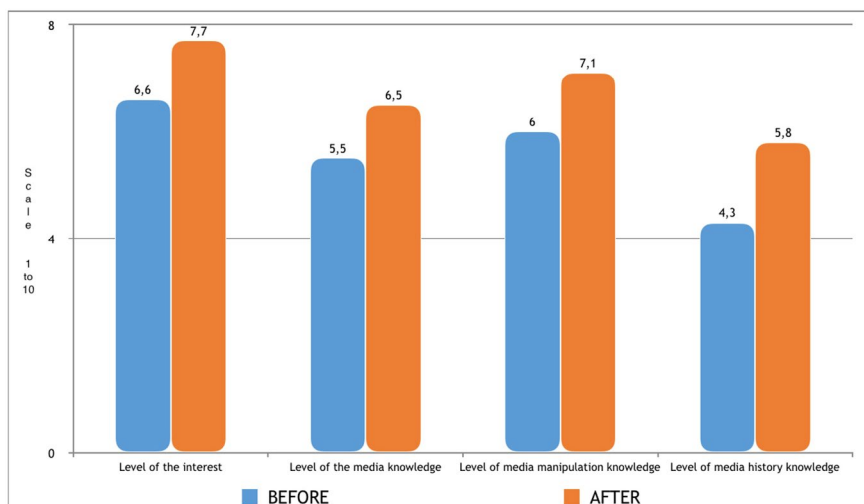> Different points of view about the topic."

Figure 5. Media knowledge and use before and after the course

Figure 5. presents media knowledge before and after the course. The authors found that before the course, the new media perspective dominated. We can identify course participants as digital natives (Prensky, 2001), who are all "native speakers" of the digital language of computers and the Internet. one student was quoted as saying:

> "We (students) are much more internet and social media-oriented."

The course participants are proficient in online search, and they can use the right keywords to find what they are looking for on the Internet quickly. The students were not familiar with terms like fake news, fact-checking, academic sources. They were not aware of the necessity of filtering and verifying information sources. What is more noticeable, participants were not old media users. However, along with the

course, they discovered old media value in the context of source relevance. That is the advantage of the intergenerational exchange of skills, knowledge, and experience between lecturers and students. They were inspired during the course to search within the comparative context of news. As one of the participants mentioned:

> *"We have to be careful when it comes to fake news and other forms of propaganda the other added Internet—we can't recognize what's the true information easily."*

Moreover, they also started to appreciate academic sources as it was emphasized in the findings of quantitative research above. It is evident that course participants are digital natives. However, they were equipped with a new set of tools through media literacy. Based on this, deep analysis and critical thinking have become essential parts of their media consumption and their ideas about media and politics. As students emphasized regarding this practice:

> *"I used to compare the verbs that different newspapers or websites employ to describe the facts. And I used to check the evidence (videos/photos) or ask for the opinions of opinion leaders."*

and

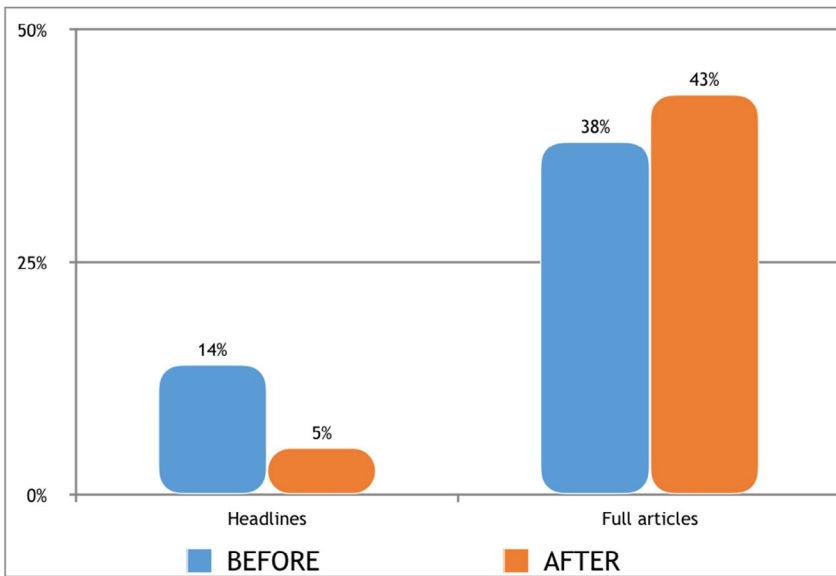> *"I am always checking and verifying sources and owner of some medium."*

Figure 6. Knowledge of history and politics before and after the course

Media knowledge and use before the course wereless critical. Students consumed media without the broadhistorical or regional context. They were not aware of connections between media and political systems or history. They also did not associate media freedom with the level of democracy. Their reception of media was superficial. Participants compared the media consumption of students and lecturers. As one of the students mentioned:

> *"In my opinion, the biggest gap is reading articles [by lecturers] vs. reading only headlines [by students]."*

International lecturers with similar historical experiences transformed students' attitudes toward political and media systems. The ethnocentric perspective of students collapsed. They also noticed differences between particular countries due to their history. Students reflected on this when they said:

> *"I want to learn more to compare more countries."*

and

> *"Every country deals with the same problems in a different way."*

Particularly for non-CEE students, the reality of communism as described by lecturers was astonishing. The students acquired terms like censorship, propaganda, communism, FourthEstate, and so on. Moreover, they learned about the fundamental relationship between media and politics. They extended their knowledge about media and history in the region, resulting in a higher level of critical thinking. As students realized after the course:

> *"Politics in many countries has a big influence on media."*

Finally, student participants recognized that censorship and manipulation in media content are still actual threats in the region. The qualitative research results indicated that students' knowledge about the democratic and non-democratic media systems before the course wasvery limited. Their awareness of history and present political issues extended after the course. What is more, intercultural contacts gave these students an opportunity to look into the experiences of others—both historical and political—providing a broader perspective and reducing ethnocentrism. The intergenerational nature of the course was also mentioned by students as the advantage of the course.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The presented feedback research contributes to the course developments in media studies with an understanding of key changes regarding knowledge, interest, media consumption, and attitudes. The academic literature and the impact of the courses emphasized the advantages of the intercultural and generation-based framework. According to the students' perception and feedback, the most noticeable changes were the higher level of interest and knowledge, the modification of news consumption, the more intensive usage of online academic sources, and the more sophisticated techniques of fact-checking. The most fundamental value behind these results was the importance of media freedom in the case of input and output as well. The participants highlighted the standard and expectation of independent media and free speech. Participants understood the profound connection between media and political systems. The political and historical knowledge of students increased along with the course significantly. The most significant change was measured in the case of historical background. The cultural differences of the presented subjects and the media-related political case studies from the same region required understanding the historical differences in the same region. In other words, students had to understand the history behind the media phenomena to improve their critical media literacy. At the end of the course, they were more open for discussion and to accept various perspectives to the same cases or examples. Students also confirmed this change along with the perceptual feedback research. They also declared that the comparative and intercultural processing facilitated the different views for the CEE region, and they learnt academic techniques to analyse media phenomena beyond the headline and social media reading. Besides, students recognised their higher level of media knowledge for both old and new media, while lecturers learnt further about social media platforms and fact check techniques. These results confirm the role of the knowledge bridge between generations in the classroom.

Regarding the online sources, two important findings have become available. First, the relevance of academic sources was considered deeply. Second, students were more focused on social media after the courses to find diverse news and perspectives to filter the relevant ones to their political opinion. It was especially crucial for them when they recognised the diverse and changing political background in the connected media narratives in the CEE region by case studies. They wanted to find frameworks of interpretations via academic and social media sources together. In other words, they had extra efforts to reach a higher level of critical media literacy along with the online scientific sources and the dynamically changing new media contents.

Beyond the online aspects, the authentic and intercultural case studies presented by lecturers from different countries resulted in strong engagement to the courses. The comparative pedagogical method supported the interactive seminars and the openness for increased critical media literacy. Moreover, students also presented online tools for the lecturers, producing a knowledge transfer between generations.

This result was expected but also strongly presented. Besides, the ethnocentric perspective of students had also changed. Participants understood the attitudes and individual characteristics of different nations from a historical and social-cultural point of view. The critical media literacy was improvedas well as techniques of media consumption and fact-checking. Consequently, the results of the perceptual feedback research confirmed the importance of the media course developments in the intercultural and intergenerational context. In summary, measurable and noticeable changes had become available in the context of critical media literacy.

Based on the key findings, recommendations are formulated as follows:

» History should be detailed in media and political studies for a higher level of critical media literacy.

» It is suggested to facilitate more news consumption instead of reading headlines to improve critical thinking.

» It is highly recommended to share online academic social media sources to engage the students.

» Freedom of media should be in the spotlight within the courses in media and politics.

» Intercultural and intergenerational approaches shape media consumption and political attitudes.

» Diverse social media should be considered as a determinative element of news filtering and political attitude shaping.

» It is crucial to share knowledge about old media with themto interpret news sources and fact check.

» The connection between media and political systems should be presented in the intercultural perspective with case studies for deeper insight.

» Social media studies support the understanding of correlations between media and politics.

» In sum, it is necessary to conduct research on lecturers' experiences and dilemmas to make further recommendations to improve critical media literacy. The course leaders are responsible for how students consume media and how their approach is shaped about media freedom.

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KRYTYCZNE UMIEJĘTNOŚCI MEDIALNE W DZIAŁANIU: ZWIĘKSZONE ZAINTERESOWANIE I WIEDZA W KONTEKŚCIE MIĘDZYKULTUROWYM

ABSTRAKT: Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie efektów rozwoju kursu, które zaowocowały zmianami w zakresie krytycznej umiejętności korzystania z mediów. W pierwszej części artykułu przedstawione zostały źródła naukowe wspierające rozwój kursu medioznawstwa w kontekście nauczania międzykulturowego. Po tej części dostępne są szczegóły dotyczące badania percepcyjnego sprzężenia zwrotnego i jego

mieszanej metodologii. Zgodnie z wynikami, krytyczna umiejętność korzystania z mediów przez studentów została poprawiona dzięki naukowym źródłom mediów społecznościowych w analizie, regionalnym studiom przypadków w kontekście międzykulturowym, oraz technikom sprawdzania faktów w konsumpcji wiadomości. Ostatecznym rezultatem było głębsze zrozumienie wartości stojących za wolnością mediów. Ponadto, poziom wiedzy w dziedzinie historii i polityki wzrósł, a etnocentryczna perspektywa załamała się w międzykulturowym środowisku. W końcowej części artykułu podsumowano kluczowe ustalenia oraz wkład w rozwój kursu wraz z rekomendacjami. Głównym przesłaniem badania jest znaczenie studium przypadku opartego na międzykulturowym i historycznym podejściu w studiach nad mediami dla poprawy krytycznej umiejętności korzystania z mediów w szkolnictwie wyższym.

słowa kluczowe: krytyczna umiejętność korzystania z mediów, Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia, wolność mediów, tło historyczne, media społecznościowe, fake news, konsumpcja mediów, nauczanie międzykulturowe

APPENDIX. THE QUESTIONNAIRE

This survey is entirely anonymous.
We use your answers to research media and politics studies.

I. MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS
1. Nationality: CZ ES DE PL SVK TW TR DZ OTHER: _____

2. Level of studies: BA MA

3. Study programme at homeland university:
a) Media or journalism studies
b) Political science or sociology
c) Marketing or PR
d) Other: _____

4. What is your preferred language to read about public life and politics?
a) mother tongue only
b) English only
c) both mother tongue and English
d) mother tongue and one or more foreign languages

5. What is your preferred language to read about media and politics during your homeland or Erasmus studies?
a) mother tongue only
b) English only
c) both mother tongue and English
d) mother tongue and one or more foreign languages

6. Planned future carrier
a) Media, journalism b) Politics
c) Public relations d) Marketing
e) Other social science fields
f) Other field: _____ g) I do not know yet

7. What were your typical sources to collect information on politics by media BEFORE the course? Please choose only one option from each category!
Types:
a) print
b) radio
c) TV (plus TV via internet?) d) internet

Ownership:
a) Public Service TV/radio/news agency
b) Commercial TV/radio/news agency
c) State media
d) Local media
e) National media
f) International media
g) NGO media
h) Citizen media
i) Community journals or broadcasting
Internet-based sources:
a) Online news media
b) Websites from professionals via PR, marketing
c) Fact-checking websites
d) Social media platforms and posts
e) Blogs
f) Vlogs
g) Forums/online discussions
h) Messengers, chats
j) News collections/aggregated news sites
k) Social news aggregation or web content rating sites/apps

8. What are your typical sources to collect information on politics by media AFTER the course? Please choose only one option from each category!
Types:
a) print
b) radio
c) TV (plus TV via internet?) d) internet
Ownership:
a) Public Service TV/radio/news agency b) Commercial TV/radio/news agency c) State media
d) Local media
e) National media
f) International media
g) NGO media
h) Citizen media
i) Community journals or broadcasting
Internet-based sources:
a) Online news media
b) Websites from professionals via PR, marketing
c) Fact-checking websites
d) Social media platforms and posts
e) Blogs

f) Vlogs
g) Forums/online discussions
h) Messengers, chats
j) News collections/aggregated news sites
k) Social news aggregation or web content rating sites/apps

9. What were the current genres/formats that you preferred collecting information about politics by media BEFORE the course? Please choose max. three options!
a) Professional videos by video sharing sites/news sites
b) Amateur/prosumer videos by video sharing sites
c) Headlines by news media platforms
d) Full articles by news media platforms e) Posts by blogs
f) Posts/tweets/comments by social media g) Memes/viral contents
h) Streaming live content
i) Other: _____

10. What are the current genres/formats that you prefer collecting information about politics by media AFTER the course? Please choose max. three options!
a) Professional videos by video sharing sites/news sites
b) Amateur/prosumer videos by video sharing sites
c) Headlines by news media platforms
d) Full articles by news media platforms e) Posts by blogs
f) Posts/tweets/comments by social media g) Memes/viral contents
h) Streaming live content
i) Other: _____

11. Have you ever learned about media and politics before?
a) Yes
b) No (if not jump to question 13)

12. What were your typical sources to learn about politics and media BEFORE the course? Please choose only one option!
a) Academic database (e.g., Google Scholar, Ebsco, Jstor)
b) Academic journals and books
c) Academic blogs, posts, twitts
d) Academic networks (e.g. Academia.edu, Researchgate) e) Non-academic offline sources: _____ f) Non-academic online sources: _____ g) Other: _____

13. What are your typical sources to learn about politics and media AFTER the course? Please choose only one option!
a) Academic database (e.g., Google Scholar, Ebsco, Jstor)
b) Academic journals and books

c) Academic blogs, posts, twitts

d) Academic networks (e.g. Academia.edu, Researchgate) e) Non-academ-
ic offline sources: _____ f) Non-academic online sources:
_____ g) Other: _____

14. What was your opinion about guarantees of freedom of media BEFORE the
course?
a) The guarantee is a democratic political system b) The guarantee is a democratic
media system c) The guarantee is the state media
d) The guarantee is the social media
e) The guarantee is the public service media
f) The guarantee is the commercial media or any media provided by advertisements

15. What is your opinion AFTER the course?
a) The guarantee is a democratic political system b) The guarantee is a democratic
media system c) The guarantee is the state media
d) The guarantee is the social media
e) The guarantee is the public service media
f) The guarantee is the commercial media or any media provided by advertisements

II. SCALES
16. How would you rate your knowledge about media and politics? (low)1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8 9 10(high)

17. How would you rate your knowledge BEFORE the course?
(low)1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10(high)

18. How would you rate your interest inmedia and politics?
(low)1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10(high)

19.How would you rate your interest BEFORE the course?
(low)1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10(high)

20. How would you rate your knowledge about manipulation techniques and media
systems?
(low)1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10(high)

21. How would you rate it BEFORE the course?
(low)1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10(high)

22. How deep is your knowledge about the history of media in Central and Eastern
Europe?
(low)1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10(high)

23. How deep was your knowledge about media history in Central and Eastern Europe BEFORE the course?
(low)1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10(high)

24. How important is freedom of speech for you?
(not important) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (very important)

25. How useful was the course to understand the connection between media and politics?
(notuseful)1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10(veryuseful)

26. How useful was to understand the historical background to the interpretation of contemporary politics and (new) media?
(notuseful)1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10(veryuseful)

27. How important is to teach this special topic by an intercultural team of lecturers with different professional/academic background?
(non-important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (very important)
III. IN YOUR OWN WORDS (keywords or max. 1-2 sentences)

28. Do you have any practice in verifying truthful news to avoid fake news?
_____

29. What is the most important knowledge or lesson ofthe course for you?
_____

30. What up-to-date information did you gain during the course?
_____

31. Why is it important to talk about media and politics, and also post-communist media in the CEE context, in your opinion?
_____

32. What was the most important tool or form of media in the age of propaganda in Communism/ Nacism or other authoritarian systems? Highlight only one, please!
_____

33. What is the most important contemporary manipulation tool or form in the media? Highlight only one, please!
_____

34. What is your new perspective in/approach to media and politics after the course?
_____

35. What were the advantages of an intercultural team of lecturers?

_____

36. What is the biggest generation gap in media consumption among students and lecturers, in your opinion?

_____

37. Other/further comments (if you have)

_____