

Tell me your zodiac sign, I tell you who you are – Horoscopes in teen magazines. The portrayal of horoscopes in German and American teenage girl’s magazines

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ABSTRACT. Even though it is common knowledge that astrology is not based on scientific evidence, a lot of people seem to care about it. For example, they read their horoscope on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. One way to get easy access to horoscopes is through media such as magazines. Depending on which magazines you are reading these astrological predictions may vary. Previous studies suggest that these differences can be explained either by different target groups, which have different socio-demographic backgrounds, or by different cultural background depending on a specific geographical region. Thus, not only media in general but also specific media outlets account for creating a certain reality. Focusing on young women’s magazine – which influence the development of teenage girls who read them – this study aims to find out how horoscopes are presented in the German *Bravo-Girl* and in the American *Teen Vogue*. A textual analyse was conducted on 24 horoscopes – one for each zodiac sign and each magazine. The findings suggest that romantic relationship, friendship, feelings and self-development were the most prevalent topics, whereas money was not mentioned at all. This could be explained by the varying importance of these topic for teenagers, mostly still living at home. Unexpectedly, technology

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and family do not play a big role even though they are part of teenager's everyday life. Nevertheless, there could not be found any differences between the two magazines since Germany and the USA are both considered Western cultures with similar cultural backgrounds.

Keywords: horoscope, astrology, zodiac sign, magazine, teenagers, cultural differences, media reality

Introduction

Star, planets and the impact of their constellation according to your birth month – astrology has struck the human interest for a long time. Most of us have read at least her or his horoscope – whether it was for fun or because you really believe in them. Horoscopes are nothing new in today's society. They have already played an important role in the ancient astronomy (Liparová, 2022). And their popularity can still be observed nowadays: Many people read their horoscopes even though it does not have any scientific support (Allum, 2011). Researchers found a relationship between personal life crisis and belief in astrology (Lillqvist & Lindeman, 1998).

The most common way to access your horoscope is through media such as magazines. As Campion (2008) shows horoscopes can not only be found in women's magazine but also in magazines for young teenage girls. Since the audience of such magazines – girls in their teenage years – are at an important stage of their life where they search for their own identity, we should keep in mind that those magazines can have a big impact on the development of teenage girls who read them (Carpenter, 1998; Davalos et al., 2007).

Horoscopes have already been researched. Previous studies have shown that the content of the media reflects some cultural beliefs and habits. Tandoc and Ferrucci (2014) found that the content of a horoscope in a specific magazine depends on the target group of that magazine. Comparing German and Czech magazines, Liparová (2022) as well as Alfrahová (2005) show that the analysed horoscopes differ on a linguistic as well as on a

formal level. Finally, researchers found that the content of the American platform *TikTok* and the Chinese platform *Douyin* (which can be considered *TikTok*'s Chinese twin since they function similarly) is different for each platform (Sun et al., 2020).

Therefore, this study analyses how horoscopes are portrayed in teenage girls' magazines. Furthermore, it aims to find out if the horoscopes differ depending on the cultural background. Thus, two magazines from two different countries were chosen. A weekly horoscope from the American *Teen Vogue* and a daily horoscope from the German *Bravo-Girl* were analysed since they have a very similar target group when it comes to demographic characteristics. The examination employs a textual analysis like the study conducted by Tandoc and Ferrucci (2014). In total, 24 horoscopes were analysed on the following categories: *romantic relationships, friendships, money, technology, feelings & self-development*.

First, this study reviews existing literature about astrology, young women's magazines, and cultural differences in media. Then the research questions and the research design are presented. After describing the findings, they will be discussed. At the end limitations of this study are shown and topics for further research are suggested.

Literature Review

1.1 Astrology

Just like the scientific discipline called astronomy, astrology deals with the sky, the sun, the planets, the stars and its constellations. The only difference is astrology is not considered a scientific discipline, and its assumptions are not scientifically proven. Nevertheless, astrology has struck people's interest already 10.000 years ago, which can be observed on cave paintings.

Even nowadays people are still interested in astrology. Andersson et al. (2022), for example, found out that the higher a person's narcissism is the higher the belief in astrology. They also showed the higher the level of

intelligence is the lower the belief in astrology is. “However, the people who read horoscopes are more likely to believe in their accuracy, so it is important to analyse what messages are embedded in these horoscopes they are reading. [...] To read a horoscope, people must determine their astrological sign. Based on the day they were born, people fall under one of the 12 zodiac signs. For instance, those born between January 20 and February 18 are under the sign of Aquarius” (Tandoc & Ferrucci, 2014, p.35).

Parallel with the growth of mass media, astrology’s popularity started to increase with the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century (Pınarbaşı, 2021). “The horoscope column is a familiar part of most modern newspapers and has been so for half a century. [...] Every single magazine aimed at women and teenage girls in the UK carries a horoscope column”, states Champion (2008, p. 239). That column is made up by 12 paragraphs so that each zodiac sign has its own text that consist of prediction and general advice. It is written in such a way that the reader can find significance in it. It is not scientific and, if we want to understand its appeal and cultural context, then its claims are neither true nor false” (Champion, 2008, p. 245). Nevertheless, mass media publishes horoscopes and takes advantage of the human need for hope and fear (Pınarbaşı, 2021).

1.2 *Young women’s magazines*

It is commonly known that during your teenage years you are trying to find where you belong. One way of achieving this is by the consumption of certain media. Especially magazines that are made for teenagers try to give them some orientation by talking about topics like friendship, relationships, sexuality and the newest trends. As Carpenter (1998) and Davalos et al. (2007) showed, young women’s magazines influence the development of teenage girls who read them. The reason for that is that they are in an important stage of finding their own identity (Firminger, 2006). Two examples for those type of magazines are the German *Bravo-Girl* and the American *Teen Vogue*.

1.2.1 *Bravo-Girl*

Bravo-Girl is a teenage girl magazine that is part of the *Bravo-Group* and appeared 1988 for the first time. Since then, it was first published every two weeks and later only once a month. Its main target group are girls and young woman at the age between 14 and 19 years. The content of this magazine focuses on topics like love, relationships, beauty, fashion and boys (Gille, 2014).

In 2023, after a publishing period of 35 years, the publisher *Bauer Media Group* decided to not publish this magazine anymore (t-online,2023). Nevertheless, *Bravo-Girl* is still accessible online.

1.2.2 *Teen Vogue*

Teen Vogue is a fashion and entertainment magazine for teenage girls that is owned by *Conde Nast Publications*. It was published in 2003 for the first time and appears every month. The median age of their readers is around 22 years and has a slightly older target audience than *Bravo-Girl* (Tandoc & Ferrucci, 2014). Just like *Bravo-Girl*, *Teen Vogue* is also accessible online.

1.3 *Cultural differences in media*

1.3.1 *Horoscopes for different target groups*

Previous studies have analysed cultural differences between media outlets and how this affects the presentation of horoscopes. Tandoc and Ferrucci (2014), for example, examined the horoscopes of the magazines *Glamour*, *Essence* and *Teen Vogue*, which have different target groups (white woman, black women and teenage girls accordingly). Comparing these three magazines, the horoscopes tend to differ since the target groups differ in their life circumstances, their cultural background as well as in their socialization. The findings show that in *Teen Vogue*, teenage girls are encouraged to be assertive because they are stereotyped as adventurous and risk-takers. When it comes to money, *Glamour* and *Teen Vogue* associate spending money with happiness while readers of *Essence* were reminded to

save money and be careful about it, which corresponds to the “stereotypical Black woman faced with financial constraints” (Tandoc & Ferrucci, p.29, 2014).

1.3.2 *Content differences in different cultures*

Furthermore, Liparová (2022) as well as Alfrahová (2005) compared horoscopes from German and Czech magazines and found differences on a linguistic and formal level. By comparing the German *Vogue* magazine with the Czech *Vogue* magazine as well as the German *Bravo* magazine with the Czech *Bravo* magazine Liparová (2022) was able to show that the differences mentioned before are conditioned by the different countries – not mainly by different target groups.

Another study, conducted by Sun et al. (2020), analysed the content of short-form videos on *TikTok* and *Douyin* and was able to show that the content of those two platforms show cultural differences. Even though these two social media platforms function in a similar way they target different groups. Videos from the American platform *TikTok*, for example, show more individual events, outdoor activities or interactions with friends and family. In contrast to that, videos on the Chinese platform *Douyin* show a simple and more static lifestyle, relaxing activities and family activities. These differences could be explained by the different styles of living and cultural differences between the USA and China.

Research questions

As the mentioned studies show, astrology and especially horoscopes play a crucial role in today's media. A lot of women's magazines contain such predictions about the future – also magazines like *Bravo-Girl* or *Teen Vogue*, whose main target group are teenage girls.

Many studies have shown that specific characteristics like a high level of narcissism makes a person more likely to read a horoscope (Andersson et al., 2022), that young women's magazines influence the development of teenage girls who read them (Carpenter, 1998; Davalos et al., 2007) and that

cultural and linguistic differences have an impact on the media content (Alfrahová, 2005; Liparová, 2022; Sun et al., 2020; Tandoc & Ferrucci, 2014). Therefore, this study aims to investigate on the following questions:

RQ1: How are horoscopes presented in teenage girls' magazines?

RQ2: To what extend do the horoscopes in teenage girls' magazine from different cultural backgrounds differ from each other?

Methodology

Like Tandoc and Ferrucci (2014) this study uses a textual analysis to examine the differences in horoscopes between the German magazine *Bravo-Girl* and the American magazine *Teen Vogue*. To understand if there are any cultural differences visible, the object of investigation will be on the one hand the daily horoscope in *Bravo-Girl* from the 24th of March 2023 and the weekly horoscope form in *Teen Vogue* from the 12th of June 2023. For both magazines all twelve horoscopes are accessed online on their website (the horoscopes can be found in the appendix). The horoscopes of *Bravo-Girl* were translated into English for this study. The horoscopes of the two magazines were compared in the following five categories: *romantic relationships, friendships, money, technology, feelings & self-development*.

Results

Both magazines start with a little introduction before they each tell the horoscope of each of the twelve zodiac signs. The texts for a zodiac sign are longer in *Teen Vogue* than in *Bravo-Girl*. That can be explained by the fact that *Teen Vogue* offers the reader a weekly horoscope, whereas for *Bravo-Girl* it is a daily horoscope.

What is noticeable is that each of the 24 horoscopes only talk about one specific topic at a time, for example having to deal with problems with your crush (*Teen Vogue*, Aquarius), being stuck in an argument between two

friends (*Teen Vogue*, Cancer), staying loyal to your own principles (*Bravo-Girl*, Aquarius) or not taking any risks (*Bravo-Girl*, Capricorn).

Nevertheless, sometimes one horoscope deals with more than one of the following categories: *romantic relationships, friendships, money, technology, feelings & self-development*. In the following part these categories will be analyzed.

1.3.3 *Romantic relationships*

In *Teen Vogue* romantic relationships are mentioned for the horoscopes of Aquarius, Aries and Scorpio. All of them speak either about a problem in the relationship or advice the reader to end it: "It may be time to set yourself free from the situationship" (*Teen Vogue*, Aries).

In *Bravo-Girl* romantic relationships are only mentioned for Taurus and Libra. In contrary to *Teen Vogue*, the advice given here is filled with hope: "'Things are going particularly well in love" (*Bravo-Girl*, Libra) or "It could be worthwhile to rekindle the spark with an ex-partner" (*Bravo-Girl*, Taurus).

1.3.4 *Friendship*

Friends in *Teen Vogue* are either described as a reliable person or as a competitive relationship: "It is always important to tell your friend how you feel" (*Teen Vogue*, Libra) or "You're feeling somewhat competitive with your BFF" (*Teen Vogue*, Capricorn).

In *Bravo-Girl* the friendship is seen as something valuable and even something worth protecting: "You'll realize with each conversation how great you complement each other, and that this friendship is good for you" (*Bravo-Girl*, Gemini) and "Don't project mistakes onto your friends" (*Bravo-Girl*, Aries).

1.3.5 *Money*

Neither *Teen Vogue* nor *Bravo-Girl* mention money in any of the horoscopes.

1.3.6 Technology

Technology is only mentioned in *Teen Vogue*: "... disconnect form your phone" (*Teen Vogue*, Aquarius).

1.3.7 Feelings & self-development

Most of the horoscopes deal with feelings and topics connected to self-development and self-empowerment. *Teen Vogue* encourages its readers with the following sentences: "Believe in your visions" (*Teen Vogue*, Pisces). "It's not worth your energy to be a mediator to people who don't want one" (*Teen Vogue*, Cancer). "Speaking inspiring words to yourself every morning and night" (*Teen Vogue*, Leo). "The ups and downs you have dealt with are helping you define your character" (*Teen Vogue*, Virgo). "Lean into your passions and heart's desires", suggest the Sagittarius horoscope of *Teen Vogue* while also recommending journaling.

In *Bravo-Girl* you can read sentences like: "Make sure YOU are happy" (*Bravo-Girl*, Leo). "Today you are a problem solver" (*Bravo- Gril*, Scorpio). "You feel exhausted and need some time for yourself" (*Bravo-Girl*, Sagittarius). "You should always be loyal to yourself, and not go against your principles because of others" (*Bravo-Girl*, Aquarius). "Speak out what is on your heart" (*Bravo-Girl*, Pisces). Moreover, it is noticeable that most of the horoscopes are connected to topics like self-development, self-empowerment, and acceptance of your own feelings.

Discussion

In general, the horoscopes in *Teen Vogue* and *Bravo-Girl* are similar. Unlike other horoscopes neither of them was longer than one paragraph, ore in some cases even just one sentence (e.g. *Bravo-Girl*, Taurus). Because of the short length the horoscopes are not parted into different topics but rather only cover one topic at a time.

The content of the horoscopes did not really differ depending on the two magazines. In both magazines the horoscopes covered topics from the analysed categories like romantic relationship, friendship and especially

feelings & self-development. This can be explained by the fact that these are topics in which teenage girls are interested the most since it affects their everyday life. And since teenage girls are the main target group for both magazines it was not unexpected to find these topics in the horoscopes. Nevertheless, it is surprising that *Bravo-Girl* suggests giving your ex-partner a second chance in the Taurus horoscope. Especially after a break-up teenagers might feel even more insecure and are looking for advice how to handle such situations. Because they can get easily influenced by horoscopes such non-reflected advice should be seen critically.

Technology was only mentioned in in *Teen Vogue's* horoscope for Aquarius by advising to "disconnect from your phone", which is surprising because you would expect that technology and social media play a big role in teenagers' life nowadays. Another interesting fact is, that money was not mentioned in any horoscope as it is usually done in other magazines (cf. Tandoc & Ferrucci, 2014). One explanation for that could be that most of the people in their teenage years still live with their parents and even get financial support by their family. Speaking about family, none of the analysed horoscopes talks about the relationship to the family - only about romantic relationships and friendships. As previously listed, teenagers spent a big amount of their time at their parent's home and are usually depended on them. That is why it is surprising that none of the horoscopes mentioned parents, siblings, or other relatives.

Other than previous studies, this one could not find any major differences between the horoscopes in the two magazines. This could be explained by the fact that Germany as well as the USA are still pretty similar since they are both consider Western countries. This might not be the case if African or Asian magazines are compared.

Conclusion

Using a textual analysis this study examined horoscopes in teenage girls' magazines. The first research question aimed to find out how the horoscopes were presented. The findings suggest that romantic relationship,

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friendship, feelings and self-development are recurring topics. However, money, technology and family do not play a big role. Especially for the last two topics it is curious since they are part of teenage girl's everyday life. Money might not seem that important yet, since they teenagers usually rely on their parents' money. The second research question asked to what extend the horoscopes of the two magazines differ from each other since they were published in different countries. This study could not find any major differences that could be explained with cultural differences. This may be the case because Germany as well as the USA are both considered Western countries and might therefore not differ that much regarding their culture.

Of course, there are certain limitations that should be considered. For example, *Teen Vogue* published a weekly horoscope and *Bravo-Girl* a daily horoscope. First, because of that the horoscopes differed in their length. Second, the horoscope of *Bravo-Girl* was not the most recent since this magazine is not being published anymore. Furthermore, only the horoscopes of a specific date or time of period was analysed for each magazine, which does not give a complete overview about how horoscopes are being portrayed in that magazine.

In the future this study should be repeated in a bigger context since horoscopes have a big impact on how teenager perceive the world (cf. Carpenter, 1998; Davalos et al., 2007; Firminger, 2006). It is important to know which advice are given to young people who can be influenced so easily. After this study has given a first insight to the content of horoscopes, further research should also focus on the audience. For example, it would be interesting to know, how teenage girls perceive horoscopes and if they believe in them or if they question them at all - especially when it comes to toxic behavior like in the *Bravo-Girl's* horoscope for Taurus.

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