

Reservations regarding the "consumer" term in German

The notion of "consumer" or "Konsument" (or "Verbraucher") in German language offers diverse connotations, depending on context and circles where it is used. Many of EURALO's German (or germanophone) ALSes may challenge this term because it offers a dichotomous and rather traditional understanding particularly if adopted for the Internet age. And we have learned that this ambiguous perception is shared by member ALSes in other European countries.

A consumer or "Konsument" or "Verbraucher" in German is somebody who is mostly interested in general consumption. Commercial offers should be inexpensive and of decent quality or providing a good value-for-money ratio. Consumer trust is considered important. Besides a certain purchasing power, "der Konsument" is rather inactive than pro-active, or sort of "couch potato" in a traditional sense. Consumer associations are still confined in the analogue age and remarkably reluctant to broaden their scope to the Online world.

The notion of "consumer" or "Konsument" is more and more generalized up to whateverism and political abuse. In the area of media for example, recipients are no longer and more precisely specified or characterized as readers, spectators, audience, public or the like but reduced and generalized as "Konsumenten". And whatever pleases a certain majority of "consumers" must be good, even if bare of substance. Institutions of public broadcasting are increasingly affected by this tendency. Furthermore, Internet users are more and more also producers of content and actively sharing information. Besides, traditionally consuming something (e. g. food, water, energy etc.) implies that the resource or commodities in question diminishes by consumption. Therefore we think, we should not use the same word for a resource which actually grows in value when it is "consumed" or shared by more people.

When you refer to consumer choice, trust, protection and the like, you imply conventional commerce, consumption and markets but not obviously Online and the Internet. As this notion in a German language context and further European perceptions doesn't offer much specification or clarification but more likely nebulisation, our community prefers and mostly uses the Internet user notion ("Internetnutzer"). The Internet user won't reconcile him/herself with a role of conventional passive consumption but insists on inter-activity, surfing, commenting, down/uploading, and the whole variety of options provided by the Internet. To our understanding, the "Internetnutzer" is comparably younger with certain skills for the use / Nutzung of the Internet (factor of empowerment) and showing a certain political sensitivity when key issues and principles of the Internet like access or openness etc. are at stake. In related terms, we also talk about Internet-Nutzung (usage), Nutzungsgewohnheiten (habits) and more of such user specifications, whereas "consumption of the Internet" simply sounds strange and dissociated in German. These are some brief reflexions explaining our reservations regarding the "consumer" term.

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