

The German phenomenon

By Katharina MAIER (10)



If asked about Germany's most influential newspaper, most people would think of Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Die Zeit or Die Welt, all highly regarded high-brow publications. However, you might be surprised to find a tabloid topping the list: Bild. Explanations by Katharina from CNC-Communications & Network Consulting.

Published Monday to Friday by Axel Springer AG, with a special Sunday edition, it is the best-selling newspaper in Europe and has the sixth-largest circulation worldwide. Articles are written in a fairly lurid manner and have to be taken with a pinch of salt. However, Bild's journalists are known for distorting information but still rank highly in public opinion, since they rarely publish anything completely untrue. In order to arrive at their sometimes questionable conclusions, they investigate and carefully pre-select content.

A key part of German media tradition

As a result, quotations and stories in Bild often become part of the German Zeitgeist. So, although it might seem strange to find a newspaper with pictures of naked women on a manager's desk or headlines such as "scorching heat -are we all becoming Africans?"- this is actually a key part of German media tradition. Bild speaks to the Germans, and they love it. Germans are also very fond of investigative journalism, including in-depth analysis and on-site reporting, and don't mind the media taking a confrontational approach. The tenacious magazine Der Spiegel is one of Europe's most prestigious publications, with a weekly circulation of more than one million. It is known for its critical investigative pieces and academic writing style and continues to attract a large print and online readership.

Local papers are a strong force in the German Media landscape

Generally speaking, the Germans have a high regard for their daily papers. Every morning

seven out of ten Germans read one or more of 350 different regional and national papers. Partly due to German federalism, local papers are still a strong force in the German media landscape and often report on national and international news together with other publications. The circulation of the dailies amounts to 19.9 million. With its regional editions and a print run of approximately 3,754,000, Bild sells by far the most. Süddeutsche Zeitung, known for its solid analyses, ranks second with around 516,000 printed copies. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (457,000), Die Welt (331,000) and Germany's leading business paper, Handelsblatt (163,000) are all surpassed by regional publications.

Differences between French and German medias

All in all, German newspapers reach about 71% of the population as opposed to 44% in France, where radio traditionally plays a much more important role. As a result, German companies continue to invest in print advertising, which sustains the profitability of the medium. Today, German print media generates half of its revenue from daily sales. Return on sales is also significantly higher in Germany than in France, where a large percentage of the profit is taken by third party distributors. On a side note: free daily mini papers, such as Direct Matin in France, have never managed to seriously challenge traditional publications in Germany.

In addition, German newspapers primarily belong to large, independent media groups rather than large business conglomerates, which dominate the industry in France. This not only ensures a deeper understanding of the journalistic profession, but also allows publishing groups like Axel Springer, Hubert Burda or Gruner+Jahr -which own online platforms as well as radio and TV stations- to coordinate their businesses and exploit content throughout all divisions to cope with growing digitalisation. ●

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