

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES OF BRANDING IN THE MEDIA SPACE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THREE LEADING GERMAN MEDIA

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Introduction

The German media market represents a complex system in which the success of media depends not only on the quality of content but also on effective branding strategies. In the era of digitalization and growing competition, media companies are forced to adapt their brands to the needs of their target audience by employing various management approaches.

Die Zeit, Handelsblatt, and Bild—three leading German publications occupying different niches in the media industry—utilize distinct branding strategies. Studying their management approaches to brand creation and development will provide a deeper understanding of the factors influencing media sustainability under conditions of global digitalization. This paper analyzes the visual identity of these publications, their content policies, advertising strategies, as well as their interaction with the audience and societal roles.

The aim of the study is to identify the key features of the branding strategies of Die Zeit, Handelsblatt, and Bild, their impact on audience perception, and their competitive positions in the media landscape.

Methodology

The methodological foundation of this study is based on a combination of comparative and content analysis of the branding strategies employed by the three German publications. To achieve the research objectives, content analysis was conducted by examining materials from the official websites of Die Zeit, Handelsblatt, and Bild, including their visual design and advertising campaigns. Comparative analysis was used to assess the differences and similarities in branding strategies, considering factors such as target audience, media formats, and market positioning. Additionally, the study explored audience interaction through an analysis of social media engagement, reader comments, and subscription models.

The research is based on open sources, including materials published on the websites of the selected media outlets, analytical reports on the German media market, and academic works by leading researchers in the field of media branding.

Literature Review

Modern research in media management and media economics emphasizes that media branding plays a key role in the competitiveness of media in the age of digitalization. In

her work, Lucy Kueng examines strategic management in the media industry, noting that successful branding combines digital transformation, effective monetization models, and audience engagement [Kueng, *Strategic Management in the Media*, 2017, 85].

The issue of media organizations' sustainability in the era of digital change is also discussed in the studies by Robert Picard. He emphasizes that the economic model of media should take into account not only traditional forms of financing but also innovative methods of content monetization, such as subscription services and digital advertising [Picard, *The Economics and Financing of Media Companies*, 2002, 112].

The effectiveness of the media market and branding is further explored in the work of Gillian Doyle, who notes that competitive media strategies depend on the ability to adapt to new technologies and evolving audience needs, which is particularly important in conditions of global competition [Doyle, *Understanding Media Economics*, 2013, 56].

Additionally, David Hesmondhalgh highlights the cultural aspect of media branding in his studies. He examines the influence of social and political factors on building public trust in the media, noting that successful media brands strike a balance between commercial interests and editorial independence [Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*, 2019, 79].

Thus, studying the branding strategies of leading German media through the lens of existing theoretical approaches allows for a comprehensive assessment of their adaptation to modern challenges and the identification of key factors for successful positioning in the digital era.

Scientific novelty

The novelty of this study lies in the comprehensive examination of the branding strategies of leading German media outlets – *Die Zeit*, *Handelsblatt*, and *Bild* – in the context of digitalization and global competition. Despite existing research on media branding, there is a lack of a detailed comparative analysis of these publications that considers their evolution and strategic decisions within a unified conceptual framework. The results of this study may be useful both for theoretical research in the field of media management and for practical applications in media brand management.

Analysis

History of the Brands and Their Positioning

- ***Die Zeit*** (founded in 1946):

Die Zeit is one of Germany's most respected weekly publications, specializing in in-depth analysis of socio-political, cultural, and economic issues. The newspaper is aimed at intellectuals, scholars, educators, and politicians, offering analytical articles, expert opinions, and a broad discussion platform. Its brand is associated with quality journalism, independence, and objectivity. In recent decades, *Die Zeit* has expanded its digital

presence by launching its own podcasts, online subscriptions, and special editorial formats for a younger audience.

• *Handelsblatt (founded in 1946):*

Handelsblatt is Germany's largest business newspaper, renowned for its thorough financial analysis and economic research. Its primary readers include entrepreneurs, investors, economists, and politicians. The Handelsblatt brand is associated with reliability, promptness, and expertise. The publication actively develops digital services, such as analytical platforms for investors, exclusive online reports, and multimedia economic reviews. Handelsblatt also regularly organizes economic forums and summits where key issues of the global economy and financial sector are discussed.

• *Bild (founded in 1952):*

Bild is Germany's most widely circulated daily newspaper, aimed at a broad readership and known for publishing news in a concise, accessible, and sensational format. The Bild brand is recognized for its provocative style, interactivity, and focus on the rapid dissemination of information. The publication actively employs visual content—including photographs, videos, and infographics—and maintains a strong presence on social media. Although Bild has frequently been criticized for using flashy headlines and sensational materials, it remains one of Germany's most popular media outlets, setting the agenda for millions of readers.

Target Audience

• *Die Zeit:*

Aimed at the intellectual elite, including scholars, educators, students, politicians, and cultural figures. The newspaper attracts those interested in in-depth analysis of current issues, international politics, culture, and science.

• *Handelsblatt:*

Primarily targets the business community, including entrepreneurs, investors, financial analysts, company executives, and economists. Handelsblatt offers expert materials, business analytics, financial market forecasts, and up-to-date economic research.

• *Bild:*

Caters to the mass reader, including young people, workers, employees, and various social groups. The newspaper focuses on accessible, concise, and sensational coverage of events, emphasizing entertainment, scandals, and social life.

Main Editorial Values

• *Die Zeit:*

Emphasizes depth of analysis, objectivity, critical thinking, and independent journalism. Its subscription model underscores the publication's premium character.

• *Handelsblatt:*

Values reliability, precision, promptness, and professionalism. The newspaper serves as a decision-making tool for businesses and investors.

• *Bild:*

Prioritizes accessibility, dynamism, sensationalism, and interactivity. Bild actively employs social media and online formats to maximize audience engagement.

Media Content

• *Die Zeit:*

Primarily focuses on analytical and research materials. It publishes articles on politics, culture, economy, and social issues. The content is marked by deep analysis and includes expert opinions and opinion columns.

• *Handelsblatt:*

Specializes in financial and economic journalism. It covers news on stock markets, macroeconomics, corporate finance, and investments, often featuring exclusive interviews with business leaders and economists.

• *Bild:*

Concentrates on brief news, sensational stories, and entertainment content. Topics include politics, sports, show business, scandals, and crime reporting. The materials are designed for a mass audience and are characterized by an emotionally charged tone.

Website Content

• *Die Zeit:*

Features a minimalist design with a focus on textual content. The main materials are available via subscription and include analytical articles, expert columns, and podcasts. The absence of aggressive advertising underscores its premium status.

• *Handelsblatt:*

Offers an extensive multimedia platform that includes online analytics, financial tools, reports, and charts. Both free and premium materials are available for subscribers, and interactive services such as market forecasts and professional forums are supported.

• *Bild:*

Boasts a bright, dynamic design filled with a large amount of photo and video content. The content is updated in real time, offering readers exclusive news and sensational stories. Clickbait headlines and interactive elements are widely used.

Content on Social Media

• *Die Zeit:*

Actively utilizes Twitter and LinkedIn to publish analytical materials and announcements, fostering discussions with subscribers through live discussion formats.

• *Handelsblatt:*

Focuses on professional platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter. Its social media content includes articles, investment recommendations, and economic forecasts, along with live broadcasts of business events and summits.

• *Bild:*

Engages extensively on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Emphasis is placed on short videos, memes, interactive polls, and viral news, all aimed at provoking active discussions among a mass audience.

Advertising

• *Die Zeit:*

Advertising is minimal and carefully selected, primarily represented by partnership integrations and premium advertisements. Advertising blocks are virtually absent within the content.

• *Handelsblatt:*

Advertising is tailored to the business community, including announcements for financial services, investment products, and conferences. Premium subscribers have the option to disable advertisements.

• *Bild:*

Advertising is one of the main sources of revenue. An aggressive advertising model is employed, featuring banners, video ads, and native integrations. Advertising blocks occupy a significant portion of the website.

Feedback

• *Die Zeit:*

Readers actively participate in online discussions, and comments are moderated. The platform also offers opportunities for readers to write opinion pieces and join subscription clubs.

• *Handelsblatt:*

Provides dedicated platforms for discussing economic and financial topics, and conducts webinars and online discussions with experts.

• *Bild:*

Leverages active engagement on social media by conducting polls, encouraging comments, and stimulating user reactions. Readers can submit their own content and help shape the overall content.

Political and Ideological Orientation

• *Die Zeit:*

Positions itself as a liberal-centrist publication, emphasizing an analytical and balanced approach to covering political events.

• *Handelsblatt:*

Maintains a neutral, business-oriented stance, focusing primarily on economic and financial issues while avoiding strong political statements.

• *Bild:*

Known for its right-conservative editorial policy, Bild often employs populist narratives, particularly regarding political and migration issues.

Reputation and Audience Trust

• *Die Zeit:*

Enjoys a high level of trust among intellectuals, the academic community, and the political elite, being regarded as a reliable source of analysis and objective news.

• *Handelsblatt:*

An authoritative business publication with a strong reputation among businessmen and investors, known for its high level of expertise as a leading financial media outlet in Germany.

• *Bild:*

While being the most mass-circulation publication, Bild is also the most controversial. It is often criticized for its sensational headlines, yet it remains one of Germany’s most widely read media outlets.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis

Category	Die Zeit	Handelsblatt	Bild
Target Audience	Targets intellectuals, academics, and cultural figures. Appeals to those interested in in-depth analysis and expert opinions on politics, culture, and economics.	Targets financial professionals, investors, and business executives. Appeals to those seeking expert financial insights and market analysis.	Targets a broad mass audience, including working-class readers and young people. Focuses on accessible, entertaining, and sensational news.
Main Editorial Values	Prioritizes depth, objectivity, and critical thinking. Subscription-based model reinforces its premium positioning.	Values accuracy, timeliness, and professional economic journalism. Serves as a decision-making tool for business leaders.	Emphasizes accessibility, emotional engagement, and sensationalism. Uses interactive and viral content strategies.
Media Content	Focuses on analytical articles and expert columns covering politics, economy, and society. Content is highly detailed and research-based.	Specializes in financial and economic reporting with a strong focus on stock markets, macroeconomic trends, and investment strategies.	Concentrates on short news pieces, entertainment, scandals, and crime stories with an emotionally charged tone.
Website Content	Minimalist design emphasizing text. Subscription model limits access to premium content, ensuring exclusivity.	Offers an extensive multimedia platform, including financial tools and analytics. Provides both free and premium content.	Features a dynamic, visually engaging website with real-time news updates and strong multimedia integration.
Content on Social Media	Active on Twitter and LinkedIn, engaging audiences through discussions and expert-led conversations.	Primarily active on LinkedIn and Twitter, focusing on economic forecasts, investment insights, and live business events.	Highly active on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, using viral formats, short videos, and interactive elements.

Advertising	Carefully curated premium advertisements with minimal ad presence, enhancing its intellectual image.	Tailored advertising for financial services, investment opportunities, and corporate events. Premium subscribers can opt out of ads.	Relies on an aggressive advertising model with high ad volume, including banners, video ads, and native content.
Feedback	Encourages moderated discussions, reader contributions, and subscriber-based community interactions.	Facilitates professional discussions, webinars, and expert panels for economic and financial discourse.	Encourages mass audience interaction through polls, comments, and user-generated content on social media.
Political and Ideological Orientation	Liberal-centrist stance with an analytical and balanced approach to political reporting.	Maintains a neutral, business-oriented stance, avoiding explicit political engagement.	Right-conservative editorial stance, frequently employing populist narratives on political and migration issues.
Reputation and Audience Trust	Highly trusted among academics, policymakers, and intellectual circles as a reliable source of objective journalism.	Recognized as a reputable financial media outlet with a high level of credibility among business professionals and investors.	Despite criticism for sensationalism, Bild remains Germany's most widely read newspaper, sustaining high engagement levels.

Conclusion

Die Zeit, Handelsblatt, and Bild represent three fundamentally different approaches to branding in the German media space, reflecting differences in target audiences, content policies, and models of reader engagement. Die Zeit adopts an analytical and intellectual style that appeals to the academic community and political elite, with a strategy based on in-depth analysis, minimalist design, and premium subscriptions that reinforce its reputation as a reliable information source. Handelsblatt, as Germany's leading business publication, focuses on the economy and finance, creating value for its business audience through expert materials, digital services, and specialized analytical platforms. Its neutral stance and high degree of professionalism secure a stable level of trust among investors and entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, Bild targets the mass reader by offering dynamic, sensational, and emotionally charged content. Its aggressive advertising strategy, active use of social media, and multimedia formats help maintain its leadership among tabloids, despite provoking mixed reactions from society. The study demonstrates that successful media branding depends on a clear understanding of one's audience, the adaptation of strategies to the digital environment, and the maintenance of unique positioning. In the face of global digitalization and increasing competition, media companies must continuously update their approaches to content, advertising, and audience engagement. In the future, technological advancements, changes in media consumption, and tighter media regulations will continue to create new challenges and opportunities for media branding strategies, necessitating flexibility and innovative management approaches.

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Management strategies of branding in the media space: a comparative analysis of three leading German media

Key words: media economy, media branding, managerial strategies, German media

The article examines the managerial aspects of branding in three leading German media outlets: *Die Zeit*, *Handelsblatt*, and *Bild*. The study analyzes their strategic approaches to brand formation, positioning, target audience, content structure, advertising models, mechanisms for audience engagement, etc. The research is based on content analysis, comparative analysis, and the study of audience feedback, allowing for the identification of the unique features of each media strategy. *Die Zeit* is an analytical publication aimed at the intellectual elite. It provides in-depth expertise on key socio-political, economic, and cultural issues, offering its audience authoritative analytical articles, expert opinions, and interviews. *Handelsblatt* serves as Germany's leading business publication, catering to financial professionals, entrepreneurs, and investors. The newspaper provides exclusive analytics, stock market news, economic forecasts, and expert reviews, emphasizing accuracy and timely reporting. *Bild*, in turn, is Germany's largest mass-market publication, focusing on sensationalism, dynamic content, and broad audience engagement. Its content is designed for the general public and includes political news, sports events, scandals, and entertainment stories, utilizing visual formats, videos, and interactive elements extensively. The study highlights the importance of branding for the sustainability of media outlets in the digital era, where audience needs are constantly evolving, and global competition is intensifying. The analysis identifies key trends and patterns that shape the development of media brands and their adaptation to new models of information consumption. The findings of the research can be useful for both media market researchers and media managers developing effective brand strategies in the digital age.