



Frank Baier

What is the Future of the (Printed) Newspaper?

Several times in recent years, the (daily or weekly) newspaper has been pronounced dead. Of course, reading the classic printed newspaper has not been so typical in our society for more than a decade. Print declines have been compensated by digital variants: Accordingly, the e-paper has proliferated.

The crucial question is: is there a future for the (printed) newspaper? Currently, eight out of ten Germans rely on reading the newspaper. The total reach of newspapers in Germany is 79.8 percent. This means that 56.3 million people now regularly read a printed edition or use newspapers digitally at least once a week. This is revealed by a recent evaluation of the latest market media study „best for planning“ (b4p) by [ZMG Zeitungsmarktforschung Gesellschaft](#) on behalf of the [German Association of Digital Publishers and Newspaper Publishers](#).

Many combined users

Meanwhile, digital usage is even slightly ahead. While 38.2 million of the readership reach for the printed edition (readers per issue), 40 million use the newspaper offerings via desktop, mobile or apps (users per week). The total reach of 79.8 percent is a net figure. Here, every reader is counted only once – regardless of how often or via which channel they read the newspaper.

In fact, however, there are now many combined users: 38.9 percent read both a printed and a digital edition of their newspaper. What's more, newspapers are attracting new people inte-

rested in using them via the digital channel, especially among young target groups.

Channels are a question of age

While print reach among 14- to 29-year-olds is 35.5 percent, the total reach from print and digital in this age group is 67.1 percent. Among 30- to 49-year-olds, 80.7 percent read newspapers at least weekly (with a print reach of 46.6 percent), and among those over 50, the figure is 84.2 percent (with a print reach of 65.6 percent).

Meanwhile, two-thirds of the population uses the newspaper every day of the week – whether as a printed copy or via the online portal. For the b4p study 2022, 30,810 randomly selected people were surveyed. It is representative of the German-speaking resident population aged 14 and over.

Specialization is not a lifeline

Due to further digitization, newspaper production changed significantly in recent years. Several newspaper publishers have had to shift the portfolio of their web offset printing plants more clearly in the direction of special commercial jobs and advertising supplements. Specialization in special forms and special formats (e.g. altar folds, booklets, half pages) alone did not always save the day. This is why numerous newspaper printing houses had to give up and close down, and not only in Germany itself.

„Circulations of printed newspapers are falling, digital newspaper subscriptions are on the rise, but this is not yet really profitable for the publishers. Above all, the distribution of printed newspapers is a difficult cost factor, but digital newspaper subscriptions are cheaper,“ says Bettina Knape, press spokeswoman for the [German Printing and Media Industries Federation](#), listing the advantages and disadvantages of both output variants.

Digital printing is hardly an alternative

As long as advertising customers and subscribers pay, the future of printed newspapers is also assured. Offset printing alternatives such as digital printing may only be used for small quantities of „daily papers“ with segmentally updated editorial content, for example for guests of vacation hotel restaurants or cruise ships. What events are on the agenda today? What will the weather be like today? What gastronomic offers are there tonight?

Classic printed newspapers in the subscription model could be personalized and also individualized in digital printing. However, due to the considerable distribution and cost effort involved, implementation is highly questionable.

Personalization as a topic for the future

A survey published by the [German Association of Digital Publishers and Newspaper Publishers](#) and [Schickler Unternehmensberatung](#) conveys optimism. According to the survey, one third of the top decision-makers in the media industry already see growth in the total number of subscribers to printed newspapers, e-paper and paid content. Another third does not expect this growth until 2027.

Personalization in particular is seen by more than half of the respondents as a topic with high to very high future relevance, with an upward trend. Publishers and digital publishers plan to introduce personalization in many use cases such as article recommendations and editorial newsletters in the next three years.

Publishers reach users of all ages

Today, publishers are not only winning over primarily older generations with their products,

but also other target groups than expected due to their broad portfolio. According to the study, e-paper is already reaching those around 60, online the user groups around 40, and podcasts the 30-year-olds. However, the acquisition of target groups is primarily dependent on the (output) channel and not on the content, because the content often hardly differs between the channels.

Data literacy is increasingly becoming a core competency in the media industry. According to the survey, 62 percent of publishers want to build up key competencies around data analysis internally. Currently, respondents believe that in ten years, 78 percent of editors will work primarily with a focus on digital.

Experts from the newspaper industry currently expect that in just under ten years, the majority of the company's earnings will come from digital or online products. As early as around 2026, revenues from digital are expected to compensate for the decline in revenues from print. Between 2027 and 2032, there should be a significant shift from printed to digital products.

Your
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