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What is driving the circulation? An investigation of characteristics of successful newspapers

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**University of
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What is driving the circulation?

An investigation of characteristics of successful newspapers

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Keywords: Newspaper, Success, Media Management

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1 Introduction

Due to growing competition from other players and new market entrants, it is vital for media companies to be cognizant of the factors that make their products and services successful. Thus, development and production processes can be optimized and the position in the market can be stabilized. Especially regarding the struggling newspaper industry, a successful management of products and services is essential (Dal Zotto, Dichamp, & Sommer, 2012). However, research on periodicals is scarce, suggesting the following question: *What are the key characteristics of successful newspapers?*

Based on a comprehensive literature review, this paper investigates success factors in the newspaper industry. While only a few studies were conducted in print media, a lot of useful research has been done in the motion pictures industry, which can be adapted for periodicals. Scientific literature lacks a merger of these findings (Sommer & von Rimscha, 2013). Cross-national research is also scarce (Habann, 2010). Furthermore, some results need to be updated, as the media business has changed considerably over recent years as digitalization and social media have become key issues.

Following the literature review (Chapter 2), research questions and hypotheses are developed (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 summarizes the empirical study. Subsequent results are presented and discussed (Chapter 5 & 6). The paper concludes with key findings, implications for media management, and recommendations for further research.

2 Literature overview

The theoretical approaches related to success factor research are the resource-based view and dynamic capabilities. They are “the firm’s ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments” (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997, p. 516). Dynamic capabilities should be honed to users’ needs as well as unique and hard to replicate. Examples of such capabilities are sensing opportunities, seizing structures and processes as well as managing threats (Teece, 2007, p. 1342). They can be seen as success factors of companies: “The approach endeavors to explain firm-level success and failure” (Teece et al., 1997, p. 509).

What success means and how it is operationalized varies across studies and especially across types of media (Sommer & von Rimscha, 2013). In print, circulation and reach are used, as well as questions regarding the achievement of goals, which

could lead to a key informant bias (Hurrle & Kieser, 2005). Success factor research in the motion pictures industry employs box office figures while in television, market share is a popular measure. Despite these differences, results can be summarized as common patterns arise. Studies tend to focus on production, and/or development processes or the product itself. Apart from this differentiation, the media company plays an important role in the success or failure of media products and services. Hence the literature overview explores those three areas in further detail. In doing so the focus lies on print, while research for other types of media is summarized to support these results and provide further insights for the hypotheses.

2.1 Media company

Regarding the media company, the size of a publishing house proved to be a success factor in the magazine industry (Tschörtner, 2008, p. 347). Similarly, synergies are important (Bleis, 1996, p. 291). Numerous concepts in the literature, such as diversification or concentration, relate to that factor (Fritz, Grüblbauer, & Förster, 2008). Diversification and multiple revenue streams had an impact on success in recent studies for various types of media (Clement, 2004; Dal Zotto et al., 2012; Lubbers & Adams, 2004; Wirtz & Ullrich, 2009; Wolf, 2006). In the motion pictures industry the available budget proved to be crucial (Chang & Ki, 2005; Christensen, Clement, Papies, Schmidt-Stölting, & Briese, 2008, p. 76; Elliott & Simmons, 2008; Hennig-Thurau, Houston, & Heitjans, 2009, p. 174; Joshi & Mao, 2012, p. 565; Lampel & Shamsie, 2000; Lee, 2009; Simonton, 2009, pp. 407–408), as well as the budget available for advertising (Clement, Proppe, & Rott, 2007; Simonton, 2009, p. 413). The number of screens (Boatwright, Basuroy, & Kamakura, 2007; Chang & Ki, 2005; Christensen et al., 2008; Clement, 2004, p. 257; Elliott & Simmons, 2008; Gemser, van Oostrum, & Leenders, 2007; Hennig-Thurau, Marchand, & Hiller, 2012, p. 271; Joshi & Mao, 2012, p. 565; Lampel & Shamsie, 2000; Liu, 2006; Reinstein & Snyder, 2005; Simonton, 2009, p. 413; Zuckerman & Kim, 2003) and the number of cinemas on the opening weekend (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2009, p. 174) also had a positive effect. All these findings relate to the size of the media company, which proved to be a success factor across the media.

Irrespective of size, there are different goals media companies pursue: "(1) Reporting on important events, people, and issues, particularly those involving governmental institutions and actors, in ways that are accurate and balanced, and (2) generating sufficient advertising and circulation revenue to make a profit regarded by the stock market or private owners as acceptable" (Entman, 2005, p. 58). From the management point of view market success and profit maximization are key (Schumann & Hess, 2006; Siegert, 2002). In print media especially, companies aim for fulfilling functions for society at the same time. The latter proved to be a success

factor in previous studies (Bleis, 1996, p. 291; Schönbach, 2004). This is also shown for movies (Kim, 2009, p. 51) as well as TV entertainment (Wolf, 2006, p. 330). Controlling of development and production processes in terms of quality is important in television (Zabel, 2009, pp. 286–296). Accordingly a media company's goals could be a success factor.

2.2 Processes within the media company

Looking at processes within the media company, recruiting is key as research shows that a company's employees are a success factor in print media (Bleis, 1996, pp. 277–279). A study focusing on managers shows their positive effect on success. Age, education, and the leader's network were important (Tschörtner, 2008, p. 347). Project managers influenced the success of innovation projects they were heading (Habann, 2010, p. 218). Similarly, leadership skills and expert knowledge are valuable for online projects (Büsching, Hellbrück, & Teluk, 2011, p. 20). In the TV industry it was leadership as well as motivation and qualification of employees (Wolf, 2006, p. 329). These findings can be summarized as the success factor "recruiting".

Studies also investigated other processes within the media company such as monitoring competitors, which had a positive effect (Habann, 2010, p. 220). Important information on planning and developing services can be derived from results for print and other media (Schnell, 2008, p. 477; Wyatt, 1994, pp. 156–161; Yoder, 2004). They show that the timing when bringing a new product to market is a success factor (Bleis, 1996, p. 279; Tschörtner, 2008, p. 347). This has been investigated not only for magazines, but also for books (Blömeke, Clement, Mahmudova, & Sambeth, 2007; Schmidt-Stölting, Blömeke, & Clement, 2011), and particularly the motion pictures industry (Chang & Ki, 2005; Christensen et al., 2008, p. 76; Clement, 2004, p. 258; Elliott & Simmons, 2008; Hennig-Thurau, Henning, Sattler, Eggers, & Houston, 2007; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2009, p. 174; Joshi & Mao, 2012, p. 565; Lee, 2009; Reinstein & Snyder, 2005; Shamsie, Miller, & Greene, 2006, p. 132; Simonton, 2009, pp. 412–413; Zabel, 2009, pp. 296–297). In television, controlling of development and production processes in terms of time and costs is important (Zabel, 2009, pp. 286–296). All these processes are different means companies use to achieve their goals and are another success factor.

2.3 Media product

The media company and its processes lead to a product or service. Structure and design of this product's content are a success factor of newspapers (Schönbach, 2000, Schönbach, 2004; Schönbach & Lauf, 2002; Schönbach, Lauf, Stürzebecher, & Peiser,

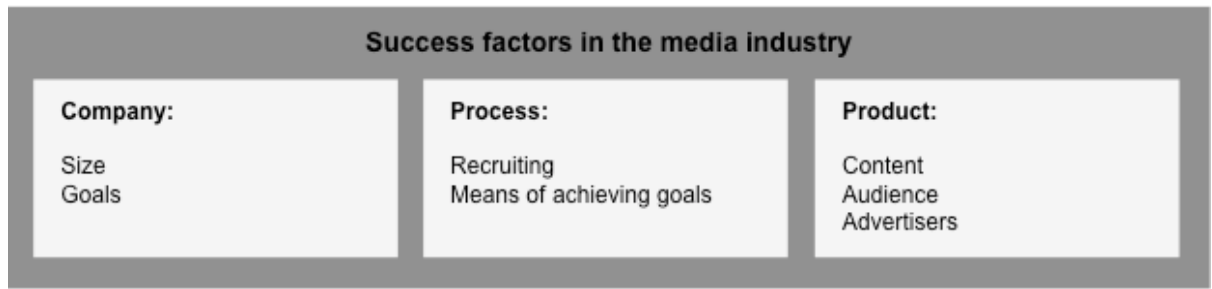
1997). For magazines the coherence of the layout has a positive effect (Bleis, 1996, p. 291). In book publishing, studies find the importance of the cover's appearance (Blömeke et al., 2007, pp. 430–431). Besides these formal criteria, the content itself was at the center of success factor research. For newspapers diversity and variety were important, as well as local orientation (Schönbach, 2004). Local orientation and variety had a positive effect on success in the motion pictures industry too (Clement, 2004, p. 257; Kim, 2009, p. 51). Similarly, the genre had an influence (Chang & Ki, 2005; Clement, 2004, p. 256; Desai & Basuroy, 2005, pp. 216–217; Elliott & Simmons, 2008; Hennig-Thurau & Dallwitz-Wegner, 2004; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2007; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2012, p. 271; Lee, 2009; Reinstein & Snyder, 2005; Simonton, 2009, p. 409; Wanderer, 2011). In television it was shown for programming (Feddersen & Rott, 2011, p. 365; Förster, 2011; Wolf, 2006, p. 329). These results lead to the success factor "content", covering criteria in content and form.

Research also shows that a media product's audience is a success factor of newspapers. The product and the content have to be aimed at the needs of the readership (Schnell, 2008, p. 475). For the magazine market, the reader needs to get more out of a publication than what is offered by any competitor's product (Bleis, 1996, p. 291). In television and radio positioning proved to be important (Greve, 1996; Wolf, 2006). For whom the product is designed had a positive effect on success in the motion pictures industry (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2012, p. 271). Therefore characteristics of the recipient could be a success factor.

Other studies analyzed the second market a media product is aimed at as a success factor: the advertising side. It is shown for print media that the advertiser's acceptance of a product is crucial for success (Habann, 2010, p. 218). As readers need to get more out of a publication than from any competitor's product in the magazine industry, the same holds true for advertising customers (Bleis, 1996, p. 291). Also multimedia, cross-media, and cross-promotion had a positive influence on success, not only in print, but in other media too (Blömeke et al., 2007, p. 437; Habann, 2010, p. 218; Wolf, 2006, p. 329). Accordingly winning over the advertising market is a success factor.

The literature overview outlined key findings of success factor research. These results can be seen in Figure 1. Success factors in the media industry on a company level were summarized as size and goals. Studies showed that on the process level recruiting and means of achieving goals are key. Focusing on the product, research proved the importance of content, audience, and advertisers.

Figure 1: Success factors in the media industry



3 Research questions & hypotheses

As shown above, several success factors have been identified in the literature. Some studies were conducted a while ago, others focused on a single factor or a small selection of criteria. This paper investigates whether they are still valid characteristics of successful newspapers and hence is following a different approach than other studies. Rather than trying to predict success through selected variables, a group of more successful papers is compared to a group of less successful ones, regarding success factors derived from the literature.

RQ 1: Are successful newspapers bigger in size than less successful ones?

Several studies showed a positive effect of indicators of size, e.g., the budget, on the success of media products and services (e.g., Bleis, 1996, p. 291; Tschörtner, 2008, p. 347). Therefore it is assumed that successful newspapers are bigger in size than less successful ones (*H1*).

RQ 2: Do successful newspapers follow other goals than unsuccessful papers?

Literature reveals a positive influence of quality content on a media product's success (e.g., Bleis, 1996, p. 291; Schönbach, 2004). Hence it is assumed that successful newspapers value journalistic goals more than less successful ones (*H2*). At the same time they do not follow financial goals, such as high profit and high circulation, as much.

RQ 3: Are successful newspapers focusing on different skills when recruiting employees compared to unsuccessful papers?

Research hints at the importance of employees' education, knowledge, and skills (e.g., Büsching et al., 2011, p. 20; Tschörtner, 2008, p. 347). It is assumed that successful newspapers value recruiting criteria more than less successful ones (*H3*).

RQ 4: Do successful newspapers follow other means of achieving their goals than less successful ones?

Analyzing the environment proved to be a success factor in the media (e.g., Habann, 2010, p. 220). Also other processes, which are understood as means of achieving goals, had a positive effect. Hence it is assumed that successful newspapers put more emphasis on them than less successful ones (*H4*).

RQ 5: Are successful newspapers focusing on other criteria of content than unsuccessful newspapers?

Studies show that content, layout, and design influence the success of media products and services (e.g., Bleis, 1996, p. 291; Schönbach, 2004). Therefore it is assumed that successful newspapers are investing more in content than less successful ones (*H5*).

RQ 6: Do successful newspapers have a different audience than unsuccessful ones?

Research points out that the audience is a success factor in the media industry (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al., 2012, p. 271; Schnell, 2008, p. 475). It is assumed that there are differences in audiences between successful newspapers and less successful ones (*H6*).

RQ 7: Do successful newspapers focus on other criteria in order to appeal to advertisers than less successful papers?

In scientific literature advertisers have a positive influence on a media product's success (e.g., Bleis, 1996, p. 291; Habann, 2010, p. 218). This paper assumes that successful newspapers place a higher value on criteria to appeal to advertisers than less successful ones (*H7*).

4 Data

Data stems from a multidisciplinary, cross-national research project (Siegert, Gerth, & Rademacher, 2011).¹ Following Hallin & Mancini (2004), one country with a liberal media system (UK), three democratic corporatist countries (Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland) and two polarized pluralist media systems (Italy and France) were

¹ The Swiss National Science Foundation generously funded the project "Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century" as one of its National Centers of Competence in Research (NCCR). The project context had to be considered when operationalizing the constructs. For further information see www.nccr-democracy.uzh.ch.

chosen. To reduce the number of competitors the survey was conducted in six large metropolitan areas: Berlin, Copenhagen, London, Paris, Rome, and Zurich. The sample of media outlets was systematically selected and consisted of the leading news outlets in the respective metropolitan area. Elite newspapers, tabloid newspapers, free press, and weekly news magazines were distinguished. This led to a total of 74 media outlets. As the aim of the paper is to look at common characteristics of successful newspapers across regions, country-specific success factors are not investigated.

The data was collected by an online questionnaire with editors in chief and business directors. For most items a 5-point Likert scale was used (exception e.g., budget). The response was acceptable in Switzerland (n=13, including outlets in French- and German-speaking Switzerland), Denmark (n=7), Germany (n=4), France (n=6), and Italy (n=6). Unfortunately the response in the UK was very low (n=1), which led to a total of 49% (n=36).

The data set was complemented through secondary sources: circulation data for 2010 and 2011 provided by the members of the International Federation of Audit Bureaux of Circulation (IFABC) was used as a measure for success. Due to a lack of data for Italian free papers, Audipress figures had to be utilized. Circulation and reach are common measures of success in other studies (Schönbach, 2004), which allows meeting demands of criticism of success factor research regarding a key informant bias (Hurrell & Kieser, 2005). Circulation is preferred over reach as data is collected similarly across countries.

To answer the research questions, newspapers are split into two equal groups of more successful and less successful companies, depending on the development of their circulation from 2010 to 2011 (Median=-2.38). Hence, in times of uncertainty and economic difficulties, a stable circulation or even a slight decline can be a success when compared to other market players. T-Tests were performed in order to test for significant differences between those groups.

Regarding the first research question about a newspaper's size, we investigated circulation, budget, number of employees, and number of full-time journalists. Similar factors were included in other studies (Tschörtner, 2008, p. 228).

Items for goals (RQ 2) and means of achieving goals (RQ 4) were derived from the literature (Demers, 1996, pp. 14–15; Ewing & Napoli, 2005; Habann, 2010, p. 220; Meckel, 1999, pp. 150–152; Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2004; Thorson, 2003; Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007, p. 83). Among others, profits and circulation were investigated, as well as more journalistic ones, such as high-quality journalism.

Means of achieving goals were focused on efficiency and competition-related activities.

The question about recruiting and employees' education, skills, and knowledge (RQ 3) focused on eleven items: educational level, experience in journalism, original training, aptitude for teamwork, creative writing, flexibility over hours, contacts network, specialist knowledge, general knowledge, wage level/wage costs, connection with the region covered (e.g., grew up in it, lives in it, etc.) (Gerth, 2012, p. 214). It goes more into detail than previous studies (Tschörtner, 2008, p. 347).

For the fifth research question, this paper looks at form and content of newspapers (Litman & Bridges, 1986; McCombs & Mauro, 1977, p. 4; Russi, 2013, p. 183; Schönbach, 2004): Design, extensiveness (length of article/individual reports), number of contributors to an article, general resource allocation to the production, header or lead, subject, storyline, and independent research/investigation.

Regarding the sixth research question, characteristics of the newspapers' readership are investigated. The items age, education, income, politics, and gender were also derived from the literature (Chan-Olmsted & Cha, 2008, p. 37).

The last research question (RQ 7) focuses on the advertising side. What arguments newspapers use to position themselves in the ad market was investigated in previous studies (McDowell, 2004, p. 223).

5 Results

5.1 Media company – size & goals

Results in Table 1 show that successful newspapers have a smaller circulation than less successful ones (M=358'594 vs. M=383'551). The group of less successful newspapers also has a slightly higher budget (M=18'154'646 EUR vs. M=18'556'363 EUR). Looking at the personnel, successful newspapers employ more people than less successful papers (M=346 vs. M=213). The same holds true for full-time journalists (M=167 vs. M=136). None of these differences are significant.

Table 1: Differences in size between successful and unsuccessful newspapers

Item	More successful	Less successful	p
Circulation	358'594	383'551	
Budget (EUR)	18'154'646	18'556'363	
Personnel	346	213	
Full-time Journalists	167	136	

t-Test; n=36 (18 more successful/18 less successful); *** p < 0,001; ** p < 0,01; * p < 0,05; ° p < 0,1

Table 2 reveals that all goals are valued higher by less successful media companies, except “Maintaining or securing high employee morale” (M=4.17 for both groups). Differences for “Keeping size of audience as large as possible” (M=4.17 vs. M=4.33) and “Producing journalism of high, above-average quality” (M=4.44 vs. M=4.61) are very little too. Similarly, “Earning high, above-average profits” (M=3.94 vs. M=4.17) and “Influencing the political agenda and getting topics added to it” (M=3.44 vs. M=3.78) are rated. Neither of these differences is significant.

Table 2: Differences in goals between successful and unsuccessful newspapers

Item	More successful	Less successful	p
Earning high, above-average profits	3.94	4.17	
Keeping size of audience as large as possible	4.17	4.33	
Producing journalism of high, above-average quality	4.44	4.61	
Influencing the political agenda and getting topics added to it (opinion leadership)	3.44	3.78	
Maintaining or securing high employee morale	4.17	4.17	

t-Test; n=36 (18 more successful/18 less successful); *** p < 0,001; ** p < 0,01; * p < 0,05; ° p < 0,1; “Let us now turn to the goals that a media organisation may set itself. Please indicate the relative importance of the following goals for your newspaper.”

5.2 Processes within the media company – recruiting and means of achieving goals

Results in Table 3 point out that for successful newspapers the educational level of their employees is more important than for their less successful counterparts (M=4.27 vs. 3.58; p<0,01). Similarly, they place a higher value on specialist knowledge (M=4.27 vs. M=3.55; p<0,1) and original training (M=3.73 vs. M=2.82; p<0,1).

Though not significant, general knowledge (M=4.45 vs. 4.10) and experience in journalism (M=4.18 vs. M=3.67) are more important at successful newspapers. Successful newspapers also put more emphasis on teamwork (M=4.00 vs. M=3.67). When it comes to the contacts network they value it more (M=4.55 vs. M=4.25), while connection with the region is less important than at less successful papers (M=2.55 vs. M=3.40).

For successful newspapers creative writing (M=3.73 vs. M=3.92), wage costs (M=3.18 vs. 3.55) and flexibility towards over hours (M=4.00 vs. M=4.08) play less of a role than at unsuccessful ones. These differences between the two groups are not significant.

Table 3: Differences in recruiting between successful and unsuccessful newspapers

Item	More successful	Less successful	p
General knowledge	4.45	4.10	
Specialist knowledge	4.27	3.55	°
Educational level	4.27	3.58	**
Original training	3.73	2.82	°
Experience in journalism	4.18	3.67	
Creative writing	3.73	3.92	
Wage level / wage costs	3.18	3.55	
Flexibility over hours	4.00	4.08	
Aptitude for teamwork	4.00	3.67	
Contacts network	4.55	4.25	
Connection with the region covered (e.g., grew up in it, lives in it, etc.)	2.55	3.40	

t-Test; n=23 (11 more successful/12 less successful); *** p < 0,001; ** p < 0,01; * p < 0,05; ° p < 0,1; "How important in your personnel recruitment are the following aspects when you are seeking a new journalist to cover home affairs (political)?" (Specification to "home affairs" due to the project context)

Table 4 shows that there are no significant differences between successful and unsuccessful newspapers regarding their means of achieving goals. Successful newspapers put less emphasis on "Shrewdly judged action to uphold readers' and stakeholder interests" (M=3.88 vs. 4.00). Though also valuing "Analysis of competitors' strengths and weaknesses" less (M=3.44 vs. M=3.72), successful papers rate "Swift reaction to competitors' initiatives" (M=3.89 vs. 3.65) and "Editorial strategy of differentiation from competitors" (M=4.50 vs. M=4.44) as more important than the less successful group.

"Setting specific targets and requirements as a means of improving performance delivery" (M=3.75 vs. M=4.00), "Precisely calculated use of resources in the production process" (M=4.12 vs. M=4.44) and "Strategic planning tightly geared to budgeting" (M=4.11 vs. M=4.35) are less important at successful newspapers than at unsuccessful ones.

The contrary is the case for "Cost-effective production" (M=4.44 vs. M=4.06) and "Lower production costs than competitors" (M=3.83 vs. M=3.50). Both items are more important at successful newspapers than at less successful ones.

Table 4: Differences in means of achieving goals between successful and unsuccessful newspapers

Item	More successful	Less successful	p
Shrewdly judged action to uphold readers' and stakeholder interests	3.88	4.00	
Analysis of competitors' strengths and weaknesses	3.44	3.72	
Swift reaction to competitors' initiatives	3.89	3.65	
Editorial strategy of differentiation from competitors	4.50	4.44	

Setting specific targets and requirements as a means of improving performance delivery	3.75	4.00
Precisely calculated use of resources in the production process	4.12	4.44
Cost-effective production	4.44	4.06
Lower production costs than competitors (for comparable products/content)	3.83	3.50
Strategic planning tightly geared to budgeting	4.11	4.35

t-Test; n=36 (18 more successful/18 less successful); *** p < 0,001; ** p < 0,01; * p < 0,05; ° p < 0,1; "Please indicate how important the following measures are for your newspaper as a means of achieving your goals."

5.3 Media product – content, audience & advertisers

Looking at Table 5, successful newspapers differentiate themselves from the competition through the extensiveness of their articles (M=4.28 vs. M=3.50; p<0,01). Design (M=4.17 vs. M=3.94), header (M=4.11 vs. M=3.94) and subject (M=4.63 vs. 4.56) are also rated higher than at less successful companies, though not statistically significant. There is only a small difference for storyline (M=4.59 vs. M=4.61).

Successful newspapers value items related to resources in research slightly lower than the unsuccessful group: Independent research/investigation (M=4.35 vs. M=3.94), number of contributors to an article (M=2.06 vs M=2.17) and general resource allocation to the production (M=3.24 vs. M=3.33). None of these differences are significant.

Table 5: Differences in content between successful and unsuccessful newspapers

Item	More successful	Less successful	p
Header or lead	4.11	3.94	
Subject	4.63	4.56	
Storyline	4.59	4.61	
Extensiveness (length of article/individual reports)	4.28	3.50	**
Design	4.17	3.94	
Independent research/investigation	4.35	4.44	
Number of contributors to an article	2.06	2.17	
General resource allocation to the production	3.24	3.33	

t-Test; n=36 (18 more successful/18 less successful); *** p < 0,001; ** p < 0,01; * p < 0,05; ° p < 0,1; "How important do you consider the following characteristics to be in differentiating your newspaper from your competitors?"

Table 6 shows that percentage of male readers is higher at successful newspapers than at less successful ones (M=55.11 vs. M=52.76). Their readership is younger (M=41.89 vs. M=45.29), has a higher household income (M=3.33 vs. M=3.17), and is politically more left (M=6.33 vs. M=6.78). While there is no difference in interest in politics, readers of successful newspapers are more educated than the readership of

less successful outlets (M=8.78 vs. M=7.28; $p < 0,1$), which is the only statistical significance.

Table 6: Differences in readership between successful and unsuccessful newspapers

Item	More successful	Less successful	p
Male readers in %	55.11	52.76	
Age	41.89	45.29	
Monthly household's total income (after tax and compulsory deductions)	3.33	3.17	
Educational level	8.78	7.28	°
Interest in politics	3.72	3.72	
Political orientation	6.33	6.78	

t-Test; n=36 (18 more successful/18 less successful); *** $p < 0,001$; ** $p < 0,01$; * $p < 0,05$; ° $p < 0,1$; "How, in your view, would the average reader of your newspaper be best defined in terms of the following characteristics?"

While Table 7 reveals that "The newspaper's good reputation" (M=4.29 vs. M=4.41) and "Cross-media group targeting" (M=3.24 vs. M=3.29) are less important at successful newspapers than at unsuccessful ones, only small or no differences can be found for "Own investment in editorial department and quality of journalism" (M=3.78 vs. M=3.75) and "Information about your readers' usage patterns" (M=3.82 for both groups). Neither of these differences is significant.

Successful newspapers rate "Information about your readers' lifestyle" (M=4.17 vs. M=3.53; $p < 0,1$) significantly higher than less successful ones. The same holds true for "Indicators of your readers' age and gender" (M=3.94 vs. M=3.82) and "Indicators of your readers' income and purchasing power" (M=4.39 vs. M=4.29) without significant differences.

Table 7: Differences in criteria to appeal to advertisers between successful and unsuccessful newspapers

Item	More successful	Less successful	p
Indicators of your readers' age and gender	3.94	3.82	
Indicators of your readers' income and purchasing power	4.39	4.29	
Information about your readers' usage patterns (e.g., time spent daily)	3.82	3.82	
Information about your readers' lifestyle	4.17	3.53	°
Cross-media group targeting	3.24	3.29	
Own investment in editorial department and quality of journalism	3.78	3.75	
The newspaper's good reputation	4.29	4.41	

t-Test; n=35 (18 more successful/17 less successful); *** $p < 0,001$; ** $p < 0,01$; * $p < 0,05$; ° $p < 0,1$; "Please indicate the importance of the following aspects to the arguments you use when presenting your newspaper to advertisers or potential advertisers."

6 Discussion

On company level only small differences regarding the size of the company could be found. Circulation and budget of successful and unsuccessful companies are only slightly different. These findings are contradictory to previous studies (Tschörtner, 2008, p. 347). Therefore the hypothesis (*H1*) could not be confirmed. However, it is interesting that the group of more successful newspapers has on average more employees and more full-time journalists. Hence these companies seem to be able to employ more people without increasing their budget.

This is also true for goals of media companies: The hypothesis (*H2*) derived from the literature could not be confirmed. Successful media companies do not value journalism and quality more than unsuccessful ones. The contrary is the case: the group of less successful companies rated four out of five items higher. For employee morale both groups were even, which could hint at a greater importance of a good working climate at successful companies relative to other goals. This finding can be added to literature in the field of creative industries and creative workers (von Rimscha & Przybylski, 2012). It has been pointed out that a history of successfully working together in the past has an influence on success in the media (Meiseberg & Ehrmann, 2008).

Regarding the recruiting criteria of successful and unsuccessful newspapers the findings reveal differences between the two groups. For both of them contacts network and general knowledge are most important, valued higher by successful companies though. Significant differences can be found in educational level, specialist knowledge, and original training. These items are rated higher by more successful papers too. Hence the background of employees regarding education and knowledge is a characteristic of successful newspapers. This was already shown for managers of publishing companies (Tschörtner, 2008, p. 347). At the bottom of the ranking creative writing, wage level, and connection with the region can be found. Those three items were rated higher by unsuccessful news outlets, though without statistical significance. That the wage level is not important to successful papers seems contradictory, as they are able to employ more people with the same budget. Creative writing's rating can be explained with the selection of news media companies, where the focus lies on information rather than entertainment.

For means of achieving the companies' goals, the hypothesis (*H4*) could not be confirmed. Both groups rated editorial differentiation as most important. Though not significant, effectivity and efficiency are more important for successful newspapers. The same holds true for swift reaction to competitors. This was already shown in a previous study (Habann, 2010, p. 220). Unsuccessful papers on the

contrary put their emphasis on precise calculation, strategic planning, setting targets, and analyzing the competition, also without significance. These items have in common that they are more conceptual and less hands-on than the ones successful newspapers rate higher. Therefore these companies might lose too much time and resources when analyzing and are not able to implement their ideas.

Successful newspapers differentiate themselves through formal criteria. They rate the extensiveness of their articles as more important than unsuccessful companies. Earlier studies proved “the bigger, the better”-hypothesis when it comes to predicting readership (McCombs, Mauro, & Son, 1988, p. 28). Design plays a more important role too, though not significant. These findings match results of previous studies (Schönbach, 2004). Also without statistical significance, subject and header are somewhat more important at more successful papers. Only small differences can be found for the three research-related items independent investigation, resource allocation and contributors to an article. They are all valued slightly more by the less successful group. This is contradictory to research on financial commitment, which states that it pays to invest in journalism (Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2004).

The audience of the group of successful newspapers has a greater majority of male readers. Its readership is younger, wealthier and politically left compared to the less successful group. However, the educational level is the only significant difference, with the readers of successful companies being better educated. This finding has to be kept in mind when producing a paper. Scientific literature shows that it is a success factor for whom the product is designed (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2012, p. 271). This in turn has a direct influence on the second market media companies are competing in, the advertising side of the media business.

The biggest difference between successful and unsuccessful newspapers regarding the advertising side lies in information about readers’ lifestyles. The item is valued significantly more by the successful group. Income of readers and the newspaper’s reputation are most important to both, with only small insignificant differences. The same holds true for age and gender as well as usage patterns. Least important to both groups is cross-media group targeting, which is somehow surprising as multimedia proved to be a success factor in the past (Habann, 2010, p. 218).

7 Conclusion and implications

This paper provides a comprehensive literature overview, merging results of success factor research for different types of media. On top of that, the lack of cross-national research is addressed as characteristics of successful newspapers are investigated across six metropolitan areas. The findings show that there are differences between

successful and unsuccessful newspapers regarding the success factors derived from the literature. While there are no differences on the company level regarding size and goals, on the process level successful newspapers value recruiting criteria “education”, “training”, and “specialist knowledge” more than unsuccessful ones. Looking at the product level, there are differences in extensiveness of articles, education of readers, and lifestyle information about readers in order to appeal to advertising customers (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Characteristics of successful newspapers



These results provide implications for media managers. First, they should evaluate their recruiting process in order to check what criteria they focus on in human resources. Second, content in terms of extensiveness of articles has to be considered. Third, media managers have to analyze their readership, to provide the kind of content needed. Fourth, media companies should gather data about their readers, in order to provide advertisers with information about their lifestyle and other relevant criteria.

Despite the small number of cases, the results hint at characteristics of successful newspapers in six European metropolitan areas. Success factor research in the media is a promising field for further research (see also Sommer & von Rimscha, 2013). Analyzing a larger number of cases, it would be valuable to cover different aspects for different types of media to look at factors that are generalizable or specific. There is also a need for more focused studies though. Research should investigate specific factors in more detail with the use of economic and communication theory.

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