

MUSLIMS IN THE EUROPEAN MEDIASCAPE

German Report: Findings from Interviews with Specialist and Mainstream Media Producers; Findings from Consumer Focus Group Data; and Findings from Consumer Surveys

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

The research project *Muslims in the European Mediascape* was conducted by Staffordshire University (UK), Keele University (UK), and the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence (Bielefeld University, Germany), in cooperation with the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (UK). The study was funded by Vodafone Foundation Germany and the British Council.

The report is divided into three sections. It follows the structure of the study, which was conducted as three complementary inquiries:

- Interviews with journalists in Germany, with participants whose media output is consumed by the general public, and participants whose media output is consumed to a large extent by consumers with a Muslim background.
- Focus group interviews with Muslims and non-Muslim German citizens.
- Analysis of a survey in which Muslim and non-Muslim media consumers were polled.

Key Research Questions

The topics of ‘Muslims’ and ‘Islam’ are a frequently recurring theme in media coverage, and the way in which they are brought up is often criticised. For that reason, we focused on the following research questions:

- According to journalists and consumers, how are Muslims presented by coverage and by the narratives that appear in coverage? How is Islam presented in coverage? Which features, images and prejudices are ascribed to Muslims and to Islam by journalistic coverage?
- To what extent are Muslims presented as a homogeneous or a heterogeneous group?
- How are stereotypes and prejudices concerning Muslims built into the media, and by the media?
- How do consumers in general perceive the coverage of Muslims and Islam?
- How do individuals of a Muslim background see themselves represented in media coverage?
- How is media coverage linked to the personal development of a ‘Muslim identity’?

Aims and Objectives

Our aim is to illustrate the mechanisms underpinning the coverage of Muslims and Islam, and the opinions and strategies of those who consume this coverage. At the same time, we seek to comparatively analyse patterns of media use and media production of individuals of a Muslim and non-Muslim background.

We aim to understand:

- The way **journalists** produce articles, reports and other pieces on Muslims and Islam, i.e. the professional practices and the production context relating to coverage of issues of diversity and inclusion in various news outlets.
- The potential differences between the methods of journalists that produce for the general public in Germany and journalists that produce more specialised content for consumers linked to a Muslim background.
- The potential differences in the perception of both these groups of journalists concerning the coverage of Muslims and Islam.
- The potential for a change in the coverage of this topic, seeking fair treatment that achieves a balance between Muslims as a group and the individuality of each person with a Muslim background and its multiple constituent identities.
- The way **consumers** (readers, viewers, and listeners) receive and perceive media coverage of Muslims and Islam.
- The potential differences between the media use of consumers who have a Muslim background and the consumers who do not.
- The various strategies consumers use to gain access to the coverage that is important to them.

A central assumption is that there are mainstream media in Germany that target the public and that there are *specialist media* serving the interests of Muslims, like there are also other kinds of specialist media, for example for occupational groups (journalists, researchers, business people or craftsmen) or social minorities (e.g. gay people). Furthermore, mainstream media in Germany are understood as media that, although aimed at the general public, are often implicitly aimed at people with no personal migratory experience, a Christian background and indigenous white origin.

In this report, when we refer to Muslims we include persons of Muslim faith as well as ‘culturally oriented Muslims’ – individuals who, although religiously inattentive, continue to identify with what they recognise as a Muslim culture, based on the social and cultural environment in which they live and/or were raised.

We acknowledge that every individual leads a life with multiple identities, that change over time and that are perceived as of being of different importance by that person – depending on the situation he or she is in. A person who is Muslim can also regard herself, for example, as woman, as a Turk, as German, as a mother, as a professional and so on. To describe a person just as being a Muslim would be grossly simplistic. However, we observe that identification as being Muslim, or being connected to a Muslim background, plays a crucial role in the life of a large number of people living in Germany. Firstly, this is due to the self-identification of people, which is shaped by discourses and practices. Someone who is Muslim, or who was socialised in a household with a Muslim background, has a sense of belonging to particular narratives, and has a specific way of dealing with events and symbols. And it is probable that he or she identifies himself or herself, to a greater or lesser extent, with the religion and/or cultural aspects interconnected with the religion. Secondly, individuals with a Muslim background often have experiences of being predominantly identified with their religion.

Participants in this study/ Samples

In the first part of this research project, we interviewed media producers in Germany working in both specialist and mainstream media. We interviewed 35 people including editors and producers working in a broad range of media vehicles, including high-profile organisations as well as smaller organisations. 23 male participants took part in the interviews, compared with 11 female participants. Twelve of the participants were freelance producers. The interviews were conducted between April and August 2011.

For the second part of the study, we conducted nine focus group discussions with 41 participants, conducted during the second half of 2011. We differentiated between Muslim focus groups –those with participants that identify themselves as Muslims – monocultural demographic focus groups – that consisted of participants of a similar cultural background who are non-Muslims (here meaning specifically persons with a German background) – and mixed demographic focus groups, that were composed of Muslims as well as non-Muslims.¹

The third part of the project – the online survey – was completed by 268 media consumers (both Muslim and non-Muslim). This survey was conducted between July and November 2011.

FINDINGS OF INTERVIEWS WITH SPECIALIST AND MAINSTREAM MEDIA PRODUCERS

SPECIALIST MEDIA PRODUCERS

Main findings: What media producers perceived and assumed

- Most interviewees described the coverage by mainstream media carefully, trying not to condemn mainstream media. Most sensed the lack of an authentic and heterogeneous image of Muslims in mainstream media, criticising the stereotyping of Muslims by the use of extremist images. Most stressed that persons representing the majority of ‘normal’ people of a Muslim background are overlooked.
- Most observed a demonstrable lack of knowledge about Muslims and Islam when journalists in mainstream media cover topics in this field. They stated that, for example, terms in common usage amongst people with a Muslim background are charged with a negative meaning in coverage by mainstream media, although these notions are commonly used in a broader and more neutral range by their originators.
- An ‘*Islamisation*’ of topics was highlighted. Interviewees perceived regrettably disproportionate coverage of Islam and Muslims, and, furthermore, they emphasised that controversial topics are unreasonably connected with Islam. Honour killings, for example – individual behaviour potentially motivated by tradition – are mistakenly traced to the religion of the perpetrator.
- Interviewees stated that stereotyping of Muslims and Islam in mainstream media leads to the stronger identification of people of Muslim identity with their religion or religious

¹ This report presents translated quotations by the interviewed journalists and the participants of the focus groups. The original German quotations can be found on www.euromediascape.com.

community. According to that line of thought, 'secular' Muslims identifying with their religion also come to its defence.

- Journalists stressed the importance of implementing an alternative approach to coverage, notably clarifying terms being used and keeping track of *positive* developments in the Muslim community and positive contributions by migrants.
- There is an assumption that journalists with a Muslim identity have better access to sources relating to Muslims and Islam than non-Muslims. This allows them to find stories that are beyond the mainstream. Some journalist also emphasised that education - especially Islamic studies- can endow journalists with the knowledge to approach topics concerning Muslims and Islam adequately prepared. It was said that these personal factors should not be underestimated (e.g. language knowledge, being a practicing or non-practicing Muslim, and ethnicity).
- Interviewees assumed that journalists with a migrant background may approach a topic with a perspective that is often neglected by other journalists. However, it appears that immersion or involvement in a particular religion can lead to blind spots- incidents and events are taken for granted and perhaps not recognised as reportable. Furthermore, the output of a journalist should not only be judged by the wording of an article or report. It is crucial to observe who says what in an article or report.
- The work of 'Muslim journalists' can be a useful way for mainstream media to create a fairer image of Muslims and Islam in their coverage. Some journalists praised the fact that a few mainstream media outlets have started to employ more journalists of a Muslim background as well as specialists that have, for instance, a degree in Islamic Studies and are therefore able to cover stories in a more nuanced way.

Participants in this sample

In total, we interviewed 12 producers who work for media organisations whose output is consumed, to a large proportion, by Muslims and individuals of Muslim backgrounds. Only one female producer was included. All of the participants were Muslims, or of a Muslim background. The majority were of Turkish origin, which corresponds with ratios in the German population: 63 per cent of Muslims in Germany have a Turkish background.² All of those who talked about their career path studied at university – this share of academics is overrepresented with regard to the population (the share of academics in the German population in 2010 was 12.5 per cent³), however, a high rate of academics among journalists is usual (68,8 per cent in 2005⁴).

More than the half of the journalists were employed by a media organisation, meaning these individuals usually worked for one employer. Some of the journalists worked for more than one

² Haug, S. et al. (2009): Muslimisches Leben in Deutschland im Auftrag der Deutschen Islam Konferenz. Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. Nürnberg, p. 12.

³ Statistisches Bundesamt (2011): Bildungsstand der Bevölkerung. Wiesbaden, p. 13.

⁴ Weischenberg, S.; Scholl, A.; Malik, M. (2005): Journalismus in Deutschland 2005. In: Media Perspektiven, 7/2006, S. 353.

medium or 'distribution channel'. Six journalists worked for newspapers or print magazines, that is, half of the journalists in the sample – this corresponds with the share of journalists working for newspapers or print magazines in Germany (52.9 per cent in 2005⁵).

Audience Profile

The range of consumers who use the media included in this sample varies widely. All of the producers interviewed who mentioned the allocation of gender among their consumers referred to about 50 per cent being female users and 50 per cent being male users. One newspaper stated that it mainly reaches readers belonging to the first and second generation of Turkish immigrants to Germany. Concerning the educational background of consumers, one organisation referred to an audience that comprises a high proportion of academics, students and readers who have completed secondary education. Some media outlets defined their audience by proficiency in a particular language, e.g., media that publish or broadcast in Turkish or Arabic. Most media did not define their audience explicitly as being Muslim, usually referring to an audience potentially including individuals of a Muslim background but also individuals of a non-Muslim background. Several media outlets did not have an accurate way of measuring their audience, due to cost restrictions. The editor of one magazine stated that half of readers are individuals with migrant backgrounds and half are individuals with no family history of migration. We included that publication in this sample since it nevertheless specialises on topics connected with Muslims and Islam.

Staff Profiles / Diversity Policy

Most of the organisations included in this sample have editorial staff that can be ascribed to different ethnic backgrounds. Some editorial staff comprise entirely of Turkish-speaking employees and freelancers. One web magazine, which works mainly with volunteers, has staff of Turkish origin as well as Korean, Russian, Polish and German backgrounds. One TV channel employs a large proportion of journalists of Palestinian origin. One problem in differing between the various staffs is that some of the journalists referred to their organisation as a whole, while others referred to the editorial colleagues they work directly with. Some organisations work with freelancers and authors they can hire on short term; often there are journalists of German background among those. According to the interviewees surveyed, most organisations did not appear to have formal policies on employee diversity. One organisation states in its job advertisements that it fosters cultural diversity and welcomes applications from persons of foreign origin. It also conducts programmes for the training and development of journalists of a migrant background. Another organisation states that it took official action so that the share of employees of migrant backgrounds was increased, meaning that this population is now – according to the organisation – appropriately represented.

⁵ Weischenberg, S.; Scholl, A.; Malik, M. (2005): Journalismus in Deutschland 2005. In: Media Perspektiven, 7/2006, S. 351.

Media representation

Looking at media representation of Muslims and Islam in general, the participants talked a great deal about topics that are linked both appropriately and unduly with Islam and/or Muslims, and also focused on coverage of Islam and Muslims and changes in this coverage.

Several interviewees in this sample observed, and criticised, the fact that Islam is often reduced to a small set of topics; terrorism and jihad; headscarves, veils and fully body veils; the integration of Muslims; Islamic religious instruction in schools; and the building of mosques. Corresponding with this simplification an “*Islamisation*” of debates was also observed. In this respect, Islam is often scapegoated for problems that are associated with Muslim immigrants and their descendants, and, conversely, is sometimes glorified as a solution to societal problems. The former observation means that, in media coverage, Islam is often identified as a reason for the actions of Muslims seen as deficiencies by parts of mainstream society – the wearing of full-body veils, the oppression of women- although other reasons are likelier causes of these phenomena, such as lack of education and the development of traditions not originally related to Islam.

Several interviewees distinguished between mainstream media that cover issues in a more balanced and fairer way and those that do not. Some also stated that the quality of coverage can vary within the very same outlet:

It is interesting in my view that, in a magazine like *Der Spiegel*⁶, [...] there is direct stigmatisation towards Muslims and migrants – and then again [...] it is possible to feature a relatively critical report on the whole right-wing populist and anti-Islamic scene. It is interesting that such coverage can run parallel in some magazines, and that it is just a mirror of the public debate. (Specialist web magazine editor)

The coverage of Muslims and Islam is described as often being superficial, although it is recognised that this is not always the case:

Thankfully, there are journalists, also in Germany very good journalists, that promote the differentiation [in coverage]. But that is not the dominant opinion, the dominant way of thinking is simply ‘black and white’ thinking, and ‘friend and enemy’ thinking. That is something that we also owe unfortunately to American politics, also their language that politics [in Germany] has picked up. (Specialist print magazine editor)

Several interviewees criticised the fact that established media often treat individuals of Muslim religion as ‘solely Muslims’ with no other identities, and, furthermore, as a homogeneous group of Muslims. Another problem identified was that the term ‘Muslims’ is often used synonymously with the term *(im)migrants*, excluding that there are migrants who are not Muslims and that there are individuals of German origin that are Muslims. Several participants discern that being Muslim is depicted as something special. Moreover, several interviewees believed that Muslims are disproportionately depicted as not being integrated within Germany:

What image has the individual as a Muslim? [...] Unsuccessful, not integrated, criminal – those are the images we have in mind. And that has to change. (Specialist radio producer)

⁶ Der Spiegel („the mirror“) is a German weekly news magazine. It has a circulation of more than one million.

In respect of coverage on Muslims and Islam in general, some interviewees noticed that, by associating the Muslim religion with terrorism, a chain of associations emerge that conflate the term 'Muslim' with the term 'terrorist'. The same effect is observed for cases of so-called 'honour killings', and forced marriage, which, according to several interviewees, are usually connected to Muslims in coverage by the established media:

When there is an honour killing or a woman is forced to marry – these are hard cases. But how am I involved in that as someone who is also a Muslim? (Specialist web magazine editor)

Another example is the accusation that Muslims refuse to learn German. According to several interviewees, this accusation is aimed at Muslims in particular as well as foreigners in general. The interviewee cited above tells of a politician who demanded that foreigners need to learn German. According to him, the politician stated:

'It is not acceptable that foreigners do not learn German'. Okay, [but] why does she say that? Of course it is not acceptable! That is self-evident. So, one covers her statement. One reproduces the statement. And to what does this lead? To the readers thinking: 'Yes, when she said so, that must have a reason'. Namely that there are lots of foreigners who are not willing to learn. This subtext is suggesting something. (Specialist web magazine editor)

Here, a technique of agenda setting is also described. The politician utters a normative demand: that she wants foreigners to learn German. However, indirectly, the politician implies that there are a number of foreigners unwilling to learn German. By not stating any particular numbers, she creates the impression that this unwillingness is widely valid. And so a chain of associations emerges that connects foreigners with the inability to speak German and the unwillingness to learn the language.

This example illustrates the observation of participants that negative attributions are often connected to 'the other' -particularly Turks or Muslims- while positive attributions are connected to 'the Germans' perceived as mainstream society. Beyond that, some journalists observe that mainstream media often associates the acts of individual Muslims with Islam as a religion.

Internal representation

The extent to which the specialist media covers Muslims and Islam differs. In this sample, four media outlets focus on this theme area, while the other eight treat Muslims and Islam as two topics among many others. Measuring a focus on this theme area can include counting the number of stories that are written on topics associated with Muslims and Islam, and it can also include the length of these articles or the duration of TV and radio reports. And it can – although by no means must– include that a journalist covers stories from a 'Muslim point of view'.

Regarding the depiction of Muslims and Islam within their own organisation, interviewees stated that they attempt a more differentiated approach than that which they observe in mainstream media in Germany. This includes the differentiation between Islam as a religion and confession of faith, on the one hand, and the everyday life of Muslims who possess additional identities, on the other.

That is, when we form a category – the category of Muslims – then each person perceives differently how he conceives his being Muslim and how he shows it in the public sphere. Whether he regards it as something individual or whether he says publicly ‘Yes, I am Muslim.’ I think these are different approaches. (Specialist press producer)

This differentiation can also include the highlighting of topics that are perceived to be ignored by most media, and it can include the diminution of topics that are perceived to be exaggerated by other media outlets. Some journalists said they try to approach all topics from a critical perspective – the topics of Muslims and Islam included. They attempt to cover all stories in as objective a way as possible. One key point is that most of the participants in this sample say that they let Muslims themselves have a say on the topics of Muslims and Islam. One producer describes his medium as an exception; insofar as it lets Muslims speak themselves. He describes his TV magazine as a broadcast:

[...] in which Muslims get a chance to speak authentically, in which Muslims are asked themselves, in which it is not talked *about* Muslims but *with* Muslims. (Specialist TV producer)

Stories

Topics on Muslims and Islam in general

The interviewees were asked which specific topics they cover on Muslims and Islam. Usually they answered with recent examples. One consistent story that dominates the coverage in the specialist media is not recognisable. In a few cases, journalists explicitly referred to some stories as pieces written or suited to counter the dominant image.

One story type is on contributions of Islam and Islamic thinking to society. This can concern the depiction of the Sufi philosophy, specific stories about contributions of Islam in the areas of housing, upbringing or economic fairness and, furthermore, the Islamic foundation system that comprises the idea that persons demise land or a plot for religious or charitable applications.

On a similar track are stories that consider aspects of everyday life from a Muslim perspective. Examples that were referred to included travel and tourism, the economic system, or perceived Christian topics like ‘charity’ and its relevance in Islam.

Furthermore, debates within the Muslim community in Germany are covered in the specialist media consulted in this sample. One example is the debate on liberal Muslims:

What makes a Muslim a liberal Muslim and what makes him a conservative one? Say, when he prays five times a day is he conservative or is he simply a normal Muslim? A person who does not pray five times a day: Is he liberal? Or is he conservative because he considers other values more important? (Specialist press producer)

Moreover, the interviewees mention stories that illustrate Muslim life in Germany or elsewhere, for example, Ramadan and how it is practiced. This area can also include the history of Islam in Germany, or the view of scientists and writers on Muslims and Islam, or Muslims in the German army, training of Imams, Muslim fashion labels, or the celebration of Islamic feasts. Interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims is also often discussed, such as the *iftar* event held by the

political party Christian Democratic Union (CDU⁷) in Berlin or one by the *Katholische Akademie* in Berlin (Catholic Academy in Berlin). Both invite representatives of Muslim associations to a joint breaking of the fast.

Stories on Muslim life include – according to several interviewees – the treatment of Muslims in Germany, for example, the occasion in 2010 when former President Wulff stated that Islam belongs to Germany, or when Federal Minister of the Interior Hans-Peter Friedrich (CSU⁸) objected and said that Islam does not belong to Germany, but the four million Muslims living in Germany. Another topic mentioned was the political initiative to integrate Islamic religious instruction in the German language into schools. Other examples included the debate surrounding the author Thilo Sarrazin, who criticised Germany's Muslim population harshly in his 2010 book; the debate on headscarves; and debates on the building of mosques in German cities. The debate on headscarves includes judicial decisions on the wearing of headscarves, political decisions and trends in politics on that topic. Such stories about debates on Islam are often picked up when they appear in the mainstream media:

It happens often that the debate on Islam is led at the expense of Turks in Germany. Every time there is a debate on Islam, there is also a debate on Turks – or so it is often. But concerning the topic from a theological view or a religious view, it is minimised in our broadcasts. (Specialist radio producer)

Those stories can include articles that mix up Muslims that advocate violence or condemn democracy with the majority of peaceful individuals with Muslim backgrounds who live in Germany.

As mentioned, there are stories written that counter the dominant image. They show that individuals of a Muslim background, or a migrant background, are normal members of German society. Examples include stories on the rising number of students of Turkish origin at German universities, pieces on the noticeable culture of entrepreneurship among migrants, articles about migrants who have built sizeable property portfolios in Germany, and on migrant associations founding successful private schools in Germany.

Thilo Sarrazin and 'Deutschland schafft sich ab' ('Germany Is Abolishing Itself')

In the course of the interviews, we asked producers and journalists how they reported Thilo Sarrazin⁹ and his book '*Deutschland schafft sich ab. Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen*' [*Germany Is*

⁷ *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands* (Christian Democratic Union of Germany)

⁸ *Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern* (Christian Social Union of Bavaria)

⁹ Sarrazin can be described as an "anti-immigrant commentator". He is a member of the Social Democratic Party and he was a board member of the German Bundesbank, dismissed in September 2010. Sarrazin generated a broad media debate by publishing his book "*Deutschland schafft sich ab*". The author holds the opinion that Muslim immigrants are making the German population as a whole less successful and educated. In his book he writes that the German population is sinking rapidly and the demographic balance is maintained only by immigrants' birth rates being higher than that of indigenous Germans. The result, in his view, is dropping school standards and rising crime. According to Sarrazin, people from certain ethnic groups are of low IQ, are neither willing nor able to contribute to society, and do not embrace German values. In his view,

Abolishing Itself: How we Jeopardise Our Country] and how the coverage of Sarrazin and his views connects to the coverage of Muslims and Islam. Most of the media organisations in this sample tried not to enhance the importance of Sarrazin by covering him. In many cases, the debate on Sarrazin and his book was treated as a minor story.

One Turkish-language newspaper represented in this sample printed several comment pieces on the debate. The producer interviewed said his newspaper could have taken up the challenge to analyse Sarrazin's assertions more thoroughly, but did not. Nonetheless, according to him, a survey has shown that only one third of immigrants in Germany noticed the debate. When he requested an interview with Sarrazin, his request was denied. In a comment piece the journalist tried to show that Sarrazin's statements are not only taken up by indigenous white Germans; he mentioned a Turkish immigrant he had met who supported Sarrazin's arguments. It appears that this journalist, therefore, tried to go against black and white thinking. Another producer could conduct an interview with Sarrazin. The journalist summarised: "We did not suppress or conceal the topic". He said: "We covered what he said, what he wrote. I also conducted an interview with the Federal Chancellor on her reaction to his writing." Moreover, the newspaper presented the reactions of people of Turkish origin to Sarrazin's utterances. The editor of a web magazine emphasised that his colleagues were reticent in covering the ideas of Sarrazin. When the magazine covered the story, it was mainly covered the ensuing debate and its implications for the life of migrants in Germany. An editor said that his organisation featured the debate on Sarrazin as a main topic. He and his colleagues tried to highlight a broad range of perspectives on the topic:

In that issue we tried to also give non-Muslims a word. A professor [...], a student of theology [...], and a reverend wrote about the topic. That means, not that Muslims wrote in our magazine on Sarrazin, but non-Muslims wrote on Sarrazin, in order to have a change of perspective. And I think we did well. (Specialist print magazine editor)

Several of the media represented in this sample published articles and comments on Sarrazin criticising his equation of social problems with the religion of Islam. Some journalists said that they tried not to argue from the victim's point of view when they covered the topic. What is more, some specialist media also criticised media colleagues who covered Sarrazin and his book in depth, saying that this only increased the public attention on the topic.

Arab Spring/ Political upheavals in the greater Middle East

The political upheavals in the greater Middle East that started at the end of 2010 were aimed against the authoritarian regimes in power in several states in the region. During the conducting of the interviews, the protests resulted in the toppling of autocratic rulers in Tunisia and Egypt. There was ongoing unrest in Bahrain and Iran, and in Libya the protests had turned into a civil war. In all of these states the Islamic faith is – in different manifestations – the dominant religion of the population. During the interviews, the question of how the political upheavals were being

immigration from Islamic countries poses a threat to the European cultural model. He opines that Muslims integrate themselves distinctly less than other groups of migrants. The reasons are to be found "in the culture of Islam".

covered by their employers was posed. Also, the interviewees were asked how the upheavals were linked to the topic of Muslims and Islam.

The majority of the interviewees in this sample did not see a direct connection between the protests and Islam more generally. One newspaper journalist said that these countries would eventually reach a crossroads; there was a chance that they might become pluralistic democracies, but on the other hand there was a danger that Islamist politicians could take over and establish new but equally dictatorial regimes as those that had recently been toppled.

That is why I think there is no Islamist discourse in these countries, no re-Islamisation. The people won't be convinced to turn from one totalitarian system to another. Rather, the people look for 'How can I increase my prosperity?', 'How do I get access to education?', 'How can I lead a self-determined life?' And leading such a life does not have to be a religious life. (Specialist press producer)

One editor (of a specialist print magazine) emphasised that Islam becomes relevant only when the protesters deliberately incorporate or neglect religion: "Islam plays a role when the actors themselves carry Islam into the topic or when they take Islam out of the topic".

Sources

Several journalists in this sample stated that they try to present Muslims as individuals when it comes to the topic of Islam and Muslims. In a few cases, the media focus on Muslims themselves as sources. In doing so, media can present a heterogeneous image of Muslims. In the example of a TV magazine included in this sample, the producer listed as sources and subjects an imam, a teacher of religion, a university professor, actors, publishers, and a comedian.

We have a lot of women in our magazine that do not wear headscarves, that say 'I am as religious as Nazan Eckes'¹⁰. I interviewed the only 'Miss Deutschland'¹¹ with Turkish roots. We have a lot of confident, emancipated women. We are breaking with the cliché of wearing headscarves and being oppressed (specialist TV producer)

In general, the participants in this sample sought to present a nuanced and balanced image of Muslims in Germany. Several journalists said that they avoid using extremist voices as sources. One faction known as an extremist Muslim organisation is a group of Salafists led by Pierre Vogel.

For months we have been pelted with requests that we should clarify the animosities against Pierre Vogel and his group. We just ignore that. It is irrelevant. I don't even want to bring certain people in the public gaze by reading their name. (Specialist press editor)

In this case, the argument was that Pierre Vogel's group is not only extremist but also unimportant. However, the assessment of which group is extremist and which one is not appears to vary. A radio producer, for example, explained that he uses the Muslim organisation *Milli*

¹⁰ Nazan Eckes is a popular German TV presenter with a Turkish background.

¹¹ The winner of a beauty pageant similar to 'Miss Germany'.

Görüş as a source – a group criticised by the German *Verfassungsschutz* (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution):

And then there is the Islamist group *Millî Görüş* that dominates that Islamic Council [...]. When one hears *Millî Görüş*, one thinks at first of bombers or something like that. I would say that one should see that in a more differentiated way – they are also 600 mosque communities, at least. And 600 communities means when one estimates 100 people [per community] it's quite a lot [...] And they are not only the bomb planters. A few years ago the coverage about *Millî Görüş* was, in my opinion, very one-sided, very undifferentiated (Specialist radio producer)

And another interviewee also speaks directly to members of *Millî Görüş*. He said:

Why shouldn't I let them articulate the position of an association that has existed in Germany for 50 years, and offers a lot of social services, just because the association emerges somewhere in a report by the Protection of the Constitution? Where would we be then? Then we [would also] have to leave out the *Linkspartei*¹². (Specialist press producer)

On 'Muslim Media'

The majority of the twelve participants in this sample did not recognise the term 'Muslim Media' as being an accurate description for the media that they work for. Just three interviewees identified their media as being Muslim media. One interviewee (from the specialist press) characterised Muslim media as being value-oriented; progressive and idealistic. Another interviewee (specialist print magazine) regarded a Muslim media vehicle as a vehicle through which Muslims can convey their opinions. One interviewee (specialist web magazine) said his media outlet was a Muslim medium if Muslim media are defined as outlets used by consumers wanting to get to know what Muslims think. One participant (specialist print magazine) stated that the notion of "Muslim Media" produces a greater separation in society – a dichotomy between Muslim media and non-Muslim media. He regarded this as counterproductive. Some interviewees also argued that media, in reality, tend to rely not on a religious affiliation but on the language in which they are produced, e.g., Arabic, Turkish, Pashto, Dari or Urdu..

I don't know any Muslim Turkish newspapers. I just know Turkish newspapers, or newspapers in the Turkish language. I produce a newspaper for Turkish speakers, regardless of whether they are Christians or Muslims (specialist press producer).

Another journalist (specialist TV) argued that one cannot divide media by religion. According to him, only individuals can have religion. He also disputed the terms 'Muslim journalist', as he defined being a journalist as a profession rather than a private matter.

Digital media

One editor said that the Internet has much potential for contributing to coverage on Muslims and Islam. He mentioned the website *Qantara.de*¹³; he observed that a lot of young Muslims now

¹² *Linkspartei* is a political party in Germany, officially called *Die Linke* ('The Left'). It is a democratic socialist party.

¹³ The website *Qantara.de*, according to its own definition, promotes dialogue with the Islamic world.

create and run their own websites. A problem he observed is the fact that some websites are used by radical groups to promote their statements.

So, on the one hand the Internet allows access to information by young Muslims [...] and that shows a normalisation of Islam, by that Islam is simply a normal part of the German-speaking public, the German-speaking media – that is the positive aspect. And, on the other side, there are those more radical voices that gain attention via the internet, although this attention does not equate with their [limited] numerical strength. My impression is that they [a specific Salafist grouping] are actually still a radical minority, an absolute minority among Muslims, but they are very present on the Internet and have, by that, a dominance that does not mirror their numerical importance. (Specialist web magazine editor)

Another editor of a website observed that a lot a post-factum editing occurs on the Internet. After an article is published it is often altered when readers raise a complaint.

Included in the sample is one web magazine that invites readers to contribute to the content of the website. As a result, it gained 200 authors, most of them volunteers. Thus, the Internet also is also a place of volunteer engagement in media coverage. The editor of the web magazine regarded the Internet, in general, as an increasing competitor to traditional print media. He stated, furthermore, that since the circulation of a lot of newspapers has diminished in recent times, many have abolished sound editorial principles in order to better sell their product.

Impact of coverage

The majority of the interviewees in this sample stated that media can have considerable impact on the peaceful coexistence of citizens. One editor asserted that his webpage is used by a lot of non-Muslims who want to learn about Muslims and Islam.

I believe that we have a big influence, a big opportunity for influence – at least on the people who manage to arrive at our site. Those who took the leap and said ‘I am interested in this topic; I want to hear what Muslims themselves say’. And when we communicate opinions also from a Muslim perspective, then we have, I believe, a good chance to have a positive influence (specialist web magazine editor)

A problem identified is that extensive coverage of Muslims and Islam can influence the atmosphere in the local area. In this respect, it is possible that Muslims and non-Muslims can interact without emphasising their different religions, or indeed participate in a successful religious dialogue, until media negatively cover Muslims.

Looking at the influence of mainstream media, some journalists in this sample also observed an effect on persons of a Muslim background and their emotional well-being:

We recognise that in the previous two years, not in our newspaper but in general, there are changes. We recognised that a lot of Muslims feel driven into a corner by politics or by the mainstream media (specialist print magazine editor)

Mainstream media contribute to a certain dynamic in the coexistence of Muslims and non-Muslims. Coverage not only influences interaction between Muslims but also interaction between those who are regarded as Muslims and those who are non-Muslims. That even goes so far that

persons of a Muslim background find themselves constrained to act based on their religious affiliation even though, for some of them, it hitherto did not serve an important function. Some interviewees observed that a lot of unreligious individuals with a Muslim background reacted to the extensive and often hostile coverage of Muslims and Islam by increasingly identifying with their religion.

[There are] left-wing colleagues [who] are nowadays advocates of mosques, although they were previously always rather critical of religion. Why? Because they are affirmed in their identity as Muslims when they have to take a position in this discussion (specialist radio producer)

Some of the producers in this sample also made clear that media can serve as a means of reinforcing the identity of some individuals, who use certain media to confirm their already fixed opinions on Muslims and Islam.

Media only make money when they have a large circulation And how do I sell? By being as sensational as possible or by reproducing over and over again the opinion that my readership wants to hear. (Specialist press editor)

One journalist explained that his editorial staff, when confronted with the Sarrazin debate, acts carefully in order not to add fuel to the flames. Another interviewee reports a similar strategy. According to him, during the period of events in Mölln and Solingen 14 “the atmosphere was quite explosive”. He said he and his colleagues tried to restrain and moderate their readership:

Q: In comments, or how does one do that?

I: Headline, comments, reports – that authorities will catch the guilty ones and find them, one does not have to bother oneself. That one can trust other authorities as well, and so on and so forth. Also in the comments and the reports. So, we did a good deal. (Specialist press producer)

Editorial processes

In this sample a trend can be observed towards enhanced dialogue between colleagues on sensitive topics and how these are to be covered. This usually takes the form of editorial conferences, but can also take the form of more informal conversations between colleagues on certain topics and their coverage.

In a few cases, one person or a small group decides what is published and how it is published. This is especially true for media that are mainly run by voluntary staff. In an example of such an outlet that is run voluntarily (a web-based news journal), authors send in articles that they propose for publication, or topic proposals. A member of the board of the online magazine then decides whether to publish the article at all, whether to do so directly in the current format or whether to ask for revision. In the case of proposed topics, the board decides whether to accept them or not. So, the board mainly acts as a coordinator for the authors that contribute content. In the case of one print magazine – the initiative of one person who acts as both author and

¹⁴ At the beginning of the Nineties, persons belonging to the extreme right-wing committed arson attacks on houses in which Turkish families lived in the German cities of Mölln (1992) and Solingen (1993).

editor – the responsible journalist decides on the topics to cover, asks potential authors for contributions, and translates foreign articles with the permission of their authors. In several other cases, the editorial staff decides in conferences which topics will be covered, and the particular focus and perspective. Often the editorial processes within the organisations represented in this sample appeared to be informal.

I am relatively free in the selection of my topics. When I've written an article I, if necessary, confer with the deskman. But apart from that, 95 per cent of what I write is published. (Specialist press producer)

Some media created unwritten rules, such as that only Muslim women cover discrimination against Muslim women with headscarves. In this case, that approach is implemented because Muslim men lack the personal experience of wearing a head covering.

Another example is the use of certain terminology, meaning implicit commenting on notions by framing them in a particular way – such as when producers talk of 'so called terrorism' instead of 'terrorism', because of a sense that terrorism is not clearly defined. According to one interviewee (specialist TV producer), another example of an editorial statement is when journalists speak of an 'Israeli occupation of Palestine'.

Beyond that, another trend to be observed is that some media put a purposeful emphasis on positive stories concerning Muslims and Islam. This can include stories that are about the successes achieved by individuals with a migrant or Muslim background.

Most of the producers in this sample explained that their media aim to show the diversity of opinions held by Muslims. Thus, they try to avoid depicting a homogeneous Muslim minority in Germany, and show the blended composition of perspectives of people of a Muslim background.

According to some journalists interviewed, guidelines that govern coverage can be found in the mission statements of their organisations. These guidelines can advocate the principle of a dialogue-based approach in dealing with different cultures or religions – something opposite to the concept of a 'Clash of Civilisations' propagated by Samuel Huntington. As one producer states:

That means that we regard religious, culture and language diversity as an asset [...] We don't stigmatise social groups. You won't find this in our coverage. We don't state connections between negative characteristics and general ascriptions: 'The Germans are xenophobic' – you won't find this in our coverage. Or: 'The Turks don't integrate themselves' – you won't find this. We do not combine general ascriptions like Germans, Christians, Muslims and Turks with negative characteristics, but we bring together those negative characteristics with those individuals involved (specialist press producer).

To what extent is the background of a journalist considered to affect output?

The journalists interviewed, in most cases, identified connections between the background of a journalist and the way he or she produces reports. Several of them did not narrow the background down solely to religion, but also included national origin, academic background or the ability to speak certain languages.

One central aspect that was often addressed by interviewees was the access to topics and sources related to them. A journalist working for a TV station said that, being a member of a certain Muslim branch can allow one access to particular people. “Every Arab knows that Omar is a Sunni name. And every Arab knows that Amar is a Shiite name.” Here it quite vividly seems that the personal background of a journalist can be important to staying safe and to gaining contact with sources for stories. Another producer (specialist TV) explained that it can create trust in the Muslim community when a media organisation hires Muslim journalists to cover topics related on Muslims and Islam. According to him, the idea was to avoid giving Muslim sources the feeling of being interrogated and patronised about Islam by non-Muslim journalists:

It is aimed at creating trust in the [Muslim] community. And that can be done better when there are also journalists that have the same belief [...] of course, a non-Muslim journalist can learn the ropes, but I could also read so many books about Catholicism or Protestantism – I could never understand them like someone who is socialised in this religion, in this belief. [...] One notices it [also] in practice. When we phone somewhere and the people hear our names and ask then ‘Are you Muslim?’ and we say ‘Yes’ – oh, then one notices that the door opens. [...] We are blamed as not being critical enough, or that we cannot cover critically [issues relating to Islam] as Muslims. That is nonsense. We are hired first and foremost as journalists, as critical journalists. (Specialist TV producer)

Some journalists said that they have an insider view:

I know how a mosque association works. I was raised in a mosque association; German colleagues do not need to tell anything about that. (Specialist press producer)

Nonetheless, a few journalists in this sample referred to blind spots that a Muslim journalist can be vulnerable to when he constantly deals with the topics of Muslims and Islam:

I think when it comes to the topics of Muslims and Islam [...] I find it important that not just Muslims write about it but also non-Muslims, to gain a change of perspective. When only Muslims write always about a certain topic – an Islamic topic –they perhaps may not see certain points that an outsider does see. (Specialist print magazine editor).

On the other hand, one producer explained that many German colleagues often lack the ability to analyse information about Muslims and Islam;

He or she cannot classify whether this information is qualitatively right or wrong. And then he writes anything, nonsense. He creates links that are not the case. (Specialist press producer)

Several interviewees emphasised that journalists of a Muslim background are often criticised for covering the topics of Muslims and Islam. Some interviewees themselves criticised the existence of double standards in dealing with journalists with a religious background. One producer said that criticism often stems from editorial staffs specialised on Christian religions [*Kirchenredaktionen*] that are interspersed with people that are members of religious, especially Christian, groups:

Here one could say ‘Are you actually objective enough to cover your own religion?’ But funnily enough, in this case it is not built up as an obstacle.” (Specialist TV producer)

Another journalist said that reports by Muslims can be judged differently by editors and colleagues, compared to reports submitted by non-Muslims. This seems to be the case for coverage on Muslims and Islam-related topics for which a certain discourse exists (for example, the idea that specific Muslim groups are always suspicious).

Because when you, for example, cover something about *Millî Görüş*¹⁵ and that has just the hint of nuance in it – then you are accused of being a sympathiser of *Millî Görüş* [...] When one does not use horror music and overlay the video with a black camera lens – you as journalist are under strong suspicion of being a sympathiser of this group. (Specialist radio producer)

According to this journalist, someone who is in a more junior position (e.g. as a freelancer or as a recently hired employee) has often to side with the mainstream in order to get into a position where he can decide more freely how to present such stories as that mentioned above. ‘Unwritten rules’ (see above) have an impact on the way a journalist presents his story, making the journalist’s background less important.

The same journalist explained that it is possible that a journalist who does not follow the mainstream discourse in covering Muslims and Islam can be thwarted by his superiors. (“That is especially the case when you advocate a different opinion in the debate on integration, or something like that.”) Several interviewees stated that a journalist of a Muslim background must work with a certain angle on stories in that area.

As shown, the output of journalists of a Muslim background often appears to be regarded as being more problematic, and less objective, than that produced by non-Muslims. The issue of who is writing a certain story on Muslims and Islam can matter, when it comes to the appreciation of other journalists and the audience. A story written by a journalist of a Muslim background can, however, also be seen as conveying a more authentic impression than a piece written by a non-Muslim. One interviewee told us that often journalists of Muslim heritage are treated as experts on Muslims and Islam due to their religious background, and that sometimes journalists of a Muslim background use their connection to this religion to foster their career.

In general, most of the interviewees emphasised that the quality a journalist’s work does not depend on the religion of the journalist and its relationship to the topic he or she works on. Rather, most of the journalists in this sample identified universal journalistic principles and asserted that journalists, regardless of their background, should seek to attain a level of professionalism that can successfully separate their private interests from their journalist interests:

Journalism has no religion; it does not matter whether one is Muslim, Christian, or Buddhist. But the person himself or herself who is journalist can have a religion– and in this respect I am Muslim (Specialist print magazine editor)

¹⁵ *Millî Görüş* is an Islamist movement founded in 1969 by Necmettin Erbakan, a former prime minister of Turkey. It is considered to be the biggest Islamist organisation in Germany. The movement estimates that it has 50, 000 members in Germany.

Still, one interviewee explained that his ethnic origin means he has a special perspective on developments in Arab countries, that make it difficult to distinguish between professional interests and personal interests:

Yes, of course from time to time something [personal opinion] leaks. And that is for me just an indication of a lack of professionalism. [...] Whether I am Arab and cover the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, or whether I am revolutionary and I cover Egypt, it must not happen. (Specialist TV producer)

One editor (specialist print magazine) raised the question of whether a journalist should feel aggrieved when his or her religion is publicly offended. She recommended not exaggerating certain debates on Muslims and Islam, that it is sometimes wise to ignore these contentious issues or to ask a non-Muslim journalist to comment on such debates.

Suggestions for change

One basic argument for seeking change was that media coverage has an impact on the everyday life of Muslims. One editor recommended journalists should work accurately:

When one covers a minority – and Muslims are a minority – then you need to have the thought in mind that, when one performs a bad journalistic job, or works sloppily, that there are people that suffer directly as a result [of the coverage] in situations in everyday life. (Specialist web magazine editor)

Beyond that, some interviewees in this sample suggested that journalists who write about Muslims and Islam should make their definitions clear and stick to their terminology. One example is the term ‘Islamist’, which is often associated with illegal or dangerous activities in the media, despite the fact that the term is broader and can be applied to any Muslim who wants to realise components of their belief in a political way, like members of Christian parties, and something that does not necessarily contradict governing laws.

Furthermore, a few interviewees encouraged journalists in general to approach more persons of a Muslim background and depict their perspectives more extensively in media:

Minorities are minorities because their voices are not heard. That means the media could take on the task by reporting on minorities, reporting on their statements. So that these groups are appreciated and incorporated into coverage (Specialist print magazine editor)

Another journalist recommended the inclusion in newspapers of comments by representatives of Muslim associations:

There are very few guest articles by representatives of Muslim associations in German newspapers. When one criticises the associations, one has to give them the chance to have a say and present their view so that the reader or consumer can see it for himself or herself. (Specialist TV producer)

One producer emphasised that he adapts his articles and positions to the different audiences that he writes for:

That may be seen as arbitrary by outsiders. But I don't see it that way. I think, actually, that when I talk to my father I have to represent other positions than when I talk with an official of the Central Council of Muslims. And that does not mean that my position is arbitrary, but that I adapt it to the dialogue partner. (Specialist web magazine producer)

One crucial aspect several journalists mentioned was that Muslims should not be depicted as a group separated from wider German society, but as normal people whose life is not necessarily determined by their religion. One producer recommended that journalists should include more individuals with a Muslim background in their coverage on topics other than religion:

Muslims and migrants should be invited as talk show guests, people who are not reduced only to these topics [Islam and Muslims] but also speak about normal topics that have societal relevance (Specialist web magazine producer)

One interviewee argued in a similar direction when he demanded more differentiated coverage. He criticised the conflation of marginal Muslim groups with the majority of Muslims.

Especially in mainstream media, one covers about five per cent of Muslims and pretends that the remaining 95 per cent are identical with these. (specialist print magazine editor)

Another interviewee spoke of the emphasis placed on 'otherness' and criticised the fact that media tend to highlight aspects that separate people with migrant or Muslim backgrounds from 'established' communities in Germany:

Recently a 'Turkish woman from a TV show undressed and *BILD*¹⁶ produced a story on that and said 'Yes, her parents and the ...' In this case one notices, every day there is a woman undressed somewhere in the world. That is quite usual, regardless of what our opinion is on that. But 'when it comes to Turks one needs to cover about the parents and make a story'. In the end the message is always 'they are different'. (Specialist TV producer)

From that observation follows the recommendation not to confuse in coverage aspects of religion or nationality with the behaviour and lifestyle of an individual, and not to narrow one's perspective on a person by simply focusing on religion, nationality or tradition. The importance of avoiding such a culturally simplistic view was also emphasised when several interviewees suggested that journalists should remember not to employ stereotypes and clichés about Muslims and Islam. Otherwise it would be difficult to provide unbiased coverage about topics in this field. Another clear finding in the interviews in this sample was the idea that journalists should not just focus on the problems of people of Muslim and migrant backgrounds but also highlight the efforts of those seeking to lead successful, independent lives.

The personal contact of journalists with people of a Muslim background was stressed as vital by one journalist. Another interviewee stated that the discourse on Muslims and Islam in the media is governed by people who are in contact with no or very few Muslims. He recommended allowing more journalists of a Muslim background cover issues relating to Islam and Muslims.

¹⁶ BILD is a German tabloid, considered to be the best-selling newspaper outside Japan.

I think it is important journalists of Muslim background get involved more. And that they tell more of the inner life of the community, tell something – of course objectively as far as possible. (Specialist TV producer)

Another journalist (specialist radio producer) regretted that Muslim journalists are missing from leading positions in the media (“Muslims that are in responsible positions in journalism are hard to find”). Some of the interviewees referred to the need for more experts on Muslims and Islam in editorial staffs – experts not necessarily because of their own religious affiliation but by qualifications and studies (especially Islamic Studies).

MAINSTREAM MEDIA PRODUCERS

Main findings

- Though the journalists in this sample, to a broad extent, described polarising and simplified coverage of Muslims and Islam in general, several of them observed that coverage has become more nuanced during recent years. However, mainstream media producers stated that the topics of *Muslims* and *Islam* are often overemphasised in mainstream media coverage. According to several journalists, this is sometimes due to a mix-up of categories: when the behaviour of a person, or a group, from a Muslim background is featured in media coverage, it is often in a simplified way that highlights their religious background but not their individual experiences, tradition, or education.
- It was criticised that, in mainstream coverage, a lot of myths about Muslims and their religion were treated as facts by journalists. On the other hand, a sort of counter-coverage is believed to have emerged in mainstream media, which leads to waves of debates between journalists who sympathise with one of the factions.
- It appears that the media producers in this sample were aware of the need to maintain responsible journalism that clarifies the background of events, omits stereotypes and clichés, and thus helps to foster more unbiased interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims.
- Journalists did not want special treatment of the topics surrounding Muslims and Islam. They wanted these topics to be treated like other topics in the media. None of the journalists recommended special guidelines for coverage on Muslims and Islam. Rather, they sought adherence to core journalistic standards, like the need to cover stories objectively and in a balanced way. The journalists interviewed for this sample underlined that they try to work in this way. In accordance with their wish to treat Muslims as ordinary members of society, the journalists interviewed supported the idea of involving more people of Muslim background as sources when it comes to societal topics beyond religion.
- Most of the journalists suggested that people with Muslim and/or migrant backgrounds are generally underrepresented in editorial staffs. However, it was observed that people with Muslim names are increasingly common as presenters and reporters on TV and radio. Several participants in this sample mentioned that it is helpful to have a Muslim background when working as a journalist in the field of Muslims and Islam. However, they made clear that every journalist has to stick to certain universal standards, such as balanced coverage that includes all relevant perspectives.

- It was judged that journalists of a Muslim background often have better access to sources in the fields of Muslims and Islam than non-Muslims; as a result of being familiar with Muslim practices, they are often able to discern problems and developments more easily than non-Muslim journalists. However, there were other – non-Muslim – journalists that emphasised that education (especially Islamic Studies) can endow journalists with the knowledge to approach topics concerning Muslims and Islam in a prepared and informed manner.

Participants in this sample

In total, 22 journalists were interviewed. They work for media that are consumed by the broader German public. Ten of them were female, twelve were male – these proportions are close to the wider demographic distribution of journalists in Germany (62.7 per cent male, 37.3 per cent female¹⁷). Of the journalists that discussed their religious background, about two third were of Christian background and one third were of Muslim background. Here a disproportionately high share of Muslims is clearly recognisable. This is possibly due to the fact that journalists with a Muslim background sometimes feel forced by their editorial staffs to specialise on the topics of Muslims and Islam (a finding that is reported in this study). The interviewees were mostly of German background, but participants with a migrant background were also included. All of the participants who talked about their career path studied at university. As shown above, such a high rate of academics among journalists is usual (68.8 per cent in 2005¹⁸). Eight of the interviewees had a degree in Islamic studies. That means there was a bias towards journalists who are academically trained on topics in the themes of Muslims and Islam.

About half of the journalists were employed at one media outlet, the other half worked freelance, often for more than one media outlet. Here we can observe an over-representation of freelancers, based on a survey which stated that among (full-time) journalists 25.2 per cent are freelancers and 74.8 per cent are permanently employed journalists.¹⁹ The distribution of represented media in this sample appears balanced; several of them work for newspapers or news magazines, many of the participants work for broadcast media, mainly radio; three work for national TV. Several of the freelancers work simultaneously for national radio, newspapers, and online magazines.

Audience Profile

The composition of audiences of the media represented in this sample is very mixed. With reference to print media, it ranges from local or regional circulation of around 30.000 to national circulation with numbers around one million and above. Mainstream media involve a cross-section of population. For example, one radio journalist said the listeners of his channel are

¹⁷ Weischenberg, S.; Scholl, A.; Malik, M. (2005): Journalismus in Deutschland 2005. In: Media Perspektiven, 7/2006, S. 350.

¹⁸ Weischenberg, S.; Scholl, A.; Malik, M. (2005): Journalismus in Deutschland 2005. In: Media Perspektiven, 7/2006, S. 353.

¹⁹ Weischenberg, S.; Scholl, A.; Malik, M. (2005): Journalismus in Deutschland. URL: <http://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/sowi/journalistik/kvvarchiv/KvvArchiv/jourid.pdf>

academics, housewives, university students as well as school pupils. According to one TV journalist his audience comprises every societal class. One TV journalist described her audience as “the critical public”. A few journalists specifically characterised their audience as educated.

Staff Profiles/ Diversity Policy

The majority of the media personnel included in this sample had a non-migrant background, according to the journalists who specifically discussed this topic. Only a few media outlets currently have quotas on diversity. One radio journalist said that fostering integration is a crucial element of the internal policy of his media organisation, which seeks and attracts applications from employees of foreign origin. One media organisation has an informal quota for women employees but does not use quotas for individuals of Muslim or migrant backgrounds. Only a few journalists reported that their organisations employ individuals of migrant or Muslim backgrounds. So, for example, one journalist who works in a media organisation with 200 employees and freelancers stated that she knows only five colleagues with migrant backgrounds.

Media Representation

Generally, most of the interviewees that worked for mainstream media stated that Islam and Muslims are topics whose media coverage is afflicted by generalisations, mix-ups, stereotypes, and clichés. However, there was a small range of interviewees that named themes that they describe as being connected with Islam and Muslims without acknowledging that this connection may be unjustified.

When it comes to the topic of Islam, some interviewees complained that the media repeatedly associate Islam with negative connotations: with the oppression of women, with terrorism, with violence and crime, and with hostility to democracy:

There is also a respective iconography, for example, the veiled woman as a symbol of the oppression and narrow-mindedness of the whole religion, or the famous picture showing a minaret that is higher than a church tower. That is in Mannheim, where the church tower is actually double as high as the minaret but it was photographed this way and is used repeatedly for the image that the media often have: of Islam threatening to roll over Europe. (mainstream press producer)

Also the notion of “jihad” is described as being frequently – and often inappropriately– used, when it comes to describing conflicts between groups identified as Muslims and non-Muslims. One interviewee referenced the riots in the French *banlieues*:

Here it was always said: ‘Muslim teenagers have’ ... and some people said ‘that is the beginning of the jihad against Europe’ and so forth. [...] And when the riots in London occurred, nobody said: ‘Marauding Christian teenage gangs rage through London’ – though the majority there were black and white teenagers of the lower class who are nominally Christians and not Pakistani or Indians. On the contrary, three of the fatal victims were Muslims that tried to protect their mosque. (Mainstream press producer)

Looking at the array of topics associated with Islam, some interviewees also mentioned honour killings, and the wearing of headscarves or veils, as topics often raised in media coverage, with

the suggestion of the oppression of women in Islam. It was also stated that a lot of media organisations emphasise the danger of radical Islamic groups in Germany, despite, according to participants, this danger not corresponding with reality.

Muslims are – according to some interviewees – often shown as one homogeneous group, as ‘THE’ Muslims. Additionally, certain groups of migrants and their descendants are equated with this homogeneous group of Muslims. For Germany, this mainly refers to Turks and the Turkish-speaking part of the population, and sometimes Kurds and Kurdish-speaking people. Another group that is usually depicted as homogenously Muslim are Palestinians. One interviewee observed that other groups are excluded when Muslims are mentioned in media coverage, e.g., people from Indonesia, the state with the most Muslims inhabitants.

Beyond that, interviewees stated a mix-up of notions, for instance, the frequency with which all Muslims are equated with Islamists. Some of the interviewees said that Muslims are commonly being stigmatised as being willing to use violence and as fanatics. According to them, Muslims are mainly presented in a negative light and it is these bad aspects that are emphasised. Interviewees stated that Muslims are often depicted as slow and unintelligent, with a focus on debates about lack of education, the separation of Muslim groups (‘parallel societies’), and about problems adapting to Western society. It was criticised that there is a tendency for media outlets to produce sensationalist stories about Muslims and omit the ‘normal’ lives of Muslims. However, a few interviewees observed that there are contrasting reports showing Muslims in everyday life, featuring them as regular members of German society. Also, there are stories of ‘successful Muslims’. This was described in an ambivalent manner; on the one hand this approach contradicts the cliché of uneducated and failing Muslims and reflects well on Muslims, while on the other hand it can serve to support the cliché, since the successful persons appear as exceptions.

With regard to the coverage of Muslims and Islam, interviewees noted a one-dimensional representation of Muslims and Islam, a coverage that is not heterogeneous enough, that focuses too much on sensationalist stories, that fixates on certain topics and repeats these (e.g. honour killings as ‘typical’ Muslim behaviour), that uses clichés and symbols that suggest a situation that contradicts with reality.

Interviewees stated that there were several ‘waves’ or ‘points of crystallisation’ in coverage linked to Muslims and Islam. ‘9/11’ was the most often-mentioned turning point. Other events that led to enhanced coverage in the realm of Islam and Muslims were the debate on the Prophet Mohammed cartoons in 2005 and 2006, the lecture of Pope Benedict XVI in Regensburg in 2006, in which he quoted an unfavourable remark about Islam and the prophet Mohammed originally uttered in the 14th century, and the *Deutsche Islamkonferenz* (German Islam conference)²⁰. The minaret controversy in Switzerland – which resulted in a referendum in 2009 – was described as another turning point. Earlier events that were mentioned included the

²⁰ In 2006 the German government founded the *Deutsche Islamkonferenz* as an official platform in order to bring together politicians and representatives of the Muslim community to discuss Muslim integration in Germany.

Iranian Revolution in 1979, the first Palestinian Intifada, which started in 1987, and the Gulf War of 1990 and 1991.

According to most interviewees, the perception of the threat posed by of Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups changed after 9/11. Political Islam gained attention as ‘the antithesis of Western culture’ and as ‘a threat to liberal-democratic civilisation’. Corresponding with this fear, Muslims are treated as more susceptible to fundamentalism in media coverage:

It is often assumed that Muslims are more prone to fundamentalism than, for example, Christians [...] After the attack or double attack in Oslo it once again became completely clear to me: when people see bearded Muslims, they often think they are fundamentalists and they have no problem in putting them in this corner. But when one talk of Christian fundamentalism in the context of the assassin in Norway, people often say: ‘Well, you can’t call him Christian, he is no Christian. What he does doesn’t match with Christian values.’ (Mainstream radio producer)

Apart from this broader double standard, competition within the media is described as one reason for polarised coverage. Particularly in a challenging economic situation, media organisations are tempted to try to increase their circulation or ratings by showcasing sensationalist news. Another reason mentioned for inaccurate coverage was erroneous reporting due to increased working pressure on journalists: Participants observed a change in working patterns, with budget cuts resulting in an intensification of workloads.

Internal Representation

Most producers in this sample stated that their media organisations tend to provide differentiated and balanced coverage. Several journalists asserted that their media organisations approach all topics with a problem-oriented perspective. They look at extremists and religious fanaticism, for example, when they cover Islamic terrorism, with Islamist cells in Germany and the tracing of terrorists as sub topics. Muslims and people of a Muslim background also take centre stage when the journalists work on the topic of integration, e.g. the question of how German society deals with immigrants and people of a Muslim background. The topics of discrimination, xenophobia and parallel societies were mentioned as being related to integration. Some journalists also mentioned that they deal with Islam as a religion, focusing on issues such as debates on reform within Islam. Other topics of interest included the Muslim world and the depiction of different lifestyles in the Middle East. Historical events associated with Muslims and Islam were also mentioned. One journalist, who works as correspondent in an Arab country, stressed that he attempts to show that Islam is a lively and diverse religion:

I try to counteract the public opinion in Germany that portrays Islam as meaning some public danger, and that Muslims stick severely to the Koran, walk through life with the Koran in their arms and orientate themselves towards it. I try to argue against all this, [saying] that their life is influenced by many factors, just like is the case with us. By that my coverage stands out from that which is written by those who cover Islam predominantly from Germany. I see Islam in its lived form and not like [it is] carved in marble in front of me in the newsroom. (Mainstream newspaper producer)

On the local/regional level, Muslims appear in the media when the media covers events like opens days in local mosques. The editor-in-chief of a mainstream regional newspaper also

mentioned the highlighting of initiatives aimed at fostering integration e.g. a project where a soccer team consisting of players of Turkish origin adopted a German team name. It was also noted by several interviewees that it is important to distinguish between supporters of political Islam, or 'Islamists', and people of Muslim faith that seek freedom of belief without wanting to change the democratic society they live in. The journalistic occupation with Islam as a religion is described by one editor as a way to resolve the impression that it allows or pushes on terrorism. He said that it needs to be made clear "that Islam by itself does not promote terrorism" (mainstream press editor). Some interviewees said that the use of the term 'Muslims' can lead to generalisations. One participant in the sample said that, in her newspaper, the different branches of Islam are not always appropriately discerned. However, on the contrary, a mainstream radio producer said that it can also sometimes be inappropriate to distinguish between Islamic sects, for example when it concerns the conflicts in Iraq ("I, for one, say it often has to do with power and political interests, that are somehow dressed up religiously").

Another interviewee made clear that she avoids the broad term 'Muslims' since it signifies thinking in narrow-minded paradigms. She said that she and her colleagues cover particular Muslim groups or individuals:

When you ask 'How do you cover Muslims?' I say, 'We cover what we have to say about the individual or about the group'. [...] I cannot say 'We cover about THE Muslims', but I can say 'When it is Salafists then we cover about Salafists, when it is the Muslim imam then we cover about the imam, when it is the Muslim boy [...] who got a scholarship and now enjoys a three week stay in the US and studies at one of the best US universities, then we cover about the Muslim boy. It is not one jar with Muslims and foreigners and persons with migrant backgrounds – this view is wrong. And that exactly is the problem. (Mainstream TV producer)

Stories

Topics on Muslims and Islam in general

The interviewees noted a wide range of stories that they associate with Muslims and Islam. Included were stories on Muslim life in Germany and on Muslim life in foreign countries, as well as pieces on religiously –justified terror.

Asked about their coverage of Muslims and Islam, several interviewees mentioned integration as a crucial topic:

In Germany live more than three million fellow citizens of Turkish origin or Turks. And here I see the biggest problem with regard to language, because lacking language competence means successful integration is often impossible. The topic of religion plays a secondary role. There is a question of different values - the understanding of man and woman, for example. But that is not anchored in religious convictions, but rather in traditional convictions that have to do with cultural origin. When you compare Turkey nowadays with the cultural convictions and traditions of a lot of our immigrants, then you realise that there are fellow citizens with migrant backgrounds that tend to shut themselves off, not realising the developments in their former home country, or they do not go along with these developments. (Mainstream press editor)

Another topic mentioned was the situation of teenagers from Muslim backgrounds, who often encounter problems entering the job market, due to discrimination.

An editor (mainstream press) said that he opposes the oppression of women that takes place in several Muslim parts of the world. According to him, he has to deal with this topic if such behaviours are brought to Germany as a result of immigration. Other examples of featured stories are reports on a former radical who left the Salafist scene, the reconstruction of biographies of Muslim assassins, and protests by an interest group opposed to the establishment of a radical Islamic centre. Stories on protests against the building of mosques were mentioned by some interviewees. One journalist stated that she tried to highlight several perspectives in her coverage of the building of a new mosque in Cologne:

I learnt after long enquiries that the city of Cologne itself asked the [Muslim] associations – that are maybe conservative but not extremist – and said ‘Would you build a representative mosque, with German preachers, so that we [can] get rid of the backstreet mosques?’ And then I saw things in clearer light. Then I think ‘Aha. That is preventative. That’s clever!’ And then I am still worried and empathise with the population of Ehrenfeld [a district of Cologne] that says ‘Damn, why directly in front of my house?’ But then I think, of course, in an overall context, as a politician in Cologne, I would also say ‘Better a beautiful mosque, in which we can really interact with each other, than a thousand small backstreet mosques from which I don’t know what happens there.’
(Mainstream TV producer)

Several journalists emphasised the difficulty of not confusing stories on immigrants with stories on Muslims. One interviewee, who works as a freelance correspondent, said that she prefers covering stories on the everyday lives of Muslims in the Arab country she works in:

What I like most are everyday life stories. [...] I have got a problem with the term ‘coverage of Islam’. It is extremely rarely that the matter is about Islam the religion. An example from the past I could maybe mention is ‘the logic of women who wear the face veil’ or ‘Marriage brokering – how do wedding proposals proceed?’ [...] I would denote those stories as being ‘Muslim’ because the people talked about their religion.
(Mainstream radio producer)

With regard to Germany, stories that were mentioned as giving insight into Muslim lives included one highlighting local mosques and their activities. An interviewee also told how a colleague of hers accompanied a group of teenagers of a Muslim background to describe their everyday lives. (“He tried to let them speak themselves”, – mainstream print magazine producer). Another journalist (mainstream radio) covered a story on the consequences of 9/11 for the everyday lives of Muslims in Germany. He showed how moderate Muslims felt, to a certain extent, driven to holding more firmly to their religion, as a result of the polarising coverage in the media – coverage which, according to the journalist, transmitted the message that only an unreligious Muslim is a good Muslim. A radio journalist (mainstream) explained that she tried not to narrow individuals’ stories down to just being Muslim. She said she wants to discuss societal questions that concern everyone, including Muslims and Muslim migrants. One example that she mentioned was questions concerning old age – a report about an intercultural residential home and another report on ‘meals on wheels’ for Muslims.

With regard to stories focusing on religiously-justified terrorism, one editor (mainstream press) stated that he, as a journalist, has to deal with Islam as a religion, since it is used as a justification for certain actions (see above). According to him it is his responsibility to make clear that Islam does not promote religious terrorism. Stories on terrorism, for example, related instead to the tracing of terrorists or security policy.

Thilo Sarrazin and his book “Deutschland schafft sich ab”

We also asked mainstream producers and journalists how they reported on Thilo Sarrazin and his book “*Deutschland schafft sich ab*” [*Germany Is Abolishing Itself*], and how the coverage of him and his opinions is connected to the topic of Muslims and Islam. In general, the interviewees described the debate on Sarrazin’s book as polarising. However, at least two dominating opinions were found among the participants on the issue of how to deal with his divisive statements. On the one hand, there were those journalists who believed that media have the function of informing the public about relevant events, and who regarded Sarrazin as relevant since he is, for example, a member of the Social Democratic Party of Germany and a (now former) board member of the German Bundesbank. On the other hand were those journalists who argued that covering Sarrazin give him enhanced relevance in setting the political agenda.

A producer (mainstream press) described Sarrazin as a ‘splitter’, as the audience is forced to decide a position to take towards his statements. Another producer argued similarly. She stated that the two opposing groups kept the debate on Sarrazin running:

The debate on Sarrazin in Germany was a case where every newspaper in Germany highlighted examples of successful integration. However, I think that this kind of coverage is part of the same cycle. I don’t believe it is part of the solution, but rather [evidence] that by that two camps are established. One front is the Islam-bashing camp, and the other camp is the defence camp that is brought to the scene when there is the impression that an accusing finger is being pointed at a certain group. (Mainstream radio producer)

The editor mentioned above – like other journalists in the sample– emphasised that Sarrazin and his statements are relevant because they mirror existing attitudes in society. Another journalist stated an opposed perspective, saying that media have covered Sarrazin and his book naïvely, transported his statements, and downplayed them:

The media become guilty in that they received it [the book] so much and exaggerated it so much and made something important that was complete rubbish from a scientific point of view. (Mainstream radio producer)

Arab Spring/ Political upheavals in the greater Middle East

Most of the journalists in this sample who reflected on this topic emphasised that the reasons for the Arab Spring cannot be found in the idea that the protesters are mainly of a Muslim background. Rather, the wish for freedom and democracy appear to be the principal reasons for the uprisings, according to interviewees. In their coverage, several tried to portray the protesters themselves. One journalist accompanied a group of friends and showed the changes they went

through. Another journalist said that she had tried to depict the situation in the affected Arab countries concretely, using examples. She recognised that, at the beginning of the revolution, insecurity and fear prevailed in public – in commentaries and talk shows and the utterances of politicians – because people were not sure what the upheavals in the Middle East meant. According to her, people were, for example, unsure whether a theocratic regime was coming in Egypt.

We spent a lot of time in the [radio] studio in order to get an idea of it ourselves. We told our impressions and opinions and tried to describe as accurately as possible what was really going on, and that it was no Islamic overthrow, for example. (Mainstream radio producer)

Some participants in this sample noted that a majority of the media suddenly changed the image of (Arab) Muslims that they had previously presented, when they covered the Arab Spring. They said it was a simplification and generalisation to describe the Muslims that took part as being alike:

The same media who had this undertone for years, like: ‘The Arabs can’t get anything straight in their head, so democracy is impossible anyway’ [...] exactly the same media now jumped onto the revolution hype and suddenly had these stories: ‘Oh, they use Facebook and Twitter, they are exactly like us, and they support democracy and freedom, we have to support that’. In my opinion both point of views are equally one-sided. I don’t know which one is better. The reporting of the last months sounds more friendly, but actually it is reporting that is just as oversimplified and one-dimensional as before. (Mainstream radio producer)

Sources

The sources that the interviewees used depend, of course, on their function and place of work, for example as editor on the news desk or as correspondent in an Arab country. Typical sources include newswires like *Associated Press*, *Reuters* and *Deutsche Presseagentur* [German Press Agency]. A small group of interviewees used foreign media in Turkish, Arabic, or English. Some also used Turkish- and Arabic media distributed in Germany. A few times the *‘Islamische Zeitung’* (‘Islamic newspaper’) was mentioned as a specialist medium that covers the latest debates within Muslim communities. Being from a Muslim background, some of the interviewees came to know of stories by personal contacts. Non-Muslim journalists would take an interpreter with them when they visit mosques. It was emphasised that it is crucial to have a strong network with links to organisations, protagonists in the Muslim community and other journalists, in order to stay informed. Other sources of inquiry were Muslim pages on the internet (religious as well as political pages), books, conferences, scientific studies, researchers in universities or religious-scientific institutes, and email distribution lists.

Several interviewees approvingly noted that there have recently been more attempts to let Muslims themselves talk, for example when journalists interview representatives of local Muslim associations. It was also mentioned that coverage had become more differentiated by presenting individual Muslims, for example, via personal portraits in newspapers of successful individuals who are Muslims.

In relation to coverage of Islamist organisations (here mainly referring to a group of Salafists whose best known representative, Pierre Vogel, was mentioned earlier) it was clear that some participants try to let every side have a say. However, it was acknowledged that it is not usually possible to talk with people from the core of an Islamist group. The organisation typically sends a media-savvy expert from its headquarters. This closing of access means it becomes difficult to hear an authentic opinion presenting the opposing side of a story.

There was criticism of correspondents that work in Arab countries and cover Muslims and Islam without being fluent in the local language. “They automatically receive a filtered view of the society”, one producer (mainstream radio) complained. Such correspondents are dependent on their stringers – local freelancers that provide them with information – and other locals that speak foreign languages, mostly academics.

On ‘Muslim Media’

Most of the interviewees disapproved of the term ‘Muslim media’ for media that is mainly consumed by individuals of a Muslim background. Most of them associated Muslim media with religious media that covers questions on the Islamic faith and covers stories with a religious perspective. One producer (mainly radio) said that she would regard media as Muslim only if they carry an ‘Islamic element’ in their title or mission statement, and would certainly not apply that definition to media simply on the basis of their having a Muslim-majority staff. Otherwise the German *Südwestfunk* (SWR, ‘Southwest Broadcasting’), for example, would be a ‘Christian’ channel. One producer (print) criticised the category “Muslim media” for subsuming a group, irrespective of the multiple additional identities of people that are, inter alia, Muslims. Another interviewee (mainstream TV producer) argued that, if a medium determines its audience and decides to restrict it to Muslims, then the medium has a pro-Muslim attitude, and this would contradict professional journalistic standards that require objectivity.

One journalist addressed the interviewer directly with regard to the wording ‘Muslim media’:

[With this title [...] you become – though you are full of the best intentions – part of the process of the tightening spiral that reduces everything about Islam. Thus my pleading is: Do not make it a topic! We have strived for secularity, and religion ought to be a private matter – so get rid of it. (Mainstream radio producer)]

Digital media

In this sample, digital media was described as a means for both advantageous as well as disadvantageous outcomes. One problem that was identified was that fundamentalist Muslim groups can deliver pictures and clips of Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri much more easily than in years before. Not only is the distribution faster, the content can reach people who had no or little access to it before. On the other hand, however, the Internet allows audiences to contribute in real time to the webpages of media organisations, and it allows them to run their own webpage, in the form of a blog, for example. A problem identified by some interviewees was that bloggers do not always follow journalistic standards such as objectivity, however, there are bloggers that do manage to gain influence on public debates.

Impact of Coverage

Most participants agreed that media coverage can have substantial impact. One comment was that media can create and reproduce images of people with a Muslim or migrant background. Here media are seen as a source of information that is used by consumers to form their own opinions. In this respect, perceptions of reality are, to a broad extent, governed by media and thus people are influenced by the images presented by media outlets:

I hope that it [coverage of Muslims and Islam] has influence, that it interests people and they read it. And when they read it with interest, they possibly occupy themselves with the topic, reflect it, reflect on social dislocations, and reflect on their own behaviour towards others. (Mainstream press editor)

These debates by media consumers become visible when they take place on the web. One interviewee told how her radio reports are discussed on the Internet; she can also observe that people share hyperlinks to her reports on Facebook. However, she was careful in suggesting that her reports have a strong impact (“[...] that does not mean that I have noticeably made a difference. That would be too exaggerated” – mainstream radio producer)

As some participants stated, the dependency on information conveyed by the media about Muslims and Islam is especially important for non-Muslims in Germany with no personal connections to Muslims. As one interviewee observed, there is a broad range of the population in Germany that is separated from Muslim people, and that has no experience or links with people from different cultural backgrounds. Some interviewees also emphasised that there are people of Muslim or migrant backgrounds that are separated from mainstream German society and consume foreign language media such as Turkish satellite TV. As such, they are perhaps less involved in German society and hold onto their mother tongue.

With regard to people of a Muslim background, media can also, according to interviewees, induce a change of atmosphere. The Sarrazin debate, with its xenophobic undertones, was mentioned as an example of a story that created an atmosphere in which some Turkish Muslim immigrants started to feel like strangers in Germany, and started questioning their German identity. Some interviewees also identified a responsibility that comes with the ability of media to produce and distribute images, stereotypes and clichés: they have the power to shape and break important concepts of identity and integration. However, not all participants were sure about their impact and saw media as possessing only a superficial influence. One journalist said that he made several reports on a Muslim school in Germany in which children were treated inhumanely:

We produced seven reports [...], tough reports, and it had had zero relevance. I think in the debate on Islam and immigration there are two poles. One can determine this in the Sarrazin debate: The one is pro, the other is contra [...] The general public between the poles is not reflected by the media and therefore has no relevance. (Mainstream TV producer)

In this respect, the ‘normal’ television viewer with a more nuanced view would not find his or her opinion reflected in the coverage of debates on immigration or Muslims, and therefore would not be influenced by this coverage.

Editorial Processes

Most of the permanently-employed journalists in this sample said that they determine the topics that they cover in editorial conferences. The freelancers in this sample stated that they offer topics they want to cover (or have already covered) and that they are given assignments by editorial staffs. Some media have mission statements or editorial statutes that explicitly refer to engaging against extremism, advocating for human rights and democracy, or aiming to achieve fair coverage. Such ambitions can also exist as ‘unwritten rules’ in editorial staffs. Some news outlets have an orientation towards dialogue between cultures or religions, and therefore seek to present balanced reports. Thus, when a journalist produces a report that includes a Muslim representative, he must also include a source from a Christian community.

Often there are no clear guidelines on how to cover the topics of Muslims and Islam. One editor made clear that his newspaper is interested in the emotion of topics, seeking to polarise and provoke consumers and drag people into a debate. He explained that the relevance of a topic is crucial. He specified that this can mean relevance in consequence (e.g. the impact the topic has on parts of the audience), relevance in debate (e.g. when a topic is broadly discussed by the public), and there is another quantitative view – when newswires are full of a topic it is also deemed to be relevant:

We decide exclusively according to relevance. Is the topic important or is it not important? A debate, for example, on the question of whether it is allowed to burn a Koran, is an important question for us. Also the controversy on the Prophet Mohammed cartoons. That was a relevant and important topic, and we dealt with it. (Mainstream press editor)

Another editor (mainstream press) emphasised that one aim of his media organisation is to make processes transparent and identify (social) wrongs. He held the opinion that a journalist should cover the facts, and the audience decides for itself what to make of the story. By making processes transparent, the journalist could help to foster reflection among the audience on their own actions and on their own views. Like other interviewees in this sample, he said that journalists need to decide, unrestricted, what to cover. He added that journalists should not treat some problems as taboo: “You cannot sweep problems under the mat”.

One interviewee (mainstream radio) stated that he has a preference for certain topics within the theme of Muslims and Islam:

I don’t think that there is an overt or tacit censorship. Yet I can recognise that there are preferences for certain motives. So, when it is, for example, [a story] about female Muslims. That can be sold better than stories on men. My approach is that I usually present successful women or young women or girls. And that is the reversal of the oppressed, uneducated Muslim women. And that works well. (Mainstream radio producer)

In the sample some journalists working as freelancers told of problems they had faced with reports they had prepared. One producer (mainstream radio) said that she inquired into integration courses and discovered positive developments which she then covered, for example motivated participants. However, according to her, the piece was re-edited by editorial staff and

a passage which corresponded with a cliché was placed prominently in the piece, while other passages that described the participants favourably were cut out.

To what extent can the background of a journalist be considered to affect output?

Most interviewees agreed that journalists need to uphold professional standards like reporting truthfully, avoiding violating the human dignity of individuals that are part of a story, and avoiding clichés. Part of this professionalism appears to be centre on attempting to separate personal opinion from facts. According to most interviewees, it is not necessary to assign a journalist with a certain background to cover certain topics like stories about Muslims and Islam:

I do not need to send a Swede as a correspondent to Stockholm and a Brit as correspondent to London, and an African as a correspondent to Africa. Anyway –I need good journalists. And they can have any personal background. (Mainstream press editor)

However, according to some interviewees, the background of a journalist can have some impact in covering stories, both in terms of access and in terms of interpretation of facts and situations. A non-Muslim journalist stated:

Socialisation or family background give access and comprehension that I myself need to work hard for. That also can lead to misunderstandings and prejudices. Proximity and access are always advantageous for journalists, provided that one approaches his or her work professionally. (Mainstream press producer)

In terms of interpreting facts and situations, being of a Muslim background – or a migrant background – can sometimes bring an emotional closeness when covering the theme area of Muslims and Islam. Being of a Muslim or a migrant background can also mean a wealth of experience that supports differentiation and the eschewal of stereotypes and clichés:

Surely, one knows more stories, one has more experience – be it from one's own family circle, from the circle of acquaintances. One has a bigger spectrum of comparability. One does not have that if one does not stem from this cultural hearth. (Mainstream TV producer)

Some of the interviewees made clear that, when it comes to the journalistic product – an article, a TV or a radio report – the knowledge and insider perspective of an author can help to create a diverse and detailed story:

Distance is important but proximity and familiarity can help an author to explain things better. A journalist should be able to illustrate his topic and break it down into a personal, everyday level. Otherwise there is danger of staying abstract and theoretical. (Mainstream press producer)

In the interviews it became apparent that a Muslim or a migrant background can provide a journalist with implicit and explicit knowledge on how to interpret facts and situations, and it can help him or her write a vivid and detailed story. However, several journalists stated that being from a Muslim background is only one way of gaining an understanding of practices and narratives that are common for Muslims. Reading certain subjects like Middle Eastern Studies or Islamic Studies is mentioned as another approach to gain background knowledge and languages

that enhance a journalist's ability to engage with Muslim contexts. One interviewee (non-Muslim), who speaks Arabic and who had read Islamic Studies, explained that because he does not come from a Muslim community, he has the perspective of an outsider and that – in his opinion – makes him an intermediary with no personal interests.

In general – according to some interviewees – the attitude of a journalist appears to be crucial when covering Muslims and Islam. What is more, according to all interviewees, different experiences and backgrounds are no reason to prefer Muslim journalists ahead of non-Muslim journalists or vice versa. However, it was observed that, in practice, it is often journalists who are assumed to be of a Muslim background that are gently pushed to cover stories on Muslims and Islam:

There is a tendency in Germany that the – in quotation marks – ethnic Germans or Christians pass topics they do not want to occupy themselves with to others. When there is a problem with anything Jewish or with Israel, then one finds a Jew who writes about it. And when it is about Islam then one assigns a person with a respective background. The problem that I see is that nobody can claim authority just due to nationality or origin. So, Necla Kelek²¹ is not necessarily better informed about [the] problems of Islam, just because she is a Muslim. (Mainstream press producer)

Suggestions for change

The interviewees in this sample came up with several ideas of how to deal with media coverage of Muslims and Islam in the future. The suggestions were often close to the advice given by the interviewees in the specialist media sample.

One crucial idea was to attempt to produce more balanced stories that represent multiple perspectives:

The ideal would be intellectual integrity [of journalists]. That one does not suppress anything but presents a balanced image. Pro and contra do not always have to be compulsively listed, but having both sides should be possible. That would be nice. (Mainstream radio producer)

Another issue raised was the quantity of coverage of Muslims and Islam. Several journalists complained about disproportional coverage in this area of reporting. They criticised the fact that other topics, that are equally important or potentially even more important, stay in the background:

Maybe we simply need less coverage. Since I work a lot on this topic it may be a bit funny to say that. There is so often the call for a better coverage on Islam but quite often the attention for these topics is rather too great than too small. Or the attention is on the wrong aspects, and maybe on the wrong problems. In my opinion there is a long list of problems in Muslim countries that I consider very worthy of discussion. But they don't become important because one is too busy with oppressed women and this and that. I don't say these topics are unimportant, not at all, but they are topics that have been

²¹ Necla Kelek is a German social scientist, Islam critic and publicist, originally from Turkey.

discussed repeatedly on a large scale. But principally I have got the wish – next to less attention – that journalists should maybe cover more about individuals than about groups, and they should create fewer offender-victim-categories. In coverage on Islam there is the tendency to say: ‘The male Muslim is the offender, the female Muslim is the victim’. That does do no service for anyone. So, more caution with categorising and marking groups in any way. That goes, of course, not only for Muslims. I don’t want to separate this topic from other topics. (Mainstream media producer, Radio and TV)

Like this interviewee, several other journalists sought normalisation of the coverage of Muslims and Islam, so that the topic is treated with less hysteria. One way – according to some interviewees – could be to include more moderate sources in coverage of Muslims and Islam:

And please, please, please – this is an important matter to me – don’t bring the same rowdies onto TV or in the media, whatever their names are. There are a lot of super-qualified people who could talk about this topic. But they are calm and diplomatic, thus they don’t push up the TV ratings. Nobody invites them. (Mainstream press producer)

For a qualitative change in coverage, one producer (mainstream radio) recommended including more positive examples of successful migrants of a Muslim background, not only to show positive developments, but also to emphasise the normality of Muslims in Germany. She also emphasised that such stories would showcase role models for people of migrant backgrounds.

With regard to people of a Muslim background and, especially, representatives of Muslim associations, journalists in this sample recommended that they should go public more often. This refers to both Muslims as sources when journalists ask them for a comment, and also Muslims as citizens when topics related with Islam and Muslims are discussed publicly:

Where is the difference between a Muslim and a Catholic? Catholics – when I cover the sexual abuse in the Catholic Church [...] I always get an interview with the bishop. When I cover the same topic with regard to the Islamic community then I get threatening letters and no interviews. So, that has to change. (Mainstream TV producer)

Participants described a tension between Muslims who are not willing to take up a position in front of journalists, and journalists who are ignorant when it comes to the practices and associations of Muslims:

If I had I wish – [I want] a coverage ... it should be discussed more frankly with each other and, on the other side, I wish that the Muslim community [would] stop being offended all the time, along the lines of ‘You offended my Islam, thus I won’t talk to you any more’. And I would wish from the ethnic German non-Muslims that they eventually do their homework. Deal with the immigration society in Germany and with the rules and institutions. I get a nightmare every time I talk with politicians and with colleagues who tell me ‘I don’t know *DITIB*²²’ (Mainstream TV producer)

Several interviewees criticised the fact that people of a Muslim background and their actions are often assessed only in terms of their religion:

²² *Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion* (‘Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs’).

The problems are extraordinarily assorted; the problems of integration are very different and are not always directly linked with religion. There are problems that are linked with religion, but there are also a lot that are not. And I wish that one differentiates that and that when one looks on the spectrum [...] the problems that have to do with religion that one checks accurately with which aspects of religion they have to do and not perform a sweeping blow. One should check that accurately. I plead vigorously in favor of nuances (mainstream radio producer).

In this respect several journalists advocate incorporating people of a Muslim background not only when their religion is relevant, but also when they cover regular topics. That could include asking individuals of a Muslim background about their opinion on topics that are generally relevant to society. One journalist, who himself is of a Muslim background, supports that idea:

I was born here, I was raised here, I went to school here, I think German, I speak German, but then one is not asked for one's opinion when it is about topics that are relevant for society [...] Muslims are only in the focus when it is about Islam. And if that would change, that would be great progress in the whole debate, [for example] when a Muslim says something about FC Bayern München or something like that. (Mainstream print producer)

FINDINGS OF CONSUMER FOCUS GROUPS

MUSLIM GROUPS ANALYSIS

Main findings

- The statements and descriptions from the focus groups showed that Muslim consumers are acutely aware of a negative and imbalanced image of Muslims that they see portrayed in a broad range of media. However, they also emphasised that there are media that convey a fairer image of Muslims: some of these outlets are specialist media aimed at migrants and/or Muslims, others are smaller media outlets that have a limited circulation or are simply unknown by most people.
- It was very noticeable that consumers were careful in the use of generalisations. Participants often gave nuanced statements, trying, for example, not to speak about 'the media', but of a trend in media or a dominant way of dealing with the topics at hand. Most participants made clear that no homogeneous group of Muslims exists, and they also emphasised that every Muslim identifies not only with his religion but also by other attributes like nationality, age group, gender, ethnicity, or occupation.
- Participants in the focus groups listed several examples of terminology that is regularly used by media, but differs from their own use of particular terms. Some notions are, according to particular participants, defined by media in a way that significantly differs from the meanings Muslims generally ascribe to them. As a result, misunderstandings are inevitable.

- In the focus groups, informative coverage of Muslims and Islam was described as being useful, for example reports that give an insight in the practices and daily lives of Muslims in Germany.
- Most said that the image of Muslims conveyed by media has had an impact on their daily lives, and that there is a danger that they sometimes feel forced to defend or correct issues covered by the media. However, it appeared that they mostly react assertively, rather than passively, after unfair coverage of Muslims and Islam.

Participants in this sample

The data was taken from an analysis of six focus groups whose participants identified themselves as Muslim – four in Bielefeld, two in Dortmund.²³ There were 31 participants in total. The proportion of male and female participants was balanced (15 male and 16 female). 19 of these individuals described themselves as being Turkish or German-Turkish, a proportion that corresponds with the fact that about two-thirds of Muslims in Germany have a Turkish background.²⁴ Four of the focus groups were convened with the support of a German-speaking Muslim university group, as well as with the help of the members of a mosque in Bielefeld. Two groups were brought together by interfaith volunteers in the Ruhr district, in a mosque in Dortmund. Based on those facts, there was a bias within the focus groups towards practising Muslims, rather than ‘cultural’ Muslims who do not practice Islam or who are socialised in a Muslim environment but do not live a spiritually Muslim life.

As shown above, the focus groups took place in two cities. Bielefeld and Dortmund are situated in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia, the most populous state in Germany. However, other states in Germany are not represented. Furthermore, the sample represents younger Muslims in Germany; the majority of the participants (26) were aged between 18 and 34 years old. This could potentially create a distortion, as most of these participants grew up with new media, one focus of this study. Ten graduates were represented in the groups; a relatively high representation.

Media Use

Several participants referred to their use of online media (the online editions of *Süddeutsche*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *die tageszeitung (taz)*, and *Die Welt*). The TV news broadcast *Tagesschau* was referred to, as well as the local newspapers *Ruhrnachrichten* and *Neue Westfälische*, the Turkish-language newspapers *Türkiye Gazetesi*, *Zaman* and *Hürriyet*, and more (entertaining) women's magazines (including *Glamour* and *Vogue*). The participants also named specialist media that are mainly consumed by Muslims; the weekly newspaper *Islamische Zeitung*, the multicultural women's magazine *Gazelle*, and the TV channel *Al Jazeera*. Several Turkish-speaking TV channels

²³ One group (of six participants) was Muslim except for one participant. Due to the much higher proportion of Muslims and due to the relatively limited contribution of the one non-Muslim participant, we analysed this group together with the all-Muslim groups.

²⁴ Haug, S. et al. (2009): *Muslimisches Leben in Deutschland im Auftrag der Deutschen Islam Konferenz*. Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. Nürnberg, p. 12.

were used by participants, including the news channel *Habertürk* as well as *Samanyolu TV*, *TRT Turkish Radio and Television Corporation*, *Euro D*, and *Star TV*. Some also made reference to the websites *cube-mag.de*, *muslime.tv*, and *waymo.de*.

It appeared that a large number of the participants do not limit themselves to consuming a certain set of media, such as specialist media aimed at Muslims. Rather, they combine the use of different kinds of media to learn about key topics. One participant stated that he uses several media outlets specifically to see the differences in coverage. One female participant said that her use of media depends on her aim; when she, for example, wants to learn about the Arab revolutions, then she makes sure that she uses specific media outlets. The fluency in different languages can be seen as one key tool in allowing access to a broad range of media and allowing consumers to enrich their own views on events covered by the media.

Media Representation

The majority of participants said that they observe a mostly negative image of Muslims in the media. They stated that coverage of Muslims is often generalised and laden with clichés, and that Muslims are depicted in a highly distorted manner. According to the participants, Muslims are often portrayed as being naïve and blindly accepting of religious dogma. Participants also observed that Muslims are stigmatized, for example as criminals. Several participants emphasised that Muslims are often unfairly associated with terrorism. Participants observed that Muslim women are shown as meek, obedient and lacking in confidence.

Several participants criticised the fact that the religion of Islam and Muslims themselves are often seen as being one thing, despite the fact that Muslims are unique individuals with a personal approach to their religion. They stressed that the individual behaviour of Muslims is often generalised to extend to the wider community, especially when they have done something wrong.

Every follower of a religion is responsible for himself. So I, as a Muslim, am responsible for my actions, not for my religion. I want to act based on my religion. But when I do something wrong, then people cannot say ‘The Muslim has done something wrong.’ I, as a person, have done it wrong. (Female, Muslim, Dortmund)

One respondent observed that Muslims are usually shown in a negative way, regardless of what they have said or done. He advised against generalising all Muslims as acting in the same way:

It does not come across that Muslims are positive. It just comes across that Muslims are always negative, that they don’t speak out, that they don’t integrate themselves. So, here Muslims are not considered as modern, and they are not regarded as democratic people. [...] There is no positive impression. I don’t see any. Regardless where and what – they never write anything good, always bad things are written. (Female, Muslim, Dortmund)

One respondent raised the question as to whether this pattern of emphasising negative news is merely a typical pattern in media coverage:

When one looks on the title-pages – mostly only bad things are covered. So, always negative news, never positive news is covered. That concerns above all the title-pages. When one reads a newspaper or watches a TV newscast, at first the negative things

come. I do not know whether that only has to do with Muslims – in any case Muslims are also represented negatively (Female, Muslim, Bielefeld)

One respondent stated that negative news is more likely to be associated with Islam, whereas positive content about Muslims tends to be associated with other terms, such as ‘Arab’:

Negative events are very readily linked with THE Islam and THE Muslims. Positive things, on the contrary, are not. That is what I noticed. Recently I heard on a radio channel – in a broadcast of the *NDR* – a report about music in the different cultures, Jewish, Christian and Arab. [...] The term ‘Islamic’ was systematically left out. Systematically! I was spoken about Jewish music, Christian music – and when it was actually about Islamic music, it was spoken about Arab music, while in the background one could hear Turkish music, Turkish spiritual-religiously shaped music (Male, Muslim, Bielefeld)

Several participants made clear that more nuanced coverage does exist. Nonetheless, they criticised that fact that this coverage is distributed in niches; in broadcasts late in the evening or in media that are mainly unknown and do not have a broad reach.

Concerning the general representation of Muslims, participants complained about the visual ‘language’ used in coverage of Muslims, such as a magazine cover showing a woman wearing a headscarf in front of a black background, or women in black burkas standing in front of burning houses. In their focus groups, participants discussed their belief that Muslim women who wear headscarves are depicted as ‘abnormal’ and are usually associated with being oppressed. Several female participants said that they generally do not feel well-represented in the media. One female respondent explained that she was under the impression that people in the media want to determine what a Muslim woman is, allowing her no chance to speak for herself. However, several participants stated that they perceived a change in coverage. This did not mean that coverage is positive, but that it is more reflective, inquiring into individuals’ backgrounds and highlighting clichés, showcasing different Islamic attitudes, and attempting not to pigeonhole Muslims. The daily newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* was named as an example of a media outlet that often publishes positive articles about Muslims. Furthermore, according to some participants, many more Muslim journalists now work in the media compared to years past. It was also observed that young Muslims are shown in a more differentiated light in today’s coverage, and that more teenagers have a say in media generally.

One respondent said that he occasionally saw positive coverage of Muslims and their religion. He told about an article that he had read online:

At Ramadan, there was an article on fast-breaking. It was quite positive. It explained, very objective, what Ramadan is and so on, and a mosque was visited, so one [the journalist] sought contact, one did not cover as an outsider what one sees or reads in media. And I liked that. (Male, Muslim, Bielefeld)

Participants emphasised that, in coverage, Muslims are often confused with other groups or categories. According to some participants, Muslims are often generalised as being a lower-class

social group, ignoring their real social class. One participant said that socio-economic problems or social problems are often inappropriately associated with Islam.

According to the participants in this sample, another category that Muslims often found confusing in the media is the category of 'Islamists'. In the focus groups which addressed that topic, Islamists were understood as being defined as Muslims who are politically motivated by Islam. In this respect, they are a subgroup of Muslims. Some participants stated that the term "Islamist" has gained negative connotations in the recent years when used by the German media, which has tended to suggest that all Islamists are extremists and ready to use violence.

The term Islamism is, in my view, a very good example of how media successfully established that a certain political movement is associated with negative things. It is difficult to talk about it objectively. Islamism just means that there are Muslims that are politically motivated by their religion. Like there are Christian Democrats that have certain values. (Male, Muslim, Bielefeld)

It was seen as problematic that the word 'terror' was associated with the term 'Islam' in the media:

It's disastrous that terror is being declared as Islamic. (Male, Muslim, Bielefeld)

As mentioned before, according to most individuals interviewed, terrorists are a group with whom Muslims are confused by journalists. One participant said that she was shocked when she realised that Muslims are now primary suspects when a terrorist attack happens – that a chain of associations starts to emerge after an attack, and that it often leads to Muslims being viewed as potential culprits (Female, Muslim, Bielefeld).

Furthermore, according to participants, Muslims in Germany are often equated with being Turkish immigrants or their descendants:

That includes a certain danger in my opinion, especially because not everyone ... there are a lot of people that are Turks but that are not Muslims, maybe even consciously are not Muslims (Male, Muslim, Bielefeld)

One respondent (female, Muslim, Bielefeld) made clear that there are also people of German origin who are Muslims. According to her, Muslims are often described as being migrants, and this assumption does not do justice to the heterogeneous nature of Muslims and people of Muslim background in Germany.

This leads to another issue that was raised by some participants: What kind of Muslims do media refer to, when they talk about Muslims? During the focus groups, several participants clearly differentiated between Muslims who practice their religion and Muslims who do not.

Role of New Media

The Internet and, with it, Social Media, was highlighted as an important source of information. Online sources seem to help groups that share a common interest to inform each other quickly on topics particularly relevant to them. However, as those interviewed were mainly under 35 years old, there was no meaningful information to be gleaned about the use of new media by

older Muslims, or other older persons of a Muslim background. One respondent assumed that it is mainly younger people who use the Internet to seek information.

It was stated that the Internet also acts as a platform for comments that cast slurs on Muslims and Islam, for example, via anti-Islamic websites. As one example, it was said that the cartoons about the Prophet Mohammed were quickly spread on the Internet.

The Internet was mentioned as having been crucial for the organisation of protests during the Arab Spring, allowing protesters to arrange meetings and demonstrations via Social Media:

The revolution in Syria, it started via Facebook and YouTube and so on. Via those pages [people were] called up to go to this and that place in order to protest. Without Facebook and YouTube it maybe would not have come so far. (Male, Muslim, Bielefeld)

Muslim media

The term 'Muslim media' was treated as a vague and ambiguous notion. One participant (female, Muslim, Bielefeld) said it was difficult to use the word 'Muslim' because, on the one hand, it could refer to Muslims, meaning the followers of the religion, and, on the other hand, it could refer to media content that corresponds to the principles of Islam. Another participant emphasised that he associates the term 'Muslim-Islamic' primarily with religiosity. He referred to a German TV magazine that could be seen as a Muslim medium:

And when *Cosmo TV* covers on Yezidi Kurds – is it still a Muslim medium? But it is *the* medium that perhaps covers most on Yezidi in Germany, and they are not Muslims. So, already, the term in my view embeds something that is dangerous: that one mixes up ethnicity and religion (Male, Muslim, Bielefeld).

Another respondent refers to the fact that Muslim media could be considered to mean media mainly used by Muslims:

Muslim media, to me, that sounds actually like media that are made by Muslims [...] There are certainly also media that are mainly used by Muslims without being produced by Muslims. [...] What first comes to my mind is *islam.de*²⁵, known in the whole of Germany. Yes, that is made by Muslims but not only aimed at Muslims. But certainly mainly used by Muslims. (Male, Muslim, Bielefeld)

One respondent said that, to him, the term Muslim media was rare in Germany. He regarded it as being more accurate for Great Britain:

No, in Germany I haven't heard [this notion]. I think that is because Muslims are not active, well, compared to the Muslims in Great Britain. The Muslims there are very active – concerning politics, economy, vocational training. [...] And – there were a lot of

²⁵ According to its self-description *islam.de* is a project of the *Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland* (ZMD, Central Council of Muslims in Germany) and is to be understood as outlet for information and service at disposal for each interested person.

Pakistanis and Indians that came very early to England²⁶, that built up the whole community [...] So, they are anyhow more progressed with regard to media. Who knows, maybe in a few years we get the same here. Maybe also an Islamic channel, or something like that, I don't know. (Male, Muslim, Bielefeld)

Reasons for negative coverage

The respondents that named reasons for negative coverage of Muslims referred to the media tendency to generalise certain phenomena and specific groups. Also suggested was the prejudices of some journalists towards people of a Muslim background, and the interest of consumers to seek out media that affirm their existing opinions of Muslims. Some participants stated that the sensationalism of media, especially tabloids, is a reason for negative coverage, linked to the idea that negative news sell better:

I believe they sell what the people want. And the people want to have something negative, because the *BILD* newspaper cannot sell anything to them when the people say 'The Muslims are good, they are nice' and so on. But when they say 'The Muslims are evil', then people buy it. (Male, Muslim, Dortmund)

Case Study Stories

Thilo Sarrazin and his book "Deutschland schafft sich ab"

Nearly all of the participants in the focus groups harshly criticised Thilo Sarrazin and his book '*Deutschland schafft sich ab. Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen*' [*Germany Is Abolishing Itself. How We Jeopardise Our Country*], as well as the ensuing media coverage.

One participant (female, Muslim, Bielefeld) said that she was shocked that so many educated people in Germany supported Sarrazin's 'dumb' ideas. She was surprised that people did not question his ideas, and felt let down by her compatriots.

Another participant stated that Sarrazin has reinforced the opinions of people already holding a negative attitude towards Muslims.

He plays on the primal fears of the people and he is therefore successful. And he is man from the [political] centre, that is important. He is not someone from the right wing. The assumption [of Sarrazin is] that the failure of people with Turkish migrant backgrounds is due to their being Turks, or Muslims. That is a conclusion that many people support. (Male, Muslim, Bielefeld)

Sarrazin and his statements were considered as an example that demonstrates how Muslims are often equated with Turks in German public debate – the mix-up of a religious identity and a national one.

It was observed that Sarrazin was largely criticised by the media. Nonetheless, that treatment was described as an advantage for him, seeming to prove that certain topics are off-limits in German public discourse. In that respect, Sarrazin was believed to have become a martyr.

²⁶ "England" is commonly used as synonym for Great Britain in German.

Another participant said that Sarrazin could use this attention to market his book– be it positive or negative. The participant's recommendation was therefore to ignore Sarrazin.

Arab Spring/ Political upheavals in the greater Middle East

The participants agreed that the revolutions in several Arab countries are generally not a phenomenon that emerged due to the religious orientation of the protesters or the religious orientation of the politicians being protested against. Several participants repeatedly said that one crucial reason for the revolutions was that people were unsatisfied by human rights abuses and the lack of participation that was afforded to them in their countries, and that they then started to demand their rights.

One participant talked about Egypt as one example:

The people were politically weary of the regime [of Mubarak] because they had problems to find something to eat, the food prices rose constantly and so on. So, these are things that are not necessarily linked with Islam, but simply existential fears. (Female, Muslim, Bielefeld)

Another participant believed that people tend to narrow their minds when they look at Islamic societies, always seeking to explain phenomenon in terms of the dominant religion.

However, several participants said that the events of the Arab Spring, and the coverage of these events, often deliver a different picture of Muslims:

That they are quite normal people, with needs, that make appointments on Facebook or Twitter in order to protest. And there were a lot of reports in which the link to Islam was not in the foreground, that explained from where this dissatisfaction came, that it is young people and so on. (Male, Muslim, Bielefeld)

Another participant argued in a similar direction:

I find that the Arab revolutions proved that Islam is compatible with human rights and democracy. And that changes, this combination of Islam and human rights and democracy – that it [the combination] is possible, that can influence the image of Muslims. (Female, Muslim, Bielefeld)

Although Islam was regarded as not being a central motivating factor for the Arab Spring, one participant recalled the special situation of Muslims in Tunis before the revolution, where they were unable to demonstrate their religion in public (“But for example, the people were not able to go to the mosques, they were not allowed to wear headscarves and had great problems”, female, Muslim, Bielefeld). Beyond that, it was stated that, during the revolutions, Islam could play a role in creating unity among the protesters – similar to the role of the Christian churches during the ‘gentle revolution’ in the German Democratic Republic. However, a lot of protesters in the affected Arab countries are not Muslims.

Some participants observed that protesters in the Arab Spring are often described by journalists as people unsure of what they are protesting for. It was praised that a lot of women have been highlighted as being among the protesters, and showcased as important contributors to the revolutions.

Because, before that, women were shown, unfortunately, with their heads down – and on the title-covers they were shown as shy and reserved. And now they are represented as vociferous and impassioned. (Female, Muslim, Bielefeld)

Impact of Coverage

Community Relations

Some participants emphasised that the image of Muslims conveyed by members of the media creates a certain atmosphere that influences the lives of many Muslims. One participant remembers that, when 9/11 happened, her classmates ask her whether she was rejoicing. She remembers a sudden change of attitude towards Muslims in Germany:

There is this association in the mind. And when one sees it often [in media] – women oppressed, Muslim teenagers as danger for society, and that is always in relation with Islam, then that becomes one's first association. Attitudes are difficult to change. And that is the danger. So, one has formed an attitude by what one has seen [...] and it is easier to stay on this level. And that is something that makes media incredibly dangerous. They influence the thoughts of the people. They quash something before it can develop. (Female, Muslim, Bielefeld)

According to several participants, the image of Muslims in Germany has not improved over time, largely because of the negative coverage of media. This coverage counters the positive experiences of non-Muslims who interact with Muslims. One participant said that she had the impression that Muslims often feel compelled to defend themselves when there is negative coverage of Muslims. Feeling powerless, they refrain from contact with other communities.

One participant stated that the negative image of Muslims portrayed by media can also lead to problems between people with Muslim backgrounds. Teenagers can let themselves be influenced by the image of Islam presented in the media, leading to splits in families. She said that she herself temporarily thought badly of other Muslims and did not want to be a Muslim. According to her, the children of Muslim immigrants often face a problem with their identity: they need to decide which nationality or religion they want to belong to. If they start rejecting Islam as their religion, they develop even more problems in determining their sense of identity. On the other hand, it might transpire that teenagers react to negative coverage by identifying excessively with their ethnic origin or religion. This could also lead a fanatical orientation.

Several participants considered it to be a problem that people with fewer social contacts – be they Muslims or non-Muslims – often maintain their connection to the outside world by using media.

One respondent told an example of a teacher of hers. In her view his image of Muslims does not correspond with reality and is dependent on media:

I visited my teacher last year, who was a very good teacher 20 years ago. But now I have determined that he holds on to what was [the situation] 20 years ago – there is no development – and that he just looks on that what the media cover, and that he does not look on reality. (Male, Muslim, Dortmund)

However, one respondent explained that more positive media coverage could help to make non-Muslims interact with people of a Muslim background.

Another respondent emphasised that media are a means of contact between different groups in society. According to her, the information transferred via media could have positive effects on the relationships between groups:

Via the media we have, of course, contact to others. And when we are depicted badly it is a logical consequence that they consider us negatively or think such negative things about us. If we communicate well with each other, then they have, for example, maybe also a more positive image of us or of Muslims. (Female, Muslim, Dortmund)

It was also explicitly stated that, just as they can foster conflict, media can support the limiting of conflicts in society.

Personal reactions and experiences

Several respondents said that they often feel compelled to respond to topics that emerge in media. One participant (female, Muslim, Dortmund) said that she is often asked whether her parents will choose her husband. She regarded this question as being associated with the issue of forced marriages, something regularly reported in media with reference to Muslims.

In the focus groups there were also cases of discrimination shared, that were seen as connected with media coverage. A respondent told how a colleague of his was called a terrorist in a tram, simply because of his appearance.

Some participants described strategies as to how they deal with discrimination and negative coverage of Muslims. One strategy identified was the ironic reframing of notions that are used in the media in reference to Muslims. One example is the term “*Kopftuchmädchen*” (‘headscarf girl’). One male participant said that when he wants to know whether someone wears a headscarf, he sometimes asks jocularly whether she is a “headscarf woman”.

In general, most of the Muslim participants made clear that they react self-assuredly to the often simplified and negative image of Muslims portrayed by the media. For example, one participant said that she claims the right to represent herself, and does not let others, such as journalists in the media, define her and how she should behave. She said that she turns the tables, working with local young Muslims, and she tells people what Muslim women are like in reality. She gives her own explanations for wearing a headscarf – explanations that differ from the idea that the headscarf is a symbol of the oppression of Muslim women.

MIXED AND MONOCULTURAL GROUPS ANALYSIS

Main findings

- The statements and descriptions of the mixed and monocultural groups tended – although there were Muslims and non-Muslims represented – towards a similar direction. The media consumers observed an overarching negative portrayal of Muslims in media. One explanation was that media outlets seek to deliver news that is of interest to its audience, and that negative news generally sells better than news focusing on positive developments.
- Similarly to the Muslim focus group, the participants in this sample tried not to generalise their observations. Several participants noticed double standards in the media with regard to the treatment of Muslims, meaning the same action is judged differently depending whether it is performed by a Muslim or a non-Muslim. Also, respondents emphasised that Islam, as a religion, does not call for violent actions – that, to the contrary, it demands peaceful behaviour. The religion therefore should not be used to explain the violent or criminal behaviour of people of a Muslim background.
- Most of the respondents described themselves as media consumers that engage critically with the coverage they read, listen to, or watch. However, several participants held the opinion that media can have an impact on people; that when individuals have no particular opinion and no other sources to get information from, the media can be used as the basis for judgement on Muslims and Islam. People with preconceived opinions can also be influenced by media, particularly coverage that helps them to maintain their pre-existing ideas on Muslims and Islam. Still, media can – according to the respondents – serve as a source for individual opinion-forming; this can happen when media consumers use a range of media sources to compare reports and commentaries, and then develop their own position.

Participants in this sample

As in the case of the Muslim focus groups, the mixed and monocultural focus group inquiries were conducted in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia; one focus group in Bielefeld and one in Essen. As such, inhabitants of the most populous state in Germany are represented; participants of other federal states are not included. One group was a monocultural group (Bielefeld); one group was a mixed demographic group. There were ten participants in total. The samples were dominated by male participants (seven male, three female participants). The majority (six) described themselves as German. All of the respondents were born in Germany. Similar to the Muslim sample, the participants in these focus groups represent a younger share of the German population; all of them were younger than 35 years old, which potentially has implications for their statements on New Media, as the participants have grown up during the period when the Internet became a common medium of communication. Four respondents described themselves as Christian, four respondents stated they were Muslims, and two stated they had no religion.

Media Use

The participants in this sample named a wide range of media that they use to gain information. Several of them referred to internet pages like *Spiegel Online*²⁷, *sueddeutsche.de* or the webpage of the TV channel ARD. For the most of them the Internet was their major source of information, with TV following as the second most used source (the news channel N24, *ProSieben*). Local newspapers like *Ruhrnachrichten*, *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (WAZ), *Haller Kreisblatt* and *Neue Westfälische* (NW) were also mentioned.

The respondents appeared to be self-regulated media consumers that do not ‘automatically’ tune into certain programmes, but who consciously decide which media outlets to use, and what to make of the presented contents.

One respondent said that he is aware of the political leaning of the media that he consumes and, as a result, reacts in a more critical manner towards content within the media.

Another participant explained how he consults a range of Internet sites to stay informed, and stated that he does not trust TV as a vehicle for information:

For me, the most important distinction is that I don't use TV to inform me, just for entertainment. I can go online, can look at the homepage of *Spiegel Online*, then I can look at *Welt Online* [...] So, the Internet, for me, is also a lot of entertainment, but when I look for information, then usually [it is] on the Internet. Locally, for me, newspapers like NRZ²⁸ or WAZ are quite important. (Male, mixed, Essen)

Media Representation

All of the respondents stated that they believed Muslims tended to be treated as one homogeneous group by most media. They saw a depiction of Muslims as being deviant and hostile; terrorists and criminals. According to the participants in this sample, people of a Muslim background are often judged in the media, after a terrorist attack. One respondent explicitly stated that the media fostered the impression that Muslims form a united front against non-Muslims.

Several participants observed double standards being applied by the media to the behaviour of Muslims. They stated that the same behaviour is judged differently depending on whether it is performed by a Muslim or a non-Muslim. They had the impression that negative actions tend to be ascribed to Muslims. According to this view, when non-Muslims perform the same negative action as a Muslim, it is usually treated more indulgently or is perhaps even ignored.

Let me put it this way: I am sure that not only Muslims oppress. There are also Germans, Jews, Christians, Protestants, Buddhists, non-believers who oppress others. But when it

²⁷ *Spiegel Online* is one of Germany's most widely-read news websites. It started as the online version of the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*. The page *sueddeutsche.de* is the internet portal of the national newspaper *Süddeutsche*. ARD is a public-service broadcaster in Germany.

²⁸ *Neue Ruhr/ Neue Rhein Zeitung*, belongs to the WAZ media group.

comes to the point that a Muslim or a Muslim country oppresses, then it is hung high.
(Male, mixed, Essen)

Several participants described 9/11 as an important turning-point in the public perception of Muslims. According to them, since the attacks, the media treatment of Muslims has become worse, and the issue of Muslims has become more high-profile:

Xenophobia has become very pronounced with many people ... I think the problem is mainly that one always fears everything that one doesn't know and that one cannot categorise. And the problem for most people that are non-Muslims is, in my opinion, that they know too little about Islam to be able to distinguish between the groups – and to be able to decide if they are dangerous or not, and if I have to be afraid of them, or if they are nice people. And the reporting doesn't help here in my opinion, because constantly one reads only about [the] fear of terrorism and about persons suspected of terrorism and of course these are always Muslims ... or almost always ... (Female, monocultural, Bielefeld)

I think there is strong Islamophobia since 9/11. In that respect it is strong – the media exploit this topic, this, the Islam. In many media it is covered 'That was again the Muslims'. And then this emphasis that it was Muslims, or Germans that converted to Islam. And always this reference to religion. Although it has nothing to do with religion itself. Because the religion itself forbids this terror and this hate, this bad thing. [...] Maybe one has noticed it in the media: When an Arab, a Muslim, blows oneself up or does something else, it is traced back to the religion. But when a non-Muslim blows oneself up or runs amok, that is not traced back to the religion. (Male, mixed, Essen)

The last quote was from a Muslim participant. It is striking that he himself experiences negative thoughts when he considers the image of his religion and his fellow believers. It seems that even he as a Muslim cannot, on an emotional level, resist the images repeatedly put forth by media outlets, even though he intellectually refutes these images. One respondent emphasised that tendency within media coverage, and made clear that she also tends to expect certain images of Muslims and Islam in the media, simply because she is so used to them. She directly addressed the Muslims in her focus group:

But don't be mad with me [...] When I hear that and someone tells me 'Yes, today there is something with Islam or Muslims in TV', I would think at first: Yes, there has again been an attack.' But that is nothing against you. (Female, mixed, Essen)

The use of actual images – pictures – in media was also stressed by participants in the focus groups. This iconographic angle seemed to be a crucial aspect in the view of the respondents. It was also stated that there is often a mixing-up of terms in the media. This was attributed less to bad intent than to carelessness and ignorance by the journalists responsible.

One participant emphasised that it depends on the particular medium as to whether Muslims or Turks are mentioned as the most likely potential culprits of crimes:

I perceive that at least at *Spiegel Online* – when there are somewhere terrorist suspects it is explicitly mentioned in the article [that] Muslims are under suspicion or Turks. When I

read *taṣ Online* or something like that it [the suspicion of certain groups] remains quite open, simple in terms of the wording.” (Male, monocultural, Bielefeld)

Role of New Media

Respondents in this sample seemed to regard the Internet and associated Social Media as an integral part of everyday life. With regard to the functions of such New Media for Muslims, they referred to the Internet as a space for media outlets which give access to niche information and which allow the connection with others that share this interest.

One male respondent in Bielefeld (monocultural) stated that such websites can lead to involvement with one area of interest, to the neglect of other parts of a person’s life. Another respondent emphasised that Internet forums can give shelter to people who want to discuss topics without being disturbed by people that do not share their convictions or interests.

When you write such messages in an entirely open forum then you get a roasting by the Christians who are a bit more radical. Then you maybe get a roasting by the Buddhist although they are mostly very peaceful and don’t care what you are doing. So, with that in mind, I can understand that one uses a [password-protected] forum.” (Female, monocultural, Bielefeld)

The respondent mentioned above referred to the Internet as a way for non-Muslims to get to know more about Muslims and Islam. He mentioned an email distribution list that gives him access to information about topics that are – according to him – not dealt with publicly:

I’m in an email distribution list [which deals with] with topics like that women are to be stoned to death because they are homosexual, or that people are to be hanged or whatever because they confessed publicly that they don’t believe in God. And that would be something that reflects discredit on Islam. You hardly find [such information] in the media. (Male, monocultural, Bielefeld)

Muslim media

Concept of Muslim media

There was no distinct idea as to the meaning of the term ‘Muslim media’ in either of the types of focus group. In the monocultural group, two participants guessed that Muslim media could be media that are consumed by people of migrant background who are Muslims:

Q: Have you heard that before, are you able to make a use of it? ‘Muslim media’?.

A: Al Jazeera? [Laughs] No idea, to be honest I don’t know whether there are any [Muslim media] in Germany, for Muslims in Germany, especially. Just Al Jazeera comes to my mind.

B: Yes, there are, at least for Turks in Germany, several newspapers that are explicitly in Turkish but tailored for Germany. That is what I know. But as I lack Turkish I don’t use them.” (Female and male, monocultural, Bielefeld)

In the mixed group, the idea came up that Muslim media specialise on questions of faith and act as an advocate for Muslims within wider society:

I believe that they go more into the topic. For example, the sharia [law] in Iran, that is treated more thoroughly than in normal newspapers, in which things are addressed briefly and I believe it is just roughly quoted. I think in these [Muslim media] newspapers it is properly deepened. I believe it is better explained because there is just written ‘Sharia – a very rigorous religion of Muslim sort’ [in the normal newspapers] [...] And in the media, in this special newspaper it is explained properly why, for what reason.” (Male, mixed, Essen)

Another respondent stressed the belief that Muslim media would clarify the misunderstandings introduced by other media. In that sense, it seems that Muslim media performs the function of advocating for Muslims, practicing responsible journalism to inform audiences accurately. The consumer described Muslim media as outlets targeted not only at Muslims, but also at non-Muslims, to inform them about widespread misconceptions.

I would think that these Muslim media [contribute] to clarification, i.e. after 9/11, they would say these attacks are not from the Muslims. [...] So, they would not only tell the Muslims, but also the non-Muslim people ‘Yes, that wasn’t Islam. That was just so and so’. (Male, mixed, Essen)

Reasons for negative coverage

The participants that attempted to offer reasons for negative coverage about Muslims mentioned the possible carelessness and ignorance of certain journalists (see above), who appear reluctant to inform themselves of alternative truths to the prejudiced and simplified images of Muslims and Islam that widely appear in the media. Moreover, respondents stated that the generalisation of Muslims and people of a Muslim background as being part of one homogeneous group is easier than attempting to draw a more nuanced image.

Another reason suggested was the interests of the audience, which perhaps expects certain narratives about Muslims and Islam, narratives that are sensationalist and serve a need for a familiar frame of reference. The delivery of such stories was also considered to be linked with the financial interests of media organisations:

I believe that one could become disinterested. So when there is another headline and the woman does not look that threatening, simply a young, pretty woman that obviously comes from Turkey or so. That is maybe not dangerous enough, and therefore one does not read it. Maybe one feels attracted to media with which one can orientate oneself simply. ‘Oh bad, oh Turks and oh foreigners and Islam’. Possibly that has to do with the fact that one expects these things and then buys the media that gives what one expects. (Male, monocultural, Bielefeld)

Case Study Stories

Thilo Sarrazin and his book ‘Deutschland schafft sich ab’

The respondents mainly criticised Thilo Sarrazin argument in *Deutschland schafft sich ab* ['Germany Is Abolishing Itself']. They focused less on the way the media covered the story than on Sarrazin himself. None of the participants stated that he or she had read the book by Sarrazin, and all of them stated disapproval of the book. One can therefore assume that their knowledge about Sarrazin and his book stems from media coverage of the topic.

Several participants in this sample criticised the image of Muslims that Sarrazin depicted in his book. According to the respondents, he depicted Muslims as strangers, as a group that lives at other people's expense, and as a threat to people of German origin. As such, they concluded that Sarrazin established a dichotomy between two groups that are, in Sarrazin's view, incompatible with each other. One respondent stated that Sarrazin wanted to influence people who are unsure about their opinion of Islam:

I would say that – like it is written [in an excerpt of an article] – he is an agitator. He just wanted to tell those people who don't know what Islam is, the people who are between two opinions, that Islam is bad. That Muslims intend only bad things in this country and that one should not become friends with them.. (Male, mixed, Essen)

Several participants noted that Sarrazin created fallacies by establishing connections between the religion of Islam and the individual behaviour of followers:

I find what Thilo Sarrazin said back then and still says [...] has nothing to do with religion [...] The religion does not say 'Do this and that negative thing'. Rather it is the respective person who has had bad company, lived in a bad area, and that behaves and acts according to the influences that affect him. A lot of people cannot differentiate between a religion and a person. The religion is different from the human being who acts the religion out. (Male, mixed, Essen)

In describing their observations of Sarrazin and his book, some respondents spoke of foreigners as well as Muslims as being the groups the author deals with:

He has drawn an apocalyptic image. True to the motto 'Oh God, if we don't close the borders, then there will be no Germans anymore, because we will be overrun by foreigners'. That was the basic thought behind the whole book. (Female, monocultural, Bielefeld)

One participant explained that Sarrazin described integration in a one-sided manner, as meaning an obligation to provide. According to the participant, it is not only the people who are new in a country that are responsible to seek to integrate; the country in which they live also has a responsibility to support them:

It's a shame that the Sarrazin debate was not about integration, but only about the question of whether he is right or whether he is wrong. It is a fact that people have to be integrated. We are one country, we all need to live together, we all need to have a similar comprehension of values and that is what has to be worked towards. But he just put the blame on one side and by that he freed himself and the Germans completely of all [obligations]. (Male, mixed, Essen)

Arab Spring/ Political upheavals in the greater Middle East

Most of the respondents did not see the Arab Spring as being directly connected to the theme of Muslims and Islam; people's behaviour during the political upheavals were not viewed as being based upon their being Muslims or followers of Islam. This was the personal opinion of those questioned, as well as the view they saw reflected in mainstream media. Rather, the protesters were – according to most participants – identified as Arabs or secular protestors in media coverage. However, most of the participants stated that the generally positive coverage of the Arab Spring could help foster a more positive image of Muslims, since most of the protesters are of a Muslim background.

I, for myself, don't see any relationship [between Muslims and the revolutions]. There was such a domino effect, that started in Egypt. So, they have seen 'Look, there are people going on the streets, we will join in'. In the case of Libya I think – there is a country with large resources [...] a very important country that is out of control, 'There we have to step in now' [referring to the intervention of the NATO] [...] But in the other cases I think that it was a chain reaction that the people thought 'We are suppressed for so many years. We never would have thought that it could succeed to go on the street and that that [could] work. We join'. And it has nothing to do with religion but simply with poverty and suppression (Male, mixed, Essen)

One participant mentioned the Arab Spring before the issue was raised. He described the participants as Muslims; another participant contradicted this view:

A: Now comes an example to my mind, which was covered rather neutrally and then positively. Namely, the revolutions that currently are taking place in the Arab-speaking region, or in the Islamic space. In Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, where Muslims rebel against their dictator or head of government. There is basically no negative coverage of Muslims themselves. It just emerges that they want freedom for their people. That is coverage that is relatively positive.

Q: So, a different image of Muslims.

A: Yes.

B: I would understand it rather as an image of people that live in countries in which there are a lot of Muslims. I never registered that it was about Muslims protesting. There are Muslims that are involved, but there are certainly other people that not believe [in protesting]. And that, again, is what I said at the beginning that it is difficult that all of these people are lumped together. So, just because people in Tunis rise up, they are not acting as Muslims. They are coincidentally Muslims, but they don't rise up because they are Muslims.

C: Because they are human beings.

A: Yes, but the media could perceive that differently, [namely] as 'Muslims spread terror. They exert terror against their head of government.' Media could do that as well. (Male/female/male, monocultural, Bielefeld)

According to the last statement, media refrain, in this case, from depicting the protesters as violent, deviant Muslims. In the following statement, a participant referred to an excerpt of an

article that was handed out during the focus group discussion. The article was from the mainstream national newspaper *Süddeutsche*, and featured the headline ‘How the Arab Spring rolls over Al Qaeda’ (*Wie der Arabische Frühling al-Qaida überrollt*);

[...] and the in the end follows this sentence, that I find very provocative ‘Nonetheless, the terrorists will try to bomb back the attention’. This word ‘bomb back’ – that is provocative. That aims to incite [consumers] to read on and to inform oneself. [...] If I started a survey, [I estimate] more than 70 per cent would see terror as the first connection to Islam. This would be contingent on the media, that often leads to one direction like this [refers to another article] ‘Revolt without Islamists’ – that should mean ‘They were able to accomplish a revolution without blowing themselves up’, it should be related with [a positive image] ‘They come closer to this image, they change’. But nonetheless it’s also this ‘Without a bomb’, ‘Oh! Without Islamists’ (Male, mixed, Essen)

Impact of Coverage

Community Relations

Several participants in this sample described media as agents that affirm the opinions of their consumers, so that people who have an antagonistic attitude towards Muslims can maintain this attitude. One respondent held the opinion that media mirror the expectations of their consumers:

Exactly, it’s the stereotypes that are delivered because they are expected, I think. And it’s still alright, I think – after [all], one is free to decide what newspaper to read. Readers of *BILD*²⁹ expect something different to the people who read the *Frankfurter*³⁰ or something like that. (Female, monocultural, Bielefeld)

There was also the argument posited that some people rely on the media for information about Muslims and migrants, whereas others get their information from personal contact.

Correspondingly, another respondent in the same focus group explained that he observed that different people rely on media to a differing degree to shape their opinion on groups in society:

One party gets affirmed what it thinks [by media], the other thinks ‘No’. And then, the third party that is indecisive that does – as he [another respondent] already said – inquires and considers. But there are also parties that say ‘Okay, I am afraid’. And that is because the people don’t know them [members of other societal groups]. For example, when a German married couple sits in front of the telly and they see ‘Islam, boom, Islam, boom’. Of course, then when they see a couple of Muslim people in the street, then they think [...] ‘Oh wow, no, no, they are maybe also such teenagers’” (Male, mixed, Essen)

Another respondent stated that media are basically unable to contribute any positive influence to enhancing mutual understanding between communities. He said that he relies on personal

²⁹ *BILD* is a German tabloid, considered to be one of the best-selling newspapers in the world.

³⁰ *Frankfurter Rundschau* is a national newspaper.

contact and personal communication with people that have a different ethnic or religious background:

I believe that media cannot contribute anything in this [the removal of mutual prejudices], nothing positive. Because media can always just generalize. [...] Media always summarize a problem [...] And only by really personal contact this can be overcome.
(male, mixed, Essen)

Although participants in this sample in principle regarded Germany as a multi-cultural country, some of them remembered stories from the media that stand for the separation of communities in Germany. One respondent described a mismatch between media coverage and the reality as he sees it:

It's the negative examples that strike me more – Nazis that set on fire buildings that house asylum seekers and so on, the perception in the media against not only Muslims but generally everything that is – let's say – foreign. And here the negative things are apparent. That it actually reasonably works that one lives together with quite a lot of different nations, I know that myself. I have lived in a housing area for a while in which 50 different origins of nations were accommodated. And there were no problems at all.
(Male, monocultural, Bielefeld)

According to other respondents, the cohabitation of people of different origin seems to differ depending on regions and areas:

For sure, there are also regions in which it does not work that easily. Especially in the East [of Germany]– where the NPD³¹ accomplishes 30 per cent in elections. I wouldn't move to such a village as a non-German. During the WM [Football World Cup in Germany] there was again and again the debate about so called no-go-areas, mainly in the Eastern German federal states.” (Male, monocultural, Bielefeld)

Personal reactions and experiences

In this sample were just a few examples that show how public discourse on people of a Muslim or a migrant background influences the everyday life of the interviewees. One Muslim participant said that he let people get to know him as an individual first, before explaining that he has a Lebanese background:

I have the Ger[mans], they are astonished because they know the image of Lebanese as temperamental, antisocial, and just violent. That is what the majority thinks about the Lebanese because it is partly true [...] I talked with people and when I said 'Lebanese, my home country Lebanon', they have thought 'No, you are kidding. Never- Lebanese and he is so kind and he is so – such [good] pronunciation. That can't be true'. And that, of course, changes the opinion of people.” (Male, mixed, Essen)

³¹ The NPD, 'National Democratic Party of Germany – The People's Union' ('*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands – Die Volkunion*, NPD'), is a far right nationalist party in Germany.

SURVEY ANALYSIS

To gain a better understanding of the attitudes and perceptions of Muslim and non-Muslim consumers, an online survey was conducted. The survey aimed to see if the impressions of journalists are shared with a wider consumer community. Although the survey is not representative, samples are big enough to meaningfully test the different opinions of Muslim and non-Muslim consumers.

Sample and overall impressions of media

The German sample consisted of $n = 268$ participants. 97 of these were Muslims. In the whole sample, 31.7% of respondents were male and 68.3% were female. In the subsample of Muslims, we had a gender distribution of 32% male and 68% female. In the non-Muslim subsample the breakdown was 31.6% males and 68.4% females. Concerning age, 67.5% of the participants were 21 to 30 years old. In the Muslim subsample, 61.9% of the participants were from this age range; in the non-Muslim subsample 70.8% were in that age group. 16.4% of the total sample, 13.4% of the Muslim subsample, and 18.1% of the non-Muslim subsample, were 31 to 40 years old. Higher educated respondents were overrepresented. 52.6% of the participants had the highest school degree (*Abitur*) or an equal degree; 38.1% possessed a University degree. In the Muslim subsample the figures were similar (*Abitur*: 51.5%; University degree: 33%), and in the non-Muslim subsample too (*Abitur* 53.2%; University degree: 40.9%). Looking at the current work situation of the participants, there was a preponderance of students (68.3% in the whole sample, 66% in the Muslim subsample, 69.6% in the non-Muslim subsample). 22.4% of all participants, 22.7% of the Muslims and 22.2% of the non-Muslims were in paid employment.

Most of the participants were German (79.1%). In the Muslim subsample, we only found 58.8% answered positively in this category, because 13.4% held German and another nationality at the same time. Only 4.7% of the non-Muslims had this status.

On the question of whether the participants were born in Germany, 87.7% answered positively in the non-Muslim subsample, while 80.4% of the Muslims were born in Germany. The parents of the Muslims in this sample were mostly born abroad (82.5% answered that both of their parents were born abroad), but the parents of the non-Muslims in this sample were mostly born in Germany (76.6% answered that none of their parents were of born abroad). Besides ethnic and national origin, we were interested in language, particularly in relation to use of media. We asked the participants which language they prefer when they consume media. Most participants answered German (86.6%); this value was marginally lower in the Muslim subsample (82.5%). Besides German, Muslims preferred the Turkish language (10.3%) and English (6.2%).

When it came to religion, we had a distribution of 36.2% of participants identifying as Muslims, 40.7% as Christians and 23.1% of other and no religion³².

³² In this analysis, we focus on the two groups as being Muslims and non-Muslims, meaning Christians and other religions (and those who have no religion) together form the non-Muslim group. This is one possible way of dividing this sample, but not the only one.

Muslims in our subsample mostly did not feel that the mainstream media caters to their needs and interests (83.5%). So, in their media consumption, 63.9% said they use both mainstream and specialist media when it comes to news or current affairs. Only 13.4% said that they only use specialist media for that purpose. The question ‘Are there any media you use, which attracts you specifically as a Muslim?’ was answered positively by 57.7%, but 42.3% of respondents said no, there are not any outlets that could be defined as such. Muslims that stated they use media specifically targeted at Muslims mentioned the following examples: the Internet in general (13 participants), Islamic newspapers (6), and several websites, for example *Wikipedia*, *islam.de* and – on TV – *Cosmo TV*, *Al Jazeera* or *Arte*.

The main reason amongst the whole sample for the use of specialist media was having a specialist interest (65.5%). Only 33.9% claimed to use specialist media for language reasons, but nearly the same amount of participants (35.2%) use specialist media to get information about countries/regions with which they have a family connection. When asked ‘Which are the main ‘specialist’ outlets you use when it comes to religious affairs?’, different media were mentioned. Examples included *Wikipedia*, *Aya*, *Sofya*, *Hilal TV*, *Al Jazeera*, *Chrismon* and several others.

Attitudes on Muslim media representations

Most people surveyed thought that Muslims are stereotyped in the media (83.2%, Figure 1).

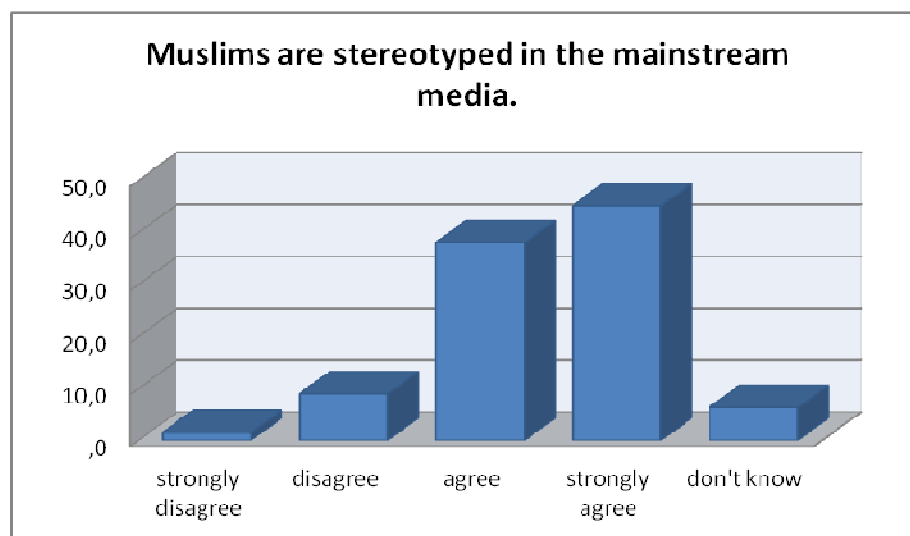


Figure 1: ‘Muslims are stereotyped in the mainstream media’ (whole sample; values given in per cent).

This figure was even higher for the Muslim subsample (Figure 2). 89.7% of the Muslim respondents agreed with the statement “Muslims are stereotyped in the mainstream media”. 73% of the non-Muslims participants agreed with that statement, i.e. nearly the same number of non-Muslims as Muslims share the belief that Muslims are stereotyped by media (Figure 3).

The same pattern was found when participants were presented with the following statement “The mainstream media portrays a negative view of Islam.” A significant majority agreed with this statement. Figure 2 and 3 show the statistics for Muslims and non-Muslims.

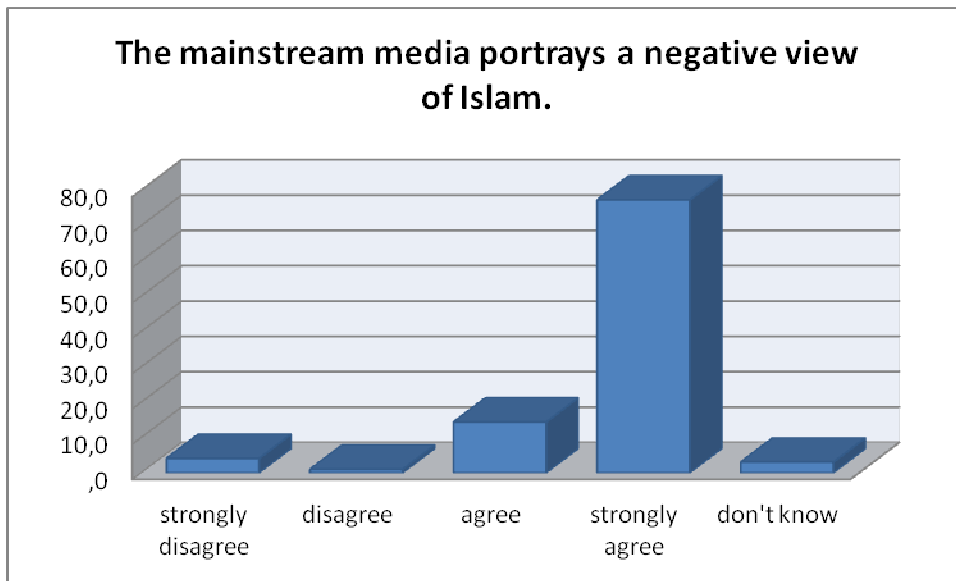


Figure 2: ‘The mainstream media portrays a negative view of Islam’ (Muslims; values given in per cent).

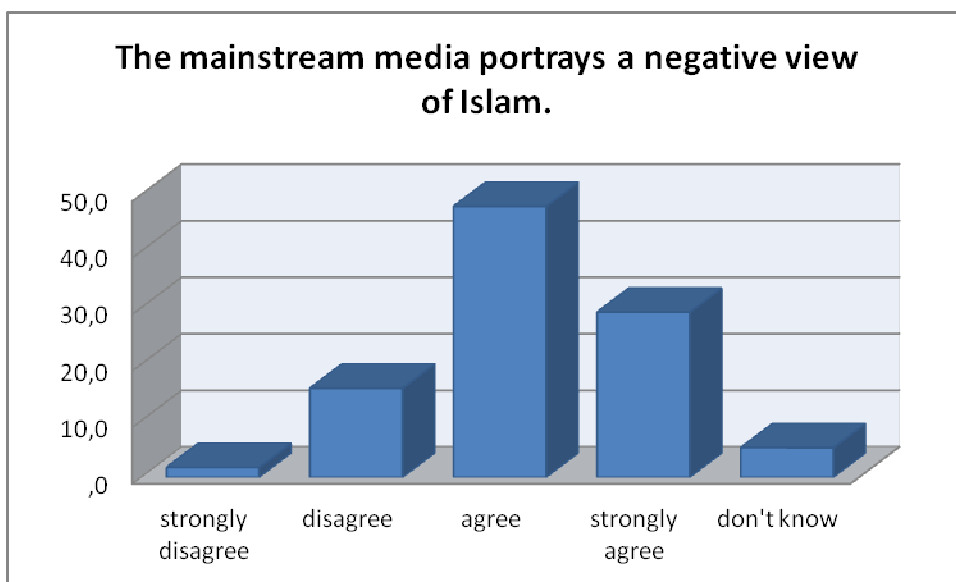


Figure 3: ‘The mainstream media portrays a negative view of Islam’ (Non-Muslims; values given in per cent).

Muslim respondents also overwhelmingly agreed with the statement “Mainstream media treat Islam disrespectfully.” 77.4% agreed with the statement whereas only 9.2% agree to this statement.

The overall sense that Muslim respondents perceived media to be highly prejudiced was enhanced by their agreement with the following statement “Media reporting of Islam is fair and balanced.” 87% of Muslim and 66% of non-Muslim respondents agreed. “There should be more coverage of Islam-related stories in the media.” 72% of Muslim and 66% of non-Muslim

respondents agreed. “The media should report more on prejudice against Muslims.” 92% of Muslim and 73% of non-Muslim respondents agreed.

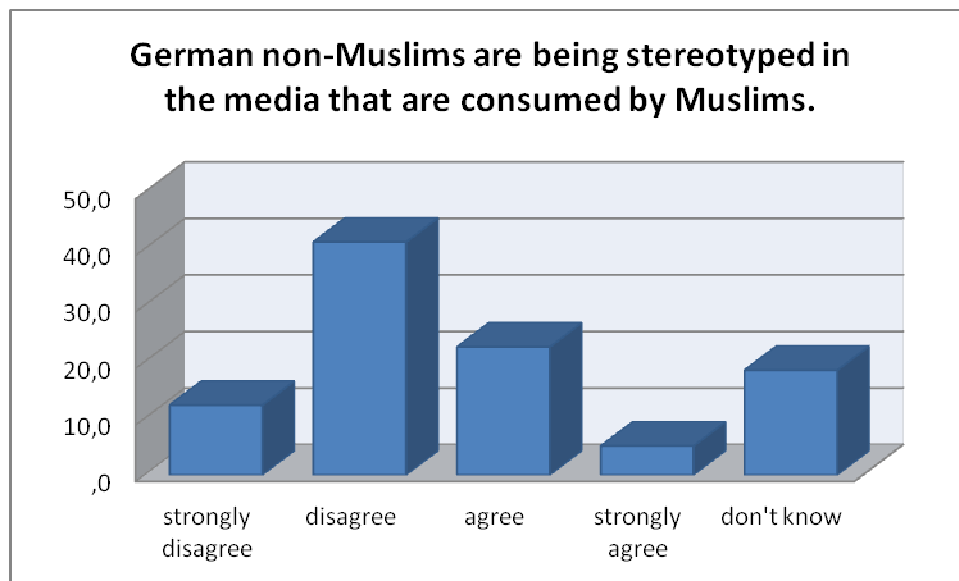


Figure 4: ‘German non-Muslims are being stereotyped in the media that are consumed by Muslims’ (Muslims; values given in per cent).

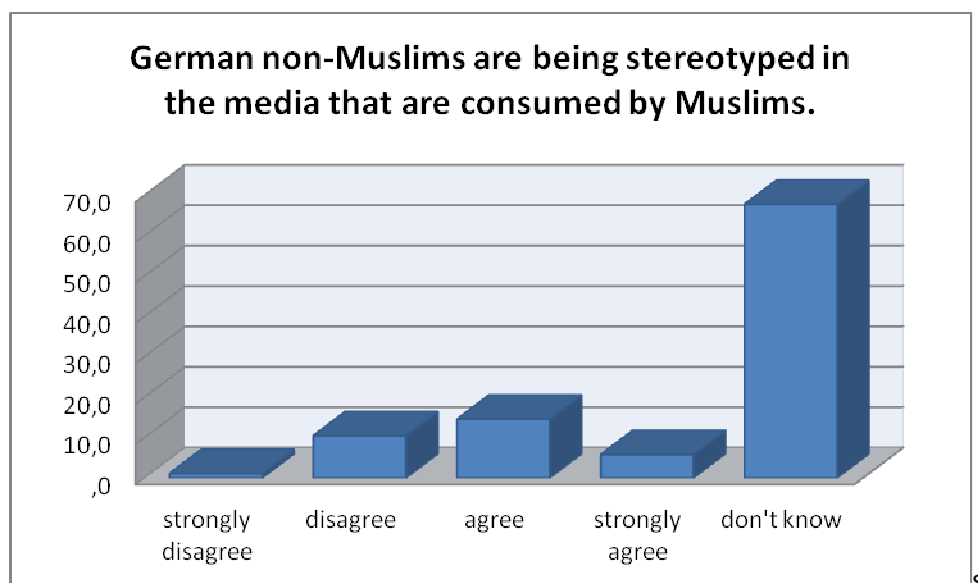


Figure 5: ‘German non-Muslims are being stereotyped in the media that are consumed by Muslims’ (non-Muslims; values given in per cent).

When the perspective was inverted and respondents were asked about the stereotyping of *Germans* the attitudes appeared more ambivalent. We asked if respondents agreed with the statement “German non-Muslims are being stereotyped in the media consumed by Muslims.” Muslims disagreed more than they agreed (53.6% to 27.9%; Figure 4), and non-Muslims mostly did not know how to respond to that statement (67.8%; Figure 5).

Concerning the impact of media on social cohesion, the attitudes displayed were similarly ambivalent. Figures 6 (Muslim respondents) and 7 (non-Muslim respondents) illustrate the

response to the statement “The media I consume has a positive effect on relations between Muslims and other Germans.”

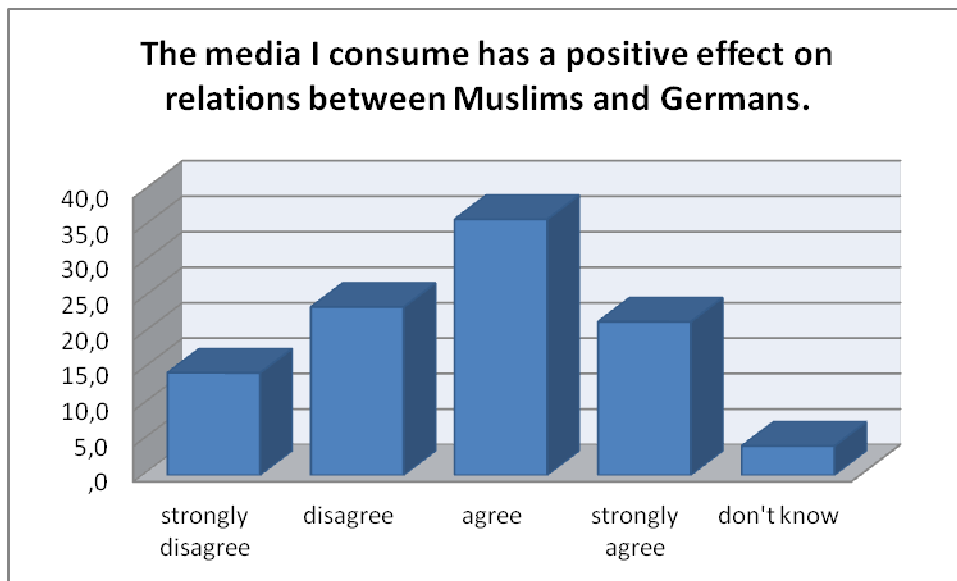


Figure 6: ‘The media I consume has a positive effect on relations between Muslims and Germans’ (Muslims; values given in per cent).

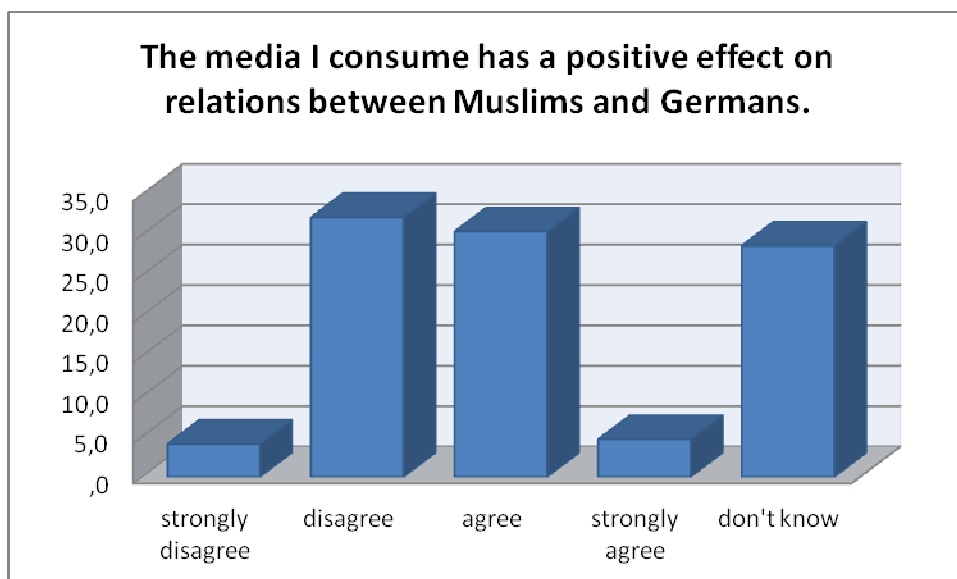


Figure 71: ‘The media I consume has a positive effect on relations between Muslims and Germans’ (non-Muslims; values given in per cent).

Whilst the Muslims in this sample agreed more strongly, non-Muslims disagreed more strongly. The agreement of the Muslims was 57.7%, and the disagreement was 38.1%. For the non-Muslims, the agreement was only 35.1%, and the disagreement was 36.3%, nearly equal to the disagreement of the Muslims in that sample. However, many non-Muslims participants could not decide whether to agree or disagree with the statement (28.7%).

We changed the statement from ‘mainstream media’ to ‘specialist media’ and asked the participants about their view on the statement ‘Specialist media coverage has a positive impact

on relations between Muslim and non-Muslims in Germany.’ In the Muslim subsample, we found 44.4% agreement and 37.1% disagreement; 18.6% did not know how to answer. 28.6% of the non-Muslim participants disagreed with the statement, and 20.5% agreed. Half of the Non-Muslim participants did not know how to answer.

Do media help reduce stereotypes? When asked about the power of the media to reduce prejudices against Muslims in Germany, both Muslim and non-Muslim participants tended to believe that there is such an influence. 89.7% of the Muslims in this sample agreed to this, and 86% of the non-Muslims.

Overall, Muslims did not feel represented by the mainstream media (87.6%, see Figure 8), although this is also the case for nearly half of the non-Muslim respondents (47.4%) (not presented in a table).

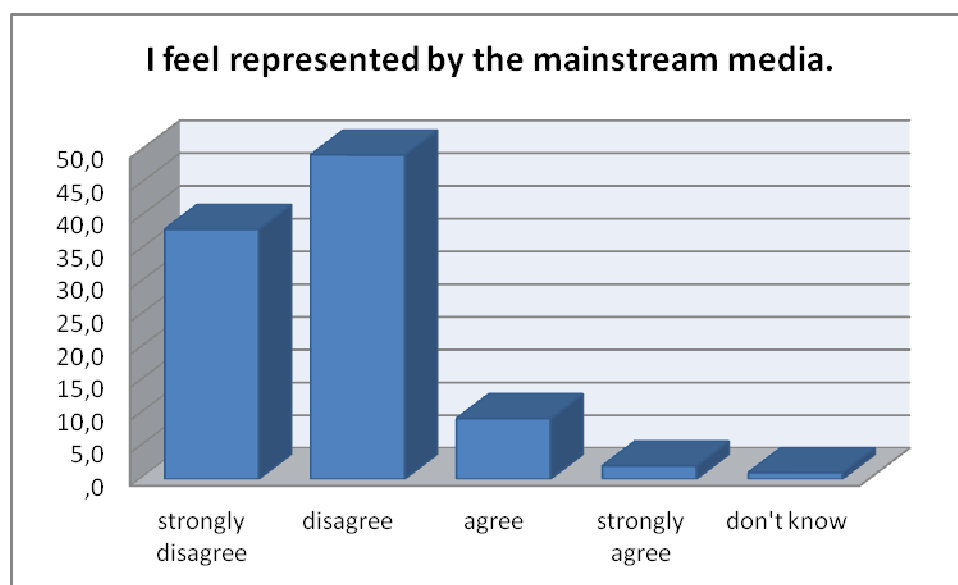


Figure 8: ‘I feel represented by the mainstream media’ (Muslims; values given in per cent).

More than half of the Muslim participants felt threatened by media reports on Islamophobia (58.7%), but only 19.9% of the non-Muslim participants agreed with that.

Feeling threatened by Islamophobia was interlinked with responses to several other statements. If Muslim participants agreed or strongly agreed about feeling threatened by Islamophobia they:

- Believed more strongly in the positive effect of the media that they consume on the relationship between them and Germans;
- Believed more strongly that the media conveys a distorted view of Islam;
- Felt more attached to their parents’ country;

- Believed more strongly that the mainstream media treat Muslims and Islam disrespectfully;
- Believed more strongly that the mainstream media treat their religion disrespectfully;
- Considered themselves less to be German;
- Said that it is less important for them to define themselves as Germans.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of the survey results and of the discussions within the focus groups appear to be generally consistent in the estimation of the treatment of Muslims and Islam in the media. Muslims, as well as non-Muslims, believe the coverage of Muslims to be stereotyped and prejudiced; this is the most important message that German journalists and consumers stressed at almost every stage of this research study. This impression was more significant for Muslims. Clearly more closely connected to the subject matter, the belief in Muslims as being a stereotyped societal group, and the responsibility of the media for that – not in total but as a shared responsibility – defined nearly every qualitative interview.

The online survey mirrors the impression from the qualitative interviews. This was accompanied by a sense of collective shame. Within the focus group discussions, we clearly perceived a sense of regret that Islam is often associated with terrorism in the media. Furthermore, we found that most participants (Muslims and non-Muslims) agreed that mainstream media portray a negative view of Islam. This corresponds with the statements elucidated in the focus groups. However, the participants in the focus groups mainly focused on the presentation of Muslims (and not the religion of Islam) in media.

All of the participants in the focus groups stressed that the image of Muslims that has been constructed and conveyed by media is predominantly negative. Like the media producers that we interviewed, they found that people of a Muslim background are often depicted in media in a generalised way as being deviant and poorly integrated into German society. It is not surprising that one finding in the survey is that a clear majority of the Muslims questioned do not feel represented by the mainstream media (87.6%). Remarkably, nearly half of the non-Muslims questioned (47.4%) state that they do not feel represented by the mainstream media. This emphasises the impression also put forward in the focus groups that mainstream media, as a whole, tends towards exaggeration and simplification. It is possible that the non-Muslims that feel unrepresented by mainstream media feel the topics they are interested in are ignored by mainstream media, or are presented in a negative way. Still, the question of to what extent consumers as a whole feel represented by mainstream media, and what they like, dislike or miss in coverage, would be a good basis for another research inquiry.

Although there was clear criticism of mainstream media, respondents also stated that there are positive examples of coverage, and they made clear – as stated above – that people are not controlled by media. Following their statements, a question is how susceptible people are towards negative media coverage of Islam and people of a Muslim background. This seems to be especially problematic in the case of people with no access to ethnic communities other than their own.

Many of the consumers in the focus groups appeared to use several media outlets to stay informed. Those who spoke more than one language often accessed mainstream German media) but also media from other countries or in other languages; in some cases there seemed to be an emphasis on the use of media in a different language other than German. Those who spoke just one language (German) also used a variety of media outlets – if the topic seemed important to them – in order to get a broader picture. Internet sources played a crucial role, due to easy

accessibility and that these resources are usually free of cost. The Internet was seen as a way for individuals to connect with others that share a similar interest; this included, however, the danger that websites used by persons with similar interests and similar point of views can lead to a self-affirming involvement with a topic.

Some participants of a Muslim background also used mainstream media to stay informed about topics that interest the majority of the people in the country in which they live. They did so in order to be able to build up familiarity by addressing or referring to those topics. This way of combining elements of the country of origin (often the country of respondents' parents in our samples) and elements of the country one lives in creates a definition of integration that allows migrants to balance between the countries to which they feel they belong. From the survey, we can observe that the majority of the respondents felt attached to their country of residence and, at the same time, believe that immigrants in Germany should maintain a link to their country of origin. This was true for Muslims as well as non-Muslims. It seems as if the majority of Muslims and non-Muslims agreed on a concept of integration that gives Muslims of migrant background the chance to develop their own blended identity in Germany.

However, it is striking that this wish is at odds with the actual experiences of the Muslims that participated in the survey. Nearly two-thirds of them thought that they, as Muslims, constitute an important and accepted part in society. This corresponds with the utterances of the Muslims in the focus groups, who described a certain atmosphere that influences Muslim lives, an atmosphere that includes the impression and sometimes actual experience of being treated differently when media coverage of Muslims took a negative turn. Several participants of a Muslim background told that they had personally noticed that, when media coverage of Muslims in Germany took a bad turn, they were scrutinised suspiciously, being asked to justify why they hold onto their religion or why they, for example, wear a headscarf. These negative consequences of media coverage can be seen as being connected to the statements of Muslims as well as non-Muslims on the impact of mainstream media coverage on relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. The majority of the respondents in the survey disagreed with the statement "Mainstream media has a positive impact on relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in my country of residence"; there was stronger disagreement on the side of the Muslims, however, it is clear that non-Muslims as well as Muslims disagreed with this statement.

Specialist media, that focuses more on the perspective of people of a Muslim background, appears not to be seen as an obvious solution to the negative treatment of this group by mainstream media. 44.4% of the Muslims in the sample agreed with the statement "Specialist media coverage has a positive impact on relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in my country of residence", but a similar share of Muslims in the sample (37.1%) disagreed. 18.6% did not know how to answer this statement. The term 'Muslim media'- coined at the beginning of the inquiry as a term covering specialist media for Muslims, mainly made by Muslims- was unfamiliar to the respondents in all of the focus groups and was regarded by most of them as unusual and unnecessary. Their interpretation of the notion was inconsistent; it ranged from media that corresponds to the principles of Islam to media that covers the lives of Muslims. 'Muslim media' was also defined by some as media that seeks to clarify wrong images of Muslims- and media mainly consumed by Muslims.

The overall impression one derives from the data from the focus groups and the survey is that the majority of Muslims of a migrant background aim to balance between the different cultures to which they feel they belong. Furthermore, several of the participants in the focus groups used a range of available media to compare coverage and to shape their own opinions. Consumers mainly seem to be self-aware regarding their use of media, and not at the mercy of the coverage of media organisations. In this respect, the Muslim participants in the focus groups, as well as the non-Muslim participants, gave the impression that they have a similar approach to the use of media. Given the mix of media that is utilised by the consumers surveyed, we can conclude that the concept of a 'parallel media society' is inaccurate for the participants in the focus groups.

APPENDIX

Assumptions and Definitions

We define ‘media’ as a means of communication that allows technical reproduction and distribution of content via writing, images and/or sound, to a potentially unlimited number of persons. We distinguish between print media, television, radio, and digital media (mainly Internet sources, and defined as including social media).

We define ‘mainstream media’ as media aimed at the general public. We define ‘specialist media’ as media that serves the interests of groups with special interests, in the case of this study, people of a Muslim background.

It is not always easy to differentiate mainstream media from specialist media, for example when a public-broadcasting channel – regulated by public law and, in that respect, mainstream media – hosts or operates a TV magazine aimed at a certain social, cultural or religious group. Another example is of newspapers that appear in a foreign country as mainstream media but, when they are published in their original language in another country such as Germany, appear as specialist media (as they are consumed only by a group that speaks the respective language), even though they are aimed at a very diverse audience.

The differentiation of producers in a ‘specialist media’ or ‘mainstream media’ category is not always simple. That is partly due to the fact that some producers work across different sectors; furthermore, some of the producers who are freelancers work predominantly in one sector but also work for media in the other sector. It is also possible that a producer once worked in one of the sectors and now works for the other. We have categorised participants in accordance with their own identification, or based on where they currently or predominantly work.

One presumption at the beginning of this project was the concept ‘Muslim media’ as specialist media consumed by a mainly Muslim audience or an audience with a Muslim background, and produced mainly by journalists who are Muslims. The idea was to inquire into differences and similarities between ‘mainstream media’ and ‘Muslim media’. As such, one issue that was raised in most of the interviews was the question of whether the producers of specialist media aimed at an audience with a Muslim background would use the self-designation ‘Muslim media’ for their media.

During the project we learned that the notion of ‘Muslim media’ does not seem to work well for media in Germany; this is according to most of the interviewed journalists. Moreover, only very few journalists interviewed referred to themselves as Muslim journalists; as such, the term ‘Muslim media’ does not accurately describe the vast majority of the journalists we interviewed. Rather, the term was usually associated with media that maintains a religious perspective and also promulgates the Muslim creed. This is a crucial finding, as our research colleagues in the UK did not encounter such a rejection of the term and of the identification of media outlets as being Muslim.

In Germany, we found only a few exceptions. Three journalists we interviewed described their media outlets as being Muslim media, on being specifically asked whether they would regard them as Muslim media. The opinions what such a Muslim medium is ranged from a medium that

deals predominantly with topics linked with Islam as a faith to a medium that presents what Muslims think.

We decided, therefore, to honour the consensus of the interviewees, who generally rejected the term Muslim media. We still adhere to the belief that there are media that tend to be consumed by people who can be referred to as Muslims. That is why we have chosen to use the term 'specialist media' in our report to refer to media that are mainly consumed by people of a Muslim background.

MEDIA PRODUCER INTERVIEWS

Methodology

In collaboration with our colleagues in the UK, we developed questionnaires aimed at four groups: editors of mainstream media, editors of Muslim media (later labelled by us as 'Specialist media', see below), producers (editorial staff and freelancers) of mainstream media, and producers of Muslim media. During the project, we invited about 150 journalists to be interviewed. We also contacted journalists' associations, and distributed our request for participation via the e-mail lists of such associations. In the end, 35 journalists participated in the study. In both groups – journalists working for mainstream media and journalists working for specialist media – we found a high rate of individuals who identify themselves as Muslims. This may have been due to self-selection; another reason could be that it may often be persons of a Muslim background in editorial staffs who cover stories on Muslims and Islam. As we have learnt from the interviews, this could be due to their personal interest, the designation of others who regard them as experts because of their personal background, or because the topics of Muslims and Islam are fashionable and therefore afford journalists working in this area career advancement. In some cases, it may be a blend of these reasons, in other cases none of these reasons may be valid.

We used face-to-face interviews and interviews via telephone and Skype. The questionnaires were semi-structured. As such, the interviewer did not necessarily follow the specific questions; he/she posed questions based on the previous answers of the interviewee. However, there was a concerted attempt to cover the central questions in the questionnaire.

The qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts was based on Grounded Theory³³. The central idea is to develop theoretical statements that are derived from the interview material; established theories can be used as a tool to examine the data, but the statements must be grounded in the data.

In collaboration with colleagues from the UK, we jointly analysed the transcript of an interview with a journalist which was conducted in the UK. The aim was to derive shared themes and sub-themes that emerge in the transcript as a base for the subsequent analysis of all the other interviews that were conducted by each team.

³³ Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research* (3rd Ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Participants in detail

Specialist media producers: Who are they?

In total, we interviewed twelve producers that work for media that is consumed, to a large extent, by Muslims and individuals of a Muslim background. Eleven of them were male; only one woman took part in this sample. Seven of them were employed journalists, two worked as freelancers, three worked voluntarily for their medium. All of the participants in this sample that referred to their religious backgrounds were Muslims or of Muslim background. Many of the interviewees said that they were raised in Germany, a majority were of a Turkish background, two possessed a German background, and there were individual participants with family connections to Syria and Afghanistan. Nearly all of those who attributed themselves to a class chose *Mittelschicht* (comparable to being middle class in the UK), two chose *Arbeiterschicht* (comparable to working class). All of those who talk about their career path studied at university, focusing on subjects including law, Islamic studies, journalism and communication science, political science, sociology, and social sciences.

Who do they work for?

More than the half of the journalists were employed at a media organisation, meaning half usually worked for just one employer. There were some journalists who worked for more than one medium or 'distribution channel'. Four journalists worked for newspapers for which subscriptions are available across the whole of Germany. Two journalists worked for print magazines, one worked for a radio channel, two worked for TV, and four worked for web magazines or blogs. The majority of their media published in German, one published in German and Turkish, one channel broadcasted in Arabic, and another one broadcasted partly in Turkish and German (often switched between the two during the course of one programme). The circulation of the print media represented in this sample ranged from a few hundred to 40,000 in Germany. In the case of the web magazines, these were visited by numbers of viewers ranging from a few up to several thousand visitors.

The following media and media outlets are inter alia included in this sample:

- *Al Jazeera*, TV broadcaster based in Qatar, available worldwide
- *Ayasofya*, German-Turkish journal for religion, dialogue and science, linked with the web magazine *misawa.de*
- *islam.de*, news and service portal of the *Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland* (ZMD, Central Council of Muslims in Germany)
- *Forum am Freitag*³⁴ [Friday Forum], TV magazine and online service by German national TV broadcaster ZDF
- *Funkhaus Europa* [Broadcasting Center Europe], international and intercultural radio station for which the radio broadcasts "*Köln Radyosu*", "*Café Alaturka*", "*Çalgın*" are

³⁴ In this report the interviewed journalist of this media outlet is referred to as „Specialist TV producer“.

produced by a Turkish editorial department. Funkhaus Europa is run by German public-broadcasting institutions

- *Horizonte. Zeitschrift für muslimische Debattenkultur* [Horizonte. Journal for Muslim debate culture], published two times per year
- *Hürriyet* [“Liberty”], daily newspaper in Turkey, also distributed in Germany
- *Islamische Zeitung* [Islamic newspaper], monthly newspaper in German
- *MiGAZIN*, independent online magazine that deals with topics round integration and migration in Germany
- *Zaman*, [“time” or “era”] daily newspaper in Turkey, also distributed in Germany

Mainstream producers: Who are they?

In total, we interviewed 22 journalists that worked for media consumed by the broader public. Ten of them were female, twelve were male. Most of them were between ten and 15 years into their career. From the journalists that referred to their religious background, about two-thirds were of Christian background, and one third was of a Muslim background. The interviewees were mostly of German origin; there were also some participants of a Turkish background and others with migrant origins linked to Syria, Switzerland, Indonesia, Palestine, Serbia and the UK. Nearly all who attributed themselves to a class chose *Mittelschicht* (comparable to being middle class in the UK), while a few chose educated or upper *Mittelschicht*. All of those who discussed their career path studied at university; eight of them possessed a degree in Islamic studies. A number of them were members of the journalists’ organisation NEFAIS (*Netzwerk Fachjournalisten Islamische Welt*; ‘Network of Journalists Islamic World’), which specialises in coverage on the Islamic world. Several of the participants in this sample specialised in coverage on immigration and integration issues, or coverage of Muslims and Islam.

Who do they work for?

About half of the journalists were employed at one media outlet, the other half worked as freelancers, often for more than one media outlet. Many of the media outlets the journalists worked for were national broadcast media, mainly radio, although three worked for national TV. Several of them worked for national broadsheet newspapers or news magazines; two of them worked for the tabloid press. Several of the freelancers worked simultaneously for national radio, newspapers, and online magazines. Two journalists worked for regional newspapers, and one for a city magazine. A few of the interviewees that were freelancers worked not only for mainstream media, but occasionally also for media that are mainly consumed by individuals with a Muslim background.

The following media and media outlets are inter alia included in this sample:

- *ARD Hörfunkwellen* [ARD radio stations], run by the joint organization of Germany's regional public-service broadcasters, ARD
- *BILD* [“Picture”], German daily tabloid

- *Cosmo TV*, intercultural TV magazine, broadcasted by the regional public service television station *WDR Fernsehen*
- *DER SPIEGEL* [“The Mirror”], German weekly news magazine
- *Deutschlandradio* [Germany Radio], national German public broadcasting radio broadcaster
- *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* [Frankfurt General Newspaper], short FAZ, national German newspaper
- *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* [Stuttgart News], regional daily newspaper
- *SWR2*, cultur radio station, run by Südwestrundfunk [SWR, Southwest Broadcasting], a regional public broadcasting corporation
- *WDR5*, radio station with focus on present-day culture and society, run by the German public-broadcasting institution Westdeutscher Rundfunk [WDR, West German Broadcasting]
- *WELT GRUPPE* [World Group] which comprises inter alia the national German newspaper *Welt* [“World”] and the German national Sunday newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* [“World on Sunday”]

CONSUMER FOCUS GROUPS

Methodology

We differentiated between Muslim focus groups consisting of participants that identify themselves as Muslims; monocultural focus groups consisting of participants of a similar cultural background who are non-Muslims, here meaning persons of an ethnic German background; and mixed focus groups composed of Muslims as well as non-Muslims. We analysed the Muslim focus groups as one sample, and we analysed the monocultural and the mixed focus groups jointly as another sample.

The Muslims that participated in the focus groups were mainly gathered in the context of mosques, meaning the respondents can be supposed to be – as some of them explicitly stated in the course of the focus groups – practicing Muslims. From that follows that non-practicing Muslims are underrepresented in the focus groups in this analysis. This is crucial, as we included in our inquiries with producers and consumers practicing Muslims as well as non-practicing Muslims (also referred to as cultural Muslims) and included non-practicing Muslims when we speak of ‘persons of a Muslim background’.

The focus group discussions were run face-to-face. We employed questionnaires, which were used in a semi-structured way. As such, the researchers who ran the discussions did not necessarily follow the order of questions; rather, each researcher posed questions that were related to the previous answers of the participants in the group. However, there was a concerted attempt to cover the central themes in the questionnaire. Participants filled out a short questionnaire on socio-demographic questions before the actual focus groups started. During the

course of the focus groups, two focuses on Muslims and Islam were prompted with excerpts from media coverage of the respective topics (the case study focuses were ‘Arab Spring/ Political upheavals in the Greater Middle East’ and Thilo Sarrazin and his book *Deutschland schafft sich ab*). All of the focus group discussions were recorded (audio and some video), and later transcribed.

The qualitative analysis in this report is based on Grounded Theory³⁵. The central idea is to develop theoretical statements that are derived from the interview material. Established theories can be used as a tool to examine the data, but the statements must be grounded in the data.

Like with the media producer interviews, we agreed with colleagues from the UK on a range of themes and sub-themes (by researchers also often referred to as codes and sub codes) as a common basis for the analysis of the focus group discussions that were conducted by each team. Subsequently we analysed the German focus group transcripts focussing on these particular themes (e.g. “Impact of coverage”) and subthemes in order to derive statements about estimations and strategies of the respondents.

Participants in detail

Muslim groups

The data was taken from an analysis of six focus groups – four in Bielefeld and two in Dortmund. There were 31 participants in total. One group (six participants) was entirely Muslim except for one participant³⁶. Due to the great dominance of the Muslim participants in this group, and due to the relatively small contribution of the non-Muslim participant, we analysed this group alongside the all-Muslim groups.

There were 15 male and 16 female participants. Six described themselves as German, eleven as Turkish, one as Kurdish, one as Palestinian, one as German-Tunisian, one as German and Syrian, one as German-Moroccan, and eight as German-Turkish. 23 respondents were born in Germany, four were born in Turkey, one in the Netherlands, two in Palestine, and one did not specify a country of birth. Four of the focus groups were gathered with the support of a German-speaking Muslim university group and with the help of members of a mosque in Bielefeld. Two groups were gathered at a meeting of interfaith volunteers (*Ehrenamtliche Dialogbeauftragte*) in a mosque in Dortmund. 17 respondents fell into the 18-24 age bracket, nine in the 25-34 age bracket, three in the 35-44 age bracket, one was between 45 and 49 years old, and one was between 50 and 54 years old. Ten of the respondents were students, eight were in paid employment, five were school students, four were in vocational training, three were chronically ill or disabled, and one was a house-husband. About one third (twelve) of the respondents had gained a qualification³⁷ comparable to A levels, and eight had a secondary

³⁵ Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). Basics of qualitative research (3rd Ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

³⁶ If and when the participant is mentioned as the source of a quote in our analysis, he is marked as being non-Muslim.

³⁷ German: Abitur, Fachhochschulreife, 12. Klasse der polytechnischen Oberschule

school certificate³⁸. Ten graduates were represented in the groups. One respondent had a secondary modern school qualification³⁹. 19 out of 31 participants stated Turkish as being their first language, four indicated German as their first language, four stated Arabic, one Persian, and three indicated that they spoke another language.

Mixed and monocultural groups

The data was taken from an analysis of two focus groups – one in Bielefeld and one in Essen. One group was a monocultural group (Bielefeld), and one group was a mixed group. There were ten participants in total.

There were seven male and three female participants. Six described themselves as German, two as Lebanese, and one as German- Lebanese. All of the respondents were born in Germany. The monocultural group was gathered at Bielefeld University. The other group was part of the project *Interkultureller Dialog zur Aktivierung und Partizipation von Jugendlichen in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft* ('Intercultural dialogue for activation and participation of adolescents in the immigrant society'). On average the mixed group was younger than the monocultural demographic group. Four respondents of the mixed group fell in the 18-24 age bracket, five in the 25-34 age bracket, and one was younger than 18 years old. Of the monocultural demographic group all respondents were between 25 and 34 years old. . Five of the respondents were university students, two were school students, two were in vocational training, and one works freelance. The monocultural group consisted mainly of students (three). The mixed group consisted in equal shares of university students, school students and apprentices. Five of the respondents gained a qualification⁴⁰ comparable to A-levels, and two had a secondary school certificate⁴¹. Two university graduates were represented in the groups. One respondent had no school qualifications. Four respondents described themselves as Christian, four respondents stated they were Muslims, and two stated they had no religion. Three stated Arabic as their first language, six indicated German as their first language, and one stated Arabic as well as German as their first language.

³⁸ German: Realschulabschluss, mittlere Reife

³⁹ German: Hauptschulabschluss

⁴⁰ German: Abitur, Fachhochschulreife, 12. Klasse der polytechnischen Oberschule

⁴¹ German: Realschulabschluss, mittlere Reife