

The interrelation between funding and diversity: A comparison of French and German newscasts

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1 Introduction

Every country is characterized by its own specific media structures and its unique media landscape. Even though the process of globalization is also affecting the media and their structures, scholars often underline that roots and traditions as well as cultural particularities are still the main reasons for the great differences between the media landscapes and journalism cultures in the world (Kopper, 2003; Neveu, 2003). Even the mass media in Europe are quite different from each other – we just have to think about the different backgrounds in which the media systems have developed in Eastern and Western Europe. But Hallin and Mancini (2003) showed with their often cited model that the Western European media systems cannot be lumped together easily. Although these differences have often been described (e.g. Hahn, 2008), there are still few comparative studies. This is surprising because the conditions make international comparisons possible: to take the example of broadcasting, public and private providers coexist in all of the European countries. The European legislation has been harmonized and researchers speak from an Europeanization process in the media systems that may also be confirmed by the success of worldwide television concepts and shows.

This partly unification of television formats may be one reason for the increasing worldwide speculations about the decreasing quality of television programs in general and especially about information programs. The following example shows that these questions are not only being discussed in scientific but also in journalistic circles and the two journalists from the famous German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* are worried about the future of their profession:

"Despite the crises of the tabloid press, tabloid journalism never has been so omnipresent as it is nowadays. Its topics are spreading out in public and private television but also in 'Süddeutsche Zeitung', 'Stern', 'Zeit' and SPIEGEL (...) The tabloidization of journalism has increased so strongly across the board that in the near future a separate tabloid division is not needed any longer." (Brauk & Hülsen, 2008, p.72-73)

French researchers are worried in the same way about the future of the countries' journalism and underline that the former ideal of French newscasts "Entertain, educate and inform" has changed towards "Seduce, touch and caricature". Chivot (2010, p.377) even assumes that the end of the "holy mess"¹ is near and that French newscasts have lost their particularity compared to news shows in other parts of the world. But both reflections have one thing in common: none of the authors underlines his argumentations with data or other facts that confirm the described developments.

In order to bring some light to these assumptions, the present paper compares French and German newscasts and uses a methodological approach that has been invented by other authors. The specific background in which the two media systems have developed and especially the differences that concern the funding situation of broadcasting are of special interest here and thus are being considered. But before the research questions and the methodology are presented, it is a first aim to describe the conditions for television and newscasts in France and Germany and to give evidence about the few results of former studies that compared French and German news shows.

2 Television and news casts in France and Germany

The media systems of France and Germany have both deeply changed during the 1980s when private channels appeared. While in Germany the new commercial channels RTL and SAT.1 launched their program in 1984 (Altendorfer, 2001), the privatization of the former French public television broadcaster Antenne 1 in 1987 was more spectacular (Albert, 1999, p.104). The public broadcasters in France and Germany as in many other countries suffered from this new competition and adapted their programs to be

¹ When talking about the main evening newscasts in France, viewers as well as researchers often spoke from the "grande messe" and referred to the fact that often more than 15 million people followed the two main evening news of TF1 and France 2

prepared for the future. But since the 1980s, the situation in both countries has developed in a very different way. In Germany, where structures for cable and satellite television were being created soon within the 1980s and where the broadcasting system is traditionally federal, the French television channels continued to broadcast their program mainly in the analogical terrestrial way. This situation did not change before the launch of the digital terrestrial television and the French households mainly received seven channels until 2005 (Vedel, 2005). In this context, the private channel TF1 could reach a market leader position that is unique in Europe. In Germany, the strong competition between the television broadcasters and the reception of multiple television channels has created a more or less equalized situation in terms of market and audience share and there is no real market leader as in the French case. Table 1 shows the parts of market share from the two German television channels ARD (public) and RTL (private) and the two French channels France 2 (public) and TF1 (private) for the year 2008.

Table 1: General market share of the main television broadcasters in France and Germany (2008)

	Main German broadcasters				Main French broadcasters			
	Erste (p)	ZDF (p)	RTL (c)	Sat.1 (c)	TF1 (c)	FR 2 (p)	FR 3 (p)	M6 (c)
General market share in 2008	13,4%	13,1%	11,7%	10,3%	27,2%	17,5%	13,3%	11,0%

Sources: ARD (2009) ; TF1 (2008)

The figures in the table indicate that the situation on the German television market is highly competitive and that the two main public channels have almost the same market share. The situation in France is quite different and even if TF1 has lost large parts of its market share due to the digitalization of television, the commercial channel is still the undisputed market leader. First of all, TF1 attracts large audiences with its entertainment-based family-programming. But its information programs are also very popular and with its daily newscasts and especially the evening edition *Journal de 20 Heures* the channel is in direct competition with the public broadcaster *France 2* that offers a newscast with the same title at the same time. The popularity from TF1's newscast is also confirmed by the

figures in table 2 showing the market share and the number of the audience of the main public and commercial newscasts in Germany and France².

Table 2: Market share of the main public and commercial television newscasts in France and Germany (2008)

	Tagesschau (ARD)	RTL aktuell	20 Heures (France 2)	20 Heures (TF1)
<i>Market share in 2008</i>	19,0%*	18,2%	21,5%	34,7%
<i>Audience (in Millions)</i>	5,2 M*	3,7 M	4,7 M	7,6 M

* the figures for the first channel are 19,0% and 5,2 M, but if the market shares of all third public programs that together form ARD are added, the market share is much higher with 32,0% (audience 8,7M)

Sources: ARD (2008); France Télévisions (2008); Médiametrie (2008)

While TF1 attracts almost 8 million viewers and reaches a market share of almost 35 percent with its newscast, the public broadcaster France 2 is far behind with only about 21,5 percent of market share and almost 5 million viewers. Here again, the situation is more counterbalanced in Germany and there are less differences between ARD *Tagesschau* and RTL *aktuell*. But two explanations are necessary here: First, the two channels do not offer their newscasts at the same time (ARD broadcasts *Tagesschau* at 8pm, RTL its *aktuell* at 6.45pm) and thus are not in direct competition. Second, if one counts together the market share of all third regional programs that broadcast *Tagesschau* and that form together the ARD, the figure is not 19 percent but 32 percent. Even if most viewers watch *Tagesschau* on the first channel and not on the third programs³, this difference is important.

This difference has some important impacts on the content of the newscasts and critics often say that there is no real difference between the newscasts offered by TF1 and *France 2*. Because of the fact that *France 2* is less successful with its newscast, it is assumed that the French Public Broadcaster has chosen an imitating-strategy and tries to offer a very similar newscast that copies the TF1 strategy. Similarly, after launching its program, the commercial German broadcaster RTL also imitated the public newscast *Tagesschau* for a

² As the study of this paper focuses on newscasts of the four channels ARD, RTL, France 2 and TF1, the following tables only consider these four broadcasters

³ The newscast on the first channel ARD and on the third programs is identical

while but soon abandoned this strategy because of lacking success. The following newscasts were broadcasted earlier to avoid the direct confrontation with ARD/ZDF and RTL offered a more entertainment-oriented newscast. It has to be underlined here that ARD *Tagesschau* may seem very conservative to non-German viewers because of its undynamic style, the lacking interaction in the studio, the neutral tone of the speaker and the preference for classic hard news issues. Even compared to the second public German broadcasters newscast – the ZDF *heute* –, *Tagesschau* is very different.

The different situation in France and Germany is also interesting because of the great differences in funding of public broadcasting. While the actual broadcasting fee in Germany is with almost 216 Euros per year one of the most elevated in Europe, the French fee is with 121 Euros much lower (Ce qui va changer..., 2009). Table 3 gives some more information about the funding of public television in the two countries.

Table 3: Financial situation of the main French and German television broadcasters in 2008

	ARD	RTL Group (RTL Germany)	France Télévisions (FR2)	TF1
Total revenue in 2008	6,192 Mrd. €	5,774 Mrd. € (2,020 Mrd. €)	2,818 Mrd. € (1,008 Mrd. €)	2,595 Mrd. €
broadcasting fee	5,348 Mrd. €	---	2,438 Mrd. € (0,663 Mrd. €)	---
publicity	0,447 Mrd. €	3,656 Mrd. € (2,278 Mrd. €)	0,263 Mrd. €	1,647 Mrd. €
Program costs in 2008	2,569 Mrd. €	2,186 Mrd. €	1,869 Mrd. € (0,782 Mrd. €)	1,032 Mrd. €

Sources: France Télévisions (2009), KEF (2009), RTL Group (2009), TF1 (2009)

Table 3 shows that ARD with its budget of more than 6 milliard Euros is the broadcaster with the highest total revenues compared to the three others listed in the table. The broadcasting fee is the main financial source: 86 percent of ARD's revenues are assured by the broadcasting fee and only about 7 percent stem from publicity. But ARD also has the highest program costs. The budget of the French broadcaster *France 2* is with around one milliard Euro much lower. Even if one counts together the revenues of all the other chains belonging to the French Public Broadcaster *France Télévisions*, its budget is far away from being comparable to the German broadcaster ARD. In 2008 the French President Sarkozy decided that the public channels would have to disclaim on publicity

from 2011 on and this caused demonstrations and strikes from the personal of *France Télévisions*. Even if Sarkozy assured that the public channels budgets would not decrease, many media specialists stayed very skeptical and spoke from a dangerous situation for the independence of French broadcasting. The financial situation of the two commercial channels is much more equal: while TF1 has higher total revenues than RTL, the German broadcaster is better in attracting advertisers. Compared to TF1, the program costs of RTL are two times higher. This may mainly result from RTLs purchasing of sport rights and the rights to broadcast numerous American serials.

It is now imaginable that the higher budget of ARD also has an impact on the program and that it allows the public broadcaster to produce a cost-intensive newscast that focuses more on hard news issues and does not follow the assumed trend of emotionalization that is often discussed nowadays. But before the research questions are being presented, it is another aim to discuss the previous research on newscasts in France and Germany and to define the term tabloidization.

3 Scientific discussion on tabloidization and previous research on newscasts in France and Germany

First of all it is striking that only few studies in France and Germany treated the question of the interrelation between the financial situation of a television broadcaster and the quality of the program. In Anglophone studies this question is most often linked with the phenomenon of "tabloidization" and/or the very large term "infotainment". For example Esser (1999, p.293) describes tabloidization as follows:

"'tabloidization' can be understood as a micro- or macro-scale process. Taken at the micro-level", it can be viewed as a media phenomenon involving the revision of traditional newspapers and other media formats driven by reader preferences and commercial requirements. On the macro-level, 'tabloidization' can be seen as a social phenomenon both instigating and symbolizing major changes to the constitution of society (...). In that context, it means a change in the range of topics being covered (more entertainment, less information), in the form of presentation (fewer longer stories, more shorter ones with pictures and illustrations) and a change in the mode of address (more street talk when addressing readers). "

Many other authors define "tabloidization" in the same way (Brants & Neijens, 1998; Donsbach & Büttner, 2005; Kurtz, 1993; McLachlan & Golding, 2000; Schönbach, 2000; Sparks, 2000). Bird (2000, p. 224) discusses the term "tabloidization" more especially in the context of television news and defines it as "a product of the dynamic among audiences, journalists, and economic forces" (Bird, 2000, p.224). The author argues that that in particular growing competition and decreasing audience rates have led to a certain "vicious circle" and created a "murderous market": while the broadcasters need to attract large audiences to be interesting for advertisers, they orient themselves towards the preferences of the audience. But the competitive market and the economic restrictions also force them to produce cost-efficient programs. Bird (2000) underlines that the viewers, especially the younger ones, are less interested in newscasts and prefer a personalized human interest reporting style. As the broadcasters want to fulfill the wishes of the audience, they deliver these programs that are also cheaper to produce (Bird, 2000). The authors' assumptions are also confirmed by statistical data showing that younger German viewers in general watch less television than older ones:

Table 4: Time spent for television viewing per day among German viewers belonging to different age groups (Monday to Sunday in minutes)

Age group	2007	2008	2009
3-13	98	92,5	90,5
14-19	108	105	108,5
20-29	167,5	175,5	173
30-39	203,5	203	211,5
40-49	229,5	224,5	225
50-64	275	269,5	269
64 and older	297,5	299	295,5

The data show a correlation between the age of the viewers and their daily television consumption for all three years 2007, 2008 and 2009. It seems to be true – at least for Germany – that younger viewers are watching less intensively television.

Of course it has to be considered here that Bird's (2000) argumentation reflects at first the situation in the United States with its much more commercialized media system.

It seems that the explanations cannot be used to explain the developments in many European countries where public broadcasting has a strong tradition. But if one considers that if the public broadcasters would lose large parts of their audience, they would also lose their legitimation and could risk a public discussion about their existence, this argumentation also seems appropriate in the context of public broadcasting. A decreasing audience would rise up questions about the public financing and reevaluate the commercial broadcasters that do not ask their viewers to pay for the offered program. Even if the public broadcasters theoretically would not have to pay attention to audience rates and are not subjected to the same economic forces as commercial broadcasters, in practice they also underlie the pressure of viewing rates.

As showed above, the tabloidization of news can be measured on three levels (Esser, 1999, p. 293):

- (1) the topics ("more entertainment, less information"),
- (2) the journalistic style ("fewer longer stories, more shorter ones with pictures and illustrations", "more street talk when addressing readers") and
- (3) the form/the layout (more dynamic presentation of newscast).

Former studies showed that hard news issues were dominating the television news of both countries in the late 1980s. Landbeck (1991, p. 107-108) compared French (TF1 and A2 now called *France 2*) to German newscasts (ARD and ZDF) and found out that political topics were the most treated issues in the 148 analyzed newscasts of both countries (France: 48% of all sequences; Germany: 52% of all sequences). Economic (France 6% of all sequences, Germany 8% of all sequences) and social issues (France and Germany: 3% of all sequences) were other prominent topics. The study also indicated some differences between the two countries: for example news reporting about culture, arts and science was more popular in French News (4% of all sequences) than in German News (2% of all sequences) and spectacular and dramatic issues played a more important role in France (13% of all news sequences; Germany 8%). But it has to be remembered that Landeck (1991) compared two German public newscasts with one commercial and one public French newscast which limits the findings. At least for Germany, more recent studies show a decrease in the political reporting of commercial and public newscasts. While the amount in the commercial news show RTL *aktuell* has decreased from 32% to

only 22% between 1983 and 1998, the amount for the public news show *Tagesschau* is with about 45 percent relatively stable (Donsbach & Büttner, 2005, p. 28).

The same study from Donsbach and Büttner (2005) also indicates changes towards a more conflict-oriented reporting in German newscasts as well as a trend towards a more emotionalized and sensational news reporting style. The authors also underline that the tone in the news shows has changed between 1983 and 1998 and that especially the style of speech in the commercial newscasts from RTL and SAT.1 has become more informal. While commercial and public newscasts still report about different issues and use different journalistic styles when producing their news shows, the formal characteristics are becoming more similar: especially the newscasts of public broadcasters are much more dynamic at the end of the 1990s than at the beginning of the 1980s. The average length of cuts in news films is lower in 1998 than in 1983 and the average length of sound bites has decreased dramatically. Donsbach and Büttner (2005) conclude that the newscasts of the analyzed public and commercial channels have become more similar but that there are still great differences, especially when comparing RTL *aktuell* to ARD *Tagesschau*.

The study of Donsbach and Büttner (2005) is very helpful to close the existing research gap concerning tabloidization of German newscasts but it is also limited in the way that the authors only analyzed the reporting about political issues and chose election periods for their comparison. This is problematic because the reporting about political issues is higher in election periods than in non-election-periods and elections are exceptional cases. The fact that the authors even chose the four last weeks before the federal elections in Germany took place may have distorted the findings because they do not give any evidence on the everyday news reporting. Nevertheless the authors codebook is very helpful and has been used here to compare their results with the findings of the present study.

4 Research questions and methodology

The previous chapters showed that the broadcasting systems in Germany and France are quite different and that the reasons for this result mainly from different developments in the media systems. While German television broadcasters are used to

share the market with a lot of other competitors, the French market is dominated by the commercial channel TF1 and the public broadcaster France 2 is far behind. This competitive situation also has an influence on the news program and because of the fact that both French newscasts are broadcasted at the same time, French scholars often argue that there are only few differences between the public and the private newscast. In Germany, the situation is different and the commercial provider RTL tries to offer a very different newscast. The fact that both German newscasts are broadcasted at different moments in the evening underlines this “strategy of avoiding a competitive situation”. These circumstances led to the following general hypothesis:

H1: French public and commercial television newscasts are more similar while the newscasts of German public and commercial broadcasters are more different; Nevertheless, there are still strong differences between the newscasts of commercial (*20 heures de TF1 / RTL aktuell*) and public television broadcasters (*20 heures de France 2 / Tagesschau*).

This very general hypothesis is now difficult to verify and needs to be specified. We decided to measure the similarities and differences on three levels: the treated topics in the newscasts (1), the reporting styles (2) and the dynamics of news reporting.

To begin with the topics (1), we not only wanted to know whether there are differences between the countries but also whether the newscasts from commercial and public television broadcasters differ. Even if it is assumed that there are fewer differences between newscasts of public and private broadcasters in France we do not expect that they are similar. According to other researchers, we assume that there are still strong differences. This leads to the following hypothesis 1a:

H1a: Public newscasts in general report more about hard news issues while in commercial newscasts we find more soft news issues; the differences between public and commercial newscasts are lower in France than in Germany

Hard news means here the reporting about political or economic issues while under the term soft news we define such topics as sports, catastrophes, disasters and delinquency but also abnormal, unexceptional and spectacular issues.

In regard of the fact that the French newscasts are broadcasted at the same time, the great distance between the channels in terms of audience figures concerning newscasts and the recent introduction of digital television (due to the appearance of new channels the established main channels loose large parts of their market shares), we assume that this competitive situation has an effect on the newscasts in the way that concepts are being created that attract large parts of audiences. We thus expect that both public and commercial French newscasts tend more towards an emotional style of news reporting and negativism while this plays a minor role in Germany, at least for the public newscast:

H1b: Commercial newscasts tend more towards emotionalized and negative news reporting than public newscasts do; the differences between public and commercial newscasts are lower in France than in Germany.

With the last hypothesis 1c, we express the expectation that commercial broadcasters have to offer vivid and almost exciting newscasts to keep their audience and to avoid channel-switching and viewing of the competitors newscast. We assume that commercial newscasts are more dynamic in the way that there are more cuts, more news films and a greater participation of common citizens (via soundbites/statements). It is also expected that the tone of speech is more casual in commercial newscasts.

H1c: Newscasts from commercial broadcasters are more dynamic (more cuts, more news films) than newscasts from public broadcasters and the tone in the reports is more informal ; the differences between public and commercial newscasts are lower in France than in Germany

In order to be able to compare the different findings, we conducted a quantitative content analysis and used in part the codebook of Donsbach and Büttner (2005). In the context of the discussion about tabloidisation of newscasts, the authors the authors conducted a content analysis on German newscasts in 2005.

It has to be underlined here that the conclusions are based on an analysis of 16 newscasts which limits the findings (four newscasts from ARD *Tagesschau*, RTL *aktuell*, *Journal de 20 heures* from TF1 and *Journal de 20 heures* from France 2). Nevertheless the comparison can be seen as a first fundament for a later research project that will follow

this study. The analysis was conducted on the micro-level and defines every sequence as a research unit (for example an anchors announcement of a story and the following news film are coded as two sequences). Table 5 gives evidence about the repartition of the 569 sequences on the four channels.

Table 5: Repartition of the sequences on the channels

Newscasts / channel	Sequences
ARD Tagesschau	98
RTL aktuell	108
Journal de 20 heures France 2	178
Journal de 20 heures TF1	185
Total	569

In order to avoid an influence of one single event that may distort our findings, we chose newscast from four different moments within the year 2008 (4th of February, 14th of May, 22nd of August and 30th of November)

4 Findings

As it was shown in the previous chapters, it is assumed that there is a difference in news reporting between public and commercial channels due to the financial situation of the broadcasters and the specificities resulting from differences of both media systems. It is expected that the public newscasts offer a more serious reporting focused on hard news issues such as "politics, economics, and society" while the second ones are characterized by a preference for soft news issues as for example "sports, scandal, and popular entertainment" (Sparks, 2000, p.10). Table 6 gives evidence about the treated topics in the analyzed public (ARD *Tagesschau* & *20 Heures France 2*) and commercial newscasts (RTL *aktuell* & *20 heures TF1*).

The findings show that the two public newscasts indeed report more about political issues (26% of all analyzed "public" sequences) than the two commercial ones (17% of all analyzed "commercial" sequences) but it is also confirmed here that they

seem to play a less important role compared to the late 1980s where political issues dominated half of the television news shows in France and Germany (Donsbach & Büttner, 2005; Landbeck, 1991; Pöhls, 1989). While the differences can easily be observed here, it becomes more difficult when comparing other classic hard news issues such as "economics and finance", "justice" or "social and humanitarian issues" because

Table 6: Topics of public and commercial newscasts in France and Germany (sequence level)

Issue	ARD Tagesschau	RTL aktuell	20 H France 2	20 H TF1	Public news	Comm. news.
Politics	28 (29%)	11 (10%)	38 (22%)	33 (18%)	66 (24%)	44 (15%)
International crisis & foreign military deployments	15 (15%)	5 (4%)	21 (12%)	18 (10%)	36 (13%)	23 (8%)
Economics and finance	1 (1%)	4 (4%)	9 (5%)	10 (5%)	10 (4%)	14 (5%)
Justice	6 (6%)	2 (2%)	7 (4%)	8 (4%)	13 (5%)	10 (3%)
Social & humanitarian issues	6 (6%)	3 (3%)	23 (13%)	32 (17%)	29 (10%)	35 (12%)
Sports	4 (4%)	6 (6%)	16 (9%)	16 (9%)	20 (7%)	22 (7%)
Catastrophes, disasters & delinquency	16 (16%)	30 (28%)	28 (16%)	32 (17%)	44 (16%)	62 (21%)
Nature & environment	1 (1%)	---	4 (2%)	6 (3%)	5 (2%)	6 (2%)
Culture	3 (3%)	2 (2%)	10 (6%)	8 (4%)	13 (5%)	10 (3%)
Abnormal, unexceptional & spectacular issues	2 (2%)	14 (13%)	7 (4%)	5 (3%)	9 (3%)	19 (7%)
Science & technology	---	---	---	2 (1%)	---	2 (1%)
Useful and practical advises	---	5 (5%)	---	1 (1%)	---	6 (2%)
Mix of different issues	---	4 (4%)	5 (3%)	4 (2%)	5 (2%)	8 (3%)
No issue	16 (16%)	21 (19%)	8 (4%)	8 (4%)	24 (9%)	29 (10%)
Other	---	---	---	2 (1%)	---	3 (1%)
Total	98 (100%)	108 (100%)	177 (100%)	185 (100%)	275 (100%)	293 (100%)

the results (in particular for France) are very similar. If one compares on the other hand the soft news issues, the findings show that commercial newscasts tend more often towards a reporting about "catastrophes, disasters & delinquency" than public channels and the amount of sequences treating "abnormal, unexceptional & spectacular issues" is higher in commercial newscasts. But where do these differences come from? Are there greater differences between public and commercial newscasts in Germany and can we find in contrast a higher similarity concerning the treated topics in French newscasts?

The results confirm our expectations, at least for the topic-level: the public German newscast *Tagesschau* reports much more often about political issues (34% of all analyzed "*Tagesschau*"-sequences) than its commercial counterpart RTL *aktuell* (13% of all analyzed "RTL *aktuell*"-sequences) and there are also great differences in the reporting about "catastrophes, disasters & delinquency" (ARD 20% vs RTL 34%) or "abnormal, unexceptional & spectacular issues" (ARD 2% vs RTL 16%). On the other hand, both French newscasts are much more similar and the differences in reporting about hard news such as political issues (*France 2* 23% vs. TF1 19%) or economics and finance (*France 2* 5% vs. TF1 6%) are marginally. The similarities and differences appear more clearly if one counts together all sequences treating hard news ("Politics", "International crisis & foreign military deployments", "economics and finance", "justice" and "social and humanitarian issues") and compares them with the sequences about soft news issues ("sports", "catastrophes, disasters & delinquency" and "abnormal, unexceptional & spectacular issues") as shown in table 7.

Table 7: Hard news vs. soft news reporting in French and German newscasts (sequence-level)

Issue	ARD Tagesschau	RTL aktuell	20 H France 2	20 H TF1	Public news	Comm. news
Hard news issues	56 (57%)	24 (24%)	98 (56%)	101 (54%)	154 (56%)	125 (39%)
Soft news issues	22 (22%)	50 (47%)	51 (29%)	53 (29%)	73 (26%)	103 (38%)

The results are surprising in the way that the analyzed public and commercial French newscasts do not show a strong trend towards soft news reporting. In contrast, the commercial channel TF1 reports equally about hard news as its counterpart from *France 2*. There are almost no differences between the two channels while on the other hand

the findings for Germany indicate only few similarities between ARD *Tagesschau* and RTL *aktuell*. There are still remarkable differences if one compares the public channels ARD and *France 2* to their commercial counterparts RTL and TF1. In other words, this means that our hypothesis 1a is confirmed.

But the comparison can not only focus on the topics but also has to consider the journalistic styles and the way in that these topics are treated. For this reason, we tried to find out whether the reporting in the sequences is characterized by an emotional style and whether negativism and conflict situations play an important role. Regarding our findings it is striking that German newscasts tend more towards an emotionalized style than French newscast. But the collected data for Germany show a strong difference between the public broadcaster and the commercial one because in *Tagesschau* we found more sequences without any emotionalization (62% of all analyzed sequences) and fewer sequences with little or strong emotionalization (38%) compared to RTL *aktuell* (55% / 45%). The results for the two French newscasts again are relatively similar and the sequences of the public channel *France 2* even were a little more emotionalized (28%) than those broadcasted by TF1 (25%). For example while *France 2* showed dead bodies in its reporting about armed hostilities in Chad or the terror attacks in Bombay, TF1 did not show such shocking pictures in its sequences dealing about the same topic. Table 8 gives evidence about the exact amount of emotionalized sequences for both countries and broadcasting types.

Table 8: Emotionalized sequences in French and German newscasts

Issue	ARD Tagesschau	RTL aktuell	20 H France 2	20 H TF1	Public news	Comm. news
No emotionalization	51 (62%)	47 (55%)	122 (72%)	133 (75%)	173 (67%)	180 (65%)
Little / strong emotionalization	31 (38%)	39 (45%)	46 (28%)	44 (25%)	77 (33%)	83 (35%)
Total	82 (100%)	86 (100%)	168 (100%)	177 (100%)	250 (100%)	263 (100%)

A trend towards negativism is also confirmed by the findings and the often cited phrase that only "bad news is good news" seems to be true here. But of course it has to be considered that only 16 newscasts were analyzed and that the topics as the earthquake

in China, a plane crash in Spain, an attack on French soldiers in Afghanistan or terror attacks in Bombay and Israel themselves were very negative. But this negative news background also offers the possibility to see how the different broadcasters dealt with those kind of news. The findings indicate that the two French newscasts do not only choose fewer stories with negative reporting background but they also broadcast more news stories with a neutral background. Again, the differences between the public and the commercial French newscasts are very marginal. Table 9 shows the results concerning the reporting background of the sequences in the analyzed French and German newscasts.

Table 9: Reporting background of the sequences in French and German newscasts

	ARD Tagesschau	RTL aktuell	20 H France 2	20 H TF1	Public news	Comm. news
Slight / strong positive reporting background	27 (33%)	20 (23%)	41 (24%)	47 (27%)	68 (28%)	67 (25%)
Neutral reporting background	13 (16%)	26 (30%)	62 (37%)	66 (38%)	75 (27%)	92 (34%)
Slight / strong negative reporting background	42 (51%)	40 (47%)	65 (39%)	63 (36%)	107 (45%)	103 (41%)
Total	82 (100%)	86 (100%)	168 (100%)	177 (100%)	250 (100%)	262 (100%)

The results concerning emotionalization and negativism were contrary to our expectations and thus hypothesis 1b has to be rejected partly even if it became clear that the French newscasts are much more similar than their German counterparts. Other findings showed that the reporting on the public channels also was more conflict-oriented and conflicts between politicians or ethnic groups were shown in a more direct way while on the other side the commercial channels reported fewer about conflicts.

The third level of analysis concerns the layout and the form of presentation of the newscasts. We firstly analyzed the style of speech in the newscasts and the assumed difference between the public and commercial broadcasters was confirmed by the results. But this is mainly due to the very contrast findings for the two German newscasts that are very different in this point while the French newscasts again are very similar. It has to be remembered here that *Tagesschau* is characterized by an extremely

sober style of speech that sometimes is even described as conservative and that the anchorman or -woman never comments or interprets any news story while this is often the case in RTLs news show. Even if the hypothesis 1c is confirmed, we cannot really speak of a difference between public and commercial broadcasters because of the very different situations in the two countries.

Table 10: Style of speech in the sequences of French and German newscasts

Style of speech	ARD Tagesschau	RTL aktuell	20 H France 2	20 H TF1	Public news	Comm. news
Sober style of speech	82 (100%)	48 (56%)	118 (70%)	130 (73%)	200 (85%)	178 (64%)
Between sober and informal	---	18 (21%)	24 (14%)	28 (16%)	24 (7%)	46 (19%)
Informal style of speech	---	20 (23%)	26 (16%)	19 (11%)	26 (8%)	39 (17%)
Total	82 (100%)	86 (100%)	168 (100%)	177 (100%)	250 (100%)	263 (100%)

Previous studies also compared the dynamics of different news shows and found out that in German newscast short film-sequences play a more and more important role, the sequences have become shorter in general and cuts are used more intensively during the years. Donsbach and Büttner (2005, p.32) found out that the average length of the time spent between two cuts in German news films has decreased dramatically, especially when comparing the findings for the two public newscasts ARD *Tagesschau* (while in 1983 around 19 seconds passed between two cuts, the time shift has decreased to 10,5 seconds in 1998) and ZDF *heute* (1983: 26 seconds; 1998: 7 seconds). The public broadcasters seem to have adapted their newscasts to their commercial counterparts because they have been very dynamic from the beginning (average time spent between two cuts in 1990 around 6 seconds and in 1998 around 8 seconds). Table 11 gives evidence about the situation in 2008.

Table 11: Dynamic-degree of French and German newscasts

	ARD Tagesschau	RTL aktuell	20 H France 2	20 H TF1	Public news	Comm. news
Average length of news film	34,4s	39,8s	48,9s	45,7s	41,7s	42,8s
Average number of cuts per news film	4,4	8,9	10,9	11,1	7,7	10
Average time spent between two cuts	7,8s	4,5s	4,5s	4,1s	6,2s	4,3

Film sequences in German newscasts are in general shorter than the French ones but it has to be remembered here that the main evening news shows in France last two times longer than in Germany. But the findings for both countries can nevertheless be compared because even if the French news films are longer, there are also more cuts. The findings show that the newscasts have still become more dynamic compared to 1998 and only for *Tagesschau* the time spent between two cuts is with around 8 seconds relatively higher to the three other newscasts where a cut appears every 4 or 4,5 seconds. Other findings in the study of Donsbach and Büttner (2005) indicated a decrease of soundbites and their average length but it seems that this decrease did not continue and that the average length of a politicians' statement has been relatively stable in Germany with around 14 seconds compared to 14,7 seconds in 1998 (Donsbach & Büttner, 2005, p.33). But it has to be remembered that in 1983 (before the commercial channels started to broadcast their programs) the statements of politicians lasted on average almost 34 seconds. Table 12 shows the results for both countries.

Table 12: Soundbites of politicians (as first actors⁴)

Issue	ARD Tagesschau	RTL aktuell	20 H France 2	20 H TF1	Public news	Comm. news
Number of news films	30	27	62	71	46	49
Soundbite (politician)	12 (40%)	2 (7%)	8 (13%)	9 (13%)	10 (27%)	11 (10%)
Average length of soundbite	13,6s	14,5s	14s	9,8s	13,8s	14,2s

⁴ Under « first actor » we understand the person that appears at first with its statement in a news film

In contrast to Donsbach and Büttner (2005) we also measured the soundbites of ordinary citizens and the findings are shown in table 13.

Table 13: Soundbites of ordinary citizens (as first actors)

Issue	ARD Tagesschau	RTL aktuell	20 H France 2	20 H TF1	Public news	Comm. news
Number of news films	30	27	62	71	46	49
Soundbite (politician)	2 (7%)	10 (37%)	29 (47%)	22 (31%)	31 (27%)	32 (34%)
Average length of soundbite	9,5s	8,2s	9,5s	8,7s	9,5s	8,5s

The results show some interesting differences between the channels. While ARD integrates practically no statements of ordinary and unknown citizens in its news films but gives politicians on the other hand much more space, the situation is quite different for the other channels. Especially the findings for the public French broadcaster are surprising and a citizens' statement or opinion appears in almost half of the analyzed news films. This means that the statements and opinions of ordinary citizens are presented between two (TF1) to five times (RTL) more often than the statements of politicians.

5 Conclusion and discussion

The present article discussed the interrelation between the financial situation of a broadcaster and the diversity of newscasts in France and Germany. As shown in the previous chapters, the situation for broadcasting is quite different in both countries. While the private channel TF1 still is the undisputed market leader in France and more successful with its daily series, films and newscasts than his public counterpart *France 2*, there is no real market leader in Germany and the four first channels have more or less equal market shares but in terms of information programs the German audience prefers the newscasts offered by the public channels. If one considers that the budget of ARD is between two and three times higher compared to the three other channels analyzed in this study, it is imaginable that this difference might also be visible in the offered programs. In regard to the differences caused by the specificities of the media systems

and the financial situations, we expected great differences between French and German newscasts but also between the public and the private channels.

The first findings indeed indicated a different reporting of the public and private broadcasters and while the first ones gave more space to hard news issues such as politics or economics, the private channels reported more on soft news issues. But the results also showed a great similarity in the treated topics of French newscasts. Other findings that compared the differences in reporting styles were more surprising because the stronger emotionalization of German newscasts shown by the results was not expected. When considering this and the fact that German news shows tend more to report on negative and conflictual stories and events, other results show that at least the German *Tagesschau* is characterized by a sober news speech style and a moderate degree of dynamics. The public German newscast also gives much more space to the statements of politicians while all three other channels are much more dynamic in terms of cuts and give much more space to the opinions and statements of ordinary people that are easier to obtain.

It seems that the comfortable financial situation indeed may have an influence on the program. The example of the public broadcaster ARD shows that the channel has much success with its serious newscast that focuses mostly on hard news issues. But the findings also showed that the differences between ARD *Tagesschau* and the French public and commercial broadcasters are not very high although they have a much smaller budget. The study did not confirm the expectation that the French channels are characterized by a reporting style that prefers soft news issues and a more emotionalized reporting style. It is true that there are only few differences between the public and the private channels – but this does not mean in contrast that the French newscasts are less serious.

But it also has to be underlined that the conclusions drawn from this study are limited in the way that only 16 newscasts have been part of the analysis and that it has more to be considered as a large first pretest than a real research project. The codebook of the final analysis will be enlarged and includes other variables that analyze the three levels “content, style and form”. It is planned to compare 244 newscasts (144 German and 108 French newscasts) that have been broadcasted between 1992 and 2008. This approach may help to draw more general conclusions than the presented findings that only give evidence about some moments of the year 2008.

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