# SC|M

Studies in Communication and Media

# EXTENDED ABSTRACT

## Media criticism in the ethnomedial public sphere
An analysis of the reporting of Jüdische Allgemeine

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About 75 years after the Holocaust, antisemitism is widespread in Germany. In 2019, about 2,000 antisemitic crimes were recorded in Germany, 13 percent more than in the previous year (Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2020). Against this background, it is plausible to assume that Germany's Jewish community closely monitors the development of antisemitism and the public opinion toward Jews. In doing so, the media play an important role—especially when individuals assume that the tenor of reporting represents or will influence public opinion (Gunther, 1998).

To follow mainstream society's opinion toward Jews and antisemitism, Jews may perceive community media as important sources of information (Zick, Hövermann, Jensen, & Bernstein, 2017). Moreover, from a media ethics point of view, knowledge of how the Jewish community media evaluate mainstream media outlets may provide them with information about how their work affects the Jewish community. The present paper deals with how mainstream media are covered by *Jüdische Allgemeine*, the most important daily Jewish newspaper in Germany, published by the Central Council of Jews in Germany (Kauschke, 2013).

### Theoretical Background

Geißler (2007) postulates the ideal of "intercultural media integration." This ideal is based on the concept of "intercultural integration," which follows the idea of multiculturalism and demands active integration of minorities in the media. According to Geißler (2007), media content is considered interculturally integrative if it meets the following criteria:

(1) The media should portray ethnic diversity as societal normality and avoid discrimination (e.g., stereotyped reporting). This led to our first research question:

> *RQ1. According to Jüdische Allgemeine, how far are Jews portrayed in media reports as part of German society?*

(2) Geißler (2007) demands that the media also report successes of and opportunities for multiethnic societies. In doing so, they would create a positive counterweight to the necessary thematization of problems associated with the multiethnicity of societies. Thus, our second research question arose:

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*RQ2. According to Jüdische Allgemeine, how far do the media report successes and achievements of Jews?*

(3) Geißler (2007) also formulates the demand that the media address the problems faced by minorities in multiethnic societies. For the Jewish community in Germany, a focus is on the media portrayal of different forms of antisemitism, leading to our third research question:

*RQ3. How does Jüdische Allgemeine evaluate the media portrayal of antisemitism?*

## Method

To answer these research questions, a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2015) of the reporting of the online version of *Jüdische Allgemeine* was conducted. First, all articles published on the website between January 1, 2019 and June 15, 2020 were reviewed. Available articles were checked for media references, which were given when the reason for reporting was to refer to mainstream media content, or at least one paragraph of an article referred to mainstream media content. In total, 168 articles with references were identified and therefore examined in more detail, following a structuring content analysis according to Mayring (2015). The analysis was structured by the following main categories, derived from the concept of intercultural integration (Geißler, 2007):
1) societal inclusion (RQ1),
2) thematization of successes and achievements (RQ2), and
3) thematization of antisemitism (RQ3).

Those main categories were constantly extended by inductively generated subcategories during the analysis process.

## Results

*RQ1. According to Jüdische Allgemeine, how far are Jews portrayed in media reports as part of German society?*

Following Geißler (2007), the media should avoid the unreflective reproduction of stereotypes. However, our analysis demonstrated that according to *Jüdische Allgemeine*, antisemitic stereotypes were frequently reproduced in German media. In particular, the media focus on ultra-Orthodox Jews as supposed representatives of Judaism in Germany was criticized and assumed to contribute to the antisemitic stereotype of Jews being "strange" or "foreign" in German society (see Baugut, 2020). For example, harsh critics referred to a magazine cover (published by the most prestigious news magazine in Germany, *DER SPIEGEL*) showing two ultra-Orthodox Jews, with the heading: "*Jewish live in Germany. The unknown world next door.*" According to *Jüdische Allgemeine*, this cover resembled portrayals of Jews formerly published in the Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer*.

Additionally, *Jüdische Allgemeine* criticized mainstream media's use of antisemitic stereotypes formerly used by the Nazi regime to criticize Israel. For example, print media were criticized for choosing headlines calling the Israeli prime minister "the eternal president." According to *Jüdische Allgemeine*, this was an allusion to the well-known Nazi propaganda film *The Eternal Jew*, which equated Jews with parasites and was intended to prepare the German population for the Holocaust.

According to *Jüdische Allgemeine*, the media were generally reluctant to admit their spreading of antisemitism by publishing stereotyped media content and offering antisemites a public platform. In this regard, *Jüdische Allgemeine* referred to a formerly popular German music award, broadcasted on public TV, which was given to two rappers for their music album with antisemitic lyrics such as "*My body* [is] *more defined than that of the Auschwitz inmates.*"

> *RQ2. According to Jüdische Allgemeine, how far do the media report successes and achievements of Jews?*

Various articles pointed to mainstream media content focusing on Jews' successes and special achievements in the public sphere. *Jüdische Allgemeine* also highlighted media reports that emphasized the cultural diversity and the multifaceted nature of the lives of Jewish people in Germany and other European countries today. This underscores the fact that *Jüdische Allgemeine* not only criticizes stereotypical portrayals by the media but also appreciates non-stereotypical, differentiated portrayals.

> *RQ3. How does Jüdische Allgemeine evaluate the media portrayal of antisemitism?*

According to *Jüdische Allgemeine*, the problem of antisemitism in Germany was often relativized by mainstream media. While members of other vulnerable groups were given credibility in mainstream media when complaining about hostility, Jews were rather described as "hypersensitive." Given that, *Jüdische Allgemeine* implied that media producers rather tolerated antisemitism than other forms of minority discrimination. Additionally, *Jüdische Allgemeine* complained about the media's ignorance regarding certain manifestations of antisemitism; in doing so, the media were found to convey the impression that only right-wing extremists were antisemites, concealing the fact that antisemitism was also widespread among Muslims.

Furthermore, as stated by *Jüdische Allgemeine*, media debates about the Middle East conflict typically tended to neglect an antisemitic motivation behind the criticism of Israel. The lack of empathy in mainstream media was described as follows: "*In this country, it is better to be 'neutral' towards Jews whose lives are threatened: it is better not to know anything.*"

## Discussion

The present study draws attention to the fact that about 75 years after the Holocaust, the main medium of the Jewish community in Germany harshly criticized German mass media in various respects. Certain media outlets spread antisemitic

stereotypes, provided a platform for people who expressed antisemitic views, and did not clearly condemn certain manifestations of antisemitism. Against Germany's historical background, accusations appear tremendously important when they refer to media outlets such as *DER SPIEGEL* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*; both are highly circulated and considered trustworthy quality media by the German population (Newman, Fletcher, Schulz, & Nielsen, 2020). Assuming that many recipients of *Jüdische Allgemeine* view the community media reporting on mainstream media as either a reflection of the current opinion climate or a factor influencing the future opinion climate toward Jews in Germany (Baugut, 2020), it is understandable that the Jewish community is discussing about leaving the country before it might be too late once again (Brenner, 2020).

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