

Media Narratives of Leadership: A Decade of German Newspaper Discourse

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Online published: January 2025
Print published: March 2025
Editor: CJ Rhoads

Authorship Roles and Conflict of Interest Statement is on file at the Journal of Leadership and Management offices,
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ABSTRACT

This study employs a ten-year dataset (2009-2019) from six national newspaper publications to analyse implicit leadership prototypes in German newspaper narratives within the framework of Culturally Endorsed Implicit Leadership Theories (CLT). It explores how cultural values and media discourses shape perceptions of leadership, examining the distribution and representation of six CLT dimensions across German newspapers with a focus on their alignment with societal leadership expectations. The findings reveal an emphasis on Autonomous and Humane-oriented Leadership, corresponding with Germany's cultural preference for independence and empathy. Charismatic and Participative Leadership traits also feature prominently, indicating an evolving preference for value-added and collaborative leadership frameworks. Conversely, Team-oriented and Self-protective Leadership receive less representation. A comparative analysis of the framing of editorials reveals a distinct preference of business-focused newspapers which emphasise autonomous and charismatic leadership traits, while those of a more generalist and sensationalist nature offer less nuanced descriptions. The study advances Implicit Leadership Theories by integrating cultural and media-specific contexts, underscoring the media's dual role in reflecting and shaping leadership perceptions in the population. It calls for a cross-cultural analysis, drawing parallels between leadership illustrations in Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America to enhance leadership strategies in an increasingly globalised media landscape. By comparing leadership representations in these countries, it identifies both universal and culturally contingent leadership attributes, enriching the broader discourse on leadership perception and media framing. The study concludes with a call for leadership frameworks aligned with cultural norms and media discourses..

KEYWORDS

Implicit Leadership Theories (ILT), Culturally Endorsed Implicit Leadership Theories (CLT), Media Framing, Leadership Narratives, Cross-Cultural Leadership Perceptions

Acknowledgements

Earlier versions of the paper were presented at the European Group of Organisation Studies (EGOS) conference in Tallinn in 2018, and at the European Academy of Management (EURAM) conference in Lisbon, in 2019. I would like to thank Zdeňka Konečná, Gyula Bakacsi and Rainhart Lang for their contributions

Introduction

Implicit Leadership Theories (ILT) propose that individuals form cognitive leadership schemas based on cultural and societal influences (Eden & Leviatan, 1975). These implicit schemas interact with the perceptions, expectations, and decision-making processes in leadership contexts (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2016). Media narratives play a crucial role in constructing and reinforcing these schemas by framing specific leadership attributes as effective or desirable (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2016). Given the agenda-setting function of media, analysing its influence on leadership prototypes is important in order to understanding how societal

leadership expectations are shaped. Therefore, the study of leadership should consider how leadership attributes are represented in mass media and how these representations influence leadership perceptions at an individual and collective level. Culturally Endorsed Implicit Leadership Theories (CLT), as introduced by the Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) Program (House et al., 2004), provides a structured framework for assessing leadership perceptions across different cultural contexts (Tung & Verbeke, 2010). However, leadership perceptions are also shaped by gender expectations (Role Congruity Theory, Eagly & Karau, 2002), ethical authenticity (Authentic Leadership, Avolio & Gardner, 2005), and transformational attributes (Burns, 2004; Northouse, 2021). Integrating these theories allows for a more comprehensive understanding of leadership in the media. The GLOBE Program has made a substantial contribution to leadership research by systematically analysing leadership prototypes across diverse national cultures. While there has been extensive research on leadership prototypes in organisational and cross-cultural settings (Den Hartog et al., 1999; Dorfman et al., 2012), relatively few studies have examined the role of mass media in constructing and reinforcing leadership narratives in a global context, particularly in a European context. The present study addresses this research gap by systematically analysing leadership illustrations in German newspapers over a ten-year period. To provide a broader cross-cultural perspective, it integrates comparative insights from British and American media representations. This enables a more nuanced interpretation and understanding of leadership prototypes that dominate in Germany, how they align with German national cultural expectations, and identify universal or culture-specific patterns.

Newspapers are influential institutions that play an important role in reflecting the public discourse and constructing leadership perceptions. They engage in the selection and framing of narratives that reinforce societal values (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Through the selection of stories, the framing of narratives, and the language they use, newspapers help to construct an idealised or problematic image of leadership. These media-driven perceptions have real-world implications, influencing public trust in leaders, shaping organisational leadership expectations, and reinforcing cultural assumptions about what constitutes effective leadership (Holmberg & Åkerblom, 2001). The German media landscape offers a unique case study for leadership discourse analysis due to its well-established and archived print media tradition each with its own editorial angle and ideological bias. Business-oriented newspapers, for instance, may emphasise Autonomous and Charismatic leadership traits, aligning with market-driven notions of leadership effectiveness, whereas generalist and more sensationalist publications may offer less nuanced illustrations, focusing instead on individual personalities and controversies. Despite extensive research on leadership theories and their applications, there is a gap in understanding how mass media constructs and reinforces leadership narratives. Existing research on leadership effectiveness (Avolio et al., 2009; Oc, 2018) has largely focused on organisational contexts, without adequately addressing how leadership perceptions are shaped by media discourses. Furthermore, studies examining cross-cultural leadership differences (Den Hartog et al., 1999; Chhokar et al., 2007) have explored leadership prototypes in workplace settings, yet these have not systematically been applied to media representations. The present study addresses this gap and offers important insights by systematically examining how leadership is portrayed in German newspapers, the frequency with which different leadership prototypes appear, and the cultural implications of these expressions. It contributes to the field by analysing which leadership attributes appear most frequently in German newspapers. In order to achieve the defined research goals, the following research objectives have been specified:

- Extending leadership research by applying it to mass media narratives.
- Assessing editorial preferences in leadership illustrations across different newspaper types.
- Identifying dominant leadership prototypes in German newspaper media and examining their alignment with cultural leadership expectations over a ten-year period in Germany.
- Exploring the cultural and societal implications of media-driven leadership representations reflecting and shaping implicit leadership theory and practice.

The study empirically investigates how German media representations of leadership reflect and shape cultural norms, reinforcing dominant leadership models while marginalising others. It is essential for scholars and policymakers in the fields of leadership and media studies to recognise and analyse these media-driven

leadership patterns, so as to assess their impact on public trust, leadership legitimacy, and cultural leadership norms. Building on the theoretical foundation in the next chapter, the study explores:

- Which CLT dimensions are present in German daily newspaper articles?
- Which leadership prototypes are predominantly illustrated in the German media?
- What are the frequencies of these dimensions, and which newspapers prioritise them?
- How do media illustrations reflect, shape and reinforce cultural leadership expectations?
- What are the broader implications of these descriptions for leadership theory and practice?

Newspapers remain an important source of information, reaching millions of readers and reflecting, shaping and influencing a country's public discourse. In Germany, national daily newspapers have a combined circulation of over 13.5 million copies per day, with 50% of the population regularly consuming print or online newspaper content (BDZV, 2024). Thus, media narratives play a significant role in shaping public perceptions. The extent to which leadership dimensions are represented in the German media provides considerable insights into which leadership attributes are socially reinforced and which are downplayed or contested. By analysing these representations, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of leadership prototypes in the media and their influence on cultural leadership expectations. The findings provide empirical evidence on how leadership is illustrated in German newspapers but also contributes to the ongoing discussions on the role of the media in the construction of leadership legitimacy, credibility and authority. Through a systematic analysis of leadership narratives in German newspapers, the study provides expressive empirical insights into how the media construct, reinforce and challenge perceptions of leadership in the public discourse.

Theoretical Foundation

Implicit Leadership Theories (ILT) describe how individuals develop cognitive schemas that shape their expectations of leadership based on cultural exposure, social influences, and past experiences (Lord & Maher, 2002). These schemas interact dynamically with societal values, media narratives, and organisational norms, shaping leadership evaluations across different contexts (Eden & Leviatan, 1975). Cross-cultural research has demonstrated that leadership expectations are not universal but are shaped by societal norms, values, and institutional structures (Dorfman et al., 2012). The GLOBE Program, one of the most extensive cross-cultural leadership studies, identified six global leadership dimensions: Charismatic/Value-Based, Team-Oriented, Participative, Humane-Oriented, Autonomous, and Self-Protective Leadership (House et al., 2004). These leadership prototypes vary across cultural clusters, reinforcing the argument that leadership is inherently contextual (Javidan et al., 2006). Western leadership paradigms often prioritise Charismatic and Participative Leadership (Chhokar et al., 2007). Conversely, Asian cultures may favour Self-Protective and Team-Oriented Leadership, reflecting high-context communication styles and hierarchical societal structures (Javidan et al., 2006). Cross-cultural media studies revealed that British and American media platforms tend to illustrate leadership in individualistic and transformational terms, reinforcing narratives of charismatic, visionary figures (Javidan et al., 2006). However, the German media predominantly emphasises institutional stability, pragmatic governance, and consensus-driven leadership, reflecting broader cultural preferences for structured decision-making and collective responsibility (Reinemann et al., 2019). Charismatic leadership, as outlined by Northouse (2021), can be further divided into Transformational and Transactional Leadership. Transformational leaders inspire through vision and ethical values, whereas transactional leaders focus on structured rewards and performance expectations (Burns, 2004; Scandura & Dorfman, 2004). Media representations generally tend to favour transformational leadership, reinforcing narratives of visionary and ethically inspired leadership (Burns, 2004; Scandura & Dorfman, 2004). Transactional leadership, in contrast, is often characterised as bureaucratic and static, despite its role in effective organisational management (Northouse, 2021). This framing of leadership expectations in the media contributes to shifting perceptions in times of crisis (Junker et al., 2011). Additionally, Eagly and Karau's (2002) research on gender differences in ILT emphasises how stereotypes shape the perception of male and female leaders differently across cultures. Eagly & Karau's (2002) Role Congruity Theory posits that female leaders mostly encounter a double standard in leadership evaluations due to conflicting societal expectations regarding communal and agentic traits. This phenomenon is particularly evident in media illustrations, where female leaders are subject to heightened scrutiny (Koenig et al., 2011). These gendered leadership expectations serve to reinforce traditional norms,

which often restrict the visibility and credibility of female leaders in specific cultural contexts. Furthermore, ILT interact with media narratives in shaping leadership perceptions, as media discourse serves as a reinforcing agent of existing leadership prototypes (Koenig et al., 2011). Recent scholars have emphasised the dynamic nature of ILT in response to social and technological shifts. For instance, the implicit leadership expectations of different generations have been shown to vary in their preferences for different forms of leadership (Kwiecińska et al., 2023). This evolving nature of ILT indicates that leadership perceptions adapt to changing social, technological, and economic conditions. Empirical research has examined the relationship between media exposure and leadership perception formation. Avolio and Gardner (2005) argue that digitalisation has contributed to the democratisation of leadership expectations, enabling a more participative model in contrast to traditionally hierarchical structures (Wang et al., 2022). Moreover, studies by Shondrick et al. (2010) indicate that ILT evolve in response to cultural shifts and crisis events. These shifts emphasise the need to integrate media theories into ILT frameworks, as societal and digital leadership narratives increasingly influence public and organisational leadership expectations. Leaders who embody transformational attributes during uncertain times may experience enhanced public approval, whereas those who fail to align with implicit leadership expectations may struggle with legitimacy. This is particularly evident in global leadership situations, where cultural and contextual differences impact how leaders are perceived (Osland, 2017).

Cultural Values and Leadership Prototypes Across Contexts

Cultural values have been demonstrated to exert a significant influence on the shaping of leadership expectations and the acceptance of different leadership styles. Hofstede's dimensions of national culture, including power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, and long-term orientation, have been shown to influence how leadership is perceived. His research revealed that societies with high power distance may favour leadership styles that are autonomous and self-protective, while those with lower power distance may prefer leadership styles that are participative and team oriented. Cultural values influence not only the behaviour of leaders but also the manner in which they are evaluated. In high-context cultures, such as those found in East Asia, leadership is characterised by indirect communication, group harmony, and situational adaptability (Kim et al., 1998; Würtz, 2005). In contrast, low-context cultures, such as those found in the United States and Germany, value direct communication, individual initiative, and decisiveness (Kim et al., 1998; Würtz, 2005). The evolution of cultural leadership values has led to an increased emphasis on inclusive and ethical leadership models (Würtz, 2005). Research by Maier and Ravazzani (2019) underlines the growing importance of ethical decision-making and corporate social responsibility (CSR) in leadership evaluations across different cultural contexts, a shift that is particularly prominent in Western societies, where ethical leadership is becoming a key determinant of leader legitimacy and organisational success. As globalisation reshapes leadership expectations, hybrid leadership models that integrate multiple cultural influences have emerged. Stahl et al. (2017) theorised that leaders who combine elements of charismatic, participative, and humane-oriented leadership styles are more effective in multicultural settings. Moreover, technological advancements, including artificial intelligence (AI) and digital transformation, are reshaping leadership perceptions by shifting expectations from human-driven expertise. The GLOBE Program developed a framework for understanding how leadership is perceived across cultures, providing a systematic approach to identifying global leadership attributes across different cultural contexts (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: GLOBE Cultural Competencies

1.	Performance Orientation	Degree to which a collective encourages and rewards (should encourage/reward) group members for performance improvement and excellence.
2.	Assertiveness	Degree to which individuals are (should be) assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in their relationship with others.
3.	Future Orientation	Extent to which individuals engage (should engage) in future-oriented behaviours like planning, investing in the future, delaying gratification.
4.	Humane Orientation	Degree to which a collective encourages and rewards (should encourage/reward) individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring, kind to others.

5.	Institutional Collectivism	Degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices, encourage and reward (should encourage/reward) collective distribution of resources and collective action.
6.	In-Group Collectivism	Degree to which individuals express (should express) pride, loyalty, cohesiveness in their organizations or families.
7.	Gender Egalitarianism	Degree to which a collective minimises (should minimise) gender inequality.
8.	Power Distance	Extent to which the community accepts and endorses authority, power differences, and status privileges.
9.	Uncertainty Avoidance	Extent to which a society, organisation, or group relies (and should rely) on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate the unpredictability of future events. The greater the desire to avoid uncertainty, the more people seek orderliness, consistency, structure, formal procedures, and laws.

Source: Adapted from GLOBE, 2004.

The understanding of cultural attributes can enhance the precision of cross-cultural leadership comparisons (Stahl et al., 2017), thereby reinforcing the importance of contextual adaptation in leadership assessments. These insights can inform leadership development programs, global talent management, and international communication strategies, assuring culturally adaptive leadership models. The effectiveness of leadership depends on contextual factors. Fiedler's (1972) Contingency Model proposes that leadership outcomes are shaped by task structure, leader-member relations, and situational control. This theoretical framework is highly relevant for media portrayals, as certain leadership styles are favoured in different situational contexts (e.g. crisis vs. stability). Goleman (1998) introduced the concept of Emotional Intelligence as a key predictor of leadership effectiveness. Leadership images in the media frequently accentuate attributes such as empathy, adaptability, and self-regulation, reinforcing the notion that effective leaders must possess emotional competence (Treem et al., 2021). The framework further reinforces the argument that leadership expectations are dynamic and evolving, requiring constant adaptation by global leaders to align with cultural and organisational norms. Recent studies have accentuated how gender egalitarianism is increasingly influencing leadership prototypes, particularly in Western societies where female leadership representation is growing. Furthermore, uncertainty avoidance has been demonstrated to influence leadership during crises, with high-uncertainty-avoidance cultures tending to favour structured decision-making and risk mitigation strategies (House et al., 2013). This underlines the importance of cultural adaptability in leadership research and practice, suggesting that future research should examine how these leadership dimensions evolve in response to global trends such as digitalisation and international mobility. Further studies are required in order to assess how AI-driven leadership models interact with culturally established leadership expectations. As organisations become increasingly global, understanding cultural adaptability and flexibility will remain critical.

The Role of Media in Shaping Leadership Perceptions

Media platforms play an important role in shaping leadership perceptions by influencing the public opinion, reinforcing societal expectations, and framing leadership narratives (Auvinen et al., 2019). The agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1993) explains that media channels do not merely report events but actively shape the importance of issues, including the illustrations of leadership. In the context of Germany, media narratives reflect both cultural leadership norms and broader societal debates about power, governance, and leadership effectiveness (Müller, 2018). The diversity of Germany's media landscape, encompassing both business-focused newspapers and general-interest publications, including tabloids, offers a multifaceted perspective on leadership. Business-oriented newspapers, such as *Handelsblatt* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (F.A.Z.)*, are known to emphasise Autonomous and Charismatic leadership styles, mostly portraying corporate executives and political figures as strategic, visionary, and decisive (Reinemann et al., 2019). However, general-interest newspapers, such as *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Die Welt*, offer a contrasting perspective. These publications often frame leadership through the framework of ethical responsibility, inclusivity, and transparency, placing greater emphasis on Participative and Humane-Oriented leadership models (Hunt, 2017). Sensationalist tabloids, such as *Bild*, mostly construct leadership narratives based on directive and self-protective leadership traits, portraying political and business leaders in polarised or scandal-driven contexts

(Dziuda & Howell, 2021). Burns (2004) differentiated between Transformational and Transactional Leadership, arguing that transformational leaders focus on vision and ethical inspiration, while transactional leaders rely on structured exchanges. Media representations tend to favour transformational leadership, reinforcing narratives of visionary, ethically driven, and charismatic leadership (Burns, 2004; Scandura & Dorfman, 2004). In contrast, transactional leadership is often illustrated as bureaucratic and rigid, despite its essential role in structured decision-making and crisis management (Northouse, 2021). This particular framing does not only influence the public expectations of leadership, but it also evolves in response to societal crises, where the demand for decisive, authoritative figures often intensifies (Junker et al., 2011). The tendency is consistent with ILT, as the public often seeks stability in leadership figures during periods of uncertainty (Koenig et al., 2011). An illustration of this phenomenon is the way in which the German media portrayed Chancellor Angela Merkel during the COVID-19 crisis, with her scientific and data-driven crisis management approach being seen as an ideal leadership response (Kneuer & Wallaschek, 2023). However, Maier and Ravazzani (2019) emphasise that ethical leadership and corporate social responsibility have become fundamental in contemporary models of leadership. Media narratives scrutinise ethical failures to a greater extent, thereby reinforcing public expectations for transparency and integrity (Northouse, 2021). According to Tewksbury and Scheufele's (2019) news framing theory, media channels may highlight or neglect certain leadership traits, thereby reinforcing bias and shaping public perceptions. Comparative studies have indicated that charismatic and visionary leaders receive greater prominence in Anglo-American media outlets, whereas the German media places a much stronger emphasis on pragmatic, institutional, and consensus-driven approaches (Bakir & McStay, 2018).

The increasing dominance of social media and digital journalism has transformed leadership communication, making it more direct, interactive, and, at times, populist (Treem et al., 2021). Unlike traditional news media, social media platforms enable leaders to control their own narratives, bypassing journalistic framing (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). Research on mediatised leadership (Fakhreddin, 2025) argues that contemporary leaders, particularly in politics, utilise Twitter, YouTube, and other social platforms to craft personalised and populist leadership personas. In Germany, political and corporate leaders are increasingly leveraging digital platforms to engage with audiences. However, this trend raises concerns about polarisation and credibility, as leaders who successfully utilise direct communication strategies may gain influence regardless of their actual competencies (Treem et al., 2021). This phenomenon reflects a broader shift in leadership perception formation, where authenticity, relatability, and responsiveness often outweigh traditional leadership qualifications in digital discourse. The globalisation of leadership narratives through digital media provides a unique opportunity to make cross-cultural comparisons. While German leadership prototypes are historically rooted in rationality, pragmatism and institutional stability, increased exposure to leadership styles from Anglo-American and Asian countries in digital media is influencing domestic leadership expectations (Scandura & Dorfman, 2004). Cross-cultural research shows that leadership representations differ significantly depending on national media norms and cultural expectations. Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions, particularly Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance, exert a significant influence on the portrayal of leadership in the media. In cultures characterised by high power distance (e.g., France), authoritative leaders are more positively described, whereas participative leadership is emphasised in cultures exhibiting lower power distance, such as Germany. In the United States, leadership narratives are frequently characterised by an emphasis on individualism and transformation, with a focus on charismatic and inspirational figures (Northouse, 2021). In contrast, Asian media platforms commonly propagate collectivist and hierarchical leadership models, emphasising team-oriented and strategic leadership approaches with a focus on the long term (Keuscher & Vergossen, 2024). However, German media representations tend to balance charisma with institutional responsibility, reflecting a preference for structured, methodical, and ethically sound leadership models (Reinemann et al., 2019). This underscores the importance of cultural contexts in leadership media expressions and highlights how national values shape leadership expectations. Further research should explore how the media continues to influence leadership models.

The theoretical foundation outlined in this chapter establishes a comprehensive framework for integrating ILT, leadership prototypes, cultural value dimensions, and media representations. Each of these components contributes to a holistic model of leadership perception, reinforcing the argument that leadership is a socially constructed and contextually shaped phenomenon. ILT highlight how individuals develop cognitive leadership prototypes based on societal norms and personal experiences. These preconceived expectations

influence leadership evaluations across different cultural and medial contexts (Lord & Maher, 2002). However, ILT alone do not fully explain variations in leadership perception, demanding the integration of cultural dimensions and media framing theories to provide a more nuanced understanding (Tung & Verbeke, 2010). Cultural values, further refine leadership prototypes by demonstrating how leadership expectations vary across societies. CLT serves as a methodological foundation for understanding how societal preferences shape the acceptance of specific leadership attributes. For instance, societies with high power distance tend to endorse directive leadership styles, while those with egalitarian cultures favour participative leadership models (House et al., 2004). These dimensions provide a systematic approach for categorising leadership expectations in cross-cultural settings and form the foundation for the methodology of this study. The role of media representation in constructing leadership narratives further demonstrates how leadership perceptions are reinforced or challenged. Media framing and agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1993) shape public understanding of leadership, emphasising specific traits and leadership prototypes depending on political, economic, or cultural contexts. The increasing digitalisation of leadership communication further complicates leadership evaluation, as leaders actively participate in shaping their own narratives through social media and direct digital engagement. CLT categorises leadership attributes based on how societies endorse or reject specific leadership traits. This approach enhances the cross-cultural validity of leadership prototype analysis by systematically identifying variations in leadership perception across media representations. The following chapter is going to operationalise these insights through the integration of CLT as a methodological and structured framework.

Methodology

The methodological approach was based on a systematic and quantitative content analysis, characterised by a structured and objective nature, grounded in theoretical frameworks and assuring comparability, replicability and structural clarity (Saunders, 2009). The study followed a positivist-functionalist paradigm, assuming that media portrayals of leadership were external and measurable realities which can be analysed using quantitative methods. It applied deductive reasoning and examined long-term trends in media leadership representations over a ten-year period (2009–2019). The timeframe allowed for the identification of stability, or development, about how leadership was constructed and perceived in the public discourse. To reach a representative coverage, the study examined six national daily newspapers, selected based on their readership, editorial diversity, and data availability in German newspaper archives. The exclusion of weekly newspapers ensured a consistent media coverage over the ten-year period, while the selection of newspapers with a large readership made sure that the findings reflected the leadership descriptions of the population. The sample included business-focused, general-interest, and sensationalist newspapers, allowing for a contrasting expression of leadership prototypes. To maintain data consistency, only newspapers with full-text archives available were included, enabling the measurement of leadership discourses without direct interaction with the media (Pedersen et al., 2025).

Table 3.1: Overview of the German Daily Newspaper Sample

No.	Daily Newspaper	Database	Timeframe	Newspaper Type
1.	Bild	Wiso ¹	1.1.2009-31.12.2019	Sensationalist
2.	Süddeutsche Zeitung	FI LibraryNet ²	1.1.2009-31.12.2019	General Interest (Left-Centre)
3.	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	F.A.Z. Archive ³	1.1.2009-31.12.2019	General Interest (Right-Centre)

¹ WISO: Online database for science. Over 21 million references, 17 million full texts from over 770 specialist journals, more than 230 million articles from the daily and weekly press, 88 million company information, 15 million personal information, 1 million market data, approx. 12,000 electronic books.

² FI LibraryNet: Exclusively all articles in the Süddeutsche Zeitung since 1992.

³ F.A.Z. Archive: Exclusively all articles in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung since 1949.

No.	Daily Newspaper	Database	Timeframe	Newspaper Type
4.	Die Welt	Genios ⁴	1.1.2009-31.12.2019	Conservative
5.	Das Handelsblatt	Genios ⁵	1.1.2009-31.12.2019	Business-Focused
6.	Total	–	10 Years	Balanced Selection

Source: Author

The prototype dimensions were classified to ensure cross-cultural validation in the methodology. Each newspaper article was systematically coded for explicit leadership references corresponding to implicit leadership dimensions that were endorsed by the respective culture. The study applied Boolean search operators, allowing for a precise and consistent classification. This approach assured consistency during the identification of relevant leadership illustrations across all newspapers. **Table 3.2** outlines the CLT dimensions, and their corresponding keywords used in the analysis. Computer-assisted keyword searches efficiently identified the media descriptions while maintaining a systematic classification consistency.

Table 3.2: GLOBE CLT Dimensions and German Search Keywords

No.	CLT Dimension	Definition	German Keywords
1.	Charismatic/Value-Based Leadership	Inspires, motivates, and promotes high performance through core values.	(Führungskraft ODER Manager) UND (visionär ODER inspirierend ODER integer ODER leistungsorientiert)
2.	Team-Oriented Leadership	Focuses on collaboration, diplomacy, and administrative competence.	(Führungskraft ODER Manager) UND (kollaborativ ODER Teamspieler ODER diplomatisch ODER administrativ ODER kompetent)
3.	Participative Leadership	Encourages shared decision-making and inclusivity.	(Führungskraft ODER Manager) UND (partizipativ ODER demokratisch)
4.	Autonomous Leadership	Emphasizes independence and self-reliance.	(Führungskraft ODER Manager) UND (autonom ODER eigenständig ODER unabhängig ODER einzigartig)
5.	Self-Protective Leadership	Ensures status, security, and group safety.	(Führungskraft ODER Manager) UND (egozentrisch ODER statusbewusst ODER konfliktverursachend ODER gesichtswahrend ODER prozedural)
6.	Self-Protective Leadership	Ensures status, security, and group safety.	(Führungskraft ODER Manager) UND (egozentrisch ODER statusbewusst ODER konfliktverursachend ODER gesichtswahrend ODER prozedural)

Source: Adapted from GLOBE, 2006.

To achieve methodological rigour during the data processing and coding procedure, the study adhered to an established coding protocol adapted from Bartlett & Vavrus (2016) (Table 3.3), which guaranteed consistency and reliability in the categorisation of leadership prototypes across various media sources. To strengthen the methodological robustness, the following multiple validity and reliability measures were implemented.

Table 3.3: Quantitative Content Analysis Process Model

No.	Process Phase	Key Question
1.	Conceptualisation	What phenomenon is being studied?

^{4,5} GENIOS: GBI-Genios Deutsche Wirtschaftsdatenbank GmbH is a commercial provider (host) of electronic press, company and business information in full text.

No.	Process Phase	Key Question
2.	Theory Review	What does previous research suggest?
3.	Research Questions	How will the study address gaps?
4.	Content Definition	What media content is relevant?
5.	Sampling Strategy	How is the data selected?
6.	Coding & Categorisation	How are leadership prototypes classified?

Source: Adapted from Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016.

With the aim of establishing external validity, the study evaluated whether media representations of leadership correlated with societal leadership expectations. The semantic reliability test, based on Krippendorff's (2011) guidelines, was sensitive to symbolic meanings. To enhance the methodological accuracy, the coding protocol was pilot tested, followed by an independent re-testing. A random sample of 50 articles was analysed to verify the inter-coder reliability, achieving an accuracy rate of 96%, which confirmed the consistency and reproducibility of the classification process. The pilot study helped to refine the coding framework and to make sure that the subjectivity in the categorisation was minimised, and consistent coding criteria were applied across the entire dataset. The study analysed the contemporary newspaper reach and audience quotas to estimate how leadership narratives might have influenced the public opinion, which was crucial for understanding the impact of media on the public opinion of leadership, and to minimise sampling bias. By analysing widely circulated national German newspapers, the leadership representations reflected the public discourse (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: Newspaper Reach and Quotas

No.	Newspaper	Reach (million) 2024 → (2023)	Quota 2024 → (2023)
1.	Bild	23.21 → (25.79)	0,49 → (0,49)
2.	Süddeutsche Zeitung	8.03 → (8.33)	0,16 → (0,17)
3.	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	6.94 → (7.24)	0,13 → (0,14)
4.	Die Welt	5.85 → (5.92)	0,12 → (0,12)
5.	Handelsblatt	3.67 → (3.51)	0,10 → (0,08)
6.	Total	47.70 → (50.79)	1,0 (1,0)

Source: Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 2024.

1. External Validity

- By selecting major national newspapers, the analysis increased the generalisability of the findings and confirmed that the results were reflective, broader, national leadership representations rather than medial niche illustrations.
- The application of the GLOBE CLT framework made sure that the comparability of the study's findings with those of established cross-cultural leadership research was possible, thereby enhancing the study's relevance across diverse cultural contexts and media landscapes.

2. Reliability Measures

- The inter-coder reliability was measured using Krippendorff's (2011) Alpha ($\alpha = 0.96$), which is widely regarded as a reliable measure of consistency between coders. This approach was adopted to enhance the credibility of the data categorisation process.
- In order to establish face validity and take care of the categories used, it was necessary to confirm that they were appropriate and aligned with the study's objectives. In order to achieve this, expert reviews were conducted (Kemper, 2020).

- The study incorporated triangulation with previous leadership content analyses (Wimmer & Dominik, 2011), which enabled more comprehensive validation of the coding system and established consistency in the interpretations.

3. Predictive and Construct Validity

- The study then compared its findings with those of existing leadership perception studies to test for consistency, confirming that the media descriptions were aligned with existing research.
- Finally, the study tested whether the leadership descriptions in the German media were aligned with the expected leadership attributes defined within the CLT framework for Germany, thereby providing an additional layer of validity to the results.

Results

With 13.52 million, daily newspapers remain one of the most influential sources of information and discourse in Germany. A total of 327 newspapers with 1,452 local editions are published every day, alongside 17 weekly newspapers (1.61 million copies) and six Sunday newspapers (1.74 million copies) (BDZV e.V., 2024). In 2024, daily newspapers reached more than 50% of the German population, meaning that more than 40 million people read at least one newspaper per day (AWA, 2024). The analysis revealed that Bild had the highest readership with 23.21 million, followed by Süddeutsche Zeitung (8.03), Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (6.94), Die Welt (5.85), and Handelsblatt (3.67). The quotas below represent each newspaper's proportion of the total readership, reflecting their relative influence. Bild accounts for almost half of the readership (49%), while Handelsblatt, as a specialised business newspaper, has a smaller but influential readership. A total of 281,598 newspaper articles was examined, of which 2,846 articles (10%) explicitly referenced CLT dimensions (Table 4.1).

Autonomous Leadership (46%) and Humane-Oriented Leadership (21%) dominated the media coverage, collectively accounting for 67% of all leadership descriptions in Germany.

- Autonomous Leadership is characterised by independent, self-reliant and individualistic leadership, which is in line with Germany's cultural preference for self-directed decision-makers. The frequency (46%) indicated that German media plays a central role in shaping and reflecting leadership legitimacy by consistently amplifying narratives that prioritise individual authority over collective decision-making. This framing was consistent with Germany's broader leadership culture, valuing self-reliance, strategic autonomy, and task-oriented leadership.
- Humane-Oriented Leadership is defined by its supportive, considerate and ethical nature, reflecting an increasing emphasis on empathy and social responsibility. The study demonstrated that the German media favours leadership styles that balance authority and ethical responsibility.
- The findings indicate that German media narratives predominantly favoured leaders who demonstrate both independence and compassion, aligning with broader societal expectations.

Table 4.1: CLT Distribution Across German Newspapers 2009-2019

Newspaper	F.A.Z. 118,147		Handelsblatt 15,188		Die Welt 17,377		Süddeutsche 24,425		BILD 106,452		Total 281,598
	No.	Rank	No.	Rank	No.	Rank	No.	Rank	No.	Rank	SUM
Autonomous Leadership	634	1.	397	2.	132	3.	105	4.	38	5.	1,306 45.9%
Humane-oriented Leadership	323	1.	135	2.	57	3.	48	4.	35	5.	598 21.0%
Charismatic value-based Leadership	172	1.	105	2.	37	4.	87	3.	20	5.	421 14.8%
Participative Leadership	244	1.	78	2.	56	3.	20	4.	1	5.	399 14.0%
Team-oriented Leadership	59	1.	25	2.	16	3.	6	4.	4	5.	110 3.9%
Self-protected Leadership	5	1.	1	2.	1	2.	5	1.	0	3.	12 0.4%
Total	1,437		741		299		271		98		2,846
%	50%		26%		11%		10%		3%		100%
Quota	0.14		0.08		0.12		0.17		0.49		1.0
Weight	201.88		59.28		35.88		46.07		48.02		/
Rank	1.		2.		5.		4.		3.		/

Source: Author.

Charismatic/Value-Based Leadership (15%) and Participative Leadership (14%) were the next most frequently mentioned leadership dimensions in Germany.

- Charismatic/Value-Based Leadership emphasises leaders who inspire, motivate, and value high performance, and maintain strong ethical core values.
- Participative Leadership focuses on collaborative decision-making, reinforcing the importance of inclusivity and shared governance in leadership discussions.
- These dimensions expressed that media narratives acknowledged the role of visionary leadership and democratic engagement, though to a lesser extent than individualistic and humane attributes.

Team-Oriented Leadership (4%) and Self-Protective Leadership (0.4%) least represented.

- Team-Oriented Leadership, emphasising collaboration and group cohesion, appeared in 110 articles, indicating a low emphasis on collective leadership in German media discourses.
- Self-Protective Leadership, which focuses on face-saving, conflict avoidance, and status preservation, was almost entirely absent (12 articles, 0.4%), indicating that German leadership narratives did not prioritise hierarchical or defensive leadership styles.
- The results suggest that the German media favoured leadership styles that balance individual autonomy with ethical responsibility, while hierarchical and team-based leadership models received significantly less attention.

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) and Handelsblatt

- Together, business-oriented newspapers accounted for 76% of all leadership-related coverage.
- They predominantly highlighted Autonomous Leadership (634 and 397 articles, respectively), aligning with their readerships' focus on economic and political independence.

- They also placed strong emphasis on Charismatic and Humane-Oriented Leadership, reflecting their interest in ethical corporate leadership and visionary economic figures.

Süddeutsche Zeitung and Die Welt

- General-interest newspapers provided a more balanced representation of leadership prototypes.
- They featured a relatively higher proportion of Participative Leadership references (14%), expressing an editorial preference for democratic decision-making.
- Their moderate emphasis on charismatic leadership was consistent with centralist political interests that value visionary leadership while maintaining institutional stability.

Bild Zeitung

- The sensationalist tabloid contained the fewest leadership-related articles (98 out of 2,846, 3%).
- Bild primarily focused on Autonomous Leadership (38 articles) and Humane-Oriented Leadership (35 articles), reflecting its preference for individualistic leaders who exhibit strong personalities and emotional appeal.
- The absence of other leadership traits showed that Bild prioritised strong, independent figures over collaborative decision-makers. This editorial framing aligns with populist media strategies, which favour personality-driven leadership models that emphasise direct action, strong rhetoric, and decisive authority. This illustration reinforces leadership as an individualistic rather than collective process, resonating with a tabloid's readership demographics. The distribution of Autonomous and Humane-Oriented Leadership in Bild further indicated that its readership was more receptive to leaders who exhibit strong decision-making combined with emotional appeal.

Discussion

The study analysed how leadership prototypes were represented in the German media and assessed their impact on reflecting and shaping the public expectations of leadership. The results revealed a strong preference for leadership styles that balance decisiveness with ethical responsibility, as evidenced by Autonomous (46%) and Humane-Oriented (21%) Leadership representing 67% of all descriptions. The results provide insights for CLT, emphasising the role of media as a key influencer in leadership perception. The analysis also indicates that the German media reflects and constructs public leadership expectations by reinforcing a dual leadership ideal – one that integrates autonomous decision-making with ethical responsibility. The emphasis on Autonomous Leadership (46%) aligns with Germany's high individualism and low power distance, as previously identified in Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2011). The German media frequently portrays leaders as self-reliant, decisive, and goal-oriented, reflecting societal expectations of leadership effectiveness. However, the strong representation of Humane-Oriented Leadership (21%) demonstrated that leadership is not solely viewed through the lens of individualism and independence, but also incorporates a growing emphasis on empathy, social responsibility, and ethical behaviour. This dual expectation demonstrates that German leadership values both, assertiveness and compassion, reflecting shifts towards human-centred leadership paradigms (Meyer et al., 2019). Charismatic/Value-Based Leadership (15%) and Participative Leadership (14%) further support an evolving leadership paradigm in Germany, emphasising visionary and inspiring leadership qualities, often associated with transformational leadership models (Bass, 1990). Participative leadership, which encourages collaborative decision-making, is in line with the growing focus in contemporary leadership research on inclusive leadership approaches (Bolden et al., 2023). The moderate representation of team-oriented leadership (4%) and self-protective leadership (0.4%) indicates that German media narratives place less emphasis on collective and status-preserving leadership styles. This media framing has the potential to reinforce public expectations that leadership effectiveness is prioritised by individual agency rather than by collaborative decision-making or hierarchical authority (Rice, 2018). This is in line with Germany's broader leadership culture, which favours self-reliant yet ethical leadership models (House et al., 2013). The emphasis on autonomous leadership corresponds with Germany's low power distance and high individualism, as already identified in Hofstede's cultural dimensions. At the same time, humane-oriented leadership reflects an increasing societal expectation for ethical leadership,

corporate social responsibility, and workplace inclusivity (Maier & Ravazzani, 2019). The present study confirms that German newspapers frame leadership through the lens of autonomy, ethical responsibility, and charisma, while collaborative and hierarchical leadership styles receive less coverage and reveals that business-oriented newspapers favour independent and charismatic leaders, while general-interest newspapers emphasise participative and humane leadership.

While this study focused on German newspaper coverage, its findings are also relevant to understanding how the media shapes leadership norms across different cultural contexts. The strong representation of Autonomous and Humane-Oriented Leadership in Germany expresses a unique combination of individualistic and ethical leadership expectations. However, leadership prototypes vary significantly across different cultural contexts. In high power distance cultures such as China and Russia, leadership descriptions tend to emphasise hierarchical, directive and status-conscious leadership styles, reinforcing the expectation that authority is derived from positional power rather than individual performance (Brodbeck et al., 2002). In contrast, leadership discourses in low power distance countries such as the Nordic states prioritise consensus-building and participative leadership models. Germany's media narratives combine elements of both autonomy and ethical responsibility, indicating a hybrid approach – rooted in individual performance yet increasingly valuing social responsibility as a leadership trait. In contrast, Nordic countries, which also have low power distance and high individualism, tend to favour participative leadership models, highlighting collaborative decision-making and consensus-building as key leadership attributes (Dinçer, 2021). These differences underline the importance of contextualising leadership theories within specific cultural frameworks. The predominance of Autonomous Leadership in German media is influenced by historical and economic factors, including Germany's emphasis on technical expertise, efficiency, and structured decision-making (Berger, 2019). The increasing prominence of Humane-Oriented Leadership reveals a shift towards more inclusive and socially responsible leadership narratives, reflecting global trends towards ethical leadership and sustainability (Keuscher & Vergossen, 2024). The increasing use of AI-driven and digital leadership models, and hybrid work environments may further reshape leadership expectations and representations (Ly, 2020).

Conclusion

The study's focus on German newspapers limits the generalisability of its findings to other cultural contexts (Barmeyer et al., 2019) and further research should be conducted to examine how the interaction between leadership and the media varies globally. The study analyses six major national newspapers, but does not include regional media, platforms, social media or television narratives. Further research is therefore encouraged to expand the study to include digital platforms, television and social media to capture a more holistic picture of leadership expressions and their public impact (Iacus et al., 2020). Given the specific context of crisis leadership, which is characterised by specific leadership conditions (Wu et al., 2021; Forster et al., 2020), this study examined a fixed 10-year dataset from 2009-2019. Hence, further research should examine how leadership prototypes shift during crises in response to industry-specific transformations or broader socio-political disruptions (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023). The present study investigates leadership illustrations in the media; however, it does not assess the extent to which these leadership portrayals translate into leadership effectiveness. Further studies could examine the impact of media endorsed leadership traits on actual leadership effectiveness and organisational success (Sertel et al., 2022).

However, newspapers are an important medium for interacting with public perceptions. However, the extent to which they support certain leadership prototypes, challenge traditional leadership expectations, or introduce alternative narratives, remains underexplored. This study systematically examines how different newspaper genres influence the leadership discourse in Germany, and whether these media expressions align with or deviate from established societal leadership norms. The distribution of leadership prototypes across newspapers reflected editorial priorities and audience preferences, shaping how leadership was framed and emphasised in each publication. The findings strengthen the idea that leadership expectations are culturally specific and reinforced by media portrayals, which has been previously explored in cross-cultural leadership studies (Brodbeck et al., 2002). The emphasis on Autonomous and Charismatic Leadership over participative or hierarchical frameworks was consistent with Germany's high individualism and low power distance and suggested that media narratives support a leadership ideal that conforms to cultural expectations while

marginalising alternative models. The increasing representation of Humane-oriented Leadership signals a shift towards ethical and socially responsible leadership paradigms. A considerable key finding of the study is that leadership legitimacy is shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by media influence. The role of the media in supporting or challenging societal norms of leadership in the public is demonstrated, as the media reflect and shape public perceptions, thereby influencing which leadership traits are considered legitimate. Furthermore, the study shows how leadership is socially constructed, thereby justifying its hegemonic and conceptual structure. A practical recommendation is that German leadership development programmes should focus on cultivating a balance between independent decision-making and ethical responsibility. The findings suggest that German leaders who can demonstrate both strategic autonomy and social empathy may gain more public trust and legitimacy. The dominance of Autonomous and Human-oriented Leadership in the German media reflects a dual expectation of leaders to be both independent and ethically responsible. The presence of Charismatic/Value-Based and Participative Leadership in German media narratives emphasises that leadership training should include inspirational communication, ethical decision-making and inclusive leadership practices, in line with contemporary ethical and inclusive leadership expectations. The study contributes to the advancement of ILT and CLT by demonstrating that leadership prototypes are dynamic constructs that are reinforced by media discourses rather than being culturally predetermined. It emphasises the crucial role of the media in reflecting, shaping, reinforcing or challenging culturally endorsed implicit leadership attributes while reproducing or constructing leadership paradigms over time (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Leadership Prototypes in German Newspapers 2009–2019

No.	Prototype	Definition	Percentage	Key Newspapers
1.	Autonomous Leadership	Independent, goal-oriented, self-reliant decision-making	46%	F.A.Z, Handelsblatt
2.	Humane-Oriented Leadership	Ethical, compassionate, socially responsible leadership	21%	F.A.Z, Süddeutsche Zeitung
3.	Charismatic/Value-Based Leadership	Visionary, inspiring, strong ethical values	15%	F.A.Z, Handelsblatt, Die Welt
4.	Participative Leadership	Inclusive, collaborative decision-making	14%	Süddeutsche Zeitung, Die Welt
5.	Team-Oriented Leadership	Emphasis on teamwork, cohesion, collective goals	4%	FAZ, Handelsblatt
6.	Self-Protective Leadership	Status-conscious, hierarchical, defensive leadership	0.4%	No significant representation

Source: Author.

The findings of this study underline that leadership theories should integrate media influence and regional variations as key variables in leadership frameworks. The understanding of media narratives can help leadership scholars, educators and practitioners to navigate public expectations and perceptions more effectively. It is crucial for leadership communication strategies to consider how different media platforms frame leadership attributes, allowing leaders to adapt their messaging, public image, and leadership styles in order to resonate with societal expectations. Further research should explore the impact of digital media, social media, regional leadership narratives and globalisation on leadership perceptions. A deeper understanding of these dynamics would be essential for developing innovative leadership frameworks. The study also provides evidence of editorial preferences in how the different newspapers frame leadership. The analysis showed that business-oriented newspapers tended to favour Autonomous and Charismatic

Leadership, aligning with their readership's preference for strategic, visionary, and performance-driven leadership models (Ernst et al., 2022). In contrast, general-interest newspapers provided a more balanced image of leadership prototypes. This implies an editorial preference for democratic and collaborative leadership approaches, aligning with their broader audience's expectations of governance and leadership effectiveness. Tabloid newspapers tended to mirror sensationalist reporting rather than in-depth leadership analysis. The absence of Self-protective Leadership across all newspapers indicates that hierarchical, status-driven leadership styles are not prominently featured in German media narratives, reinforcing the country's preference for egalitarian leadership models (Lang & Keuscher, 2020). The media's tendency to emphasise certain leadership styles over others underlines the importance of critical media awareness. The findings of the study support that traditional frameworks should integrate media influence as an important factor in shaping leadership perceptions. A proposed model for further research should consider the interaction between cultural values, media narratives and leadership prototypes. Such a model should consider that leadership prototypes are not only culturally determined but also influenced by media discourse and organisational contexts. Further research could empirically test such a model across other countries and industries to refine an integrative cross-cultural leadership framework. This study contributes to theoretical and practical discussions on implicit leadership prototypes, cultural influence and media discourse. The results indicate that autonomous and people-oriented leadership traits are the most dominant leadership prototypes in German print media, reinforcing public expectations of self-reliant yet ethically responsible leadership. Further research should focus on cross-cultural leadership comparisons between different countries, the influence of print media on leadership legitimacy, and the evolution of leadership perceptions over time. Incorporating digital and social media into leadership research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary leadership frameworks. By extending leadership theories to account for media influence, the research paves the way for a more integrated understanding of how leadership prototypes are constructed, reinforced and adapted in global, cultural and organisational settings. For Germany, the findings recommend that leadership development programs should focus on a balance between independence and ethical responsibility, reproducing societal expectations. Given the media's emphasis on leadership, leadership development programs should prioritise training in inspirational communication, strategic vision, and inclusive decision-making. However, understanding how media narratives interact with leadership perceptions can help leaders to manage public expectations (Jian, 2022). However, leaders should be aware of the dominant leadership discourses and how they influence public image, especially as digital and social media play an increasing role in leadership legitimacy (Makridakis, 2017).

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