Medienmonitor Schweiz 2022

Summary

In 2022, *Medienmonitor Schweiz* examines for the sixth time the roles played by the media in forming opinions in Switzerland, while documenting the balances of power and business ties in the media market. Compared with the previous year, the media (and particularly the strongest brands) lost some of its reach and opinion-forming power. Amongst the media types, TV lost some of its opinion-forming power to social media. The greatest market concentration in terms of the media groups' opinion-forming power was found in the Hochalpen and Bern media regions. However, the conditions for a balanced formation of opinion among the population are still met.

Methodological information

***Medienmonitor Schweiz 2022* combines three survey modules and brings together data from a multitude of sources:**

1) Representative sample online survey about the importance of 176 Swiss media brands when it comes to forming individual opinions (N=4,700)

2) Secondary analysis of recognised Swiss baseline surveys on the daily reach of media brands (radio/TV: Mediapulse, print: WEMF, social media and online: own survey and projection)

3A) Secondary analysis of sector studies and business reports on the economic weight of the key players in the Swiss media market

3B) Ongoing market monitoring and documentation of ownership and contribution structures in the Swiss media landscape

Media diversity and opinion formation in Switzerland

Medienmonitor Schweiz aims to measure media diversity and the potential for the free forming of opinions within Switzerland. For a democracy to function, the population must have be able to form balanced opinions. As a platform for content and opinions, the media plays a significant role in opinion-forming processes.

Since the 1960s in particular, the Swiss media sector has undergone major changes, reflected in an ongoing **process of concentration**. This tendency has also been accentuated in recent times by the **digital transformation** of society and the media. Against this backdrop, the question arises as to how these developments affect available media and companies, and the opportunities to form opinions freely in Switzerland.

Each year *Medienmonitor Schweiz* supplies a factual and systematic basis for the evaluation of the media landscape in Switzerland and, in particular, of the free forming of opinions. The study 2022 collects information concerning the **opinion-forming power** of **176 media brands** and **ten media corporations** in the national market, three regional language and 14 local regional markets. It documents the business ties and economic balances of power within the Swiss media market. In the case of one brand (Il Caffè), publication was discontinued during the year under review, and five regional online brands were newly included in the 2022 study sample.

To determine **opinion-forming power**, media users evaluate the performance of the brands as an information medium in a representative sample survey. This qualitative evaluation is combined with the daily reach of the available media as identified by the official Swiss coverage studies for TV, radio, and print and by internal surveys and projections for online and social media. This results in an indexed performance number for opinion-forming power, which represents the relative **potential** of media brands to have opinion-forming effects. With the 2022 study period, results are now available for the sixth time.

Medienmonitor Schweiz measures the **concentration of opinion-forming power** using the established **Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI)**, which is also used by US antitrust authorities to assess the balance of power in competition. A high concentration of opinion-forming power may be an indication that opinion formation is at risk.

Opinion-forming power gap closes slightly

In 2022, a further part of the increase in reach, and thus opinion-forming power, from the coronavirus year of 2020 was lost. Compared to the previous year, the cumulative opinion-forming power of all 176 media brands being reviewed fell by just under 7%, while the three top brands in Switzerland lost almost 14% in opinion-forming power. **Larger losses** were recorded in particular by TV, but also radio programmes, particularly by the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR) as well as other brands with greater opinion-forming power; such as 20 Minuten, Facebook or even Blick. These decreases also affect the two strongest online brands, srf.ch and watson.ch, which led the upswing in their media type during the previous year and recorded significant growth. In contrast, there are only **three winners** amongst the 20 brands with the strongest opinion-forming power: the Neue Zuercher Zeitung, Instagram and YouTube. Just outside the top 20, Twitter and, with exceptionally high growth rates, TikTok in particular are growing.

Compared with the previous year, the **gap** between the larger and smaller media brands in terms of opinion-forming power has therefore tended to close, which is a positive sign for plurality of opinion. Given this pattern, it is hardly surprising that the concentration of opinion-forming power among individual brands has decreased year-on-year. From this point of view, all 18 regions are less concentrated, and a relatively large number of different offerings are universally available. As measured by the HHI, **individual brands** are not expected to pose a **problematic threat** to plurality of opinions in 2022.

The wide erosion of opinion-forming power across a large proportion of the media brands also means that there are only **minor shifts** among the **media types** compared to the previous year; one percent of the national percentage of opinion-forming power moved from TV to social media. A multi-year comparison of media types shows a shift in the share of opinion-forming power away from traditional media types (print, radio, TV) to newer, **digital offerings** (online content, social media). As a result, ever-larger parts of the opinion-forming market are increasingly moving away from the direct sphere of influence of Swiss media promotion.

Less concentrated markets due to brand systems

As the range of media brands does not single-handedly guarantee plurality of opinion or content, the analysis of concentration on the basis of individual offerings falls short of the mark. This is because the largest **brand combinations**, which generally maintain a central editorial office for supra-regional content, or a similar system, can develop influential opinion-forming power through the consistent realisation of the network potential, which far exceeds the individual brands. **SRG SSR**, with its German-language offering (SRF), has by far the largest brand system. This is followed by the combinations of **Meta**, **20 Minuten,** RTS, radio/TV from **CH Media** and the Swiss German print brand systems from **TX Group** and CH Media.

When calculating the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) based on these **brand systems** and the remaining individual brands, all 18 Swiss media brands analysed remain below the 1,500-point limit considered critical in this respect. All are therefore considered **low in concentration**. The highest concentration value due to brand systems was in the **Bern** media region, with 1,319 points. Compared with the previous year, a decrease in market concentration was observed in 17 of the 18 areas; the concentration only increased in Graubuenden media region.

Hochalpen and Bern with a powerful corporate duopoly

Ten major media corporations operate within the Swiss media market, alongside numerous other providers. **SRG SSR** clearly holds the greatest opinion-forming power, with a share of 28%. The number two, **TX Group**, achieved an index value under half that of the market leader (14%). The combined influence of the two largest media companies has thus decreased by 2% since 2021. These are followed by the US corporation **Meta** and by **CH Media**, both with an 8% share of the national opinion-forming market, then by **Ringier** with 5%. The remaining corporations (NZZ-Mediengruppe, AZ Medien, Gruppo Corriere del Ticino, Somedia, and ESH Médias) again have significantly lower shares. Taken together, the 10 largest companies control 102 of the 176 brands in Medienmonitor Schweiz; the remaining 74 have a variety of different owners. Similar to brand systems, media companies can also negatively impact the plurality of opinion. Aside from the centralised product of content, there is the risk that corporations will also enforce editorial requirements across all media, for example, to enable a certain angle and tone of reporting to break through.

All competing companies have certain regional strengths, and they encounter each other in various competitive relationships across the 18 regions analysed. The HHI for the share of **media corporations'** opinion-forming power is clearly above the values for brand combinations or even individual brands in 2022. However, the absolute level of concentration rarely gives cause for concern, as the entirety of Switzerland, the two major language regions and, from a corporate perspective, half of the media regions are also **less concentrated**. In comparison with the previous year, the market concentration in 14 of the 18 regions analysed has decreased. Overall, **eight regions** surpass the 1,500-point threshold and are therefore considered to be **moderately concentrated**, although in most cases only slightly. The most pronounced is the market concentration in the Hochalpen media region (despite a decrease compared to 2021) and in Bern, with 1,689 and 1,606 points respectively. In both these regions, there is a marked **concentration of power** among the two largest companies (SRG SSR and TX Group). A strong number three is also lacking, which would be detrimental to market concentration.

Slightly reduced concentration of power, challenging digitalisation

In summary, the conclusion drawn by *Medienmonitor Schweiz 2022* is similar to that of the previous year. In principle, Switzerland has a functioning media system, which safeguards the free forming of opinions across all regions of the country. Even though the market concentration has slightly decreased compared with the previous year, the plurality of media, and thus the plurality of opinion, are still under a **certain amount of pressure**. The issue continues to vary by region, with particular attention paid to the **Hochalpen** and **Bern** media regions. Aside from the regional concentration effects, the main focus of politics, regulation and science should be on **digitalisation** and the associated, **age-related changes in media use**. As can be demonstrated by Medienmonitor, there is an accentuated tendency in the Swiss media landscape for opinion formation to be increasingly left to market forces in large sections of the population, particularly within the younger and middle-aged segments.

Medienmonitor Schweiz will continue to observe the developments of the media landscape and opinion formation in Switzerland on an annual basis. The **study website** visualises the core findings, documents market structures and current events: **www.medienmonitor-schweiz.ch**