

Axel Springer SE

Company: Axel Springer is a German media and technology company that empowers people to make free decisions for their lives with independently researched information. This applies to both its strong media brands (e.g. BILD, WELT, BUSINESS INSIDER, POLITICO) as well as its classifieds portals (e.g. StepStone, immowelt, SeLogger). Through consistent internationalization and digitization, Axel Springer SE is active in more than 40 countries through subsidiaries, joint ventures and licenses. It primarily operates in Germany, Poland, France, the UK, and increasingly in the US.

Project Scope: Sustainability Strategies in **European Media Companies:** A Market Research

Project objectives:

Axel Springer has been committed to sustainability since the early nineties. In 2019, sustainability has become an official value of the organization. Today, this is part of the company's DNA - from the protection of the environment and human rights to the promotion of diversity, from greener print products to digitalization of all the processes and services.

The findings of this student project will outline key strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities with respect to sustainability strategies at media and publishing houses in general and at Axel Springer in particular. If high academic scholarship is maintained throughout the project, the research outcome(s) have the potential to impact future developments with regards to sustainability in the media industry.

Expected Outcomes:

- A Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of the academic body of literature on Responsible Media, specifically the role of media companies in tackling climate change.
 - We expect the REA to be a literature review. Resources on how to conduct a systematic literature review are provided below.
 - The REA constitutes the academic foundation for the subsequent market research, that is, it provides the theoretical underpinnings of the project.
- A Market Research on sustainability in leading media companies. This Market Research comprises two levels:
 - The Macroeconomic or External Level: we expect students to use macroeconomic or external strategy tools to lay the ground for the macroeconomic environment Axel Springer is operating in.
 - In terms of political considerations, students are invited to consider the impact(s) the Supply Chain Due Diligence Act and the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, approved by the German parliament, will have on the industry in general and on Axel Springer in particular.
 - Students might find PESTEL a relevant tool for this part of the research.

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- The Microeconomic or Internal Level: we expect students to use microeconomic or internal strategy tools to assess Axel Springer's competitive (dis-)advantage in terms of its climate strategy.
- Informed by the synthesized scientific knowledge *and* the macroeconomic scope of the market research on sustainability in (leading) media companies, the group should provide recommendations for the industry at large:
 - To what extent are the recommendations made by the scientific community implemented by the media industry?
 - What specific recommendations made in the academic literature are implemented in the industry?
 - What specific recommendations made in the academic literature are **not** implemented in the industry? What room for improvement is there?
- Informed by the synthesized scientific knowledge *and* the microeconomic scope of the market research on sustainability in (leading) media companies, the group should benchmark Axel Springer with respect to its competitors.
 - What are Axel Springer's strengths in terms of its commitment to sustainability relative to the industry?
 - What are Axel Springer's weaknesses in terms of its commitment to sustainability relative to the industry?
 - What are Axel Springer's opportunities to counter previously identified weaknesses?
 - We recommend a SWOT Analysis for this part of the research.

Deliverables:

- A Rapid Evidence Assessment by means of a (Systematic) Literature Review
 - This *can* include a literature matrix to turn the review more structured. A literature matrix is a table comprising:
 - (1) The names of the authors of the journal article;
 - (2) The title of the journal article;
 - (3) The method(s) employed in the journal article;
 - (4) Key findings of the journal article;
 - (5) (If present) recommendations for the media industry.
- Overview of the social, political, economic, etc. landscape European and UK media companies are operating in.
 - Please note that this might differ between the EU and the UK due to Brexit.
 - Recommendations for the media industry to mitigate its impact on the environment.
- Overview of the existing climate commitments at leading EU & UK media companies based on the market research;
 - Detailed case studies of the ten most outstanding examples from the region;
 - Benchmarking Axel Springer's climate commitment with best practices in the region;
 - Recommendations for improving Axel Springer's climate commitment.

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Yes - depending on the outcome of this project, that is, the findings of the research.

Would you like for this project to be delivered by more than one team?

No.

Which sector is this project focused on?

Media and Publishing

Which skills might be required for the successful delivery of your project?

Academic or Research Skills:

- Rapid Evidence Assessment.
 - This will be a good introduction to qualitative research for those students that have not written a dissertation yet.
 - This will be particularly important for students wishing to pursue a postgraduate qualification.
- Macroeconomic or External Strategy Tools. Becoming familiar with referred-to tools will enrich students' market research skillset (valued by most companies).
- Microeconomic or Internal Strategy Tools. Becoming familiar with referred-to tools will help students identify key aspects managers have to consider. This is especially relevant for those students who wish to transition into a managerial position post-graduation.

Transferrable or Professional Skills:

- Market Research;
- Market Analysis;
- Business Analysis;
- Sustainability Analysis;
- Legal Analysis (i.e. analysis of the European and British policy environment).

Can the project outcomes be shared with the public?

Possibly, upon presentation of the findings *and* agreement by Axel Springer Corporate Communications & Sustainability.

SDGs related to this project: 6, 7, 12, 13

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Resources available to the team:

Axel Springer

Axel Springer SE (2021) *Sustainability*. Available at: <https://www.axelspringer.com/en/values/sustainability>

Axel Springer SE (2021) *Sustainability Report 2020*. Available at: https://sustainability.axelspringer.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/sustainability_report_AS_EN_211001.pdf

Leading European Media and Publishing Houses Committed to Sustainability

Responsible Media Forum (2022) *The media sector is fast moving, and so are the social and environmental challenges facing it*. Available at: <https://responsiblemediaforum.org/home>

Responsible Media Forum (2022) *Participants*. Available at: <https://responsiblemediaforum.org/who>

Responsible Media Forum (2022) *Insights*. Available at: <https://responsiblemediaforum.org/forum>

Rapid Evidence Assessment

Collaboration for Environmental Evidence (2018) *Guidelines and Standards for Evidence Synthesis in Environmental Management*. Available at: <https://environmentalevidence.org/information-for-authors/>

Collins, A., Coughlin, D., Miller, J. & Kirk, S. (2015) *The Production of Quick Scoping Reviews and Rapid Evidence Assessments: A How To Guide*.

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (2015) *Emerging Tools and Techniques to Deliver Timely and Cost Effective Evidence Reviews*.

Corporate Strategy

Drucker, P.F. (1994) 'The Theory of the Business', *Harvard Business Review*, 72(6), pp. 95-104.

Porter, M. (1996) 'What is Strategy?', *Harvard Business Review*, 74(6), pp. 61-78.

Strategy Analysis Tools

Macroeconomic or External Strategy Analysis Tools

- Porter's Diamond
- Porter's 5 Forces

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- PESTEL

Starting Literature:

Harvard Business School (nd) *The Five Forces*. Available at: <https://www.isc.hbs.edu/strategy/business-strategy/Pages/the-five-forces.aspx>

Porter, M. (2008) 'The Five Competitive Forces That Shape Competitive Strategy', *Harvard Business Review*, 86(1), pp. 78-93.

Microeconomic or Internal Strategy Analysis Tools

- Hoffman, Lash & Wellington
- Value Chain
- SWOT
- VRIO
- TOWS

Starting Literature:

Barney, J. (1995) 'Looking inside for competitive advantage', *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 9(4).

Hoffman, A. (2006) 'Getting Ahead of the Curve: Corporate Strategies That Address Climate Change', *Pew Center on Global Climate Change*.

Lash, J. & Wellington, F. (2007) 'Competitive Advantage on a Warming Planet', *Harvard Business Review*, 85(3), pp. 94-102.

McKinsey & Company (2008) *Enduring Ideas: Classic McKinsey frameworks that continue to inform management thinking*. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/enduring-ideas-classic-mckinsey-frameworks-that-continue-to-inform-management-thinking>

Further Resources

Seymour, F. & Langer, P. (2021) *Consideration of Nature-Based Solutions as Offsets in Corporate Climate Change Mitigation Strategies*. Washington D.C.: World Resources Institute. doi: 10.46830/wriwp.20.00043

United Nations (2015) *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/publications/transforming-our-world-2030-agenda-sustainable-development-17981>

United Nations Global Compact (2015) *Guide to Corporate Sustainability*. Available at: [https://d306pr3pise04h.cloudfront.net/docs/publications%2FUN Global Compact Guide to Corporate Sustainability.pdf](https://d306pr3pise04h.cloudfront.net/docs/publications%2FUN%20Global%20Compact%20Guide%20to%20Corporate%20Sustainability.pdf)

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World Economic Forum (2020) *Building Back Better: An Action Plan for the Media, Entertainment, and Culture Industry*. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/building-back-better-an-action-plan-for-the-media-entertainment-and-culture-industry>

World Economic Forum (2020) *The Media, Entertainment, and Culture Industry's Response and Role in a Society in Crisis*. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/whitepapers/the-media-entertainment-and-culture-industry-s-response-and-role-in-a-society-in-crisis>

Contact people:

1. Main Contact Person: Gilles Muller, Sustainability Manager at Axel Springer SE.
E-Mail address: gilles.muller@axelspringer.com
2. Second Contact Person: Marcus Werner Blank, Head of Sustainability at Axel Springer SE.
E-Mail address: marcus-werner.blank@axelspringer.com

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