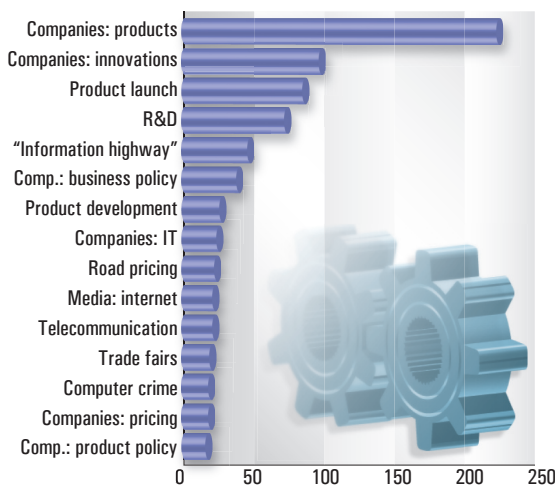# IT: Nothing but company coverage

German media relate information technology to companies only

Even after the hype around the Internet has long gone, information technologies are still considered to have an increasing impact on soci-

Information technology is reduced to company coverage

Number of articles with a reference to IT

Source: Media Tenor
01/01/2003 – 06/30/2004

Basis: 3,479 articles
in 26 media

ety as a whole. Nevertheless, the German media relate information technology to companies only. Some media, including the **Welt am Sonntag**, covered these technologies relatively frequently. But **Media Tenor** data has also shown that the passages on IT appeared almost exclusively in the context of company coverage, while remaining almost absent from reporting on political or societal developments in Germany.

Coverage of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), initiated by the United Nations with the goal of creating strategies for an effective and fair information society, also turned out to be sobering. **Media Tenor** has been observing the organization's media presence since October 1st, 2003. Since then, not a single news story focusing primarily on the WSIS has been published in the politics and business sections of the opinion-leading German media.

WamS: The German IT medium

Looking at the amount of coverage of technologies as a whole, however, there are significant dif-ferences between media outlets. Comparing how often the characteristics and effects of information technology were described by the media, the publishing house Springer came in first. Throughout the 18 months of analysis, from January 1st, 2003, until June 30th, 2004, the weekly paper **Welt am Sonntag** covered information and communication technologies in a total of 315 passages. Although the **WamS** is published not more than once a week, the number was significantly higher than in the affiliated daily paper **Welt**, which came in second with 176 passages.

The **Welt am Sonntag** did well in the qualitative content analysis of its technology reporting, as well. 93% of the passages on information and communication technology in the **WamS** were not reduced to the technology as such, but discussed its real or potential benefits and harms. Only the **Berliner Zeitung** scored higher in this category with 95,3%, while featuring a significantly lower amount of coverage than the **WamS** on this topic overall.

Springer media show strongest interest in information technology
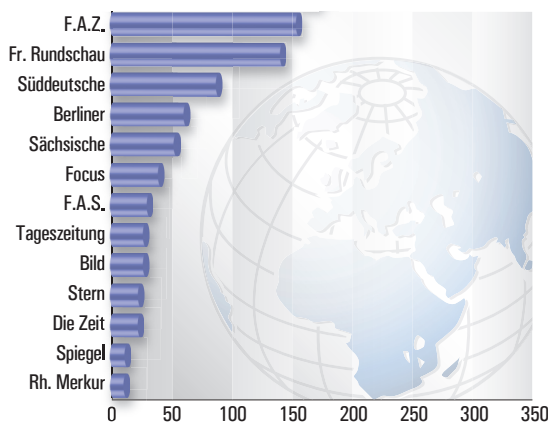
Number of articles with a reference to IT

Source: Media Tenor
01/01/2003 – 06/30/2004

Basis: 3,479 articles
in 26 media

The daily paper **taz** and the weekly **Zeit** are on the other end of the spectrum. Not only did they cover technology rather infrequently, but they also offered explanations of its benefits and harms in a mere 70% of all passages. More often than not they only mentioned the technologies, while leaving their readers in the dark when it came to their effects.

WSIS - SMSI has been an invisible summit as far as media and public are concerned. Yet, this is the first time that the Internet has been considered seriously at the UN level; the focus is on the ways in which information communications technologies can serve human development goals. The story is complex, and often the proceedings make a dull spectacle. But the stakes are high, and the question of how to devise a framework to achieve a humane and sustainable global village using new information technologies is a matter that surely affects all of us. We deserve to be better informed by our news media.
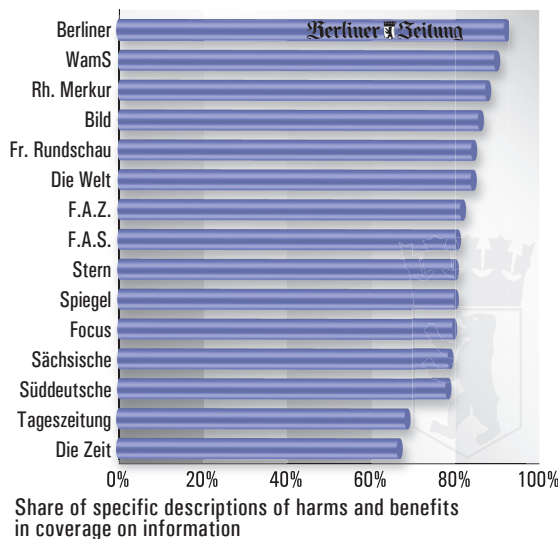
Prof. Dr. Liss Jeffrey

Prof. Dr. Liss Jeffrey is an expert on citizen engagement in e-governance, and was a civil society member of the Canadian delegation at the Geneva phase of WSIS-SMSI. She teaches graduate seminars in communications and new media and policy at the University of Toronto's McLuhan program in Culture and Technology, where she is Director of the Global Research Network.

But even in cases when media attributed significant attention to IT, the idea of the purported information society was noticeably absent, as was illustrated by the analysis of the main topics of articles with references to information technologies. The lion's share of passages on technologies appeared in articles on companies, primarily dealing with products and product development. They were not featured in the context of the political, societal or economic situation in Germany.

Specific information wanted: Share of harm/benefit descriptions

Share of specific descriptions of harms and benefits in coverage on information

Source: Media Tenor
01/01/2003 – 06/30/2004

Basis: 3,479 articles in 26 media

Thus the information society does not play a role at the politics or business desks. Journalists reduce its impact simply to how companies make money with it. This also explains why they basically ignored the preparatory meetings of the WSIS. The summit dealt with the effects of digital networks on the global community, as well as their social and political reality. The German media, however, did not look at IT from that perspective.

The United Nations were more concerned with that aspect. The Canadian WSIS delegate, Prof. Dr. Liss Jeffrey of the University of Toronto, says that the UN initiative is a unique opportunity for bringing together the different participants in society on a multilateral forum. It should mould the information society in such a way that it serves both economic prosperity and other needs of human development. According to Jeffrey, the UN summit offers an exclusive platform for this task, while, at the same time, confirming the significance of information technologies for the development of society on a global scale (see commentary of Liss Jeffrey, on the left-hand side of this page).

Information society thrives on communication

So far, the German media have not fully acknowledged this principle, despite the well-known fact that it is the communication infrastructure which allows for the cohesion of democratic societies, particularly that of modern nation states. On a smaller scale, most of them have already been information societies for centuries. A large number of protagonists, living enormous distances apart from one another, were able to communicate with the help of technologies, starting with the postal service, then trains and the telegraph and finally telephone and the Internet. The results were societies with a division of labor and political participation across regional boundaries. Depending on the quality and reach of the communication infrastructure, it potentially allows citizens to participate in political power and interact with members of the society they live in.

Today's rapid expansion of communication technologies obviously creates an enormous potential for changes in society, not only from an economic point of view. It equally creates a pronounced and probably rising divide between the technology-haves and -have-nots.

Nevertheless, technological development engenders many opportunities, which are squandered if those responsible for societal development are not sensitized to them. The question not only concerns companies, but all members of society, including politicians and citizens. The task of informing the public of opportunities and risks can only be accomplished with the help of the media.   me