

Research reveals influence of media moguls

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Individual or family ownership of media outlets is bad for editorial independence, according to new research by an academic at the University of East Anglia.

Dr Chris Hanretty, a lecturer in politics, investigated the levels of owner influence in 211 different print and broadcast outlets in 32 European media markets, including the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Russia and Spain. He found that owner influence is greater where voting power within the company is concentrated in the hands of individuals and families rather than companies.

The findings also show that groups which own multiple titles on a national level only are more likely to exercise owner influence, whereas groups which spread their ownership across titles in different countries are less likely to.

Dr Hanretty looked at whether more concentrated ownership increases owner influence and whether individual owners (or ownership stakes held by individuals) bring with them more influence than corporate owners (or stakes held by corporations). He said the findings had implications for policy-makers and regulators.

"Competition authorities might want to look not just at how concentrated the ownership of a particular media outlet is, but also who owns it.

"To the extent that policy-makers and regulators are involved in scrutiny of the acquisition of ownership shares in [media outlets](#), they should

exercise different levels of scrutiny depending on whether a proposed acquisition will take an ownership interest from an already-controlling share to a larger share, or whether instead the acquisition will increase the ownership interest's voting power compared to the status quo.

"Policy-makers and regulators interested in minimizing proprietorial influence have good reason to 'pierce the corporate veil' and examine the ultimate owners behind ownership interests, because ultimate owners of different types differ in the propensity to exercise owner influence."

Dr Hanretty also warned against putting barriers in the way of ownership of media outlets by foreign operators, in particular groups which have other international titles but no other domestic title, as these groups reduce owner influence.

More information: Read the paper: www.ueapolitics.org/wp-content.../minster_preprint.pdf

Provided by University of East Anglia

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