
Media ownership and concentration in France

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Abstract

This chapter discusses three key issues regarding media ownership and concentration in France. The first issue is the impact of regulation and privatization in the french media market. The second key issue is technology: liberalization of the audiovisual and telecom sectors took place just as rapid technological advances were happening in the information and communications technology (ICT) field worldwide. And, the third key issue is that of globalization.

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Media Ownership and Concentration in France

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses three key issues regarding media ownership and concentration in France. The first issue is the impact of regulation and privatization in the French media market. In France, traditional media such as the national daily press have been heavily regulated since 1945. D'Armagnac (2005) discusses how this arrangement came to be following World War II:

> [Liberation] gave rise to a number of newspapers which were founded by individuals or families, under a social agreement with the union of press workers—the syndicat du livre (CGT)—on printing and distribution activities, under the control of the French state. This system had for a long time remained at a standstill in its afterwar configuration. But the general picture of the French press is now on the move and it has not reached its final shape.[1]

The agreement with the press workers' union, which affected most national dailies, resulted in a closed-shop arrangement, so printing these dailies became rather expensive over the years. The high costs have also resulted from distribution logistics, which under a 1947 law are carried out by one company, Presstalis (formerly the NMPP). Until 2011, it was controlled by press publishing groups and the Lagardère Group (through its subsidiary Hachette S.A.). In 2011, Lagardère withdrew, and two cooperative firms representing magazines (75% stake)

1. D'Armagnac, Bertrand. "Industriels et familles règnent sur la presse française." *Le Monde*, Jan. 22, 2005 (translated by the author).

and daily newspapers (25% stake) gained ownership of Presstalis, which like all print distributors is facing growing financial difficulties in the 21st century. In contrast, other sectors of French media have been deregulated and their overall financial situation is much better than that of most newspapers.

Privatization in audiovisual media began in the 1980s in France. In 1981 the public sector monopoly in radio ended. Then the broadcasting sector was opened up to commercial operators; previously, there were just a few private radio channels and some TV channels operated by French commercial broadcasters, who transmitted from neighboring countries (specifically, Luxembourg, Germany, Monaco, and Andorra). In the television sector Canal Plus was launched in 1984, and by 1987 the privatization of the state-owned television network TF1 was completed. A further step toward deregulation was the liberalization of the telecom industry that was carried out gradually between 1986 and 1998.

A second key issue for French media is technology: liberalization of the audiovisual and telecom sectors took place just as rapid technological advances were happening in the information and communications technology (ICT) field worldwide. Technological advances, especially in digital technology, have been fundamental for the growth in the telecom and Internet industries. Most French newspapers, as well as most audiovisual media, now have online editions. Some of them have already registered large audience shares; for example, in January 2012, *Le Monde*'s web portal (lemonde.fr) counted 231,000 unique visitors per day and over 21 million unique page views per month.[2] There are now several expanding online titles, including *Rue 89* and *Mediapart*, and the French-language version of AOL's (US) *The Huffington Post*. The present trend among French newspapers and magazines is to publish mostly free online editions, while charging for some specific content.

A third key issue is that of globalization.[3] Before the start of today's globalization wave in the 1980s, the presence of international media groups in France was limited, with the exception of the film industry because Hollywood majors from the United States have had a strong presence in France since the early 1920s. But now, in other media sectors, international media companies have come to hold significant market shares. Conversely, some large French media and communications companies like the Lagardère Group, Vivendi, and France Telecom have developed their own worldwide media activities.

PRINT MEDIA

Newspapers

The *Belle Époque*, the period that lasted from the late 19th century to the end of World War I, was a golden age for the French press.[4] But after World War I (1914–1918), national readership fell into decline, a trend that continues to this day: in 1914, there were 322 dailies in France; this had fallen to 179 by 1945, at the end of World War II. By 2011, France counted 66 dailies. The number of *national* dailies stood at 26 in 1945 but by 2011 had fallen to 11. Circulation has also decreased dramatically: in 1914, one of leading national dailies, *Le Petit Parisien*, had a daily circulation of about 3 million copies, while in 1946, even as the country was recovering from World War II, there were 28 national dailies that had a total circulation of about six million copies. In comparison, the two main national dailies publishing today, *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*, have a combined daily circulation of

2. Alexa, The Web Information Company. "lemonde.fr." 2012. <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/lemonde.fr#>. Dec. 31, 2012.

3. For an analysis of globalization, see Badillo, Patrick-Yves, Proulx, Serge. "Mondialisation de la Communication: à la recherche du sens perdu," in *Les essentiels d'Hermès "Sociétés de la Connaissance - Fractures et évolutions."* Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2009, 117–134.

4. For a historical analysis since about 1820, from an economic point of view, see Eveno Patrick. *L'argent de la presse française des années 1820 à nos jours*. Paris: CTHS, 2003; for a more recent analysis, see Charon, Jean-Marie. *La presse quotidienne*. Paris: La Découverte, 2004 and Albert, Pierre. *La presse française*. Paris: La Documentation Française, 2008.