

Think Global. The missing link between media market concentration and news diversity: Evidence from Flanders

Abstract

This dissertation explores the connection between media market concentration and news diversity. It uses the small and highly concentrated media market of Flanders as a case study. The dissertation is structured in nine chapters, scattered across four parts. This does not exclude the ensuing introduction, which outlines the dissertation in more detail and presents its three main research questions.

Part I, Concepts & theories, contains chapters one through three. It lays the conceptual and theoretical foundations for the remainder of the thesis by developing framework for news diversity. Several other key terms are discussed and analysed in relationship with news diversity, including pluralism, media and content diversity, the public sphere and the marketplace of ideas. Part I also proposes mixed methods research designs to study all dimensions of news diversity separately, as well as more scholarly attention for the roles of individual citizens and societies in assessing the value of news and journalism.

Part II, Mediahuis, contains chapters four through six. Three separate studies are presented which were carried out between 2017 and 2019. A quantitative news content homogeneity analysis is compounded with an ethnographic field study inside the newsroom of Mediahuis' largest newspaper, Het Nieuwsblad, as well as with a news consumption study through Mediahuis' internal data platform. A combination of the studies leads to the unfavourable outcome that overall news diversity at Mediahuis has declined, notwithstanding a few notable positive findings as well.

Part III, DPG Media, contains chapters seven and eight. The media company DPG Media did not even exist yet when the trajectory of the dissertation at hand started in July 2017 but was studied exhaustively throughout 2020. Here too, a quantitative news content homogeneity analysis was carried out alongside an ethnographic field study, this time inside the newsroom of Flanders' only commercial TV news broadcaster, VTM NIEUWS. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the field study was not executed as initially planned. This will be discussed appropriately in part III and onwards. It is too early yet to make finite statements about changes in overall news diversity at DPG Media, though a decline is projected for the (near) future, nonetheless.

Finally, part IV, Conclusions, contains just chapter nine. It synthesises contributions and findings of the three preceding parts at the conceptual, methodological and empirical axes and makes tentative statements of news diversity at the level of the Flemish media market. Furthermore, the final part and chapter highlights limitations and recommendations for future news diversity research, which is best said to be both international and interdisciplinary in nature.