

Understanding and investigating media capture

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Media capture

- The concept refers to *“media having failed to achieve or having gained and then lost autonomy and thus not exercising their core function of informing people.”*
- *“Media capture can be defined as a situation where a group of interests formed around a country’s political and business power takes over and abuses the key regulatory and funding mechanisms, the public media, as well as a majority of the privately owned media to control the journalistic narrative with the long-term purpose of maintaining their grip on power and, with it, access to public resources.”*

Dragomir, M. & Horowitz, A., Media Capture and Its Contexts: Developing a Comparative Framework for Public Service Media. In: Tunez-Lypez, M. et al (eds.) *The Values of Public Service Media in the Internet Society*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021

Media capture environment

- Media capture by type of media:
 - Public Service Media (PSM)
 - Commercial media
 - Licensed vs unlicensed media:
 - Online news outlets (incl. only social media accounts) vs printed media
 - Local, regional and national media
- MC is always context-specific and depends on a number of economic, political, and cultural realities (path-dependency):
 - MC / gov. control over PSM is pertinent in SEE/CEE: *“the transformation of state media into PSM has generally failed, as governments in the region have maintained a tight grip on public service broadcasters thanks to their power to appoint key players in their governance structures and make decisions about their funding”* (Dragomir & Horowitz, 2021)
- Media capture is a process (of intensification of external influence)

Media capture environment (2)

- High levels of MC in entire media sector of SEE/CEE countries (PSM & commercial media, online media, (un)licensed, etc.), incl. but not limited to:
 - High levels of media ownership concentration
 - Market vertical integration (TV, radio, newspapers, online news outlets and news portals)
 - Wholesale (and retails) market concentration;
 - Non-transparent funding, incl. from the GOV, coupled with concentration of funding streams & opaque (illicit) financing;
 - Advertising market dominated and controlled by the GOV and few big advertisers (advertising agencies):
 - Non-transparent market of paid (sponsored) content
 - Ineffective enforcement of existing regulations

Media capture environment (3)

- High levels of MC in entire media sector of SEE/CEE countries (cont.):
 - GOV influence/meddling in appointment of management and professional staff in PSM (and GOV allied media)
 - Commercialization and digitization of media:
 - Questions about the unfair advantages of PSM and their right to operate on commercial platforms
 - Monetization
 - Lax regulatory framework and enforcement
 - lower barriers to entry would democratize the media market so that media ownership would no longer be dominated by the wealthy and powerful

Media capture: conceptual framework

- Framework that allows for:
 - Assess the degree of risk to editorial independence
 - Comparative analysis across countries
- 4-component model:
 - Ownership capture
 - Financial capture
 - Regulatory / Censorship capture
 - Cognitive capture
- MC manifestations:
 - Success in the next electoral cycle
 - Enjoy impunity

Dragomir, M. & Horowitz, A., 2021

MC conceptual framework's components

- Ownership capture:
 - Ownership takeover
 - Digitisation makes legacy media less profitable – and respectively – more vulnerable to ownership change
 - Owners benefiting from other forms of captured business environment (links between oligarchs, the banking sector, the media, and politics)
- Financial capture:
 - Advertising budgets / paid content
 - Public subsidies
 - Opaque / illicit financing

MC conceptual framework's components (2)

- Regulatory / censorship capture:
 - GOV/allied oligarchs control over regulatory process (both regulators and legislation)
 - Influence over appointments of management and professional staff
 - Influence on decisions to dismiss journalists
- Cognitive capture

Sources of information

- Business registers / corporate databases
- Specialised providers of information and data about the advertising market
- Public subsidies (incl. EU funds) data
- Media and competition regulators' annual reports, esp. market concentration monitoring reports
- Investigations on funding / ownership / polit-economy links by independent journalists or CSOs
- Web statistics for traffic and reach (SimilarWeb, Semrush, etc.)
- Insiders' information (informal talks/interviews)
- Legislation process (minutes and transcripts from public hearings / discussion in the parliamentary committees and the hall)

Sources of information (2)

- Information about appointments / dismisses of personnel
- Media freedoms rankings and analyses
- Media (incl. social media) monitoring data – to uncover the networks of influence, related to media (groups)

Analysing media capture

- National media system
- Current public discourse – how is the role of media discussed:
 - Focus on discourse, not on policy (it could be captured)
 - Focus on future policy options
- Analysing the 4-components of media capture model



Thank you!