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**What we talk about when we talk about “media independence”**

Media independence is a central normative principle in media policy. Like many other such notions, it is also a contested concept that carries different meanings and connotations. In different contexts, from debates on the position of media in authoritarian societies, to the status of European public service broadcasters, and to “indie” music and film, independence is understood differently by various actors.

Independence can be debated on many levels, and linked to a variety of theoretical frameworks. On the level of social theory, media independence links, for example, to a Habermasian ideal of autonomy from the systemic forces of state and economic power. On a more practical level, independence is valued both as a principle of journalistic professionalism and as an organizational guideline for media institutions. The conceptual contestation over what independence means is highly topical in European media policy right now. At both European and national levels, commercial actors have actively sought to reframe the distinction between “independent”, commercial media and public service media as “state media”. In parallel, the decline of traditional newspapers and the new aspects of control and dependence, brought about by the role of Google, Facebook and their algorithmic filtering, have also reheated the question of what we actually mean by media independence.

In this paper, we (a) analyse the uses of the notion of independence in current European media policy discourse, and (b) attempt to develop a more fine-tuned understanding of the different dimensions that the notion contains in contemporary media environment. We argue that critical media policy research needs conceptual clarity, not least in terms of from what and for whom we declare independence.