[NL] Report of the Dutch Media Authority on the transparency and independence of Dutch media

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For 25 years the Commissariaat voor de Media (the Dutch Media Authority) has been the monitor of the Dutch media sector, seeking to safeguard its pluralistic and independent character. An annual report, called Mediamonitor, gives insights into the sector's latest trends, media corporations and markets (for previous reports see IRIS 2015-1/34, IRIS 2011-5/35 and IRIS 2006-1/33). The latest report, published on 23 November 2015, mainly focuses on two themes: the independence of the media and the transparency of media institutions. Subsequently, it highlights some specific trends shown by contemporary media developments.

Though media independence is one of the core values within the Dutch democracy, the Authority's research has shown increasing pressure on the independence of media editors and reporters. As financial ressources decline - especially for newspapers - the pressure imposed by commercial organisations is expected to rise. Thereby, media concentration will keep intensifying, which could also affect independence.

Transparency in the media sector can as well be seen as a central topic within the supervising tasks of the Dutch Media Authority. The report highlights how Dutch media corporations increasingly tend to develop into multimedia corporations, focusing simultaneously on, for instance, television, online services and web shops. Internationally operating media corporations enjoy an increase in revenue, whereas nationally operating corporations experience the opposite. The latter do not yet seem to keep pace with new market players like Netflix, who successfully utilise new digital possibilities through the local applications of their global services.

An important trend acknowledged in the report is the rapidly growing influence and use of YouTube. In particular, younger age groups are highly attracted by the platform and the amount of YouTube channels and subscriptions is constantly increasing. The Mediamonitor reports on how this development is of specific interest to advertisement industries, since commercial messages that cannot be broadcasted via regular television may easily reach the target audience through specific YouTube channels.

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The YouTube trend relates to the more general conclusion that increasing numbers of users are consuming audiovisual content online. The report shows 91% of the Dutch population makes use of the Internet, mostly by using a laptop. It is expected that the smartphone will overtake this role in the coming year. Surprisingly, the amount of time people spend on watching television has increased with 5 minutes a day. Nevertheless, the average time spent on listening to the radio has decreased from 184 to 175 minutes a day.

In anticipation of future trends, the Dutch Media Authority is translating the notion of pluralism into one of their core values. This motivation derives from the ongoing diminution of newspaper editions, especially at the local and regional level. As local and regional press tends to lose its significance, this results in a less well-informed society - a crucial element for a healthy democracy.

With regard to pluralism in relation to television, the report concludes with research on the diversity of TV packages and the general level of consumer satisfaction. Acquisitions in the television media sector show how growing corporations tend to dominate the market, which could negatively influence its pluralistic character. Nevertheless, the average consumer score for diversity is deemed acceptable; probably due to the fact digital TV packages offer a high number of channels.

Commissariaat voor de Media, Mediamonitor: mediabedrijven en mediamarkten 2014-2015, november 2015

http://www.mediamonitor.nl/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Mediamonitor-Mediabedrijven-en-Mediamarkten-2014-2015.pdf

Dutch Media Authority, Mediamonitor: media companies and markets 2014-2015, November 2015

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