

Read the introduction to Who Owns the Media?

'What does it mean to have a 'free' media when the nation's TV channels, news outlets, radio stations, search engines and social media platforms are owned by a handful of giant corporations? What does it mean to have 'independent media' when many of our most influential media organisations are controlled by individuals and Boards that are so closely connected with vested interests? This short report shows that just three companies dominate 71% of the national newspaper market – a market that may be shrinking but is still crucial when it comes to setting the agenda for the rest of the news media. When online readers are included, just five companies dominate some 80% of market share. In the area of local news, six giant conglomerates account for 80% of all titles while the 50-plus publishers have less than 20% of the remaining titles. We are facing an increasing number of news deserts given the fact that 36 million UK citizens – some 57% of the total population - do not have a local daily paper that is able to dedicate itself to matters of concern to their community. And where there is still a local press presence, some 85% of local government areas are faced with a monopoly or duopoly supply of local outlets. Sky, effectively controlled by Rupert Murdoch's 21st Century Fox empire, is by far the UK's biggest broadcaster and continues to dominate the pay TV landscape. ITV is making huge profits on the back of its format sales and faces fewer and fewer obligations to serve domestic audiences. Meanwhile, Channel 5 is already owned by a US giant, Viacom International, and there are constant rumours that the government is keen to sell off Channel 4 to the highest bidder. Two companies have nearly 40% of all commercial local analogue radio licences and control two thirds of all commercial digital stations. Only 14% of non-BBC stations are now independently owned while radio news is provided either by the BBC or by Sky. Is the internet any different to this? UK search is overwhelmingly dominated by Google while the most popular apps like Instagram and WhatsApp are owned by Facebook, itself by far the most popular social media site. The BBC remains a powerful presence in broadcasting and online but its budget has been severely cut by the last two licence fee deals, its independence has been undermined, and it is increasingly being told by government to be mindful of its impact on the wider commercial market. We believe that concentration within news and information markets in particular has reached endemic levels in the UK and that we urgently need effective remedies. This kind of concentration creates conditions in which wealthy individuals and organisations can amass huge political and economic power and distort the media landscape to suit their interests and personal views. Urgent reform is needed in order for both to address high levels of concentration in particular media markets and to protect against further concentration in others. We hope that this report will provide data and arguments that will be useful to groups and individuals who want to see a far more pluralistic media structure in which a genuine diversity of views, voices and opinions are aired.

Introduction from:

Who owns the UK Media? Published by the Media Reform Coalition

The full article can be accessed here http://www.mediareform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Who_owns_the_UK_media-report_plus_appendix1.pdf

Questions

1. What is meant by 'vested interests' in line 4?
2. What percentage of non BBC radio stations are independently owned?
3. What is the most popular social media site?
4. What does the writer mean when they say '... that concentration within news and information markets in particular has reached endemic levels'?
5. What is the consequence of the concentration identified in question 4?