



Ivane Sekhniashvili

Doctor of Philology, Affiliated Professor

New Higher Education -NEWUNI

FEATURES OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA

Abstract

Does media truly possess autonomy, or does genuine independence characterize its functioning? Responding to this query proves to be a formidable task, notwithstanding our extensive experience across diverse television platforms. From our perspective, the concept of independent media remains elusive, and we shall endeavor to elucidate the intricate reasons behind the inherent challenges that impede the attainment of complete autonomy by media entities.

The growth of social networks throughout the world has enhanced the necessity of objective information, not just important information, because it is in this “space” that fake news spreads so effectively that the interested individual is readily duped. However, it is now possible and extremely simple to check bogus news, using television and radio as examples.

In our opinion, no media, including “independent” television, can be free, because it has an owner, sponsor, financier, etc. That is, you, as a hired person, in this case the television, and also “independent”, must carry out his/her or their policy. This is no longer freedom, or even independence. Televisions dependent on the founders’ money will face serious problems in terms of stability. If someone thinks that it is no longer worth pouring millions into television, the channel instantly ceases to exist.

Key words: independents media, fake news, bias.

Does media truly possess autonomy, or does genuine independence characterize its functioning? Responding to this query proves to be a formidable task, notwithstanding our extensive experience across diverse television platforms. From our perspective, the concept of independent media remains elusive, and we shall endeavor to elucidate the intricate reasons behind the inherent challenges that impede the attainment of complete autonomy by media entities.

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For a nation like Georgia, the significance of verified and objective information cannot be overstated. Such information stands as a linchpin for stable development and the realization of true democracy. While it’s acknowledged that online media is rapidly advancing, with various state apparatuses contributing to its evolution, the role of television, as per our observations, is poised to remain profoundly significant for an extended period. In our estimation, only media unencumbered by external influences can furnish TV viewers with information that is objective, impartial, and accurate.

As the digital landscape continues to evolve, the importance of television persists due to its pervasive influence and reach across diverse demographics. The observation holds that the integrity of information disseminated through television is crucial for the informed citizenry and, consequently, for the democratic fabric of the country.

In a parallel drawn to business dynamics, the analogy is evident: a model where customer satisfaction is contingent upon the quality of the offered product or service. In the media realm, this aligns with the

principle that only free and independent media can deliver content of the highest quality — content that is devoid of undue influences, political bias, or commercial interests. This fidelity to accuracy and impartiality is imperative to retaining the trust of the audience. Just as in business, where a decline in product quality may lead to a loss of clientele and, consequently, a reduction in revenue, the same principle holds for media.

According to our observations, the civic sector and TVs play an essential role in raising the knowledge of Georgians. This is significant because society is required to be aware of its rights. The TV viewer should know exactly how to respond when dealing with this or that problem. Raising public awareness following telecasts should also be vital in satisfying public interest in challenging problems. It is more necessary that society faces a significant task; on the contrary, it should occur and educate the media on numerous concerns, and television should express and cover these subjects in an intelligible way.

Viewers and televisions complement each other in raising awareness. Community organizations provide education, while television provides unbiased information to its viewers about issues of public interest, concern, and personal concern. Television is obliged to provide the viewers with necessary and most importantly interesting information. In this case, it is the responsibility of both the viewer and the television to provide objective, unbiased and verified information to the interested party.

According to our observation, the main problem is that in all countries, including Georgia, a large part of TV stations is politicized. Political parties, we mean the position as well as the opposition, are not interested in incomes, expenses, advertising time, etc. At this time, the most important thing for them is the political agenda.

We find interesting the article published by Radio Liberty on March 01, 2022 “No more Facebook, no Tiktok, no more YouTube - the Kremlin’s media is blocked all over Europe”, which quite well and clearly describes the situation that took place in our time, in front of our eyes, just a short time ago.

This is what Radio Liberty published on its website: “Following the footsteps of European regulators, social networks are also blocking Kremlin-controlled media - RT and Sputnik. At this time, all Russian media outlets are prohibited from calling the ongoing war in Ukraine a war. Europeans will no longer see RT and Sputnik tickers. In the wake of the ongoing war in Ukraine, like the Chinese giant, YouTube and Facebook have blocked access to Russian state media for European users. Facebook’s Nick Clegg tweeted today that “a number of governments and the European Union have asked us to take additional measures against Russian state-controlled media. Considering the extraordinary nature of the situation, this time we will limit access to RT and Sputnik in the entire territory of the European Union. A day before the social media decision, EU President Ursula von der Leyen announced that both media outlets would be banned from broadcasting in the entire EU. “[They] will no longer be able to spread lies to justify Putin’s war.” We are working on tools to block their toxic and harmful disinformation in Europe,” he tweeted. Kremlin media websites may also be blocked. At the same time, Google stopped monetizing RT. Which means they can no longer get paid for advertising on their content.

“Ministry of Truth”

Founded in 2005, RT broadcasts on television frequencies and on the Internet in English, German, French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian. RT’s YouTube channel has over 6 million subscribers.

Numerous studies have shown that television broadcasts fake news, conspiracy theories and distorts facts in favor of Moscow’s political interests.

“Sputnik” news agency works in 31 languages. Among them, in Georgian. EU and US authorities, international organizations and other media have repeatedly accused it of spreading fake news.

Several Baltic and Eastern European countries have already banned Kremlin media. Even before the war, there were calls in the UK and the EU for RT to stop broadcasting. European regulators cited “unbalanced editorial policy” as the reason for this.

In an assessment of French-language RT on February 7, Maxim Odinet, a representative of the country’s military ministry’s Center for Strategic Studies, said that international news is usually reported

impartially. However, when it comes to issues important to Russia's foreign policy, "the coverage becomes biased and often even manipulative."

An Unprecedented Step

Unlike Russia, the EU must go through legal procedures before shutting down the Kremlin's media outlets. The point is that blocking a media outlet in the entire territory of the European Union is an unprecedented step. Until now, media regulatory decisions of all 27 member countries were made independently.

Vera Jourova, the European Commission's vice-president for values and transparency, is confident that the EU will soon find a solution.

"We need to look at the events more broadly and not concentrate only on [them]," he told Politico, "Kremlin has turned information into a weapon." Disinformation is a part of Russian military doctrine, as well as influence operations abroad." This initiative has its critics. Some of them claim that whether they are propaganda or not, both RT and Sputnik are still media outlets. Banning them is a "dangerous precedent" for restricting freedom of speech. In addition, the Europeans are also thinking about Russia's possible response. They do not rule out that the Kremlin will intensify the pressure on independent media outlets, or ban them altogether. As a result, the Russian population will remain in an information vacuum. Digital policy analyst Julien Noquet tells "Politico" that there are a number of prerequisites for this.

In early February, Germany's media regulator suspended RT's license. In response, the German "Deutsche Welle" was banned in Russia. Since the war began, the Kremlin has increasingly restricted the free flow of information in Russia. A few days ago, "Roskomnadzor" slowed down the work of Facebook, Twitter and other social networks in order to prevent the "spreading of disinformation about the war".¹

Television has a great influence on its viewers. Based on our experience, we can even say that especially television can have a psychological effect on a person. For example, it is television that has the ability to very easily create an image of this or that person for its viewers, create a positive or negative opinion about it. Also, what the viewer could not believe until now, this or that issue can even be considered as an acceptable story after the story presented on television. We have talked about disinformation many times in different articles. Once again, we would like to emphasize this issue, which in our opinion has not been resolved or could not be resolved despite many efforts. This problem is especially in regions where information verification is difficult due to various circumstances.

A seemingly innocuous phrase uttered on television, which we hear almost every day in the recent period, if we carefully observe and analyze it, contributes to the formation of hate speech. It is television that can develop the thinking of the TV viewer or, on the contrary, decrease it. Time will tell us what difficulties the language of hate has created and what more the TV viewers of today will reap. We can really wish that television should be objective, impartial and independent. And this is on the conscience of their owners, especially private televisions at this time.

The website millab.ge also publishes interesting information about the transparency of media ownership and funding:

"In a democratic society, transparency of media ownership and funding are essential tools for strong pluralism. A broad understanding of media pluralism includes, among other things, an economic dimension, which may create risks of interference with the editorial independence of media outlets and their functioning. Complete information on ownership and funding sources allows us to assess the viability of the media market and determine the extent to which editorial decisions are influenced by political and economic interests, including media owners and advertisers.

Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)xx of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe "On Media Pluralism and Transparency of Media Ownership" establishes special criteria for member states in order to ensure the transparency of the funding sources of media publications and to promote the increase of media accountability. The Council of Europe calls on the member states to adopt and implement

¹ <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31730494.html>

legislation that would impose the obligation to disclose the following information: about media revenue sources, including state and other funding mechanisms, as well as (state) advertising; Regarding existing structural or contractual cooperation with other media or advertising companies, political parties or the state, including in relation to state-ordered advertising.

The guidelines developed by the Council of Europe provide several recommendations for member states on how to make media information available to the public, including by integrating relevant provisions into local legislation.

Guiding principle #1: Public access to information about the media: “This should be done in a way that protects the rights and legitimate interests of persons or bodies that have an obligation to be transparent by law. Particular attention should be paid to balancing the obligation of transparency with the principle of freedom of trade and industry, as well as with respect to data protection, protection of commercial secrets, confidentiality of media information sources and protection of editorial secrets.”

At the same time, the prerequisite for the development of such legislation implies the existence of different regulations and policies for different types of media (broadcast, print and online media). According to the recommendation, the limit of obligations can be determined taking into account such factors as the commercial character of the media, access to a wide audience, implementation of editorial control, frequency and systematicity of publication or broadcast, etc.¹

In our opinion, no media, including “independent” television, can be free, because it has an owner, sponsor, financier, etc. That is, you, as a hired person, in this case the television, and also “independent”, must carry out its policy. This is no longer freedom, or even independence. Televisions that are dependent on the founders’ money will face serious problems in terms of stability. If someone thinks that it is no longer worth pouring millions into television, the channel ceases to exist in an instant. This is what happened, and as an example we can cite the first independent television station in Georgia, “Ibervizia”, which stopped working in the “dark 90s”.

In summary, the hallmark of “independent television” lies in the conscientious implementation of policies by sponsors, be they business representatives or others. It hinges on their judicious utilization of sponsored channels and broadcasting platforms. The key criterion for ascertaining the independence of television stations is their commitment to allowing representatives the freedom to objectively, impartially, and equitably convey and disseminate information. When sponsors refrain from imposing undue influence or biases, permitting the authentic transmission of information, it is then plausible to assert the existence of truly “independent television.” This commitment fosters an environment where journalistic integrity prevails, upholding the principles of transparency and reliability in the dissemination of news and information.

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¹ <http://millab.ge/ka/mil-resources/any/23/any/>