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Received: January, 2015
1st Revision: April, 2015
Accepted: May, 2015

DOI: 10.14254/2071-789X.2015/8-1/17

BUSINESS INFLUENCE ON MEDIA NEWS PROCESSING: A COMPARISON OF JOURNALISTS' PERCEPTIONS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND SOUTH AFRICA

Abstract. How do journalists in two formerly authoritarian countries, the Czech Republic and South Africa, perceive the potential of media owners and other business people to influence their work? Multinomial ordinal regression analysis was applied to data collected in the Czech Republic and South Africa for the present 50 country-wide Worlds of Journalism (WoJ) Project. A total of 291 journalists in the Czech Republic and 371 journalists in South Africa were interviewed according to the WoJ protocol. Three aspects of media freedom, as perceived by the respondents, are discussed, namely the freedom journalists have to select news stories; to emphasize certain news aspects; and to participate in editorial discussion and decision making (news coordination). The results suggest that media owners as well as business people curb, but also support, journalists' freedom in dealing with the news. In the Czech Republic, a country in the global North and a former member of the Soviet bloc, the results show the influence of media owners and business owners supports the freedom of journalists in selecting their own stories. More influence of business people is associated with more freedom of journalists in aspects emphasized in the stories and in the frequency the journalists participate in newsroom coordination. In South Africa, a former white minority-ruled country in the global South, the results suggest that the influence of media owners seems to lessen journalists' freedom to select news and to emphasize certain news aspects, and coordination. Moreover, the perceived level of influence of business people in South Africa did not statistically significantly relate to all three aspects of journalists' freedom.

Keywords: media economics, business ownership, freedom of press, Czech Republic, South Africa, news selection

JEL Classifications: L82, M20, P12, P26

Introduction

A long standing research issue in journalism and media studies is the influence, real or perceived, that media owners and businesses in general have on media freedom, more specifically on journalists' agency to select news stories; to emphasize certain news aspects and to participate in editorial discussion and decision making (news coordination) (e.g. Price, 2003; or Gilensa and Hertzman, 2000).

The interaction between business people and the media has been a standing topic of research, not the least because the results could also be of interest to business people and not only the academic sphere (see Tejkalová et al., 2015). For example, Dougal et al. (2012) used exogenous scheduling of *Wall Street Journal* columnists to identify a causal relationship between financial reporting and stock market performance. Moreover, it appears that more experienced, more trusted and reportedly independent journalists tend to have more influence over the stock market behavior (Li, 2014).

The research question this paper addresses deal with the same question, but this time within the context of two formally authoritarian countries, the Czech Republic and South Africa, namely: How do journalists in these two countries perceive the potential of media owners and other business people to influence their work? Could one expect the situation in the two countries to be more or less the same after democratic independence was obtained in late 20th century?

A fundamental question is of course whether one can compare the two previously authoritarian countries within the context of media freedom? The Czech Republic (then Czechoslovakia) was a Socialist country with a command economy and thorough and total control over mass media exerted by the ruling Communist Party, while South Africa was a well-functioning market economy, but distorted by its racial policy of apartheid and clampdowns on the free flow of information.

Although the political change to a democratic dispensation happened in both countries roughly at the same time (1989 in the Czech case, and 1994 in the case of South Africa), the nature of the changes was relatively different. In the case of South Africa, there was the change to black majority rule, with most of the structures of private property and market economy remaining for a time more or less the same. It was only after Nelson Mandela did not seek a second term that the full weight of the state came to bear on a change towards a socialist form of government, including black economic empowerment and affirmative action in all walks of life (see e.g. Wasserman and de Beer, 2010). In the case of the Czech Republic there was a profound change of everything, with all formal and informal institutions included in the process (see e.g. Tejkalová et al., 2015).

What both countries had specifically in common was the change of the people at the top. All of a sudden, freedom fighters, without any particular political experience or background in national governance, found themselves ruling a country. At first, they were sympathetically supported with mistakes being swept under the carpet of international political public opinion. However, as time passed, governments in both countries became corrupt, greedy for power, and more than willing to limit the freedom of speech and mass media. As a result, they increased pressure on journalists to toe the official line. On top of the pressure experienced from the state, journalists also had to cope with the influence (real or perceived) media owners and the business sector exerted. The broad topic of this paper is then the way journalists in the Czech Republic and South Africa, both former authoritarian countries, the first being part of the global north and the second of the global south, perceive these influences.

Media ownership

Comparisons between media ownership in the two countries should be approached with caution. In the Czech Republic, there are only two types of ownership; either private or public (Chart 1). In South Africa, the types are multiple and include mixtures of the various types (Chart 2).

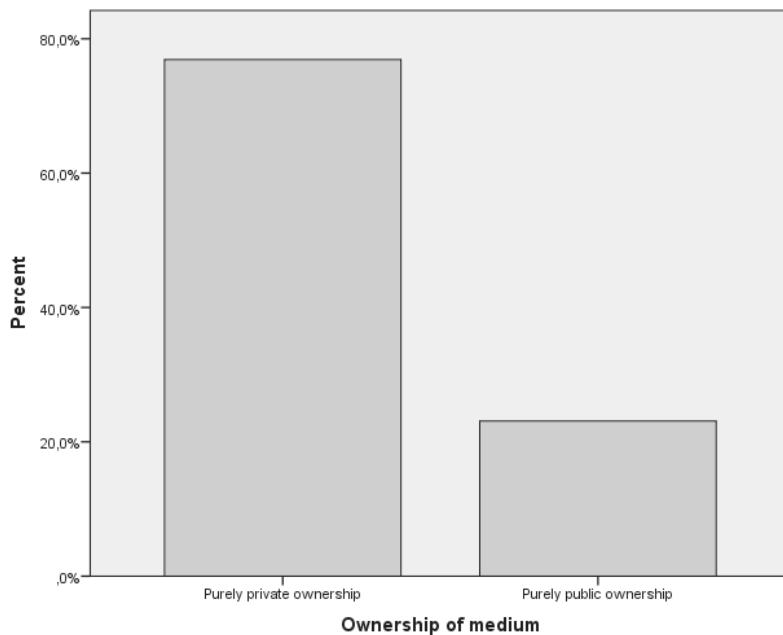


Chart 1. Mass media ownership structure in the Czech Republic

Source: Own results.

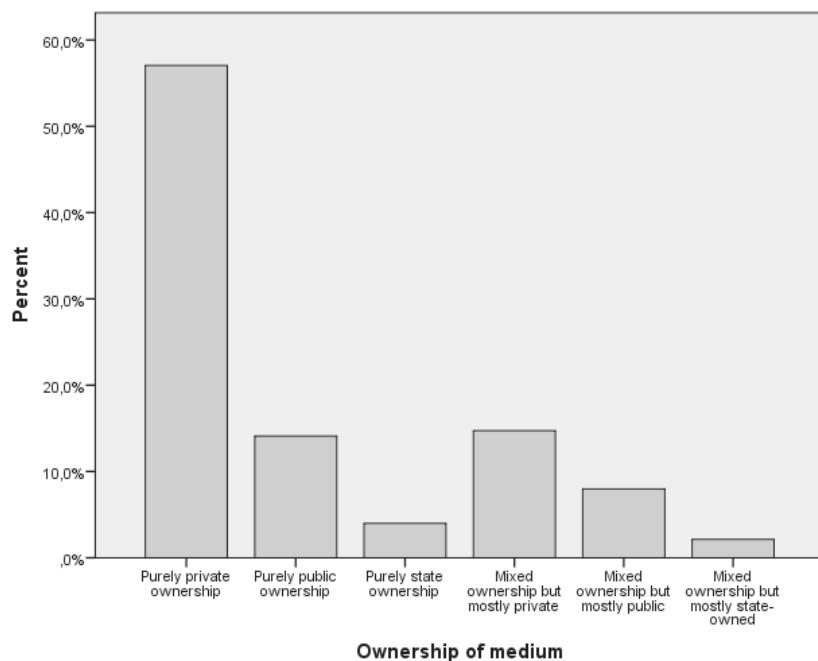


Chart 2. Mass media ownership structure in South Africa

Source: Own results.

While no state ownership was reported in the Czech Republic, there is a difference between state ownership and public ownership in South Africa (see Chart 2). It appears that local specifics and traditions might pre-dispose the level of control and business influence over the mass media. The reported differences are also influenced by the historical development within the different types of economic systems.

This paper is structured as follows: The next section provides a short literature review on the business influence of mass media, followed by a section that presents the data employed in this project. The following section outlines the empirical model, its main methods and specifics, as well as reports the model results and discusses their implications. Finally, the last section provides main conclusions and policy implications for both the Czech Republic and South Africa, as well as further research.

Business influence and mass media: a literature review

Business influence on the press in particular, and mass media in general, can be noted in the way that money, presents, and freebies, or the use of manifest or latent force can directly or indirectly influence journalists in their coverage of the business environment. This approach is *inter alia* described in case studies in third-world countries such as Cameroon, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Zimbabwe (see e.g. Ndangam 2006; Lodamo and Skjerdal 2009; Kasoma 2007; Mawindi Mabweazara 2011; or Hanitzsch 2005), and in former East-European countries such as the Czech Republic (Tejkalová et al., 2015).

Indirect influence of business in mass media news coverage in Western economies and post-transition economies has also been researched. For instance Čábelková et al. (2015) describe the influence of business owners and business people on mass media in 21 countries using the data collected at the Worlds of Journalism Study (WoJ) project. Muggli et al. (2004) report on the efforts of Philip Morris to gain control over the mass media in United States and some EU countries to soften the results of the US EPA report related to passive smoking. Moreover, Goldacre (2007) or Keeble (2008) describe the conflict of interest that journalists in developed Western democracies have when covering medical and pharmaceutical issues. De Beer (2010) describes the changes in the news coverage in media that was brought about by the democratization in some African countries.

The second approach to measuring the influence of business over the news media, namely ownership, is more complicated. Basically, the question arises: If someone owns one or more news media, can she or he yield any influence on what is being reported in that media?

The research literature on the business influence of mass media is vast. In general, researchers agree that the media ownership factor might play a decisive role, not just in asserting influence over the media, but also on the political and economic situation in the country through the way the particular median has a direct or indirect influence on the mass media coverage of business: (see Williams 2005; Stańczyk 2011; Tejkalová et al., 2015; or Koudelková et al., 2015). Houston et al. (2011) show that state ownership of media might be associated with bank corruption. It also appears that state control of mass media ownership might contribute to the increase in corruption (directly or indirectly) (see Koudelková et al., 2015). Moreover, Cushion (2007), Waters et al. (2011), Čábelková et al. (2015) show that both media business owners and editors might also abuse their influence over news processing by shifting the deadlines for the important media events, or changing the employment status and the remuneration of journalists. In many countries, freedom of state control by mass media is associated with the trust the general public and journalists would have in the state and various public institutions (Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Hanitzsch and Berganza 2012; Čábelková and Strielkowski, 2013). Research con- ducted

in various countries showed that a concentration of media ownership by private businesses caused the decline in the freedom and independence of press in those countries. This is of special importance and relevance for such “problematic” countries as Ukraine, Turkey, Hong Kong, or Saudi Arabia for freedom of the media is under constant pressure (e.g. Ryabinska 2011; Christensen 2007; So and Chan 2007; Cochrane 2007; Bilan and Bilan, 2011).

Generally, it appears that business owners are capable of influencing the freedom of speech by influencing the media they control, even though modus operandi in practice might differ from country to country.

The data

The Czech and South African data used for this paper was collected as part of the present Worlds of Journalism (WoJ) Study (2013-2015). The project covers journalists' perceptions of their work and their professional roles in about 50 countries in all the regions of the world (www.worldsofjournalism.org).

Within the framework of this project, 291 journalists in the Czech Republic and 371 respondents in South Africa were interviewed. The concept “news media” in the case of WoJ was limited to media organizations that have their own news program or news section (e.g. radio stations that broadcast music only were not considered to be news media per se). Journalists were defined as people earning at least 50 percent of their income from news media and being involved in producing and editing journalistic content. The WoJ project primarily focused on the differences in journalism cultures. Various indicators of perceived influence were calculated, including the influence of the business community and media owners; overtime, hours spent or work or investigative reporting, hidden influence and bribery. The following biographical data was also covered: age, gender, professional experience, education level, political leaning; type of employment, and audience size.

Empirical model: methods, specifics, and main results

In our study, we aim to assess the relation between the subjective influence of owners and business community and perceived autonomy of journalists in selecting stories, aspects emphasized, and ability to participate in editorial coordination.

Multinomial ordinal regression that is expressed in the form or the multinomial logit model belongs to the class of the binary response models. The Multinomial logit model uses the logistic cumulative distribution function which is considered to be more realistic in the majority of situations and uses the classification method that generalizes logistic regression to multiclass problems with more than two possible discrete outcomes. The Multinomial logit model are used to predict the probabilities of the different possible outcomes of a categorically distributed dependent variable, given a set of independent variables (e.g. real-valued, binary-valued, categorical-valued, etc.). The model can be presented in the following general form:

$$P(y = i|x) = \frac{\exp(\beta_0 + \beta_i x)}{1 + \sum_{j=1}^k \exp(\beta_0 + \beta_j x)} \quad (1)$$

where P is the probability of our discrete variables assuming the value from 1 to 4 (depending on the type of response of the respondents and signifying various types of autonomy (autonomy in selecting stories, emphasized aspects of autonomy, and autonomy to participate in editorial coordination and co-decision), and β are coefficients of various variables used in our model. Respecting the importance of magnitudes, the main task of the model is to estimate the signs

of each effect with the highest possible robustness. In order to obtain consistent estimates results the selection of independent variables was carried out gradually and tested using the Likeli-hood-Ratio test which the substitutes test for multiple restrictions of parameters within limited dependent variables model.

In our case, the dependent variable represents the Likert-scale type answer of the type almost always (1) rather often (2), sometimes (3), or rather rarely (4), while the independent variables are represented by the binary (dummy) variables or numerical variables yielding various technical, demographic and business characteristics. Table 1 shows the results of the multinomial logit model for the Czech Republic and SA.

Table 1: Results of multinomial logit model – autonomy in selecting stories

	Autonomy in selecting stories		CZ		SA		
	Estimate	Std. Errof	Sig.	Estimate	Std. Errof	Sig	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Threshold = 1					-62,043	45,596	,174
Threshold = 2	-42,482	59,298	,474	-60,483	45,592	,185	
Threshold = 3	-38,017	59,277	,521	-58,627	45,586	,198	
Threshold = 4	-35,439	59,263	,550	-55,076	45,558	,227	
Influence owners	,253*	,144	,079	-,431***	,118	,000	
Influence businesses	,260	,198	,189	,050	,127	,695	
Number of newsrooms worked for	,240	,332	,469	,097	,088	,270	
Roles: report things as they are	-,005	,008	,554	,534***	,197	,007	
Years working in journalism	-,117	,693	,867	-,019	,027	,489	
Age	,017	,040	,672	-,028	,023	,215	
Political stance	-,019	,030	,514	,035	,090	,696	
Religion: importance	,056	,101	,577	,139	,104	,181	
Salary	,281*	,169	,097	,020	,079	,799	
Reach of medium	,189	,151	,209	-,195	,149	,190	
education	-,934***	,287	,001	-,225	,292	,441	
Editor in chief	,046	,159	,770	2,176***	,793	,006	
Managing editor	-1,217	1,209	,314	1,829**	,746	,014	
Desk head or assignment editor	-1,289	1,337	,335	,507	,589	,389	
Department head	-1,181	1,114	,289	2,460***	,733	,001	
Senior editor	-,184	1,170	,875	,360	,567	,525	
Producer	-1,339	1,218	,272	,423	,689	,539	
Reporter	-,717	,933	,442	-,016	,480	,973	
News writer	-,812	,994	,414	-,821	,738	,266	
Trainee				,264	1,130	,815	
specialist	,894**	,433	,039	,627*	,354	,076	
Female	,066	,359	,855	-,547*	,299	,067	
Purely private ownership	,765	,582	,189	-2,822*	1,469	,055	
Purely public ownership				-2,457	1,513	,104	
Purely state ownership				-2,237	1,595	,161	
Mixed ownership but mostly private				-2,842*	1,491	,057	
Mixed ownership but mostly public				-2,763*	1,509	,067	
Senior/executive manager	,880	,805	,274	,887	,549	,106	
„Junior“ manager	-,691	,708	,329	,579	,439	,188	

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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
N		144			240		
Sig.		0,01			0,000		
Cox and Snell		0,313			,349		
Nagelkerke		0,35			,385		
McFadden		0,167			,182		

Note: Reference variables: occupation – other, generalist, male, purely public ownership (for CZ), Mixed ownership but mostly state-owned (for SA), rank: rank and file; * sig. < 0,10, ** sig. < 0,05, ***sig. < 0,01

Source: Own results.

The results of the first multinomial logit model show the main differences for the two countries. In the case of the Czech Republic, it appears that the *more* influential the Czech media owners are, the *more* autonomy in selecting stories the Czech journalists would have. In the case of South Africa, the results show that the *more* influential the mass media business owners are, the *less* autonomy in selecting stories the South African journalists tend to have.

Table 2 reports the results of the next logit model that reflects the emphasized aspects of autonomy and independence of mass media in both countries. The results are once again different: In the case of the Czech Republic, the *more* influential the business owners are, the *more* autonomy in aspects emphasized in the news the Czech journalists would have. In the case of South Africa, the results show that the *more* influential the owners, the *less* autonomy the South African journalists would have.

Table 2: Results of multinomial logit model – emphasized autonomy

Emphasized aspects of autonomy	CZ			SA		
	Estimate	Std. Error	Sig.	Estimate	Std. Error	Sig.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Threshold = 1				-49,342	42,083	,241
Threshold = 2	-43,528	59,504	,464	-46,869	42,074	,265
Threshold = 3	-40,622	59,490	,495	-45,020	42,067	,285
Threshold = 4	-37,783	59,474	,525	-42,478	42,055	,312
Influence owners	-,014	,142	,921	-,343***	,110	,002
Influence businesses	,381*	,201	,058	-,003	,120	,979
Number of newsrooms worked for	-,181	,322	,574	,014	,081	,865
Roles: report things as they are	-,002	,008	,762	,615***	,190	,001
Years working in journalism	-1,126*	,664	,090	,013	,025	,608
Age	,047	,040	,244	-,023	,021	,272
Political stance	-,017	,030	,576	,018	,085	,832
Religion: importance	-,199**	,102	,052	,143	,097	,143
Salary	,050	,168	,765	-,047	,073	,518
Reach of medium	,280*	,151	,065	-,197	,139	,158
education	-1,050***	,286	,000	-,136	,274	,621
Editor in chief	,134	,160	,401	1,465**	,721	,042
Managing editor	-,335	1,202	,780	2,050***	,712	,004
Desk head or assignment editor	-1,416	1,337	,290	1,211**	,553	,029
Department head	,072	1,079	,947	1,379**	,653	,035
Senior editor	-,343	1,170	,770	,967*	,528	,067
Producer	-,816	1,202	,497	,499	,639	,435
Reporter	-,877	,921	,341	,173	,451	,701

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
News writer		-1,151	,991	,245	-,299	,706	,672
Trainee		-5,329*	1,956	,006	-,942	1,071	,379
specialist		,662	,425	,120	,399	,327	,223
Female		-,064	,355	,858	-,188	,273	,491
Purely private ownership		,618	,575	,282	-,312	1,070	,771
Purely public ownership					,299	1,112	,788
Purely state ownership					-,158	1,231	,898
Mixed ownership but mostly private					-,111	1,102	,920
Mixed ownership but mostly public					,080	1,119	,943
Senior/executive manager		-,655	,791	,408	,402	,506	,426
„Junior” manager		-,700	,702	,318	,153	,408	,708
N		145			241		
Sig.		0,026			0,000		
Cox and Snell		,244			,265		
Nagelkerke		,274			,289		
McFadden		,127			,123		

Note: Reference variables: occupation – other, generalist, male, purely public ownership (for CZ), Mixed ownership but mostly state-owned (for SA), rank: rank and file; * sig. < 0,10, ** sig. < 0,05, ***sig. < 0,01

Source: Own results.

Table 3 reports the results of the third multinomial logit model that measures the autonomy to participate in editorial coordination reported by the journalists in the Czech Republic and South Africa.

Table 3: Results of multinomial logit model – editorial coordination

Autonomy to participate in editorial coordination	CZ				SA	
	Estimate	Std. Error	Sig.	Estimate	Std. Error	Sig.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Threshold = 1	-130,419**	61,908	,035	64,199	40,372	,112
Threshold = 2	-129,428**	61,897	,037	65,281	40,377	,106
Threshold = 3	-127,803**	61,870	,039	66,260	40,383	,101
Threshold = 4	-126,541**	61,853	,041	68,206*	40,396	,091
Influence owners	,108	,139	,440	-,051	,107	,635
Influence businesses	,353*	,201	,078	-,136	,120	,257
Number of newsrooms worked for	-,167	,308	,586	-,161**	,077	,038
Roles: report things as they are	,008	,009	,401	-,139	,195	,475
Years working in journalism	-,858	,653	,189	,023	,024	,340
Age	-,037	,041	,361	,034*	,020	,090
Political stance	-,064**	,031	,040	,058	,086	,494
Religion: importance	,071	,102	,484	,150	,096	,118
Salary	-,007	,161	,963	,160**	,073	,028
Reach of medium education	,078	,142	,584	-,088	,137	,522
	-,413	,260	,112	-,479*	,273	,079

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Editor in chief	-,143	,162	,375	2,903***	,809	,000
Managing editor	2,619**	1,252	,036	2,170***	,701	,002
Desk head or assignment editor	3,161**	1,552	,042	3,024***	,644	,000
Department head	1,156	1,015	,255	1,850***	,659	,005
Senior editor	2,524**	1,144	,027	,969*	,511	,058
Producer	1,704	1,139	,135	,227	,613	,711
Reporter	,411	,864	,635	,798*	,443	,071
News writer	-,083	,923	,929	-,256	,687	,709
Trainee specialist	,380	,408	,351	-,518	,322	,107
Female	,159	,349	,649	-,409	,273	,133
Purely private ownership	,815	,550	,139	-,807	1,174	,492
Purely public ownership				-,405	1,214	,739
Purely state ownership				-,783	1,310	,550
Mixed ownership but mostly private				-,282	1,199	,814
Mixed ownership but mostly public				-,517	1,219	,672
Senior/executive manager	1,251	,799	,117	,791	,503	,115
„Junior“ manager	,798	,700	,254	1,265*	,409	,002
N	145			241		
Sig.	,000			,000		
Cox and Snell	,491			,392		
Nagelkerke	,513			,412		
McFadden	,216			,164		

Note: Reference variables: occupation – other, generalist, male, purely public ownership (for CZ), Mixed ownership but mostly state-owned (for SAR), * sig. < 0,10, ** sig. < 0,05, ***sig. < 0,01

Source: Own results.

For the Czech Republic, the results show that the *more* influential the business owners of mass media are, the *more* autonomy in participation in editorial coordination the Czech journalists tend to have. In the case of South Africa, the results turned out to be inconclusive and insignificant.

Overall, the perceived level of influence of business people in South Africa did not statistically significantly relate to all three aspects of journalists' freedom. In the Czech Republic, though, more influence of business people is associated with more freedom of journalists in aspects emphasized in the stories and in the frequency the journalists participate in newsroom coordination. The results might indicate that the business community in the Czech Republic supports freedom of press.

Business owners in South Africa tend to mitigate journalists' freedom while in the Czech Republic they tend to support it. The business community in the Czech Republic tends to support journalists' freedom while in South Africa the effect of the business community was not statistically significant.

According to findings above, it is possible that the mass media culture in the Czech Republic still bears some remnants of the earlier Communist regime (the more years respondents work in journalism, the less freedom they perceive). On the other hand, international media practices (reflected in freedom to emphasize) are more and more being accepted by journalists through international channels (the wider the reach of the medium [local, regional, national, transnational], the more freedom there is to emphasize aspects a journalist perceives). The

finding, that the higher the education of the respondent is, the less freedom to emphasize aspects he/she perceives sounds rather alarming.

In the case of South Africa, the more respondents saw it as important to “report things as they are”, i.e. to have more freedom to emphasize certain news aspects.

Editors-in-chief, managing editors, desk heads or assignment editors, department heads and senior editors perceive more freedom to emphasize aspects of the news. They also might have more power to do so. On the other hand, South African reporters have more freedom (frequency) to participate in editorial and newsroom coordination, such as attending editorial meetings or assigning reporters.

In the Czech Republic, the more right-wing the political orientation of the respondent (as opposed to left-wing) is, the less often do they participate in editorial and newsroom coordination, such as attending editorial meetings or assigning reporters.

In South Africa, the higher the number of newsrooms the respondent works for, the less often she/he participates in editorial and newsroom coordination (such as attending editorial meetings or assigning reporters).

Conclusions

On the basis of the obtained results, it can be concluded that a comparison is possible between the way journalists in two former authoritarian countries perceive media ownership and business influences on their work.

The main results of our study are that the influence of the mass media business owners in South Africa mitigates freedom of journalists in selecting stories and emphasizing aspects of the news, while in the Czech Republic business owners are seen to be supporting the journalists' freedom in selecting stories. The perceived level of business influence South Africa did not statistically significantly relate to all the examined aspects of journalists' freedom. In the Czech Republic the influence of business people over mass media is associated with more freedom for journalists in emphasizing certain aspects in news stories and in the frequency the journalists participate in newsroom coordination.

The comparison of the two formerly authoritarian countries mentioned above yields interesting results and some food for thought. It is remarkable how similar and yet different both countries are in dealing with media ownership and business influence on the work of independent mass media and journalists. We aver that our results might be used to develop a benchmark in the global context of assessing, analyzing, and comparing business influences on media news processing in different post-authoritarian countries elsewhere in the world.

Acknowledgements

De Beer wishes to thank his colleagues, Sean Beckett, Vanessa Malila and Herman Wasserman for their contribution to the South African part of the WoJ 2015 Study. Funding for the particular research was received from the South African Research Foundation and the WoJ. Láb, Strielkowski, and Tejkalová wish to thank their colleagues Sandra Štefaniková and Roman Hájek for their hard work on the data collection for the Czech part of WoJ 2015 Study. Views expressed and conclusions reached are those of the authors.

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