

Media Industry Development in France

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Abstract: In France, as elsewhere, mass communication play a decisive role in democratic life and constitute fundamental vectors for everyone's access to knowledge, entertainment and social life. As such, the State is responsible for supporting their proper development internally and internationally, promoting pluralism of information, richness and diversity of cultural creation, and facilitating access to all to these contents.

This media development policy essentially depends on the growth and development of digital techniques on these last few past years.

Thus, we will see in this research study the history of the French media industry as well as its development.

This will also allow us to analyze and compare the French media industry with the global media and to understand particularly our limits and the necessary improvements to do in the future.

Keywords: Media Industry Development, France.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the media industry in France has been a complex and complicated process. Currently, France has what it calls its fifth republic, which commenced in 1958. The republic on the other hand 1792, a period of only 166 years. The complicated modern history of France as a nation is uniquely intertwined by the development of its media industry (Israel, 2015). This complication also explains the unimpressive relationship between the French and their media industry. As compared with other developed countries, the French media is not only relatively weak but also suffering relatively limited trust and attention from the populace. The history of the development of the French media begins with the story of the Newspaper going as far back as the 17th century (Israel, 2015). There is also the story of the radio, going back to the early parts of the 20th century and the story of the Television going back to the 1930s (Cannon, 2017). Finally, the internet and online content play a major role in modern media and France is no exception. The entire history of media development in each of the four mediums indicated above has government ownership and/or interference as a constant motif. This role by the government has played an adverse and arguably stunting role in the development of French media. On its part, the stunted development has limited the amount of trust that the French people have on the media and the role that the media plays in French society. In the instant paper, an evaluation of the development of the Media in France shall reveal how the said media came to play a relatively limited role on the French society, more so as compared to France's global peers.

2. HISTORY OF THE FRENCH MEDIA INDUSTRY

Government ownership, government control, and government censorship are constant motifs in the history of media development in France. In the modern history of France, it has seen a large variety of government than any of France's modern peers. The story of the media begins with the age of the Bourbons through to the French revolution, the French Empire and a variety of French Republics (Israel, 2015). On the other hand, the development of French media began with the newspaper, through to the magazine, then to the radio, TV and finally online content.

The Newspaper and Magazine

The history of the newspaper, magazines and other printed material in France dates back to the early 17th century. One of the most influential French politicians Cardinal Richelieu started a newspaper to propagate his ideas and propaganda to the French (Sunderland, 2019). At the time, a newspaper was literally that, a large piece of paper printed on both sides, in the handwriting of the writers themselves. In the first newspaper, it is alleged that most of the content would be in

Cardinal Richelieu's own hand. From the 17th century to the French Revolution, there were only two newspapers both owned and regulated by the government. The first explosion of privately owned newspapers would come in the rundown to the French Revolution. Politicians and commentators such as Jean-Paul Marat and Maximilien Robespierre became eminent publishers (Israel, 2015; Zublin, 2017). However, just like with the government publications, newspapers were more about molding the public opinion than propagating the truth. Propaganda would thus remain an integral part of the French media for centuries to come. The French Revolution brought with it the First Republic, followed soon after by the Napoleonic era. By the advent of the Napoleonic era, tens of newspapers were in publication (Israel, 2015). The emperor closed down most of them, leaving only a handful of carefully regulated newspapers and magazines. The strict control of newspapers would continue through the Second Republic, the Second Empire and into the 19th century. In the Great War, the French Government maintained a firm grip on French newspapers and magazines to try to rally the French against the Germans. However, in the Second World War, the roles reversed as Nazi loyalist used money and manipulation to control the French media (Evans, 2013). After the fall of France to Nazi Germany, the Nazis got even more control over French media, until the Free French Army retook France. Unfortunately, the new Republic, instead of allowing for a free press took over the media and commenced a new form of control and censorship.

De jure media freedom would come with the enactment of the current French constitution in 1958 which formed the fifth republic (Villalobos, 2013). Under the constitution, there was a guarantee of the freedom of the press. However, the de jure freedom of the press did not necessarily amount to a de facto one. A free press includes the ability to gather and disseminate news without inordinate repercussions. Under the French laws, the protection of sources and protection of media houses from libel and defamations suits is extremely lax (Villalobos, 2013). Technically, there is freedom of the press as per the letter of the law but exercising that freedom can have adverse ramifications for a journalist. This is the status of French print media to the even date.

Radio

The history of radio in France begins with the same motif of government ownership, control, and censorship, the goes on from the advent of Radio up to around 1981! The advent of radio in France can be traced to the early 1920s, soon after the end of the Great War (Lardeau, 2017). Radion was a powerful and effective medium, more so due to its real-time communication abilities. The French government primarily owned and controlled early radio. A few private radio stations commended in the 1930s but they were all taken over by the government during the Second World War (Cannon, 2017). Government ownership changed hands but did not end after the end of the Second World War. After the enactment and promulgation of the Fight Republic constitution in 1958, government regulation and censorship of radio would still continue. In 1981, the French government, under pressure from the populace eventually allowed for the licensing of privately-owned radio stations (Lardeau, 2017). From the perspective of journalism, the private radio stations enjoyed the same freedoms and limitations as newspapers. On the one hand, the constitution guaranteed freedom of the press. On the other, the said freedom faced limitations form libel laws and the inability to protect sources.

The Television

From the perspective of government control, ownership and censorship, the story of the Television are no different. The first TV station in France went live in 1931 but TV had a very slow start in the country (Cannon, 2017). Through the Second World War to the end of the 1940s decade, TV had negligible exposure in France. There was only one TV station, fully owned and controlled by the government. Further, according to Lardeau, (2017), only 297 households had access to TV by 1949! TV rapidly permeated the market and by 1965, 40% of the population had access to TV. However, there were only two TV stations, both wholly-owned and controlled by the government up to 1975. In the said the year 1975, the government would allow for the licensing of commercial TV stations but still maintain a relatively high level of censorship. The slow pace of development and expansion would continue into the 21st Century. According to Lardeau, (2017), by the year 2000, most French home only had access to about 10 TV stations. By 2015, the number of stations had gradually increased but four main companies controlled most of them. The government has thus always closely regulated TV content in France.

Online Journalism

As the French government had the penchant to control, limit and censure the media pushed the public to rely on a new news source, online media. As with most developed nations, France saw a major advancement and proliferation of information technology in the 1990s and early 21st century. According to Balland & Baisnée (2011, June), online content began with technicians and engineers who did not have any journalistic backgrounds. Gradually, investigative and other

journalists took advantage of this new medium to propagate their stories to the French populace. Eventually, traditional media houses also commenced using the internet as a medium for communicating content to the populace. The internet also assistant traditional media houses financially as most of them were struggling in the 21st century. Although the French Government could not own this new medium as it had done with the others, it did try to control and censor it. According to Deutsche Welle. (2019), the concept of national security has been roundly abused by the French government to control and censor online content. Whereas the government cannot undertake blanket control of the media due to the constitutional freedom of the press, it does find some witty avenues for control. A good example is an excuse that investigative journalists have exposed state secrets. The government utilizes this excuse to harass journalist, and in extreme cases, to arrest and prosecute then. Based on the totality of the above the constant motif of government control of the media is inescapable.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF FRENCH MEDIA INDUSTRY

The development of the French media industry relied on the three major bearing factors of government regulation, technological advancement, and availability of demand. The cascade of media development in France begins with the ability to print on a piece of paper, leading to the creation of a newspaper. The initial technology relied on expensive garment-like paper, printed on using screw-based printers. By the French revolution, a combination of all the three bearing factors above fermented monumental development on French media (Israel, 2015). The combination of a weakening government and an enlightened populace reduced government control and increase demand for news contemporaneously. Conversely, technological advancements including the availability of wood-based cheaper paper and mechanized presses made newspaper production easier and cheaper. These factors led to not only a high proliferation of newspapers but also the advent of magazines. Magazines such as the *Le Petit Journal* ensured the proliferation of news media even to the rural masses with circulation growing into millions of copies per publication (Cannon, 2017)! The sudden rise in printed media created by the availability of better technology found limitations through government control and censorship. However, the sector kept growing into the 20th and through to the 21st century.

Media development in radio and TV did not have a demand limitation per se, only government and technological limitation. At the beginning, radio technology was limited by broadcasting distance on the one hand and availability of radios among the populace on the other (Lardeau, 2017). Technological advancements overcame these two challenges by the mid-20th century, leaving government control and censorship as the only main challenge. Overcoming this government-based challenge in 1981 led to rapid growth in radio journalism. TV, on the other hand, required technology that is more advanced. The proper proliferation of TV sets was only attained in the 1970s (Lardeau, 2017). From then on, the only primary limitation to TV content was government control and censorship. It is important to note that the technology for TV and radio kept on advancing into the 21st century, including the blurring of the lines between TV, radio and online content. Speaking of online content, the relatively new media advanced rapidly due to the inability of the government to interfere inordinately. The proliferation of information technology in the 21st century, such as the advent of Apple's iOS and Google's Android exponentially increased the reach of internet-based content in France. Finally, the internet provided a journalistic media that the French government could not control, regulate or censor, a fact that transformed journalism in France.

Whereas the French government should take a lot of blame for the stunting of the development of news media in France, the journalists themselves and news consumers cannot escape blame. Historically, there has been endemic corruption within the French media itself. For example, Cardinal Richelieu, Marat, and Robespierre, some of the pioneers of the French news media cannot escape the corruption tag (Sunderland, 2019; Zublin, 2017). All three were willing to bend the truth or even fabricate news to meet their own end. On the other hand, according to Wilke (2016), corruption played a major role in the framing of news due to inter alia to advertisements. The most successful magazine in 19th century France *Le Petit Journal* owed part of its success in compromising on the news. The magazine cherry-picked news items in order to increase circulation and by extension, advertising revenues. Similarly, journalists shied away from publishing content that would elicit the chagrin of important advertisers for pecuniary reasons. In extreme cases, journalists would publish favorable content for companies or even government entities at a fee. On the other hand, the French populace contributed to the stunting of the development of journalism in France due to their gullibility. A good example of French gullibility is engendered in how Marat was able to use news media to influence, inspire and motivate the French public during the French revolution (Israel, 2015). The Nazi propaganda machine also greatly influenced the French populace during the Second World War (Evans, 2013). While the government takes the largest amount of blame for the way new media developed in France, the journalist and news consumers also played an adverse role.

4. DISCUSSION: CURRENT STATE OF THE FRENCH MEDIA INDUSTRY

After more than three centuries of media development in France, the current state of journalism paints an unflattering picture for freedom in France. For a start, the level of trust for the press by the French people is exponentially low. According to Mitchell, Sumida & Walker (2019), only 28% of the French consider News media as very important to them. Further, almost a quarter of the population does not consider news media to be of any importance. When it comes to the issue of trust, the statistics are grimmer. Only 4% of the French population fully trusts news media. Conversely, a monumental 65% of the populace does not trust the news media at all! The statistics above present a major chasm between journalists and the populace in France. With an effective press being one of the hallmarks of democracy, the above statistics do not auger well for France as a democracy.

From the perspective of the share of the populace that each segment of media gets, print media is still highly prominent in France, but not for news content. Most French people are consumers of print media for content such as entertainment. With regard to news, the primary source of news in France is television or televised content. As indicated in the development segment above, due to technological advancements, the line between TV and multimedia internet content had blurred. According to Lardeau, (2019) 86% of the French watch TV content several hours a day with some of the content including news programs. The viewership spreads across traditional television, computers, tablets, and phones. On the other hand, 80% of the French population consumes non-TV online content including online news media. Finally, about 65% of the French population listen to at least one radio station per day, which also includes news content.

It is easy to see a paradox when evaluating the statistics in the two sections above. On the one hand, the French populace does not trust news media and many of them do not consider news media as important. On the other hand, the French are evidently major consumers of news content. Perhaps the paradox is also an opportunity for the future of news media. There is a major potential for the news media in France to earn the trust of the French people as they are still listening, watching and reading news content. To gain the trust of the populace would begin with changing the current ownership of news media in France. According to Lardeau, (2019), most of the News Media in France is owned either by the government or by major corporations. The government-owned media houses will seek to propagate the government's agenda while corporations will seek to protect their interest. News media in France is thus in need of an actual revolution.

Comparison between French Media Development and Global Media

In order to be fair to the French news media, it is important to conduct a nuanced comparison of French media to other countries around the world. On the positive side, the development of French news media can be compared with that of the USA, a nation that has come to be referred to as the free world. To create a balance, the French media can also be compared to that of Russia, a part of the developed world known for its stunted development of the media (Denber, 2017). Finally, with regard to its relationship with the populace, France does compare unfavorably against its European counterparts. Beginning with the latter comparison, according to Mitchell, Sumida & Walker (2019), only 28% of the French consider news media as very important. In Sweden and Germany, 61% consider news media as very important while in Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK stand at over 40%. Conversely, while only 35% of the French trust their news media, in Germany, Netherlands, and Sweden, over 60% of the populace trusts the news media. Clearly, France had vast room for improvement.

The USA has a constitutional guarantee for the Freedom of the press. The constitutional guarantee stems from the first amendment to the US constitution, which has been in place since 1791 as opposed to the French guarantee that only came about in 1958. Further, the constitutional guarantee for the freedom of the media in the USA has, over the years been cemented and expanded by judicial precedent (Cambell, 2017). The kinds of laws that limit freedom of the press in France, such as the ones about exposing government secrets would not stand in the US due to the robust constitutional system. On the other hand, the most powerful entity in the USA is the corporate sector, not the public sector. Growth in news media has thus been primarily driven by the private sector and not the public sector, hence augmenting its independence. Its current president, Donald Trump, reflects an important mark of the independence of the American media. Despite dubbing US media as fake news and an enemy of the people, the said president is unable to take any active steps to muzzle the media (Acosta, 2019). Conversely, the French news media would be considered as well developed and thriving when compared to its counterparts in Russia. The nation of Russia has been under a strict socialist dictatorship for the most part of the 20th century. The Russian government takes more latitude in controlling the media including persecuting and locking up, and in some cases killing journalists (Denber, 2017). France has a lot of room for improvement as far as the development of news media is concerned but it also compares favorably against some developed nations.

5. CONCLUSION

France is a part of the developed world but it is evident that its news media has a lot of developing to do. However, the French news media and journalism has had a lot of development in the last few centuries. The development process began with the advent of newspapers in the early 17th century. The newspapers remained under government control until the French Revolution when the government lost control leading to rapid growth. The rise of the Napoleonic errors reversed the rapid growth despite the presence of better technology and demand for news content. Government control and censorship would remain a constant limitation for the French media. Over and above print media, the development of French media would later expand to include radio and TV in the early 20th century and the internet towards the end of the said century. The French have remained ardent consumers of the news but due mainly to government control and censorship, the news media has yet to earn the trust of the populace.

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