

Argumentative Essay

Team #5

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AIS 4012 Trends in Communication

December 7th, 2024

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The Impact of Media Conglomeration

We are now living in an era where information is now power, in result the Concentration of media ownership has become a critical issue. The concentration of media ownership has sparked significant debates regarding its impact on Culture, Democracy, and the Economy. When looking into Ben Bagdikian, he concluded that “When 50 men and women, chiefs of their corporations, control more than half the information and ideas that reach 220 million Americans, it is time for Americans to examine the institutions from which they receive their daily picture of the world” (Morrison, P., 2011). This statement shows the influence that only a few conglomerates have over the media landscape. Since the 1970s, the U.S. government has treated media as a commodity as they prioritize profit over its initial role as a facilitator of political and cultural that works to enable dialogue, collaboration, and engagement within a society. “In 1984, fifty independent media companies owned most media interests within the United States. By 2024, this number had dwindled to just six conglomerates controlling 90% of the US media” (Rao-Poolla, K., 2021). Examining these concerns in depth will determine which media conglomeration impacts cultural diversity, democratic processes, and economic fairness. By analyzing, a better understanding of the implications of media ownership concentration will also determine if these concerns are justified.

Thesis Statement |

Media conglomeration poses a significant threat to cultural diversity, democratic processes, and economic fairness. The concentration of media ownership leads to a merge in content that undermines cultural plurality, centralizes power that can skew democratic discourse, and creates controlling practices that restrain competition and innovation in the economy. These

impacts overall create imbalances in the principles of a diverse culture, democratic, and economic vivid society.

Impact on Culture Diversity |

Media conglomeration reduces the diversity of cultural expressions and viewpoints. It also leads to the merge of content, where diverse cultural expressions are overshadowed by mainstream and commercial content. As media ownership becomes concentrated, the variety of content diminishes leading to merged products. This limits the representation of minority voices and alternative perspectives. The diminishment also leads to less diverse media landscape.

According to this article, A study by the Global Media Journal highlights that media globalization, driven by conglomerates, can lead to cultural merging, where local cultures are overshadowed by dominant global media content (Stasberger, G. D. (2023)).

Major dominance of major media conglomerates like Disney, Comcast, and Warner Bros has led to a significant focus on movies and mainstream TV shows. Large media empires that hold a variety of content types, including television, movies, radio, and digital platforms, have been created because of the growth of corporations like Disney, Comcast, and Viacom. For instance, Disney's acquisition of 21st Century Fox in 2019 brought together a vast array of content under one umbrella, including popular franchises like Marvel, Star Wars, and The Simpsons. Similarly, Comcast's control over NBCUniversal has allowed it to dominate various media sectors, from television networks like NBC and Telemundo to film studios like Universal Pictures. The merger of Viacom and CBS in 2019 created a media giant with extensive holdings in television, film, and digital media, including brands like MTV, Nickelodeon, and CBS News. This centralization has the chilling effect of reducing the range of perspectives and stories that

the public is exposed to. This focus sidelines independent films and niche cultural content which reduces the diversity of cultural narratives available to the public. “Media conglomerates prioritize content that appeals to the broadest audience possible, often at the expense of niche and culturally diverse programming. This results in a media landscape where unique cultural voices are drowned out by the dominant narratives of a few large corporations” (Medoff & Kaye, 2021, p. 112). Proponents of media conglomeration argue that it can lead to economies of scale which allows media companies to produce higher quality content at a lower cost. It is claimed that larger media companies have more resources to invest in innovative technologies and high budget productions which can enhance the overall quality of media content available to the public. Walt Disney is one of the largest media conglomerates and has been able to produce high quality, globally successful films and TV shows due to its vast resources. “Disney’s acquisition of Pixar, Marvel, Lucasfilm, and 21st Century Fox has enabled it to create a diverse portfolio of content that appeals to a wide audience” (Opinion Front. (n.d.). While economies of scale can lead to higher quality content, they can also come with significant drawbacks. The concentration of media ownership can suppress diversity and reduce the plurality of voices in the media landscape. According to this article, A study made by the Stanford graduate school of business found that media consolidation often results in local TV stations focusing more on national politics at the expense of local issues, reducing the diversity of viewpoints available to the public (Stanford Graduate School of Business., 2023, October 10). This can lead to merging of content where only commercially viable narratives are promoted and minority perspectives are marginalized. Despite Disney’s success, its dominance in the media industry has led to concerns about the lack of diversity in the content it produces. “Independent filmmakers and smaller production companies often struggle to compete with the marketing and distribution power of

large conglomerates, leading to a less diverse media landscape” (Medoff, N. J., & Kaye, B. K. (2021). The marginalization of minority voices is made worse by media conglomerates. The enormous marketing resources and distribution networks of conglomerates make it difficult for independent producers and specialized content creators to compete for visibility. "Media conglomerates' vast marketing resources and distribution networks overshadow independent and niche platforms, leading to the marginalization of underrepresented communities" (Now Media, Chapter 6). Underrepresented populations' creative and culturally significant works so run the risk of being marginalized or ignored entirely. Platforms that target certain populations, like LGBTQ+ people or Indigenous creators, for example, are frequently eclipsed by mainstream options that do not fairly reflect these communities. These conglomerates' lack of diversity in ownership and leadership roles feeds a vicious cycle where minority viewpoints are left out of decision-making processes, which eventually produces content that is less representative of the society it reflects and less diverse overall.

Unquestionably, media conglomerates pose a danger to cultural diversity because they foster an environment where minority voices are frequently silenced, and content is homogenized. Promoting independent and varied media is more important than ever as the lines separating media ownership continue to narrow. Encouraging the growth of independent media outlets is crucial for maintaining a diverse media landscape. "Independent media plays a vital role in promoting transparency, accountability, and cultural diversity by providing a platform for voices that are often overlooked by mainstream media" (International Republican Institute). To ensure that all stories have the chance to be told, shared, and celebrated, policymakers, artists, and consumers must work together to create a media environment that celebrates and supports cultural diversity. "To ensure a diverse media environment, it is essential for policymakers to

enforce regulations that limit media consolidation and support independent media ventures" (Civil Rights Blog). We can only protect the integrity of democratic discourse in our society and the diversity of human experience by making such coordinated efforts.

Impact on Democratic Progresses |

The consolidation of media ownership into a few powerful conglomerates poses a significant threat to the democratic process by reducing media independence and diversity. When only a handful of corporations control most of the media channels, the diversity of opinions and perspectives is diminished. This can lead to a more uniform media landscape where only certain viewpoints are featured, which can limit the public's access to a wider range of information. According to the textbook, "Now Media" points out "Public relations professionals must ensure that a diversity of viewpoints is represented to support a healthy democratic society." By restricting the media's independence and variety, the conglomerate of media corporations is seen as undermining the democratic process.

The media conglomerates often have various business interests outside of traditional media, which creates a conflict of interest. Information gathered solely from these corporations may result in a conflict of interest, whereby the political or economic interests of these companies may impact news coverage as this can result in biased reporting. A good example of this is media monopolies have an easier time influencing public opinion when there are fewer independent voices. This gives it the power to shape public opinion which has the potential to undermine democratic processes by influencing political outcomes and public perception. According to the textbook, "Now Media" argues that "media monopolies threaten the foundation of democracy by concentrating power and limiting diverse voices in public discourse."

Independent and local journalism are threatened by media conglomerates. Local news outlets typically suffer as the corporations strive to maximize earnings. People are unable to learn about the issues that are directly impacting their communities because of the reduction in local journalism. In summary, Bagdikian's thrust of concern was that media concentration posed a significant threat to democracy by limiting the diversity of viewpoints, reducing the quality of information, and empowering a small group of elites to control public discourse. According to the journal "The media revolution that will begin the world again" Nichols (2016) highlights that "media concentration threatens democracy by reducing the quality of information and empowering a small group of elites to control public discourse." The "Global Media" journal also highlights this concern by noting that "a reduction in local journalism diminishes the public's access to information about their own communities, weakening the democratic process." The Global Media Journal also has highlighted several key concerns regarding the role of media in democratic progress. The journal emphasizes the importance of a free and independent media for a functional democracy. It highlights the risks posed by political interference and economic pressures that can compromise media independence. Some may argue that media conglomeration leads to economies of scale which can lower costs and improve efficiency that can potentially result in better quality content. The claim is that larger media organizations have more resources to invest in higher quality journalism and technology. However, this perspective has overlooked the detrimental effects on diversity and independence. Even if larger organizations have more resources, the concentration of media ownership still centralizes power and restricts the variety of viewpoints presented to the public. The "Global Media" journal counteracts this viewpoint by stating that "while larger media corporations may have more resources, the loss of diverse voices and local perspectives ultimately harms the democratic process." According to the textbook

“Now Media: The Evolution of Electronic Communication,” the authors discuss how media conglomeration impacts democratic processes. They note that "the consolidation of media outlets results in fewer voices being heard, leading to a homogenized media landscape." This is particularly problematic in a democracy where a diversity of viewpoints is essential for informed decision-making.

Undoubtably, media conglomerations pose a serious threat to democratic processes by restricting media independence and diversity. The concentration of media ownership leads to a homogenized media landscape, conflicts of interest, and the erosion of local journalism. While some may argue that larger media corporations can produce better quality content, this does not justify the negative impacts on democratic discourse and public access to diverse information. Ensuring a free and independent media is essential for a healthy democracy, where a multitude of voices can be heard, and public opinion is duly influenced by a few powerful entities.

Impact on Economic Fairness |

Media conglomeration poses significant threats to economic fairness and market diversity. The concentration of media ownership leads to monopolistic practices that stifle competition, job losses that also negatively impact local economies and reduce investments towards local media which can undermine economic vitality and innovation. These economic impacts can collectively hinder development of a competitive and diverse media landscape which is essential for a healthy economy.

Media conglomerates can dominate the market which can cause problems with competition and innovation. This can lead to higher prices for consumers and fewer choices that the consumer can choose from within the marketplace. A good example of this being the case is

the merger of AT&T and Time Warner created a media giant that had significant control over both the content that was created and distributed. This integration can limit the amount of competition by making it harder for other smaller businesses and companies to compete. According to the textbook “Now Media,” Media conglomerates often engage in monopolistic practices, leveraging their market power to suppress competition and control pricing, which harms consumers and stifles innovation” (Medoff & Kaye, 2021, p. 198). A report from the Stanford Graduate School of Business also highlights how media consolidation can lead to less local news coverage and more national content which reduced competition and diversity in the media landscape. Another example of media conglomerates dominating the market is “Job losses and economic development.” Consolidation can often lead to job cuts as companies seek to reduce the amount of costs and eliminate redundancies. This can have a negative impact on employment in the media industry. According to the Tribune Company, which owns several major newspapers, cut nine hundred jobs in 2005 following a merger. Similarly, Clear Channel laid off approximately eight hundred staff in 2002 due to merger restructurings. These job losses can have a ripple effect on local economies, reducing spending and economic activity. According to the textbook “Now Media,” “Media mergers frequently result in significant job losses as companies streamline operations to maximize profits, leading to economic displacement and reduced local employment opportunities” (Medoff & Kaye, 2021, p. 210). An article from Forbes also backs this up by talking about how media mergers are changing the news industry, which can often lead to job cuts and a focus on profitability over quality. Finally, “reduced investment in local media” is how media conglomerates can dominate the market. Media conglomeration often results in reduced investment in local media outlets, as conglomerates prioritize national and international content that can generate higher revenues. According to local

TV stations owned by conglomerates like Sinclair Broadcast Group have been found to focus more on national politics at the expense of local issues. This shift can leave local communities less informed and less engaged in local governance. According to the textbook “Now Media,” “Consolidation in the media industry often leads to a reduction in local news coverage, as conglomerates prioritize content that appeals to a broader, national audience, undermining the role of local media in fostering community engagement” (Medoff & Kaye, 2021, p. 225). A study by “Global Media Journal” talks about the impact of media globalization on local cultures and economies which notes that local media often struggles to compete with resources and reach that larger companies may have from conglomerates. Proponents of media conglomeration argue that it can lead to economies of scale, which allow media companies to produce higher-quality content at lower costs. They claim that larger media companies have more resources to invest in innovative technologies and high-budget productions, which can enhance the overall quality of media content available to consumers. A good example of this is the Walt Disney Company, as one of the largest media conglomerates, has been able to produce high-quality, globally successful films and TV shows due to its vast resources. Disney has been able to produce with acquisitions of Pixar, Marvel, Lucasfilm, and 21st Century Fox has enabled it to create a diverse portfolio of content that appeals to a wide audience. According to the textbook “Now Media,” “Media consolidation can lead to significant cost savings and efficiencies, which can be reinvested into content creation, resulting in higher-quality programming and innovative media products” (Medoff & Kaye, 2021, p. 198). While economies of scale can lead to higher-quality content, they also come with significant drawbacks. The concentration of media ownership can stifle diversity and reduce the plurality of voices in the media landscape. This can lead to a homogenization of content, where only commercially viable narratives are promoted, and

minority or niche perspectives are marginalized. A good example of this is despite Disney's success, its dominance in the media industry has led to concerns about the lack of diversity in the content it produces. Independent filmmakers and smaller production companies often struggle to compete with the marketing and distribution power of large conglomerates, leading to a less diverse media landscape. According to the textbook "Now Media," "While large media conglomerates can produce high-quality content, they often prioritize profit over diversity, leading to a homogenized media landscape that marginalizes minority voices and niche content" (Medoff & Kaye, 2021, p. 210). A study by the Stanford Graduate School of Business found that media consolidation often results in local TV stations focusing more on national politics at the expense of local issues, reducing the diversity of viewpoints available to the public.

In conclusion, media conglomeration poses significant threats to economic fairness and market diversity. The concentration of media ownership leads to monopolistic practices that stifle competition, job losses that negatively impact local economies, and reduced investment in local media, which undermines economic vitality and innovation. While proponents argue that economies of scale can lead to higher-quality content, the drawbacks of reduced diversity and increased homogenization cannot be ignored. The evidence suggests that media conglomeration harms the foundational principles of a competitive and diverse media landscape, essential for a healthy economy and a vibrant democracy. Therefore, it is crucial to implement policies that promote media diversity and prevent excessive concentration of media ownership to ensure a balanced and fair media environment.

Conclusion |

In conclusion, the concentration of media ownership has profound implications for cultural diversity, democratic processes, and economic fairness. This analysis demonstrates how media conglomerates undermine the democratic fabric of society by limiting the diversity of opinions and compromising journalistic integrity. For instance, Disney's acquisition of 21st Century Fox and Comcast's control over NBCUniversal exemplify how a few powerful entities dominate the media landscape. "The consolidation of media ownership has led to a homogenization of content, where the same types of stories and characters are recycled to maximize profitability" (Now Media, Chapter 4). Additionally, media conglomerates reduce the variety of cultural expressions available, homogenizing content to meet the demands of widespread commercial appeal. These issues are exacerbated by the decline of local journalism, which leaves communities with little awareness of their own pressing challenges. "Media conglomerates' vast marketing resources and distribution networks overshadow independent and niche platforms, leading to the marginalization of underrepresented communities" (Now Media, Chapter 6). Moreover, media companies' preference for profit over the representation of diverse viewpoints distorts the economic landscape and diminishes public discourse on economic realities. By prioritizing the interests of a few powerful entities, the media environment risks perpetuating injustices, affecting individuals' awareness of and participation in critical political and economic issues. To address these challenges, it is crucial for consumers, artists, and legislators to advocate for a more inclusive media landscape that highlights diverse perspectives and minority voices. Promoting local journalism and supporting independent media are essential steps to restore balance in media representation and ensure that all narratives are heard and respected. "Independent media plays a vital role in promoting transparency, accountability, and cultural diversity by providing a platform for voices that are often overlooked by mainstream

media" (International Republican Institute). As we move forward, we must collectively strive to mitigate the negative impacts of media concentration. By fostering an environment that values diversity in ownership and content, we can create a media ecosystem that truly reflects the complexity of human experiences. This ongoing effort is essential for maintaining a healthy democracy and a rich cultural tapestry.

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