

New Directions in the Governance of Communication: Competition Policy and Market Power Control in Convergent Communication Sectors. A Comparison between the EU and the U.S.

Research project

Investigator:

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Abstract:

Over the past few decades there has been a common understanding that general competition rules would not be sufficient per se to maintain a diverse and pluralistic media industry. Media concentration was seen as a threat to democracy, and a far-reaching sector-specific regulatory framework was put in place to guarantee media plurality and a free and diverse communications landscape. An example of such sector-specific regulation would be ownership prohibitions both within and across traditionally distinct media, such as restrictions on common ownership of broadcasting and newspapers, or telephone and cable.

Lately, however, there has been evidence of a striking and fiercely contested policy change: the common understanding is being eroded and a trend towards the relaxation or abolition of such rules in favor of the sole application of general competition law is becoming widely evident. It is argued that the convergence of media, telecommunications and information technologies has blurred the traditional lines between media and is giving rise to a proliferation of channels of communication and information outlets. It is commonly held that the Internet and digital media change everything, by allowing for diversity, accessibility and affordability, thus eliminating the need for sector-specific rules. This trend to relax or abolish sector-specific rules is widely evident. Prominent examples are the UK, the U.S. and Italy.

The major objective of this research project is a comparative analysis of these new directions in the governance of communications in the EU and the U.S., to evaluate their socio-political and economic implications and reveal whether they constitute a part of a new communications policy paradigm in developed economies and of a new pattern of statehood in communications regulation.