

British culture versus corrupt companies: the battle for media plurality (guest blog)

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The major threat to the quality of media today isn't the economy or trust – it's plurality. That's the view of [top analyst Claire Enders](#), given in her [Polis Media Agenda Talk](#). Polis intern Gideon Reid reports.

2012-11-2



Enders at LSE

Claire Enders began by describing the huge changes in media consumption. Over the last 15 years. Television audiences are down 15%, Radio has declined but at a slower rate while the adoption of Internet and mobile consumption of news and entertainment media has spiked sharply in the last few years. All of which, she says, makes who owns and control these new forms of media, how their content is commissioned and paid for and by whom of interest to consumers and business consultants alike.

For Enders it's a question of British Culture versus corrupt companies who "are not taking full responsibility" for their actions. Media plurality is threatened by the direction of [media ownership](#) and the erosion of the idea of civilian "patronage" of the media.

She said the total commercial media market in the UK is essentially a duopoly controlled by News Corporation and Daily Mail General Trust (DMGT). Under their combined corporate umbrellas they have interests in the vast majority of newspapers and television content available. Alternative media outlets, such as the trust run *Guardian* newspaper despite its popular online presence make up a smaller percentage of the remaining market.

Then of course there is the countervailing force of public service broadcasting: the BBC. Still the most popular broadcaster on both Television and Radio with its state subsidised spectrum and, at least for the next few years, guaranteed license payer revenue stream.

The BBC ideals, Enders says, are a just cause worth fighting for. Although she had less glowing words to say about its current management. She went on to make the point that the BBC's potential to contribute a plurality of voices is under attack and is something which should be skilfully fought against.

In particular for Enders the possibility of News Corporation expanding its ownership with the take over of BskyB would have been a major blow to British Culture. She went on to say that News Corporation had attempted to use its "privileged dialogue" with government to try to ensure the transaction would happen.

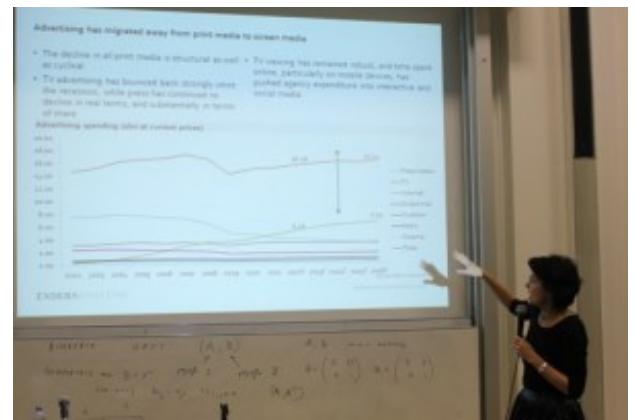
She went on to explain that the fact that most people are unaware of the threat to media plurality was something worth becoming an activist about. Do most people know that many of the different newspapers they can choose to buy, or channels they can choose to watch are controlled by less than a handful of corporations? If they do know does it bother them? Should it bother them? For Enders the answer is an emphatic yes.

She made mention of a few concepts familiar to most Media & Communications students: Agenda Setting, the Spiral of Silence and, although didn't use the exact term, hinted that her efforts to resist such takeovers were a fight against Re-Feudalisation of the media.

Enders is a self described activist for the BBC, and said its current crisis of trust regarding Jimmy Saville shouldn't make people lose sight of its long term cultural value. She was forthright about corruption in self-regulating bodies such as the [PCC](#) which she says have been co-opted by the main controlling interests who have members making up it's board and at the same time is very sceptical about the value new statutory controls which may be the result of the soon to be filed [Leveson Inquiry](#) report. They would, she said, "allow politicians to intimidate the press". Finally she had a few words of encouragement about reforming [retransmission fees](#) which would enable the BBC to make a contingency plan against further threats to its license fee revenue.

This report by Polis Intern Gideon Reid

Polis Media Agenda Talks are every Tuesday at 5pm – [details here](#)



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