REGULATORY ISSUES CONCERNING THE PROMOTION OF MEDIA LITERACY

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The challenge of regulating the internet

The internet age provides new and seemingly inexhaustible opportunities, but the convergent media space also harbours numerous risks. When it comes to communication over the internet, traditional instruments of regulation are more difficult to apply, primarily because human rights limit regulatory options, as does the way in which the internet works. The convergent media space necessitates new regulatory approaches and solutions because as a result of the explosive growth in the amount and types of media contents, and the appearance of contents created by users and the globalisation of the media universe, the previous control-based approach towards the media universe has become outdated.

Towards a uniformisation of regulatory approaches

Nevertheless, the internet today is of course not a lawless zone, but the range in which legal instruments or state intervention can be applied is considerably narrower than in the case of electronic media. In this age of convergence, the line that separates the world of traditional media and internet-based media consumption is increasingly vanishing. Studies on media consumption show that the younger generations' consumption is increasingly shifting towards online contents. **Regulatory solutions concerning the convergent media space can be best delineated on the basis of technological neutrality and by relying on a functional approach.** In the short term, a uniform approach to traditional media services and online services is inconceivable, but nonetheless, the relevant regulatory solutions must be approximated, which also charts the need for a course of deregulation, self-regulation and co-regulation in the area of traditional media regulation.

Risk-sharing– autonomous and informed users

One element of the new regulatory scheme that is to be created to address the convergent media space is that, at least in part, the management of risks and responsibilities will be incumbent on the user, who will have a greater role than previously in averting the dangers and risks that may affect her personally.

With respect to communication and media consumption over the internet, this is an area where it is especially difficult for the state to perform external control functions, while there are only limited possibilities for compelling providers to perform such functions. **The new regulatory regime requires autonomous users who strive to keep themselves informed about the complex new digital environment and are also capable of managing the risks that they are burdened with.** Media literacy presumes knowledge and skills that result in responsible and autonomous decision-making, as well as the maximisation of opportunities that arise out of the informational environment and the minimisation of the corresponding risks. The Commission's recommendation on the promotion of media literacy writes that "[m]edia literacy relates to the ability to access the media, to understand and critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media content and to create communications in a variety of contexts" (Europa, 2009: para. 11).

Target group – society at large

Before the convergent media environment emerged, the issue of media literacy was primarily discussed in the context of children and youth, and the question of the state's involvement was typically raised in the areas of education and education policy. Due to changes in the structure of the public sphere, this approach is no longer tenable, and thus the question of promoting media literacy has emerged as vital for all of society. Future regulatory environments must react to this change, which presumes the need for harmonising educational and communication policies, and coming up with solutions that mutually reinforce one another.

In European discourse, the issue of media literacy promotion has in recent years become increasingly intertwined with the issues of digital citizenship and media pluralism. "A media literate society would be at the same time a stimulus and a pre-condition for pluralism and independence in the media. The expression of diverse opinions and ideas, in different languages, representing different groups, in and across societies has a positive impact on the values of diversity, tolerance, transparency, equity and equity and dialogue. **The development of media literacy in all sections of society should therefore be promoted and its progress followed closely**" (Europa, 2009: para. 16).

Central issues in promoting media literacy

The objective of promoting media literacy is no longer just an education policy issue but has also emerged as a general public policy challenge that necessitates a redefinition of the state's role. A regulatory approach that is mindful of both the risks and opportunities inherent in the new media environment and internet-based communication, and seeks to properly react to these changes, must devote pre-eminent attention to raising consumers' awareness. **This is an area where the subject of regulation is the same with respect to both traditional media and internet**. Let us consider, for example, that media authorities or audiovisual policy-makers have little to no competencies in the area of internet regulation, but they can assume responsibility for promoting media literacy. Repositioning media literacy is inconceivable without the ongoing and detailed state-funded monitoring of changes in the digital environment, as well as research about

the latter. In addition to child protection considerations, such monitoring and research must also extend to a review of the state's competencies in the digital age of digital citizenship.

The research

The research **seeks an answer to the question of what responsibilities the state must assume in the context of promoting an informed and responsible use of the new media environment, especially the internet. What are the regulatory problems that need to be solved in the area of institutionalising the promotion of media literacy?** What are the institutional solutions that can provide the basis for promoting user awareness (protection, responsibility, information and participation)? The paper reviews and schematically arranges the instruments necessary for promoting the knowledge and skills that provide the basis for responsible and informed media/internet usage. It will further define the regulatory starting points and instruments aimed at promoting media literacy.

The most important topics analysed in the research:
The state's role in the basic research that is necessary for promoting media literacy; the ongoing monitoring of typical usage, trends in usage and levels of media literacy, as well as reports on the state of media literacy.

The harmonisation of education and audio-visual policies and the instruments and institutional solutions employed in the process of institutionalising media literacy promotion.

An assessment of the possibilities for involving players along the media market value chain, as well as of the instruments and possibilities of promoting self-regulation mechanisms in the area of media literacy.

The distribution of state funds necessary to operate an effective set of instruments.

References

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