Ethical media policy versus freedom of the press: regulation after Leveson and Prince Harry

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When The Sun newspaper published naked photos of Prince Harry last week, other publications shied away, not wanting to embroil themselves in issues of Royal privacy under Lord Leveson's watchful eye. Rupert Murdoch claimed that there was a "clear public interest" in publishing the photographs "in order for the debate around them to be fully informed". In his new book, **Petros Iosifidis** *calls for global media policies which are both ethical and driven by public interest. Can we have both?* **Gwyneth Sutherlin** *looks closer.*

Global Media and Communication Policy. Petros Iosifidis. Palgrave. August 2012.

Fervour surrounding the Leveson inquiry and the regulation of media through information and communication technology (ICT) has shone a spotlight on issues of freedom of expression, legal frameworks, access to information, and media monopolies. The most recent and obvious example is of course the publication of photos of a naked Prince Harry in a Las Vegas hotel room, available for any interested person to see online but not printed by any British newspaper apart from *The Sun*. As politicians and commentators condemned *The Sun*'s decision to print the photos, Rupert Murdoch argued that the media blackout was a farce in light of the availability of the images online and in newspapers around the world. Murdoch even tweeted, "Needed to demonstrate no such thing as free press in UK. Internet makes mockery of these issues…"
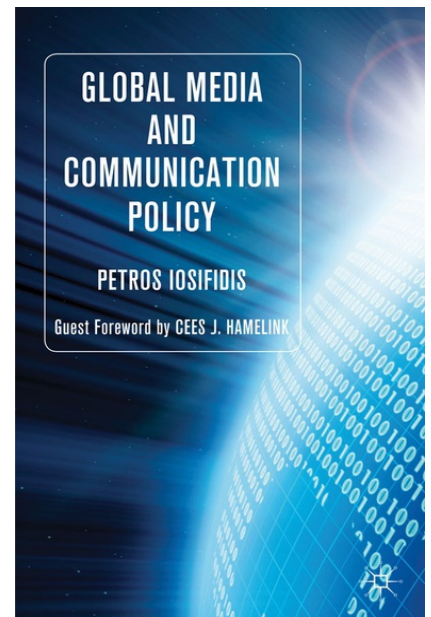
This book is a timely look at the outside approach that policymakers are taking to the proverbial 'box' as they approach new challenges beyond the traditional media landscape. Author Petros Iosidifis, a media and communications researcher in the department of sociology at City University London, champions ethical, public interest driven policy-making as the way forward in this emerging and undefined area, something which integrates the regulatory framework of traditional media with a new, flexible approach appropriate to a converged media environment.

The book draws upon policy examples largely from the EU and in particular from the UK, and first explores the concept of public interest policy in theoretical terms followed by a review of specific examples of regulation from print and broadcasting. The effect of globalization is introduced in an examination of the decline of state-enacted regulatory policies in the 1970s and 1980s, as multinational corporations grew beyond the state's control. Iosifidis suggests that supranational entities such as the International Telecommunication Union (the specialized agency of the United Nations which is responsible for information and communication technologies), OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), and WTO (World Trade Organisation) will come to play a crucial role in policy-making across borders. He writes, "the existence of these supranational bodies shows that media policy is increasingly made outside national regulatory agencies" (p. 140). Iosifidis also considers the concept of convergence. With the dominance of the internet, all types of media have converged and have become nearly indistinguishable both in terms of mode of delivery and legal embodiment.

From a sociological perspective, the book stratifies the recent history of media policy in relation to the public interest, something Iosifidis believes has been and should be policy-makers' primary benchmark against which they weigh decisions. Students and newcomers to the field will find this work foundational and instructive on the challenges facing current policymakers. While taking a philosophical approach to the topic, his style is accessible and compact.

In light of the upcoming ITU meeting to discuss integrating internet policy with traditional media regulation, and following both the recent UNHCR panel on freedom of expression and the 2011 OECD policy announcements declaring that the group had adopted the policy-making recommendations of the US, many readers may be keen to understand these organizations in more depth. However, the sociological treatment of these actors in this book does not engage with any assessment of their politics, and rather briefly summarizes their purpose. These descriptions include how many of the non-state actors have been created, influenced, or circumvented by the US. However, Iosifidis stops short of acknowledging that the US seems to be running the table. While Chapter 5 presents a theoretical framework borrowed from political science in order to consider issues surrounding "the transfer of power" (p. 107), the decision to focus on EU and UK examples seems at odds with offering guidelines for the future, leaving the reader ill-equipped to assess current trends which are being evermore dictated by the US. Anyone who reads this will be left coaxing the ideological ember that decades ago fueled traditional media policymaking in the UK and western EU.

The book goes on to examine the EU as a model of the transition away from state regulation. Iosifidis guides us through the legal and political changes of the past twenty years, encouraging us to consider this evolution as a roadmap for global media policy. "The large variations among the media systems stem from the different traditions and political cultures as well as regulatory systems that exist across Europe…Over time these differences blur as the EU emerges as a

supranational organization seeking to harmonize national media policies" (p. 143). "Member states maintain much of the sovereignty and rights… while the EC has an increasingly interventionist and monitoring role" (p. 164-5).

The analysis of this regional example launches the speculative concluding section, in which we are encouraged to question the place for media regulation in a digitally converged era. "Regulation based on existing frameworks may not be appropriate or effective for emerging converged services. Why is that?" (p. 183). Iosifidis presents a succinct set of guidelines for global media policy that act as broad, ideological questions – an ethical foundation for global media policy-making. Amidst the most concerted effort so far to regulate the internet, the newest member of the communications family, he provides a frame to examine how the nation-state, international, and supranational actors have approached this task in the past, as well as proposing a framework for strategists to measure the value of policy choices.

The degree to which Iosifidis focuses on research about print and broadcast media in early chapters compared with the smaller amount of information on new media in Chapter 8 emphasizes his command of knowledge with traditional media. Anyone reading this book to understand more about the internet's role in the media landscape may be disappointed. However, anyone reading this book for that reason alone will have missed the larger picture. The enormous challenge of integrating competing information sources, regulatory schemes, and international legal codes has been catalyzed by the internet, and solutions must address all of these factors.

This less pragmatic approach permits even the most seasoned expert to review the foundation on which decisions should be made at a crucial turning point in media policy. Rather than analyzing the landscape as it is, his guidelines and argument lead the reader to valuably ask, 'What do we want the new landscape to look like?' In the final chapter, Iosifidis contextualizes a range of options such as self-regulation and co-regulation with issues such as copyright law and freedom of expression. While the treatment is not analytical, it is prescriptive in a way which will definitely speak to public interest advocates and to the next generation of strategists who have come of age with new media.

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