



# independent media



## what is it?

Independent media is free from state control, billionaire ownership and corporate advertising. Its aim is to provide content that is a) factually accurate; b) not biased towards elite interests; and c) often not reported in the mainstream, corporate media because it's not in the interest of the elite for the public to know it.

**Mainstream media:** newspapers aren't very profitable any more (some break even, the *Mail* makes money, but from celebrity photographs online, rather than news). They're valuable for their propaganda influence, amplified by the BBC, who constantly report 'what the papers say' – but only the corporate papers. As the BBC represents 70% of the TV and radio news market, the corporate media is setting the agenda; plus it's difficult if not impossible to nab a top job at the BBC if you don't support the corporate / neoliberal agenda. It doesn't help that the BBC has an appointed board that includes board members of corporations, including arms manufacturers. The licence fee is not paid directly to the BBC, it's paid to the government, who then pay the BBC.

**History:** since the invention of the printing press, there's always been media produced away from the centres of power, and this has accelerated in the age of the internet. There are organisations to support and develop independent media, like the Media Reform Coalition, who research into ownership of the media. The internet has given independent media a huge boost, although corporations and states try to dominate. But they can't (yet) stop independent blogs, podcasts or websites. IndyMedia.org, launched after the Seattle anti-globalisation protests in 1999, became a template for citizen-produced content, but was ultimately unsuccessful because of the difficulty of sustaining an organisation based solely on volunteering. In contrast, *New Internationalist* has been publishing successfully for 40 years, with paid staff.



*If billionaires can influence the result of elections, how will that affect govt. policy?*

## what are the benefits?

Independent media can question power, because unlike corporate or state media, they don't rely on a powerful elite for their existence.

**Democracy:** it's not possible to have real democracy when most people get their information only from the powerful, in the interests of the powerful. This creates mainstream consent, and those who dissent are seen as 'outsiders'. We have to have independent media that will question the powerful, or we can't have a functioning democracy.

Peter Osborne, political editor at the *Telegraph* during the Libor scandal, resigned after being prevented by the *Telegraph's* owners, the Barclay Brothers, from publishing anything about the role of HSBC, who were providing half the *Telegraph's* advertising income. Usually, journalists don't have to be told who they can't investigate – they know what to do if they want to keep their job.

**Accuracy:** truth is also a casualty of the corporate media. There are 'filters' that prevent you from getting the truth about the world. Ownership is the most important filter - owners of the mainstream media are either the state, or tax-dodging billionaires. Another filter is advertising – the corporate media is funded by other corporations that have a vested interest in not having negative stories published about them.

**Data:** there's an issue with data-mining. Data is now a very profitable tradeable commodity. Online corporate media harvests user data and sells it to businesses that learn about behaviours and beliefs, playing on impulse and short-term desire to sell targeted products. We now have private ownership of information on what makes you you. If individuals want to sell their data in this way, fine – but as things stand, people's data is being used secretly, for profit, without their consent. We need independent online media that allows users to control their data, or doesn't collect it.



HOME NEWS FEATURES



*There are local independent news providers everywhere, like Manchester's Meteor.*



## what can I do?

Choose news sources wisely. Avoid the mainstream media, including the few considered 'the good guys' - the billionaire-owned, mis-named 'Independent', or the *Guardian* – funded by corporate advertising and owned by Scott Trust Ltd, registered in Bermuda to avoid taxes, or the BBC - see above. It will take time, effort and maybe money (if you're not paying for it, someone else is – who doesn't have your interests at heart). Biased, untrue or selective information means that you're not properly informed about the world.

**News sources:** in the UK, there's the *New Internationalist*; and in the US, *Democracy Now!* and the *Real News Network* have had long-term success. In the UK, *Novara Media* give a spin to the news rather than reporting it, and also local organisations that produce news content, like the *Bristol Cable* or the *Ferret* in Scotland. Research to find sources near you. There are investigative organisations like *Open Democracy*, *Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, *Centre for Investigative Journalism*; a great news source is the *Byline Times*, or the *Canary*, that does a lot of reportage. Independents, because they're smaller, often provide only one type of media, so to get a full picture, you have to build a portfolio of sources. See our links page to get started. The Media Fund has a listing of media partners, and will soon provide a regular round-up of news from independent sources. *Bywire* are also producing an app to provide access to all independent media in one place. Make yourself a Twitter list (I know, corporate, but we'll get there) of independent news sources, so you'll have an independent news feed each day.

**Reliability:** once you've rejected the corporate media, you'll have to work out which independent sources are reliable. After the Leveson Inquiry, press regulations were largely re-written by Paul Dacre, editor of the Daily Mail. The result was weaker press regulation than previously, and a not-very-reliable press regulator, IPSO. IMPRESS, fully compliant with the recommendations of the Leveson Inquiry, is a reliable regulator. It's also affordable / free for the public to take complaints to, and there are moves to register all reliable independent media with it. The Media Fund make sure their partners abide by the NUJ's code of conduct. There are also fact-checking sites.

**Social media:** 80% of people now get their news from social media, most of which is owned by global corporations, beholden to shareholders, not users. They use algorithms that give users only what they like, which denies them the range of opinions required to understand the world, and causes political division. The business model is based on the dopamine hit of shares, likes and comments, which brings people back and satisfies advertisers and data purchasers. Providing independent social media is hard, because the giants are so ubiquitous. They have no effective global regulation, and they are almost impossible to compete against without huge amounts of money that independents don't have. There are alternatives, like Social.coop, but membership would have to grow significantly to compete.

**Contributing:** to gain insight and skills, volunteer for an independent media organisation, locally or nationally. Contact them and see what they say. The Independent Community News Network train people to become community news producers; and the Centre for Investigative Journalism provide courses. You could also donate to these organisations, or the Media Fund, or do some research and find another organisation you like.

## resources

- lowimpact.org/independent-media for more info, courses, links & books, including:
- Tom Mills, *the BBC: Myth of a Public Service*
- Chomsky & Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*
- Nick Davies, *Hack Attack*
- themediafund.org – funding independent media
- tcij.org – Centre for Investigative Journalism
- fair.org – challenging corporate media bias (US)
- realmedia.press – journalist co-op dedicated to public interest journalism



Open Democracy – independent online news.

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