

Camille Urvoy, Mannheim, Departmental Seminar 02.12.2024

Host: Dr. Theodoros Alysandratos

"Hosting Media Bias: Evidence from the Universe of French Broadcasts, 2002-2020"

Abstract

We study the personnel economics of media organizations to understand how slant emerges in practice. We use new data from millions of French television and radio shows spanning nearly 20 years and consider the share of airtime devoted to guests associated to the different political parties as a measure of media bias. Leveraging the movements of thousands of journalists between media outlets, we first estimate a model in which the share of coverage for each political group is determined by both journalist and outlet components, reflecting individual journalist decisions and outlet-level editorial strategies. We find that outlet-level decisions – such as those set by top executives – account for three-fourth of the differences in political coverage; on the contrary, journalists' personal editorial preferences play only a minor role. We further examine how journalists respond to a major takeover-induced editorial change. Using a difference-in-differences strategy, we show that while many journalists left, those who stayed largely adapted to the new editorial direction. Notably, this compliance came at nearly no cost for the new owner, reflecting journalists' low bargaining power in an industry in crisis.