

MEDIA RELEASE

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AUT research centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy (JMAD)

INDEPENDENT MEDIA OWNERSHIP BOOMS POST COVID-19

2020 was a challenging year for every sector, but dramatic change played out in New Zealand's media. The 10th anniversary *New Zealand Media Ownership Report* by AUT research centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy (JMAD) has identified a trend towards independent ownership, with more of our media now independently owned than at any other time in the past decade.

“New Zealand's media is still transnational, highly financialised and vulnerable to volatilities in advertising revenue. Yet, the general media landscape is rapidly changing. In 2020, we have more independent media outlets than at any other time since 2010. Funding models are also changing; many independents are funded by subscriptions, sponsorships, donations and memberships as advertising has been gobbled up by Alphabet (Google's parent company), and Facebook.”

The 10th JMAD report focuses on Covid-19. While the full impacts of the pandemic on New Zealand media are unclear, the report finds that the Government played a crucial role in keeping media afloat after severe declines in advertising.

“Our media survived Covid-19 with help from the Government, Google's financial support to local news organisations and readers. Some news sites reported 'skyrocketing traffic' and significant spikes in their reader revenue, but without the Government wage-subsidy the picture could have been much worse,” says JMAD co-directors Dr Merja Myllylahti and Professor Wayne Hope.

The report says major shifts in the New Zealand media ownership landscape beg the question regarding the Government's role in future funding of media beyond the Covid-19.

“In 2019, the Local Democracy Reporting scheme funded eight reporters across the regions. In 2020, the scheme was expanded to cover all media outlets belonging to the New Zealand Media Council and \$1.5 million of new money was promised to support local journalism. Before the

General Election, Labour pledged \$75 million in new contestable funding for media, distributed via NZ on Air. This money may well give a great boost to many independent and local media outlets.

“In an age of misinformation and fake news, it is paramount to keep funding local and independent media. It is our duty to check that the Government is keeping its promises. Money spent on supporting local and independent reporting as part of a healthy media system advances democracy,” write Dr Myllylahti and Professor Hope, Co-Editors of the report.

Key trends and events in the New Zealand media:

- MediaWorks sold its television business to Discovery;
- Bauer Media pulled out of the New Zealand market;
- Mercury Capital acquired Bauer Media magazines;
- Stuff became independently owned by Sinead Boucher.

Several AUT academics from the School of Communications Studies contributed to the 2020 JMAD Report, drawing on expertise in their fields. Contributors included Dr Sarah Baker (television), Dr Peter Hoar (radio), Dr Rufus McEwan (radio), Dr Atakohu Middleton (Māori media), and Dr Greg Treadwell (print and online news outlets). Co-directors Dr Merja Myllylahti and Professor Wayne Hope co-edited the report, and also contributed several sections.

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About:

JMAD is AUT research centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy, and its reports are publicly available at AUT online: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/study-at-aut/study-areas/communications/research/journalism,-media-and-democracy-research-centre/journalists-and-projects/new-zealand-media-ownership-report>

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