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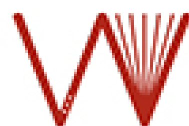
Challenges and Developments in Public Service Journalism



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With the support of the International Association of Public Media Researchers (IAPMR)

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PREFACE: FALSE PROMISES AND BRIGHT FUTURES

Klaus Unterberger

Public communications is in a state of massive disruption. Digital transformation has changed the way we perceive, select, and use information, the way we produce it and, lately, how, with the fast rise of generative artificial intelligence. This digital transformation poses threats and creates opportunities for new and useful ways to communicate and interact across a growing range of smart devices. This tension has significant ramifications for the future of public service journalism, which is the focus of this anthology.

Early hopeful enthusiasm for a *free* internet with promises of opening new dimensions of diversity and strengthening open access democracy has regrettably imploded. Today's world wide web bears little resemblance to the vision of emancipation portrayed in Apple's iconic '1984' advertisement that dramatically proclaimed digital technology facilitating a liberating revolution. The image makers envisioned liberation from a presumably suffocating regime of mainstream mass media. The reality today is more accurately understood as a multibillion-dollar business venture owned by a handful of global platform giants. A handful of wealthy, powerful 'Big Brothers' dominate the internet and exert influences that shape media perceptions and channel the digital communications of societies to profound effect. Evgeny Morozov's conception of a new digital feudalism has the ring of truth: in the media ecology, free markets have become empowered principalities and free citizens are treated as consumer-vassals who provide a resource for harvesting personal data to produce fabulous profits and enact surveillance. The heralded 1984 revolution was sadly experienced as a series of unrealised, even false promises.

In 2024 we face a worrisome dilemma for the future of democracies that is linked with challenges facing contemporary journalism and news provision. Digital disruption combined with the profound impact of commercial social media corporations have leading roles in a declining print sector in media, and complications, growing fragmentation of audiences, increasing commercialisation, and the rise of algorithmic media replacing editorial oversight. The context shift is the cause of grave concerns about the future reach and relevance of quality journalism.

The development of public service media (PSM) over the past twenty years and more, signalling a transition from broadcasting-only to multimedia competence, has played a non-substitutable role in efforts to ensure a credible, reliable continuing source of public service news and information provision. Despite persistent, often harsh attacks from populist, nationalistic, and neoliberal governments threatening journalistic independence, and despite self-inflicted deficits rooted in an old-school public service broadcasting (PSB) mindset, PSM has managed a successful transition while maintaining distinctive characteristics the digital giants lack.

This has been facilitated by public funding, which is the best guarantor of independence from commercial interests and direct political influence, supporting the arm's-length principle that is essential for fulfilling the public mission and remit. Doing so provides an invaluable safeguard for the public interest in quality news and information, and for ensuring public accountability through transparent rules and regulation. PSM is bound by stricter checks and balances than commercial media companies and governed by an ethos rooted in social responsibility. This has enabled public service journalism to combat and even counteract some of the negative impacts of an otherwise thoroughly commercialised internet. Public service journalism is needed to empower liberal democracy as a social practice that depends greatly on continually building and strengthening the public sphere.

The future of public service journalism can't be taken for granted. Research and deliberation are essential for thoughtfully addressing a host of thorny questions in the context of digital transformation. Some of particular relevance for this book include how we can avoid the worst-case scenario of AI-

empowered 'news' generated by big tech global media corporations driven primarily by commercial motives and wilfully neglecting the public interest in media and communications. It isn't difficult to imagine the dire consequences of the fourth estate of independent news media being overwhelmed by the fifth power of commercial social media. We already see too much evidence of declining editorial accountability and the rise of partisan news for commercial gain. How can we carve out a public sphere on the internet that is devoted to serving the common good in digital communication? That is essential for enabling and supporting democracy in the digital context. How can PSM counteract the harmful influences of today's commercialised internet? Can international regulation work? Can national regulation work in a globalised media industry? How can public service journalism intervene to help tame the tsunami of fake news and partisan propaganda flooding social media channels? How can digital platforms deliver public value beyond the much narrower commercial interest of growing shareholder value?

These and related questions were addressed in RIPE conference discourse in 2022 in Vienna.[1] Conservation and innovation were of primary interest, and these were not treated as a contradiction but rather as a dynamic, because conservation depends greatly on innovation in our disrupted media environment. Participants deliberated on the Enlightenment heritage in the digital context, articulated aspects of a vision for accessible and trusted information that keeps faith with the core values that legitimise PSM while developing new perspectives and options for delivering on those values in ways that are competitively effective – values that steer the public service mission of 'informing, entertaining, and educating'.

While the conference was unique, the focal concerns are not. Policymakers and institutions across Europe (and beyond) are searching for solutions to a raft of challenges that were addressed in the 2022 RIPE conference and refined in the contributions to this Reader. The 2022 RIPE conference proved to be an effective platform for strengthening collaboration between the academic community and practitioners, particularly strategic managers, in both respective and collective efforts to ensure a sustainable future for public service news, information and communication.

For nearly twenty-five years, the RIPE initiative has provided a platform for expert collaboration that has persistently produced a library of future-oriented discourse about the mission, roles, and performance of PSM in the digital age. RIPE has been invaluable as a bridge for gaps in university–industry collaboration. The research and analyses presented at RIPE conferences over the decades have provided fresh, timely insights but also a necessary reality check for PSM organisations and leaders. This is clearly a win-win for both communities.

ORF (the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation) welcomed the opportunity to cooperate with the University of Vienna in hosting the 2022 conference. In fact, ORF has a long-standing heritage of cooperating with the scientific community in research and development. ORF's management team harvested substantial insights and useful advice for developmental thinking about how to successfully navigate the enormous challenges of digital transformation in ways best suited to regain trust where it has declined and retain it where it persists. Expertise shared in the many presentations and workgroup debates, and in intensive networking during the conference, has been very beneficial to the ongoing work of change management inside ORF.

There is much at stake. The next several years will have decisive importance in determining the future of public service journalism. Societies need effective ways to apply and manage AI in the public interest. That is a daunting challenging given the wealth and power of commercial interests engaged with AI hardware and software. Societies need to navigate the difficult balance between protecting both markets and publics from unhealthy distortion. Media are social technologies with value that exceeds private interests in profits and market shares. What happens will decide whether we can communicate and interact only in filter bubbles or in transparent public spheres. What kinds of information will we be able to access freely? Will trust in media continue to decline or be revitalised? Will editorial quality be a priority? The answers have existential implications for the future of democracy.

In 1987 the late prime minister of the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher, summarised the mindset of a neoliberal revolution succinctly: 'There is no such thing as society'. That wasn't true then and isn't yet true today, but her vision

could be realised as a consequence of the *digital* revolution. The scale of commercial involvement in media is enormous and growing. Platform companies are capturing and connecting huge amounts of personal data and exercising proprietary control through opaque algorithms. They are constructing an increasingly efficient model of personalised communications that has undeniably contributed to societal fragmentation and polarisation. The media moguls of today's digital platform kingdoms don't prioritise the needs and interests of publics or democracy.

That said, we want to acknowledge the enormous potential benefits that can be realised by harnessing digital media technologies to facilitate social innovation. Open-source technologies, the Fediverse, and legions of 'nerds, geeks', and prosumers are building socially responsible networks that connect people beyond business interests and outside surveillance zones. Despite a host of unrealised *false promises* heralded in the early period of digital transformation, there are *realistic opportunities* to revive the enormous potential of the internet as a platform to provide public services for the common good. Whether this happens depends on decisions and actions taken by policymakers, publics, and PSM organisations – among others. This book is a call to pay much closer attention to the continuing, even growing, importance of public service news and journalism.

In his historic analysis of the declining Austrian–Hungarian monarchy titled *The Man Without Qualities*, Robert Musil (2002) presented a perspective that seems useful in times of disruptive change: 'So the sense of possibility could be defined as the ability to think about everything that could just as well be, and not to take what is as more important than what is not'. That is worth keeping in mind while reading this book.

Note

1. RIPE is an international network of scholars and practitioners who are committed to the development of public service in media (PSM). The acronym stands for Re-visionary Interpretations of the Public Enterprise in

media. The project launched in 1999 at the initiative of Professor Gregory Ferrell Lowe (one of the editors of this volume). The first RIPE conference took place in Helsinki, Finland in January 2002. The most recent conference at the time of writing was RIPE@2024 in Lisbon (May 2024). The first RIPE Reader, co-edited by Lowe with Taisto Hujanen, was published 2003. All RIPE Readers are available open access at: https://iapmr.media/ripe-publications. The RIPE initiative sits within the International Association of Public Media Researchers (IAPMR). Information about IAPMR and its initiatives can be found at https://iapmr.media. An account of the RIPE history can be found in Lowe (2020).

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Chapter 1

Public Service Journalism in Digital Markets

Alessandro D'Arma, Maria Michalis, Gregory Ferrell Lowe, and Michael-Bernhard Zita

Summary

This chapter contextualises the contributions that follow by focusing on clarifying essential tensions that affect the practice of journalism in the public interest within PSM organisations. In doing so, it contributes to work intended to advance understandings of distinctive challenges as well as opportunities that have a bearing on strategies to address both. While acknowledging the formidable challenges for public service journalism in the digital platform economy amid a concerning trend of political illiberalism, it distils several remedies derived from the analyses by contributors to this volume related to policy interventions, organisational strategies, and professional practices. Ultimately, the chapter emphasises the distinctive role public service media can play in promoting journalism as a public service function.

Introduction

This anthology, the eleventh Reader in the RIPE series, examines challenges and prospects for public service journalism (PSJ) in theory and practice.[1] It

represents the culmination of the RIPE@2022 conference in Austria that focused on public sector journalism in the contemporary platform economy. Journalism in the public interest has always been a core aspect of the remit for public service media (PSM) organisations. The first two featured tasks of the Reithian trilogy emphasise this importance – to inform and educate. Journalism and public media scholars alike have long recognised the essential need for a public service orientation in news provision for citizens in a democracy, the vitality of which depends on ensuring a healthy public sphere (Harrison, 2019). Today's information landscape is characterised by news deserts at the local level in particular, rampant mis- and disinformation, sophisticated uses of social media and algorithms for propaganda to sway public opinion, and a decline in editorial responsibility for much of what passes as 'news'. Strengthening PSJ is widely called for, but systemic features of today's platform economy make this especially challenging in practice. Technological, economic, and political pressures have undermined the integrity of information systems around the world and threaten this foundational pillar of PSM.

This anthology contributes to discourse and deliberation about journalism in the public interest as a public service function from various analytical and geographic perspectives. The collection breaks ground in two ways. First, this is the first collection to consider the topics treated with a specific focus on PSM. The focus follows the theme of the RIPE@2022 conference, which was the first to directly tackle challenges in the theory and practice of PSJ in the digital platform ecology. Second, contributors to this collection include fresh work on PSJ in relation to countries associated with the Global South, as well as PSM organisations in the historic heartland of the enterprise. The following questions motivated our work and informed the analyses:

1. How can PSJ be distinctive in the digital age, countering problems that are rife in commercial media platforms associated with partisanship, filter bubbles and echo chambers, fake news, cyber propaganda, and the like?
2. How can PSM effectively resist the constellation of pressures that threaten to undermine relevant mandates and organisations with strategies rooted in the public service ethos to maintain their role and function as

independent, trusted sources of truthful, fair, and balanced information dedicated to serving the whole of society?

3. How can national PSM organisations effectively compete with the scale, wealth, and dominance of the digital majors that are transnational in scope?
4. How can PSM keep pace with the complex dynamics of ongoing disruption and mitigate socially damaging consequences of digital transformation in media systems and their effects?

In this introductory chapter, we contextualise the contributions that follow, which seek to help answer these four questions. We focus on clarifying essential tensions that affect the practice of journalism in the public interest within PSM organisations. In doing so, we seek to contribute to work intended to advance understandings of distinctive challenges as well as opportunities that have a bearing on strategies to address both. Ultimately, we want to emphasise the distinctive role PSM can play in promoting journalism as a public service function.

We begin by engaging with debates that reflect shifting and diverse understandings of journalism as this intersects with the public service concept. This is followed by a distillation of glaring deficiencies in the contemporary information ecosystem to emphasise the crucial necessity for PSJ today. We then consider intensifying pressures posed by political, regulatory, and financial trends that limit the ability of PSM to fulfil the public service mission in journalism, even for mature and comparatively strong national PSM organisations. After this, we consider challenges embedded in this broader context related to the growing power of big tech companies, and the attendant risk of PSM becoming dependent on third-party platforms for news dissemination, and a new wave of disruption keyed to rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI). While acknowledging the formidable challenges for PSJ in the digital platform economy amid a concerning trend of political illiberalism, we distil several remedies derived from the analyses by contributors to this volume related to policy interventions, organisational strategies, and professional practices.

Understandings of (public service) journalism

There is wide agreement that journalism is in crisis, and that the crisis is rooted in disruption created by advances in digital transformation. This crisis, however, is not only caused by technology, and it is not as recent as some assume (for example, see Pickard, 2020). Whether the crisis is actual or perceived is debatable, and the degrees to which it could be considered as such vary by country, news organisation, and population. Some scholars reject the crisis characterisation but acknowledge significant problems. Waisbord (2019, p. 210) described four *vulnerabilities* of journalism in mature democracies: commercialisation, the precarisation of labour, the rise of anti-democratic forces, and growing attacks on press freedom. Zelizer (2015) referred to *challenges* for journalism and made a convincing argument that the notion of 'crisis' is unhelpful and projects a unitary discourse driven by a 'modern, Anglo-American imaginary' (p. 896), which obscures distinct 'technological, political, economic, social, occupational, moral and legal' conditions of journalism (p. 888) in different settings. In this view, which we accept, it is important to avoid temptations to suppose a single uniform set of solutions. What is not in doubt are defining characteristics that indicate the scale of challenges faced by journalism in its public service role. These especially include declines and uncertainty in funding; changing ownership structures; increasing employment precarity; threats to journalists' safety and lives; the erosion of press freedoms; and dissatisfied, distrustful audiences.

The worrisome, fraying condition of journalism in the Global North is not isolated from the growing fragility of other and broader democratic institutions. Even in the Western world, where democracies are often presumed to be mature and secure, Nielsen (2014) identified several features of concern for journalism in democratic corporatist countries like Finland and Germany that are largely political and related to declines in public confidence in news, while in polarised pluralist countries like France and Italy journalism is undermined by economic factors in the digitalisation context, as well as persistently low public confidence in news, and professional crisis caused by lack of autonomy from politics and proprietors. He further observed that in

the liberal economies of the UK and the USA, growing financial and professional challenges are comparatively new.

The character and quality of journalism in a given society or community depend on political and socioeconomic conditions. It is vital to understand that the agency of journalists and journalistic organisations is enacted in the context of broad structural conditions, and the conditions are not stable. Aspects of particular importance include changing preferences in ideology and political parties, changing ownership structures and degrees of market concentration, the viability and stability of funding models, the legal and regulatory framework for journalism practice, the availability of offline and online media, the geographic scope of the news system, path dependencies such as the historical presence or absence of strong newspapers, and a tradition of public service broadcasting. All of this, and more, significantly influences the mission of journalism – that is, what journalism is supposed to accomplish – and its practice: how it is done.

Thus, it is not simple to answer the essential question: what is journalism? It seems fairly clear in broad and largely normative terms but less so in applied practice. It is therefore not surprising that it is also difficult to precisely answer the question: who is a journalist? For the most part, the answer has coalesced around an occupational perspective: 'Journalists have an occupational ideology (a system of beliefs about what "real journalism" is) with claims to an exclusive role and status in society, which keeps together their professional identity' (Rottwilm, 2014, p. 13 citing Deuze, 2005). For Hermida (2019, p. 177) this occupational ideology 'presents perhaps the single biggest challenge to journalism'.

However, in today's hybrid media system and platform economy (Chadwick, 2017) traditional boundaries between information, news, and entertainment are increasingly blurred, and power dynamics are shifting. In truth, the boundaries were never as clear as some preferred to think. News can be entertaining and entertainment can be educational. But the historic paradigm was based on genre definitions and distinctions, the varying primary intentions of content creators, and the utility a type of content was expected to provide for users (mainly as audiences). In the digital media ecology, genres are

fluid, intentions are mixed, and utility is more complex. This was observed by Papacharissi (2014, p. 27) who suggested that in the complex digital networked (social) media ecology, news is ' "prodused" through networked platforms that converge broadcast and oral traditions of storytelling in contemporary news practices'. Put differently, 'practices commonly associated with journalists have been undertaken by actors outside of the formal structures and institutions of journalism' (Hermida, 2019, p. 177) such as bloggers, influencers, and citizen journalists, all of whom vie for audience attention, authority, and enrichment. The new constellation of news actors invokes a key question regarding 'who [can] assume authority for the public record and how?' (Zelizer, 2015, p. 898).

The dominant perception constructs journalism as an Anglo-American invention (Chalaby, 1996). By extension, journalism is interdependent with democracy. Josephi (2013) asked a provocative question: 'How much democracy does journalism need?' Viewed this way, journalism is not as much about normative beliefs as often emphasised but more about practice. There is no perfect democracy, and journalism is practised in countries with low degrees of 'democratic maturity'. This points to an important strand of fairly recent scholarly discourse about journalism beyond the contexts of Western liberal democracies. What defines journalism as practice, Josephi went on to note, 'is the provision of accurate and verified information that rests on independent news judgement and is responsible to the interests of the public' (p. 486). Here, then, we come to the nub of the matter for our interests in this anthology. However produced in all the fulsome complexity of practices and purposes, journalism is supposed to serve the public interest by providing information that is truthful, fair, informed, relevant, reasonably independent (which is never total), and accountable.

We argue for a conceptual shift from understanding journalism primarily as a profession to produce news products to instead understanding journalism as an institution and practice that is service-oriented (Reese, 2021). This shift cannot be accomplished without the involvement of journalists, 'professional' and otherwise, and by collaborating with active audiences, both extant and underserved or excluded. While boundaries are blurring and the answer to 'what is journalism?' is disputed, there is broad agreement that journalism, as

an institution and practice, is needed more than ever and primarily to fulfil a public service role and function. Hence, the focus of this anthology.

The shift encourages reconsideration of two terms embedded in policy and academic discourse: 'high-quality journalism' and 'public-interest journalism'. Setting out to examine the future sustainability of journalism in the UK, the final report of the Cairncross Review in 2019 engaged with definitional matters (Cairncross, 2019). The authors noted 'the widely differing and conflicting suggestions' (p. 16) by stakeholders for how 'high-quality' journalism should be defined, including definitions focusing on the credentials of journalists and their employers (that is, high-quality journalism as journalism provided by professionally trained journalists and professional publishers), the regulatory framework (high-quality journalism as journalism provided by organisations subscribing to professional codes) or, conversely, demand-side definitions judging quality by the amount of attention people give to news and their willingness to pay. The report concluded that 'ultimately, "high-quality journalism" is a subjective concept that depends neither solely on the audience nor the news provider' (p. 16).

The report advocated instead developing policy to support 'public-interest news and information', reflecting our interests and intentions. This was described as including two types of journalism that while 'of limited interest to the public' (p. 17) matter the most to democracy – namely investigative journalism and reporting on the daily activities of public institutions and leaders at all levels of governance. Other news genres, such as travel, culinary, and fashion reporting, may be of high quality as well but were not the focus of their recommendations. The rationale they emphasise rested on the premise that these two types are scarce resources that greatly matter for societal cohesion, public accountability, and the legitimacy of democracy.

This brings us to the focus of this anthology on 'public service journalism' and how we understand that term. Our focus is squarely on PSM providers as primary sources of journalism in the public interest. PSM has philosophical, practical, and institutional aspects. Various contributions in the anthology investigate and critique these aspects, always emphasising issues related to public interest needs. It is important to understand that PSM organisations

mostly began as public service broadcasting companies that have evolved into multiplatform and multimedia providers (Bardoel & Lowe, 2008).

Despite considerable diversity in institutional configurations, governance structures, and funding arrangements, PSM organisations share a commitment to fulfilling mandates that are embodied in a public service remit. The specifics also vary but are enshrined in laws and foundational documents, all of which (to our knowledge) include journalism as a primary and priority component. However, it is important to also note that content other than news services has always been an integral aspect of remits as well. Thus, while PSM is closely linked with PSJ, the two are not synonymous. PSJ can be done by institutions and companies other than PSM organisations. In fact, it is done by a pluralistic assortment of media actors and platforms that include alternative media, community media, newsprint media, underground media, commercial media, and state media. It is done by radio and television, in printed publications and online in many formats (podcasts, blogs, reports, current affairs discussions, and so on).

Understanding PSJ as a set of practices committed to serving the public interest that together actively contribute to the vitality of the public sphere in each society, and across societies, means accepting the principle that a broad spectrum of news organisations and individuals have a legitimate stake in PSJ. Connecting this role and function with public interest journalism denotes practices that uphold high standards of accuracy and accountability to fulfil a fundamental societal purpose. In this sense, then, public interest journalism is high-quality journalism. Given its pivotal role in nurturing citizenship in all its forms, journalism as a whole can be viewed as inherent to serving a broadly important public service function.

The implications are treated in several chapters of this anthology. In Chapter 3, Eddy Borges-Rey and Malek Al Manaa examine the historical and philosophical underpinnings of the public service ethos in the Middle East, with a focus on a tradition of civic responsibility. They draw specifically on Harb's model of Arab values to broaden conceptual understanding of public service and connect this with varied manifestations of digital citizenship in the region. Madhavi Ravikumar and Shuaib Shafi in Chapter 10 examine the

complicated intersection of colonial history, state involvement, and public service broadcasting (PSB) in India to demonstrate tensions between evident intentions to serve the public interest under conditions that feature exceptional diversity in languages, cultures, and socioeconomic conditions within a broad population of startling complexity. And all of this happens in a postcolonial context with lingering legacies that further complicate efforts to improve degrees of journalistic independence while supporting understandable needs for social cohesion. Transitioning to PSM from state media is no easy task, but even as state media it is clear news services are widely used and generally trusted.

Other contributors provide an alternative perspective, which is to narrowly define PSJ as journalism produced by PSM organisations. This viewpoint is occasionally implicit in the academic literature on PSM (for example, Lamuedra et al., 2018). While acknowledging that PSJ extends beyond PSM organisations, our focus in this anthology is on the role PSM plays in advancing PSJ. With this analytical framework, we explore whether there are distinctive features of PSJ as practised by PSM organisations. This is the central question addressed in Chapter 2 by Marko Milosavljević and Marína Urbániková: 'Is the concept of quality journalism universal, irrespective of the media platform, or does PSM journalism possess unique characteristics that differentiate it?' Their conclusion, which we accept, underscores that alongside traditional hallmarks of quality journalism such as factual accuracy, fairness, and objectivity, PSM journalism should reflect and enact the public service principle of universality. This encompasses various dimensions, including diverse journalistic forms and genres, equitable and inclusive access for all segments of society (particularly crucial in an era of increasing paywall journalism), and a comprehensive service spanning local, national, and international coverage.

Countering the information disorder

Discussions regarding the role of PSM organisations in promoting PSJ occur amid widespread recognition of the negative information externalities

generated by profit-driven digital platforms, alongside growing concerns about threats to journalistic independence in the context of surging political illiberalism across Europe and beyond (for example, Akser & Baybars, 2022; Štětka et al., 2021; Surowiec & Štětka, 2019). Using an analytical framework focused on 'structural inequalities' in information provision – which is an apt lens given the universalism mission of PSM that is not only about access but also about ensuring *equality* of opportunities – Napoli (2024) offers a valuable categorisation of what he calls 'information inequalities' within the contemporary news and information ecosystem. Newer forms of information inequalities have emerged from, or have been exacerbated in, the context of the contemporary platform economy.

One of the paradoxes in the era of media abundance brought about by digitalisation is the so-called 'news deserts' phenomenon. News deserts refers to a dearth of local news but also to a lack of representation (or misrepresentation) of minorities within a given society. Entire localities and social groups lack a voice, as mainstream media fail to (adequately) address them. A recent report by the European University Institute's Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF) defined a news desert 'as an area that is lacking sufficient, reliable, and diverse information from trustworthy media sources' (Verza et al., 2024, p. 1). News deserts are particularly encountered at the local or community level (for the UK see Cairncross, 2019). The CMPF study found a growing number of news deserts in the twenty-seven EU member states examined, a decline in local journalists and worsening working conditions.

'Algorithmic bias' has emerged as another facet of information inequality, within the pervasive use of algorithmically driven automation in news dissemination. A substantial body of literature has highlighted how biases encoded in algorithmic system designs, and in the data they are fed, perpetuate disparities by curtailing the variety and volume of information recommended to users based on socio-demographic profiling. Algorithm-driven recommendation systems, while not the sole contributor to filter bubbles, surely play a significant role in another paradox that has become apparent in the era of media abundance. News, or rather information, has become more

widely and readily available than ever, and yet more people choose not to consume it. The era of media abundance is characterised by growing news avoidance, a disconnection of some audiences from news. The latest Reuters Institute Digital News Report covering forty-six countries in six continents notes that trust in news declined by a further 2% in 2023, while news avoidance reached the all-time high at 36% (Newman et al., 2023, pp. 10–11). News avoidance indicates that some publics feel disconnected from traditional journalism and turn away from news.

Finally, Napoli discusses how mis- and disinformation, 'the signature concern in relation to the contemporary news and information ecosystem' (2024, p. 55), disproportionally affect certain groups in society, and how digital platforms' efforts to counter it through content moderation are skewed in favour of affluent markets, primarily in the USA, thus exacerbating a new form of geographic divide. This skewed focus perpetuates inequalities both in access to accurate information and in the allocation of resources for combating mis/disinformation, ultimately widening the information gap between different regions and socio-economic groups.

This work, and others in the same vein, underscore the importance of ensuring conducive regulatory and political conditions, both for the ethos and the institutional framework. That is the only way to ensure PSM can be a structural remedy for many of the pervasive inequities in the information system today (see Michalis & D'Arma, 2024). Solutions to complex problems such as news deserts, news avoidance, mis/disinformation, and algorithmic biases require the engagement of a multitude of actors across levels of governance and the implementation of diverse strategies in practice, which explains why PSM is increasingly called upon to play a major role in these collective endeavours. In some instances, PSM entities are already actively contributing by providing financial support to local journalism, participating in fact-checking initiatives, and exploring the development of 'public service algorithms' aimed at facilitating users' serendipitous encounters with news.

Enduring challenges to PSM's journalistic mission

Our discussion thus far underscores Marius Dragomir's succinct assertion in Chapter 4 that 'genuine PSM is as crucial today as PSB was in its historical context'. Despite its obvious potential to offset many of the problems in declining journalism and a public-interest orientation in news, PSM organisations face significant hurdles that curtail their capacity to effect positive change (see, for example, Barwise, 2022). Many of these challenges are long-standing, predating the current era, but are exacerbated by the platform-driven nature of today's news ecology (more about that soon). PSM providers remain important actors in national news markets. While their distinct funding mechanisms and not-for-profit status insulate them from the commercial pressures felt by private news companies that must grapple with declining advertising revenues and public reluctance to pay for news, they are at a severe disadvantage in many other respects – including adequate funding, lack of political support, and growing commercial competition.

Anything public is inherently political. Thus, it isn't surprising that politics is a major friction point for PSM. Dragomir provides a sobering analysis that draws on an earlier 'State of State Media' report he produced at the Media and Journalism Research Center. Despite modest improvements in recent years, a majority of 'state and public media organisations' remain tightly controlled by governments or susceptible to political interference. Even in robust PSM systems with relatively high degrees of journalistic independence, political pressures are evident and complex. Dragomir assesses degrees of independence in finance, oversight, and content across types of public institutions in media and concludes with a cautionary note because, when viewed collectively, the challenges indicate declining independence that poses a formidable threat to the continued preservation and advancement of PSJ.

Other chapters in this anthology provide more situated analyses of political, economic, regulatory, and cultural challenges that limit PSM's capacity to fulfil a PSJ mission in different countries and regions. In Finland, the country with the highest trust in news and where the perceived importance of PSM is also the highest (Newman et al., 2023, p. 10), public broadcaster Yle is not exempt from the same pressures. In Chapter 2, Marko Ala-Fossi and his colleagues examine a notable instance when Yle's commercial rivals successfully

contested the scope of its online journalism under EU state aid law, resulting in imposed limitations on Yle's ability to publish text-based news. Although this has so far had minimal practical effects on Yle's journalistic production and public consumption, the case illustrates intensifying political pressures even in the historic heartland of PSJ. When the ground shifts, all castles can tumble. These pressures encompass the threat of substantial funding cuts, particularly as a populist right-wing party gains traction and Finland's economy is not doing well.

In weaker European PSM contexts, historically characterised by a political culture of media instrumentalisation, challenges to fulfilling the PSJ mission are even more pronounced. In Chapter 11, Achilleas Karadimitriou assesses Greek public broadcaster ERT's digital adaptation and the prospect for PSJ. Despite severe budget restrictions, ERT is trying to keep up with technological advances by moving to an integrated newsroom, revamping the online news portal, and experimenting with AI in news production. But Greece's political culture, internally and externally, has not changed, and structural conditions remain a barrier to PSJ in practice. Drawing on a survey of ERT journalists, Karadimitriou concludes that 'the principles of PSJ are mostly absent from the operational status of ERT, primarily characterised by low editorial autonomy and weak journalism professionalism'. The ERT journalists participating in the research attributed the status quo to 'managerial executives' transient and often politically influenced decision-making'. What he found and concluded is applicable for countries outside Europe, but equally for several in Europe. PSJ faces mounting challenges everywhere.

Outside Europe, Ravikumar and Shafi in Chapter 10 reflect on similarities in their analysis of Doordarshan, India's public television broadcaster. They do not characterise Doordarshan as PSM but rather as public media because DD is a state media institution. While outreach to remote areas highlights DD's important role in fostering national development and social cohesion, integral components of its public service mandate are under tight government control. Interference has worsened in India's shift toward authoritarian governance, which undermines democratic institutions. Such circumstances fundamentally impede Doordarshan's ability to engage in PSJ to enhance Indian democracy

and society. Excessive bureaucracy, resource constraints, and motivational factors – resulting in a lack of innovation – are all ramifications. In this context, it is not surprising to find DD struggling with challenges posed by digital transformation.

In sub-Saharan Africa too, as discussed by Kobina Bedu-Addo in Chapter 9, digital platforms are increasingly shaping news flows and public broadcasters in a region struggling with 'a problematic post-independence history' in efforts to reform media systems and relations. As a result, hopes to transition state institutions to become genuine public service broadcasters following the democratic wave and its attendant media liberalisation that hit the continent in the early 1990s have proven largely unsuccessful. Examining the wider regulatory framework for online news in Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana, and its impact on PSB news provision, Bedu-Addo offers a critical assessment, arguing that 'in some cases, regulatory instruments retain colonial-era values of repression and control', while neglecting to address 'the social and cultural goals that media policy needs to promote as a way to enable wide participation in the continent's fledgling democratic efforts and development'. Regulation is, thus, one factor among others, such as political culture and budgetary restrictions, that prevent PSJ from thriving.

Taken together, then, the anthology paints a rather bleak scenario for PSJ, in large part because of weakening conditions for PSM organisations and social responsibility principles. While political cultures are very hard to change, some cause for optimism arises from recent regulatory initiatives, particularly at the supranational level. The European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), adopted in April 2024, enshrines the editorial independence of PSM in the European Union by stipulating that the board members of PSM organisations should be selected through transparent and non-discriminatory procedures and criteria for sufficiently long terms of office (Regulation 2024/1083: article 5(2)) and that PSM organisations should be financed on the basis of transparent and objective procedures and criteria laid down in advance, and the funding should be 'adequate, sustainable and predictable' (Regulation 2024/1083: article 5(3)). Some of the measures initially intended to support PSM and journalistic independence were watered down during the legislative process, and there

remain question marks over the EMFA's enforceability. Nevertheless, the Public Media Alliance (PMA), an international association advocating for PSM, described the EMFA as 'a significant step in the right direction in offering better protection for independent public media', arriving at a crucial time when PSM across the EU face significant political challenges (Public Media Alliance, 2024, para. 9). Of course, this only applies to Europe, and only within the EU at that, but it illustrates awareness of the issues and need for regulatory change.

Platform power, AI, and public service journalism

In addition to political circumstances playing out largely at the national level, digital transformation has strengthened transnational structural conditions. Digital transformation has impacted journalism in three main ways, all with implications for PSJ. First, news providers and news consumers have increasingly become platform-dependent (for example, Nielsen & Fletcher, 2023; Nielsen & Ganter, 2022). Online intermediaries such as search engines, social media platforms, and news aggregators exert substantial influence on how news is created, found, accessed, verified, and consumed (Ofcom, 2024). In essence, powerful intermediaries now perform automated editorial functions using opaque algorithmic processes. Moreover, they operate within and prioritise profit-driven strategies. They are not designed for, and have little apparent interest in, upholding media freedom and journalistic integrity, and certainly do not adhere to PSJ values. In essence, news providers, media organisations, and cultural producers increasingly rely on a handful of transnational platforms to fulfil key functions. This dependence creates a highly asymmetrical power relation whereby platforms, given their pervasiveness, have assumed infrastructure-like attributes (Plantin et al., 2018) and act as powerful gatekeepers.

Second, social media platforms compete with media and journalism for audience attention. Changing patterns of media consumption as audiences move online is particularly noticeable among young consumers. Online consumption has grown largely at the expense of traditional media and

journalism. Furthermore, as earlier noted, social media have given 'rise to new social media actors' such as vloggers and influencers who compete with journalists for societal relevance (Badr, 2024, p. 28). Finally, search engines and social media platforms have bled advertising revenues away from commercially funded (public service) media and journalism. In addition, they provide mostly 'free' content and services, further driving audiences away and undermining the financial sustainability of news publishers.

National governments and supranational organisations have intervened in attempts to address some of these tensions. For instance, in 2022 the European Union adopted the Digital Services Package comprising the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and the Digital Services Act (DSA), which respectively aim to promote contestable and fair markets in the digital sector and impose obligations on very largely intermediaries and platforms in order to prevent the spread of harmful content, disinformation, and other societal risks (Regulation 2022/1925 and Regulation 2022/2065 respectively).

At the national level, a noteworthy policy initiative concerns the so-called bargaining codes, such as Australia's News Media Bargaining Code and the more recent Canadian Online News Act (known as Bill C-18), which require Google and Meta/Facebook to compensate traditional news organisations for use of their content. Notwithstanding the shortcomings of these policy interventions (see Bossio et al., 2024), by channelling financial resources back into news production they may help redress power imbalances between platforms and news publishers, though at the same time they risk making publishers financially dependent on platforms. Partly in response to these new obligations, Meta/Facebook and other digital platforms have recently started to de-emphasise news in users' feeds and are disengaging from partnership programmes with news publishers (Kobie, 2023).

In Chapter 5, Philip Napoli scrutinises a specific manifestation of platform power vis-à-vis news publishers: the practice of digital platforms labelling 'state-affiliated media outlets' as part of their strategies to counter online disinformation. Napoli contends that this is an instance of the *definitional* power wielded by digital platforms, citing Emily Bell (2021: para. 12), who writes that 'In deciding where and how to apply labels, tech companies are, in an

important sense, defining what journalism is' – or, more granularly, what an *authoritative* news source is. Napoli shows that the history of labelling practices by digital platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) has been characterised by 'inconsistency, inaccuracy, and policy reversals', and considers the negative implications of these labelling activities for the credibility and visibility of the journalism produced by legitimate PSM organisations.

The rise of AI systems arguably represents a new frontier of platform power, creating distinctive challenges for news organisations and journalists. Many PSM companies, like other news organisations, have started to incorporate AI tools in the news production process in the hope that AI automation will lead to greater efficiency and liberate journalists from mundane tasks and enable them to focus on value-adding journalism (for example, Diakopoulos et al., 2024). However, the dependencies of news providers on platforms are expected to grow with the increasing use of AI and to extend beyond mere dissemination to encompass control over the means of news production (for example, Simon, 2022). Two chapters in our collection discuss the impact of AI on journalism.

In Chapter 6, Anis Rahman provides an overview of opportunities and challenges associated with adopting and developing AI applications in PSM organisations, considering contextual differences in the Global South compared with countries in the North. Acknowledging the predominant role of big tech in driving AI innovation within the private sector, while PSM organisations grapple with insufficient funding to keep pace, Rahman considers AI as 'another and continuing chapter in the running dilemma of PSM striving to keep up with less support and fewer resources'. Amid widespread cuts to public funding, public–private AI partnerships could be an opportunity, despite the inherent risks that 'private interests may overshadow public ones, especially in countries with weaker public institutions and oversights'. Rahman makes a case for a more ethical approach to AI development and application in newsrooms, one rooted in a public interest perspective. With due diligence and persistence, he believes 'AI can be utilised as a tool that serves the public good and contributes to a more equitable and inclusive media landscape everywhere, in the Global South and North alike'.

In Chapter 7, Bronwyn Jones, Rhianne Jones, and Ewa Luger argue that when faced with intricate and opaque AI systems, PSM organisations and their journalists face 'an intelligibility-agency problem' that may undermine their capacity to act in alignment with their public service ethos and journalistic principles. Drawing upon empirical research conducted at the BBC from 2020 to 2023, the authors emphasise the need to enhance PSM organisations' ability to anticipate, understand, and address the complexities of AI. They argue for establishing proactive measures to foster new 'communities of practice' within PSM organisations specifically focused on AI in news production. These communities should serve as bridges, facilitating collaboration between academia and industry, as well as between industry and the audience/citizens, and breaking down disciplinary and organisational silos. By doing so, PSM organisations can not only mitigate the risks associated with AI but also identify new opportunities to generate alternative forms of public value.

While such recommendations 'could help build resilience against pervasive platform logic' and help news organisations reap the societal benefits of AI, the challenges in maintaining journalistic values appear far more tangible at this point. An important point made in both chapters is that most of the new technology is Western in origin and sensibility, posing a set of complex challenges for societies associated with the Global South. The challenges associated with AI are, thus, especially pronounced in newsrooms in the Global South due to resource and infrastructure limitations, and language barriers (see also Beckett & Yaseen, 2023; Rotman, 2022).

Conclusion

In this first chapter of the collection, we have set the scene for the contributions that follow by emphasising the distinctive role PSM can play in promoting journalism as a public service function while acknowledging tensions and challenges that affect the practice of journalism within PSM organisations in different national and regional contexts. While political dynamics, largely inimical to PSJ, unfold primarily at the national level, we have

argued that digital transformation has created a new set of more generalisable structural conditions that are transnational in character. Today's digital news platform ecology shapes the practice of PSJ within PSM organisations and beyond, imposing constraints and creating dependencies in complex interactions with nationally specific market, political, and cultural circumstances. The ten chapters that follow dive much deeper into the theoretical dimensions of PSJ and examine the impact of contemporary technological, political, economic, and cultural conditions on the practice of PSJ within PSM organisations.

The first two chapters offer normative and conceptual contributions to our understanding of the notion of public service in relation to journalism. In Chapter 2, Marko Milosavljević and Marína Urbániková consider the distinctive normative expectations of the PSJ offered by PSM; in Chapter 3, Eddy Borges-Rey and Malek Al Manaa discuss aspects of the public service ethos that are specific to the Arab world and their implications for journalism and digital citizenship specifically in the Middle East. In Chapter 4, Marius Dragomir provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the political and other enduring challenges that PSM face within the evolving landscape of digital news platforms worldwide. This chapter serves as a culmination of the first section of the book.

The next three chapters offer analyses of different facets of platform power vis-à-vis journalism and PSM. In Chapter 5, Philip Napoli discusses the contentious practice of social media platforms labelling state-affiliated media, assessing its implications for PSJ. Following this, Chapter 6 by Anis Rahman and Chapter 7 by Bronwyn Jones, Rhianne Jones, and Ewa Luger investigate the repercussions of AI advancements on journalistic newsrooms and practices.

The final section of the book presents geographically contextualised analyses illustrating the influence of political, regulatory, market, cultural, and technological forces on PSJ and PSM organisations. The contributions cover a range of national and regional contexts, from Finland in the heartland of PSB discussed in Chapter 8 by Marko Ala-Fossi and colleagues, to Southern Africa which is explored in Chapter 9 by Kobina Ado Bedu-Addo. We then consider the case of India with analysis and insights from Madhavi Ravikumar and

Shuaib Shafi in Chapter 10, followed by Greece presented by Achilleas Karadimitriou in Chapter 11. The book includes a preface from Karl Unterberger from ORF (sponsor of the RIPE@2022 Conference in Vienna) and a postface from Dorien Verckist from the Media Intelligence Service at the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), the international professional association of PSM organisations.

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Part I

Normative Frameworks

Chapter 2
Updating the Classics: The Roles and Principles of Public Service Journalism in the Digital Era

Marko Milosavljević, Marína Urbániková

Summary

The transformations brought about by recent societal, technological, and political developments have challenged public service media (PSM) to re-evaluate its principles, roles, and functions. This also applies to PSM journalism, which has traditionally been one of the foundational pillars of PSM. This chapter delves into the response of PSM journalism to contemporary developments, examining the guiding principles it should embrace and the roles it should fulfil to maintain its relevance in the digital age. In addition, it explores the concept of quality journalism and examines whether PSM journalism should be 'just' quality journalism or have unique characteristics that set it apart. We argue that PSM journalism should be based on the core normative principles of quality journalism while simultaneously incorporating the normative principles intrinsic to PSM as a whole. Thus, in addition to the standards of quality journalism, PSM journalism should incorporate and exemplify the principle of universality, which refers to: a) the diversity of forms and genres; b) equitable and universal access for all segments

of society; and c) comprehensive coverage not only at the national but also at the local, regional, and international levels.

Introduction

Public service media (PSM) have been recently facing serious challenges. In addition to the ongoing and well-researched issues regarding political and economic pressures (Hanretty, 2011), major disruptive transformations of media ecosystems have emerged, primarily due to digitalisation (Lowe et al., 2018). These new conditions have led to processes that extend well into the 2020s, including fragmentation of the media sphere, platformisation, the development of strategic disinformation campaigns, and the rise of fake news. In addition, broader political and societal processes have also significantly affected the functioning and performance of PSM, including political polarisation and the rise of populism and illiberalism, resulting in a shifting and frequently unstable position of PSM (Holtz-Bacha, 2021; Sehl et al., 2022).

As a result of these combined societal, technological, and political processes, for more than a decade, the rhetoric of crisis has dominated the debate on PSM. PSM, both as a concept and as organisations, are said to be eroding, collapsing, vanishing, under pressure, in flux, in trouble, and under threat (Chivers & Allan, 2022; Donders & Raats, 2015; Horowitz, 2015; Lowe & Steemers, 2012). As often repeated, to remain relevant, PSM needs to reconsider its remit, roles, and functions and modernise and adapt to the changing conditions. This is the task facing PSM services as a whole, not leaving aside the domain of PSM journalism, which has traditionally been one of its founding pillars. The significance of PSM journalism from the audience's perspective is also reflected in the fact that PSM is the most trusted news source in twenty-eight of thirty-one European countries (European Broadcasting Union [EBU], 2022).

So how should PSM journalism respond to these current developments? What principles should it adhere to in the rapidly evolving digital environment, and what roles and functions should it fulfil to remain relevant to its audiences

in the digital age? And, moreover, is the concept of quality journalism universal, regardless of the type of media in which it is practised, or does PSM journalism have unique characteristics that set it apart? This chapter explores the implications of the dramatic changes and challenges for public service journalism and aims to critically examine and reconceptualise its roles and principles in the constantly transforming media environment in the digital age.

We argue that PSM journalism should be based on the fundamental normative principles of quality journalism while also integrating the normative principles and functions intrinsic to PSM as a whole. Therefore, in addition to adhering to the standards of quality journalism, PSM journalism should incorporate and exemplify the principle of universality, which is recognised as one of the core tenets of PSM (Born & Prosser, 2001; EBU, 2014; Iosifidis, 2007; Lowe & Savage, 2020; UNESCO & World Radio and Television Council [WRTVC], 2001).

Universality refers to: a) the diversity of forms and genres; b) equitable and universal access to all segments of society; and c) comprehensive coverage not only at the national but also at the local, regional, and international levels. Universality becomes particularly significant in societies dominated by private, commercial media (Milosavljević & Poler, 2018). Such media typically offer shorter news forms and a limited range of genres and topics that are less demanding in terms of knowledge, time, and production costs and target specific segments of society that are most profitable for them with regard to their business model and advertising or sales strategies. The focus on universality is the basis for the distinct journalistic approach and unique journalistic content, which contributes to the overall distinctive value of PSM in contemporary societies.

PSM principles, roles, and functions and their implications for PSM journalism

The significance of news and journalism in PSM production and distribution, along with the expectations and demands placed on them, arises from the

foundational principles, roles, and functions of PSM. As an integral component of PSM, journalistic content is expected to contribute to its broader mission and adhere to its general principles. However, defining the mission and remit of PSM, including its journalism, particularly in the constant flux of digital disruptions and innovations, is a chronically difficult exercise, not least because different perspectives clash here. In addition to a normative/academic perspective, there is also a legal perspective and perspectives of the audience, PSM managers, and journalists (Urbániková, 2023). Based on the literature that draws on and maps these different perspectives, the PSM mission, tasks, and functions can be summarised in the following ten points – without any claim to completeness and with a necessary degree of simplification.

First, in line with the principle of universality (Born & Prosser, 2001; Cañedo et al., 2022; Chivers & Allan, 2022; EBU, 2014; Lowe & Savage, 2020; UNESCO & WRTVC, 2001; Vanhaeght & Donders, 2015), PSM should provide universal coverage and access to all citizens, serving as a common reference point for all (Campos-Rueda & Goyanes, 2023; Council of Europe, 1994; Holznagel, 2000). To achieve this, it should aim to create a public sphere where every segment of society can access both universal content that overcomes filter bubbles and, at the same time, specialised content tailored to their specific needs. PSM offering should be varied and diverse in terms of content (topics, actors, formats, and genres), platforms (diversity of distribution, including the online sphere) and target groups (for example, youth; seniors; people with disabilities; national, ethnic, and religious minorities; LGBTQ+). In essence, PSM should be accessible to all, allowing everyone to choose content that interests and is relevant to them. Only in this way can it fulfil its role as a forum for broad public debate.

Second, PSM should fulfil the information function and act as a guide for the free formation of opinions. It should provide impartial news coverage and serve as a source of reliable analysis explaining why and how things happen and their consequences at the individual and societal levels (Campos-Rueda & Goyanes, 2023; Cañedo et al.; Council of Europe, 1994; Hastings, 2004; Holznagel, 2000; Lamuedra et al., 2019; Lowe & Maijanen, 2019; Mazzucato et al., 2020; Ofcom, 2023; UNESCO & WRTVC, 2001). This requires PSM to

deliver quality journalism with all its usual attributes. To achieve this, PSM must remain independent from political and commercial pressures (including advertising, where applicable) and maintain full editorial integrity in the production of its news and current affairs content. While independence and autonomy are among the foundations of journalists' professional identity (Deuze, 2005), whether they work in commercial media or PSM, it can be argued that public expectations are even higher and stricter for journalists in PSM.

Third, PSM should provide information and analysis based on national perspectives and interests. It should serve as the voice of the nation in Europe and the world and promote national identity (Lowe & Maijanen, 2019; UNESCO & WRTVC, 2001). From the point of view of PSM journalism, this involves maintaining a stable network of foreign correspondents for comprehensive foreign coverage.

Fourth, PSM should serve as a watchdog (Campos-Rueda & Goyanes, 2023; Trappel, 2010) and control public and private corporate power. PSM fulfils this control function mainly through its journalism. This requires PSM journalism to hold power accountable, which should be reflected in the choice of topics and genres. It also implies a commitment to investigative journalism, which is often not lucrative for many commercial media due to its high financial cost.

Fifth, PSM should approach its audiences as citizens rather than consumers and encourage their active participation in society (BBC, 2004; Born & Prosser, 2001; Campos-Rueda & Goyanes, 2023; Cañedo et al., 2022; Chivers & Allan, 2022; Hastings, 2004; Lamuedra et al., 2019). Thus, it should fulfil the task of promoting citizenship. PSM journalism plays a pivotal role in this. It should promote civic engagement by covering and explaining political processes, including those at the local level; providing diverse perspectives; facilitating public discourse; highlighting social issues; educating the public about their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society; and promoting transparency and accountability. Furthermore, PSM journalism itself can integrate the principle of public participation into its operations and foster dialogue and engagement with its audiences. This can be achieved through using interactive

features; user-generated content; engaging with audiences on social media; using technology to tailor content to individual interests and preferences; and being responsive to audience inquiries, concerns, and feedback.

Sixth, PSM should reflect the diversity in multicultural societies, be attentive to the needs of minorities (this includes creating programmes for national, ethnic, and religious minorities; children and youth; regional and local programmes, and so on), give voice to the less privileged and promote an understanding of different human experiences (BBC, 2004; Cañedo et al., 2022; Council of Europe, 1994; EBU, 2014; Chivers & Allan, 2022; Hastings, 2004; Lamuedra et al., 2019; Mazzucato et al., 2020; Ofcom, 2023; UNESCO & WRTVC, 2001). In short, PSM should promote social empathy and cohesion (Campos-Rueda & Goyanes, 2023; Holznagel, 2000; Vanhaeght & Donders, 2015). PSM journalism can play a pivotal role in this by offering accurate and balanced reporting free of prejudice and stereotyping; representing diverse voices and perspectives within a society; giving voice to marginalised groups; helping people from different backgrounds see themselves reflected in the news; promoting dialogue and debate; and exposing injustice and inequality.

Seventh, PSM should educate and entertain also within its news programming and offer pluralistic, innovative, and diverse programmes, including those not provided by the commercial sector (BBC, 2004; Born & Prosser, 2001; Cañedo et al., 2022; Chivers & Allan, 2022; Council of Europe, 1994; Ofcom, 2023). Even though the primary purpose of PSM journalism is to inform, it can also contribute to fulfilling educational and entertainment functions. In-depth reporting and expert insights into various subjects can educate the public, while visualising data, multimedia elements, effective storytelling techniques and interactive content can help engage and entertain audiences.

Eighth, PSM should promote national and European production (including original production by independent producers) and mediate the diversity of national and European cultural heritage (BBC, 2004; Chivers & Allan, 2022; Council of Europe, 1994; Hastings, 2004; Holznagel, 2000; Lowe & Maijanen, 2019; Mazzucato et al., 2020; UNESCO & WRTVC, 2001). Thus, it also has cultural and creative functions. While these functions primarily

apply to non-news content, especially entertainment and culture, they can also be relevant for PSM journalism. After all, news content can and should be innovative and creative, and PSM journalism should lead in devising new ways to engage audiences and deliver important messages.

Ninth, PSM should serve as a credible reference point in fragmented media markets and provide help with orientation within the market of content and services (Holznagel, 2000). This extends to PSM journalism too. Fulfilling the curatorial function requires a high level of trust. PSM journalism should be a safe harbour, and audiences must be able to rely on PSM news being selected, organised, and presented in a truthful and impartial manner that reflects reality well.

Finally, PSM is expected to set and guarantee high quality standards, thus also contributing to the cultivation of the entire media sector (Holznagel, 2000; Lowe & Maijanen, 2019; Mazzucato et al., 2020). This reference function naturally extends to PSM journalism and its contribution to raising the standard of the news media system, which brings us back to the requirement for quality journalism.

Principles of quality journalism

In essence, PSM journalism should be quality journalism. But how to untangle this concept and what exactly does this ideal entail? The debate about quality journalism is mostly approached from a normative democratic viewpoint (Bachmann et al., 2022), and the core of the definition stems from the expected roles and functions of journalism in democratic societies (Anderson, 2014). Thus, the principles originate from the classical Western perspective of the news media as the fourth estate (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). This also means that, as expectations of journalists and the news media vary in different parts of the world (Hanitzsch et al., 2019), these principles cannot be considered as universally valid and accepted.

Despite this limitation, drawing on normative, audience, and journalist perspectives of quality journalism, its elements, principles, and functions can be

summarised as follows (Bachmann et al., 2022; Bosshart & Hellmüller, 2009; Deuze, 2005; Gil de Zúñiga & Hinsley, 2013; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Maurer, 2017; Meijer, 2012; Urban & Schweiger, 2014; van der Wurff & Schoenbach, 2014). Quality journalism should provide timely, truthful, accurate, and verified information. It should serve as an independent monitor of power and hold the powerful to account; provide the audience with analysis and interpretation of current affairs and complex problems; report different views and perspectives; and give ordinary people a chance to express their views. Furthermore, it should enable citizens to form their own opinions and motivate them to participate in public life.

Quality journalism should also be objective, impartial, neutral, balanced, and fair. Given that objectivity is a contested term and that its lack is frequently objected to by audiences and other groups, particularly politicians, a more detailed definition of this term is needed here. According to Westerståhl (1983), the main components of objectivity are factuality (truth and relevance) and impartiality (balance/non-partisanship and neutral presentation). Thus, objectivity extends beyond mere balance, and quality journalism should not settle for merely balancing multiple points of view and giving them equal time and space. Such 'false balance' (Brüggemann & Engesser, 2017) actually stands in direct opposition to quality journalism. Instead, quality journalism should pay equal attention to other components of objectivity, such as truth, relevance, neutral presentation, and fairness, just as it does to balance. Moreover, balance, while important, should be viewed as merely an instrument rather than a goal in itself.

At the same time, objectivity in journalism is often considered a Platonic ideal because it represents an abstract, aspirational concept that may be difficult to fully attain in practice (for a detailed discussion, see Maras, 2013). Journalists face the inherent need to make choices about what to include or omit and how to frame their stories. These choices encompass the processes of selection and editing, which imply that the resulting product – whether it is text, audio, video, graphics or photography – cannot offer a complete perspective. Furthermore, these choices are influenced by journalists' personal perspectives,

values, and worldviews. Consequently, journalism cannot be entirely devoid of subjectivity.

In addition to the above-mentioned normative characteristics of quality journalism, various other criteria are frequently used, such as clarity, comprehensiveness, comprehensibility, diversity, factuality, relevance, contextualisation, and transparency (Maurer, 2017). Besides, quality journalism should involve captivating presentation, be interesting, entertaining, and enjoyable (Bosshart & Hellmüller, 2009). Also, to be able to meet all the requirements of quality journalism, journalists must be professional, independent, practise their profession autonomously and adhere to high ethical standards (Urban & Schweiger, 2014).

Is PSM journalism 'just' quality journalism or does it bring a unique value?

The debates about the normative principles of PSM and quality journalism often run parallel but remain distinct, for several reasons. First, PSM encompasses a much wider range of content and areas than solely journalism. Second, the realm of (quality) journalism approaches its foundational principles from a distinct historical perspective. Discussions on objectivity, diversity, plurality, verification, and truth within journalism have existed and persisted for decades or even centuries prior to the establishment of the first public broadcasters (Elliott, 1978; Merrill, 1997; Ward, 2006). However, at the intersection of the debates on PSM and quality journalism, we can identify a number of shared normative principles but also specific aspects that contribute to the distinctive identity of PSM journalism, which in turn can contribute to the overall unique value of PSM in contemporary societies.

We recognise the principle of universality as one of the fundamental principles of PSM (Lowe & Savage, 2020), which has significant implications also for PSM journalism. Universality remains a highly relevant principle even in the digital age. The disruption of business models has placed commercial media under economic pressure (Pickard, 2019), making them more susceptible

to refraining from high-cost journalism and journalistic content and genres that do not yield high audience figures. This challenge is particularly pronounced in smaller countries (Milosavljević & Poler, 2018). Drawing on and extending the conceptualisation by Iosifidis (2007), we distinguish between universality of: a) forms and genres; b) access; and c) news coverage. The remainder of this section will address each of the three aspects of universality which contribute to the distinctive value PSM brings.

Universality of forms and genres

News content and journalism in general, is produced and presented to the public in a variety of forms and genres. In the most general classification, they fall into either informative (information and data-based) or interpretative (opinion-based) genres and are then classified into narrower specific genres such as news, reportage, news analysis, interview, commentary, and portrait. These genres are then produced within different forms and formats, with distinctive lengths, elements, visuals, and platform specifics (audio, video, running stories on the web).

These different forms and genres enable journalists in PSM to fully perform the tasks and roles that are generally expected of them, particularly normative tasks of informing, interpreting, investigating, serving as a watchdog, advocating, and also entertaining (Janowitz, 1975; Knowlton, 1995; Scheuer, 2008).

Some of these tasks are uncontroversial for PSM journalism, such as the task of controlling and criticising the sources of power (Scheuer, 2008). Others are discussed only in relation to their extent and manner – for example, the task of entertaining where 'to make popular programmes good and good programmes popular' (Tracey, 1998, p. 35) has been one of the historical mottos of PSM. The tasks of performing interpretative or advocacy journalism, however, are more contested within PSM. This directly affects which news forms and genres should or should not be used in PSM journalism.

Journalism which aims primarily at the detached dissemination of information builds on data- and information-driven reporting that rests on the

assumption of verifiable truth. This approach stems from a general 'fascination for the creed of factual objectivity' (Cudlipp, 1976, p. 410, as cited in Elliott, 1978, p. 184), where the task of journalists is to remain detached in their portrayal of social reality (Maras, 2013) and to sharply separate facts and opinions (Janowitz, 1975).

This effort is understandable in the context of PSM organisations striving to provide a universal service to an entire society, encompassing all its constituents and demographic groups. This endeavour is also in line with the principle of promoting social cohesion (Iosifidis, 2007). Such pursuit of a universal audience leads to the avoidance of interpretative and advocacy aspects and genres that could give rise to accusations of bias and sidelining.

The outcome of this approach has been a 'particularly fragmented type of news concentrating on available events and incidents', though this does not preclude 'controversy over their selection and interpretation' (Elliott, 1978, p. 184). This general disinterest in ends 'leads to a concentration on means', resulting in the production of 'castrated journalism' (Milosavljević, 2001) and the emergence of the type of journalists that Desmond Taylor, in his BBC lunch-time lecture (1975, p. 4), called the 'intellectual eunuchs' of PSM.

Another normative task of journalism, in addition to informing, is that of advocacy. It acknowledges that objectivity in news reporting is not possible and argues that journalism should include the perceptions and interests of various competing social groups, particularly those that are marginalised, excluded or underprivileged (Janowitz, 1975). However, engaging in full-on advocacy within PSM poses challenges. On the one hand, it can potentially lead to accusations of bias, contradicting the principle of universality of coverage, where PSM should strive to provide a shared voice for the entire society without alienating specific segments. On the other hand, the principle of universality of forms and genres requires PSM to produce content in a diverse range of informative and interpretative formats. The solution could involve being sensitive to the problems and needs of various social groups, without favouritism and blind spots, ensuring that no one feels left out or left behind.

Even more crucial, not just for the PSM but for the entire media ecosystem and society, is whether and to what extent PSM journalists produce the forms

and genres that are more complex and demanding both in terms of knowledge and in terms of time and production costs, such as investigative journalism. PSM journalism is reasonably expected to take the lead in producing (or commissioning, based on its in-house standards) high-quality long-form content. This becomes particularly crucial in an era where quality journalism produced by commercial media is increasingly restricted behind paywalls, excluding citizens who may lack the financial means to afford it.

Besides investigative journalism, news analysis, for example, is another complex and resource-intensive genre. According to Bourdieu's well-known view of television and journalism, there is a journalistic tradition to 'focus on simple events that are simple to cover' (1996/1998, p. 8), with a 'patent lack of interest in subtle, nuanced changes, or in processes that, like the continental drift, remain unperceived and imperceptible in the moment, revealing their effects only in the long term' (1996/1998, p. 7). Because the mission of PSM is not to generate profit but to serve the public interest and contribute to the democratic, cultural, and social needs of society, PSM should not fall into this trap and should offer analysis and interpretation in addition to information.

Universality of access

While universality of access is defined as a general characteristic of PSM (Iosifidis, 2007; Lowe & Savage, 2020), it plays a specific role within PSM journalism, as it enables access to news – in terms of its content and production – to all groups of society. Commercial media can and usually do target specific socio-demographic and opinion segments of society and choose those that are most relevant for them with regard to their business model and advertising or sales strategies. This leads to a focus on specific groups that are often economically stronger and more privileged.

However, the specific task of PSM is to address and provide universal access to its journalism to each and every individual, group, and segment of society. This is particularly relevant to marginalised groups and individuals who are often not (sufficiently) included in news content, either as creators or as speaking actors, and specific niche groups that are not economically attractive

and viable for commercial media. This is also reflected in the general approach to the reporting of viewing figures for private and public service broadcasters, with private broadcasters usually reporting and publishing their results in the 15–55 (or 18–55) age group (which is the typical segment reported in surveys such as AGB Nielsen), while PSM reports results in the 5+ age group, thus avoiding age discrimination against children or young people on the one hand and the elderly on the other.

Universality of news coverage

While other media outlets may provide either general coverage or cater to niche audiences, the particular role of PSM is to provide universal and non-discriminatory coverage of all geographical areas, or what has Tuchman (1978) defined as an appropriate 'news net'. This obligation extends not merely to the country and society as a whole but also to all regional and local areas, as well as to international coverage. This universal approach presents another unique contribution of PSM journalism to society. This is especially significant in recent decades when commercial media outlets have been reducing the number of correspondents and field reporters, both at the local and regional levels, as well as internationally (for example, Rasmussen, 2012). Consequently, societies are grappling with a scarcity of news in their regions, creating what are referred to as 'news deserts' (Pickard, 2023).

Also, while international news agencies such as Reuters and the Associated Press, along with other outlets, may offer a global perspective on foreign events and developments, PSM has a distinct role in providing a 'translation' of these international events to the domestic audience in their respective countries. This involves offering specific context and historical knowledge, and establishing connections between the domestic society and the locations where correspondents and field journalists are reporting from.

Digital opportunities and challenges for PSM journalism

The digital transformation of the media ecosystem has also impacted PSM and its journalism. While PSM may be less affected by digitalisation in terms of changes to their business models compared to many private commercial media outlets, they are nonetheless significantly influenced by innovations in various digital technologies that affect both journalistic production and distribution. Additionally, they face other challenges of the digital era, including the advent of artificial intelligence, disinformation campaigns, and the polarisation of society.

Digital production of PSM journalism

Digital transformations within newsrooms have been underway for over thirty years, evolving from singular aspects, such as the introduction of integrated newsrooms, to complex and overlapping integration and implementation of various technologies and approaches in recent years. This includes an emphasis on multiskilling and constant reskilling in areas such as video and audio recording, editorial and production systems, and more. It also involves integrated production of audio and video content for diverse technologies (radio, television, web, apps, podcasts, and so on), the adoption of new systems for (big) data journalism, and the exploration of innovative forms of communication using different applications. Additionally, it encompasses the incorporation of emerging technologies for data collection and verification, which are particularly crucial in addressing issues of (strategic) disinformation and digital manipulation, including deep-fake technologies. While these and other new technologies offer opportunities for PSM journalism, they also bring significant challenges, particularly in the face of ongoing stagnation and erosion of their funding (EBU, 2023).

Digital distribution of PSM journalism

In addition to changes in production, PSM journalism must adapt and respond to significant shifts in media content distribution and consumption. The traditional means of distributing PSM through radio and television broadcasting have been, along with cable and satellite distribution, augmented by the internet and various digital forms, particularly through platforms and social media. Despite challenges and restrictions on the presence of PSM on the web in many countries (Cappello, 2015), it is essential for PSM to maintain a distribution-agnostic approach and leverage any available means, analogous to its integration with television when that technology became relevant, following its initial role as (mere) radio broadcasting. Presently, PSM needs to be accessible through any technology to remain truly universal and available to the entire society, including the youngest generations. Achieving this requires aligning with the shift in digital media use and consumption and reaching audiences wherever they are in terms of technology. For PSM journalism, this imperative also entails ongoing reskilling and education of PSM journalists and editors to keep pace with the constant flux of media and journalism.

Artificial intelligence

A distinct challenge and opportunity that transcends the specific domains of production and distribution in PSM journalism is so-called artificial intelligence (AI), which holds the potential to fundamentally transform the entire media ecosystem. This gives rise to at least three implications for PSM journalism. First, the specific information function of PSM in delivering verified information takes again centre stage. A steadfast commitment to high journalistic standards and quality can enhance the value of PSM and its journalism to society as a safe harbour not only from disinformation but also from manipulated images, audio and video content (including deep fakes), and other deliberately misleading and inauthentic content.

Second, PSM and its newsrooms can and should develop specific approaches to AI and algorithms, including creating their own unique PSM algorithms (Hoffmann et al., 2015; Van den Bulck & Moe, 2018). These efforts further fulfil the general principle of serving the public interest and enhance

PSM's autonomy, particularly in contrast to commercial stakeholders that dominate contemporary media ecosystems. While full autonomy may not be entirely feasible (as PSM will need to interact with commercial stakeholders and their algorithms to some extent), autonomy in the realm of AI remains a significant goal for the future of PSM – perhaps never entirely achievable but important as an aspirational ideal.

Third, PSM organisations must develop and implement their own standards for the use of AI technologies. These standards need to ensure quality, editorial autonomy, adherence to ethical principles, transparency, accountability, and other aspects involved in AI implementation in journalism (Milosavljević & Vobič, 2019). For this purpose, PSM should stay abreast of the development of international standards and documents related to AI in journalism, such as the 'Guidelines on the responsible implementation of artificial intelligence systems in journalism' by the Council of Europe (2023).

PSM journalism as a lighthouse in a polarised society

Several other challenges represent a new dimension of old issues regarding the roles, principles, and ideals of PSM and quality journalism. The rise of disinformation campaigns (often related to the proliferation of political populism), manipulated content, and the dissemination of conspiracy theories have become prominent in the 2010s and 2020s. This underscores the renewed significance of PSM journalism's information function, which is grounded in the search for accurate data, verification, fact-checking, and the pursuit of truth. This was further emphasised in the post-2020 period, especially after the outbreak of COVID-19. This crisis not only led to the spread of disinformation but also fostered doubts in science and data (Horowitz & Lowe, 2020). In this context, the role of PSM journalism goes beyond the information function; it also encompasses the public forum function of providing a shared space for public discussion, a variety of voices, and the presentation of important (scientific) insights and data, while subjecting them to potential criticism and deliberation. Thus, PSM journalism should serve as a lighthouse of information and integration in a polarised society.

Translating theory into practice: Recommendations for PSM

In a time of decreasing interest in news and increasing news avoidance (Newman et al., 2023), staying relevant to the public is vital for PSM funding and survival in the decades to come. PSM journalism needs to not only maintain its existing audiences but, ideally, also attract new audiences, especially the youngest generations, which PSM news often falls short of addressing (Schulz et al., 2019). How should PSM journalism transform itself in the digital era to accomplish this?

First, we argue that the principle of universality has gained renewed importance for PSM journalism, encompassing aforementioned aspects such as the universality of forms and genres, access, and coverage. Navigating the digital landscape, PSM journalism should leverage the advantages of digital technologies by producing niche (news) content that was once considered too narrow for traditional mass audiences. However, caution is necessary to avoid the pitfalls of filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011). PSM journalism needs to strike a balance between what Negroponte referred to as 'The Daily Us' and 'The Daily Me' (1995, pp. 153–164); that is, between providing a collective narrative addressing societal issues and personalised content catering to individual interests. Achieving this equilibrium poses a key challenge for PSM journalism, but it is imperative for remaining both relevant and appealing to a diverse audience.

Second, as the digital era has disrupted traditional revenue models for journalism, negatively affecting the financial viability of commercial media (Pickard, 2019), the importance of quality PSM journalism for democracy becomes even more pronounced. It is therefore essential that PSM does not abandon complex, expensive long-form journalism, investigative reporting, and the maintenance of both local and foreign correspondent networks. These pillars of high-cost, quality journalism contribute significantly to a well-informed and engaged citizenry.

Third, a particular challenge for PSM journalism is how to convince the public that it is here for everybody, without any favouritism. Previous research

shows that perceived independence of PSM is crucial for public trust (EBU, 2022); applied to PSM journalism, it means that it must be as objective and impartial as possible (Urbániková & Smejkal, 2023). This has long been a significant challenge for journalism as such, and PSM is under even stricter scrutiny with higher demands and expectations. Moreover, maintaining objectivity and impartiality, both in practice and as perceived by audiences, becomes increasingly difficult in a polarised society with rising political populism and the emergence of what some call 'conspiracy theories', while others view them as 'alternative opinions'. As suggested by Ojala (2021), the lack of public trust towards the media primarily arises from the challenges that mainstream journalism encounters in providing equal representation to various political groups and perspectives during periods of heightened ideological contention and differing moral positions. Diversifying sources, including diverse perspectives and voices, while simultaneously correcting possible factual mistakes and untruths, clearly distinguishing news from opinion, presenting information neutrally, ensuring transparency in the reporting process, engaging with the audience, and fostering diversity in the newsroom can be some of the strategies for maintaining the image of objectivity and impartiality in a polarised society.

Fourth, to attract new audiences, PSM should leverage the opportunities provided by digital technologies, such as the use of open data (Lin, 2015); encouraging active participation and engagement; incorporating user-generated content; engaging in dialogic communication with the public and specific audiences (Vanhaeght, 2019; Vanhaeght & Donders, 2021); as well as implementing curation, moderation and the integration of social media networks (Hjarvard, 2018).

Finally, to ensure quality, accountability, transparency, and trustworthiness, PSM journalism should not only embrace digital technologies but also convincingly demonstrate to the public that it handles them thoughtfully and responsibly. Among other measures, this involves updating or creating new codes of journalistic conduct that address emerging issues, such as the use of AI in PSM journalism. These initiatives should also establish an industry benchmark for journalism as a whole.

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Chapter 3

Digital Citizenship in the Middle East: The Tension Between Normative and Radical Approaches to Public Service

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Summary

This chapter explores the nuanced relationship between traditional public service ideals and digital citizenship in the Middle East. It begins by examining the historical and philosophical underpinnings of the public service ethos, tracing its evolution and the impact of ethical frameworks on civic responsibility. The discussion then shifts to the Middle East. We take into account the unique socio-political and cultural dynamics of the region in (re)conceptualising digital citizenship. Drawing on Harb's model of Arab values, the chapter introduces a new framework that integrates these values in explaining the various manifestations of digital citizenship in the region, thereby broadening the conceptual scope of public service As the concept of citizenship is central to both the theory and practices of journalism, this contribution aims to enrich academic discourse on the principles of public service by offering a more inclusive perspective on digital citizenship. This is especially important for fostering a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics that shape digital citizenship practices in the Middle East today.

Introduction

This chapter[1] rests on the premise that the ethical and moral imperatives, being one of the motivations driving citizens and the media to act in the public interest, are closely aligned, if not identical. In the Western imagination, journalism is seen as fundamental to supporting democratic practices and crucial for upholding the public interest. Consequently, the actions of both citizens and journalists are guided by shared imperatives, which are vital for the effective functioning of democracy.[2] This chapter contributes to the theme of the book by examining the adoption of ethical and moral frameworks that compel individuals to care about fostering public welfare through the establishment of a public service orientation in media using contemporary efforts to (re)conceptualise digital citizenship. Our approach can help facilitate the exploration of how digital citizenship manifests in non-Western contexts especially, by highlighting how underlying ethical motivations that legitimise the public service ideal matter for public engagement and action in the digital age.

There is nothing especially new about the principle of public service. This orientation has been deeply embedded in human civilisations since ancient times. In ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China, the rudiments of public service are evident in the bureaucratic systems for managing state affairs, from tax collection to public works (Gabrielian, 1996; Ajdini, 2014). The notion further evolved in Greek and Roman societies, where civic virtue and public duty underscored the importance of contributing to the common good and serving the state, respectively (Gorman, 1992). Religious teachings across various traditions emphasise the ethical nature of public service, as evidenced in Christianity's emphasis on serving the less fortunate (Kotva, 1996) and Islam's mandate for Zakat (*charity*) (Abdullah, 2012). Leaders from various religious traditions are widely recognised and respected for their commitments to public service.

This complex heritage has instilled public service as a moral imperative, stressing the virtue of aiding those in need. The Enlightenment era championed reason, individual rights, and the social contract, critically shaping

contemporary understanding of the government's role in securing citizens' welfare (Boucher & Kelly, 2003) and the responsibilities of citizens in the exercise of citizenship. Philosophers in this period laid the foundations for modern thought about democratic governance, for which public service is integral to implementing policies, delivering services, and ensuring the public welfare. Characteristic principles include accountability, transparency, and a commitment to serving the public interest, all of which reflect a complex interplay of administrative efficiency, civic engagement, moral obligations, and philosophical norms (Hamilton, 2015).

With the emergence of the 'free' press, first in newspapers and later in broadcasting, the public service orientation became a cornerstone ideal with a critically important instrumental role in the exercise of citizenship. This orientation was institutionalised in the early 20th century as evident in the professionalisation of journalism in the West, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom (Conboy, 2004; Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005). The heritage concept of public service journalism has become global, partly through influences of colonisation and partly due to globalisation. Countries beyond North America and Western Europe were encouraged to adopt the public service orientation as a journalistic standard for national development. This was often presented as a universal ideal norm to which all should aspire (Lowe & Savage, 2020).

Extant research on the subject argues that this diffusion was not merely a matter of developing professional practices but, more importantly, was deeply imbued with values and ideologies that are intrinsic to liberal democracies, especially in its emphasis on the role of the media in fostering a participatory democratic society (Cueto, 2014; Sardar, 1998). The public service ethos is often associated with the fulfilment of individual rights as well as broad democratic ideals, reflecting core values of the liberal democratic contexts where they originated. While illuminating, this courts the danger of homogenising the complex and diverse realities of regions outside the Global North. It suggests that the public service ethos in media is inherently foreign to contexts in the Global South, implying that it can only be introduced through practices and processes often criticised as neo-colonial and globalising.

This understanding is the framework for the chapter, which seeks to unpack ways in which the idea of public service is manifest outside and beyond the West by focusing on contexts in the Middle East. Specifically, we examine how notions of public service and social responsibility are conceptualised and enacted in this region, with particular interest in the internet, which has become a pervasive platform for citizens in the region (as elsewhere, of course) to enact diverse manifestations of the public service orientation that merits scholarly attention.

Focusing on the Middle East, we make a case for adopting a broader understanding of public service – one that transcends the confines of classical Western normative conceptualisations. This reimagined framework considers how values inherent to societies in the region influence motives for exercising citizenship and participation (or lack thereof) in the media. At issue is whether public service as an ideal and orientation might encompass a broader and more inclusive range of behaviours not typically associated with the democratic participatory ideals that are characteristic in the Global North. By examining the actions and motivations of both media practitioners and the public within the digital journalistic landscapes of the Middle East, we seek to uncover a more nuanced understanding of public service – one that is reflective of the region's unique socio-political and cultural dynamics.

Our approach does not seek to diminish the significance of the traditional public service ethos developed in the West, but rather to expand its conceptual boundaries by incorporating perspectives from the Global South and specifically the Middle East. In so doing, we seek to enrich understandings of what motivates individuals – be they journalists or members of the public – to engage in acts of digital citizenship. We hope the chapter contributes to a more inclusive and diverse dialogue on the role of public media in society by challenging prevailing normative paradigms to broaden the discourse on public service and social responsibility in the media.

We begin with a succinct exploration of the philosophical origins of the idea of public service in society and then consider how this idea was internalised as a media ethos. In doing so, we emphasise the role of journalism in promoting public welfare and critically reflect on its global spread through

colonisation and globalisation. With this conceptual groundwork established, we then examine normative and radical conceptualisations of digital citizenship documented in contemporary academic literature. We end with a proposed framework based on the work of Harb (2015) to understand the interplay between the intrinsic public service drive within individuals, fostered by their community membership and the public service ethos disseminated by the media in the Middle East. This analysis highlights how citizens engage with digital technologies, contributing to the public good through various forms of digital citizenship that are not necessarily embedded in classical public service broadcasting (PSB) as an institutionalised form.

The idea of public service as a moral imperative

Before exploring the narrative of public service and social responsibility in media and digital citizenship, we begin with an overview of how broader understandings of public service have evolved and their implications for citizenship responsibilities. We distil three key currents of Western philosophical thought: deontological, consequentialist; and virtue ethic. We believe these three form the foundation of ethical deliberation as a public service practice and social responsibility. Individuals are guided by their own moral frameworks while they navigate the complexities of life, but these are not purely individual as most adhere to a system of ethical principles that are shared and emphasise a particular dimension to achieve a morally defensible stance (Garofalo & Geuras, 1999). When attempting to act in the public interest, citizens may adhere to established rules with a sense of duty (deontological ethics); to a sense of morality measured by the outcomes of their actions (consequentialist ethics); and to the cultivation of moral virtues, advocating for actions that embody qualities such as integrity, empathy and public-spiritedness (virtue ethics). These ethical frameworks intertwine to inform contemporary notions of public service, demands for accountability, principles of ethical conduct, and commitments to serve the collective good, all

while balancing moral duties, the consequences of actions, and the virtuous character of those who serve (Sing, 2016; Bowman & West, 2021).

In the Middle East, as in other regions, the concept of public service has been influenced by a confluence of diverse ethical philosophies, among which Greek ethics have played an important part. Greek traditions, notably associated with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, contributed foundational ideas about civic responsibility, virtue, and the good life that have permeated many cultures (Villa, 2001), including those in the Middle East. These concepts have been communicated through various channels, including seminal works by Muslim scholars during the Islamic Golden Age (8th to 13th centuries), a period of significant cultural and intellectual confluence in the Middle East (Adamson, 2016).

While Greek ethics have had a broad and lasting impact on global philosophical understandings of public service, it is important to recognise that conceptualisation in the Middle East is also deeply rooted in their own traditions (Day, 2017). Islamic teachings, local customs, and regional history have shaped the understanding and practice of public service in Middle Eastern societies – as we will see in following sections – resulting in a distinct interpretation that cannot be solely attributed to the permeation of Greek philosophy via the translation of treaties and essays in the Islamic medieval era (Horten & Hager, 1974).

Throughout this chapter, a recurring theme is reflected in the dynamic interplay between global and local traditions and beliefs (Lapidus, 2001). Similar to how Western philosophical ethics have intermingled with Middle Eastern concepts of civil duty and public welfare, in the following sections we explore how this blend of ideologies was further solidified as Western notions of public service disseminated through colonial and global media expansion, encountered – and at times clashing with – local ideals of public responsibility.

The public service ethos of the media, a potential point of departure

In tracing the historical narrative of public service ethos within the media, one of the first theorisations recorded in academic literature appears in the seminal work of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956). The authors articulated a principle that media should serve the public interest, a philosophy that emerged in reaction to the already apparent concentration of media ownership and control. The problem of concentration is even more evident in the colonial context and its expansion (Conboy, 2004). The concept is anchored in the principle that media should uphold a social responsibility ethic that requires informing publics about issues of general, shared interest. This view was instrumental in laying the groundwork for PSB in the early 20th century and, by extension, what we understand as public service media (PSM) today.

The 1920s was a period when journalists in the United States and the United Kingdom sought to professionalise their craft (Tumber & Prentoulis, 2005). The professionalism turn was, in part, a response to the consolidation of media power that potentially threatened journalistic independence and, therefore, the fabric of a well-informed democracy. There were, of course, other reasons that can be traced to the rise of the penny press in the late 1800s, but for electronic media (that is, broadcasting) the confluence professionalisation in journalism and the emergence of PSB are foundational. Journalists sought to counter the threats by establishing standards and routines for practices – including regulation, academic curriculum development and the enshrining of journalistic ideals – all aimed to safeguard the media's integrity (the so-called 'arm's length' character) and the democratic function of news media (Cushion, 2019; Zankova, 2013).

These ideals were not confined within the borders of North America or Western Europe. In the aftermath of colonial rule after World War II, newly independent former colony nations emerged. The Western model of journalism, with its public service ethos, was exported to various regions of the Global South as part of the national development agenda of Western nations (McChesney, 2001). This was often facilitated through trends in globalisation, requirements for receiving foreign aid, and the establishment of media operations and organisations that were modelled on Western systems and foreign to local cultures and traditions (Lugo-Ocando, 2020). Some hallmarks

of the attempted transplanting of Western norms in journalism include the concept of news media as a watchdog, the fourth estate as a powerful non-governmental phenomenon, and the task of holding power to account (Lugo-Ocando, 2020).

The diffusion of these media ideals was not without its complexities. As these journalistic standards took root in different soils, they interacted with local values and power structures, leading to varying levels of media hybridisation (Kraidy, 2002). Some adopted the watchdog role with fervour, while others modified these standards to fit more comfortably within their own socio-political contexts. The extent to which these imported ideals were adapted, resisted or embraced has shaped the diverse media landscapes of countries in the Global South and testifies to the dynamic nature of the public service ethos as it encounters diverse global contexts and experiences.

From normative notions of mediated civil public service to radical approaches of digital citizenship

To comprehend how media have shaped understandings of public service, we now move to the Global South and the different forms of enacting digital citizenship within its unique context(s). This enactment is characterised by the dynamic interactions between local moral and ethical frameworks and the ideals imported through global news agendas and media narratives. Beyond mere technological usage, we expand the conceptualisation of digital citizenship to include a wide array of social, cultural, and political frameworks that interplay with individual agency in shaping online behaviours. Conceptualisations of digital citizenship, as examined by Chen et al. (2021), fall into three frameworks.

The first is described as a competence-driven framework and is the often cited definition in literature (Chen et al., 2021). The framework has been detailed in three iterations of *Digital Citizenship in Schools* by Mike Ribble (2007 with Gerard D Bailey; 2011; 2015). Ribble's conceptualisation emphasises

digital literacies, mapping the various domains of digital citizenship as responsible and effective online behaviour (Ribble, 2011).

The second framework focuses on political, social, and economic participation (Chen et al., 2021). The work of Karen Mossberger, Caroline Tolbert, and Ramona McNeal (2007) is often cited for this framework, defining digital citizenship based on frequency of internet access. Unlike Ribble, Mossberger's definition encompasses identity and systematic inequalities (Chen et al., 2021).

A third conceptualisation, as noted by Chen et al. (2021), comes from Choi and Cristol (2021). While their definition shares Mossberger and colleagues' emphasis on participation, Choi and Cristol highlight issues of identity and intersectionality that diverge from the more normative stances. They classify definitions of digital citizenship into unidimensional and multidimensional approaches. The unidimensional approach, specific to the discipline of each scholarly work (for instance, education, communication, political science), views digital citizenship as responsible and ethical behaviour taught through media or as information literacy. Citing Choi (2016) they include operational, technical, cognitive, socio-economic, and emotional skills as crucial for navigating digital spaces (also citing Simsek & Simsek, 2013).

Interestingly, the normative emphasis on the nature of digital citizenship is often assumed to be universal and generalisable in the literature. Just as traditional notions of journalism and PSM have faced challenges, standard conceptualisations of digital citizenship and its claims to universality are also being revaluated. Scholars like Isin and Ruppert (2015) call for a radical rethinking of digital citizenship that considers the socio-cultural, political, technological, and economic contexts within which digital citizens operate. We adopt their approach to develop a context-specific lens in understanding media dynamics in regions beyond the historic confines of North America and Western Europe. These areas frequently exhibit divergence from the most cited definitions of digital citizenship, like those of Mike Ribble, Karen Mossberger and colleagues.

In the upcoming sections, we aim to demonstrate how adopting a critical and comparatively radical perspective on digital citizenship can provide new

insights into the public service ethos and motivation for this ethos in regions outside the Global North. Our exploration starts with an examination of three principal conceptualisations of digital citizenship, based on the analytical work of Chen et al. (2021). Their study offers a comprehensive overview of the most referenced definitions of digital citizenship in scholarly literature from 2010 to 2018, setting the stage for our discussion on reinterpreting digital citizenship across diverse global contexts.

Digital citizenship as effective behaviour online

As noted above, the most cited conceptual framework in the literature studied by Chen and colleagues (2021) is that of Mike Ribble in *Digital Citizenship in Schools* (2011). Ribble's conceptualisation, described as a competence-driven model by Chen et al. (2021), focuses on digital literacies and explores nine domains (elements) of practice in digital citizenship: digital security and safety, digital wellness and health, digital etiquette, digital law, digital rights and responsibilities, digital access, digital commerce, digital communication, and digital literacy.

The popularity of Ribble's definition can be attributed to the general approach of studying digital citizenship in relation to education, with most studies citing his conceptualisations appearing in journals on education (Chen et al., 2021). Another reason for its popularity, one might argue, is the universality of digital citizenship practices and values that his approach assumes. Although the model is comprehensive and highlights important domains to address in literacy programmes, it supposes a level of universality in understanding and practice in online behaviours that does not account for the varied socio-political and cultural contexts governing them and the values around them.

The universality claim is apparent in the normative attributes assigned to digital citizenship, describing it as 'appropriate' and 'responsible'. Ribble's conceptualisation is normative as it defines digital citizenship as 'the norms of appropriate, responsible behaviour with regard to technology use' (Ribble, 2011, p. 10). This definition raises questions regarding the moral grounds it is

built upon and its effectiveness in representing the complexity of media and information flow dynamics.

Ribble's conceptualisation does not engage with the intricacies of media dynamics. It is a deontological approach for establishing what counts as appropriate behaviour online, assuming a shared level of motivation and values in evaluating digitally mediated actions. While we do not suggest there are no shared values across different regions, cultures, and socio-political contexts, we argue that values such as freedom of speech and expression can be theorised, evaluated, prioritised, and performed differently in various places, depending on contextual factors such as religion, culture, and politics. Assuming a normative stance in defining digital citizenship and evaluating its practices risks overlooking the dynamics and contestations of these practices between various powers and actors.

An interesting example here is from events in the Tunisian revolution that began in December 2010 and marked the beginning of the Arab Spring. After the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, his cousin intentionally shared false information with the media about Bouazizi being a university graduate in order to mobilise people (Lim, 2013). It worked, but that meant many people were sharing this false information online, either knowingly or unknowingly. According to Ribble's framework, intentionally sharing fake news would be classified as irresponsible and even harmful behaviour online. The question then becomes whether one's status as a digital citizen is dependent on the moral framework, or the motivations and consequences of the way they perform digital citizenship. Would Bouazizi's cousin and everyone who knowingly shared the false piece of information no longer be considered digital citizens even if their motivation was to mobilise people to seek justice for Bouazizi in an oppressive socio-political system? Is it the act of sharing false information that is deemed 'inappropriate' or 'irresponsible' in principle, or its evaluation as such, independent of the motivation, context, and consequences?

The aim of the chapter is not to permeate any behaviour under pretext of cultural relativism or personal ethics. It is beyond the scope of this work to resolve the tension between personal ethics and what has been defined as universal ethics. However, we aim to highlight problems with traditional

approaches that are caused by the presumed universality of values and implications and a lack of sensitivity to motivations and intentions. Arguably, in result at least, the example represents an act of public service intentionality. In practice, however, it moves beyond the deontological stance traditionally associated with acts of digital citizenship.

Digital citizenship as daily access to the internet

The second most cited conceptualisation of digital citizenship focuses on access (Chen et al., 2021). Karen Mossberger and her colleagues (2007) are the most mentioned scholars advocating this framework(Chen et al., 2021). They define digital citizenship based on the frequency of accessing the internet, specifically daily access. Unlike Ribble, Mossberger and her colleagues look beyond competencies and skills to specifically include rights and opportunities (Chen et al., 2021). Their rationale is not to exclude those who don't access the internet daily but rather to highlight systematic inequalities that result from varying levels of internet access (Mossberger et al., 2007).

While Mossberger and colleagues come closer than Ribble to including identities and backgrounds in the definition of digital citizenship, their conceptualisation is also heavily influenced by the socio-political history and context of countries in the Global North, specifically the United States. They apply two attributes to define the status of a digital citizen: frequency of use (that is, daily use) and effective use, the latter referring to competencies that facilitate democratic engagement in exercising one's civic duty, inclusion in community, and engaging the marketplace.

This conceptualisation draws on Roger Smith's (1993, as cited in Mossberger et al., 2007, pp. 4–7) categorisation of three US traditions of citizenship. Through the liberal model, the authors argue that expanding public use of the internet and technology is justified under liberalism because it ensures economic opportunities in the labour market. The republican model emphasises the 'duty' of a citizen to serve the greater good, moving beyond an individual-centric approach. The ascriptive tradition highlights a 'systematic and coherent tradition of legitimising the exclusion of some groups from

citizenship' (Mossberger et al., 2007, p. 7) despite progress towards liberal ideals. Mossberger and colleagues argue that ascriptive hierarchy helps us understand how systematic inequalities in the United States have historically also shaped society online. While we acknowledge that Mossberger and her colleagues advance beyond Ribble's conceptualisation by analysing the meanings of citizenship within digital citizenship, emphasising the importance of identity and inequality in contextualising digital citizenship in the United States, it is reductionist to assume its applicability elsewhere without further investigation.

An example of citizenship models and dynamics that differ from US traditions was highlighted in the work of Justin Gengler et al. (2013), who analysed the motivation behind Qatari citizens' participation in societal organisations. They found higher levels of civic engagement among citizens with low interest in democratic ideals than the reverse. This equally applied to men and women, although younger and college-educated women embraced democratic ideals representing independence. In sum, the authors argued that the motivation for participation in societal organisations is largely pursuing personal benefit to strengthen a beneficial social and political status quo (Gengler et al., 2013).

This underscores our point that the attraction to democratic ideals and their interpretation depends on the social, historical context and the cultural and social fabric of a society. While some might argue that the preservation of the political status quo is driven by marketplace interests, the analysis reinforces a need to reflect on the motivations of citizenship – and digital citizenship – practices and whether ideals such as achieving equality and common welfare are understood similarly within the intricacies of the Global South's histories and political traditions. It also encourages exploration of motivations for enacting digital citizenship in the Global South.

Digital citizenship and claiming rights through digital acts

A critical approach to conceptualising digital citizenship has been present in academic debates on digital citizenship (Chen et al., 2021). Isin and Ruppert are

among the leading scholars in this field. In their book *Being Digital Citizens*, they interpret digital citizenship as the dynamic and 'dialogical' processes of individuals' continuous emergence 'performatively, legally and imaginatively' through claiming rights using 'digital acts' on the Internet (Isin & Ruppert, 2015).

Right claims are identified as a sixth classification that the authors add to J. L. Austin's five categories of speech acts. The latter, defined as utterances with a force of urging or warning beyond mere descriptive meaning, include judgments, decisions, commitments, acknowledgments, and clarifications. According to Isin and Ruppert, right claims are tantamount to declaring 'I, you, they have the right to. . .' and include 'digital acts' such as blogging, tweeting, liking, and retweeting when enacted through the internet (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). This concept marks a significant departure from earlier conceptualisations of digital citizenship. Whereas Ribble, Mossberger and their colleagues emphasise technical aspects of digital citizenship like access and behaviours, Isin and Ruppert explore the political, social, and legal dimensions in their definitions, thereby redefining key elements of digital citizenship and cyberspace.

Another distinction between traditional literature on digital citizenship and this relatively more radical approach concerns the conceptualisation of *cyberspace*. According to our interpretation of Isin and Ruppert (2015), cyberspace is a venue for various forces (legal, imaginative, and performative) and is not separate from conceptual or 'real' space. They define cyberspace as 'a space of transactions and interactions between and among bodies acting through the Internet. [. . .] These bodies can be collective (institutions, organizations, corporations, collectives, groups), cybernetic, or social. Finally, these acting bodies are neither subservient nor sovereign subjects' (Isin & Ruppert, 2015, p. 28), indicating that the authors do not view cyberspace as distinct from social or cultural spaces.

What we find intriguing in Isin and Ruppert's (2015) definition is its adaptability and dynamism. They define conventions as 'the sociotechnical arrangements that embody norms, values, affects, laws, ideologies, and technologies' (Isin & Ruppert, 2015, p. 26). In claiming a right, conventions

determine both the content of the claim and the medium through which the claim is made, although this process is not without contestation and tension with individual agency (Isin & Ruppert, 2015).

The authors offer insight into the governing dynamics of digital citizenship and how citizens navigate these dynamics. Understanding these complexities is crucial in comprehending digital citizenship within the unique socio-cultural and political contexts of a country. Thus, the internet is defined as a convention of cyberspace, with actions within it (re)produced as part of the tensions between an individual's agency and the conventions of cyberspace, including legal, cultural, and socio-technical conventions as well as other bodies in cyberspace (such as government entities, tech companies, other users. . .) (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). This understanding is pivotal in framing acts of audience participation within PSM institutions in the Global South and examining how culture, religion, technology, and other factors interplay in these acts. We next apply our understandings so far to efforts to develop the concept of a public service ethos in the digital media era, with implications for public service journalism.

An Arab framework for the public service ethos

To better understand how these factors mediate digital acts and their associated conventions in contexts beyond the West, we propose a framework of five aspects that can broaden traditional understanding of the public service ethos. This is done using Harb's comprehensive analysis of the cultures, values, and identities of peoples in the Arab region (2015). Incorporating Harb's insights on generally shared Arab values enables a more inclusive approach to conceptualising public service, an approach that seeks to recognise the unique ways Arab citizens engage with public service, both traditionally and through digital platforms. By illuminating varied expressions of digital citizenship in the Arab world, rooted in a set of comparatively distinctive values and traditions, we contribute to the broader dialogue on public service and digital engagement. This underscores the importance of understanding the fluidity of

the public service ethos by incorporating a perspective rooted in the rich cultural heritage of the Arab world.

It is important to recognise that the framework we develop to deepen comprehension of the public service ethos cannot encapsulate the immense diversity of cultures, languages, and peoples in the Arab region. As explained by Harb, the 'Arab world', as defined by the League of Arab States, spans twenty-two countries from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian-Arabian Gulf and is characterised by profound diversity in ethnicity, religions, and cultures. While Arabs and Muslims (including Sunni and Shi'a) form the majority, there are substantial populations of ethnic and religious minorities. Moreover, the linguistic landscape is highly diverse, with formal and colloquial Arabic varying significantly across regions and countries and with French and English widely spoken due to colonial legacies (Harb, 2015). Therefore, any model attempting to encapsulate the ethos of public service in such a heterogeneous context must be viewed as a contribution to an ongoing dialogue rather than a definitive representation of the Arab world's complexity. This diversity underscores the challenge and necessity of approaching the subject with humility and an openness to the region's multifaceted nature. With these limitations in mind, the proposed framework is characterised by the following five dimensions.

Religion

Harb's insights into the complex role of religion in the Arab world provide a nuanced understanding of how religiosity shapes understandings of public service in the region. The contrast between traditional religious values and the adoption of modern values, as highlighted in the ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller (2014) poll cited by Harb (2015), suggests a dynamic interplay between faith and contemporary societal changes. This evolving religious landscape could imply that notions of public service in the Arab world cannot be homogenised; instead, they are likely influenced by a spectrum of religious interpretations and practices. The interweaving of religion with family and social structures further complicates its influence, potentially driving a multifaceted approach to civic engagement and public service. Acknowledging the diversity within Arab

religiosity, from devout observance to the integration of modern values, is crucial in understanding how religion informs individuals' motivations and actions towards public service.

Morality

Drawing from Harb's insights and Abu-Rida's analysis (1998, cited by Harb, 2015) of Islamic values, perceptions of appropriate morality will deeply influence the Arab world's conception of public service. The frequent invocation of 'haq' in the Qur'an, emphasising justice and a 'nobility of character', underpins a moral framework where public service is not merely an obligation but a manifestation of deeply held ethical principles (Harb, 2015). These principles, including justice, generosity, respect for individual privacy, fairness, and humility, permeate Arab culture and society, shaping citizens' approach to civic engagement (Abu-Rida, 1998 cited by Harb, 2015). In this context, public service could be seen as an extension of moral action, where serving the community aligns with fulfilling one's ethical duty. Such a moral backdrop encourages a public service ethos characterised by altruism, respect for others, and a commitment to equitable treatment. This moral underpinning suggests that notions of public service in the Arab world are deeply intertwined with the broader ethical imperatives that guide social and individual conduct, thereby framing public service as an integral component of leading a virtuous life.

Honour

The concept of honour is profoundly embedded in Arab cultures and could play a significant role in shaping perceptions of public service in the region. Honour is closely tied to reputation and the standing of individuals, families, and communities in social relations. This may act as a powerful motivator for engaging in public service activities. Doing so would not only be a matter of personal integrity, however; it extends to how one's actions contribute to the collective welfare and dignity of the community. In this cultural context,

engaging in public service could be seen as an honourable endeavour that reinforces one's standing in society and strengthens communal bonds. Conversely, neglecting one's duty towards the community or engaging in behaviour deemed dishonourable can have adverse effects on social cohesion and an individual's or family's reputation. Therefore, the pursuit of honour through public service becomes a means of upholding social and cultural norms, encouraging actions that are beneficial to the collective. This underscores the importance of societal values and the collective good, reinforcing the idea that serving the public is both a duty and a source of pride and respect within the community.

Hospitality and generosity

A tradition of hospitality and generosity is deeply ingrained in Arab societies and could significantly influence the development of a public service ethos in the region. Stemming from both cultural traditions and religious injunctions like 'zakat' (generosity), these values foster a community-oriented mindset, where extending help and support to others is not just encouraged but considered a fundamental aspect of one's character and social responsibility (Harb, 2015). This can be understood as an ethos of care and giving that could permeate public service as an altruistic practice, guiding individuals to act in ways that benefit the wider community, particularly those in need. In this view, public service would transcend formal duties or obligations, embodying the spirit of 'diyafa' (hospitality) and the principles of 'zakat', ensuring that actions aimed at the public good are motivated by a genuine desire to contribute to the collective welfare. The emphasis on hospitality and generosity thus shapes the broader public culture that can facilitate a public service ethos where acts of kindness, support, and altruism are paramount, reinforcing the notion that contributing to the community's well-being is both an honour and a moral duty.

Family

The pivotal role of the family in Arab societies could also shape the notion of public service, embedding it within the framework of familial values and obligations. As Harb's insights reveal, the family acts as a fundamental conduit through which cultural values, including those related to public service, are transmitted and reinforced (2015). This socialisation process ensures that individuals are raised to have a deep-seated understanding of their roles and responsibilities towards their community, viewed through the lens of familial duty and honour. The emphasis on family relations cultivates a sense of loyalty and obligation not just to one's immediate family but extends to the broader societal family, encouraging a collective approach to public welfare. In Arab societies, where the family's social position can influence one's opportunities, public service may become a means of both contributing to and enhancing the collective good, reflecting a commitment to communal well-being that is nurtured within the family unit. This familial foundation fosters a culture where serving the public is seen as an extension of serving one's family, blurring the lines between personal obligation and civic duty. As such, the values of care, support, and responsibility towards others are deeply ingrained, driving individuals to actively participate in and contribute to the public sphere as a reflection of their familial upbringing.

With this proposed framework in mind, we turn our discussion to radical approaches to digital citizenship, aiming to expand contemporary understandings of public service practice in journalism. The discussion seeks to highlight not only the profound impact that cultural, religious, and societal values have on fostering digital interactions and civic engagement, but more importantly, the tension that arises between these local sets of values and the idealised ones imprinted through colonial and global forces.

Radical digital citizenship and a new public service ethos: A discussion

In this concluding discussion section, we argue that although both the media and digital citizenship have been conceptualised with social responsibility and

participation at their core, both with obviously high relevance to theories and practices in journalism, a critical analysis of digital citizenship reveals the complexity of media dynamics that are often overlooked in traditional public service ethos. The concept of responsible behaviour that is central to Ribble's digital citizenship framework resonates with the traditional public service ethos and motivations for PSB and PSM that were established in European countries, which many countries in the Global South have thought to imitate – often, however, without much success.

Similarly to our argument about digital citizenship, David Richards and Martin J. Smith have noted that the public service ethos, as imported from the Global North, assumes a shared or at least similar normative stance (Richards & Smith, 2000). They contend that the British civil service's public service ethos has been traditionally seen as normatively positive in academia, political rhetoric, and media. However, they also highlight that reality is much more complex and the ethos has often been used largely as a 'rhetorical device' – drawing on Foucault's discourse on power dynamics – to maintain the status quo of existing power structures (Richards & Smith, 2000).

In contrast, the Arab world values identified through Harb's framework suggest that aspects of responsible behaviour online are contextual and can be mediated by distinctive and varying values, such as religiosity, a culture of honour, and a strong emphasis on family and community ties. These values can shape digital citizenship in ways that may diverge from normative standards established in the Global North but are contextually valid. For instance, the deep religiosity prevalent in the region can influence digital interactions to be more aligned with religious ethics and considerations, promoting content and engagement that respect religious sensibilities. Similarly, the culture of honour may drive individuals to maintain a reputable online presence that upholds family and community honour, influencing the nature of content shared and the manner of engagement. Moreover, the emphasis on family ties and community cohesion could lead to digital practices that prioritise collective well-being over individual expression, potentially leading to a more cautious approach to sharing and commenting online. These culturally rooted values underscore the complexity of applying a universal model of digital citizenship

and highlight the need for approaches that are sensitive to the specific socio-cultural dynamics of different regions.

Our approach to Harb's framework on Arab values and their relationship in fostering and motivating people's digital practices is echoed in Isin and Ruppert's notions of *conventions* that we discussed in previous sections. In addition to one's agency, the socio-political framework within which they live and the technical arrangements of digital media, one's code of honour, morality, family connection, and religion (Harb, 2015) are all factors that are at play in a person's right claim: that is, coming into being as a digital citizen (Isin & Ruppert, 2015).

We hope this chapter encourages a more critical orientation to conceptualising digital citizenship, moving beyond assumptions of universalism in the normative stance, to expose intricacies and tensions that are highly contextual for media dynamics and information flows in the Global South (and North, for that matter). This understanding encourages a re-evaluation of the public service ethos for the institutionalisation of PSM in the Global South. The approach we advocate for in reconceptualising digital citizenship and its motivations aims to identify aspects and values of a public service ethos that aren't emphasised in traditional Western conceptualisations.

Furthermore, conceptualisations of public service and journalism and digital citizenship alike often emphasise participation as a key element. In the introduction to their book, Mossberger and colleagues state that the goal of digital citizenship is to achieve participatory democracy (Mossberger et al., 2007). Their analysis of the three political models in the United States suggests that economic motivations in the liberal model, common welfare in the republican model, and ensuring equality beyond systematic discrimination in the ascriptive model all share participatory democracy as their ultimate objective. Participation has also been a key element in efforts to articulate a suitable public service ethos for the digital age (Enli, 2008). Enli defined audience participation as 'new feedback opportunities provided by digital technology' and explained how audience participation has evolved into a public service value over the years, particularly during the digital switchover and multiplatform convergence for PSB institutions.

Adopting a multiplatform approach was a response to threats that digitalisation posed for the universality and publicness of public broadcasters in Europe (Enli, 2008). Various strategies were adopted in Europe and the USA, all of which emphasised audience participation (Enli, 2008), but often less to actually engage citizens than to legitimate PSB organisations in the battle with commercial pressures. For commercial and some public media firms, audience participation and the multiplatform approach has offered a solution to financial challenges; participation as a resource for 'income-generating purposes' (Enli, 2008, p. 112).

Isin and Ruppert's conceptualisation departs from traditional definitions of digital citizenship by not focalising participation at the core of digital citizenship. Rather, they define participation as a 'calling' that digital citizens respond to, coming into being through the imaginary force built on conventions and a bill of rights, highlighting one's right to access technology and the modern need to connect (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). Including Harb's framework of values within the notion of Isin and Ruppert's conventions allows us to analyse participation beyond merely listing online behaviours and measuring the frequency of internet access. Instead, our approach calls for an extensive review of the context-specific factors that define and are shaped by these behaviours online.

In the context of the Middle East, online participation could be more than an expression of individual agency. For instance, the strong emphasis on family and community in Arab societies may influence individuals to participate in online platforms in ways that reinforce communal bonds and respect cultural norms. Similarly, the values of honour and hospitality could shape online behaviour to foster environments that are respectful and welcoming, prioritising the collective good and societal harmony over individual expression. Furthermore, the significant role of religion may guide digital citizens to engage in online communities and discussions that reflect their religious beliefs and moral values, shaping the nature and tone of participation.

Understanding the full extent of citizenship within the conceptualisations discussed above is a good starting point for defining the factors that interplay within acts of digital citizenship. The analysis shows that cultural, social, and

historical factors play a key role in defining the motives for civic engagement and participation. With cyberspace being defined as a relational space of interactions (Isin & Ruppert, 2015), the boundaries of interactivity and virtuality become apparent. The differences in conceptualising citizenship will result in various conceptualisations and performances of digital citizenship.

Isin and Ruppert (2015) argue that citizenship studies literature has sought to replace the traditional understanding of a citizen as a subject to the power of the state with a modern imaginary that conceptualises citizens as subjects of power. The three definitions of digital citizenship discussed before appear to be built on the assumption that behaviour in, access to, and participation on the internet transform the figure of the citizen into a subject of power. While Isin and Ruppert do not deny that the citizen has power, they argue that the figure of the citizen as a subject to power has not faded as this type of literature might suggest. Hence, they call for expanding the conceptualisation of the citizen to include submission, obedience, and subversion.

According to them, understanding citizenship through these three 'dispositions' (borrowed from Foucault) allows us to expand the conception of digital citizenship beyond the dynamics linking citizens and the state to also include linkages with corporations, tech companies, and the various bodies that fall under each of these categories (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). The authors' exploration of the paradoxical nature of the citizen subject is crucial in addressing the complexity of digital citizenship beyond traditional views of citizenship as either absolute obedience or complete agency (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). According to Isin and Ruppert, the digital citizen embodies both submission and subversion. In claiming rights, the obedient and submissive aspect of the citizen figure reinforces and follows certain conventions, yet they also have the potential to exceed these conventions and even establish new ones (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). They posit that the citizen figure is built upon two contradictions: the first between freedoms and obedience to the state; and the second between the universalism of rights and the particularism of laws.

This figure was reconceptualised – or rather reimagined – with modern political theory (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). The citizen was no longer 'a subject to power' but was now envisioned as 'a subject of power'. Critical political theory,

which the authors align with, moves beyond this divide by arguing that a subject is 'a composite of multiple forces, identifications, affiliations and associations' (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). Accepting these elements, critical political theorists, including the authors, view the subject as 'a site' for various powers (sovereignty, disciplinary, and control) and as possessing dispositions such as obedience, submission, and subversion. Etienne Balibar is credited with coining the new conceptualisation of the 'acting subject' as a citizen, embodying both the traditional 'subject of power' and the modern 'subject in power' (Isin & Ruppert, 2015).

In highlighting the paradoxical nature of Balibar's concept of the citizen, Isin and Ruppert put forth the dialogical roles of submission, obedience, and subversion that digital citizens assume in oscillating between being subjects of power and a subjects to power. In other words, in coming into being, digital citizens submit to the conventions of cyberspace while 'exceeding' and subverting others (Isin & Ruppert, 2015).

Our approach to Harb's Arab values as part of Isin and Ruppert's notion of conventions becomes particularly telling of the potentialities of submission and subversion. Submitting to cultural values such as honour, religiosity, and communal ties may prompt citizens to challenge or reinterpret state and corporate narratives in ways that align with their deeply held beliefs. Governments and corporations deploy conceptual, technical, and legal forces to frame individuals as subjects to power, urging them to align with official standards and practices. However, considering how Arab values could shape public perceptions of service, calls to action can be filtered through a cultural lens that could prioritise family, community, and ethical conduct, which can lead to varied forms of digital participation. There are, of course, other instances where individuals submit to technical conventions such as platforms' affordances as a way of exceeding cultural norms and conventions.

This dynamic between subversion and submission is also evident in the way public broadcasters and media institutions employ audience participation as a strategic aspect of their public service ethos. Even though the reality of public service broadcasters deploying audience participation was to legitimise their model in the face of commercial media (Enli, 2008), the normative stance on

public service ethos that has been adopted in media and academic rhetoric (Richards & Smith, 2000) has created an imaginary of an active audience as a convention. However, in assuming an active role and submitting to the new norm, audiences have created and enacted their potentialities of subverting news media agendas and narratives.

The interplay between these forces is crucial; citizens respond to callings of participation not merely by submitting but by negotiating these imperatives. This negotiation may involve embracing some aspects of these calls while subtly resisting others. Submission to the state or even self-censorship become, therefore, enactments of digital citizenship that respond to a framework of values that perhaps are more context-aligned.

This ability to navigate between submission and subversion underscores the importance of understanding local cultural values, as these significantly influence how digital citizenship is enacted. In this regard, the Arab values make a powerful case for understanding digital citizenship beyond Western conceptual frameworks. These values ensure that even as citizens participate in digital platforms under the guise of conventional digital citizenship, they bring to bear cultural imperatives that may alter the trajectory of their participation.

As we posited earlier, if the assumption that the ethical and moral imperatives driving both citizens and the media to act in the public interest are closely aligned holds true, then a culturally specific framework of values can significantly deepen our understanding of the motivations behind these actions. This approach is particularly crucial when considering the role of journalists in the Global South, where they must navigate the complexities of their geopolitical contexts.

Journalists in these regions are not solely driven by global journalistic standards but also by a suite of local values that shape their understanding and enactment of public service. Recognising these diverse motivations certainly enriches our understanding of journalism as it is practiced across different cultures. This perspective encourages a re-evaluation of the normative standards of journalism and public service, advocating for a model that is both inclusive and representative of the multifaceted realities of the Global South.

Notes

1. The chapter is based on a study (NPRP14C-0916–210015) that is currently underway at Northwestern University Qatar and funded by the Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF).
2. Ethics typically refers to a set of rules that are institutionalised over time, guiding individuals on how to behave in certain settings, whereas morals relate to an individual's own principles about what is right and wrong.

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Chapter 4
Public Service Media in the Platform Era: The Struggle to Stay News-Relevant

Marius Dragomir

Summary

As a constituent sector of the broader media industry, public service media (PSM) have experienced significant disruption in recent decades, caused by digitalisation and economic difficulties. In Europe especially, PSM organisations are major news producers and among the largest employers of journalists. The challenges are made more complicated by diverse and often non-commercial operational models tied to a public service mission that has been subjected to intense scrutiny in the platformised media economy. This chapter analyses PSM in the platformised context using a framework developed by the author to identify areas and activities that are most affected to encourage deeper understandings of the implications for policy, economic, cultural, and social conditions affecting the transformation of public media with a close focus on its roles and functions in the news ecology. Analysing three key dimensions – structural conditions, internal capacity, and external engagement – the author argues that a string of challenges, many of which were further complicated by the platformisation of the media ecology, together pose a formidable threat to the preservation of public service media.

Introduction

Public service media (PSM) have historically grappled with numerous challenges that include navigating complex political pressures (Šimunjak, 2016), competition from commercial broadcasters, and relentless lobbying by the private media sector (Bardoel & Lowe, 2008; Sjøvaag et al., 2019). Arguably the overall intention has been aimed at destabilising PSM's financial model (Lowe & Berg, 2013) and undermining political and popular support. The severity has varied across nations with PSM organisations, but has been persistent since the emergence of today's multichannel system in the 1990s (Larsen, 2016). Digitalisation of media has fuelled added pressures compelling PSM to reassess their role in markets teeming with channels and platforms with distinct competitive advantages and user affordances.

Efforts were made to transform the media ecology of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s after the collapse of the USSR. Governments in the region embarked on an ambitious mission to transform state media institutions to become independent PSM organisations. Results were mixed due to varying degrees of political interference (Downey & Mihelj, 2012) that complicated and often undermined these efforts (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2003). At the same time, and adding to the complexity, broadcast markets in the region underwent privatisation and commercialisation when the liberalisation of formerly 'planned economies' ushered in a bevy of competing broadcasters. Public service broadcasting was often perceived as a cosmetic description of government-controlled entities that lost significant audiences and caused marginalisation (Jung & Moleda-Zdziec, 1998). Private commercial media have persistently complained about perceived preferential treatment for PSM, particularly their exclusive access to public financial support through state subsidies and dedicated licence fees (Donders, 2013).

While some PSM organisations have struggled to compete effectively, as evident in low audience figures and limited brand recognition, others have effectively used government funding to reform their organisations, reform programming, and broaden reach (Dragomir & Thompson, 2014). However, rapid, continuous development in digital media technologies poses fresh challenges even for the most successful. This is especially evident in the rise of platformisation, a phenomenon that is transforming how content is created, distributed, and shared (Helmond, 2015; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Nieborg et al., 2019).

Here we take stock of relevant literature and apply a framework developed by the author for analysing PSM in the platform ecology. The analysis focuses on three dimensions affecting PSM performance: 1) *structural conditions* (changes in funding, governance models, and examination of remits and mandates); 2) *internal capacity* (the impact of tech platforms on the editorial agenda and coverage, and demands for professional development and skills); and 3) *external engagement and communication* (potential for developing commercial activities to support public service content production, new ways to advance audience engagement, and diversification of content formats via collaboration with audiences).

The platform economy's impact on media and journalism

Platformisation is the expansion of digital platforms affecting economies, governments, and infrastructure with significant implications for media industries and production practices (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Nieborg et al., 2019). Platformisation describes the rise of digital platforms as the prevailing infrastructural and economic model of advances in the social web (Helmond, 2015). This understanding underscores the transformative nature of platformisation (Willig, 2022).

Understanding the impact on media requires identifying and accounting for transformative changes from various perspectives. Research has identified three characteristic mechanisms accounting for the transformative impact of platformisation (for example, van Dijck et al., 2018). The mechanisms are: 1) datafication affecting the business and influence of news media (Harper, 2017; Napoli, 2016); 2) commodification that stratifies customers and can enable a 'tyranny of the

majority' (Harper, 2017); and 3) selection that entails curating topics to personalise content distribution (Tambini & Labo, 2016). Research on platformisation has been approached from three perspectives: business, political economy, and software research.

In the business domain, scholars typically focus on the activities of profit-driven companies in platform markets (Evans & Schmalensee, 2016) and the economic rationale for this focus (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Political economists study the dynamics of platform power (de Bustos & Izquierdo-Castillo, 2019) with a focal interest in 'platform capitalism' (Srnicek, 2016) and the dominance of a handful of transnational platforms (Fuchs, 2017). Here, analyses of economic growth investigate patterns and the problem of ownership concentration in the platform economy. For their part, media researchers are concerned about the dramatic erosion of media pluralism and production autonomy correlated with platformisation (Hardy, 2014).

Recent research (Plantin et al., 2018) has begun to focus on the intersectionality of technology, software, and platforms. Nieborg and Poell (2018) examined how algorithmic logic affects user access to knowledge and connections within platforms. This shift marks a departure from the traditional 'editorial logic' that privileged human expertise in content distribution decisions that is being replaced by what Gillespie (2014) described as a 'new knowledge logic'. Taken together, these trends are strongly affecting the news media ecosystem, forcing media companies to revamp operations and internal processes to remain competitive. Scholars describe this shift as the 'platformisation of news', defined as a move from a traditional editorially driven approach to a contemporary demand-driven process (Poell et al., 2017).

Platformisation is having a significant impact on PSM quite broadly, prompting PSB organisations to revamp strategies and operations for production and distribution strategies (D'Arma et al., 2021), and struggle with pressures to commodify their audiences (Sørensen et al., 2020) without exerting excessive control over them (Andersson Schwarz, 2016). Striking the right balance is tricky and especially evident in the provision of news services.

Thriving in today's rapidly evolving media ecology requires PSM organisations to embark on a new transformation project that begins with redefining and expanding their mission and ultimately retooling operations to become public service platforms (PSPs) (Bonini Baldini et al., 2021). Responding effectively to the growth of datafication, commodification, and selection requires PSM organisations to improve alignment with the new media ecology and manage complex technological dynamics created by platformisation. There are two key aspects associated with platformisation: 1) competing successfully with the sheer abundance of content and platforms; and 2) a correlated preference among audiences for personalised on-demand services (Raats et al., 2018). This makes fulfilling PSM mandates for the provision of universal service in news and information extremely challenging.

The realignment of PSM in the platform ecology is crucial because these organisations are primary employers for journalists and sources of news, with a large footprint in media markets and high investments in technical infrastructure and human resources. PSM governance structures and funding models significantly influence internal capacity and external engagement with audiences as co-determinant factors for their journalistic performance and ability to compete successfully in today's thoroughly commercialised digital economy.

However, PSM organisations have a specific mandate that must be considered for appropriate analysis of how they cope with changes in efforts to adapt to platformisation. Their efforts to adapt must safeguard six values that are foundational to the public service mission: universality, independence, excellence, diversity, accountability, and innovation (EBU, 2012). Failing to uphold those values would put them out of compliance with their mandate that both sets them apart from private commercial companies and is the basis of their sociopolitical legitimacy. This is especially important for ensuring public trust in the news and information services they produce. There is a potential, and unfortunately also real in too many cases, for lack of legitimacy and trust that hinges on the ownership and intentions of public news organisations. We address this next.

Public media or state media?

Governments influence the structures and policies that enable and constrain media systems. The past decade has seen a growing and worrisome inclination among many governments to increase control over the media sector and this especially pertains to national public and state media channels that are often among the biggest media organisations and major content suppliers with significant influence among audiences. This is particularly worrisome owing to a typically privileged position as official sources of presumably factual news and information. The extent to which a media organisation can be fairly considered a public or state institution varies across countries based on a myriad of factors that include economic conditions, societal composition, technological infrastructure, political climate, and journalistic practices, among numerous others.

The author earlier created a taxonomy described as the state media matrix to help untangle this knotty issue (Table 4.1). The matrix challenges a traditionally oversimplified binary categorisation of media organisations as being either fully state-controlled or totally independent public service entities. This is accomplished on the basis of assessing three discriminating factors: 1) sources of funding; 2) nature of ownership/governance; and 3) editorial autonomy.

Table 4.1 State media matrix, a typology of state and public media

Predominantly state-funded	**Control of governing structures and ownership**	**Editorial control**	**Model**
Yes	Yes	Yes	State-controlled (**SC**)

Predominantly state-funded	**Control of governing structures and ownership**	**Editorial control**	**Model**
No	Yes	Yes	Captured public/state managed (**CaPu**)
Yes	No	Yes	Captured private (**CaPr**)
No	No	Yes	
Yes	Yes	No	Independent state-funded and state-managed/owned (**ISFM**)
Yes	No	No	Independent state-funded (**ISF**)
No	Yes	No	Independent state-managed/owned (**ISM**)
No	No	No	Independent public (**IP**)

Source: Designed by Marius Dragomir

Editorial independence is a key feature of the taxonomy and is especially important for our interests in this chapter. Public media are categorised into two overarching groups. The first is comprised of types controlled by governments (encompassing the models SC, CaPu, and CaPr in the matrix). The second consists of media that are independent of (as much or direct) government influence (models ISFM, ISF, ISM, and IP in the matrix).

In the government-dependent category, the state-controlled (SC) media model is the largest group and encompasses channels established and operated by government authorities with the purpose of disseminating state-supportive propaganda. These channels typically function as integral components of the government machinery (for example, as government departments or offices in ministries). SC media are predominantly state-financed and are overseen by government-appointed bodies. Their editorial stance is not independent. They must receive approval from state authorities, and our traditional understanding of journalistic practice is not allowed or severely constrained. Content is based on directives from the government, and channels must follow rules enforced through censorship mechanisms. The SC model is notably common in authoritarian and autocratic regimes, such as the People's Republic of China, North Korea, Venezuela, and some nations in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, as well as Central and Eastern Europe (Dragomir & Söderström, 2022).

The second government-dependent category is the captured public/state-owned (CaPu) media model and consists of channels under government control but not financed by the state. The government holds sway over governance structures, ownership, and editorial coverage. Journalists work under sometimes direct and often indirect pressures from government. Unlike the state-controlled category that is embedded in the state apparatus, journalists in CaPu channels function as unofficial government clerks assigned to produce state propaganda often disguised to give the appearance of independence. The editorial agenda of these channels is imposed by state authorities. Within this category, three distinct types of players have been identified:

1. Print media publishers managed by state institutions that rely primarily on commercial revenue for funding. Examples include Sociedade de Notícias in Mozambique, Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) in Zambia, Zimpapers in Zimbabwe, Singapore Press Holdings (SPH), and SRMG in Saudi Arabia.
2. Public media organisations that lack editorial autonomy. Examples include Pakistan's PTV, SLBC and SLRC in Sri Lanka, HRT in Croatia, ERT in Greece, Italian public broadcaster RAI, and RTS in Serbia.
3. Media conglomerates with broadcast and print media channels that align themselves closely with the interests of a governing party or government. Notable examples include Medianova in Angola, Shanghai Media Group in the PRC, and commercially funded Russian media groups like Gazprom Media and National Media Group.

The third model of government-controlled media is represented as the captured private (CaPr) media model. This type is comprised of privately owned channels that are subject to editorial control by state authorities. They are often funded by commercial income and play a significant role in media capture architecture. State control is achieved through affiliated businesses in the private

sector, creating a complex web of interdependent influence. Funding is ostensibly commercial but includes often sizable amounts from government budgets allocated through state-sponsored advertising or other commercial revenues characteristic of crony capitalism with important political implications. Investigating media in this category poses significant challenges because they typically avoid formal links with state institutions. Control is exerted through personal relations between owners and high-ranking officials, largely behind closed doors. The CaPr model is prevalent in countries with high degrees of state interventionism in the media, including, for example, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Turkey, and Serbia.

Moving to models of public media that are far more independent of government control, the independent public (IP) model represents the ideal, classical PSM orientation that prioritises serving the public's interests and needs as the essential mission. Whether established through legal measures or plans endorsed by elected officials, this model is fortified by financial and governance mechanisms that shield such channels from government interference and external pressures. Editorial independence is typically safeguarded by legal codes, regulations, and oversight instruments. Journalists are guaranteed editorial freedom, typically enshrined as constitutionally protected freedom of the press, and expected to operate independently. This model is becoming increasingly rare and now on the brink of extinction in many regions. The model has so far persisted in Western and Northern Europe and a few countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Asia.

Numerous media institutions in Europe that are classified as ISM, ISF, and ISFM in the matrix adhere to principles and values that characterise the public service mission.

The independent state-managed/owned (ISM) media model is primarily observed in various European countries, and sporadically in other regions. Channels are predominantly owned by governments but not financed by state subsidies and have editorial autonomy. Examples include Channel 4 in the United Kingdom, DR in Denmark, France Télévisions, NRK in Norway, Radio France, and France Médias Monde. This model is also observed in some Central and Eastern European countries, including news agencies such as CTK in Czechia and TASR in Slovakia, and more broadly at Antara news agency in Indonesia and the TVNZ public broadcaster in New Zealand.

The independent state-funded (ISF) media model is predominantly state-financed but neither owned nor governed by the state. This model is used in Australia (ABC and SBS), Canada (CBC), Jamaica (PBC), and New Zealand (Maori Television), and university broadcasters in Columbia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico. It is also evident in several unique systems in Europe that include Cyprus (Cyprus News Agency), Estonia (ERR), and the Netherlands (NPO).

The independent state-funded and state-managed/owned (ISFM) model is an exceptional form of state-administered media. Outlets are predominantly funded and governed by the state but enjoy editorial independence achieved through strict regulations that prohibit government interference or due to a progressive mindset among authorities who recognise the societal benefits of a free press. Examples include Belgium public broadcasters VRT, RTBF, and BRF, IMER in Mexico, and the US Agency for Global Media (USAGM) that oversees a range of American global broadcasters including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America. It is also evident in Sidwaya

publishing house and news agency in Burkina Faso, the SNPECI newspaper publisher in Côte d'Ivoire, TBS and IPBC public broadcasters in Taiwan and Israel respectively, TeleRadio-Moldova in Moldova, Suspilne (formerly UA:PBC) in Ukraine, and most of Spain's regional public broadcasters. Journalists in all three independent models (ISM, ISF, and ISFM) make editorial decisions based on principles and values associated with a free press.

A recent study using the matrix and conducted by the Media and Journalism Research Center[1] was released in October 2023. The findings are summarised in Table 4.2. The study found that 83% of the 592 state-administered media entities spanning 157 countries lack editorial independence. Among the 493 outlets identified as lacking independence, the state-controlled (SC) model accounts for an estimated 76% of the total. Thus, of all state and public media in the world only 99 outlets are editorially independent. And of those, only 19 were in the independent public (IP) category – that is, the ideal PSM model.

The facts paint a bleak picture of the state of state-administered media, an already troubling situation now further complicated by formidable challenges posed by platformisation in a competitive media ecosystem where state-controlled propaganda channels comprise a majority in the sector. The struggle to develop genuinely independent public news media is clearly fraught with political interests and interference. For the rest of the chapter, we focus on organisations and channels in the independent group (IP, ISM, ISF, and ISFM models).

Table 4.2 Global overview of state media by typology and number of media outlets, 2023

	Number of media entities							
	SC	**CaPu**	**CaPr**	**ISFM**	**ISF**	**ISM**	**IP**	**Total**
Europe	24	11	25	30	5	10	12	117
Eurasia	52	5	6	2	0	0	0	65
Sub-Saharan Africa	107	13	1	3	0	0	0	124
MENA	51	17	14	3	1	0	0	86

Asia	93	13	8	3	0	3	5	125
Latin America*	50	2	1	5	7	0	0	65
North America, Australia and New Zealand	0	0	0	3	4	1	2	10
Total	377	61	55	49	17	14	19	592

Source: Media and Journalism Research Center
Note:
State MEDIA MATRIX: SC: State-controlled media; CaPu: Captured public/state-managed media; CaPr: Captured private media; ISFM: Independent state-funded and state-managed media; ISF: Independent state-funded media; ISM: Independent state-managed media; IP: Independent public media.
*Including some Caribbean countries

Impact of platformisation on independent public media

Platformisation exerts profound and far-reaching influences on many facets of PSM. The author presents four tables to clarify (see Tables 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 in the pages that follow). Consequential challenges were mapped in the three key dimensions noted at the start: 1) structural conditions; 2) internal capacity; and 3) external engagement and communication.[2]

Structural conditions

PSM faces formidable obstacles in two essential aspects already discussed as characteristic factors for determining degrees of independence in governance and funding. These are structural factors. Here we focus primarily on Europe as the 'heartland' of PSB.

Governance

In 2012, the Council of Europe proposed standards for the management of PSM with the goal of safeguarding independence (Council of Europe, 2012). Their standards entail reasonable, unbiased protocols for the selection and dismissal of supervisory bodies and measures to counter political efforts to manipulate procedures to gain control. Despite such important efforts, prevailing circumstances continue to pose significant challenges.

As summarised in Table 4.3, appointment and dismissal procedures face persistent obstacles to efforts to ensure media autonomy. The Media Pluralism Monitor, a research initiative supported by

the European Union, recently classified twenty-two countries at medium to high risk of undermining the independence of their PSM organisations and channels. Their evaluation specifically assessed governance and funding mechanisms (Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom [CMPF], 2023). Political independence is of utmost importance for news and journalistic provision by PSM. In fact, attempts by politicians and special interest groups to gain control over PSM governing bodies are directly linked to a desire to control editorial production, which has clearly been the primary focus of many attacks on PSM in recent years.

Table 4.3 PSM remit and governance: threats and opportunities

	Common practices and trends	**Threat to***	**Opportunity for***	**Role of platformisation****
Appointment and dismissal mechanisms	Dominance by one political faction	IND, D, A		Low
	Civil society participation/involvement		IND, D, A	Low
	Diluted political influence		IND, D, A	Low
Qualification criteria	Professional competences		IND, E, D, A	Low
	Political party affiliation	IND, A		Low
	Political connection	IND, A		Low
Relationship with state	Reporting to state authorities: possibility of	IND		Low

bodies	dismissal of board members and budget cuts			

Source: Dragomir et al., 2024.
Notes:
*Incidence of threats and emerging opportunities related to the six core public service media values: U: universality; IND: independence; E: excellence; D: diversity: A; accountability; INN: innovation.
**The platformisation factor expresses the extent to which the practices and trends under examination are triggered by platformisation (low, medium and high influence).

PSM is a focus for manipulation efforts not only by governing factions but also by opposition parties. The intricate power dynamic makes PSM news and the organisations that provide it subject to scathing criticism in efforts to undermine their credibility. Moreover, pressures to constrain PSM participation on digital platforms have been growing over the past decade. Even in countries with comparatively high degrees of editorial independence there have been pressures and legal complaints to limit their presence on new platforms and even to curtail development of new or existing broadcasting channels.

Where governance models have done better, safeguarding the autonomy of PSM is mainly thanks to involvement by civil society organisations in the designation and removal of governing entities, or public pressure that has reduced the potential for political sway by endowing all political factions with equitable opportunities to voice their views in the appointment process rather than vesting such power only in the governing party or coalition.

For example, responsibility for overseeing Lithuanian Radio and Television (LRT) rests with the LRT Council, comprised of individuals nominated by a range of civil society organisations that include the Lithuanian Science Council, the Lithuanian Education Council, the Lithuanian Creative Artists Association, and the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference (Media and Journalism Research Center [MJRC], 2022a). Sweden's SVT operates under the auspices of a foundation comprised of a thirteen-member board appointed through recommendations put forth by all political parties, thereby guaranteeing that no political faction wields excessive power in the process (MJRC, 2022b.).

Funding

PSM in Europe primarily rely on some combination of state budget allocations and public funds that are not part of the state budget (EBU, 2024). This accounted for 60% of EBU member companies in 2022 (EBU, 2024). Licence fees or similar forms of funding outside the state budget constituted the largest share of PSM budgets in 40% of countries. France, Germany, Italy, and the UK continue to rely on licence fee revenue as the primary source of funding (as of 2021). But as demonstrated in Table 4.4, funding for PSM is under significant strain in several aspects that indicate a range of threats.

Table 4.4 PSM funding models: threats and opportunities

	Common practices	**Threat**	**Opportunity**	**Role of**

	and trends	to*	for*	platformisation**
Funding trends	Flat growth of PSM funding	IND, E, D, INN		Medium
	Forecast decrease in funding	IND, E, D, INN, U		Medium
Funding models	Public funding (licence fee, various forms of taxation)		U, IND, A, INN	Medium
	State budget allocation	IND, A, D		Medium
	User-linked forms of funding (subscriptions, etc.)	U, D		High
Preferential access to infrastructure	Advantaged position in frequency spectrum		U	Low

Source: Dragomir et al., 2024.
Notes:
*Incidence of threats and emerging opportunities related to the six core public service media values: U: universality; IND: independence; E: excellence; D: diversity: A; accountability; INN: innovation.
**The platformisation factor expresses the extent to which the practices and trends under examination are triggered by platformisation (low, medium and high influence).

The licence fee has been challenged for several reasons. The increasing popularity of video-on-demand has led audiences to prefer paying for what they want and thereby exerting more direct control over payment rather than being obliged to pay for services as an imposed requirement. Political interest groups have expressed dissatisfaction with editorial positions and coverage by PSM news and seized opportunities to criticise the licence fee to generate public support. Commercial lobbies have accused PSM of an unfair market advantage and influenced several countries to shift to taxation-based funding systems. Finland introduced a public service media tax in 2013 to finance their PSM provider, Yle (Österlund-Karinkanta, 2016).

An appropriate PSM funding model must meet established standards that especially include stability, independence, legitimacy, transparency, and accountability (EBU, 2024). That has been challenging in many cases due to imposed legal limitations and politically imposed operational constraints. PSM must also navigate pressures from their publics who may view some funding models less acceptable in the platform economy and expect greater autonomy in choosing content providers.

It seems fair to conclude that a key obstacle for PSM organisations in efforts to adapt to the platformisation of the digital media ecosystem hinges on a clash between funding principles and evolving realities. This poses obvious threats to the integrity of the news reporting by journalists in PSM organisations that lack adequate funding, are subject to unhelpful pressures from authorities that control the purse strings with the potential to interfere in editorial decisions that prevent PSM from fulfilling their public service remits in the provision of news and information for societies writ large. We next turn to the second key dimension – internal capacity.

Internal capacity

PSM organisations across Europe have substantially revised content strategies to accommodate expanding demands and the changing nature of digital media markets. An important aspect is the revamping of newsrooms to transition from the legacy broadcasting-only model to a multiplatform approach for both content creation and dissemination. Significant effort and investment have been required to build the required internal capacity to accomplish the strategic goal of serving all segments of the public these media organisations are mandated to serve.

The restructuring of production flow has varying results partly due to distinctions across platforms. In the United Kingdom, the BBC adopted a collaborative news-gathering and platform-specific production approach to enhance efficiency and improve coordination (Sehl et al., 2018). Countries including Italy, France, and Poland have experienced editorial fragmentation as their PSM providers have struggled to consolidate online assets into a unified website (Sehl et al., 2018). Table 4.5 summarises threats and opportunities for PSM content production and distribution that have significant implications for news services. The table highlights several current trends, some of which are comparatively recent while others have been chronic problems.

Table 4.5 PSM content production and distribution development: threats and opportunities

	Common practices and trends	**Threat to***	**Opportunity for***	**Role of platformisation****
Automation and digital integration	Use of artificial intelligence in content production	IND, E	U, INN	High
	Increased distribution of content, access to more sources and data		INN, D, U, E	High
	Increased exposure to false news	E	U, A	High
External pressures	Pressures from commercial players intensified (both in terms of competition and lobbying)	IND, E, U, D		Medium
	Pressures from governments	IND, A		Low
	Pressures from social networks to follow their trending topics	IND, D, E		High
Safeguards for editors and newsroom	Legal provisions guaranteeing newsroom's independence		IND, A, D	Low

Source: Dragomir et al., 2024.
Notes:
*Incidence of threats and emerging opportunities related to the six core public service media values: U: universality; IND: independence; E: excellence; D: diversity: A; accountability; INN: innovation.
**The platformisation factor expresses the extent to which the practices and trends under examination are triggered by platformisation (low, medium and high influence).

Efforts to restructure PSM content production and distribution processes are affected by governance factors (such as political influence and pressures from trade unions) and funding considerations. These factors have been discussed and have an obvious bearing on projects intended to cope with platformisation that requires news approaches to content production. Automation has a prominent role as evident in private media companies. Automation is not solely driven by cost reduction strategies but also by the imperative to enhance content production. As an example, PSM organisations have been progressively employing automation, including bots, for example, to bolster the dissemination of their news content (Jones & Jones, 2019). The platform ecology opens new opportunities for content distribution, as well. Comparing PSM performance with the private sector, it is clear that many PSM organisations have higher degrees of activity on social networks (quantity) and publish higher quantity content (Ferrer-Conill et al., 2023).

Moreover, there is evidence that PSM organisations are using platforms to improve integration and synergy. The BBC and RTVE in Spain embraced collaborative strategies that are facilitated by platform engagement. Both organisations established collaborative laboratories to develop internal production processes by improving needed skills, methods, and workflows among staff members (Zaragoza Fuster & García, 2022). This has boosted employee preparedness and fostered higher degrees of loyalty to the public service mission with improved understanding of the public service role and functions (Zaragoza Fuster & García, 2022).

Digital technology has revolutionised daily practice for journalists and content creators who now work with and across diverse media platforms. This applies as much to PSM professionals as those working for private commercial firms. As noted several times, the heart of the matter is a changing media ecology overall. In this ecology, social networks are expansive repositories for data and information that journalists can tap into for news gathering and use for public engagement. The shift has not always resulted in improved content quality, however. This prompted PSM news organisations to develop guidelines their journalists are encouraged or obliged to follow when using digital networks (Direito-Rebollal et al., 2020). As now commonly recognised, social media platforms have become a primary source of misleading narratives and this presents significant challenges for journalism as a public service. PSM organisations are allocating substantial resources to tackle the problem. Fact-checking is a prominent strategy.

There are also persistent issues in content creation and career development within PSM organisations. These include mounting challenges and pressures from commercial rivals that oppose PSM, accusing them of unfair advantages owing to public funding. That argument has gained traction thanks to the widespread use of social media platforms in efforts to undermine public support (Cushion, 2019).

And PSM is still contending with political pressures that have only increased with the growth of platformisation. Although Europe boasts the highest number of independent public media

organisations globally, more than 20% of these institutions are subject to editorial control by state entities (Dragomir & Söderström, 2022). We now turn to the third key dimension that similarly indicates both opportunities and threats for PSM in the platform media economy.

External engagement and communication

As observed earlier, PSM is a prominent feature of the media landscape for many countries, especially in Europe, despite the proliferation of digital channels. They are widely regarded as highly reliable sources of quality news and information (Sehl, 2020). This view cuts across politically diverse audiences and indicates appeal for people of differing orientations. PSM is also distinctive in the amount of investment in producing and distributing content for minority audiences. This role is amplified by platformisation because it enables effectively engaging mainstream and marginalised audiences alike in pursuit of the universalism mission that is a foundational value for PSM. Table 4.6 summarises threats and opportunities posed by platformisation for fulfilling this mandate.

Table 4.6 PSM audiences: threats and opportunities

	Common practices and trends	**Threat to***	**Opportunity for***	**Role of platformisation****
Perception of public service media content	Trust in public service media news output		IND, D	Medium
	Diverse, balanced political coverage		IND, D	Medium
	Lack of understanding the mission of public service media	U, IND, A		Medium
Audience outreach	Aging audiences	U, D, INN		High

Public participation in content production	Mismatch between the goals of the media versus those of the public	E, INN		High

Source: Dragomir et al., 2024.
Notes:
*Incidence of threats and emerging opportunities related to the six core public service media values: U: universality; IND: independence; E: excellence; D: diversity: A; accountability; INN: innovation.
**The platformisation factor expresses the extent to which the practices and trends under examination are triggered by platformisation (low, medium and high influence).

Despite progress in audience engagement efforts, improvement has been relatively slow (Głowacki & Jaskiernia, 2017). Involving audiences in content production has produced mixed results. One reason hinges on a disconnect between media-centric objectives of PSM organisations and society-centric goals prioritised by citizens (Vanhaeght, 2019). A lack of successful audience engagement in content production can be attributed to a poor understanding of the nature of audience participation in PSM as citizens (Vanhaeght & Donders, 2021).

PSM organisations have implemented strategies to enhance content accessibility across popular platforms to foster greater engagement. Some have adopted methods for tailoring their offerings to individual users, drawing inspiration from successful social media networks (Sehl & Eder, 2023). While laudable, for audience participation to have a significant impact it is imperative to move beyond a traditional perspective of people as 'audiences' and a wearied emphasis on promoting user-generated content (Vanhaeght & Donders, 2021). PSM organisations need to actively engage with their publics to facilitate improved understandings of the principles and values of PSM that are important for their interests (Vanhaeght & Donders, 2021). This can strengthen bonds between PSM and their publics and support efforts to uphold values of universal importance (Costa-Sánchez et al., 2021). A lack of citizen participation undermines fulfilling the core mission (Dragomir, 2021).

At present, we see a major divide between PSM and its publics, a divide that is especially pronounced in the younger demographic who gravitate towards alternative platforms for both entertainment and information needs. There is a need to revitalise PSM in ways that ensure improved and continued relevance for diverse groups, however profiled (Lowe & Maijanen, 2019). Accomplishing this poses considerable challenges because big tech platforms are more effective in capturing the attention of younger audiences and shaping their consumption patterns. Younger media users increasingly rely on social media as the primary source of news and information, and this plays a decisive role in market fragmentation (Eichner et al., 2021).

Conclusion

To summarise, research conducted through the normative and empirical framework used in this chapter reflects many of the concerns expressed by PSM scholars about the adverse effects of platformisation, arguably indicating that risks far outweigh the potential benefits.

PSM faces significant challenges in developing robust funding models that are accepted by citizens and inhibit (at best prevent) political interference. This is more complicated in the platform media ecology. At the same time, PSM needs effective strategies for guaranteeing public participation that is also sustainable. One option to help accomplish both goals is to create a system for audience measurement and assessment that is better aligned with the public service mission and mandates rather than the system used by commercial media for their essential needs and interests. It is vital to ascertain services for minorities and marginalised populations and the trust-building role of news programs produced by PSM.

The platform economy has not changed the political logic of governing bodies for PSM organisations. Political interference and control undermine public trust and credibility in news. Despite modest improvement in recent years, a significant majority of state and public media organisations are tightly controlled by governments and employed as propaganda instruments by authorities. Efforts to transform the public media sector are complicated by a highly unstable geopolitical context in which reliable news is an increasingly scarce 'commodity'. Even in countries with a comparatively strong and independent public media system, with large news operations that also often serve audiences abroad, there is notable pressure to limit their options and reduce their influence in the platform news ecology.

Geopolitical tensions are not helping. The war in Ukraine, growing tensions in the Middle East, instability in Asia-Pacific due to a belligerent North Korean government, and the clashes between the PRC and the Republic of China (ROC) over Taiwan, can be expected to fuel both higher uses of social media to spread mis- and disinformation, and stricter government control over public media especially. Autocratic governments in the PRC and the Russian Federation are making worrisome progress in efforts to extend their media influence operations abroad, and allocating significant resources to develop a complex network of state-controlled channels that target international viewership – often under false pretences.

Other governments are intensifying efforts to combat false information that became a glaring emergency following recent economic and health crises, and growing threats to democracies in the West and elsewhere. In such a turbulent conflicted context, the need for independent, trustworthy sources of news and information is greater than at any time since the mid 20th century. Genuine PSM is needed as much today as PSB was needed historically, and for much the same reasons. The chapter has articulated numerous challenges rooted in structural conditions, affected by internal capacity, and impacting external engagement and communication. While most are persistent challenges, they are further complicated by the platformisation of today's media ecology. Taken together, the challenges represent a formidable threat to the preservation and further development of PSM as independent, universally available, and trustworthy news media organisations. The stakes could not be higher for public service journalism – the focus of this book.

Note

1. For more information about the Media and Journalism Research Center (MJRC), see https://journalismresearch.org.
2. In the design of the framework and the analysis presented in this section, the author used historical data from multi-country research projects he led, including Television Across Europe (covering 20 European countries in phase 1, 2004–2005; and 9 countries in phase 2, 2008–2009); Mapping Digital Media (covered 56 countries, 2009–2014); Media Influence Matrix (covering 41 countries, ongoing since 2017); and State Media Monitor (covering 157 countries, ongoing since 2020). A total of 21 interviews carried out in the period 2020–2023 via email or in person as part of the research project Valcomm, conducted by the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC), have also been used in the analysis. The literature on platformisation summarised earlier in this chapter has also been used in designing the framework.

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Part II

Platform Power, Artificial Intelligence, and Public Service Journalism

Chapter 5
Defining What's News: Digital Platforms and the Labelling of Public Service Media Outlets

Philip M Napoli

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of how digital platforms have gone about labelling state-affiliated media outlets, with a focus on the implications of these practices for public service media (PSM). In addressing this issue, this chapter reviews the origins, motivations, and evolution of these labelling practices; the key critiques that have been levelled against them; what we know at this point about how accurately and consistently these practices are implemented; and, finally, the effect that these practices have on the circulation of – and audience engagement with – state-affiliated media content posted to social media platforms. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of the current state of affairs for PSM and with a consideration of possible avenues for future research.

Introduction

The fraught relationship between digital platforms and news organisations seems to have entered into another evolutionary shift. Specifically, platforms

such as X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook appear to be de-emphasising news in users' feeds (Frier, 2023; Isaac et al., 2023; Kobie, 2023). At the same time, many news organisations – including public service news outlets – are withdrawing from these platforms, for a variety of reasons (Ahlander, 2023). One reason for this withdrawal among public service news outlets has been dissatisfaction with the way in which some platforms are choosing to label such outlets (Hatmaker, 2023). Specifically, platforms such as X have continually frustrated public service news organisations with their propensity to apply a broad state-controlled media label to many public service news outlets, thereby lumping these outlets in with overtly state-controlled media such as RT (formerly Russia Today). This combination of circumstances has led to a dramatic decline in news consumed via social media (Fischer, 2023).

International conflicts such as the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine and the war between Israel and Hamas (October 2023), have once again highlighted the role of global digital platforms as vital contested spaces in information (and disinformation) diffusion and political influence operations by state actors and other stakeholders (Collins, 2022; Hopkins, 2022; Moshirnia, 2022; Scott, 2022). They also provide moments that bring into sharp relief the kind of social responsibility that these platforms are capable of demonstrating on behalf of an informed citizenry (Darcy, 2022; Gleicher, 2022; Jackson, 2022; Lomas, 2022).

However, these international conflicts come at a time when many digital platforms are dramatically scaling back their investment in the infrastructure of disinformation detection and removal (Nix & Ellison, 2023). The result is a set of conditions in which legitimate news and information sources are of diminishing prominence on platforms that are at the same time seeing a dramatic resurgence in the production and distribution of disinformation, often by actors exploiting established mechanisms (such as X's blue checkmark) for purportedly verifying the legitimacy of sources (Brewster et al., 2023). One could argue, then, that the current moment is something of a perfect storm of circumstances that tilts these platforms heavily in favour of those seeking to utilise them to polarise, misinform, and manipulate their users (see, for example, Chayka, 2023; Frier, 2023).

It is within this fraught context that this chapter considers the particular issue (noted above) of digital platforms' labelling and classification of public service media (PSM) organisations. The recent developments described above are part of a long-running accumulation of controversies surrounding digital platforms' labelling of the social media accounts of PSM organisations (see, for example, Radsch, 2018; Shaban & Filipov, 2017). This chapter will provide an overview of these dynamics, with a particular emphasis on their implications for the visibility, discoverability, and impact of the journalism produced by PSM organisations.

For the purposes of this analysis, PSM outlets are defined as distinct from state-controlled media outlets (in keeping with an approach widely employed by the European Union and most media scholars), though certainly this distinction is not always explicitly clear when evaluating a particular outlet. The key elements of the definition of PSM (as synthesised by Aslama Horowitz et al., 2020) include:

- Broadcasting and related services made, financed and controlled by the public, for the public.
- Often established by law but are nonpartisan, independent and run for the benefit of society as a whole.
- Neither commercial nor state-owned, free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces.
- Output is designed to inform, educate and entertain all audiences.
- Universality in terms of content and access.
- Maintain accuracy and high standards of journalism and excellence in broadcasting.
- Enhance social, political, and cultural citizenship and promote diversity as well as social cohesion and, ultimately, support an informed democracy.

As should be clear, the definition of PSM contains both structural dimensions (in terms of ownership and funding) and normative dimensions in terms of mission and objectives that should be reflected in the content produced. It should also be noted that the definitional parameters outlined above reflect a Western-centric orientation towards PSM and do not always apply precisely to

every media outlet that may merit designation as public service. Some do, in fact, contain a commercial dimension; and some are essentially state-owned. The key issue for this analysis is, of course, the question of the degree of state control.

For the purposes of this analysis, state-controlled media outlets are defined in accordance with the typology developed by Dragomir & Söderström (2021, pp. 9–10), where such outlets are defined as:

- Being entirely dependent on state funding.
- Managed by government-appointed bodies or directly by state authorities.
- Following an editorial line imposed or approved by state authorities.

Finally, for the purposes of this analysis, both PSM outlets and state-controlled media outlets will be organised within the broader heading of state-affiliated media (that is, media with some tangible connection to government in terms of structure or funding).

As this chapter's title suggests, this analysis intends to evoke the spirit of Herbert Gans' (2004) landmark 1979 book, *Deciding What's News*. In this book, Gans analysed how news organisations decide which individual news events merit coverage (and how much coverage). In this chapter's analysis, the notion of *defining* what is news is meant to reference a more macro level of decision-making, in which digital platforms make determinations as to how to categorise individual media outlets. As Emily Bell (2021: para 12) has stated, 'In deciding where and how to apply labels, tech companies are, in an important sense, defining what journalism is'. In this chapter, the point of focus is on the definitional categories of state-controlled and -affiliated media and on the implications associated with these particular labels and how they are utilised in digital platforms' content curation practices.

This chapter begins by reviewing the origins and implementation of the labelling systems employed by some of the most dominant digital platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X). This section includes a review of the definitional approaches employed, the critiques that have been levelled against these efforts by various stakeholder groups and researchers, and what we know at this point about the impact that these labelling practices may be

having on the attitudes and behaviours of those who access news through social media. The next section discusses the brief history of the implementation and impact of social media platforms' efforts to label state-affiliated media in terms of its implications for public service journalism. This section highlights the key points of concern for public service journalism enterprises. This chapter then concludes by considering these efforts and their implications within the broader context of past and present efforts to define journalism, news organisations, and even journalists. This section also discusses possible avenues for future research.

Background: The short history of labelling state-affiliated media on digital platforms

At this point, the accumulation of evidence of state-run media outlets engaging in coordinated influence and disinformation campaigns is quite substantial (see, for example, Bradshaw, DiResta & Miller, 2023; Molter et al., 2020; US Department of State, Global Engagement Center, 2022; Xu & Wang, 2022). Regardless, a compelling case can be made that, from the standpoint of facilitating informed media consumption, labels that effectively distinguish between state-affiliated and independent news outlets represent a valuable service to those who utilise social media platforms as a means of accessing news and information. As Anya Schiffrin has noted, 'Labeling is part of promoting consumer choice' (quoted in Nogueroles, 2022: para. 10). X executives, for instance, have asserted that their labelling practices are not primarily about policing disinformation (though, as discussed above, disinformation is a key concern in relation to state-affiliated media). Rather, the company's primary motivation is 'to give people on Twitter [X], wherever in the world they are, more context about the tweets they're seeing' (Finnegan & Thorbecke, 2021: para. 5).

That being said, concerns about election-related misinformation and disinformation do appear to have been a significant motivator for digital platforms to institute labelling mechanisms that distinguish between state-

affiliated and independent news outlets. It was in the aftermath of the 2016 US presidential election (and the prevalence of social media-disseminated disinformation in connection with that election) that YouTube initiated a policy of labelling state-affiliated media outlets (Samek, 2018). Other platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, did not follow suit until mid 2020, as that year's US presidential election approached and evidence of the continued prominence of disinformation on social media platforms mounted (Bonifacic, 2020; Buckley et al., 2020; Gleicher, 2020).

Definitional approaches

It is important to emphasise that the definitional and applicational approaches taken by the different platforms are far from uniform (and in some cases conflict with the operational definitions used in this chapter). Effectively drawing a binary distinction between state-run and PSM may, on the surface, seem relatively straightforward. However, the seven-category typology of forms of state media presented by Dragomir & Söderström (2021) highlights the complexity and nuance that are inherent in disentangling the various ways in which the state and media outlets can intertwine.

In 2018, YouTube initiated a policy in which it would label videos uploaded by news broadcasters that 'receive some level of government or public funding' (Samek, 2018: para. 1). Looking back with hindsight, the breadth of that definitional category employed by YouTube was clearly bound to generate controversy and critique (discussed in greater detail below). As the platform developed its implementation approach, it opted to employ different language in its labelling (e.g., 'BBC is a British public broadcast service' versus 'This video is funded in whole or in part by the Russian government') (Shaban, 2018a). The YouTube labelling system also includes links to each outlet's associated Wikipedia pages (which obviously represents a substantial conferral of authority upon Wikipedia) (Samek, 2018).

Before being purchased by Elon Musk and being rebranded as X, Twitter provided a label for 'state-affiliated media' (2022a), which the platform defined

'as outlets where the state exercises control over editorial content through financial resources, direct or indirect political pressures, and/or control over production and distribution' (para 8). This definition obviously runs counter to the definition of state-affiliated media being employed in this chapter (in which the ambiguity and breadth associated with a term like 'affiliated' is, I would argue, more appropriately brought to bear). Twitter's policy was initiated in 2020 (Culliford, 2022: para. 1), with accounts belonging to 'state-affiliated media entities, their editors-in-chief, and/or their senior staff' all subject to labelling. Twitter (2022a: para. 9) maintained a distinction between state-affiliated media and 'state-financed media organisations with editorial independence, like the BBC in the UK or NPR in the US'. Such outlets were not defined as state-affiliated media for the purposes of Twitter's state-affiliated media labelling policy and did not receive their own distinct label.

It is important to note that Twitter's state-affiliated media label factored into the discoverability of posts by state-affiliated media outlets. According to Twitter's policy, the platform would 'not recommend or amplify accounts or their Tweets with these labels to people' (Twitter, 2022a: para. 10). This approach was in keeping with Twitter's general tendency at the time toward being relatively inhospitable to what it termed state-affiliated media in general. For instance, Twitter did not accept advertising from state-affiliated media outlets (Twitter, 2022b).

Of course, as with many aspects of the platform, under new owner Elon Musk (who took ownership of Twitter in October of 2022) and the platform's eventual rebranding as X in July of 2023, much has changed in the labelling space under the new ownership and brand identity. Of particular importance is the fact that, in April of 2023, Twitter began to expand the application of its state-affiliated media label to NPR, a US-based PSM (radio) network that was an exemplar in Twitter's original policy language distinguishing between state-affiliated and state-financed media outlets (Novak, 2023). This original policy language is now only accessible via the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine. The shift set off a firestorm of criticism within the journalism community (including, naturally, NPR) (Chappell, 2023; Klein, 2023). When the company was asked to comment on the apparent discrepancy between the definitional

language and the inclusion of NPR under the state-affiliated media label, the company famously responded (apparently at Musk's direction) with a poop emoji (Novak, 2023).

Twitter subsequently changed the label applied to NPR to 'government-funded media', a label that it subsequently extended to NPR's television counterpart, PBS – an organisation that receives approximately only one per cent of its operating budget from the federal government (Porter, 2023). This label was further extended to PSM outlets such as the BBC (UK), the ABC (Australia), RNZ (New Zealand), and SR Ekot (Sweden) (Serrano, 2023; Silberling, 2023). After much protest (see, for example, Clayton & Durbin, 2023) the BBC's label was subsequently revised to 'publicly-funded media' (Silberling, 2023), a decision apparently based on Musk's personal assessment that the BBC is among the 'least biased' media organisations (Badshah, 2023, para. 1). Within a matter of weeks, the backlash from Twitter's various actions led the platform to drop its government-funded label entirely, including in relation to overtly state-controlled media (Nidumolu, 2023). Given the volatility surrounding X and its impetuous owner, it seems likely that additional permutations and applications of the platform's labelling system are on the horizon.

TikTok was slower than the other major digital platforms to adopt any kind of state-affiliated media labelling policy. It was not until March 2022 that the company announced a plan to begin labelling (Clark, 2022), clearly in response to the events in Ukraine. The initial rollout involved the application of a state-controlled media label to 'some state-controlled media accounts' (TikTok, 2022: para. 3). At that point, only Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus were explicitly identified by TikTok as countries whose state-controlled media outlets were being labelled. TikTok's definition of state-controlled media was as follows: 'entities for which a government exercises direct or indirect control over their content and decision-making' (TikTok, 2022: para. 4). There would appear to be enough ambiguity and breadth in this definition to leave room for some potentially problematic applications. What sort of mechanisms, for instance, might count as 'indirect control'? The platform has explicitly linked its labelling policy with its ongoing efforts to combat misinformation (TikTok, 2022).

Over time, TikTok has expanded the application of its state-controlled media label. By January of 2023, the platform had applied the label to media outlets across more than forty countries (Perez, 2023). It is worth noting that this expansion came at a time when the platform was under intense scrutiny and was seeking to counteract an intensification of efforts (which seems to have since dissipated) in many countries to have the application banned completely. As has often proven to be the case with social media, efforts to implement mechanisms to help protect the user base from harmful content often seem to emerge in response to political pressures that carry with them substantial economic ramifications (B. Barrett & Kreiss, 2019).

Meta has developed what is perhaps the most multifaceted approach to labelling state-affiliated media. Meta's policy focuses on labelling 'state controlled' media, which it defines as 'media outlets that are wholly or partially under the control of their governments' (Rosen et al., 2019, 'Labeling State-Controlled Media' section). Meta has also clearly articulated its employment of the distinction between state-controlled and PSM that was articulated at the outset of this chapter. According to Meta, the platform's policy

> draws an intentional distinction between state-controlled media and public media, which we define as any entity that is publicly financed, retains a public service mission and can demonstrate its independent editorial control. At this time, we're focusing our labeling efforts only on state-controlled media.
>
> (Rosen et al., 2019: 'Labeling State-Controlled Media' section)

Meta's approach to making this determination as to whether an outlet merits the state-controlled label extends beyond assessing financial control or ownership, also taking into account the degree of editorial control exerted by a government (Gleicher, 2020). Specific inputs that the company has taken into consideration in making its determination include:

- Mission statement, mandate or public reporting on how the organisation defines and accomplishes its journalistic mission.

- Ownership structure such as information on owners, stakeholders, board members, management, government appointees in leadership positions, and disclosure of direct or indirect ownership by entities or individuals holding elected office.
- Editorial guidelines such as transparency around sources of content and independence and diversity of sources.
- Information about newsroom leadership and staff.
- Sources of funding and revenue.
- Governance and accountability mechanisms such as correctional policies, procedure for complaints, external assessments, and oversight boards (Gleicher, 2020).

This is obviously a complex set of criteria; and with greater complexity can come greater opacity – and greater subjectivity – in terms of how a particular labelling decision was reached. Such a complex set of criteria also creates an obligation/burden to rigorously apply the full set of criteria.

Underlying all of this, of course, are the ongoing and wide-ranging concerns about the power that dominant digital platforms such as Meta's Facebook and Instagram can exert through their content curation policies and practices (see, for example, Napoli, 2019). But ultimately, these criteria are a reflection of the complexity and variability inherent in the structure and operation of state-affiliated media. It is worth noting, on this front, that Meta claims to have consulted with more than sixty-five experts in media, governance, human rights, and development (Gleicher, 2020).

Meta's policy also includes mechanisms by which a news outlet can prove its independence. Criteria that need to be met on this front include:

- A statute in the host country that clearly protects the editorial independence of the organisation.
- Established procedures, processes, and protections at the media organisation to ensure editorial independence.
- An assessment by an independent, credible, external organisation finding that the statute has in fact been complied with and established procedures have been followed (Gleicher, 2020).

Critiques

Some news outlets and policymakers have been critical of these labelling practices. In the UK, Damian Collins, chair (at the time) of the Digital, Culture, Media and Sports Select Committee in the House of Commons, criticised YouTube's approach for bringing more confusion than clarity to users. According to Collins, YouTube's approach risked roping in public, independent broadcasters, such as the BBC, alongside state-backed propaganda outlets, thereby misleading users who might not be inclined to click through and understand the differences between the two labels (Shaban, 2018b). In his critique, Collins also highlighted the range of additional relevant dimensions that could potentially be brought to bear crafting and applying robust definitions. As Collins noted, 'It's not just about the ownership structure or model of the organization, but the way it's run and the degree of editorial independence it has' (Shaban, 2018b: para. 6).

US public broadcasters like PBS and NPR reacted negatively to YouTube's policy as well, noting that (in keeping with the US government's abysmal record of support for PSM) they receive in the neighbourhood of 1% of their annual operating budget from government funding sources (Horwitz, 2018). PBS went so far as to state that 'Labeling PBS as a "publicly funded broadcaster" is both vague and misleading' (Shaban, 2018a: para. 5).

Empirical assessments of the accuracy and consistency of the platforms' labelling practices have also provided grounds for critique. A report by the University of Washington's Election Integrity Project evaluated the labelling practices of YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (TikTok had yet to initiate a labelling programme at the time of the study), with a particular focus on the degree of accuracy and consistency in labelling (Buckley et al., 2020). Through an analysis of the labelling patterns and practices that these platforms applied to Russia Today, the study found the greatest degree of inconsistency demonstrated by Instagram and Facebook (in terms of adherence to their own labelling policies), with consistency of application also varying across mobile and desktop interfaces (Buckley et al., 2020). Obviously, it is discouraging (though perhaps inevitable) to see that the platforms that appeared to apply the

most rigour and nuance in defining their labelling criteria have proven to be the least consistent in the application of these criteria. This inconsistency opens up Meta to the critique that its apparently rigorous definitional process was more about influencing public perceptions than about an actual commitment to rigorous implementation – a criticism that has frequently been directed at the company in other contexts, such as the legitimacy of its commitment to utilising fact-checking (Levin, 2018).

One important shortfall identified in the study was that some platforms apply labelling to Russia Today's profile page, but not to individual posts (Buckley et al., 2020). Reflecting this finding, a study by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (2022) found that 91% of Facebook posts from Russian state-affiliated media did not carry the state-affiliated media label.

An investigation by *ProPublica* found YouTube's implementation of its labelling policy to be 'haphazard' (Kofman, 2019: para. 3). Specifically, the *ProPublica* investigation found that 57 channels operated by state-run media outlets operating out of countries such as Iran, Russia, China, Turkey, and Qatar, were able to disseminate videos without labels (Kofman, 2019).

An April 2023 analysis of Twitter, by *Semafor*, conducted at a time when the platform was expanding the application of its state-affiliated media label beyond obvious candidates such as Russia Today and the People's Daily, to include PSM such as NPR, found that at that point in time the platform was not even abiding by its own stated policies. While NPR was being labelled as state-affiliated media, state-controlled media outlets originating from countries such as Russia and China were no longer receiving any kind of labelling (Matsakis & Saacks, 2023).

In addition to generating criticism and analysis, these labelling policies have even led to legal action. Maffick, a company which produces English-language videos and social media posts targeted at American social media users, but that had received funding from a subsidiary of Russia Today, sued Facebook for defamation on the basis of the platform's labelling of the company as state-affiliated media (Radsch, 2020). The lawsuit was ultimately dismissed (*Maffick LLC* v. *Facebook, Inc.*, 2021).

The most recent developments have seen public service news outlets withdraw from certain platforms entirely, largely over the implementation of the labelling system. Public service news organisations such as the CBC, NPR, and PBS, as well as many more locally based public service news outlets, have all ceased operations on X, explicitly in response to the platform's erratic and inconsistently applied labelling program (Folkenflik, 2023; Hatmaker, 2023; Khushi & Balu, 2023; Scherer, 2023; Smith, 2023).

Impact

Researchers have begun to explore whether these labelling policies impact the circulation and audience engagement with state-affiliated media's social media posts. Research conducted in early 2021, just over six months after Twitter instituted its initial labelling policy, found that the liking and sharing of tweets from Chinese state-run media dropped significantly in the six months after Twitter instituted the policy (Schoenmakers & Liu, 2021) – one, it should be noted, that at that time included affirmative efforts to reduce the circulation and discoverability of posts from state-affiliated media by disqualifying them from algorithmic amplification.

Conversely, a recent study by NewsGuard found that X's elimination of its state-affiliated labelling system led to a 70% increase in engagement for Russian, Chinese, and Iranian state-run media within ninety days of the policy change (Sadeghi et al., 2023). This dramatic increase is a reflection of the fact that once the labelling system was eliminated (Nidumolu,, 2023), posts from these accounts were once again eligible for algorithmic amplification (Sadeghi et al., 2023).

Another study, which focused on YouTube, found that labelling of state-associated media did not have any effect on the amount of likes a posted video received, with the exception of the context of Russia Today, where labelling had a negative effect on likes (Bradshaw, Elswah & Perini, 2024).

Another YouTube-focused study found that the labels for state-associated media had a modest, though significant, effect on mitigating the impact of

misinformation (Nassetta & Gross, 2020). This study also found that the magnitude of the effect was dependent on the visual prominence of the label, with more subtly presented labels leading to no meaningful difference in the misinformation's impact across labelled and unlabelled versions of the content (Nassetta & Gross, 2020).

A recent study of the impact of the 'state-controlled media' label on Facebook found that the labels were effective in reducing engagement – if the users notice the labels and if the label is associated with a country that is already perceived negatively. This study also found, not surprisingly, that training users about the availability of the labelling system increases the likelihood of the labels being noticed (Moravec et al., 2023).

Implications for public service journalism

Given what we know at this point about the inconsistency, inaccuracy, and policy reversals that have characterised the platforms' labelling practices in relation to state-affiliated news outlets, the imprecision that has characterised the definitional approaches of some platforms, and what we know about the effects of these labelling policies on user behaviour, there are reasons to be concerned, in terms of how these policies might affect the discoverability and impact of legitimate PSM. As is reflected in the introductory discussion of this chapter, this issue takes on added significance in light of the extent to which digital platforms are essentially dismantling their disinformation detection infrastructure. To the extent that these policies mischaracterise public service news outlets and thus affect their discoverability and impact, and to the extent that these policies essentially drive PSM off of the platforms, the net effect is one in which one important category of counterpoint to the rising tide of disinformation is undermined.

YouTube and X, in particular, have been at the forefront of demonstrating clear shortcomings in their efforts (or lack thereof) to adopt definitional approaches that maintain clear and explicit distinctions between state-run and PSM. TikTok's labelling program, while not yet subjected to rigorous empirical

analysis, does have a degree of breadth and ambiguity in its definition of state-controlled media that seems to have the potential to lead to problems. Future empirical assessments will undoubtedly offer insights into whether this is the case, particularly now that the platform's labelling program has been extended beyond the fairly narrow and events-driven contexts of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.

It is important to remember that these labelling programmes owe their origins in large part to concerns about disinformation. From this standpoint, even a *public service media* label is likely to be interpreted by end-users as placing a PSM outlet somewhere in the vicinity of state-controlled media on a trustworthiness and authoritativeness continuum. This is because these labelling programs have a built-in bias, in which the commercial media model is the default and is apparently not in need of its own label. Obviously commercial news media come with their own biases and vulnerabilities to external influence, such that users could certainly benefit from a label along the lines of 'this outlet is a commercial media enterprise that relies primarily on [advertiser support/user payment] for its revenue'.

Or, as we are seeing in the USA, there is a new breed of local news outlet emerging that has all of the superficial trappings of a traditional news outlet, but is funded primarily by political action committees or political candidates, and in some cases accepts payment from political consultants or candidates to produce stories on specific topics (or opposing candidates) (see, for example, Royal & Napoli, 2022). This is another category of media outlet that would seem to warrant a distinct label, particularly given the overt efforts that many of these outlets employ to deceive news consumers as to their mission and objectives (Royal & Napoli, 2022).

The key point here is that the narrow focus of the platforms' labelling activities as they relate to news media represents a fairly myopic view of the contemporary news ecosystem that has the potential to taint, rather than enhance, news consumer perceptions of PSM and thereby undermine public service journalism's credibility and impact.

Conclusion

The efforts described in this chapter are just part of a broader range of actions being taken by both platforms and policymakers to bring definitional clarity to questions as fundamental as how do we define journalism (Bell, 2021); how do we define a news organisation (D. Barrett & Filipov, 2017; Bauer et al., 2022; Federal Election Commission, 2022; Lee, 2020; Riedl, 2022; Royal & Napoli, 2022); how do we define a news programme (Steinberg, 2022); and, more granular, how do we define a journalist (Dickson, 2021; Tambini, 2021) or a news story (Edgerly & Vraga, 2020), or (to get even more granular) an *authoritative* news source (Scire, 2023)? This broad enterprise of *defining what is news* needs to play a fundamental role in helping to maintain the stability of democracy. And, if poorly executed, this enterprise may go a long way towards undermining democracy. Such efforts can, in many ways, be seen as mechanisms to reinvigorate journalism as a robust and well-defined institution (Harris, 2022), after years of the clearly damaging notion of 'now, thanks to the internet, everyone is a journalist' holding sway (for a critique of the 'everyone is a journalist' mantra, see Napoli, 2019).

Indeed, in addition to the need for continued and more expansive research into how consistently and accurately dominant digital platforms are deploying their labelling criteria (vital *media performance* research of the kind so well delineated by McQuail [1992]), a more cohesive, wide-ranging, multi-context inquiry into this process of defining what is news may be in order. This inquiry would consider not only the labelling practices of social media platforms, but also the definitions and criteria employed by government agencies (and the contexts in which they matter), content distributors (such as cable systems), and also news consumers, in making their determinations as to what counts a news organisation, news outlet, news story or news worker.

Such efforts are particularly important to maintaining the credibility and trust that are at the core of PSM's mission, but that can be undermined by the definitional and labelling practices of dominant digital platforms – particularly in cases in which individual platform owners utilise their platforms to essentially engage in political warfare with PSM organisations. The labelling

process then becomes a tool for subverting the vitally important impact that allows PSM to serve as a much-needed counterpoint to a news and information ecosystem that is in ever-present danger of collapsing under the weight of disinformation.

Finally, it is important to consider the managerial and strategic implications for PSM organisations of the dynamics presented here. The general trend seems to be one in which platforms are falling short (some certainly worse than others) in terms of effectively and consistently labelling PSM organisations. This finding should be considered within the broader context in which we seem to be in a bit of a transitional moment in terms of the relationship between digital platforms and news organisations. As was noted in the introduction, many digital platforms are diminishing the prominence of news stories and news organisations in users' feeds. In addition, new digital platforms continue to emerge and further fragment the social media space, imposing further costs on PSM and other news organisations seeking to reach social media news consumers.

We have a much clearer understanding now of the fact that social media platforms have never been a particularly hospitable environment for journalism, and (perhaps with a few exceptions) they appear to be becoming even less so. Research has demonstrated fairly convincingly that falsity and propaganda are better positioned to leverage the affordances of social media distribution than PSM and other legitimate news outlets (see Aïmeur et al, 2023). This fundamental platform flaw seems poised to get worse instead of better.

For those who have argued that we need a return to a distribution model of news consumers accessing news organisations directly (for example, Napoli, 2019), the diminished prominence of news on digital platforms might seem beneficial in this regard, to the extent that it forces consumers to seek out the news directly, rather than operate under the 'if the news is important it will find me' mindset. Such a shift seems particularly beneficial for helping PSM organisations re-establish a more direct and unmediated relationship with their audience – something that many PSM (and other news organisations) have committed to in recent years.

Given the persistent and wide-ranging challenges identified in this chapter that PSM organisations face in terms of being labelled properly and consistently (and thus being curated appropriately) by many platforms, a compelling case can be made that the appropriate strategic path for PSM is to essentially 'take their ball and go home'. Being mislabelled or inconsistently labelled by digital platforms could ultimately undermine public trust to a degree that more than counteracts the (declining) audience reach benefits that these platforms provide.

Of course, such an approach essentially abandons the diminishing (but still very significant) proportion of the population that relies primarily on social media for news to an environment that seems destined to continually degrade, from the standpoint of facilitating an informed citizenry (see Kreiss & Barrett, 2023). This is the existential question that PSM face: do they abandon large swaths of social media news consumers in order to preserve the perceived trust and integrity of their brands, so that they can better serve those news consumers who access their content directly? Or does serving these social media users become even more vital, from a public service standpoint, given the ongoing degradation of the social media news and information ecosystem? The research presented here provides one of many potential inputs into the complex cost–benefit calculus necessary to answer these questions.

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Chapter 6
Opportunities and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence in Public Media Journalism

Anis Rahman

Summary

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) applications and data-driven or automated decision-making is increasingly important in newsrooms. This chapter examines opportunities and challenges associated with adopting and developing AI applications and large language models (LLMs) in public service media (PSM) organisations. The author highlights characteristic challenges for private and public sector news organisations alike, emphasises distinct challenges for PSM organisations, and considers contextual differences in the Global South compared with countries in the North.

Introduction

Digital algorithms, automation, and machine learning considered under the broad rubric of artificial intelligence (AI) are transforming public and private sectors, from healthcare to genetics research, telecommunications, education and media production. The so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution is powered by innovations and research in AI that have largely originated in rich economies including the United States, European Union, Scandinavia, and

China among other Asian hotspots (Jamil, 2021; Ruan et al., 2024). The discourses surrounding AI in media and communication studies include consideration of big data, computational journalism and human–machine communication (Diakopoulos, 2019; Lewis et al., 2019). A growing body of critical research focuses on the public interest value of algorithms, platforms, and AI – important, as well, for public service media (PSM) organisations (Ali, 2021; Flew & Martin, 2022; Freedman & Goblot, 2018; Gillespie, 2014; Horowitz et al., 2023; Michalis, 2022).

Research funded by corporations is coming to the fore, such as the Google news initiative, JournalismAI, that provides a global overview of AI use in newsrooms and challenges associated with that. Microsoft has been investing in AI and media research by engaging academic communities. Several universities and news media are forging collaborations with conglomerates and non-profits such as the Knight Foundation (USA) and the Thomson Reuters Foundation (UK). Professional associations of public broadcasters, commercial surveyors, and regulatory commissions are increasingly interested in exploring this field, with a particular focus on the use of AI and guiding AI governance in European PSM contexts (see, for example, European Broadcasting Union, 2024; Public Media Alliance, 2023b; Porlezza et al., 2023). Yet, there is a general lack of research produced by or for PSM organisations. In this context, this chapter surveys challenges and opportunities associated with the adoption of generative AI (GenAI) applications and large language models (LLMs) in PSM organisations, and considers how PSM organisations can respond appropriately in the context of their public service mission and remits. We examine critical issues emerging from the introduction of new tools and processes that rely on AI tools in public service journalism. We consider this in the contexts of the Global South and North because the impact of AI in journalism surpasses geographic borders. The author adopts a critical approach because there are both generalisable concerns and distinctive differences in comparative contexts.

AI in journalism is a multidisciplinary field of study and evolving rapidly. This makes it difficult to make clear, firm judgements about its scope and impact. The situation is evolving so fast it is difficult to keep abreast. Our goal is therefore to survey this field today. The use of AI in journalism varies

depending on the stage of media production and circulation in varied countries. A limitation is caused by the rapidly changing and still unstable subject, which therefore requires making assumptions based on secondary materials. For that reason, the scope is theoretical rather than empirical. Research is beginning to emerge, and much more is needed regarding the use of GenAI and LLMs in public media in multiple modalities (audio, visual, textual, interactive, AR/VR) and in various institutional settings (local, national, international).

Platforms, algorithms, and AI

As the network society transitions into the platform society, journalism is increasingly reliant on digital platforms (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Van Dijck et al., 2018). The pervasive growth of data extraction, datafication, and commodification in all industries and sectors is evident in our field, especially in the rise of algorithm-driven journalism (Sadowski, 2019). In recent years, the uses have become more sophisticated, with advances in AI technology in various forms and types. As PSM scholars (Horowitz et al., 2023) have observed, machine learning, algorithms, automation, and other manifestations of AI are pervasive in modern societies and have pronounced importance in media industries. Advances and integration in harnessing big data and developing algorithms in the past decade have already reshaped how journalism is done, enabling news media to better predict audience demand, create content faster and cheaper (Gillespie, 2014; Napoli, 2014), and increasingly automate decision-making. It is revolutionising content moderation, personalisation of content, audience engagement, and reception ecosystems (Diakopoulos, 2019). The use of AI is becoming increasingly intense and diverse in scale and scope, accompanied by human–machine interactions that enable data-driven and automated decision-making. While many of these developments are primarily observed in Western media and technology fields, their implications are significant for media and cultural industries at large.

AI is a broad term that elicits diverse studies, interpretations, and normative expectations. Often used interchangeably with 'algorithms', AI has varied meanings. Defining the essence is challenging given that genuine human intelligence cannot exist in artificial form and 'pure AI' is practically non-existent (Beckett, 2023, p. 13). Modern AI developments increasingly pursue simulation of human intelligence. Thus, Felix Simon (2023) defines AI as 'the computational simulation of human capabilities in tightly defined areas' (p. 150). The 2023 UNESCO *Reporting on Artificial Intelligence: Handbook for Journalism Educators* described AI as 'a collection of ideas, technologies, and techniques that relate to a computer system's capacity to perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence' (Jaakkola, 2023, p. 29). In this chapter we define AI as *a collection of digital tools and technologies, including purpose-specific programmes and algorithms, designed to learn and solve specific problems by simulating human intelligence*.

Algorithms are essential for AI applications. These are intricate sets of repeatable step-by-step instructions to accomplish specified tasks. Intelligence in this context does not mean autonomous or sentient. The use of algorithms does not inherently amount to AI, although AI depends on algorithms to function. Data is raw material used for analysis, but not all data-driven issues and developments align with AI (Berger, 2023; Perrigo, 2023a). AI tools emerge from specific socio-technological conditions and processes, many of which are invisible to users. AI algorithms represent an interdependent relationship between human-machine-capital, encompassing hardware and software infrastructures, having political properties, and with embedded values and logics derived from the nature of ownership, control, and deployment.

Here we are most interested in the orchestration of platforms, algorithms, and AI tools used in journalistic production. Two examples will illustrate. Alphabet is a platform company that owns Google, which uses a proprietary LLM algorithm to operationalise an AI tool called Gemini (formerly Bard) as well as Google Translate. This integrated system is used for fact-checking, translating news into language versions and generating subtitles. The second example is OpenAI, also a platform company, that owns ChatGPT, which utilises a proprietary LLM algorithm to operationalise its generative AI

capabilities, that can in turn be used by other AI tools like Midjourney or Dall-E 2 to create illustrations to accompany a news story. Narrow AI systems like this are designed to solve specific problems, whereas artificial general intelligence (AGI), which remains theoretical, is intended to address various problems across domains.

AI is already becoming a concentrated market, with companies largely based in the United States, followed by China. These companies fall into two categories (Hamilton, 2023a). First, there are big tech research companies that develop and train AI language models (such as Alphabet, Microsoft, Meta, OpenAI, Salesforce, Baidu and, lately, Apple). Second, there are application companies that repackage and resell AI language models as premium products (such as Jasper AI, GitHub Copilot, Eleven Labs, and Kingsoft). There are also hardware manufacturers that especially include makers of chips and integrated circuits, such as Nvidia, Intel, IBM, and Huawei (Bastian, 2024). This might be construed as a third category that is a catalyst for global AI software development as well as international competition and geopolitical tension. While the US government has moved to decouple from China in technology and other supply chains in recent years, collaboration between these two powers is still happening at the corporate level. For example, Apple and Baidu are in talks to integrate Baidu's GenAI to iPhones in mainland China (South China Morning Post, 2024). Such collaboration could further concentrate commercial control of AI technologies, potentially impacting public media's ability to compete, maintain ethical standards, and uphold independence in content moderation and delivery.

GenAI and LLMs

The newest disruptor for industries engaged in media content production is generative AI. Developments in these technologies are highly relevant for journalism and, as we will discuss soon, with implications for public media. GenAI can generate increasingly realistic data constructs in images, audio tracks, video clips, and textual interactions. Big tech players include GPT-4 and

Dall-E (OpenAI), Llama (Meta), Gemini (Alphabet), Bing and Copilot (Microsoft), Ernie Bot (Baidu), Claude (Anthropic), and Midjourney. Pre-learning/training is an important function for GenAI software. They must be trained using data sets, and their performance must be developed to optimise and improve quality and efficiency (Simon, 2022).

GenAI is an umbrella term for a broad range of content-creation technologies. Generally, there are two types of GenAI: diffusion models and transformers, which overlap (Hamilton & Lee, 2023). Diffusion models are trained to create content of many types based on patterns and examples. These tools mimic human creativity. For example, Imagen by Google AI can craft realistic images based on text descriptions, and Jukebox by OpenAI generates musical pieces in various styles. Transformers, also called LLMs, are language modelling tools trained on vast amounts of textual data and operationalised by algorithms that determine statistical properties of language construction. Their primary job is to predict what comes next in sequence of words and to generate text in response to a prompt. LLMs excel at writing tasks, translating languages, answering queries, and summarising complex subjects. LLMs ingest and correlate data from a massive text corpus that includes books, articles, webpages, and internet archives. Once trained, LLMs can consult billions to trillions of data parameters to generate a response (Sample, 2023). Although GenAI and LLMs have distinct goals, they can be used in tandem.

AI in journalism

Modern journalistic production uses a variety of digital platforms, devices, and software that incorporate narrow AI subcomponents, such as machine learning (ML) and natural language processing (NLP), to perform specialised tasks (Simon, 2024). AI in journalistic production is useful and beneficial in many ways and the positive impacts should not be underplayed. AI is already integrated into daily journalistic work (Poell et al., 2022). AI-powered cloud computing infrastructures like Amazon Web Services (AWS), Google Drive, Microsoft Azure, Oracle, and Alibaba play a crucial role in contemporary

journalism (Srnicek, 2021). AI is used to automate content generation, aggregation, and prioritisation, and for deep-fake detection and automated fact-checking (AFC). AI applications are increasingly pervasive (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2021).

AI chatbots, NLP tools and big data mining are reshaping the way journalists work in the United States (Marconi, 2020). For instance, non-profit fact-checking research organisations like FactCheck, PolitiFact, Full Fact, Snopes, Poynter, and NewsGuard are invested in developing AFC tools. Media organisations have made some but so far limited contributions to development (Graves, 2018; Zeng et al., 2021). AI tools and services are particularly valuable for live coverage of wars, environmental disasters, surveillance activities, remote sensing, and mega public events (Nwanakwaugwu et al., 2023; Srnicek, 2021; Tong, 2022).

The use of AI in journalism is quickly becoming a pointed challenge. Newsrooms and academia are equally struggling to keep up. Table 6.1 shows two categories of use: direct and indirect. *Direct use* characterises AI tools and services provided directly by platform companies; while *indirect* use describes a tool that is not AI in itself but requires an AI application to work (Simon, 2022, 2023).

Table 6.1 Direct and indirect use of AI tools in news production and distribution

Direct use	**Tool's purpose**	**Application examples**	**Provider platforms/companies**

Text-to-speech and speech-to-text apps	automated subtitling, turning articles into audio, automated translation and transcription	Transcribe (Amazon), WaveNet (Alphabet), Cognitive Services Speech (Microsoft Azure)
APIs and (pre-trained) AI models for image recognition	Automatically cropping and focusing images, labelling and classifying images, content moderation (such as detecting nudity), optical character recognition (OCR)	Textract (Amazon), Rekognition (Amazon), Vision API (Alphabet), Computer Vision (Microsoft Azure),
APIs and (pre-trained) AI models for speech recognition	Content moderation (such as detecting hate speech)	Jigsaw (Alphabet)

	LLM or GenAI	Generating content in various modalities, such as text, image, video, audio, chat bots	BERT (Alphabet), ChatGPT (OpenAI)
Indirect use	**Tool's purpose**	**Application examples**	**Providing platforms/companies**
	Cloud hosting services	Storing, computing, and retrieving data	Azure (Microsoft), Google Cloud (Alphabet) and AWS (Amazon)
	Audience and business analytics	Analysis and prediction of audience behaviour for various purposes (e.g., targeted advertising or content offerings, dynamic paywalls, editorial analytics)	

Source: Author drawing from Simon (2022; 2023).

Few news media companies can afford the scale of investment required to develop large-scale, complex AI tools in-house. This requires considerable resources of several types, including data, expertise, time, and computing power. It isn't surprising that most depend on commercially affordable AI tools and services offered by the platform companies, which typically offer high degrees of user-friendliness, security, stability, and flexibility – often free of charge or quite cheaply (Simon, 2022; 2024). Drawing from various sources, Table 6.2 provides an overview of varied AI uses that are already embedded in the stages of news production, distribution, and consumption.

Table 6.2 Use of GenAI in local newsrooms in the United States

Stage of news	Example of use of GenAI tools to accomplish a task
Pre-production stage	• Discovery of newsworthy elements from large volume of unstructured data, such as XL documents with payroll • Scanning large volume of documents • Translation (usually needs human oversight for accuracy of cultural interpretation) • Scanning and processing news tips
Production stage	• Creating summary of any content • Generating headlines and outlines • Making keyword lists • Adding hashtags • Brainstorming headlines • Rapidly constructing HTML • Generating images (Midjourney, Neiman Lab) • Creating animated stories (Stable Diffusion) • Transcribing video and summarising content

Stage of news	**Example of use of GenAI tools to accomplish a task**
Post-production stage	• Comment filtering and moderation • News personalisation • Automated and manual fact-checking • Push alerts • Analysing audience responses

Source: Author drawing from Diakopoulos (2023); Rinehart (2023); Rinehart & Kung (2022), among other sources.

AI in PSM and journalism

Leaving the general, we can now drill down on the specifics for PSM journalism. The public service orientation has unique and distinctive obligations to serve the public interest in news and information (among other things). Public media are financed with public money and typically subject to public oversight. PSM is a not-for-profit enterprise and should be free from political and commercial interference and pressure to facilitate an independent role that is vital for informing and educating publics and supporting an informed electorate that is essential for a healthy democracy (Horowitz et al., 2023; Pickard, 2022). PSM organisations are exploring the potential of AI in public service journalism but mostly rely on commercial platforms for this. The rate and degree of adoption varies as much in PSM organisations as evident in commercial media. PSM organisations of different sizes may share similar challenges but face different scales of complication due to greater or lesser resources of all types (Simon, 2023). Some of the biggest that are funded well and technologically sophisticated are working to develop in-house apps and services that utilise AI.

We can illustrate with BBC News (UK), which utilises a range of in-house tools for transcription, translation, and voice services, as well as off-the-shelf services that are available free of charge to handle fact-checking, data mining, and analytics, such as Dataminr, Chartbeat, and the now decommissioned CrowdTangle, among others (Jones, Jones & Luger, 2022). Speech recognition and virtual assistant tools like Apple's Siri and Google's Assistant are used to transcribe interviews and dictate notes and streamline information gathering. Newsroom intranet bots and virtual agents assist BBC journalists in conducting research, answering queries, and automating and scheduling routine tasks. As noted, there is variance across PSM newsrooms, and the BBC is comparatively wealthy and a flagship case in many ways. But this case illustrates the potential scope of AI engagement in public (and private sector) journalism. Further discussions, along with a variety of case studies on AI's application in PSM newsrooms, can be found in a report led by Alexandra Borchardt. The report also addresses how the risks of AI use should be mitigated while upholding ethical standards (European Broadcasting Union, 2024).

Horowitz, Milosavljević, and Van den Bulck (2023) propose three levels of AI engagement: national, organisational, and audience. They observed a lack of specific 'PSM AI' strategy at any level. That is not altogether surprising because potential use depends on many internal factors that include funding, technical knowledge and skills, and organisational priorities, as well as external factors that include regulation and competition. These factors establish limits and enable potentiality for AI use in newsrooms. Organisational strategies are taking shape, however. For instance, Swedish Radio now has an AI council and Finland's Yle has decided it will only use GenAI technology developed domestically. Germany's SWR requires their journalists to label AI-generated content as a necessity for maintaining credibility (see, Public Media Alliance n.d.; and more examples in European Broadcasting Union, 2024).

While relatively well-funded PSM organisations in Europe and the USA are investing in research and development to develop in-house AI tools that are consistent with the values of PSM (Bennett, 2018; Martin, 2021; Michalis, 2022), most also rely on commercial AI platforms that are advertising-supported and filled with targeted ads and behavioural nudges that often link

to other platforms such as YouTube and Facebook or Instagram. Social media are essential for diversifying and maximising audience reach and multimedia engagement. PSM must compete with an evolving array of trending, sensational, and sometimes misleading clickbait content. For instance, YouTube's feedback loop algorithm is designed to maximise attention and promote engagement without regard for accuracy (Sadowski & Andrejevic, 2020). This makes the platform less than ideal for PSM content distribution.

Several PSM organisations in Europe aim to reduce dependency on commercial AI platforms. For instance, a team of about two dozen investigative reporters, data analysts, and AI developers at German public broadcaster Bayerischer Rundfunk (ARD) are developing multilingual AI tools. They are mindful not to upload sensitive data to foreign servers. They created prototype training algorithms to analyse linear audio content broadcast by a radio station to store on a cloud server and enable listeners to personalise on-demand consumption.

Government funding plays an important role in positioning PSM as an active agent for innovating AI tools. For instance, MediaDigest, a project at VRT in Belgium, facilitates Flemish media to engage young audiences through concise AI-generated summaries that are distributed on multiple platforms. The summaries are automated, and they use GenAI to condense news articles into concise and easily understood synopses. This is transforming their news production workflow. The project is funded by the government (Public Media Alliance, 2023a). Such examples show that different organisations have varying priorities for and approaches to AI at diverse stages of creation, adoption, implementation, and regulation.

Complications with AI in journalism

The critique of AI, machine learning, and automation is multidisciplinary and includes perspectives keyed to public interest concerns (Crawford, 2021; Eubanks, 2018; Tacheva & Ramasubramanian, 2023; Zuboff, 2018). While the use of AI tools is increasingly ubiquitous in the media ecology and therefore

including PSM, several concerns are rather distinctive for PSM. One hinges on the oligopolistic structure of AI industries, which create dependencies, and are characterised by a lack of transparency in sourcing training data, uncertain degrees of diversity and representativeness of data, encoded pre-conceived biases, and reliability issues in generated results. In the Global South, an issue of considerable importance hinges on AI's role in contemporary data colonialism (Couldry & Mejias, 2019) and digital imperialism (Kwet, 2019). LLM and GenAI technologies can facilitate problems in labour exploitation and raise legal and ethical issues.

There are direct and indirect implications for journalism. An example of direct implications is the *New York Times* suing OpenAI for scraping millions of articles from their website for training ChatGPT without compensating the newspaper company or first obtaining permission (Grynbaum & Mac, 2023). A lawsuit claims the massive amount of content used from the *NYT* has trained OpenAI's LLMs to generate similar text in style and structure and uses copyrighted information, too often almost word for word. According to the *NYT*, this has undermined their competitive advantages and if allowed to continue will devalue the quality of original reporting. In March 2024, Microsoft filed a motion to dismiss part of the lawsuit. It's uncertain what will happen as of this writing, but the verdict is likely to have far-reaching implications for all media, including PSM. Fan fiction writers, computer coders, and other creative workers have initiated copyright infringement lawsuits against companies developing GenAI technologies (Metz & Weise, 2024).

This raises ethical questions about the use of AI in PSM journalism because AI-generated content has higher potential for impactfully misinforming publics. There is clearly a need for much greater transparency about how AI models are trained and what data sets are being used. In addition, proper attribution when using AI-generated content is a crucial concern. Hamilton and Lee argue that 'AI companies need journalism more than journalism needs AI' (Hamilton & Lee, 2023, p. para. 1) because LLMs need high-quality data for training. Such data is largely derived from mainstream news media. For instance, out of the top 100 commonly utilised

domains for training OpenAI's GPT-2, fully 50% were attributed to news outlets that included the BBC, Reuters, and Politico. ChatGPT-3 was trained on a dataset called Common Crawl that included 100 million tokens (basic units of text) from the NYT and Wikipedia, the latter being one of the largest sources of data available everywhere. Qatar's Al Jazeera and America's PBS were also utilised alongside commercial media sources (Grynbaum & Mac, 2023). PSM organisations need to consider whether they should allow commercial enterprises like OpenAI to use their news archive without permission or compensation.

While some types of AI have been around for a while, the current transformation can be construed as a revolutionary expansion. Emerging problems are evident. Among the most important are AI literacy gaps among journalists across media firms in the Global South as well as the North. Few to no news organisations in affluent economies in the North are fully prepared to embrace and deploy AI technologies. Most, if not all, depend on big tech platform companies for what they use and how. This creates a dependency relationship that gives big tech a degree of control over news production and distribution because they provide the required infrastructure, services, and tools. PSM news organisations can't entirely avoid them and are unable to compete with them. They need AI hardware, software, data, and expertise to function effectively and efficiently today and tomorrow (Simon, 2023). Simon worries that news media and publishers risk *vendor lock-in effects* as newsrooms become increasingly dependent on and tethered to AI tools owned by platform companies. This can create a problem he calls 'infrastructure capture' established by the boundaries of what a tool can or cannot do.

Many journalists are not evidently as concerned about this because they view AI technology primarily as utility services that can be switched on or off and changed if necessary. A small community is concerned, however, and worries about what they perceive as growing over-reliance on these tools, as well as concerns about the oligopolistic nature of infrastructure ownership. AI tools empower platform companies to impose commercialisation and datafication logics on both public and commercial media companies, potentially contributing to a structural weakening and reshaping of journalism

as social and political institutions and the public arena (Jungherr, 2023; Simon, 2023).

As discussed earlier, the LLM industry is currently dominated by a few large platform companies, most notably Alphabet, Meta, Anthropic, and OpenAI, in conjunction with cloud-based computation and storage platforms provided by Amazon Web Services and hardware produced by companies like Nvidia. All of this is the essential infrastructure for very large-scale machine learning and data training operations. Rapid development in digital technology may enable a smaller scale that could lessen this dominance. The computational power required to run AI technology is diminishing. It is now possible for a news media company to train and run an LLM to simulate their writing style using a laptop, with open-source models like Meta's Llama 2. This appears to be a boon for newsrooms (Hamilton, 2023a). Media companies are developing their own LLMs, and it is quite likely that in the near future individuals will be able to create and own personal LLMs (Sato, 2023). Perhaps in-house LLM technology will eventually become widely affordable for PSM organisations in the West and Global North, although it is likely to remain out of reach for much of the Global South and may further exacerbate digital divides. We will return to this soon.

In addition to availability and dependency issues, newsrooms also face risk factors in using the tools (illustrated in Table 6.1). Is it wise to use AI to decide and write news that is likely to have high impact on publics, for instance, regarding a virus outbreak or climate disaster? Is the trade-off of convenience worth the risk of misinformation? As Table 6.3 shows, in high-risk scenarios newsrooms are wise to require human oversight to review the output before publishing. When the Associated Press (AP) tested GenAI to produce news, the results were uneven, especially for weather reports in Spanish and automated police incident reports. AP decided such information is too important to entrust to AI or templates for natural language generation (Rinehart, 2023). PSM news organisations will need even higher levels of scrutiny to satisfy accountability requirements. Table 6.3 briefly illustrates degrees of risk in using AI to signal the need for nuanced policies.

Table 6.3 Risk of using GenAI in journalistic processes

Types of AI	Function/example
Process automation	Pushing a story to website and social media simultaneously
Low-risk AI	Templated stories from consistent data feeds; comment moderation
High-risk AI	Writing new stories based on prompts using multiple data sources

Source: Author drawing from Rinehart (2023).

Automation in the newsroom is producing significant change in how journalism is done, and how news is delivered, marketed and sold in various parts of the world (Diakopoulos, 2019; Jamil, 2021). Few journalists today understand the engineering or even how to use the tools proficiently and ethically. Jones, Jones & Luger (2022) described this as an 'intelligibility problem' caused by the proprietary nature of these tools combined with lack of training and unequal access both within developed and developing economies. In European PSM, only a handful of elite newsrooms have the luxury of developing state-of-the-art in-house apps leaving most local newsrooms at a severe disadvantage. This view is supported by de-Lima-Santos & Ceron (2021) who found that reliance on big tech companies like Google limits the potential for developing AI to a handful of elite beneficiaries.

Google (Alphabet) has invested heavily in developing generative AI technologies for journalism. A tool known internally as Genesis is supposedly capable of generating news content by extracting information from details of current events. It was pitched to *The New York Times, The Washington Post*, and News Corp, which owns *The Wall Street Journal*. As Jeff Jarvis observed (quoted in Mullin & Grant, 2023: paras. 10–11).

> If this [Genesis] technology can deliver factual information reliably, journalists should use the tool. If, on the other hand, it is misused by journalists and news organizations on topics that require nuance and cultural understanding, then it could damage the credibility not only of the tool, but of the news organizations that use it.

LLMs like ChatGPT, Bing, and Bard frequently 'hallucinate', spewing inaccurate information or distorted results. This is clearly a problem for trustworthy news (Diakopoulos, 2023). Hallucinations, also known as 'confabulations', are not necessarily malicious. The LLM is using an algorithm with a less than optimal success rate in prediction (Hamilton, 2023b). This raises important questions about ethics and responsibility for errors, especially when an AI tool is released without adequate testing. Who should be held liable for erroneous and biased data sets or training algorithms? Who should bear editorial responsibility for potentially racist, misogynist, homophobic or xenophobic content generated by ChatGPT, Bing, Bard, or DALL-E? AI applications like ChatGPT are either reluctant or incapable of taking a moral stance when it comes to mitigating public harm arising from the use of AI (Chomsky et al., 2023).

The lack of transparency is another challenge for using AI in the newsroom. Most commercial AI tools used for journalism are not public goods; that is, journalists cannot use them as 'non-excludable' and 'non-rivalrous' technologies. Commercial AI tools are proprietary and black-boxed. They don't reveal the source code (Sharma, 2023). This makes it impossible for a user to discern exactly what the LLM is trained on and how it derives answers. The current LLMs are not good at providing this transparency. In contrast, journalists must confirm their sources (Rinehart, 2023). The

unreliability issue, coupled with lack of transparency, is fundamentally at odds with the core values of PSM and undermines trustworthiness while posing problems for ethical news production. It may also affect universal access. Given their mission and mandates, PSM organisations must be vigilant in their use of data and transparent about technological innovation they produce (Horowitz et al., 2023). As per the 2021 UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, the use of AI and its multiple components, including algorithms and data, should be auditable and traceable (Berger, 2023). As public enterprises, PSM must adhere to the highest standards. The adoption of free commercial data-tracking algorithmic services cultivates a contradiction between the 'digital public good', 'digital commons' and 'universalism principle' of PSM content and requires adopting a logic forged by the platform majors – Google (Alphabet), Apple, Facebook (Meta), Amazon, and Microsoft.

AI and journalism in the Global South

GenAI is even more problematic for news media in the Global South. AI inequalities, inequities, and concerns in the North are compounded in the South (Rotman, 2022). The digital divide problem within the North pales in significance when considered in comparisons of the North and South (Yu et al., 2023). For much of the Global South, the AI revolution is likely to cause further erosion of journalistic autonomy in already treacherous contexts characterised by inadequate funding, low job security, high rates of self-censorship, patterns of labour exploitation, and threats of physical harm (Rahman, 2022). An evaluation conducted by Oxford Insights, assessing the readiness of 181 countries to utilise AI for public services, reveals that regions with the lowest scores are mainly in the Global South, including sub-Saharan Africa, Central and South Asian nations, and some countries in Latin America (Yu et al., 2023). As noted earlier, LLMs are primarily trained on vast internet datasets, predominantly in English, lacking inclusivity of the linguistically and culturally diverse Global South. Thus, AI-powered tools like ChatGPT may not accurately represent the distinct cultures or knowledge systems of the

Global South. Research involving journalists from Congo, DRC, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia found that ChatGPT relies on a limited dataset from Africa, resulting in selective categorisation of language, hindering its effectiveness for journalistic purposes in the region (Gondwe, 2023: 228). Notably, a *Time* investigative report revealed that OpenAI benefited from exploiting data labourers from Kenya, with most earning less than $2 per hour to remove extremely toxic content from training datasets used to build ChatGPT (Perrigo, 2023b). This highlights the disparity: foreign GenAI investments benefit owners, shareholders, and users in the North but not African cultures, media or labourers, despite their potential.

Local AI start-ups also encounter challenges. In certain instances, journalists are hesitant to embrace the indigenous opportunities of AI, fearing its negative implications, such as losing jobs to AI tools. For instance, despite Pakistan's thriving local AI start-up scene, both male and female journalists believe that these homegrown AI start-ups are not beneficial to the country's mainstream news media industry (Jamil, 2021). Journalism in many countries in the Global South must grapple with missing out on AI integration in the newsroom on one hand and algorithmic surveillance by policing agencies and corporate authorities on the other. Hybrid and authoritarian regimes are using presumed and actual threats posed by AI as a vehicle for exercising higher degrees of press control. A *Project Syndicate* article warns that uncritical adoption of AI powered predictive tools with ML, NLP, and deep learning technologies will enhance the suppressive surveillance power of authoritarian regimes (Muggah et al., 2023). This threat is serious enough to generate growing opposition from IT-literate youth (Bonini & Treré, 2024).

Discussion and conclusion

Several key points emerge from this overview of AI in journalism generally and in the context of PSM in particular. First, the private sector is spearheading AI development and innovation while media organisations are primarily adopters and users of tools that are not tailored for the media industry.

Second, the technology is rapidly evolving, and it is very difficult to keep up and know what to do. GenAI and LLMs are creating a new wave of disruption and instability. Today's tools and services are likely to become obsolete quickly as increasingly powerful advances are released. It is unlikely the instability will end any time soon.

Third, many PSM organisations will struggle to compete without adequate funding even if small scale LLM technology is becoming affordable. The AI revolution is another and continuing chapter in the running dilemma of PSM striving to keep up with less support and fewer resources, and a worrisome trend of imposing constraints on their involvement in digital media markets that are promoted by commercial media lobbies.

Fourth, as government funding for public media faces alarming cuts, public–private AI partnerships emerge as an enticing opportunity. However, such collaborations carry both positive and negative implications for local public media, as private interests may overshadow public ones, especially in countries with weaker public institutions and oversights.

Fifth, AI technologies offer clear benefits for journalism, although not uniformly. The potential benefits of harnessing AI in public service journalism, particularly in the Global South, merits much deeper investigation alongside examination of known risks and challenges that apply everywhere. Failing to do so can only widen already problematic global digital divides and information inequities.

Commercial narratives prioritise a profit-driven logic that exacerbates historic imbalances. The prospects of AI in PSM are exciting but generate concerns about biased algorithms, surveillance, data colonialism, and the consolidation of power by the big tech giants. All of this merits scrutiny. Relying only on regulations that are difficult to enforce or innovations that are costly and risk-laden are clearly insufficient to address historic, persistent structural inequalities that are exacerbated by the introduction of new technology and tend to reproduce pre-existing inequalities and power asymmetries.

That is not to say that addressing the challenges would not have a regulatory aspect. On the contrary, scholars should elaborate suitable

regulatory frameworks for the development of open-source AI technologies that are publicly available for commercial and non-commercial use alike, including data sets, algorithms, and interfaces. Investment is certainly needed to develop non-commercial AI tools and platforms, which is an aspect policymakers should consider. Damian Tambini (2021, para. 7) warns that the next generations of AI will enable targeted personalised media even more sophisticated in their ability to know and manipulate citizens. Hence, PSM should strive to counter this by leading the way in establishing ethical models of AI and media distribution.

At the national level, the costs can be partly subsidised by taxing the big tech oligopolies to invest in developing AI as a public service (Morozov & Higgins, 2023). This approach is not unprecedented. Scholars have made convincing arguments for taxing the big tech platforms to finance local journalism, and some progress has been made. It is important to note that platform companies cannot be blamed for all or even most of the crisis in journalism, PSM included. But they can be an important part of the solution (Pickard, 2020; 2022). As Victor Pickard suggested (2022, p. 37), 'talk of a "public interest social media platform" in Australia and the notion that the BBC can be redesigned and expanded to compete with search engines and social media in the UK by presenting a non-commercial alternative' indicate the potential this option has to help. Other options might be produced by cooperative movements to establish more non-profit investment partnerships for PSM along the lines of Mozilla and the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) that funded the Rwandan start-up Digital Umuganda, which benefitted from Mozilla's Common Voice and DeepSpeech voice recognition projects for African languages (Mbayo, 2020). Complementary to this approach, in September 2024, the Mozilla Foundation launched the Public AI project aimed at promoting an alternative vision of inclusive, community-driven, and public-interest AI applications that serve public needs, such as social services, education, and environmental justice (Marda, Sun, & Surman, 2024).

Pertinent, as well, are proposals to decolonise AI and other media technologies, an effort that has gained momentum. Moreover, scholars have

advanced suggestions for how to construct explainable, ethical, accountable, and transparent AI tools based on FAIR principles (findability, accessibility, interoperability, and reusability). The idea behind the Radical AI project proposes, 'co-creating new systems with impacted communities: AI by and for the people' (Kalluri, 2020: para. 12). From a decolonising perspective, Roberts and Montoya (2022) delineate CARE principles that entail collective benefits, authority to control, responsibility, and ethics for data governance. A practical example is Te Hiku Media, a Māori radio station led by Peter-Lucas Jones and Keoni Mahelona who purchased a discounted machine, among others. They launched Papa Reo, an Indigenous-led multilingual language platform project, to train their own NLP tool utilising automatic speech recognition (ASR) and speech synthesis algorithms (Jones et al., 2023). They seek to revitalise the Māori language and retain control over the data of this Indigenous community (Hao, 2022). This is contributing to global Indigenous data sovereignty movements (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016 as cited in Flew & Martin, 2022) that signify a needed shift in discourses about AI and public service (both) to empower marginalised groups to become active contributors and co-creators of a collective future.

To address challenges related to AI's role and impact on copyright infringement, data misuse, privacy invasion, and data protection issues, media organisations very much including PSM will need to coordinate efforts at organisational, community, and national media policy and regulatory levels. And they will need to tackle the complexities of AI in newsroom operations and distribution chains. Among other solutions, PSM practitioners should work together with policymakers, government agencies, and researchers to elaborate a 21st-century public utility approach to the use of AI in, for, and as public service. The heart of this approach conceives of media services as being obligated to serve the greater good rather than only benefit private interests. Public utilities have significantly affected public interests for well over a century and played a role in the formation of public broadcasting and telecoms (Melody, 1997; Trebing, 1984). Following this tradition, a growing movement advocates for treating the internet as a public good or utility network, aligning with principles advocated by scholars like K. S. Rahman (2018), Schiller (2020)

and Tarnoff (2022). Rooted in the tradition of public utility regulation, this approach offers a robust historic framework to navigate the complexities of AI today in ways that can ensure serving the interests of societies at large. As AI tools become increasingly common for journalists and media audience alike, PSM organisations should continue to invest in the development of public service algorithms. Doing so could produce a benchmark and shared framework for ethical standards in AI. PSM organisations must be transparent in their activities and vigilant in their use of data and technological innovations (Horowitz et al., 2023).

Historically, ground-up and decentralised public media networks have played a significant role in the formation of national-scale public broadcasting in the United States (Shepperd, 2023). James Muldoon advocates for 'platform socialism' which he describes as efforts by grassroot communities, tech workers, and users to take ownership and control of the platforms they use as cooperatives (Muldoon, 2022). PSM organisations could contemplate establishing AI cooperatives or collectives within their communities and professional associations, such as the Public Media Alliance (PMA) and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) with the objective of pooling AI resources to pursue common goals. In sum, by centring attention on the public interest, AI can be utilised as a tool that serves the public good and contributes to a more equitable and inclusive media landscape everywhere in the Global South and North alike.

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Chapter 7
Power Asymmetries in Public Service Journalism: Artificial Intelligence and the Intelligibility–Agency Problem

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Summary

The provision of high-quality news continues to sit at the core of public service media's role in a digital age but the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) systems raises new challenges for newsrooms. The complex, opaque, and inscrutable nature of many AI systems makes it difficult for non-experts to make sense of them, use them responsibly, and hold the companies that control them to account. In this chapter, we look at this problem from the perspective of the newsroom to argue that a lack of AI intelligibility is a fundamental issue leading to limited agency for journalists (as individuals and collectively) and for PSM (as organisations and an institution in society). We argue that two problematic power asymmetries arise in this context: between news workers and AI; and between PSM and technology companies. We propose that for PSM to further integrate AI without undermining core values, they must extend their capacity to anticipate, understand, and mitigate risks and identify unique opportunities to create alternative forms of public value in a news ecology transformed by AI and platform power.

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) and other complex data-driven systems are changing journalistic practices and processes and contributing to the structural transformation of what it means to make and distribute news (Diakopoulos, 2019). Like their commercial counterparts, many public service media (PSM) organisations have been incorporating elements of AI into news production. Drivers include the hope AI will enable: a) greater efficiency through automation that will in turn translate into better value for public money; b) increased personalisation that will translate into larger and more engaged audiences; and c) the ability to perform previously unachievable tasks that will yield new knowledge. But the complex, opaque, and inscrutable nature of AI systems can make it difficult for journalists and news organisations to understand them. The proliferation of a new wave of generative AI tools and their uptake by publics and professionals alike has supercharged this issue, putting it firmly on the agenda of newsrooms around the world (Becker et al., 2023; BBC, 2023b). Many newsrooms have created guidelines and guardrails to mitigate editorial risks of generative AI (Cools, 2023), while civil society-led initiatives have devised principles to guide news and media integration of AI, including the Paris Charter on AI and Journalism (RSF, 2023).

AI is a polysemous umbrella term for a range of technologies, techniques, and ideas. When we talk about AI in this chapter, we are concerned with computational systems which use large amounts of data to mimic or simulate elements of what we generally consider to be human intelligence. Like most users of technology, journalists primarily encounter AI through the tools, software, and apps used in work and everyday life. For instance, at home they may use a voice assistant on their phone or smart speaker, while at work they may create news bulletins for those same devices or use transcription and translation tools to process recordings of interviewees. Multiple AI techniques may be at work here, including machine learning (ML), natural language processing (NLP), and deep neural networks (DNN) involved in speech-to-text and text-to-speech conversion. However, the journalist engages with user-friendly interfaces behind which sit the algorithms, data, cloud services, and

infrastructures that comprise what gets called 'AI'. Recent years have seen what is termed an 'AI spring', which refers to the huge investment, optimism, and notable breakthroughs in the field, particularly concerning the aforementioned ML, DNNs, NLP (Mitchell, 2021) and, from late 2022, generative AI based on large language models (LLMs). These developments build on a much longer process of digitisation and datafication in the news industry and society more widely, in which the growing collection and availability of data about the behaviour, actions, and preferences of individuals, coupled with greater computing power has stimulated data-driven innovation at a rapid pace. AI systems are more complex and opaque than prior computational systems, and though 2024 saw growing AI literacy efforts in the news industry, relatively few journalists and editors currently have the knowledge and skills to effectively scrutinise their processes, predict outcomes, or assess their suitability for specific journalistic tasks. The 'black-box' character of many systems means even those developing them cannot fully explain the processes by which outputs are achieved. Additionally, use of AI can be concealed and hard to detect, for instance in generating deepfake images and video, or LLM-generated text. Use and understanding of AI remain unevenly distributed with more pronounced challenges facing smaller newsrooms and those in the Global South due to resource and infrastructure constraints, language barriers, and political realities (Beckett & Yaseen, 2023). The deficit of knowledge and expertise in the news industry risks exacerbating their loss of influence to technology companies and policymakers (Deuze & Beckett, 2022). This risk has particularly important implications for PSM organisations because their legitimacy as core pillars of the fourth estate and providers of services that impact democracy and fundamental rights is based on principles such as independence and universality, which can become threatened by increased dependence on dominant platforms.

In this chapter, we focus on a key challenge facing PSM in this context – what we call the AI intelligibility–agency problem. We assess this problem from the perspective of the newsroom and its journalists. The chapter is largely a conceptual contribution but the insights and recommendations are drawn from empirical research conducted during three years of research at the UK's largest

public service broadcaster, the BBC, spanning 2020–2023. We begin by reviewing literature about the development of AI in journalism and the implications of the associated growing influence of big tech and platform power on how news is made, distributed, and accessed, as well as the barriers to understanding and meaningfully engaging with AI. We then use the concepts of intelligibility, agency, and platform power as frames to structure insights from our qualitative research, which included interviews with journalists, multidisciplinary workshops, document analysis, and fieldwork. We develop the argument that PSM face an intelligibility–agency problem that restricts their ability to act with intentionality in line with their public service ethos. We argue that two problematic power asymmetries arise in this context: between news workers and AI; and between PSM and technology/platform companies. We then ask what can be done to ensure PSM journalists retain agency and PSM organisations can create alternative forms of public value in a news ecology transformed by AI and platform power. We argue that fostering AI intelligibility is foundational to developing a normative approach to AI in PSM and ensuring it delivers on core responsibilities and we discuss the broader literacies needed to ensure PSM organisations are equipped to shape their long-term approach to AI.

AI in journalism

An assortment of data-driven, algorithmic, and AI technologies are incrementally changing journalistic practices and processes (Diakopoulos, 2019). AI-enabled systems have been integrated into all parts of the news production process, from newsgathering to production, distribution, and engagement. They impact journalists' processes of knowledge construction and communication, news organisations' business models and monetisation, as well as audience engagement behaviours. For instance, AI techniques have been used by newsrooms in newsgathering, to monitor and alert journalists to newsworthy material; in production, for the conversion of structured data into stories in text, video, and audio (Caswell & Dörr, 2019; Dörr, 2016; Jones &

Jones, 2019b; Lindén & Tuulonen, 2019) and the automation of data-mining and analysis tasks (Broussard, 2015; Stray, 2019); and in distribution, for news recommendation (Helberger, 2019) and delivery via chatbots (Jones & Jones, 2019a) and voice agents (Turow, 2020) – to name but a few of the tasks that make up the daily routine of newsroom activities.

PSM operate in an often hostile, commercial media environment, and though not required to generate profit and meet shareholder demands, they must still meet measures such as audience volume (Jakubowicz, 2003) and public value. The initial challenge for most PSM in the 2020s has been getting up to speed with advances in AI and building a level of organisational ability to begin to exploit opportunities safely and responsibly – a harder task for those with fewer resources and in challenging political contexts. For some PSM organisations, this has generated success, helping them further their goals, for instance by improving the quality and availability of subtitles, making content available in multiple languages, and helping them better understand their vast archives to surface content for reuse. But news is arguably the most high-risk area for PSM to deploy AI and raises new issues regarding editorial integrity and autonomy, bias and discrimination, universal access, inclusion in democratic participation, privacy and data protection, and more (Helberger et al., 2020; European Broadcasting Union [EBU], 2024). PSM organisations have increasingly targeted resources at better understanding the risks and challenges of incorporating AI and have become more assertive in arguing for and developing approaches to AI that align with PSM values and priorities (e.g., Caswell, 2021; EBU, 2019; 2020). Attention shifted to generative AI following the public release of numerous language, image, and audio models kicked off by Open AI's ChatGPT release in late 2022, leading the BBC and others to release statements about intended uses (BBC, 2023b), followed by (evolving) principles (BBC, 2024) and guidance (BBC, n.d.). Notable earlier efforts include PSM recommendation services (EBU, n.d.), public service-inspired metadata labels (Zachrison, 2020), and early responsible AI guidelines (BBC R&D, 2021). Although investment in AI among larger and more well-resourced PSM, particularly in the Global North, has grown, few have the financial resources and in-house skills to develop their own systems and

products at scale. Even those that do, such as the BBC, remain highly dependent on third-party services and struggle to hire and retain staff with the necessary expertise owing to intense commercial competition for their skill sets.

AI exacerbates platform dependencies in news

The drive to integrate AI is part of a broader pattern of news organisations' growing dependence on platforms, understood as 'data infrastructures that facilitate, aggregate, monetize, and govern interactions between end-users and content and service providers', (Poell et al., 2022, p. 5). The role of platforms in news has been well studied, particularly regarding distribution (Nieborg et al., 2019; Nielsen & Ganter, 2018; Steensen & Westlund, 2020). A few dominant US-based companies (Alphabet/Google, Meta, Microsoft, Apple, and Amazon) alongside a smaller number of new entrants are playing an increasingly important role in the development and use of AI in the news industry. They do this through provision of hardware and software, products and services, research and innovation funding, training, events, and lobbying (Simon, 2022; 2023). For example, AI has been integrated in the back-end models and algorithms underpinning platform services (for example, analytics tools like the now decommissioned CrowdTangle and Google News Consumer Insights, and advertising tools like Facebook Audience Network), devices (Amazon Alexa and Apple Siri, among others), models and software-as-a-service (such as LLMs like OpenAI's GPT series of models, Anthropic's Claude models, and Google's Gemini), and the essential infrastructure on which services run (for example, cloud computing and storage like Amazon Web Services [AWS], Microsoft Azure, and Google Cloud). Thus, platforms have an outsize control over the infrastructures that enable the public arena and shared information ecosystem (Jungherr & Schroeder, 2023) to which PSM are obligated to contribute through the provision of high-quality news. Kuai, Ferrer-Conill & Karlsson (2022) found a similar widening of the power imbalance between journalism and the state and tech companies in the Chinese context, where AI innovation and regulation was threatening journalism's long-term autonomy.

Platform power is, however, relational, and news organisations negotiate their institutional position vis-à-vis platforms, insofar as they can, in 'spaces of negotiation' where 'continuous strategic maneuvering' takes place on both sides (Poell et al., 2022). Large national legacy organisations like the BBC and some other PSM can often afford to put resources into aligning their strategies with their own editorial priorities and organisational imperatives (Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016) and in turn enjoy a higher degree of platform independence than smaller players. But high costs, limited resources, and structural advantages motivate newsrooms across the spectrum to continue down this path, despite concerns based on their past experiences of being burnt by platforms, worries about 'black-box' systems and loss of control, fear of lock-in and arbitrarily changing conditions, and entrenching existing dependencies (Simon, 2023). PSM can innovate using platforms' AI, but only within the constraints set by the platforms given that they 'possess artefactual and contractual control over their technology and infrastructure' (Simon, 2023, p. 17).

The extent to which PSM can counter these trends, and even the assessment of how important it is to challenge platform power, remain contested (Simon, 2023). Technology has certainly always been central to the way PSM exercise their democratic role and responsibility (Helberger, 2019) and meet their remit and obligations. Tambini (2021) suggests PSM could 'aim to be pioneers and models in the application of AI ethics' and be on the vanguard of civic innovation that successfully applies, embeds, and enacts principles of ethical and responsible AI. But in order to do this, PSM organisations and their journalists will need to devise novel strategies to learn about, probe, and scrutinise AI and to challenge the knowledge asymmetries between PSM and tech corporations, which are a key factor in how they maintain structural dominance and extend influence. The risks AI poses are particularly acute for PSM, which are (usually) funded by taxpayers' money and held to high standards under public scrutiny, while the imperatives and incentives driving the development of these systems often differ from those of PSM, and in some instances may in fact undermine established PSM and journalistic ethics and values (such as impartiality, objectivity, accountability). Diakopoulos (Broussard et al., 2019) argues that journalists can express and

exercise their ethical and normative values through the code they implement, but we are only in the early stages of studying the hybridisation of humans and AI in journalistic workflows. Ensuring the implementation of AI and algorithmic technologies not only does not undermine these value systems but works to strengthen them is a fundamental task facing contemporary PSM. This raises the questions: what do journalists and their organisations need to know about AI? And how do they acquire the skills, capabilities, and knowledge to meaningfully and responsibly engage with, and report on AI? There is an urgency to answering these questions: as AI moves from ad hoc and incidental applications to becoming embedded and infrastructural, the window to question, negotiate, reverse, and shape AI systems narrows.

The intelligibility–agency problem

There are three main reasons journalists and their organisations need to understand AI:

1. To design, develop, and procure AI-enabled systems, products, and services in ways that are responsible and aligned to journalistic principles and goals.
2. To deploy, use, and interact with AI to augment and enhance working practice.
3. To report effectively and critically on AI in society for their audiences (see UNESCO, 2023).

In common parlance, if something is intelligible, it is capable of being understood, which is a relational characteristic between the thing/s to be understood and the person/people doing the understanding. But intelligibility is used here to mean more than that – it is comprehension that enables intentional action. This underpins the ability to have meaningful agency, understood as the capacity to make practical and normative judgements among alternative possible actions. Deuze and Beckett (2022, p. 1913) describe this as AI literacy, which is 'not simply knowing about AI, but also understanding and

appreciating its normative dimension, as much as it is linked to impact and action: being able to identify ways to apply AI responsibly, creatively and efficiently'. Agency is not solely a property of individuals but can be conceptualised collectively, for instance as an outcome of communal discussion, debate, and decision-making in groups and organisations. For journalists to have meaningful agency they need to understand AI in the context of news production; and for PSM organisations to develop appropriate AI strategies, they need multidisciplinary expertise across the organisation (legal, policy, technical, editorial) and shared intentionality based on normative as well as practical goals.

So what makes AI unintelligible? A combination of factors contributes to the difficulty of understanding AI, including most prominently:

Conceptual and terminological fuzziness

AI is a difficult concept to pin down (Mitchell, 2019); defined differently across disciplines, over time, and in different contexts, it is polysemous and problematic (Broussard et al., 2019). AI is often obscured by hype in advertising and media coverage, which distorts public understanding and discourse and feeds confusion among practitioners. This means that in the minds of most journalists, futuristic images of AI as sentient beings and robots from films and cultural depictions mingle with experiences of specific everyday products and services, like voice assistants on mobile phones or internet search and social media feeds (Cave, Coughlan & Dihal, 2019; Jones, Jones & Luger, 2022). Even research and technology communities grapple with a lack of consensus about what constitutes AI. Ensuring journalists and others in an organisation are on the same page and using terms and ideas that make sense to each other is thus a challenge.

Invisibility and embeddedness

AI is embedded and invisible within complex assemblages of in-house and external systems and technology 'pipelines'. AI is often invisible to practitioners engaging with the front end of systems, where interface

design optimises for 'frictionless' interaction and ease of use over transparency and explanation. On a micro level, this makes it hard for individual journalists and communities of news workers to conceptualise the role of AI and algorithms in their working practices, processes, and routines (Simkute et al., 2021). The implicit and embedded nature of AI within platform infrastructures then makes it difficult to extrapolate the more structural shifts and growing dependencies on a macro level. One outcome of these first two characteristics is how hard it becomes to identify, describe, and chart the extent and nature of AI across an organisation.

'Black-boxing'

AI systems are often 'black-boxed': we can observe inputs and outputs, but we cannot fully know how one becomes the other. A system can become effectively a black box due to trade secrecy on the part of technology companies who refuse access to and inspection of their models, algorithms, and data (Pasquale, 2015). This lack of transparency of (usually) commercial systems makes scrutiny and accountability a challenge, if not an impossibility in many cases, and serves the interests of the technology company. Even when access is obtained, a system may not be inherently interpretable (as is the case with deep neural networks and most large language models), meaning even though the AI experts designing them know the process and components (like training data, weights, parameters), they do not know precisely how the outputs were reached. AI can also become a black box due to technical complexity and the types of knowledge needed to understand it – the computational, digital, algorithmic and AI literacies that can provide an entry point to making sense of AI in journalism. AI systems are characterised by technical complexity, mutability/instability, and opacity, and are notoriously difficult to understand for non-experts who are nevertheless expected to engage with them in the course of their work.

This intelligibility–agency problem impacts all industries whose employees are, by and large, not experts in AI. Much focus has understandably been on 'high-stakes' contexts where AI is recognised to have serious risks to life, safety, health, and human rights, but increasing recognition is being paid to the need to retain meaningful agency in other socially significant sectors, including journalism (Simkute et al., 2021). The particular considerations at stake in newsrooms include ensuring journalistic ethics, standards, and chains of accountability are not undermined by the automation of certain tasks, decision-making processes, or interactions using AI. This is because the social role and legitimacy of journalistic organisations – in particular PSM – relies on audience trust built on a belief in the accuracy, fairness, and impartiality of news reporting. Moreover, PSM newsrooms face greater public scrutiny than their commercial counterparts and often have to be seen to meet obligations closer to those of a public service than private media company.

Methods

Our insights are drawn from research conducted in collaboration with the BBC across three projects over a period of three years from 2020 to 2023. The BBC is the UK's largest public service broadcaster and, according to the organisation, reached around 447 million people globally per week in 2023 (BBC, 2023a). In 2023 it was also the most widely used source of news in the UK both online and offline, one of the most highly trusted sources of news, and was more widely used as a source of news than many of its PSM peers (Nielsen et al., 2023). It is a case study of particular interest as it has been a global flagship of PSM and played a historic role in constructing the Reithian principles (educate, inform, and entertain) alongside values and legislative arrangements that paved the way for public service broadcasting throughout the 20th century (Tracey, 1998). Its public service ethos extends to a commitment to innovate technologically (BBC R&D, n.d.). Its research and development department and product teams prototype and develop technologies for the whole organisation, including the newsroom. In 2012 the

organisation created BBC News Labs, which was 'charged with driving innovation for BBC News' (BBC News Labs, n.d.) staffed by a mix of editorial workers (journalists and producers) alongside technologists (software engineers, UX designers). At the time of research ending in 2023, the BBC had been working with a set of machine learning principles for around four years (BBC R&D, 2021). In October that year, it shared a set of principles for how it would approach generative AI, which stated it would: 1) always act in the best interests of the public; 2) always prioritise talent and creativity; 3) be open and transparent (BBC, 2023b). By early 2024, the BBC had developed a full AI policy and set of guidance (BBC, 2024; BBC, n.d.).

The projects we conducted with the BBC included the following methods:

a. Desktop research and document analysis to analyse use of AI in the BBC and news industry, plus observation and semi-structured interviews with fourteen journalists about their understandings of and attitudes towards AI (see Jones, Jones & Luger, 2022).
b. Nine workshops lasting between one and two hours: three speculative co-design workshops each involving between six and ten BBC journalists in which they explored the ethical and professional implications of present and future applications of AI in news production (Jones & Jones, 2023); and six workshops combining industry and academic contributors in structured discussion around topics of concern relating to AI (journalism, inequality and sustainability, work and labour, law and regulation, values and ethics, generative AI, and natural language processing).
c. An exploration of the risks generative AI may pose for journalism (one multi-stakeholder workshop with news managers, journalists, technologists, and academics, combined with desktop research) (see Jones, Luger & Jones, 2023).

This was supplemented by access to BBC documentation and discussion with internal teams working in news and technology groups. We do not directly cite empirical data here but rather derive high-level insights from this work. The research received ethical approval from the University of Edinburgh. It is important that we recognise our positionality in this research – two of the

three authors were employed by the organisation being studied at the time of writing: one led a workstream on responsible innovation in BBC R&D, while the other was simultaneously an academic researcher and a part-time BBC journalist.

Findings: Disempowered journalists, underprepared newsrooms, and platform power

Over the three years researching AI in news at the BBC from 2020 to 2023, we found highly variable levels of awareness and understanding of AI technologies and tools in the newsroom. Some journalists felt underconfident and disenfranchised in relation to AI but wanted to know more and better understand its professional implications. There was a disconnect between our findings of increasingly pervasive AI in news production and journalists' ability to connect this with their professional expertise. Many were using guesswork and imagination to fill their gaps in knowledge and speculating that AI was all around them while simultaneously being unable to pinpoint examples of AI in tools or newsroom technology (Jones, Jones & Luger, 2022). There were a limited number of specialised journalists trained in computational techniques or who worked closely with technologists in cross-disciplinary teams (for example, in BBC News Labs). The broader body of editorial workers remained at the margins of technology development and deployment and were not regularly included in discussions about emerging technology. Journalists were struggling to understand these systems, critically evaluate their implications in the newsroom, and play an active and informed role in questioning, challenging, and (re-)shaping them. It was difficult for those without specialised expertise to devise strategies to meaningfully and intentionally engage with AI-driven systems – or make an informed choice not to engage at all. This was particularly clear following the release of OpenAI's ChatGPT when the limitations of large language models and the potential editorial risks were not yet well known or understood. AI technologies clearly have the potential to empower journalists and aid their work, but without a

professionally appropriate understanding, they can instead generate the conditions for reduced power, control, and confidence.

The lack of a conceptual scaffolding on which journalists can build leaves an unstable and unsettled context ripe for potential misunderstanding, misuse of systems, and even manipulation. They may struggle to apprehend the relevance, possibilities, and limitations of these systems or effectively report on their impact in society as a result of not 'seeing' them embedded in social structures around them and in the power dynamics shaping people's lives (Narayanan & Kapoor, 2024). This could hamper efforts at algorithmic accountability reporting by which 'journalists investigate algorithms in order to characterise their power and delineate their mistakes and biases' (Diakopoulos, 2015, p. 398). It could also limit their ability to cut through the AI industry hype and 'snake oil' (Kaltheuner, 2021), which can lead to poor investments. Another downstream impact for PSM of failure to adequately engage journalists can be lack of uptake of new technologies and tools that take significant resources to design and develop. This was highlighted by technologists and innovation teams as a core challenge in terms of their goal of successful technology transfer. Journalists and editorial workers hold the expert knowledge required to understand the intersection of AI and editorial policy and practice but appeared to feel too uncertain and poorly informed to contribute in this arena. At the same time, technologists and wider teams in the BBC (such as legal, policy) are grappling with how to align editorial priorities with tech development and could benefit from improved mechanisms for knowledge exchange. Though these teams shared the same overarching organisational aims, they lacked a shared community of practice, common language, set of resources, and goals. We observed that it was only when journalists were brought together with a purpose and given the time and space to meaningfully engage in discussions about AI in the newsroom, that their perspective about whether they could have any influence on the technologies they used changed. It was during workshops designed to build capacity and understanding in relation to AI in news contexts that we observed them coming together to apply this expertise, to discuss and raise concerns, and identify risks and wider potential uses – with particular reference to public

service priorities. This suggests an important component of making AI intelligible will involve making it both visible and contextualised but also a topic of collective concern, and bringing different expert communities together with shared purpose may help. The capacity for meaningful engagement and action has to be built – it does not just exist.

During the research period, the BBC had several working groups, forums, resource repositories, and mailing lists designed to foster wider engagement and knowledge transfer in relation to developments and use of AI in the organisation. These were important steps towards socialising knowledge about AI, but there remained limited engagement from journalists and editors on the ground. Black box AI restricts journalists' ability to scrutinise and understand why certain outcomes are produced rather than others and, in turn, to change or challenge them. AI systems distribute cognition and control between human and machine in new ways, which can disrupt existing chains of accountability and create responsibility gaps if newsrooms do not identify and reorganise their processes accordingly. If these systems are not intelligible to journalists, they risk disrupting long-standing professional norms and practices that underpin responsible news production, including those of accountability. This in turn, threatens to undermine public trust in journalism and could unfairly place responsibility for algorithmic biases or errors onto the journalists working with them, many of whom may not have acquired the appropriate critical literacies to deploy them responsibly. Journalists may end up being held responsible for decisions made by AI, even if they had little agency to override or amend them (Wagner, 2019) or if the algorithm goes awry (Diakopoulos, 2015). This includes legal risks such as 'libel by algorithm' resulting from automated journalism (Lewis, Sanders & Carmody, 2019).

There is also a knowledge and power asymmetry at an institutional level. Like most PSM organisations, the BBC does not have the resources to develop many of its own AI models, so it procures them, acquires licences to use them, or uses free versions of them. But many AI platform companies restrict access to the information required for effective oversight, auditing, and governance of their models, thus creating a knowledge asymmetry by design, which hinders AI intelligibility and agency at an institutional level for PSM. Additionally,

much like what happened with social media, AI companies can change their algorithms, access to APIs, models, and service charges at will, with potentially significant repercussions if PSM have built their digital workflows and infrastructures around these products and services. We observed rapidly maturing AI governance structures and practices at an organisational level at the BBC, with a focus on responsible AI. This included the creation of new teams and roles (for example, responsible data and AI manager), working groups (for example, AI governance group), AI strategies, policies, and governance documents (such as generative AI principles, [BBC, 2023b]). This builds on the organisation's earlier principles and guidance for responsible use of machine learning (BBC R&D, 2021) as it moved towards a more mandatory and risk-based approach. Since 2022, teams have tracked, monitored use, and assessed the risks posed by internal and third-party AI tools, but the growing use of AI, coupled with the integration of AI elements into third-party systems (for example, generative AI in Microsoft and Google enterprise products) presents a complex array of challenges for auditing and evaluation of AI tools beyond those deemed high risk. Effective governance relies on cultures of collaboration spanning teams and divisions able to work together to effectively anticipate, investigate, and mitigate risk of adverse impacts and harms. As legal and regulatory requirements for AI transparency and explainability develop (for instance, in relation to the European Union AI Act and Council of Europe AI Convention, both signed in 2024), PSM will need to consider how they can meet expectations of justifiable and accountable use of AI (Helberger & Diakopoulos, 2022). An AI-literate PSM community can help identify potential hazards and prompt appropriate reaction.

Recommendations for fostering AI intelligibility and PSM agency

If PSM are to further integrate AI into their news operations without undermining core values, they must simultaneously improve and extend their capacity to understand and mitigate risks and identify opportunities of specific

benefit to PSM journalism's remit and goals. This may sound obvious, but when the vast majority of tools and systems making their way into the newsroom and underpinning next generation PSM infrastructures are built according to commercial logics by technology and platform companies with differing values, aims, and goals, this can be a real challenge. To achieve this, PSM need to find ways to foreground their distinctive values and priorities when dealing with AI companies and systems; that is, when procuring/licensing, designing/developing, and deploying/using these systems. A comprehensive analysis is beyond the scope of this chapter and warrants further research, but we flesh out a pathway through a set of recommendations, which are presented under three themes: 1) journalist and organisational understanding; 2) collaboration and participation; and 3) governance and oversight.

1. Build journalist and organisational understanding

Foster critically informed AI literacies with a focus on applications in news – so that journalists as a professional group are able to understand, inform, and advocate for AI in their interest. Most technology literacy interventions in news organisations respond to immediate and practical needs, such as training on the functioning of a new system. This serves an important purpose and ensures scarce resources are targeted at the safe, efficient, and productive deployment and use of systems. However, restricting professional development to a transactional process this way can limit the types of knowledge and understanding possible. It misses opportunities for journalists to gain perspective into how these technologies fit into society and their profession, gain critical faculties and literacies beyond those of journalists as 'users', and contribute to the research, design, and development of AI technologies for the newsroom.

We recommend developing resources and running activities that:

a. Build a shared lexicon. The term AI has become shorthand for an evolving suite of technologies and techniques, and structured efforts to

clarify terminology and expose editorial and technical teams to each other's language and concepts would be mutually beneficial (for example, creating glossaries and running schemes pairing editorial and tech workers).

b. Make AI visible and contextualise it in relation to journalistic work. By making journalists aware of the existence of AI in specific existing systems and on the horizon using tangible and news-related examples, they can be encouraged to recognise the relevance of AI systems for journalism and the editorial and ethical questions they raise (for instance, by creating educational materials like explainers, case studies and plausible scenarios, or running workshops dissecting high-risk applications).

c. Facilitate knowledge exchange by bridging divides and breaking down silos, for instance by creating new roles and mandates for workers to catalyse the sharing of insights and information (for example, roles akin to 'super-users' of technology who would be identified as the go-to person on AI in a newsroom, or carving out time off-rota for journalists to learn and share knowledge). These provide learning opportunities for journalists but crucially also for the organisation, which can garner expert insights and tacit knowledge from them in a symbiotic relationship.

2. *Embed new forms of collaboration and participation*

Building new expert cross-team communities of practice that can work together over time to bridge individual-collective-institutional knowledge, identify risks and opportunities, and problem-solve collectively. Responsible use of AI necessitates the involvement of diverse perspectives and different types of expertise (Park, 2022), and particularly bridging editorial and technical divides. PSM organisations have typically organised around formal departmental structures mapped to core functions (Jackson, 2020). We suggest PSM should support new expert communities of practice to break from the more established structures, building on best practice in inclusive design and development practices (Park, 2022) to develop a 'shared repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artifacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.)'

(Wenger, 1998, p. 2). By convening a diversity of voices and engaging in processes of consensus-forming, they can enable better decision-making and build long-term AI and innovation strategies that reflect and address workforce concerns and incorporate their expertise in processes of change.

We recommend developing resources and running activities that:

a. Harness journalistic expertise and foster participation in areas of AI-related activity. AI will certainly not be needed or desirable for every task – working out what, when, and why AI should be applied, and opening pathways for resistance, rejection, or discontinuation, will be vital to directing resources intentionally and asserting editorial control. We recommend design interventions (such as workshops using context-sensitive provocations [Jones & Jones, 2023], forecasting) as a way to: a) provoke reflection by news workers of their experiences with and understandings of AI; b) encourage articulation of journalistic values and illuminate their application in practice; and c) generate a sense of agency among editorial workers. Interventions could be workshops using prototypes as cultural probes (Sanders & Stappers, 2014) that create points of friction to stimulate conversation with journalists around what is acceptable, desirable, and consistent with journalistic workflows and epistemic frameworks.

b. Encourage collaboration around collective visions. Core to this approach should be meaningful co-production that is mission-orientated (Mazzucato, Kattel & Ryan-Collins, 2020) or challenge-led (rather than driven by each new tech development) and of mutual benefit to collaborating teams. This necessitates bridging multiple divides: between academia–industry, industry–audience/citizen, between disciplines, and between silos within organisations.

c. Centre innovation methods and tools that foreground editorial and PSM values and priorities. When designing and developing AI, and when dealing with AI companies and systems, questions of ethics, values, principles, and public value must be considered throughout the full development process. Different approaches can support the involvement

of media practitioners in various parts of the life cycle of AI technologies: for example, ideation and consequence scanning, participatory design, co-design, co-production, and action research. This would enable them to have their voices heard, contribute expertise, learn about, and influence the technological landscape.

3. Strengthen oversight and governance of AI to counter platform power

Strengthening the oversight and governance of AI across the newsroom and organisation can empower PSM with new forms of knowledge about the AI systems they use and the technology and platform companies that provide them – knowledge they need to have informed discussion and debate and to make justifiable decisions about what to use, how, and why. This, we argue, is a necessary first step in asserting a counter-power to platform companies as it enables evidence-based analysis of risks, for instance to editorial and organisational autonomy (for example, regarding lock-in and exposure to platforms' changing priorities, dependence on intermediaries for connection to the public, and so on), and to established values and stated obligations (for example, related to universality, fairness, and sustainability). We are not naively suggesting this can engender some reversal of platform dominance in the market. Rather, we posit that a maturing of AI governance and associated deepening understanding of the specific ways in which AI is reshaping both news work and how PSM organisations fulfil their remit is a requirement for negotiating arrangements with platforms – and negotiating interactions on the ground with their systems – that protect core principles. AI governance is a vital component of implementing AI ethics (Mäntymäki et al., 2022) and ensuring AI aligns with PSM values. Given their obligations of public accountability, PSM may need or want to be more transparent than commercial counterparts about where and when AI is used in news production, particularly when there are implications for the attribution of responsibility for decisions, errors, or in complaints procedures. They may have to ensure mechanisms for oversight, auditing, and redress are stronger and be able to explain how and

why their AI-driven algorithms make certain automated or semi-automated decisions.

We recommend:

a. Enhancing transparency and explanation of the existence, design, role, and performance of AI as a precondition for intelligibility; for example, by logging and assessing uses of AI applications in editorial processes, performing risk modelling to indicate areas for enhanced oversight, and clarifying chains of responsibility. Varying levels of transparency and modes of explanation would be necessary for different stakeholders (auditors, journalists, audiences, for example). Making information and data available is not sufficient if it is incomprehensible to the people AI systems impact, so an emphasis on making it not only accessible but intelligible would be key.
b. Develop AI-encompassing policies and guidelines. Ensure editorial policy and guidance addresses AI. This documentation, and the case-by-case discussion that occurs in reference to it, guides day-to-day decisions to ensure that what journalists do with AI embodies the standards and values expected, which will subtly differ in a PSM context from commercial counterparts as values such as universality come into play, and will differ across country contexts.
c. Set standards and chart a distinctive path. Recognising that some PSM organisations such as the BBC have a comparatively higher degree of room to manoeuvre with regard to AI (as they are well resourced, have a relatively stable remit and resourcing, and a strong history of technology innovation), we contend that consequently they have the opportunity and responsibility to set and share standards, model ethical behaviour, (co-)create resources to support other PSM, and convene the debate. This, in concert with pan-PSM initiatives such as the EBU's AI and Data Initiative and School of AI, as well as the Public Media Alliance's AI resources (Public Media Alliance, n.d.), can contribute to systemic and collaborative change at an institutional level to ensure AI enhances PSM and supports their contribution to society. It could also begin to build a

more unified voice, amplifying PSM values in contrast to platform logics, and foster a form of institutional counter-power by offering alternative conceptual and practical approaches to AI in the years to come.

Conclusion

Addressing the AI intelligibility–agency problem will be fundamental to ensuring PSM journalists retain meaningful agency in their work as AI systems become further integrated into newsrooms, and to ensuring PSM organisations can create alternative forms of public value in a news ecology transformed by big tech and platform power. To date, PSM journalists have been marginalised in discussions about AI and the development of AI, and there have been parallel challenges for technologists grappling with editorial principles and priorities in technology design and development. In the face of an array of pressing challenges for PSM, including political hostility, questioning of legitimacy, and fragmentation of audiences, the slow-burning issue of ensuring AI and algorithmic systems support and strengthen PSM values may slip down the list of priorities. However, the incremental change that AI continues to bring could have significant aggregate and cumulative impacts that, without proper oversight and normative direction, could pose serious risks to PSM journalism. We recognise that as infrastructures of AI further embed and solidify in PSM organisations, a whole range of innovative and creative approaches will be needed to ensure responsible and value-aligned integration, and our suggestions only address a few of the issues in limited ways. If technology and platform companies come to increasingly control both the means of production and connection, with implications for journalistic autonomy, it will be a key priority to have PSM communities empowered and enabled to recognise the implications of these changes, mitigate the risks, and exploit the opportunities. A first step will be ensuring journalists, in collaboration with other experts across disciplines, can elucidate and articulate the influences AI systems exercise in news production and the work of PSM. In particular, PSM organisations can proactively build new communities of

practice around AI in news production. We argue these efforts could help build resilience against pervasive platform logics and indeed rejuvenate PSM approaches to their long-standing role delivering news of democratic value and developing editorial standards for the age of AI.

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The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests in publishing this article.

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Part III

National and Regional Case Studies

Chapter 8
Public Service Media in the Crosshairs: National Policymaking Process, the EU Competition Regulation, and the Case of Yle's Text-Based News Content

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Summary

The role of public service media (PSM) online, and specifically the provision of text-based news content, has been under scrutiny in many European countries. This chapter focuses on the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle) as a case study of the dynamics between European competition law, national PSM policymaking, and lobbying from the private media industry. The chapter examines the process that led to a legal amendment limiting Yle's text-based services online and its impact on the conditions of public service journalism. As part of a series of complaints about unfair competitive advantage by the private media industry, the Finnish Media Federation, an advocacy organisation for private companies in the media and printing industries, originally filed a complaint with the EU Commission in 2017, claiming that Yle's text-based online content conflicts with EU state aid rules. The chapter first addresses how competition law has been used to restrict PSM online in other EU member states. It then describes the Finnish case, highlighting the key

problems of the amendment accepted by the Finnish Parliament in 2022. Finally, we discuss what the case means more broadly in terms of PSM policy and public service journalism. We argue that the case of Yle exemplifies opaque communication policy decision-making and presents a danger of curbing the scope of PSM through inaccessible and technocratic processes instead of open public debate. The case can also be seen as part of a continuing transition in Finland from the so-called media welfare state to the competition state.

Introduction

This chapter discusses the attempts of the private media industry to challenge the remit of public service journalism with reference to the EU state aid rules. While public service media (PSM) have been under commercial and political pressure in many European countries for a while (for example, Wilson, 2020), Finland has been a markedly strong and mature PSM country, with high audience reach and trust (for example, Horowitz et al., 2021), as well as broad political support among the main parliamentary parties. Nevertheless, private media companies in Finland have increasingly criticised PSM for unfair competitive advantage.

Reflecting a broader tension between European competition law and PSM, the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yleisradio or Yle) has been targeted with a series of complaints about unfair competitive advantage by the private media industry. These have included inquiries about the appropriateness and market impact of Yle's text-based online content, personalisation services, the streaming service Yle Areena, educational content, and audio services.

As a case study, this chapter focuses on the process that led to a legal amendment limiting Yle's text-based services online and its impact on the conditions of public service journalism. The Finnish Media Federation, an advocacy organisation for private companies in the media and printing industries, originally filed a complaint with the EU Commission in 2017, claiming that Yle's textual online content conflicts with EU state aid rules. After non-public discussions with the EU Commission's Directorate-General

for Competition, the Finnish government proposed to introduce an amendment to the Act on Yleisradio Oy (1380/1993), which would limit Yle's mandate to provide text-based web content that is not directly related to audiovisual content. The ensuing public online consultation raised several arguments against the proposal. Professional and civil society organisations, researchers, and individual citizens, among others, expressed concerns that the amendment would limit freedom of speech and widen inequalities related to access to news, in ways that contradict the traditional role of media in the Nordic welfare states (see, for example, Nieminen, 2019). The debate also led to an official citizens' initiative to counter the government proposal. Nevertheless, the amendment was eventually accepted in the Finnish Parliament in 2022.

In Europe, text-based news by PSM has come under scrutiny due to the introduction of the so-called *ex ante* test, according to which significant new services should be analysed based partly on their public value but also on what market impact the new service might have. The question of online news has mostly been left for the member states to decide, the only requirement being that the public service remit is sufficiently well defined. This approach has been keenly used by some member states to narrow PSM's remit (Donders et al., 2020). What makes the Yle case interesting is that it appears that the Directorate-General for Competition has been more involved in defining the scope of acceptable online services than has usually been the case, which may have future implications for the dynamics of power between national PSM policy and EU competition rules.

In this chapter, we first address how competition law has been used to restrict PSM online, including an overview of different approaches in select EU member states. We then describe the Yle case, highlighting the key problems of the amendment to the Act on Yleisradio Oy.

Apart from the specific issue of text-based content, we argue that the case also has broader significance in terms of PSM policymaking and the perception of public service journalism. In particular, it raises issues about the frameworks and criteria used to assess the role of PSM journalism in society. As Puppis and Ali (2023) note, current conflicts regarding the remit and legitimacy of PSM are also about controlling the agenda and narratives of policy debates. Drawing on

the discursive approaches to policy analysis (for example, Bacchi, 2009; Fischer, 2003), it can be argued that, in addition, the case exemplifies the power of framing and the clash of conflicting frameworks for assessing PSM. While the critics of the government proposal largely justified their concerns with reference to socio-political and cultural arguments, the government on the other hand, framed the issue more narrowly as a technical matter of compliance with EU rules, which in turn allowed it to sidestep any broader arguments about the value of PSM.

Finally, the chapter argues that the case may indicate a continuing transition in Finland from the so-called media welfare state to the competition state. Although decisions on PSM funding and remit are still in national competence, they also tend to be interpreted from the viewpoint of competitiveness rather than as part of national media and cultural policy. The process exemplifies opaque policymaking, already observed in earlier media policy processes, and risks curbing the remit of PSM through inaccessible, technocratic processes.

Restricting public service media with competition law

The situation with Yle demonstrates the tension between European competition law and PSM. While public service is often portrayed as an exception to state aid rules, its definition is deeply politicised.

The Amsterdam Protocol on Public Service Broadcasting[1] provides the necessary exception to the general ban on state aid in EU law, but its interpretation and its relationship with the general state aid restrictions in EU law are complex. Part of the problem has to do with the fact that the Commission has been inspired by the case law on state aid of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) when writing its communications on the subject. These soft law instruments are impactful in practice because the Commission follows them when determining whether the funding of PSM is permissible. Still, it is worth remembering that such guidelines are not binding on the CJEU.

The Amsterdam Protocol entails three key aspects about public broadcasting and state aid. Firstly, the Protocol stipulates that the prohibition of state aid does not apply to public service broadcasting. Notably, public service broadcasting is not solely defined as a service of general economic interest (SGEI) according to article 106.2 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Although public service broadcasting fulfils the criteria of an SGEI, public service broadcasting is subject to specific conditions. Importantly, the Amsterdam Protocol contains a requirement to define what public service broadcasting entails.

The second part of the Protocol specifies that 1) the funding must be granted to a broadcasting organisation; 2) the funding is conditional on a public service remit; and 3) the remit is conferred, defined, and organised by each member state. This entails a wide margin of manoeuvre for the member states. The margin of discretion follows the doctrine of the CJEU (see Joined Cases C-197/11 and C-203/11). Failing to provide a definition would be contrary to EU law, but the actual definition is provided solely by the member state. In theory, it would also be possible to provide public service funding to several commercial broadcasters in exchange for the provision of public service content.

In its Communication, the Commission (2009) announced that it would restrict its evaluation of the second part of the Amsterdam Protocol to 'manifest errors'. The definition of manifest errors is quite unclear and, up until now, it has been about the business model of the broadcaster (EU Commission, 2007). Whereas the provision of services is up for the member states to decide, the Amsterdam Protocol also contains a proportionality test, which leads us to the last part.

The last part of the Protocol is hard to interpret because it contains a condition that is conditional in and of itself: the public service funding cannot affect trading conditions and competition to an extent that is contrary to the *common interest*, but this balancing test needs to take into account the realisation of the remit that the member state has conferred on PSM. This means that the goalposts shift depending on the remit. If the remit places a high burden on PSM, it also means that more market distortion is probably permissible.

The common interest, according to the Commission (2009, p. 16), is the 'plurality of balanced public and private media offer'. In other words, if the funding of PSM would in and of itself challenge the existence of the private media offer, it could be deemed contrary to the common interest. Following the case law of the CJEU, it does not mean state aid is impermissible as soon as part of the provision of public services can be provided under market conditions.[2] Rather, the *entirety* of the service obligations must be considered. Furthermore, the guidelines issued by the Commission can be challenged by the member states (Bruzzone & Boccaccio, 2020, p. 88). Nevertheless, overcompensation is deemed incompatible with EU law if the revenues notably exceed the costs of the public service offering.

The 2009 Communication also famously introduced the *ex ante* test requiring that new services should be judged not only on the merits of their public value but also on the likely impact on the commercial market. However, neither primary law nor CJEU cases support it. To reiterate, the CJEU has, on multiple occasions, stated that the public service obligation needs to be considered in its entirety. The *ex ante* tests were introduced to put a limit on what, exactly, public service broadcasters may provide online (Schulz, 2009). While it is up to the member state to define the public service remit, state aid investigations have resulted in *ex ante* tests being introduced as a type of compromise: states are not required to necessarily define the scope of online services more clearly, but the Commission still requires them to make some sort of assessment of the market impact. The CJEU on the other hand has been far more lenient in accepting definitions of the public service remit than the Commission (Donders & Moe, 2014).

The public service remits of EU member states

It is fundamentally up to the member states to decide what is included in the PSM remit, and a review of European practices shows a great variety. In the following, we draw on examples from the other Nordic countries and a few other European countries to highlight this variety. Although not

comprehensive, the review illustrates that there is no obvious coherence in the interpretation of the EU competition rules.

In the Nordic countries, there is a tendency to review each other's media regulations when drafting new media policies. Still, they too differ in the way the remits for PSM are defined. In Norway, the online activities of the public service broadcaster NRK are not limited at all, and no fundamental distinction is made between text-based content and audiovisual productions. The defining aim is that all content should strive towards fulfilling the public service remit, and that is not limited to a specific type of content. In Sweden, the activities of PSM are divided into three categories: core services, complementary services, and subsidiary services. Text-based online news is in the complementary category (Swedish Government Office, 2018, p. 28).

In contrast, the Danish 'public service contract' is much more oriented towards the market failure thesis, explicitly stating that the public service broadcaster DR should not compete with private actors unless it serves a clear public service goal. Although the updated public service contract initially required DR to abstain from publishing long text-based articles online, the contract terms were later redacted, removing the controversial restriction (Eller, 2019). The provision had been added out of competition concerns but was later thought to infringe on the 'arm's length' principle.

Similarly, the decree defining the objectives of France Télévisions specifies that it is its objective to distribute and develop online services that 'prolong, complete and enrich its audiovisual content'.[3] Radio France has a similar provision in the decree defining its objectives.[4] Moreover, France Télévisions' public service contract establishes the importance of providing news online (France Télévisions, 2021).

The Italian public service broadcaster's (RAI) service contract for 2018–2022 also underscores that the broadcaster should fulfil its objectives on all relevant platforms.[5] The focus lies in making broadcasts more available online (article 5). Regarding news, article 25e of the contract provides that RAI should 'strengthen its news offer on the web' and combat the spread of fake news.

In the UK, the BBC is tasked with providing high-quality content online, and no reference is made to restricting the online offering. The French and British approaches are in stark contrast to the German and Austrian regulation of the online presence of PSM. Germany's *Rundfunkstaatsvertrag* explicitly provides that the online offering of PSM may not be 'press-like' (*presseähnlich*) and the focus should be on audiovisual content.[6] Austria's *ORF-Gesetz* also describes that its online news offering cannot be comparable to the output of newspapers and magazines.[7] The federal news reports are further restricted to eighty daily reports per federal state per calendar week. Moreover, comprehensive local reporting is forbidden.

In the Flemish-speaking parts of Belgium, the public service broadcaster contract specifically endorses the provision of content on all relevant platforms (VRT & Vlaamse overheid, 2016, p. 18). However, the contract specifies that the audiovisual content is the 'foundation of the digital offering' and that the public service broadcaster VRT should provide links to other journalism providers (VRT & Vlaamse overheid, 2016, p. 19). The Flemish model is more directed towards cooperation with private media companies, whereas the Austrian and German models aim to forbid the deployment of competing products. Both German and Flemish-speaking Belgian broadcasters have been under scrutiny by the European Commission (2007; 2008).

In sum, there seems to be a clear connection between state aid cases and recent updates to broadcasting laws and contracts. In countries where public service broadcasters have been scrutinised by the Directorate-General for Competition, the remits of public service broadcasters have become more tightly regulated. Yet it seems clear that, instead of any coherent European approach, the current situation across Europe reflects what has been called 'the European communication (dis)order' (Dreyer et al., 2020), characterised by a complex and contradictory mix of national media systems, varying interpretations of the Amsterdam Protocol, and diverse demands from other stakeholders.

The Act on Yleisradio Oy and the case of text-based content

Finland is one of the leading digital societies in Europe and Yleisradio, the Finnish PSM, has been a frontrunner in establishing successful digital PSM. While Finnish people have a very high level of trust in the news media and the newspapers in Finland have been economically rather successful despite lower public subsidies than in other Nordic countries, the Finnish press industry continues to struggle with the digital transition. This has been one of the main reasons for the increased tension between the press industry and Yleisradio (Ala-Fossi et al., 2023). Unlike its Nordic neighbours, Finland has since the 1990s cut down both direct and indirect public support for media using two separate fiscal crises of the state as justification for abandoning traditional media welfare policy (Ala-Fossi, 2020). This is one of the reasons why the economic challenges of the Finnish commercial news media are now undeniable and quite severe, both nationally and locally (for example, Eromäki & Kavander, 2023; Sillanmäki, 2023), and Yle cannot alone guarantee a healthy media system or diverse journalistic contents for citizens. Still, it is not insignificant that in a nineteen-country comparative study, Finland ranks the highest in terms of audiences' trust and their perceptions of the personal and societal importance of PSM (Nielsen & Newman, 2023). These results echo earlier Finnish research on media trust (for example, Horowitz et al., 2021).

When the Act on Yleisradio Oy was passed in December 1993, it required Yle to make 'full-service broadcast programming available to everyone on equal terms'.[8] The act was the first actual law concerning public broadcasting in Finland. Until then, Yle's operations had been based only on a licence. At that point, the internet was not an important distribution platform for any media content. However, things changed rapidly as both the number of new web services and the number of households with internet connections started to grow. Yle introduced its first company website in 1995 and started to publish text-based online news a year later (Ala-Fossi, 2016).

The Finnish parliament had no objections to expanding Yle's remit into new platforms. On the contrary, in 2002 it defined the remit of the public

service broadcaster as the production of 'full-service television and radio programming with supplementary and additional services available to everyone on equal terms' in all telecommunications networks, not just in broadcast networks.[9] But the 2002 amendment of the Act says nothing about text, the simplest digital content format. Nevertheless, state aid was not mentioned at any stage in the legislative processes of the amendments to the Act on Yleisradio Oy. Therefore, the Finnish parliament never took a position on the state aid issue.

During the last two decades, the legal definition of Yle's remit has been revised three times. Besides 'versatile and comprehensive television and radio programming', the current text of the Act requires the company to also offer 'related additional and extra services for all citizens under equal conditions [. . .] in public communications networks nationally and regionally'.[10] In this context, it is absolutely clear that the de facto purpose of the legislators has been to also include the provision of text-based digital online content into the official Yle remit, although this has never been separately mentioned in the law.

By 2004, it was clear that the Finnish newspaper industry would have rather kept Yle out of the internet completely, but it was already too late. However, the publishers and the Finnish Media Federation were able to paralyse a political process for Yle funding reform in 2010 with an orchestrated campaign, which claimed the level of public funding for Yle to be too high (Ala-Fossi & Hujanen, 2010). This victory was temporary, because a year later the new parliament passed the bill on tax-based Yle funding. Finland had cut down direct public press subsidies since the 1990s and they were completely abandoned by 2008. Because of a sudden fiscal crisis of the state, indirect press subsidies (VAT reductions) too were decreased in 2012, while newspapers were already losing both subscribers and advertisers (Ala-Fossi, 2020). By 2015, the Finnish media industry had convinced the new government to establish a parliamentary committee to study Yle's remit and funding again (Karppinen & Ala-Fossi, 2017).

All the changes proposed by the committee in June 2017 were very modest. Only a few days later the Finnish Media Federation filed a complaint about Yle's web journalism to the EU Commission. The Federation claimed that any

text-based Yle journalism online with no direct connection to public service radio or television content violates the EU state aid regulations. After more than two years of non-public correspondence with the Commission and two separate negotiations with the chairpersons of all parliamentary groups, the Ministry of Transport and Communications released a proposal for an amendment of the Act on Yleisradio Oy for public consultation in June 2020. The purpose of the proposed amendment was to fix the alleged problems with state aid regulations by setting new restrictions for Yle's online offering.[11]

The challenges of the amendment

The public consultation of the proposal was exceptional in the Finnish context. First, the proposal was partly based on non-public correspondence with the Directorate-General for Competition. Second, in Finland it is customary to deal with matters concerning Yle in a parliamentary manner: that is, by consulting all parliamentary parties. This proposal was discussed only with the chairmen of the party groups. Third, a total of eighty-five organisations and private citizens decided to submit their statements. Also, we, the authors, participated with a statement addressing the problematic aspects of the proposal. Several authors also contributed to the public debates, and in early 2021 were consulted by both the Finnish Constitutional Law Committee and the Transport and Communications Committee. Our critique and the proposed alternatives were as follows:

1. The proposal to restrict Yle's online offering of text-based content would decrease the amount of quality journalism freely available in Finnish. This would severely weaken the equality of access to information among the citizens and all people living in Finland, as commercial media will not produce any substitutive quality content available for free.
2. All decisions about the funding and remit of PSM remain unambiguously and without any controversy in the national competence of the EU member states. The role of the Commission is limited to 'checking for

manifest errors', such as activities that do not serve the social, democratic, and cultural needs of society.

3. The division of text-based and audiovisual online content on which the complaint by the Finnish Media Federation was based has been technologically obsolete already at the time the complaint was written. In a digital environment, all content is bits, and text is just one (the simplest) format for consumption.
4. There is no clear research-based evidence about any harmful effects or financial losses of commercial news media caused by freely available Yle online news.
5. The proposal is also very open to interpretations and difficult to implement and monitor as a law, which means it will most likely not close this process but create a basis for new complaints.

Counterproposal and the adoption of the new legislation

The arguments listed above were also publicly supported by an official citizen's initiative,[12] launched on 15 February 2021 to counter the government proposal in the name of freedom of expression and democracy. Such an initiative bears significant weight: since 2012, an amendment to the Finnish constitution has made it possible for citizens to submit initiatives to parliament. An initiative proceeds to parliament if it has collected at least 50,000 statements of support within six months. The counterproposal of this citizens' initiative was drawn to a great extent from the assessments made by the present authors, in that Yle's text-based journalistic content should be defined by an amendment to the Act on Yle as a significant new service and a proper evaluation process of its market impact should be executed, as stipulated in the Act on Yleisradio Oy.

By the third week of May 2021, the initiative had gathered over 33,000 signatories. Then it became public that Sanoma Media Finland, the largest Finnish commercial cross-media company with journalistic and educational arms, had asked the EU Commission to investigate the scope of Yle's streaming

service Areena and suggested that Yle's e-learning content violated EU state aid rules. In Sanoma's newspaper, the biggest Finnish daily *Helsingin Sanomat*, the Dutch CEO of Sanoma noted that the company needs to know whether to invest in Finnish TV content in the future – hence the request to the Commission. The news caused a public uproar, including many subscribers cancelling *Helsingin Sanomat*, and the newspaper quickly responded with an op-ed that called the complaint outdated.[13] The chain of events resulted in a flood of signatories to the citizens' initiative that by early June 2021 had already passed well over the 50,000 mark, reaching altogether 54,425 signatures.

In September 2021, the initiative was sent for consideration to the parliament at the same time as the proposed amendment prepared by the Ministry of Transport and Communications. However, in March 2022, the parliament first rejected the citizen's initiative and then adopted the amendment with the revisions made by the Transport and Communications Committee. The amendment entered into force at the beginning of August 2022.

The amendment means, in practice, that while Yle may continue providing text content online as part of its public service, these texts should, in most cases, be supported by video or audio material. However, there are several types of exceptions to the regulation, which allow publishing text content as such. Short texts produced by the Finnish News Agency (STT) and brief news produced in-house about breaking news are exempt, and news in Saami, Romani, and other minority languages can be published only in text. In addition, cultural and educational content and official announcements, which are part of Yle's legal remit, are also exempted.[14]

The decision of the Finnish parliament to restrict the online offering of Yle has subsequently aroused some international interest, not only among the European public service broadcasters but also among the publishers' associations. At least two Nordic sister organisations of the Finnish Media Federation, the Danish Media Association (Danske Medier) and Swedish Newspaper Publishers' Association (Svenska Tidningsutgivareföreningen) have already expressed their interest in filing similar types of complaints to the European Commission (Sirén, 2021; Lunde, 2022; SVT, 2022). Although one of

the main arguments of the Finnish Media Federation for restricting the online activities of Yle was economic, the CEO of the Federation, Jukka Holmberg, has so far been reluctant to provide any estimates on how the amendment will be reflected in the net result of commercial media (Haapalainen, 2022). The chairman of the Federation, Veli-Pekka Kangaskorpi, estimated earlier that restricting Yle could result in a 10–15% increase in the number of newspaper subscriptions (Kauppinen, 2020).

A year after the reform came into effect, Yle's online news offering has hardly changed at all, apart from the fact that more news stories include moving images and sound. New challenges to Yle's operations have not been initiated by commercial competitors but by political actors: namely, while the amendment was passed under a left-centrist government, the new right-wing government (2023–) has set up a parliamentary committee to further rethink, and possibly restrict, Yle's remit and funding.

The broader issue: Dynamics of power in PSM policymaking

In the case of Yle's text-based services, it is easy to note several concerns related to the public policy debate over the proposal, including the opaque origins of the proposal, the role of lobbying and media campaigns, and the lack of public debate over alternative policy solutions. Because of the lack of transparency, it is also difficult to judge whether the case implies a shift in the Commission's approach to PSM and what other factors may explain the outcome.

Aside from the legal perspective, the recurring and highly politicised debates over the definition and remit of PSM can also be viewed from the perspective of definitional and discursive power in media policy. From this perspective, the focus falls not only on regulatory solutions but also on the problem definitions and criteria used to assess the role of PSM in society. Discursive approaches to policy analysis highlight how policy problems not only reflect objective realities, but policy debates always also enact the 'problems' they purport to address (for example, Bacchi, 2009; Fischer, 2003).

Different problem representations, in turn, reflect underlying policy presuppositions and political rationalities that shape policy considerations and guide policy objectives and alternatives.

In the PSM policy literature, it has been noted that campaigns against PSM organisations usually begin with a demand for a clear definition, which can then serve as a straitjacket that prevents the evolution of public service organisations in the new media environment (see also Freedman, 2008, p. 156; Jakubowicz, 2004, p. 20). In this case, framing text-based PSM content as a market distortion problem implies a political rationality where public media is assigned a limited and potentially declining role as an exception to 'natural' market conditions. The discursive approaches to policy analysis often emphasise how the same policy problems can look different depending on the terminology and frameworks we use to define them. Although often presented as neutral and technocratic, the naturalisation of market frameworks (instead of other, more intangible concepts associated with cultural, social, or democratic values) for evaluating PSM clearly has implications on the type of arguments, actors, and arenas prioritised in the policy process (see, for example, Karppinen & Moe, 2014). In this sense, the case clearly illustrates a clash between neoliberal and broader social and cultural logics in media policy (for example, Freedman, 2008).

Also, framing the issue as a competition problem, instead of cultural or media policy, has the added consequence of reducing it to an administrative matter of following the EU rules where national policymakers have no alternatives. Such a frame also crowds out additional considerations, such as limits to freedom of expression nationally and limitations to the PSM mandate of universal reach, especially for those who greatly rely on Yle's free text-based news – whether due to economic concerns or to disabilities that necessitate news in textual form. These alternative arguments were repeatedly expressed in the public comments on the proposal to limit Yle's services by individuals and non-governmental advocacy organisations.

In this way, the framing of the issues produces political effects since it guides the relevant criteria and arguments that stakeholders can raise and limits the range of possible alternatives open to them. The perspective of definitional

power also raises interesting questions about communication as an important power resource in media policymaking and regulation: several studies demonstrate that, for example, press coverage often tends to be critical of PSM and uncritical of issues, such as media concentration (for a review, see Ali & Puppis, 2018).

Conclusion

The case of Yle points to numerous challenges in the legal and policy processes regarding PSM. In light of the EU competition law and the Amsterdam Protocol, the Commission is likely going beyond its mandate to check for 'manifest errors' when engaging with state aid investigations in public service broadcasting. While it is clear that there are online services that would go beyond the scope of public service – like the manifest errors listed in the 2009 Communication, such as gambling, e-commerce, or the provision of advertising – it is similarly clear that providing news online could not be seen as a manifest error.

At the national level, the case points to the shift to a more opaque communication policy decision-making, observed by Neuvonen and Karppinen (2016) with earlier processes. The case reflects a broader danger of curbing the scope of PSM through the back door by employing inaccessible and technocratic processes instead of open public debate. It may also indicate a more fundamental transition in Finland from the so-called media welfare state to the competition state (Ala-Fossi, 2020).

The situation also highlights how an outdated sectoral approach to regulation still looms large and is used to define policy and to weaken Yle's role. Most media regulation is a national affair, even in EU member states, and public broadcasting regulation is especially so. National media regulation tends to be based on the technology of distribution (the medium), content, or function. Most media regulation is focused on the technology of distribution, regulating the printed newspaper, broadcasting, and the internet separately (Mac Síthigh, 2018). The Finnish amendment to the Act on Yleisradio Oy is a

blast from the past because it is based on the traditional division of print, broadcasting, and the internet. The main problem is technological media convergence, which means that various forms of media are distributed via the same technological infrastructure. Therefore, the assumptions in the amended Act on Yleisradio Oy represent an outdated understanding of the media. From a regulatory point of view, the case of Yle is thus representative of problems that arise from regulating print and broadcasting differently. Similarly, it can be argued that the Amsterdam Protocol itself needs an update reflecting how public service content is distributed today.

The case of Yle is not unique in terms of the recent public uproar when attempts to limit its operations become significant in some way.[15] But neither is the case an isolated one regarding challenges to PSM based on market distortion arguments. Yet, while complaints mount, media economic research has not found evidence of significant market distortion impacts (Sehl et al., 2020). Furthermore, recent economic arguments about PSM note that in the era of global platforms, not only do the organisations support freedom of expression and other democratic principles, but they boost innovation in the national media industry (Mazzucato et al., 2020) and at a macro level also mitigate industry risk in national supplier and labour capacity and thus stimulate economic growth (Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2021).

Finally, the case highlights the special feature of *definitional power* in media policy. Media organisations are not only involved in media policy as stakeholders but also control the avenues of public communication on the issue. Still, the public uproar after the Sanoma complaint in 2021 and the resulting wide and popular support for the citizens' initiative defending public service provision online means that the definitional power has shifted, at least partly. The parliament had to discuss the counterproposal for the amendment and deal with it according to the rules. However, this case also proves that the right to be heard and express your opinion does not guarantee that you will always be listened to. Even if the amendment did not change much in practice regarding Yle's news output, the process itself gained attention and did not seem to take into account the views put forth by the citizens' initiative. Similarly, the more recent parliamentary process to question Yle's remit and

funding seems not to take the majority of Finns' sentiments about PSM into account. Yle is continuously valued as Finland's most trusted news media in opinion polls, and according to a nineteen-country comparative study (Nielsen & Newman, 2023) Yle was not only the most trusted PSM organisation, but audiences in Finland valued the importance of PSM to society more highly than any other country.

A somewhat different policy discourse can be witnessed in the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) which seeks to ensure the role of PSM as independent media outlets that support European democracy (European Commission, 2022a). Similarly, the Rule of Law Report of 2022 (European Commission, 2022b) included, for the first time, a section on PSM that states the importance of their existence as independent parts of the media sector. It remains to be seen if and how the EU, the Directorate-General for Competition, and national policymakers will respond differently to economically and technologically outdated complaints in the future. Also, the Think Tank for Tech and Democracy of the Nordic Council of Ministers has noted the central role of PSM in the national media system and urges the Nordics to allow and support PSM innovations in digital realms as a counterforce to global platforms (Nordic Council, 2023).

To be fair, the amendment has had little impact on Yle's journalism in practice, and its news site is still among the top online news sources in the country (for example, Reunanen, 2023). The effect has more to do with how national policies position the role of PSM and the importance of PSM journalism in Finnish society. This is replicated in the work of the parliamentary committee (ongoing in 2024) to assess Yle's remit and funding,[16] and it is expected that the purpose is to limit Yle's functions further.

A significant focus in the debates will most likely be on Yle's journalism, given the dissatisfaction of the commercial competitors in the perceived competitive advantage in the very real economically challenging situation. In addition, political pressure against Yle has intensified: at the beginning of 2024, the leader of the populist right-wing Finns Party – who is also the Speaker of the parliament – demanded that Yle's funding be cut by 25%, partly because of its 'left-leaning, biased contents' (Waris, 2024). This kind of populist attack

against PSM is by no means unique to Finland (Sehl et al., 2022) but adds to the discursive struggles over national PSM policies, all the while the EU seeks to support the role of PSM through EMFA (for example, European Commission, 2023). Indeed, in these times of European 'polycrisis' (for example, Zeitlin et al., 2019), including 'infodemic' (WHO, n.d.) and 'information warfare' made powerful with the rise of artificial intelligence and other 'computational propaganda' (for example, Woolley & Howard, 2018), the attempts and actions to limit digital public service journalism seem ill-advised, especially in countries with a strong and trusted PSM, like Finland.

Note

1. Treaty of Amsterdam amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related acts; Protocols annexed to the Treaty establishing the European Community; Protocol on the system of public broadcasting in the Member States, OJ 97/C 340/01, 10 November 1997, p. 109.
2. See Judgments of 19 May 1993, *Corbeau*, C-320/91, EU:C:1993:198, paragraphs 14 and 16; of 23 October 1997, *Commission* v *France*, C-159/94, EU:C:1997:501, paragraphs 59, 95 and 96; and of 15 November 2007, *International Mail Spain*, C-162/06, EU:C:2007:681, paragraphs 34 and 35.
3. Décret no. 2009-1263 du 19 octobre 2009 portant approbation des statuts de la société nationale de programme France Télévisions. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000021180238/2020-09-28/
4. Décret no. 2017-1043 du 9 mai 2017 portant approbation des statuts de la société nationale de programme Radio France. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000034679087
5. Contratto Nazionale di servizio tra il ministero dello sviluppo economico e la RAI-Radiotelevisione Italiana https://www.rai.it/dl/doc/1607970429668_Contratto%20di%20servizio%202018-2022.pdf

6. *Rundfunkstaatsvertrag*, § 11d (7). https://www.die-medienanstalten.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Rechtsgrundlagen/Gesetze_Staatsvertraege/RStV_22_nichtamtliche_Fassung_medienanstalten_final_web.pdf
7. *ORF-Gesetz*, § 4e (2a). https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10000785
8. Act on Yleisradio Oy (1380/1993), 7§, https://finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/1993/19931380 (original text, author's translation from Finnish).
9. Amendment of Act on Yleisradio Oy (492/2002), 7§, https://finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2002/20020492
10. Act on Yleisradio Oy, (1380/1993), 7§ https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/1993/en19931380.pdf (amended text, official translation from Finnish).
11. Proposal for an Amendment of Act on Yleisradio Oy (HE 250/2020 vp) https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/HallituksenEsitys/Sivut/HE_250+2020.aspx
12. *Tieto on meidän* [Information belongs to us], see https://www.kansalaisaloite.fi/fi/aloite/8023
13. See 'Sanoman Yle-kantelu jäi ajastaan jälkeen', https://www.hs.fi/paakirjoitukset/art-2000008008985.html
14. The final text of the amendment (159/2022) https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2022/20220159 and the Act on Yleisradio Oy in its present form https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1993/19931380
15. For example, on the case of No Billag in Switzerland, Schweitzer (2020).
16. 'Parliamentary working group to assess YLE's duties and funding'. Finnish government. https://valtioneuvosto.fi/sv/-/1410829/parlamentarisk-arbetsgrupp-ska-bedoma-rundradions-uppgift-och-finansiering?languageId=en_US

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Chapter 9

Big Tech Platforms and News and Information Provision in Africa: An Assessment of Policy and Regulatory Challenges for Public Broadcasters

Kobina Ano Bedu-Addo

Summary

Africa has undoubtedly been impacted by technological convergence in the communications sector, as the infrastructure for telecommunications, broadcasting, and computing have merged to transform the media environment on the continent. The use of broadband internet services has expanded, amid the proliferation and use of handheld mobile devices to access news, information, movies, sport, and other entertainment content via the platforms of big tech companies that have become powerful players in the media sector. As these developments disrupt the traditional model of journalism, they also add to the challenges confronting many public broadcasting organisations in Africa, already suffering from the persistent lack of policy and regulatory reforms to properly position them as true public broadcasters within the increasingly commercialised and digital media sector on the continent. Drawing on public interest values, this chapter examines a variety of policy documents and legal texts from four African countries: Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana. The analysis is aimed at assessing the policy and regulatory instruments for news and informational content offered by the respective public broadcasters on digital platforms. The analysis questions the adequacy of such policy regimes for regulating news and informational content on online and digital platforms and argues for reforms that take policy inspiration from some high-income Western contexts, to strengthen the public service news and informational output of public broadcasters on the online and digital media platform environment.

Introduction

This chapter considers news and information offerings by public service broadcast media in sub-Saharan Africa in the context of the emergence of big tech and their platform power in the media sector. It examines the status of public broadcasting organisations in Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana to assess whether the regulatory structure and instruments for their respective media sectors are adequate for news and information provision on online digital platforms. The analysis is not comparative; rather, the discussion highlights the policy and regulatory weaknesses and constraints that hinder the effective interventions that can strengthen the position of African public broadcast offerings on digital media platforms.

Africa has undoubtedly been impacted by technological convergence in the broadcasting, telecommunications, and computing sectors, with widespread broadband communication infrastructure and the proliferation and use of handheld mobile devices. This growing use of communication devices also reflects in the growth in internet access, despite the overall lag of the continent compared to other parts of the world (Kimumwe et al., 2022, p. 5). This impact has occurred amid the increasing presence of big tech companies on the continent. According to Birch and Bronson (2022) 'big tech' has usually referred to Apple, Amazon, Microsoft, Google/Alphabet, and Facebook/Meta, seen as the defining institutions of our day, dominating our political economies, societies, and polities as big oil or big banks did in their time (Birch & Bronson, 2022, p. 1). Thus, Meta and Alphabet have set up shop in Kenya, a country with close to 70%

mobile penetration, hosting Google's Africa headquarters. Likewise, Google's artificial intelligence lab is hosted in Ghana, and until recently X, formerly Twitter, had its African regional office also in Ghana. Ethiopia hosts Alibaba's trade platform, while Microsoft has a data centre in Nigeria. Big tech's African presence has undoubtedly contributed to an expansion in the continent's digital infrastructure, as the distribution of news, information, movies, sport, and other entertainment content via online digital media platforms continues to see growth on the continent. However, one scholar has argued that such moves are primarily to satisfy big tech's strategic interests in information technology on the continent and has characterised it as big tech's 'scramble for Africa' (Mano, 2023, p. 22). The debate about big tech has also been analysed as to whether to categorise big tech companies as media or tech companies (Napoli and Caplan, 2017; Winseck, 2019). In the media sector, as more and more people access news and information content from digital platforms, it has attracted more and more advertising to those platforms. Big tech companies have positioned themselves as the intermediaries in this content distribution chain and, thus, have shifted the balance of power in their favour and upended the traditional market power enjoyed by legacy media systems, which rested on audiences and advertisers. Advertising revenue that once went directly to publishers and was used to support journalism now flows to big tech companies. Big tech companies are thus accused of benefiting from news content without paying for it, with increasing calls for the redistribution of some of the tech industry profits to the news industry (Radsch, 2022, pp. 1–7). In this context, Barata (2016) has observed how these developments pose a challenge to national regulators as audiovisual content is provided through actors that operate beyond state borders (Barata, 2016, p. 13).

As these developments upset the traditional market power of legacy media, in Africa especially they also exacerbate the difficulties encountered by public broadcast media organisations. African public service broadcasters (PSBs) have had a problematic post-independence history, from being used as instruments for 'nation-building' and government propaganda, to unsuccessful efforts to reform them into true public broadcasters following the democratic wave and its attendant media liberalisation that hit the continent in the early 1990s (Bussiek, 2016). With such a difficult situation they have had to confront over the years, African public broadcasters now have to deal with the complexities of the digital media platform environment. Furthermore, these developments also challenge the regulatory systems in place for the media sector, since many have not seen reform to accommodate the complexities introduced by technological convergence, as the Ghanaian experience illustrates (Bedu-Addo, 2022a). Against the backdrop of weak public broadcast media operations in commercialised media markets, there arises the question about the adequacy of extant regulatory systems in Africa for the digital platform era.

The discussion in this chapter is focused on how the regulatory structures and policies for the media and communication sectors in Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana operate to facilitate the provision of news and information in online and digital platforms by the respective public service broadcasting (PSB) organisations. In particular, the chapter examines the adequacy of such extant policy within the context of digital platform power by big tech companies on the continent. The analysis illustrates the variety and complexity of media regulatory structures and instruments in Africa and demonstrates how, in some cases, regulatory instruments retain colonial-era values of repression and control, while failing to address pertinent questions that media and communication regulation ought to address: the social and cultural goals in policy needed to promote public information and news to the widest possible audience on digital platforms. In that sense, the analysis questions the adequacy of regulatory regimes for the digital space on the continent and argues for policy reforms not just to invigorate public service news and information on digital platforms but also regulatory reforms to accommodate the complexities of the digital platform era in media.

Following this introduction, the next section discusses the basis for the selection of countries as well as the framework and data sources. In the third section, the global context of convergence and digitalisation and how this has developed into a digital platform environment in media is considered, within the context of big tech's platform power and the challenges faced by publicly funded media. This discussion is extended and focused on the African situation in the fourth section, while the fifth section analyses policy and regulatory documents from the four countries to assess their adequacy for the media platform environment. The sixth section provides a discussion of the implications of the data within the chapter's framework, and the conclusion ends the chapter highlighting the themes in the overall discussion.

Method

The four anglophone countries in Africa were selected on the basis of their relative democratic stability since the 1990s. They have also been selected based on reforms in their respective media sectors, which enables a clear path to analyse their policy and regulatory systems over the same period. In addition to this, the countries have been drawn from particular regions on the continent. While this may not be representative, it nonetheless gives an indication of the common challenges and differences in regulating the digital platform environment.

The examination in this chapter is based on data from a variety of documents such as policy statements, programme codes, and legal texts, as well as news reports on linear and online media (Bowen, 2009; Karppinen & Moe, 2012; 2019; Scott, 1990) These have then been analysed within a broad public interest framework (Feintuck, 1999; 2009; Lunt & Livingstone, 2012; McQuail, 1992).

As McQuail (1992) has argued, the public interest is sometimes used or seen as an ideological device to cloak unjustified regulatory ambitions by governments, or as a weapon to assault more fundamental liberties of expression (McQuail, 1992, p. 3). Feintuck (2009; see also 1999) has also observed that the public interest has too often meant nothing or something, but is generally inadequately specified, with the consequence of it being vulnerable to capture or overturning by organised interest groups generally (Feintuck, 2009, p. 64). Thus, in some African countries, for example, various justifications have been provided for internet shutdowns 'in the public interest', such as in Cameroon and Ethiopia (see Walton et al., 2019). As it relates to media and communication regulation, such justifications provide some evidence to support the dominant framing of media regulation discourse in Africa as a fight to secure press freedom. This theme is developed further in later sections in the chapter. Given the condition of PSB organisations on the continent, especially concerning their mandate to provide news and current affairs in a commercial and digital platform media environment, a public interest framework for this examination is justified. Within this context, it is also important to understand the inadequacies of extant media regulatory structures and regimes in the context of digitalisation and platform media to argue for adequate policy and effective media regulatory systems for the digital media environment.

Big tech and platform power's transformation of news and information provision in the digital environment

The emergence and impact of big tech companies in news and information provision on digital platforms has been discussed above. As observed by Birch and Bronson (2022) their impact has also led to a surge in policy and legislative measures to curb their social and market power. This outcome reflects Picard (2020) when he suggests that advances in communication technologies have resulted in more actors becoming involved in communication policy (Picard, 2020, p. 23). Hence, according to Michalis (2022) communication policy making is a contested endeavour, as various actors seek to address various issues simultaneously on the basis of limited knowledge with unintended consequences (Michalis, 2022, p. 69). Part of the contestation emanates from the need for regulatory intervention to serve both market and public interest goals (van Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2003) through policy and regulation. Regulation points to specific institutional mechanisms for realising policy aims (Freedman, 2008, p. 13). As a result of this, Napoli (2001) has suggested that there is a constant tension between the economic and socio-cultural objectives of the regulatory endeavour in the media sector (Napoli, 2001, p. 17). In this context, Tambini (2001) has argued what makes media regulation contentious owes to the media's cultural and democratic significance in democratic societies (Tambini, 2001, p. 115).

Within the context of global convergence and digitalisation, scholars have addressed the policy issues about convergence and digitalisation from various perspectives in the media sector (Jedrzejewski, 2013) and in particular, how it has impacted regulation from specific contexts, such as in Finland (Nieminen, 2013) and the United Kingdom (Collins, 1998). For example, following convergence in media, the United Kingdom merged its sector-specific regulators in the media and communication sector to form the Office of Communications, Ofcom (Hills and Michalis, 1997; Smith, 2006; see also Lunt and Livingstone, 2012).

These examples illustrate historic outcomes of contentious policymaking and regulatory measures for the media and communication sector, as can still be seen in the contemporary situation concerning policy responses to big tech power in news and information provision in the European Union (Audiovisual Media Services Directive [AVMSD] 2018[1] and Digital Services Act 2022[2]), Australia (News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code 2021),[3] and Canada (Online News Act 2022),[4] targeted in particular at Google and Facebook. This chapter discusses these issues from an African perspective and based on an assessment of the capability of extant policy and regulatory frameworks particularly as they affect public broadcasting news and information content for the digital platform environment.

As noted above, the last two decades have witnessed an increasingly digital media environment characterised by advances in communication technologies and improved connectivity, as well as cheaper digital devices. In Western contexts, there is evidence to suggest that the digitalisation of the media environment has resulted in high levels of internet use as audience choices are driven by these technological developments and the availability of devices to access news and other media content 'beyond the box' (Nielsen et al., 2016, p. 5). The current digital environment supplements audience choices in broadcast and print news, as time spent using digital media in high income countries has seen growth, with audiences increasingly consuming news through search engines, social media, aggregators, and the like (Nielsen and Sambrook, 2016, p. 8–12).

According to Radsch (2022) as more people get their news online, journalism has become more dispersed and untethered from the institutions that produce it, the advertisers that fund it, and the public that needs it (Radsch, 2022, p. 1). Radsch (2022) has further observed that this new environment in the media sector has challenged the business models that for many years had underwritten commercial news journalism, just as it has challenged the ability of PSBs to deliver on their mandate, as well as their long-term legitimacy (Radsch, 2022, p. 5). The provision of news and informational content via digital platforms has come at a time when many PSB organisations in Europe, especially, have had to confront technological challenges, changing market dynamics, and intensified competition for audiences against commercial rivals, as well as challenges to their mandate by political and commercial opponents who have called for a narrow role and remit for PSM (Nielsen et al., 2016, p. 28). The characteristics of PSB as offered by Syvertsen (2003) and Findahl (1999) (see also European Broadcasting Union [EBU], 2012), encompassing obligations of universality and programming that appeals to both majority and special interest groups, have been put under attack. In this context, Barnett (2007) has argued that due to the widespread acceptance of liberal market theory, public broadcasters find themselves in an ambiguous position between the state and the market. As he put it:

> as the media environment becomes more fragmented and more competitive, and as convergent technologies blur the lines between broadcasting and other media platforms, the arguments against a publicly subsidised presence become more vocal and therefore, make a single publicly funded institution more difficult to sustain.
>
> (Barnett, 2007, p. 87)

The current digital media platform environment clearly demonstrates the effect of the combined technological transformations and ideological shifts that continue to affect the legitimacy and ability of PSBs to deliver on their mission, as the models underpinning both publicly funded and commercial news media have been disrupted (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016).

As is evident from the discussion above, the emergence of big tech companies as players in the media sector has been a powerful factor contributing to the disruption of decades old journalistic models (Radsch, 2022). More and more people access news and information content from other producers via digital platforms and this attracts more and more advertising and, thus, has positioned big tech companies and their platforms as powerful intermediaries in media content provision. With such market power in the media sector, Nielsen and Sambrook (2016) have argued that big tech companies have thrown down a challenge to traditional news media to adapt their formats and production processes to new platforms and patterns of consumption made possible by the cheap availability of digital devices, improved connectivity, and the increased supply of digital media content, products, and services (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016, p. 18). The involvement of big tech companies in the distribution of news and other informational media content has thus shifted the balance of power in their favour, creating in the process an uneven playing field for traditional media

organisations. For public broadcasting organisations, this situation calls for policy and regulatory measures, not just to assure their legitimacy in the digital platform era but to also assure the wider reach of their public value programming in the online digital environment.

This chapter argues that from an African perspective, policy responses that can serve as a yardstick to model a continental response should be taken from the EU, Australian, and Canadian experience noted earlier. The objective is not to analyse the adequacy or otherwise of those policy measures for regulating news and information on digital platforms. A number of recent works examine the policy frameworks in that regard, such as Bossio et al. (2022), Dwyer et al. (2023), Solomun et al. (2021), and Sullivan & Campbell (2023). Rather, the chapter highlights these examples to illustrate an active and responsive policy and regulatory context in the face of platform power in news and information distribution in those jurisdictions compared to the African situation. The next section extends the discussion to consider the African context and the challenges the continent confronts in regulating news and information on digital platforms.

Big tech's digital platform environment and sub-Saharan Africa's peculiar PSB challenge

As Berger (2012) has noted, discussing Africa comes with conceptual difficulties, given the continent's fifty-four countries, with diverse linguistic, cultural, and political differences. As a result, finding commonalities among such complexity can be challenging. The chapter adopts Berger's suggestion for a modest quest that seeks to understand the extent to which varied conditions in sub-Saharan Africa can sustain theoretical propositions capable of generalisations that can apply within some contexts (Berger, 2012, p. 1–2). To that extent, this section considers the implications of digital platforms as news and information distributors in Africa, particularly for the continent's PSBs and the policy and regulatory response, following technological convergence and digitalisation in the media sector.

In terms of news provision, Ogola (2015) has observed that African news organisations adapted to the internet era with an online presence, as some print, radio, and television media began to offer their content as multimedia packages for their growing online audience (Ogola, 2015, p. 99). As later sections will show, with the emergence of the digital platform environment, African media have extended their reach by providing news and informational content on platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, apart from the regular provision from their websites. And just as the power of big tech and digital platforms has disrupted the traditional model of journalism in high-income Western nations, African media have also had to deal with these challenges, especially with the youthful population deserting traditional media for online and digital media content.

These transformations add to the mounting challenges that have confronted many public broadcasting organisations in Africa since the early 1990s.

One explanation for the challenge faced by PSBs in Africa is the disjuncture between its conceptualisation and practice on the continent. For Raboy (1996), public broadcasting in sub-Saharan Africa is a distant ideal and not a working reality. Similarly, Banda (2006) observed that publicly funded broadcast media in most of sub-Saharan Africa rather 'answers to state or government broadcasting' (Banda, 2006, p. 2). In policy documents and legal texts, copious references are made to the fundamental core values that enshrine public broadcasting – universality of programming appeal, professionalism and independence from political control – while the actual practice has not lived up to those ideals, but rather has been more closely associated with government propaganda efforts, despite the other functions to help curb low literacy, nation building, and development (Alhassan, 2005, p. 211). Another explanation for the difficult situation of African PSBs is the issue of policy confusion, where it exists, or its absence altogether. In Ghana, for example, clear and consistent policy to address the country's public broadcaster, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), in a liberalised media market has been lacking since the 1990s (Bedu-Addo, 2022a).

The optimism of the early 1990s in Africa as many countries on the continent embraced democracy also resulted in the recognition of the media's place in democratisation, and saw the changes as a welcome climate in which an independent and pluralistic press could emerge (Declaration of Windhoek 1991; Panos Institute West Africa, 2011). A decade after this, a group of civil society actors such as the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters

(AMARC), Article 19, and Southern African Communications for Development (SACOD) gathered on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day in 2001, and proposed the African Charter on Broadcasting. Inspired by the Windhoek Declaration, the provisions in the Charter on Broadcasting among others made the specific call to ensure that:

> All state and government-controlled broadcasters should be transformed into public service broadcasters, that are accountable to all strata of the people as represented by an independent board, and that serve the overall public interest, avoiding one-sided reporting and programming in regard to religion, political belief, culture, race and gender.
>
> (African Charter on Broadcasting, 2001, p. 2)

However, the fortunes of African PSBs have not improved as envisaged many years after this call and despite the deepening of democratic values on the continent (Bussiek, 2016). Thus, two decades after the charter's publication, Ghana's GBC is still firmly under state control, albeit indirect, similar to the Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC) and Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). In South Africa, despite a relatively developed policy context for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), its public broadcaster, it has been mired in political and financial controversies (Davis, 2014). These events demonstrate the continuing difficulties in weaning off public broadcasters totally from state control and suggests how far away the practice of PSB in Africa is from its ideal after many efforts. African PSBs have operated in a complex media environment not only due to commercialisation and increased competition brought about by liberalisation and technological convergence, but also fundamental concerns about policy conceptualisation of the model. Thus, as Fourie (2013) has argued, these have not only resulted in questioning the legitimacy of PSBs as not deserving an exclusive mandate, regulatory protections, and financial advantages, but has also weakened their justification as the sole provider of quality universal programming with a diverse appeal (Fourie, 2013, pp. 8–15).

In the context of regulating news and information on digital platforms controlled by big tech companies, another hindrance to an effective policy and regulatory response is the state and capacity of regulatory systems on the continent. According to Diop (2023), Africa presents a variety of regulatory models for its media and communication sector that largely follows the linguistic and political legacy of colonialism (Diop, 2023, p. 179). Thus, de la Brosse & Frère (2012) have observed that regulation of the media in French-speaking Africa has generally been conducted either directly or indirectly by a ministry of communication or information (de la Brosse & Frère, 2012, p. 75), while anglophone Africa has followed a British or American model as demonstrated in the countries under examination in this chapter. Moreover, in many African contexts, regulatory systems have not been adequately transformed to be effective in a converged digital media market to tackle the complexities of a platform media space. As Nwankwo (2019) has put it:

> with a growing population of Internet users [. . .] [Africa] has fewer laws or no laws guiding digital media. This leaves the continent's population and economies unprotected and at the mercy of big tech from Silicon Valley.
>
> (Nwankwo, 2019, para. 11; see also Ilori, 2021)

This problem is reinforced by how media regulation is understood, framed, and implemented in the media sector on the continent. Discourse on media regulation in Africa is largely framed as a battle to secure or maintain media freedoms (Conroy-Krutz, 2020; Kimumwe et al., 2022; Ndlovu, 2023; Aduku, 2018) as much focus is given to issues related to draconian legislation that impedes free expression and punitive measures against independent media, such as in Cameroon (Ngangum, 2019) and Uganda.

With such dominant framing, media regulation is cast into a narrow legalistic discourse, where regulatory adequacy is measured in terms of the presence of particular legislative provisions that do not interfere in the work of the media and journalists. The analyses that inform such framing have been built upon the pre-independence media experiences of the newspaper press as crusading instruments in the agitation for independence during the colonial era in Africa (Mano, 2010) from where the origins of draconian media legislation can be traced. This is understandable, given the continent's difficult history of media repression under different types of governments (de la Brosse and Frère, 2012; Ngangum, 2019; Sampaio-Dias et al., 2019). Nonetheless, the chapter argues that for the more democratically stable countries on

the continent, such as the countries in the sample examined, more effort can be spent on the important socio-cultural policy goals and values that can shape the media's development to serve the public interest. More importantly, the condition of their respective PSBs, and policy that secures their further entrenchment in the digital media landscape should be prioritised. However, as the dominant focus continues to be on press freedom, such important goals tend to be diminished or not addressed at all in policy and regulatory instruments. The PSBs examined in this chapter operate within different policy and regulatory contexts with varying degrees of policy coherence that define their function and guide their operations in their respective media environments. The section below demonstrates that, in all cases, it is not clear what the policy objectives are for ensuring the widest availability of news and informational output by PSBs on digital platforms.

Platforms and news and information regulation: Institutions, regulators, and policy instruments

This chapter set out to examine the regulatory structures and instruments for the media in four African countries: Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana. By structure is meant the establishing statute of the regulator and its mandate, while instruments refer to the policies, legal and otherwise, that guide the operations of the regulator (see Irion and Ledger, 2013; Hills, 2003). As noted above, the countries were selected on the basis of their democratic stability and continental location, as well as their media and regulatory maturity. The discussion so far has considered the challenging situation for the continent's PSBs and regulatory institutions long before the emergence of the powerful influence of big tech platforms in news and information distribution. The particular aim of the analysis in this section is to assess the adequacy of extant regulatory instruments for news and information output on digital platforms in the public interest. In line with this, the establishing legislation and media and communication policies governing the sector in the countries under examination are presented. The section begins with evidence of the legislative set-up and remits of public service organisations in the countries under consideration.

Table 9.1, above shows the legislative statutes, funding, and online or digital operations of the selected PSBs. In all cases, there is a reliance on state funding supplemented by advertising. This highlights the continued control, either directly or indirectly, by their respective governments. Thus, the Tanzanian Broadcasting Corporation is 100% government-owned, with a legislative requirement to fashion a charter between itself and the country's Ministry of Finance, under which it operates (Media Council of Tanzania, 2019; Bazira, et al, 2021). Similarly, the GBC in Ghana, despite the constitutional creation of the media regulator, the National Media Commission (NMC),[5] is still susceptible to government control through presidential appointments to its board (Bedu-Addo, 2022a). Furthermore, with varying degrees of sophistication in programme packaging online, these public broadcasters have established their digital presence with news and information and other content on digital platforms. Ghana's GBC is present on Facebook as GTV LIVE, regularly streaming programmes. Similarly Kenya's KBC streams some of its programming online or makes it available via downloadable applications, while Tanzania's TBC delivers programmes on YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. South Africa's SABC has SABC+, offering a programming menu that includes news and current affairs to digital audiences. Many such programmes are extensions of routine programmes, and a clearer picture of their impact will emerge with the benefit of current audience studies.

Table 9.1 Public broadcasters and online/digital presence

Country	South Africa	Tanzania	Kenya	Ghana

Country	South Africa	Tanzania	Kenya	Ghana
Public broadcaster	South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)	Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC)	Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC)	Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC)
Established	Broadcasting Act 1999[6] (amended 2002)[7]	Public Corporation Act 1992;[8] TBC (Establishment) Order, 2007	Kenya Broadcasting Corporation Act, Rev. 2012[9]	Ghana Broadcasting Corporation Instrument 1965, L.I 430; Ghana Broadcasting Corporation Decree 1968 NLCD 226[10]
Status	State funding/advertising	State funding/advertising	State funding/advertising/investments	State funding/advertising
Online/digital presence	SABC+	YouTube, FaceBook, Instagram	KBC programmes streamed online or accessible via apps	GTV LIVE

Source: Document analysis 2023

From an African perspective, what is not in doubt is how beneficial such programmes on digital platforms are, at least, to diasporan communities, distanced from the homeland, who rely on these to stay connected. What is in doubt, however, is the long term capacity of PSBs to sustain their presence on online digital platforms with specially packaged news and information content in the competitive online digital media environment, without the necessary policy clarity and regulatory certainty in the sector. A coherent policy designed to achieve specified public interest goals in the digital environment would make such interventions better targeted and consistent, with news and current affairs provision better structured and packaged, rather than simply offering a repetition of material delivered on linear channels.

As Table 9.2 shows, the media regulatory institutions in the countries under examination differ in structure. Even though there have been regulatory reforms in some cases as a result of technological convergence, the plethora of policy and regulatory instruments designed for the media and communication sector, as seen in Table 9.3, makes difficult the tasks of regulating the media sectors generally, and in the case of discerning the aspects of policy that are relevant for the online digital environment, complicated.

Table 9.2 shows a mix of regulatory structures for the media and communication sector in the countries under examination. For example, similar to the UK experience cited earlier, South Africa's Independent Communications

Authority of South Africa (ICASA) is a merger between the erstwhile Independent Broadcasting Authority and the South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, established to meet the challenges of the converged communications sector in the year 2000 (Duncan & Glenn, 2010).[11] On the opposite side, Ghana has had a bifurcated media and communication regulation system, split between the National Media Commission (NMC) and the National Communications Authority (NCA)[12] since the early 1990s, without any merging due to the powerful influence of commercial and political interests in the country's media policy making arena (Bedu-Addo, 2022b). Tanzania revised its earlier Broadcasting Services Act 1993[13] to establish the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) as a converged regulator for the media and communications sector in 2003, with a mandate that covers broadcasting and communications.[14] In Kenya, however, although it followed a similar trajectory and established the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK) out of the previous Communications Commission of Kenya (Association of Media Women in Kenya, 2014)[15] with a mandate that covers broadcasting, multimedia, and telecommunications, as well as postal services, cybersecurity, and e-commerce, the country also has the Media Council of Kenya, a state-backed self-regulatory body for the media and journalists.[16]

Table 9.2 Media and communication regulators

Country	**South Africa**	**Tanzania**	**Kenya**		**Ghana**	
Regulator(s)	ICASA	TCRA	CAK	MCK	NMC	NCA
Established	Independent Communications Authority of South Africa Act 2000 (Amended 2014)[17]	Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority Act 2003[18] (repealed Tanzania Communications Act 1993)[19]	Kenya Information and Communications Act 1998[20]	Media Council Act 2013	National Media Commission Act (449) 1993[21] (amended Act (561), 1998)[22]	National Communi Authority (542) 1996 National Communi Authority (769) (ame 2008
Funding	Semi-independent	Semi-independent	Semi-independent	Statutory self-regulation	Independent	State-cont
Converged/Specific	Converged	Converged	Converged		Sector-specific	

Source: Document analysis 2023

Clearly, the merging of erstwhile sector specific regulators in the examples above were done in response to the convergence phenomenon. However, the question remains, whether the regulatory frameworks that these institutions utilise for their respective media sectors, presented in Table 9.3, are adequate as instruments for regulating news and information by PSBs in the digital platform environment. As argued earlier, across sub-Saharan Africa, policymaking

and regulatory systems following media liberalisation in the early 1990s emphasised the freedom of the media to operate, rather than setting specific socio-cultural goals in policy for regulators to develop the space. With few exceptions, South Africa being a good example, this persists, and even in the relatively democratic countries selected for examination in this chapter, such as in Ghana and Kenya, examples can be found. In Ghana's case, the vacuum left has been occupied by commercial broadcast media interests who have challenged efforts to introduce proper regulatory measures and thus have weakened the ability of regulators to effectively shape the development of the sector in the public interest (Bedu-Addo, 2022a)

Table 9.3 Country legislative and policy instruments for media and communication regulation

Country	**South Africa**	**Tanzania**	**Kenya**	**Ghana**	
Regulator	ICASA	TCRA	CAK	NMC	NCA
Comms policy		National Information and Communications Technology policy 2003	National Information, Communications and Technology (ICT) Policy 2019[23]	National Media Policy 2000[24]	
Media-relevant policies	Promotion of Diversity and Competition on Digital Terrestrial Television Regulations 2014[25]		Programming Code for Broadcasting Services in Kenya 2019	Guidelines for Local Language Broadcasting 2000[26]	

Country	South Africa	Tanzania	Kenya	Ghana	
Regulatory statute	Electronic Communications Act 2005[27]	Electronic and Postal Communications (Online Content) Regulations 2020[28]	Kenya Information and Communications (Broadcasting) Regulations 2009;[29] Kenya Information and Communications (Fair Competition and Equality of Treatment) Regulations 2010;[30] Kenya Information and Communications (Universal Access and Service) Regulations 2010[31]		Electronic Communications Act 2008; Electronic Communications Tribunal Regulations L.I. 2235, 2016[32]
Other	Media Development and diversity agency Act 2002[33]		Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act 2018;[34] Constitution of Kenya 2010;[35] Kenya Communications Regulations 2001[36]	4th Republic 1992 Constitution of Ghana	Cybersecurity Act 2020;[37] Ghana National Cybersecurity Policy and Strategy 2015[38]

Source: Document analysis 2023

Table 9.3 shows the policy frameworks and instruments for regulating the media and communication sector. One challenge is the clearly dated nature of some of the policy frameworks for regulating the media sector, such as Ghana's. In that instance, it has proven inadequate, as market events in the liberalised media context have overtaken some of the provisions in the policy frameworks. The flaw has been that the policy frameworks were designed for an analogue era, and partly also as the result of the NMC's lack of legal backing for them, which overall has proven ineffective. Furthermore, there is no discernible policy framework or statute specifically designed for news and current affairs regulation in the country's online digital space. The closest piece of legislation that touches the space in terms of publications online is the country's Cybersecurity Act of 2020. However, this legislation was designed more to control cybercrimes, hate speech, and the circulation of obscene imagery rather than as a framework for news and current affairs per se. Another difficulty is the multiplicity of policies in some cases, such as the Kenyan example. Thus, as Otieno (2017) has observed, with over seven different pieces of policy frameworks and legislative statutes for the media sector, and three bodies with mandates that also cover the sector, media players become confused about which regulator and which framework regulates their content and practice (Otieno 2017, p. 556). From the policy frameworks above, the preponderance of clauses aligns more closely with rules and obligations of a restrictive nature, rather than mandating obligations. Thus, in the context of guidelines for news and information on digital platforms, this appears to be lacking. The implications of this are discussed in the next section.

Discussion

Given the structure of media regulation and the policy frameworks that are operative in the countries examined above, an important question to answer is whether available policy frameworks adequately address news and current affairs provision on digital and online platforms.

From the frameworks presented in Table 9.3, policy and regulatory instruments for the media space are either too many, making it problematic and confusing to determine what applies and who applies them, such as in Kenya, or too little, such as in Ghana. This creates a policy void that ultimately does not benefit the public interest in terms of clarity and certainty about news and information provision availability on digital and online spaces. However, in between these extreme examples lies some promise. Perhaps South Africa offers the most mature policy and regulatory framework conducive for the flourishing of news and information in digital online platforms. ICASA has been active in seeking to reshape existing policy and legislative frameworks that affect the media and communication industry. Parallel to this, in policy documents (South Africa Ministry of Communications, 2004; SABC, n.d) the SABC positions itself as a multiplatform and multichannel public content service provider and offers streaming and other digital content of its programming. The broadcaster has also sought to update its mandate in the context of the digital media environment (SABC, 2021). This offers an example of what other African PSBs can do to position their organisations for the digital platform environment. In doing so, clarity will be needed in some of the policy frameworks. The Programming Code for Broadcasting Services in Kenya 2019, for example, contains clauses that obligates the media to serve the public interest at all times, and also prescribes standards to which programmes must adhere (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2019). In the fourth edition, published in 2024 (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2024) the policy recognises the responsibility of broadcasters for their online and streaming services. Nonetheless, the code is limited to broadcasters and does not specify the particular obligations of the country's public broadcaster to provide news and current affairs for the digital and online media environment. What needs clarifying in policy and regulatory legislations is how this code applies to the digital and online space, given that many broadcast media in one form or another already extend their programming to reach audiences in that environment. This reflects Fouire's (2013) argument concerning mandates for public service broadcast media not being explicit, with definitions for what constitutes public service content vague at best or non-existent.

Against this background, and the fact of digitalisation that has brought powerful platform players into the media and communication sector, the widespread availability of news and information content produced by African PSBs on digital platforms has become pertinent. However, for that to happen will require the appropriate policy framework to guide its implementation. In that sense, Africa can look at Australia's News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code 2021, Canada's Online News Act 2021, and the European Union's AVMSD 2018 and Digital Services Act 2022 as examples of policy interventions to address the particular challenges posed by big tech intermediary platforms in news and information distribution. As argued earlier, this chapter does not seek to analyse the merits of those policy frameworks, nor does it propose them to be adopted. Rather, the argument is for the consideration of the approaches adopted by the countries to fashion an appropriate African response that can work for the continent's PSBs. This proposition comes with its challenges, as the continent has not developed the competence necessary to achieve such an outcome. Nonetheless, there are promising structures that can be utilised to achieve this. The African Union (AU) is the continental body set up in 2002 out of the erstwhile Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to promote continental unity and solidarity among African states (United States Agency for International Development, 2016). In recent times, fifty-four of the African nations have signed up to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement that seeks to leverage the continent's population and resources for intra-continental trade (AfCFTA, n.d.). A further demonstration of continental commitment to policy harmonisation can be seen in how communication regulators on the continent shared their experiences during the digital switchover policy implementation, with a call from the AU for a harmonised implementation (see African Union, 2010, 2009). Any policy effort to reinvigorate the continent's PSBs in the platform era cannot achieve much due to the power of big tech companies and the weakness of individual African nations. Therefore, a continental approach to securing the right policy framework for PSBs presence on digital platforms seems the appropriate option. The experience of Canada and Australia while fashioning their platform polices demonstrates how big tech uses its power to intimidate and bully. Such an approach does not foreclose individual African nations from developing frameworks of their own. Hence, while domestic frameworks may be developed to suit each particular context with its history and politics and culture, it could draw from the broad

continental policy framework agreed with big tech. Here, the European Union experience in continental communication policymaking with member state application that suits their context is instructive. Despite the many challenges confronting PSBs in Africa in a weak policy and regulatory environment, developments in the platform environment offer the opportunity for PSBs to establish a position to demonstrate the value and uniqueness of news and information programming, and in the competing climate of fake news and disinformation in digital online media spaces, such an achievement would restore some of the lost prestige and also be in the public interest.

Conclusion

The chapter has examined the regulatory systems and policies for the media and communication sectors in Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana. In particular, the discussion has focused on the emergence of digital platform power in news and information distribution in Africa and its implications for the availability of news and information from the continent's PSBs on digital platforms. While all the PSBs considered in this examination offer their programmes online and on digital platforms, the discussion observed how extant policy is not clear about establishing a stronger presence for news and information by PSBs. The analysis illustrates the variety and complexity of media regulatory structures and instruments on the continent, and demonstrates how, in some cases, regulatory instruments retain colonial-era values of repression and control, while failing to address the pertinent questions for regulation, such as the social and cultural goals that media policy needs to promote as a way to enable wide participation in the continent's fledgling democratic efforts and development. In this sense, the analysis questions the adequacy of such regulatory regimes for the digital space on the continent. The evidence from the examination shows a patchy picture in terms of regulatory adequacy; thus, while South Africa has modernised its regulatory structures and shaped policy for the converged digitalised era, Ghana has not. And even though Kenya has a converged communications regulator, it also has a multiplicity of policy and legislative instruments for regulating the sector that makes it confusing and burdensome. In some cases, regulatory legislation for the media space still has draconian statutes, such as cybersecurity laws that impact information circulation in online spaces. This exemplifies the dominant narrative of media regulation discourse on the continent as primarily about the fight to secure or protect press freedoms.

In the face of the expanding role of big tech companies as intermediaries in news and information circulation via their platforms, Africa lacks a continental policy framework as seen elsewhere that can help shape relevant regulatory instruments for the digital platform era. The chapter argues for a continental approach to policy formulation that benefits PSBs, while retaining capability for individual countries to implement frameworks suited to their contexts without being incongruent of continental guidelines. While the examination in the chapter has been based on four countries, the assessment has implications for the continent, which invites the opportunity to expand the scope to other countries on the continent to understand the bigger picture.

Note

1. Directive [EU] 2018/1808 (http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2018/1808/oj)
2. Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 (http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2022/2065/oj)
3. Australian Communications and Media Authority (https://www.acma.gov.au/news-media-bargaining-code)
4. Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/industr/info.htm)
5. Ghana National Media Commission Act 1993 (https://ir.parliament.gh/bitstream/handle/123456789/1928/NATIONAL%20MEDIA%20COMMISSION%20ACT%2C%201993%20%28ACT%20449%29.pdf)
6. https://www.gov.za/documents/broadcasting-act
7. https://www.gov.za/documents/broadcasting-amendment-act

8. https://www.parliament.go.tz/polis/uploads/bills/acts/1566551814-The%20Public%20Corporations%20Act,%201992.pdf

9. http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/KenyaBroadcastingCorporationAct_Cap221.pdf

10. https://lawsghana.com/pre_1992_legislation/NLC%20Decree/GHANA%20BROADCASTING%20CORPORATION%20ACT,%201968%20(NLCD%20226)/181

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12. Ghana National Communications Authority Act 1996 (http://www.nyansa-africa.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/8.-National-Communications-Authority-Act-1996-Act-542.pdf)

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17. Independent Communications Authority of South Africa Act 2014, Government of South Africa (https://www.icasa.org.za/uploads/files/ICASA2014-1.pdf)

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21. https://ir.parliament.gh/bitstream/handle/123456789/1928/ACT%20449%20Rev%20Ed.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

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Chapter 10
Digital Opportunity and State Authority: The Case of Doordarshan News in the Provision of Public Service Journalism

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Madhavi Ravikumar and Shuaib Shafi

Summary

In the midst of a paradigm shift towards digital platforms in India's news landscape, this chapter examines challenges faced by Doordarshan, India's dominant public television broadcaster, in sustaining its relevance amid a shift towards digital platforms. The surge in online news consumption is driven by factors such as expanding digital infrastructure, increased smartphone penetration, and evolving youth preferences. Doordarshan's sluggish adaptation, state control, and resource constraints hinder competitiveness with private channels and non-legacy digital players. Its crucial role in reaching remote areas underscores its national significance. This chapter explores evolving news consumption patterns, Doordarshan's role in India's media ecosystem, key challenges it faces, and strategies it has adopted. The authors emphasise Doordarshan's importance in fulfilling a public service obligation that is complicated by structural issues in the context of a rapidly changing news industry.

Introduction

Effective public communication is a cornerstone of healthy societal functioning. This is especially vital in India with a population of 1.43 billion people. Establishing effective public communication channels is imperative for governments in democratic societies and can be complicated when seeking to serve a large and diverse citizenry (R. Kumar, 2013). Public broadcast media[1] address this challenge by providing platforms that transcend geographic and demographic barriers to ensure that information distribution and access are equitable for audiences (Niazai & Manjunatha, 2021). The importance of public broadcast media in India is vital for bridging social gaps, fostering national unity, and facilitating an informed citizenry (Voltmer, 2013). Historically, this was less complicated due to a scarcity of channels in the mass media era. Growth in digital technology, changing audience preferences, and a more complex media ecology make effective public communication far more challenging, especially in today's increasingly diverse and fragmented markets for news consumption (Singhal et al., 1988). Trends in the popularity of social media, digital journalism, and increasing audience fragmentation make adaptation essential for every news provider (Singhal & Rogers, 1988). Doordarshan, India's main public television broadcaster, is struggling to adapt to these changes to remain relevant in the digital ecology.

Since its inception in 1959, Indian television has been continually evolving in an increasingly more complex media environment. A Ministry of Information and Broadcasting report (MIB, 2023a) revealed that as of 2022–2023, India boasted 905 satellite TV channels. India's internet usage has surged in the past decade, with rural internet users outnumbering urban ones (Mishra & Chanchani, 2020). The country has the second-largest internet market and the cheapest connection rates in the world. DataReportal's digital report 2023 identified 692 million internet users and a penetration rate of 49%. Social media engagement was robust, with 467 million users in January 2023, comprising 33% of the population (Kemp, 2023).[2] Cellular mobile connections surged to 1.10 billion in 2023, covering 77% of the populace. A 2022 survey found 470 million active social media users. According to data reported by

Statcounter Global Stats in December 2023, Facebook had a 78% market share, Instagram had 16%, and YouTube had 3% (Statcounter Gobal Stats, 2023). With 504 million active users above five years of age, the internet has become popular for news consumption in India (Kemp, 2023). According to a 2023 survey by Statista, 72% of respondents in India reported utilising online platforms, including social media, as their primary source of news (Basuroy, 2023a). This trend underscores the increasing popularity of digital media as a means of news consumption.

The digital shift has greatly affected Doordarshan, India's government-owned television broadcasting network that has historically been the primary news source for most Indians (Asthana, 2013). But its viewership has declined in the digital environment due to more competition with private channels, the popularity of online platforms, and changing media use preferences especially among young people. Basuroy (2023b) found that Doordarshan's unique viewership dropped from 760 million in 2019 to 685 million in 2023, a modest but important decline of roughly 11%. The Indian government disputes this, however, claiming Doordarshan's cumulative viewership exceeded 6 billion nationwide in 2023 (MIB data). In an article in *The Print* (2023), Union Minister Anurag Thakur said Doordarshan's viewership has remained stable. However one views the changing reach, Doordarshan has been slow to adapt to the digital shift (PTI, 2022).

This chapter considers Doordarshan's role in India's digital news ecology and its capacity to adapt to the rise of digital platforms. Despite challenges, Doordarshan remains relevant as the exclusive nationwide TV broadcaster. We examine how the organisation is adjusting to the evolving market and audience trends to maintain a unique and important position. We begin with an overview of the historical significance of Doordarshan and then clarify contemporary news consumption patterns. We contextualise this in context of growth in digital platforms with a focus on implications for relevance of its news services. We then explore Doordarshan's adaptation strategies, highlighting efforts to develop online streaming, social media engagement, and innovative news programming. We examine some of the key challenges, especially growing competition, the importance of news quality, and funding

constraints in the context of digital disruption for traditional broadcasting. Regulatory implications are also analysed to shed light on Doordarshan's efforts to navigate the challenges.

Methodology

The researchers use qualitative methodology to explore perspectives and experiences among key stakeholders that include Doordarshan's top executives, seasoned journalists, and influential policymakers. Respondents were selected (n=24) for in-depth interviews that were conducted between September and December 2023 using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. This approach is appropriate to research for which the primary objective is not statistical generalisation but rather the attainment of contextually rich observations to deepen understanding of the subject matter (Merriam, 2015). We interviewed respondents from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Prasar Bharati, Doordarshan's joint directors, former director generals, news editors, news producers, journalists, and media critics. The duration of each interview ranged from 50 to 90 minutes. The transcripts were coded for analysis using NVivo software to identify recurring patterns to identify themes and shared understandings and differing perspectives across stakeholders.

Analysis revealed several key themes. One was the pivotal importance of credibility for maintaining public trust in the context of growing competition with private news channels. Another central concern focused on digital disruption and migration linked with the platformisation of the media ecology in India, correlated with changes in audience preferences for the news they consume and how they access it. Regulatory mechanisms that govern broadcasting practices to ensure fairness was also thematic. Audience engagement strategies were highlighted as being vital to retain viewer attention in today's digitally saturated environment. Additionally, the importance of content diversity for fostering inclusivity and relevance was emphasised, along with insights on news consumption habits that inform the development of

strategies that align with audience preferences. These themes collectively provide a window for deeper understanding of the complexities and opportunities confronting Doordarshan in India's digital media ecology.

Supplementary data were obtained from Doordarshan's annual reports and from committees and working groups addressing issues related to public broadcasting in India. The approach ensured a relatively thorough examination of Doordarshan's activities and performance across its history. The committee and working group reports facilitated detailed analyses of important matters pertinent to public broadcasting today. Policy documents provided a framework for clarifying legal and regulatory factors influencing Doordarshan's mission and operations.

The development of public broadcasting in India

Renowned for its rich linguistic diversity, India is characterised by a large plurality of identities and voices. The most recent census (2001) identified 122 major languages and 1,599 minority languages spoken in India. As the essential conduit for disseminating information, facilitating public discourse, and reflecting such a myriad of voices, India's mass communication infrastructure is a window to understand the rich fabric of India's linguistic diversity and efforts to weave a cohesive narrative.

Pre-independence era

Broadcasting began in India in November 1923 at the Radio Club of Calcutta. Amateur radio networks were soon established by the Indian Broadcasting Company in Bombay and Madras. Financial sustainability proved precarious, with expenditures consistently outpacing revenues (Chatterji, 1987). Responsibility for revenue collection fell to the company, necessitating outreach to radio device owners (Mohapatra & Jena, 2014). Facing criticism for prioritising service for the colonial European community and operating in financial deficit, the Indian Broadcasting Company was liquidated in March

1930. The British government took control of broadcasting in April 1930 (R. S. Kumar, 2013). This led to the creation of the Indian State Broadcasting Service, later renamed All India Radio (AIR), in 1936. In 1941, AIR was placed under the administrative oversight of the Department of Communication, which eventually became a government ministry. At the time India was partitioned in 1947, the AIR network comprised six stations in five princely states, overseeing 248,000 licenses in a population of 350 million. Television also started in the colonial period (Rajagopal, 2001).

These developments are quite similar to how radio and then television broadcasting emerged and was institutionalised in most European countries. This isn't surprising given colonial rule at the time. As in Europe, broadcasting in India was seen as offering potent tools for public information and propaganda (Briggs & Burke, 2009). Despite similarities, India's experience with broadcasting before independence unfolded within a unique and complex context. Unlike in Europe, it was created under colonial rule and India was a much bigger and far more diverse country grappling with higher rates of widespread poverty and low literacy rates. The context posed significant challenges for establishing a national broadcasting infrastructure. It is also important to recognise that broadcasting was a state-owned and controlled system under British rule. Although the system relied on the BBC for expertise in administrative and operational functions, broadcasting was expected to support colonial interests.

Post-independence period

Jeffrey (2006) observed that in the early years after independence, television was considered a luxury by India's information and broadcasting ministries, unlike many nations where broadcasting in the 1950s focused on catering to middle-class audiences. India had experience with television as an important channel for communication to facilitate national development and this focus was prioritised after independence (Niazai & Manjunatha, 2021). Although one of the non-aligned countries during the Cold War, India adopted centralised planning as evident in AIR's inclusion in the government's five-year plans from

1951, which facilitated expanding the broadcasting network (Niazai & Manjunatha, 2021). Television debuted in 1959 as a UNESCO-backed educational initiative, with the Dutch corporation Philips assisting in transmitter installation through a cooperative initiative (Rogers, 2000). In 1975, satellite TV was introduced via the SITE programme to expand coverage into rural areas.[3] It was intended to serve as an 'open classroom' for disseminating information (Rogers, 2000). Doordarshan was established in 1959 and became independent from AIR in 1976. Broadcast advertising was introduced the same year, marking a significant increase in commercialisation (P. N. Thomas, 2022). By 1980, television sets exceeded one million (P. N. Thomas, 2022). The introduction of colour television in 1982 saw new channels introduced in metropolitan areas (P. N. Thomas, 2022). The design for Indian television drew inspiration from the BBC's public broadcasting model rather than the American model (Singhal & Rogers, 2001b), but both AIR and Doordarshan were under more direct central government control than the BBC, a persistent reality that reflects what Jeffrey (2006) described as 'the control paradigm'. Of course, government involvement was not new. As noted earlier, Britain exercised control over broadcasting prior to independence.

Also as noted, although India was formally non-aligned in practice, the country had close relations with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. This influenced preferences in media policy and practices. From the start, Doordarshan was positioned as a channel to promote socialist ideals and national cohesion (Farmer, 2003). The 1970s marked a pivotal period as Doordarshan became a testbed for media development in the post-Cold War period (Rajagopal, 2001). Regional programming and educational content were expanded in a pattern similar to what was done among European PSB during the period. Later in the 1980s, and also as in Europe, the emergence of private commercial media compelled Doordarshan to pivot towards a stronger emphasis on entertainment to compete. Increases in sensationalism in news reporting (Rajagopal, 2001) paralleled the commercialisation of media observed in the deregulatory climates of Western countries.

Recounting the early history of Doordarshan, Sashi Kumar Menon (a popular newscaster and news and current affairs producer credited with

revolutionising broadcasting in India through the introduction of the first vernacular channel, Asianet) described characteristics that explain why we use the term 'public media' instead of public service broadcasting or media:

> In the late 1970s, Doordarshan emerged as an extension of All India Radio, transitioning from audio to visual content. While maintaining a commitment to public interest, it upheld values such as secularism and pluralism. Doordarshan served as a communication arm aligned with government policies, functioning as both a catalyst and a platform for government initiatives.
>
> (Sashi Kumar, personal communication, 10 December 2023).

Here we see a complexity of attributes that attempt to blend a public interest mission to serve a highly diverse society of pluralistic identities and cultures with the broadcasting for national development under government control. Public journalism in India reflects this complexity in character and practice.

Before 1991, Doordarshan dominated the Indian broadcasting industry. In its 65-year history to date various committees have advocated for broadcasting reforms, some of which succeeded and many of which did not. The Chanda Enquiry Committee in 1966 recommended transforming AIR into a corporation modelled after the BBC (S. Kumar, 2010). That was not approved. The Verghese Working Group of 1978 explored granting autonomy to AIR and Doordarshan, suggesting a single trust for oversight (Rodrigues, 2010). However, the Prasar Bharati Bill rejected this, maintaining government control (Shitak, 2023).[4] In 1983, the Joshi Working Group advocated for decentralisation and community television for villages (Mehta, 2008). Decentralisation and financial autonomy for broadcasters in India has remained elusive. Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's economic liberalisation policies led to an expansion in the scale and diversity of television programming, as noted by the Expert Committee on Prasar Bharati (2014). But while committees identified concerns and options for improvement, many recommendations were not implemented fully or at all. However, Singhal & Rogers (2001a) argue that despite problems rooted in centralised state control,

Indian television aimed to serve public interests throughout its first three decades, and has promoted national unity and support for the public welfare of all Indians.

From state monopoly to diversification: The rise of private news channels

Initially, television reception in India was limited to terrestrial transmissions. The introduction of private satellite TV channels in 1991 marked a transformative shift. In the same period, trends in economic liberalisation and growing globalisation caused the government to adopt a more accommodating approach in broadcast policy. Privatisation was correlated with advances in technology, as explained by Sashi Kumar Menon, founder and chairman of the Asian College of Journalism and Media Development Foundation:

> The 1885 Indian Telegraph Act, which initially governed broadcasting [. . .] restricted the uplinking of wireless signals to the state. However, direct broadcast satellite technology in the mid-1980s allowed signals to be received anywhere within the satellite's footprint, creating a loophole many exploited. Initially, unable to uplink from India, private channels uplinked from abroad. However, recognising the economic implications, the government shifted its policy in the 1990s, establishing uplinking stations within the country. This led to a proliferation of television channels, particularly in regional languages. This expansion significantly impacted Doordarshan, transitioning it from being the sole player to facing stiff competition.
>
> (Sashi Kumar, personal communication, 10 December 2023).

A pivotal moment came in 1995 when the Supreme Court of India declared that airwaves are public assets, requiring regulation by a public authority to safeguard the public's interests and prevent rights infringements (MIB, 2016). This ruling underscored the importance of managing the airwaves. The

government officially enacted the Prasar Bharati Act in 1997, following earlier progress (Prasar Bharati Act, 1990).[5] Sen (2000) summarised key aspects that include establishing an autonomous regulatory body, clarifying licensing procedures, specifying regulations for uplinking from Indian territory, establishing cross-media ownership limits, and specifying foreign ownership restrictions. Despite these efforts, the broadcasting industry in India has continued to face complicated challenges (Mehta, 2009; P. N. Thomas, 2022; Page & Crawley, 2001; Singhal & Rogers, 2001b).

According to the MIB annual report for 2022–2023 (2023b), India boasts 905 satellite television channels, of which 403 are dedicated to news and current affairs in English or regional languages. Scholars contend that the rise of private channels prompted a re-evaluation of Doordarshan's priorities. In response, Doordarshan established 403 programme production centres and 792 transmission stations to expand its reach (MIB, 2023b). Agrawal & Raghaviah (2006) observed that private networks had already gained substantial audiences and advertising revenue in urban areas, which is correlated with growth in commercialisation and a shift towards entertainment as earlier remarked. Before satellite TV was introduced, Doordarshan enjoyed exclusivity in revenue and now faces financial challenges. Initially dominant in advertising, Doordarshan lost ground to competitors offering more entertaining news content (Agrawal & Raghaviah, 2006). As with PSB elsewhere, Doordarshan operates within frameworks that require serving the public interest and related programming rules, which have constrained innovation in news programmes.

Sampath Kumar, an experienced veteran with over thirty years of expertise in AIR and Doordarshan as a news producer, documentary filmmaker, and newscaster, and later a long stint at the BBC, explained the economic impact of privatisation on Doordanshan news services:

> With the rise of private news channels, Doordarshan's advertising revenue declined despite its widespread reach. Niche-exclusive channels targeting specific audiences attracted ample advertising by precisely reaching viewers with purchasing power. Advertisers found it more advantageous to invest in channels targeting affluent

> audiences. This led to a fragmented market, with private news channels earning more ad revenue but drawing a smaller audience.
>
> (Sampath Kumar, personal communication, 22 November 2023).

Privatisation also accounts for a significant change in how news programming was delivered. Menon (Sashi Kumar, personal communication, 10 December 2023) asserts that private channels, like Asianet, provided a harmonious blend of informative and enjoyable news content, which is important for fostering a knowledgeable and enlightened society. However, according to Subhash Rai, digital editor of *The India Forum* and media critic, new competitive pressures also encouraged increasing emphasis on sensationalism and entertainment in news broadcasts that has diminished the substantive value of news (S. Rai, personal communication, 1 December 2023). Private networks tend to prioritise sensational debates that attract larger audiences over straightforward news broadcasts that aren't as appealing for many. Doordarshan maintains the traditional structured approach to news delivery.

Nonetheless, and according to the Reuters Digital News Report, Doordarshan is an established and reputable news source in India due to prioritising public welfare and combating disinformation (Krishnan, 2023). Conversely, private channels typically produce lower-quality news and don't feature information to empower viewers. Rodrigues (2010) categorised the phenomenon as a progressive movement towards commercialisation in India's public broadcasting sector and highlighted persistent conflicts at Doordarshan keyed to a need to balance its mandated roles as an educational service and competitive pressures to be more entertaining. I. A. S. Thomas (2007) noted the government's 'open sky' policy was a significant factor contributing to Doordarshan's decline in viewership, particularly in metropolitan areas. More precisely, perhaps, the decline is a result of competition the policy ushered in, rather than the policy per se. But the shift to liberalisation and privatisation in media policy has not resulted in greater independence for Doordarshan, as we consider next.

The influence of government funding and control on Doordarshan's autonomy

Maintaining arm's-length independence from state and commercial interests is a crucial requirement for genuine public service broadcasting. This is crucial to enable fulfilling the classical public service mission in media. Despite Doordarshan's aim to cater to a nationwide audience and adhere to classical principles, its management reflects significant state influence. Governed by the Prasar Bharati Act of 1990, the Prasar Bharati Corporation oversees Doordarshan and All India Radio. The board has fifteen members and includes a political nominee. Critics such as Shitak (2023) argue that the political nature of appointments to the board undermines autonomy. Additionally, parliamentary oversight and government guidance further assert state control. Although some Doordarshan programmes reflect commitment to public service broadcasting, its administrative structure depends on state patronage.

It is interesting to analyse Doordarshan using the framework Marius Dragomir and Astrid Söderström proposed for gauging the degrees to which public media organisations are independent from state control (Dragomir & Söderström, 2023). They assess this on the basis of administrative autonomy and the proportion of funds directly sourced from the government, and in the degree of editorial independence. A higher share of direct state support typically corresponds to lower media independence. Likewise, the share of government nominees among governing board members is indicative of government involvement. In this model, state-controlled media and independent public service media constitute opposing ends of a broad spectrum. Doordarshan has high government involvement at the administrative level and significant reliance on direct state funding, which facilitate state interference in editorial policy (however clearly discernible in particular programmes).

State control over Doordarshan contributes to a worrisome decline in press freedom in India. Journalists feel pressured to align with the government, leading to self-censorship and a reluctance to cover sensitive issues. This undermines the watchdog role of public media journalism and restricts the

public's access to unbiased information, perpetuating a one-sided narrative that supports the government and stifles diversity in media representation. This lack of autonomy in Doordarshan causes marginalisation of minority voices, undermines India's democracy, and fosters social division. The government's reluctance to decentralise broadcasting and ensure financial autonomy for public media poses significant challenges for India's news media environment and its role in facilitating public discourse. According to *The Hindu* (Hindu Bureau, 2023), India ranks 161 out of 180 nations in the 2023 World Press Freedom Index produced by Reporters Without Borders (RSF). That marks a decline from 150 in 2022 (not great either, but certainly better).

The practice of bribing journalists to sway coverage is certainly a factor and has drawn significant concern. The problem was highlighted by Bloomberg nearly fifteen years ago (Choudhury, 2011) and has persisted. In 2010, the Press Council of India documented instances of paid news in a comprehensive report, although only an abridged version was publicly released (Press Council of India, n.d.). Media outlets that don't adhere to the government's preferred narrative face repercussions, as evident in the case of NDTV. Labelled 'the least friendly of India's television channels' by government officials, NDTV has faced scrutiny and boycotts by federal authorities, which it condemns as a vindictive witch-hunt (Indian Express Web Desk, 2017).

The government's control over media extends to freezing advertisements, as recently witnessed when the BJP-led government halted state advertising to prominent newspapers like *The Times of India*, *The Hindu*, and *The Telegraph*, seen by many as retaliation for critical coverage (Ghoshal, 2019). Doordarshan's heavy dependence on government funding makes it susceptible to political interference in news production. Reports from the Expert Committee on Prasar Bharati (2014) and the earlier MIB Estimates Committee 1988–89 (1989) consistently emphasise the need for greater autonomy for public broadcasters in India. Implementation of reforms has been slow and uneven. A senior journalist at Doordarshan, speaking anonymously, lamented the lack of editorial freedom, stating that directives from higher-ups dictate news coverage and stifle investigative journalism (personal communcation, 16 December 2023). A single directive can drastically change a story's narrative, hindering

critical reporting and efforts to exercise independent journalism. Furthermore, Doordarshan faces pressure to steer clear of contentious topics, further stifling its ability to provide comprehensive and unbiased coverage.

Dinakaran S., a former news editor at Doordarshan News, suggests achieving decentralisation and financial autonomy for broadcasters in India is a multifaceted challenge with no straightforward solutions (personal communication, 5 December 2023). By recognising these challenges and actively seeking remedies, India could cultivate a more diverse and vibrant media landscape with a broader spectrum of voices. Taking cues from successful models abroad, such as the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in the United States that relies more on viewer contributions and corporate sponsorships, could foster greater independence. Similarly, using a television licence approach paid by all households could ensure a more stable and autonomous financial foundation. It is uncertain how possible such alternatives could be, but it is clear funding reforms are crucial to revamp India's news media environment. Even so, financial mechanisms alone would be insufficient. Political culture plays a pivotal role. Transformation would necessitate funding reforms and broader shifts in the political ethos governing the media environment. Perhaps Doordarshan could become a case of 'Independent State-Funded and State-Managed Media' in the matrix suggested by Dragomir's model.

Channelling transformation: Doordarshan's news programming journey in a dynamic media environment

Sampath Kumar observed that privatisation has raised concerns about Doordarshan's capability to handle competitive challenges from private news channels due to its high dependence on state funding and the administrative structure:

> Many news outlets avoid openly criticising government policies, but with the entry of private players, more open and critical discussions are happening. Early private participation saw the introduction of a news programme where a journalist asked probing questions, challenging traditional norms and allowing people to express their opinions freely.
>
> (Sampath Kumar, personal communication, 22 November 2023).

Ravi Kumar, an experienced journalist in print and broadcast media, notes the complexity of private news channels which extends beyond outward appearances to encompass behaviours and communication modalities. He highlights their focus on serving the middle and upper-middle class population based on financial considerations because private news channels rely on advertising revenue. This causes less engagement with lower socio-economic groups due to their more limited purchasing power, which makes them unattractive for advertisers. This is a classic case of the market failure problem. We therefore see a socio-economic divide with a large segment of the population that lives in rural areas and comprising 70–80% of the total Indian population feeling excluded by programming provided by private news channels. He also observed that Doordarshan's news programming quality is sometimes seen as lacking sophistication. In other words, it compares poorly with commercial news products. This could be partly due to its bureaucratic structure because it is seen in the same light as governmental agencies. The hierarchical structure of decision-making procedures hinders the organisation's agility and inventive potential. Clearance from above is required even for simple operational activities such as procuring a camera for shooting. The lack of motivation to pursue originality and distinction exacerbates a noticeable stagnation in Doordarshan news programming. (R. Kumar, personal communication, 11 November 2023).

Former director general K. Kunhikrishnan agrees that a lack of high-quality news production is the main cause of Doordarshan's situation. He added a problem of extravagance at the Prasar Bharati secretariat as a contributing factor to the subpar performance of the public broadcaster

despite having state-of-the-art equipment, facilities, and a competent workforce. So while Doordarshan and AIR boast extensive national news coverage, the failure to harness these advantages is attributed to state control and correlated bureaucracy (Kunhikrishnan, personal communication, 28 October 2023).

Navigating change: Transformative shifts in news consumption across India

The rise of digital platforms and technological progress are reshaping India's news ecology, undermining traditional models and ushering in a more complex journalistic environment. A survey by the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) India and Nielsen highlighted the increasing preference for video content, disrupting traditional print news media, and prompting formal changes in news practices across platforms (TechRadar India Bureau, 2020). This transition also significantly impacts news reporting and dissemination in India, presenting challenges for navigating in the digital realm. Picard (2011) noted the significant upheaval in news creation influenced by integrating digital communication technologies into newsrooms, which also applies to India today. Tapas Bhattacharya, a news producer at Doordarshan News, emphasises how this convergence enables journalists to experiment with different news formats and narrative techniques (T. Bhattacharya, personal communication, 18 December 2023). Similarly, senior journalist Chetna Sharma sees the shift to digital platforms as a natural consequence of technological advancements that is changing news consumption patterns (C. Sharma, personal communication, 1 December 2023).

In the contemporary discourse surrounding digitisation and the role of Doordarshan, Rahul Gowlikar, the joint director of Doordarshan News, raises pertinent inquiries regarding the evolving dynamics of news consumption in India (R. Gowlikar, personal communication, 9 December 2023). The rise of digital platforms has sparked a reassessment of Doordarshan's relevance as a public broadcaster. It is important to observe that despite social media's

growing popularity and the abundance of private TV channels in India, people still seek authentic information, and Doordarshan remains a trusted and often used source to verify information (see Table 10.1; DD is the abbreviation).

Table 10.1 Brand trust scores in India, 2022

Brand	**Trust**	**Neither**	**Don't Trust**
DD News India	70%	12%	18%
All India Radio	69%	14%	17%
BBC News	66%	12%	22%
CNN-News18	62%	17%	21%
India Today TV	63%	15%	21%
NDTV	64%	15%	21%
Republic TV	58%	15%	26%

Brand	Trust	Neither	Don’t Trust
The Hindu	66%	14%	20%

Source: Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023 (Newman et al. 2023, p. 131)

The data presents the findings of a survey by the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023 (Newman et al., 2023) about the level of trust in brands in India. The survey asked respondents to rate their trust in various news brands on a scale of 0 (not trustworthy) to 10 (completely trustworthy). Based on the respondent’s ratings, the brands were then categorised as shown. The key findings from the survey show that Doordarshan is India’s most trusted news brand, even above the BBC, with 70% of respondents trusting the news it provides. The two national public broadcasters, Doordarshan and All India Radio, are India’s most trusted news sources. Acknowledging the growing visual presence and numerous alternative information channels, Gowlikar highlights the importance of Doordarshan for reliable information (personal communication, 9 December 2023).

The MIB statistics reveal that DD India, the national news channel programmed by Doordarshan, has seen significant growth on television and digital platforms. Doordarshan is leveraging digital platforms to reach a younger, more tech-savvy audience. In 2022, the channel achieved the significant accomplishment of surpassing 200,000 followers on YouTube. Regarding television viewership (Table 10.2), Doordarshan is the top English news channel throughout the country (Press Information Bureau [PIB] Delhi, 2022), as confirmed by BARC India data from 2022 that reveals over 8 million viewers. It gained double the audience reach of its closest rival. In addition, the channel’s audience has grown over time, showing an impressive overall rise of around 150% (PIB, 2022).

Table 10.2 Average television viewership of news channels in India

News channel	**Average viewership**
DD News	56,658
Times Now	18,009
CNN IBN	6,804
India Today	4,511
BBC World News	1,843
News X	1,555

Source: Digital insights: Broadcast Audience Research Council India, 4–8 December 2023. https://www.barcindia.co.in/data-insights

Doordarshan has adopted strategies to remain relevant and be competitive. However, private news channels have also adapted and typically faster. Gowlikar stressed Doordarshan's pivotal shift towards a digital-first approach beginning in 2015 based on a comprehensive overhaul of news development to enhance quality and relevance. Recognising audiences' evolving preferences for

social media channels, Doordarshan strategically expanded its digital presence. This proactive approach includes launching Twitter targeted to diverse linguistic audiences. Complementing this initiative, DD News actively engages with viewers through its YouTube channel and Instagram account, working to foster a dynamic multimedia experience.

Similarly, DD India, the flagship English news channel, has embraced various social media platforms to connect with its global audience. With a dedicated Twitter handle DD India delivers real-time updates and engages in meaningful discourse. Furthermore, its YouTube presence offers a comprehensive repository of news content, ensuring accessibility and relevance. Moreover, DD India's Instagram account provides a visual narrative, enhancing engagement and outreach across diverse demographics. Doordarshan has enhanced its mobile presence by introducing news apps and providing readily understandable news content tailored for viewers on the move (R. Gowlikar, personal communication, 9 December 2023).

Gowlikar emphasised Doordarshan's efforts in storytelling as noteworthy due to its focus on regional language news. This is a cornerstone of its strength because the practice resonates with diverse audiences through local news channels. Furthermore, its commitment to producing documentaries and conducting in-depth interviews has garnered praise for offering a more nuanced understanding of complex issues than traditional news bulletins provide. Moreover, integrating social media platforms into its outreach strategy has facilitated the dissemination of news snippets and fostered two-way communication, more effectively engaging younger demographics and ensuring a broader reach for its programmes. This concerted effort underscores Doordarshan's commitment to adapt to changing media landscapes and engage with audiences (R. Gowlikar, personal communication, 9 December 2023).

The editorial team has expanded staff and resources to improve the appeal for digital audiences. Infrastructure upgrades, incorporating newer digital technologies, are integral to this. In the light of changing audience preferences, Doordarshan aims to maintain connectivity by being present on OTT platforms.[6] The broadcaster is actively expanding its digital presence, aligning with Prasar Bharati's broader efforts to adapt to the evolving digital media

landscape. Despite inherent bureaucratic hurdles, Gowlikar remains optimistic about Doordarshan's ability to catch up with private channels in technological integration and emphasised several important reasons of clear importance for public service journalism:

> We are committed to adapting responsibly in a democratic context while enhancing the member experience through improved content delivery, with technology being crucial to our efforts. Our notable initiative, MOJO (mobile journalism), is already underway, allowing us to swiftly respond to changes while ensuring authenticity and accuracy. Emphasising authenticity, we uphold rigorous verification standards for all information we deliver. Our focus is on correct, not just fast, news delivery, which is the main objective of private news channels. Our unique selling point remains timely, accurate, and authentic news.
>
> (R. Gowlikar, personal communication, 9 December 2023).

Media scholar and former digital editor of *The Hindu*, Sriram Srinivasan, sees journalism's evolution as part of a broader cultural shift affecting various aspects of Indian society. He suggests that changes in journalistic approaches are integral to wider industry transformations that signal departures from traditional practices across domains. For journalism, the changes extend beyond production, distribution, and consumption because they affect journalistic practices (S. Srinivasan, personal communication, 21 December 2023).

The impact of media privatisation on cultural representation in India is a subject of current debate. Sashi Kumar argues privatisation has negatively affected diversity, citing a decline in cultural representation across private channels compared to the previous dominance of the public broadcaster, Doordarshan. Before liberalisation in the broadcasting market, diverse Indian cultures were showcased through Doordarshan news and current affairs programmes, fostering a better understanding among different linguistic groups than is the case today. The proliferation of private news channels

catering to specific audiences has caused fragmentation in India as elsewhere, but with potentially higher stakes due to less exposure to the great diversity of national cultures. Sashi Kumar is also concerned about the consequences of narrowing content, especially the potential for more intolerance and bias that can be exacerbated by filter bubbles and echo chambers. In his view, this fosters intellectual homogeneity and intolerance and poses serious societal challenges for India. Aside from factors related to fundamental internet infrastructures, the actions of digital giants Alphabet and Meta also play a crucial role influencing performance. Changes in Google's or Facebook's algorithms may rapidly affect the visibility of news material, with important consequences for consumption in India (Sashi Kumar, personal communication, 10 December 2023).

Conclusion

India's media ecology is undergoing significant changes caused by digitalisation, globalisation of media, and distinctive national factors. Public broadcasters including Doordarshan must adapt and innovate to remain relevant and fulfil their mandates. This is even more complicated and challenging for Doordarshan because although formally autonomous, in practice the government exerts strong influence. It is vital for Doordarshan to be afforded arm's-length independence to serve the needs of India's large, diverse, and rapidly developing society. Doordarshan is too burdened by bureaucracy, slow to innovate, and struggles with motivational factors. Achieving financial independence by some means, perhaps through a separate tax system and independent oversight, is crucial for Doordarshan's development as India's public media provider. The government's reluctance to relinquish control is hindering progress, not only in the media environment but also for and in society. Doordarshan's reform depends on the government's political willingness to free it from state influence and promote a genuinely independent public *service* broadcasting system in India.

This is not a new need or issue, but it has timely, urgent importance as India's position is an increasingly mature democracy and modern economy. Since independence, the country has been striving to establish a public media system to serve all of its citizens. There have been numerous commissions mandated by various governments have over past seventy years that have proposed ways and means to transform the state media machinery for the betterment of Indian democracy and society. Journalism as a public service is an essential part of this transformation. Unfortunately, too little has been accomplished in policy and politics. Doordarshan remains under government control, with its operations, policies, and funding primarily determined by governing authorities. The lack of political determination and dedication for beneficial change has been delayed for a long time. It is frankly impossible to build a genuine public service media organisation akin to the BBC without addressing the core problem, which is government interference and reluctance to change.

This matters greatly in India given the role of television for influencing national sentiments. That has been the subject of numerous scholarly works. Aravind Rajagopal (2001) noted twenty years ago that television has a pivotal role in shaping and reshaping the public sphere in India. The government is more than an administrative, bureaucratic apparatus; it is steered by the political parties with respective agendas to safeguard. The political establishment has not been willing to relinquish state control over a medium that has such high capacity for influencing public sentiment and the political climate. The reluctance on the part of the state to empower public sector media by ensuring the needed financial and administrative autonomy is clearly a problem that needs solving. Using state television as a means for power consolidation allows each ruling government to shape national narratives in ways that work to their favour and advance their political agenda. Depending on the government of the day, this might or might not be in the best interests of all parties and, more importantly, every citizen of India.

There have been some hopeful developments for public broadcasting in recent years. The government has directed private channels to comply with the 2022 amendment to satellite television channel guidelines (MIB, 2023a) that

require them to produce public service content similar to Doordarshan for at least thirty minutes a day and report compliance to the government. That has relieved Doordarshan of the exclusive responsibility of public services in broadcasting and has potentially brought private players into the fold. The government's rationale for this is important – the airwaves are public property and therefore must be utilised in the best interest of India as a society. It is vital for the government of India to facilitate an independent public media system that provides journalism as a public service. That is an essential requirement for a healthy democracy.

Notes

1. In this chapter, the phrase 'public broadcast media' is employed to denote media that are publicly owned or controlled, distinct from the concept of public service media that may function at more of an arm's length from state involvement.
2. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.
3. The Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) was a satellite communications project launched in India in 1975. The project was a joint effort between National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
4. Prasar Bharati is an autonomous body established by an Act of Parliament. It includes Doordarshan television broadcasting and Akashvani, which were previously media units of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
5. https://prasarbharati.gov.in/prasar-bharati-act/
6. OTT or 'over-the-top' refers to digital technology that delivers content, usually in video format, through internet-connected devices.

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Chapter 11

Persistent Challenges for Public Service Journalism in Greece in the Platformised Era

Achilleas Karadimitriou

Summary

Considering the wide range of recent challenges and transformations faced by the journalism profession worldwide and based on the case of Greece, this chapter raises the crucial question of the sustainability of public service news (PSN) mission under the pressures of platformisation of communication, digital disruption, and political interventionism. The Greek case highlights wider difficulties and challenges affecting other media markets, belonging to the polarised pluralist model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), in terms of serving public service journalism (PSJ). This study draws on quantitative and qualitative data, extracted from a questionnaire survey and small-scale semi-structured interviews conducted with a sample of journalists and senior managerial executives working in the public service Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT). It aims to outline how ERT employees make sense of the PSN mission in the current platformised era. Based on the research findings, the study seeks to arrive at initial recommendations regarding how media professionals in Greece and in other Southern European markets can re-

evaluate PSJ and develop a coherent public service strategy in response to the challenges posed by platformisation.

Introduction

On 4 May 2023, a few days before the national elections in Greece, the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation, ERT, webcast the first news bulletin in Greek audiovisual history presented by a virtual reality anchorman, named Hermes. In view of the imminent television debate among the national political party leaders, the AI presenter described ERT's state-of-the-art Studio 4 where the political confrontation would take place. He also highlighted the main content-related features of the newly established thematic news channel ERT NEWS as well as the restructuring of newsroom operations based on the integration services model. This symbolic news bulletin reflected ERT's attempt to align its services with the rapid technological developments of the platformised era, leaving behind its unfavourable past.

Since its establishment, ERT has repeatedly been criticised for debt and overstaffing challenges, the dominance of civil servant mentality, low audience shares, and, above all, the adoption of a managerial model permitting governmental interventionism. These are persistent structural weaknesses clearly reflected in its informational output (Papathanassopoulos, 2017, pp. 81–84; Papatheodorou & Machin, 2003, pp. 47–52). Governmental interventionism refers to a type of symbiotic relationship between the news organisations and the state that scholars focusing on media-political relations have described as clientelism, meaning a context where access to public resources is dictated by patrons. These resources are delivered to clients in return for support and submission (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pp. 58–59). The government-dependent operational status has led scholars to argue that the existence of public service broadcasting in Greece has remained a utopian ideal (Iosifidis & Papathanassopoulos, 2019a).

Nevertheless, the Greek case is not unique in Europe. Public service media (PSM) independence has been regarded as among Europe's most challenging

issues (Llorens, 2019). Political interference is a controversial feature of both PSB systems and privately owned media organisations operating in Southern and Eastern Europe (Ciaglia, 2013; Fidalgo, 2021, p. 313) but also worldwide. A recent study investigating the role played by the governments in state-administered media organisations worldwide revealed that government control has increased dramatically, with the lack of editorial independence appearing as a common feature in nearly 80% of the 546 state-administered media outlets (Dragomir & Söderström, 2021, p. 15).

This chapter considers the sustainability of the public service news (PSN) mission under the pressures of platformisation of communication and digital disruption as well as against a persistently thorny backdrop in which the media landscape has been suffused by politics. The case of Greece illustrates wider difficulties affecting other media markets, belonging to the (Mediterranean) polarised pluralist model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), in terms of serving public service journalism (PSJ). The Greek media market, characterised by feeble editorial independence in newsrooms and clientelism behind news media operations, is representative of the above media model upon which a fruitful discussion can be developed about the extent to which Southern European countries can accomplish an updated journalistic remit and, if so, under which conditions.

Particularly, in the broadcasting sector Greece shares features with other European countries such as Italy, Spain, and Portugal, where the PSB organisations have operated under a regime of state control (Papathanassopoulos & Miconi, 2023, p. 3), and journalism has been characterised by a low level of autonomy (Papathanassopoulos, 2004, pp. 73–79) combined with insufficient in-depth investigation-based reporting (Karadimitriou et al., 2022). On the other hand, the PSB system in Greece can be considered unique for two main reasons: it has long been suffering from low audience shares (Karadimitriou, 2013); and at the peak of the global economic recession (June 2013) the government shut down ERT – based on a controversial ministerial decree, a decision reflecting an unprecedented governmental policy initiative in the context of the European media history.

This study draws on quantitative and qualitative data, generated from a questionnaire survey and small-scale semi-structured interviews with a sample of journalists and senior managerial executives working for ERT. It aims to outline how ERT's employees make sense of the PSN mission in the current platformised era. Based on the research findings, the study puts forward some initial recommendations regarding how media professionals in Greece and in other Southern European markets can re-evaluate PSJ and develop a coherent public service strategy in response to the challenges posed by platformisation.

Defining PSJ in the platform-dominated digital environment

Although defining PSJ is a complicated task, it carries some distinctive features: truth-telling is the epicentre of its intention, combined with its competence to employ objectivity and meticulousness during the investigation process leading to news reporting (Harrison, 2019, p. 3). These qualities should be evaluated vis-à-vis the increasing levels of false and inaccurate information disseminated through social media platforms (Grinberg et al., 2019), having affected adversely public spheres in several democracies (European Commission, 2018).

Against rising misinformation,[1] social media companies have reacted by implementing algorithmic and policy changes to limit the spread of false content (Allcott, Gentzkow, & Yu, 2019) or by removing accounts and pages related to cyber troop activity (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Nevertheless, formally organised social media manipulation by political actors, based on computational propaganda with the view to moulding public attitudes, has grown in several countries worldwide.

In the context of platformised media, the renewed debate about media trust, misinformation, and news-avoiding trends (Villi et al., 2022) has reignited interest in how PSM organisations perform their news remit. PSJ is regarded as a valuable means of combating misinformation by providing corrective news through automated accounts on social media platforms, a task reliant on the

regulatory conditions of each country and the level of credibility attributed to the PSB system (Pedrazzi & Oehmer-Pedrazzi, 2023). Arguably, cooperation between platform operators and PSM organisations, based on insightful policy measures, can help curtail misinformation. In this regard, PSJ can be perceived as a special type of news reporting incorporating impartial and credible content, accessible by and accountable to all citizens, thus contributing to an informed democracy.

Journalism transformations and PSM adaptations in the platformised age

Journalistic culture has been experiencing dramatic changes through the emergence of new professional practices, such as data-driven journalism, algorithmic or computational journalism, slow journalism, and problem-solving journalism, to name but a few. At the same time, the public service mentality in news production is under threat (Lowe & Stavitsky, 2016), framed by the precarious and shifting context of journalistic labour. The latter is not related merely to technological innovations but also to a change of professional perspective regarding how news stories are discovered, investigated, and presented to the public. For instance, in the thriving sector of data journalism scholars have identified the emergence of news hybridity, a trend displayed in the ways 'hard' and 'soft' news features are combined in news narratives (Widholm & Appelgren, 2022, p. 1374).

In this evolving perception of the journalism profession, PSM organisations continue to assume a democracy-enhancing role, emerging from their potential to perform a wide range of actions of considerable social impact, conducive to informed citizenship. Particularly, they play a key role in strengthening social trust (Schmitt-Beck & Wolsing, 2010), political engagement (Baek, 2009), and citizens' awareness of public affairs and international news (Curran et al., 2009).

In the online environment, the task of serving their civic mission is reliant on effective policies that can enable best practices aimed at strengthening

professional autonomy and civic accountability (Benson et al., 2017). Although, in the context of the multifaceted journalism crisis, a truly PSM system is of utmost importance, existing PSBs – even the exemplary BBC – are believed to fall short of operational independence (Freedman, 2019, pp. 213–214).

Since the 2010s, in response to changes in audience habits and the rising take-up of internet-enabled portable devices, PSM have been adapting their digital news provision by redesigning their news websites and by launching dedicated news apps (for details, see Sehl et al., 2016, pp. 26–29). At the same time, and notwithstanding national variations, European PSM have been approaching social media platforms as a means of news reporting and distribution, and as places of engagement with online audiences (Sehl et al., 2016, pp. 30–38). Moreover, experimentation with chatbots in news gathering, production, and distribution tasks has paved the way for innovative news formats. As the case of the BBC shows, these formats enhance personalised content and aim at improving online users' interaction and engagement with the news based on more conversational-oriented journalism (Jones & Jones, 2019, pp. 1049–1050).

Is PSN distinctiveness still important?

Several distinctive features characterise PSM organisations (Martin & Lowe, 2014; Schweizer & Puppis, 2018), notably independence, universality, diversity, excellence, innovation, and accountability (European Broadcasting Union [EBU], 2012). Regarding news, PSM distinctiveness lies in the provision of diverse informative content, the promotion of pluralism, and raising public awareness of considerable political, social, and economic issues that compose the public sphere (Cushion, 2012).

Against the backdrop of these public service ideals, the new audience culture, dictated by the platformisation of communication and the rise of digital intermediaries, has affected news reception and consumption habits, bringing PSM under increasing pressure and fierce competition. Indeed, in the years to come the appropriation of the platformisation culture may be the

benchmark against which the distinctiveness of PSM will be evaluated. Focusing on the weekly online and offline reach of PSBs in eight European countries (Finland, the UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Greece, and the Czech Republic), the 2019 Reuters Institute Report revealed that, although PSBs were more efficient in reaching audiences online and were considered highly trusted news sources, they presented weaknesses in providing near-universal news, especially online (Schulz et al., 2019). This implies that PSM should find ways to reinvigorate their potential for innovative ventures and production of quality news content to counter misinformation and news avoidance. To this end, in addition to a stable financial basis and a realistic remit adapted to the platformised era, PSM need to employ well-qualified professionals fully aware of the necessity for PSJ, eager to perform as counterbalances to the information disorder.

The evolution of digital technologies and the rise in digital platforms have forced PSM to invest in innovative services related to digital news. PSM have resorted to combined strategies aimed at diminishing uncertainty. The first strategy, called isomorphism, refers to PSM organisations' reliance on what is perceived as best practice by other (PSM) institutions, treating them more as a source of inspiration and learning rather than as a standard to be conformed to. The second strategy, called tight coupling, incorporates the inclusion of audiences in product development through audience research or by implementing pilot launches of online products and metrics analysis, permitting the investigation of improvements in users' experience with the new digital services (Sehl & Cornia, 2021).

Moreover, it is argued that media companies would benefit from a more systematic engagement with audiences in the field of journalism and from implementing more innovative ventures in the market (Nunes & Canavilhas, 2020, p. 54). Digital technologies, framed by the rise of platforms' services, may provide the infrastructure for new ventures; however, in addition to the considerable power asymmetries between the big platforms and news providers, the asymmetries between large and small countries in terms of the financial and operational soundness of PSM, implies key differentials of opportunities and risks which influence PSM strategies. For instance, any

attempt by ERT broadcasters to invest in innovative ventures runs the risk of falling short in terms of legitimacy and, ultimately, implementation. For, given operational and funding constraints, ERT has never been highly valued or able to operate in an increasingly competitive market where it is called upon to justify even the small licence fee paid by the citizens.

The response of PSM to the latest technological developments is not a one-dimensional task. Both organisational challenges and broader historical, political, and economic factors affect PSM resilience and adaptability to the new trends of newsroom reorganisation based on a multiplatform, integrated model of news production and distribution (Sehl et al., 2019) against a background of fierce competition and the rise of powerful digital intermediaries. For instance, in the case of the Flemish VRT PSM, the transition to a convergent newsroom structure since the 2000s aiming at the immersive engagement of the audiences has proved limited due to difficulties in internal communication between managers and producers (te Walvaart, 2019). Elsewhere, the 'News Values' project of the Swedish public service radio, conducive to automating news-sorting algorithmically, indicates that certain news functions, such as news valuing, have gradually become more data-driven (Rolandsson et al., 2022). In addition, PSM organisations have been adopting recommender systems for online streaming, thereby acknowledging the merits of content distribution in a personalised pattern (Hildén, 2022).

This quest for innovation is in line with the proven tendency of the PSM to provide distinctive news services of higher editorial standards – compared to their commercial counterparts – contributing to enhancing citizens' awareness of public affairs and politics, thus benefiting democracies (Cushion, 2019). To this end, PSM deserve to empower their potential for reclaiming the audiences' attention (Schulz et al., 2019, p. 30).

Media and journalism in Greece: The dirigiste role of the state

Journalism in Greece has been on a turbulent path since the restoration of democracy in 1974. Its development has taken place alongside the evolution of the Greek media market, influenced by several features: the interdependence between politics and media; an overcrowded media sector ever since the market liberalisation in the late 1980s, a process controlled by a few powerful business magnates; lack of media ownership transparency; limited news editorial autonomy; and the precarious conditions of journalism profession (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2021). The vulnerabilities of the Greek media date back even to the period before the deregulation of the broadcasting system, characterised by the dominant role of an interventionist state (Iosifidis & Boucas, 2015, p. 12).

The chronic weaknesses of the Greek media landscape need to be understood within the problematic socio-political context in which the broadcasting sector has evolved. Radio and television broadcasting were established as a state monopoly under dictatorial regimes in the late 1930s and in the mid 1960s respectively. The late restoration of democracy in 1974 found the broadcasting sector entangled within a framework of governmental control and interference. This disadvantageous operational framework has been attributed to the existence of a strong state in its role as rule maker or active agent, favoured by a weak civil society during the post-dictatorship era and the subsequent lack of a self-regulation culture (Iosifidis & Papathanassopoulos, 2019b, p. 132; Papathanassopoulos, 2010, p. 223).

The deregulation of the Greek broadcasting system since 1989, guided by politics and carried out in the absence of a proper regulatory framework, brought about disastrous consequences for ERT, experiencing a dramatic decline in audience ratings and advertising revenues. In 2008, ERT was a pioneer in providing digital terrestrial television services; nevertheless, the so-called ERT Digital venture was politicised, with the opposition parties criticising the government for endangering the public character of ERT through its plan for ERT Digital as a mixed public–private company with the state holding a 51% stake. Despite this innovative venture, the transition from the analogue to the digital terrestrial television system was eventually left to the

private sector based on a market-driven approach approved by the government (Papathanassopoulos, 2014).

While during the state monopoly on broadcasting from 1935 to 1989, ERT's news programmes served the primitive ideological state apparatus echoing the voice of the government (Papathanassopoulos, 2001, p. 510), after the market liberalisation Greek journalism at large, breaking with past practices, started giving prominence to 'soft' news (human interest stories usually blurring the line between information and entertainment) rather than to 'hard' news (timely fact-related stories dealing with serious and truly influential social topics). Despite this change, ERT has constantly faced a sharp decline in viewership rates. Overall, it is still a broadcasting era in which Greek journalists experience a lack of independence due to political influences on news content and, thus, a deficient professional journalism culture. Other operational issues affecting ERT's credibility are related to its persistent financial problems, its bureaucratic character, and its inability to draw up a long-term plan aimed at claiming the audience's trust within the transforming communication field.

Research questions and methodology

The findings presented in this chapter emerge from empirical insights gained from an online survey addressing ERT's employees (mainly journalists and secondarily news production team members, n=55) as well as from semi-structured interviews conducted with senior managerial executives of the PSB corporation. The task of delivering PSN in the platformised era is being influenced by several factors, among them the organisational structure of the news corporation affecting news production, and the degree to which innovative processes have been adopted. Based on this rationale and considering the theoretical argumentation, as discussed above, a set of research questions (RQs) are raised:

RQ1: Can the promise of PSJ in a media market belonging to the polarised pluralist model, such as Greece, still be fulfilled against the backdrop of the platformisation of communication?

RQ2: To what extent has the ongoing process of platformisation of journalistic production and distribution led ERT to overcome the challenges/vulnerabilities of the past and move on to the adoption of new approaches regarding news provision?

RQ3: To what extent have past experiences led ERT's employees to greater awareness of renewed cross-platform journalistic and editorial strategies in news provision?

RQ4: What are ERT's prospects for serious public affairs reporting in the new platform-dominated environment?

RQ5: What are the prerequisites for a robust practice of professional PSJ by PSM organisations of the polarised pluralist model, such as ERT, in the context of the platform society?

To understand whether and to what extent ERT has re-evaluated the mission of PSN provision in the new context of platformised communication, the chapter draws on three research strands. First, we examined any updated policy documents outlining the current mission of ERT, particularly in terms of the news sector; then we created a survey questionnaire incorporating variables aimed at investigating the corporation's response to its public service mission; and, finally, we conducted semi-structured interviews with managerial executives playing an important role in the formation of ERT's strategy.

The survey was conducted based on a sample of availability derived from a digitally structured questionnaire, formulated on the *shout.com* platform, and distributed through email to all staff of ERT's news department during the summer of 2023. Opinions of ERT's employees regarding the contribution of the organisation to PSJ were tested through 22 items, based on an 11-point scale (zero to ten). The 11-point scale was eventually transformed into a 3-point scale (no or minimal contribution/importance/threat; moderate contribution/importance/threat; outstanding contribution/importance/threat) before analysing relevant data. The questionnaire also included open-ended

questions prompting respondents to explain their perspectives on operational features. To enhance the research findings with qualitative data, four semi-structured interviews with highly experienced journalists and senior managerial executives working for ERT were conducted. The answers to the open-ended questions of the survey and the interviews were analysed by employing thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The research sample drawn from the questionnaire survey consists of 55 ERT employees, representing a notable part of the permanent staff involved in news production (537 PSB journalists in February 2024, according to data provided by ERT's human resources department). As to the demographic features of the final sample, men outnumber women (58.2 % and 41.8% respectively) and research participants belong to various age categories, but the majority are middle-aged (41.8% are aged 45–54, 34.5% are aged 55–64, 20% are aged 35–44, and a small portion, 3.6%, belong to the age category 65+). Most of the respondents (30.9%) are journalists working for television. However, the sample – albeit to a lesser extent – also includes media professionals holding various posts within PSB (journalists of online news services, radio journalists, editors-in-chief of television and radio news broadcasts or online news services, anchors of news broadcasts, and administrative officers engaged in the news sector). The great majority of them have substantial professional experience both in ERT (72.7% more than 20 years) and in the media field generally (83.6% more than 20 years).

While the views expressed by the survey participants can in no way be considered representative of all ERT employees, they offer an insight into common perceptions of PSJ.

Research results

Integrated newsroom and editorial strategies

The research findings reveal that the vast majority of ERT employees (83.6%) are fully aware of an integrated newsroom's operations where journalists

produce content intended for dissemination across all the media channels of the corporation. This distinct model of news production and dissemination process, adopted by ERT during the pandemic crisis of COVID-19, clearly signifies the tangible – albeit belated compared to other European broadcasters (van den Bulck & Tambuyzer, 2013) – response of the corporation to technological convergence.

However, most respondents claim that the integration model cannot by itself ensure the integrity of the journalistic profession and advance PSJ (Table 11.1). The integrated newsroom is stacked with a motley group of colleagues who do not communicate with each other is an observation made emphatically by a journalist, while another news professional highlights that the integrated space of news editing hinders the functioning of journalistic work since everything is swallowed up by television. Other factors questioning the integrated newsroom's usefulness relate to its operation in a way that it serves the central control and manipulation of the news by the management in a context of journalists' reluctance to work thematically, not by medium without extra payment, resulting in the same news reporting being conducted, at the same time, by colleagues on radio, television, and the internet.

The editorial strategies adopted by ERT journalists are mostly considered to make no or limited contribution to the PSJ mission (Table 11.1). However, the various services offered by ERT (television, radio, online) are not regarded as identical in terms of their performance. Although past research indicates that television in Greece remains a medium of prominent relevance (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2013) even in the video streaming era (Podara et al., 2021), the views of ERT employees on the contribution of television news to PSJ are divided (with a weighted average 5.6/11, it is mostly believed to bear a moderate contribution). By contrast, radio news is rated more positively, with most respondents claiming a very strong/outstanding contribution to PSJ. The participants' views on online news services are mostly aligned with those on radio news, attributing a very strong or outstanding contribution to PSJ (Table 11.2). Comparing the three types of media services, television news gets the lowest weighted average compared with radio and online, a trend that reflects

the strong links of the specific medium with instrumentalisation trends for political purposes.

Table 11.1 ERT employees' views on the contribution of the integrated newsroom model and editorial strategies to PSJ (%)

On a scale from zero to ten, please rate to what extent:	Weighted average	No or minimal contribution (ratings 0–3)	Moderate contribution (ratings 4–6)	Very strong or outstanding contribution (ratings 7–10)
The current way of organising the newsroom contributes to serving PSJ	4.2/10	41.8	34.5	23.6
You consider that the editorial strategies currently adopted by ERT contribute to serving PSJ	3.91/10	47.3	34.5	18.2

Source: Author's survey

Table 11.2 ERT employees' views on the contribution of television, radio, and online news to PSJ (%)

On a scale from zero to ten, please rate to what extent you consider that the following services offered by ERT contribute to PSJ	Weighted average	Zero or minimal contribution (ratings 0–3)	Moderate contribution (ratings 4–6)	Very strong or outstanding contribution (ratings 7–10)
Television news	5.6/11	28.8	38.5	32.7
Radio news	6.65/11	17	24.5	58.5
Online news	6.13/11	24.5	28.3	47.2

Source: Author's survey

Regarding digital news, PSJ has made endeavours to inclusively inform diverse audiences through comprehensive news coverage from varied sources. Recently, ERT has demonstrated a commitment to this principle by launching ERT NEWS, a 24-hour news channel featuring international, national, and local news alongside special segments. The news channel aims to deliver timely updates, supported by the online news portal *ertnews.gr*. Despite these efforts, ERT employees see moderate results in digital news provision, particularly

when it comes to attracting younger audiences who tend to avoid traditional news sources. Still ERT's online news services have contributed to expanding its audience reach, embracing those inclined toward digital news consumption.

The challenges in reaching all audiences do not imply a public broadcaster deficient of rich news content. Research participants attribute to ERT a multi-thematic approach to news coverage, claiming that the news department incorporates in its news agenda – daily or very frequently – both hard news topics of national and international character covering politics, economy, and society as well as soft news themes relating to culture and sport. The multi-thematic model of news is also believed to embrace topics on civic life, reflecting ERT's attempt to expose audiences to content they would not necessarily select by themselves.

Threats to the PSJ mission

One of the greatest challenges inhibiting the PSJ mission is governmental interventions in journalistic practices, a feature expressed in various ways by ERT employees (Table 11.3). Self-censorship is another constraining factor frequently mentioned by research participants. These challenges are interrelated; they reinforce one another and reflect a long-lasting intrinsic feature dominating ERT's operational infrastructure.

The underutilisation or inefficient utilisation of personnel is also seen as a major hindrance to the proper performance of PSJ practices. This problem mainly afflicts the top managerial positions, which are argued to be dominated by inefficacy, inexperience, and indifference regarding the production of quality journalism. However, even low-ranking news editors are frequently accused of sloppy journalism.

Table 11.3 ERT employees' claims on factors hindering the mission of PSJ

Claims related to internal factors	Self-censorship culture and fear of responsibilities on the part of

	journalists
	Inadequate management
	Displacement of competent employees/underutilised staff
	Insufficient training of journalists
	Lack of meritocracy in personnel placement (from top to the bottom of the hierarchy)
	Poor human resources management
	Lack of unfettered and original reporting based on primary sources
	Centralisation aimed at information control

	News programmes turning news topics into products
	Managerial turnover after each governmental change
	Lack of pluralism and depth in news coverage
	Overreliance on short-term contracted journalists
	Management's indifference to quality journalism
Claims related to EXTERNAL FACTORS	Political intervention/dependence on the respective government in power
	Governmental influence/control on news mission and overall governmental expediencies

	Appointed administrations intervening in shaping the news by promoting the government's line
	Censorship and veiled propaganda

Source: Author's survey

This suggests that the failure of the PSB system to serve the PSN mission is partly due to a lack of proper knowledge and predisposition to do so within a working context where lack of meritocracy is believed to hold well (Figure 11.1). This is exemplified by viewpoints of research participants emphasising the unexpected and unwise choices of people in front of the cameras and in positions of responsibility, or persons in positions of responsibility who have been selected based on non-objective criteria.

Financial issues such as the potential abolition of the licence fee and the reduction of funding granted to the PSB are also considered serious challenges; however, they represent a perception shared by a smaller proportion of the staff surveyed (Figure 11.1). Other important factors preventing ERT from providing PSJ services are deemed to be the reduced journalistic staff, the insufficient training of journalists to keep pace with technological advances, as well as frequent managerial turnover. As to the use of social media platforms by journalists for purposes of news gathering and dissemination, it seems to be a professional practice that gathers differentiated assessments; it is perceived as a challenge of moderate importance by 38.5% of respondents, of great/outstanding importance by 34.6% and of minimal/zero importance by 26.9%. ERT employees are also divided on the impact of competition from commercial broadcasters. Most respondents see it as a great hindrance to ERT's attempt to serve PSJ, whereas others describe it either as a non-threat or as a moderate one (Figure 11.1).

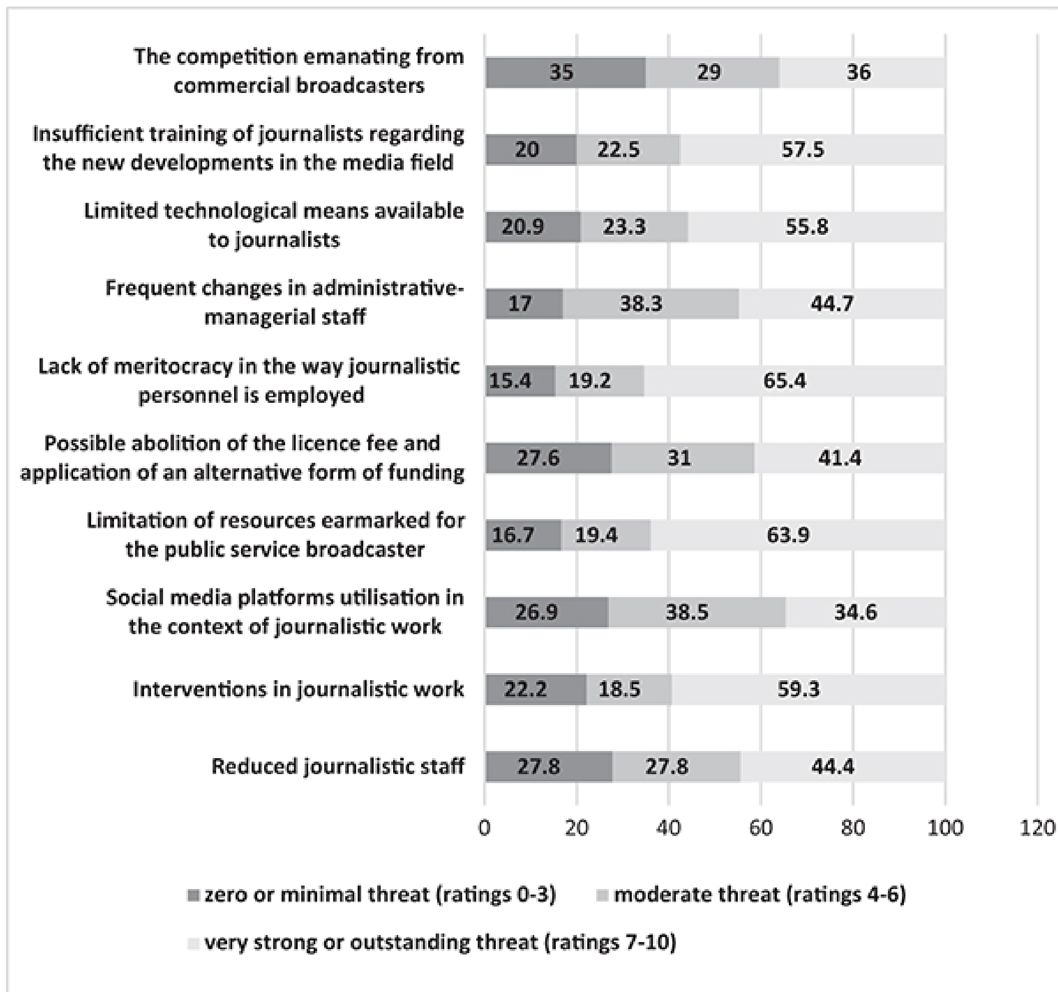

Figure 11.1 ERT employees' ratings of the seriousness of threats to PSJ mission.

Source: Author's survey

Suggested improvements in ERT's news editorial strategies

Political influences have consistently shaped the governance framework of ERT, exerting detrimental effects on its transition from the analogue to the digital era. Various restructuring initiatives have been proposed and implemented since the 1990s to address ERT's organisational and programming challenges; however, the results proved to be either transient or illusive. Even when the government abruptly disbanded ERT in June 2013,

aiming to replace it with a more cost-effective broadcasting entity, the new organisation, NERIT, replicated past vulnerabilities.

Despite the operational changes, the research indicates that ERT has not improved its news editorial strategies, with many perceiving a worsening trend on this topic attributable to the organisation's alignment with governmental communication objectives. Suggestions from ERT employees emphasise the need for reclaiming pluralism, granting greater autonomy to news editors, and reducing self-censorship to foster a PSB truly responsive to societal needs, devoid of partisan or governmental influence. Consequently, the feasibility of the PSB mission is questioned unless editorial strategies are revamped to prioritise pluralism, freedom of expression, and journalistic independence from political influence.

The request for independence is reiterated, explicitly or implicitly, denoting that journalists' autonomy in news gathering, news agenda-setting, and the dissemination process is a fundamental prerequisite for ERT's conversion into a beneficial organisation open to society, disregarding political party or governmental interests. The ineffectiveness of the current quasi-editorial strategies is reflected in an insightful remark made by a respondent arguing that the news coverage process needs to be expanded thematically, turn into more depth, and obtain increased pluralism, followed by a drastic reduction of central control.

The new 24-hour thematic channel of ERT (ERT NEWS), although launched as an innovative venture, to some extent is described as superficial in mission. Indicative of this perception is the observation of a research participant pointing out that the schedule of the channel is so firmly structured (five hourly news bulletins, live news broadcasts, twelve-minute thematic inserts under the same news format) that the same news topics are simply repeated or avoided, and there is no room for journalistic analysis or research.

It is noteworthy that suggested improvements in editorial strategies are related not only to operational factors but also to skills and training. Indeed, respondents point to the need for better education and training provision for journalists, especially those assuming managerial positions.

The news gate-keeping process

Traditionally, journalism has established several criteria applicable to news selection. Nevertheless, PSM – as opposed to their commercial counterparts – are supposed to abide by their missionary norms related to quality content addressing the entire audience. According to the participants in our research, there are three criteria that stand out: the extent to which a news event is related to institutional authority; the public figures involved in a news story; and the news themes raised by the commercial counterparts (Table 11.4).

When it comes to governmental issues, a respondent's observations reveal the noxious mentality that has historically plagued ERT: the news topics addressing adversely the image of the government appear on air only when there is a reply on the part of a governmental member or when the revelations and reactions take the form of an avalanche.

Table 11.4 ERT employees' ratings of the importance of criteria applied in the news selection process (%)

On a scale from zero to ten, please rate the importance of the following criteria in the news selection process, adopted by ERT	Weighted average	Zero or minimal importance (ratings 0–3)	Moderate importance (ratings 4–6)	High or outstanding importance (ratings 7–10)
What the public likes most at a given time	6.09/11	15.1	43.4	41.5
News topic's association	4/11	50.9	37.7	11.3

with a social media influencer				
Whether an event is related to institutional authorities	9/11	10.3	24.1	65.5
Public figures involved in a news event (except for persons related to institutional authorities)	7.87/11	4.4	35.6	60
The impact of a news topic on society	6.85/11	14.6	41.7	43.8
Whether a news event contains a human interest story	6.85/11	13.7	25.5	60.8
The dramatisation that encapsulates a timely news topic	6.95/11	17	29.8	53.2

What the competitors / the rest of the country's news organisations are disclosing	7.78/11	14	23.3	62.8
The current topics (trending topics) being discussed on social media platforms	6.27/11	25.5	21.6	52.9

Source: Author's survey

By and large, research participants emphasise repeatedly the considerable role played by the element of political expediencies in news formation. Arguments such as the editorial line is coming from the prime minister's headquarters, the news agenda formation is based on the government mandate, the news content should not be critical of the government, are indicative of a biased process upon which the formation of ERT's news agenda is based.

Prospects for a new strategy based on the platformisation trends

A substantial portion of research participants exhibit either denial (by 35%) or complete unawareness (by 30%) regarding the existence of a team-based initiative targeting innovative approaches within ERT's digital news department, while doubts are expressed regarding the operational advantages of the new integrated newsroom model. These doubts are compounded by perceived constraints on editorial autonomy and institutional independence, depicting a professional landscape wherein internal transformations appear superficial. ERT employees predominantly advocate for strategic and meritocratic staff utilisation, support the disengagement from central political

influence, emphasise the need for attracting younger audiences, and foster renewed contact with the audience. Effective personnel management entails comprehensive measures such as ongoing multimedia training, investment in specialised journalists to bolster impartial investigative journalism, and recruitment of young, qualified professionals under a permanent employment framework.

Top executives and journalists within ERT contend that the platform-oriented era necessitates investment in new productions amid internal and external media landscape shifts. They view ERT as a counterbalance to commercial broadcasters' shortcomings, advocating for a re-evaluation of traditional PSB objectives by integrating linear and non-linear television paradigms. Despite acknowledging the challenges posed by the platformised era, they propose a strategy centred on multiplatform distribution, prioritising linear television offerings while incorporating personalised content provision to engage the public, combined with the task of upholding the essence of the PSB mission.

Discussion and conclusion

Since the turn of the 21st century, news organisations worldwide have gone through various financial and operational challenges and shifts (Peters & Broersma, 2017), hindering the effort of media professionals to fulfil the promise of quality journalism in the digital age. The research findings reveal that the principles of PSJ are mostly absent from the operational status of ERT, primarily characterised by low editorial autonomy and weak journalism professionalism. No matter how hard it is experimenting to upgrade the quality of its news output through several strategic initiatives (an integrated newsroom, a renewed news portal, a 24-hour news thematic channel, and the first AI anchor), ERT does not meet the standards of a high-quality news provision, a weakness widely acknowledged by its employees. This is closely related to top executives' limited understanding of how a contemporary PSM

organisation should be run, suffering from a type of intelligibility issue (Jones, Jones, & Luger, 2022).

The case of Greece exemplifies a broader crisis within journalism, extending beyond financial and operational challenges to encompass cultural dimensions and commitments of news production (Alexander, 2015). This structural crisis is not unique to Greece but indicative of a phenomenon affecting multiple countries, reflecting a larger crisis within the information society. A recent report by the Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (2022) highlights significant threats to editorial autonomy across several European nations, with risks being observed in the appointment processes of PSM organisations in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe.

The Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT), evaluated by its employees as moderately competent in serving PSJ, faces criticism for failing to prioritise news programming aligned with the societal role of journalism. This failure is attributed to managerial executives' transient and often politically influenced decision-making. The Greek media landscape suffers from a longstanding crisis of trust in the PSM system, rooted in ERT's inability to operate as a truly independent organisation, thus failing to convince the public of its commitment to pluralistic news production. ERT has pursued technological innovation without long-term strategic planning aimed at reinvigorating its PSN remit.

To address these challenges, institutional restructuring of the media organisation is deemed essential and urgent, oriented to the establishment of an independent corporate identity and a strategic overhaul of managerial appointments and staff allocations. Amid the platformised era, rejuvenating the relevance of PSM requires embracing interactive non-linear media services and adapting to the competitive digital landscape. Regulatory interventions, though necessary, cannot fully resolve the issue without addressing the clientelist relations between the state and the media. In short, ERT needs to undertake initiatives that go beyond the regulatory or technological framework to cultivate a vibrant PSJ within the small media market it operates (RQ1). Its capacity to keep pace with developments in the platformised era cannot be

effective unless long-term policy measures are taken to make the principles of transparency and meritocracy familiar concepts of the media organisation.

Past research indicates heterogeneity in PSM strategies in the online environment (Donders, 2019, p. 1012), with no linear response to evolving audiovisual trends (D'Arma et al., 2021, p. 695). In Greece, ERT exemplifies a lack of innovative editorial strategies despite the platformised era's influence on economic and cultural production, leaving little possibility of adopting new approaches to news services (RQ2). This stagnation is rooted in longstanding vulnerabilities, characteristic of countries following a polarised pluralist model of media, framed by commercialisation, low journalistic professionalisation, high political parallelism, and weak PSM dynamics.

In summary, the resolution of the crisis in Greek (public service) journalism necessitates systemic reforms within ERT and a broader transition towards transparent and meritocratic media organisations capable of adapting to the challenges posed by the platformised era. In the contemporary networked communication environment, safeguarding PSN values, specifically editorial independence, is of utmost importance. Scholars advocate for collaborative actions among news organisations of various types, such as the renewed media policy in the Scandinavian context, emphasising quality journalism as a public good across printed media and digital platforms with increased public funding (Allern & Pollack, 2019, pp. 1435–1436). Additionally, other scholars recommend reinventing PSN based on inclusivity and sustainability, involving policy support, economic incentives, and strategic development within and across news organisations (Lowe & Stavitsky, 2016, p. 321).

Small media markets like Greece, traditionally lacking in strong PSJ advocacy, could benefit from adopting strategies borrowed from more successful markets, while also emphasising the role of journalism education in fostering new professionalism and media entrepreneurship models. Despite scholars underlining audience engagement over technological innovation for reinforcing public service (Direito-Rebollal & Donders, 2022, p. 9), ERT's strategy appears to neglect enhancing public participation in its digital platforms. Instead, it focuses on multiple distribution platforms without

investing in digital-only innovative content, a trend observed in other European media markets as well (Direito-Rebollal & Donders, 2022; Michalis, 2022; Donders, 2019). Therefore, even though employees have become aware of the need for cross-platform news provision and mostly regard themselves as multitasked media professionals, in practice the reinvigoration of editorial strategies is considered feeble (RQ3).

Regarding ERT's prospects for serious public affairs reporting in the platform-dominated environment, research findings suggest limited possibilities under current operating conditions (RQ4). There seems to be confusion among ERT journalists and managerial executives regarding the role of PSN in the digital age, with a tendency to produce news flows based on outdated practices. To address these challenges, the media markets of the polarised pluralist model, like Greece, may need to adopt a combined strategy of isomorphism and tight coupling (Sehl & Cornia, 2021), borrowing best practices from small or larger markets and actively involving the audience in innovative ventures.

Particularly, ERT's overall organisational restructuring is imperative, with isomorphism offering insights into why similar solutions have been adopted by various media organisations and how legitimacy can be ensured in the platformised era. At the same time, tight coupling with the media environment and within the organisation is also crucial for maximising news services outcomes. This involves developing relationships with platform companies, aligning with audience expectations, and implementing evaluation models for efficiency. By cutting the umbilical cord with the sins of the past, ERT must reassert its legitimacy at both a pragmatic and a moral level by strengthening relationships with audiences and utilising the affordances of the digital environment (such as algorithms, web analytics, audience metrics, and audience research). The key to effective renewal in an era dominated by platforms is both apparent and challenging to attain. It is imperative that PSM organisations not undervalue or disregard the foundational principles of journalism.

Note

1. In this chapter the term *misinformation* is used to refer to incorrect, incomplete, or misleading information usually not meant to hurt or deceive. In contrast, the term *disinformation* refers to false information deliberately and often covertly spread to deceive people – features which are difficult to prove.

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POSTFACE

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Recent changes in the national and international media landscape, socio-political developments, and the explosion in media consumption (possibilities) have translated into a wide range of challenges for media suppliers. Public service media (PSM) must juggle an increasing number of balls. A vital aspect of PSM mandates requires efforts to inform audiences, create high-quality content, ensure the distribution of this content across 'touchpoints', and innovate to sustain services and efficiency. The current socio-political context produces added strain for PSM acceptance and perceived relevance. Moreover, PSM are facing increasing pressure to abolish licence fees and, more generally, adapt to financial constraints sharpened by funding erosion.

There is urgent need for PSM companies to convince stakeholders of their public value and legitimacy. There are many and varied stakeholders, including policymakers and strategic allies in the cultural sector, as well as independent content creators, but also underserved audiences that are overlooked by media providers with a more commercial motivation. Effective communication is an essential success factor, and that requires building and maintaining trust. Messaging must be justifiably perceived as valuable, true, and relevant. That is the backbone of PSM's relationship with all stakeholders.

PSM are challenged with gaps between groups in society who are abandoning legacy mass media and are often indifferent to public service media. Efforts to communicate effectively have not succeeded well enough. Building bridges to link with citizens beyond their role as audiences and reinforcing ties with key allies should be prioritised. The principle of universalism expects PSM to connect with everyone. Depending on the type of audience, this requires rethinking how PSM organisations portray themselves.

They must compete without neglecting the core values that make PSM distinctive and distinctively important. The challenge is not only in crafting the right message, but also in being an effective messenger.

The PSM mandate

For PSM, trust entails a mandate to perform its public service mission. This mandate is a legal requirement from political partners and variously encoded by legislation, a PSM charter, a management agreement or contract, and sometimes also by citizens either in boards or simply through public debate. Contributing authors in this RIPE Reader have highlighted the tottering position of PSM today. Marius Dragomir sheds light on how platformisation is posing threats and creating opportunities for the PSM mandate. Kobina Bedu-Addo addresses the efforts of political and commercial opponents to challenge the mandate in whole and in part, to highlight but two. Academic studies and PSM research indicate trust in the institution is showing serious cracks. Some stalwart organisations have seen trust drop significantly, including ABC (Australia), the BBC (UK), and CBC (Canada) (Newman et al., 2023). Declines correspond with a wider context of falling trust in many institutions, including news. In 2021, the Reuters Institute reported that other institutions, including national and local governments, have also seen declining trust rates (Toff et al., 2021). Interpersonal trust is also diminishing.

Considering the connection the general audience makes with PSM, an interesting disparity arises. The Reuters Institute 'Digital News Report 2023' (Newman et al, 2023) shows how, across European markets, the perceived importance of PSM for society is more widely agreed on than its perceived personal importance.[1] In other words, people understand what PSM can mean for the wider society, but find it personally less relevant and valued. People might support it in principle, but connect less on a personal level.

According to Lauret (2018), institutions need to meet three conditions to instil personal trust:

1. To have a notoriously definite positive social function.
2. To resort to practices invested with a positive moral meaning, exceeding (but not excluding) technical competence or instrumental rationality.
3. To have accredited in time their constant dispositions to function according to these practices.

Institutions, therefore, require:

> [. . .] moral dispositions, and an identity in time that allows considering the institutions as a quasi-person. Conversely, the quasi-personal mistrust of an institution presupposes the condition of identity, an equivocal social function, and immoral dispositions (a set of regular and morally reprehensible practices or inducing mistrust – such as deception, secrecy, lobbying)
>
> (Lauret, 2018, sections 39–40)

Proof that PSM organisations follow these principles is ubiquitous. Horowitz and D'Arma (2023) extensively described the link between PSM's six core values and trust. Other authors, such as Milosavjlevic and Urbániková, Dragomir, and Jones et al. in this volume, highlight key PSM values.

1. Universality: PSM must strive to reach all segments of society with multiplatform content and services, enabling diverse voices and participation in society.
2. Independence: PSM are free from political, commercial, and other influences and ideologies and provide impartial content.
3. Excellence: PSM foster high standards of practice and content quality.
4. Diversity: PSM provide differing and pluralistic views, offer different genres, and promote staff diversity.
5. Accountability: PSM listen to audiences and strive for transparency of processes and practices.
6. Innovation: PSM create new formats and use new technologies to connect with audiences.

Even so, PSM have not been able to escape the broader, general trend of declining trust in institutions, especially including the media (Newman et al., 2022; European Commission, 2022). The core values of the PSM mandate are all under pressure. Several authors in this publication describe this, including Ala-Fossi et al. and Dragomir.

This declining trust threatens PSM's main responsibility of providing news, which is already becoming increasingly complex, as many of the chapters earlier in this publication series have explained. The erosion of trust in PSM raises particular worries in a year in which a huge number of people are voting: more than 2 billion voters in 50 countries head to the polls in 2024 (Masterson, 2023).

The power of PSM news

From the start in the early 20th century, PSM have been expected to provide impartial, trustworthy news, and in some cases, they have indeed succeeded in delivering this. Despite the downward trend, PSM remain the most trusted news source in twenty-eight out of thirty-one European countries (European Parliament, 2022). On average, they offer over seven hours of news a day on TV and radio, and the majority of PSM organisations (95%) operate a dedicated online news offer (see European Broadcasting Union Media Intelligence Service [EBU-MIS], 2023d). PSM news has a reputation for high quality: Elections are well-covered, and PSM encourage citizens to participate in political life (see, for instance, Leibniz-Institut Für Medienforschung | Hans-Bredow-Institut & ZDF, 2019; Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, 2019). Even more, PSM encourage voting, and higher market shares for PSM are associated with higher levels of political interest (EBU-MIS, 2023b), making them especially valuable in election years.

PSM also nurture democracy by giving voice to different opinions and views. This helps citizens to form their own opinions (see, for instance, Latvijas Radio & Latvijas Televīzija, 2022). Pluralism is another key value for PSM. The

higher the level of trust in PSM in a country, the more satisfied people are with the diversity of opinions heard and seen in national media (EBU-MIS, 2023b).

In addition, well-trusted PSM foster news literacy. The higher the trust in PSM in a country, the fewer the number of citizens concerned about misinformation. Indeed, PSM are renowned for applying high editorial news standards (see EBU-MIS, 2023d). The news offered by PSM is distinctive in many ways: it is found to be more informative (Cushion, 2019) and is more likely to empower citizens in democracy (Sehl, 2020). In this exceptional election year, it is important to note that PSM news reports more on European and local elections than commercial news sources. In addition, they report more on issues and policy implications during elections. PSM also cover more 'hard' topics (Cushion, 2022). Last but not least, PSM report more about politics, public affairs, and international issues than market-driven outlets (Cushion, 2019).

The data make clear the pivotal role of PSM as a linchpin in the voting process, and in democratic practices generally. They also have the potential to counter worrisome negative developments in the news and media industry, especially including the erosion of trust in online news, public polarisation, the explosion of fake news and disinformation, and the lack of quality and editorial guarantees in online news.

The 360° value of PSM

News is obviously only a fraction of what PSM do. A substantial body of research demonstrates the wider public value of PSM.

1. PSM support arts and culture, offering broad, diverse, and high-quality content. Moreover, PSM are the main contributors to Europe's rich audiovisual content, investing over EUR 21 billion in audio and video content in 2023 (EBU-MIS, 2024b). In addition, they provide unique benefits driven by their mandate, such as high support for artists and

creators. PSM expose four times more artists and five times more music titles than commercial stations (EBU-MIS, 2022).

2. Thanks to their positive reputation, PSM attract further investments for production companies they work with (EBU-MIS, 2022).
3. PSM should take the forefront in the production sector, as they mitigate risk in the media market. They produce local content, essential for the creative workforce, independent producers, and so on. They also contribute to wider innovation and nurture partnerships with the private sector (EBU-MIS, 2023a).
4. PSM play a major role in the sports sector. Their involvement in sports broadcasting contributed EUR 4.9 billion to Europe's GDP and supported over 60,200 jobs in 2022 (Oxford Economics, 2024).
5. Through PSM economic activities, several multiplier effects come into play. For instance, for each job created in public broadcasters, two to three additional roles are created across the economy. Every Euro invested in PSM funding generates between two and a half to three Euros in the economy (EBU-MIS, 2022).
6. PSM reinforce citizenship, positively impacting both social and political participation. They also nurture the collective identity by sharing national values, cultural identity, and so on. (EBU-MIS, 2023e).
7. Due to the high-quality standards and the unique mandate, PSM can act as an export product representing a country's qualities abroad (EBU-MIS, 2023e).

Don't shoot the messenger. . .

Despite strong evidence and rational arguments, stakeholders are not always convinced about the necessity of PSM from a personal perspective. How can PSM reinforce the personal connection? The key might be to think more deeply about how PSM typically presents itself. Research shows we are far more likely to trust people who are similar to us than different from us (Fischer, 2009; Lui et al., 2006; Wood, 1996). Physical similarity and social proximity positively

affect trust behaviour (for example, DeBruine, 2002). We like and trust people in our own social group more than outsiders (Balliet & De Dreu, 2014; Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014).

Consequently, one could argue that increasing the recognisability of the people and stories seen and heard in PSM content could be a powerful tool to stimulate trust. In that sense, PSM should emphasise inclusivity more and take still greater pains to represent the rich diversity of each society. The resulting recognition would strengthen feelings of personal relevance and affect trust. In news provision as well, connecting on a more personal level seems a good strategy. PSM organisations already acknowledge the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI): at least 80% of organisations say DEI is important or very important. They are very involved in strategies and initiatives related to DEI in both content and staff (EBU-MIS, 2023c). Continuing the efforts and becoming more recognisable in voices heard and faces seen could bear fruit in the longer term.

Admittedly, attracting and retaining people from different corners, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds is difficult. Some groups may be overlooked or especially challenging for PSM to connect with. Recruiting a more diverse workforce requires resources, and PSM budgets have eroded for years. Indeed, PSM struggle to attract and retain staff, and in the majority of cases the reasons are financial (EBU-MIS, 2024a). In addition, ensuring presence on the diverse platforms requires continuous innovation, expertise and – again – resources. Difficulties notwithstanding, it is important to try harder and do better.

Who to reach

Effective communication isn't a 'one size fits all' approach. Especially in times of limited resources, PSM are wiser to employ a targeted strategy. Academic and industry resources offer valuable insights into which audience groups are furthest away from PSM due to low levels of trust.

The Edelman Trust Barometer speaks of two trust gaps: the first gap exists in trust inequality between the so-called 'informed public' and the 'mass

population'. Globally, the informed public is 16% more trusting than the mass population, based on their trust in NGOs, businesses, government, and media. The more informed citizens are usually also more politically engaged and higher educated (Edelman, 2021; Ipsos, 2022). The second gap exists between people with high income and those with low income. The former is 15% more trusting (Edelman, 2022). There are strong indications that underserved audiences are also groups with lower participation rates in society. The Reuters Institute (Toff et al., 2021) found a connection between people experiencing lower degrees of social cohesion (bonding with other individuals and specific groups in society) and lower trust levels. More specifically, in relation to news, engaged citizens active in society and interested in politics tend to trust news more (Hanitzsch et al., 2018; Tsfati & Ariely, 2014). The same has been found to be true for people with higher education, who tend to have greater trust in legacy media such as printed newspapers and the radio (Ipsos, 2022).

Promoting trust is, therefore, about targeting potentially underserved audiences, assuming that the less informed public consumes less PSM news and engages less with PSM content overall. Indeed, the Reuters Institute (Toff et al., 2021) argues that the most distrusting are the least frequent consumers of news. These groups might stay under the radar as they are more indifferent.

Besides audiences, PSM organisations shouldn't overlook other key stakeholders. Building trust is also about strengthening ties with allies, actual and potential. A great example is the spontaneous mobilisation of the general public and the cultural sector in 2018 as a reaction to the 'No Billag' voting campaign in Switzerland. This was a federal popular initiative aiming to eliminate the TV and radio fees, as well as subsidising radio or television by the Confederation. Fully 72% of the Swiss population voted to keep the licence fee in place, based on the argument that dropping the fee would put media plurality at risk and, consequently, Swiss democracy. People feared that closing the Swiss public broadcaster would also harm the economy, the job market, and especially the cultural and sports sectors. During this campaign, different allies mobilised, including political parties, the Conference of the Cantonal Governments, tourist organisations, trade union groups, religious communities, and the Swiss folk culture organisation (EBU-MIS, 2018).

Another example is the strong support the BBC received from Pact, the UK screen sector trade body representing and supporting independent production and distribution companies. As the BBC faced serious threats (including a GBP 650m cut), Pact spoke up and delivered arguments in favour of the broadcaster to the parliament.[2]

Dialogue as a glue

Many PSM organisations understand that engaging in dialogue with stakeholders is necessary to understand diverse needs and expectations. Moreover, they know this feedback helps identify strategic priorities and keep organisations up to speed with societal developments and trends.

Traditionally, feedback is collected through surveys, panels, and customer service functions. These methods of data collection have a long-standing tradition within PSM. However, the latest trend is for PSM to step out of their buildings and meet audiences where they are. An increasing number of PSM have set up more engaging initiatives, such as roadshows. A few examples include the Spanish broadcaster RTVÉ ('La Gran Consulta'),[3] and the Flemish broadcaster VRT ('Jouw VRT').[4] In addition to their legitimate interest in understanding their audiences, these events are a unique opportunity for PSM to create a feeling of proximity and approachability. That feeling of being near is importantly one of the conditions for building trust.

In the same vein, proximity shouldn't be overlooked in news provision. Local news is often perceived as more highly relevant than news about distant locations and events because it resonates with daily life experiences, giving citizens the opportunity to participate and feel connected to their local communities (Park et al., 2022). As such, it plays an important role in building social cohesion. However, the provision of local news is under pressure due to funding cuts across news providers and ongoing competitive pressure by big platforms such as Google News, leading to news agglomeration and platformisation. The chapters by Dragomir, Bedu-Addo, and Karadimitriou are especially relevant here.

Proximity has an interesting role to play in the performance of universality. Europe risks a rise in news deserts that already exist in Croatia, Portugal, and Turkey, as shown by the European Federation of Journalists.[5] In response, the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom has launched a flagship research project, the 'Media Pluralism Monitor'.[6] Through this initiative, the project assesses the health of media ecosystems in Europe, with an emphasis on combating news deserts.

One key solution to this problem is funding independent media to ensure the continued provision of local news. This also entails funding PSM and protecting its independence. PSM both provide and reinforce local news provision. Collaborations between PSM and other news providers have yielded multiple positive outcomes, including market-making outcomes in the UK, Sweden, New Zealand, and elsewhere (see, for instance, Swart et al, 2017; Winseck & Thompson, 2023). PSM offer 116 regional/local news services and collaborate in various ways to ensure regional and international news coverage. The EBU's 'A European Perspective' is an outstanding example of this collaboration.[7] Furthermore, 24% of PSM have agreements with local news providers (EBU-MIS, 2023d). In short, PSM are an essential enabler in the news market, supplying local, national, and international news, either directly or through collaborations with local news providers.

Conclusion

PSM generate enormous value for media markets, as demonstrated in academic research. And PSM is generally perceived by publics to be useful and valuable. The missing link, however, hinges on feelings of low personal relevance. Overcoming this gap requires efforts to create a stronger sense of closeness, recognition, and relatability. PSM will need to increasingly invest in staff diversity and interaction with diverse stakeholders. They must reach out on a more personal level through face-to-face initiatives to become more 'human' and approachable.

In doing so, PSM must keep faith with its core principles and values. PSM should not neglect the power they can exert as a resource for unity and cohesion. PSM can be a beacon of trust in these socio-politically uncertain times. They operate as a trusted guide for navigating the whirlwind of content, opinions, and global and local developments. To best achieve this, they need to be a strong united voice. In addition, dramatic advances in artificial intelligence and its massive impact on journalism, as discussed by Anis Rahman and Jones et al. in this volume, will undeniably bleed into the news experience of consumers. Understanding how news is produced, how to classify news reliability based on the context it is found in, and judging the quality of sources will become a complex task for a population that often struggles with media literacy.[8] It is essential that PSM act on this as a united front, ensuring clarity and transparency and countering the erosion of news literacy.

Therefore, the future of PSM will be a balancing act between the institution and the partner. PSM has a strong and compelling message as an agent for and of the public for trustworthy news and information, but the messenger is too distant and unfamiliar to big parts of society in many countries today. Overcoming this problem is a major challenge and opportunity for development in public service journalism.

Notes

1. Based on the net importance, namely the proportion who said PSM is important minus the proportion who said it is unimportant.
2. For more information, see https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/7026/pdf/
3. For more information, see https://www.rtve.es/rtve/20230517/gran-consulta-sumado-casi-140000-respuestas-ciudadanas/2386907.shtml
4. For more information, see https://www.vrt.be/nl/jouw-vrt/
5. For more information, see https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2023/04/11/news-deserts-arent-new-the-cases-of-croatia-portugal-and-turkey/

6. For more information, see https://cmpf.eui.eu/
7. For more information, see https://www.ebu.ch/eurovision-news/european-perspective
8. For more information, see EBU-MIS 'Public service media strengthening media literacy' (2023) (https://www.ebu.ch/research/membersonly/report/public-service-media-strengthening-media-literacy)

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