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Making Public Television Social? Public Service Broadcasting and the Challenges of Social Media

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Abstract

This article investigates how the rise of social media affects European public service broadcasting (PSB), particularly in the United Kingdom and The Netherlands. We explore the encounter of “social” and “public” on three levels: the level of institution, professional practice, and content. After investigating these three levels, we address the more general question of how public broadcasters are coping with the challenges of social media. How can public television profit from the abilities of social media to engage new young audiences (and makers) without compromising public values? And will PSB be able to extend the creation of public value outside its designated space to social media at large? While the boundaries between public and corporate online space are becoming progressively porous, the meaning of “publicness” is contested and reshaped on the various levels of European public broadcasting.

Keywords

social TV, public broadcasting, social media, broadcast regulation, cross-media, public value

Introduction

Over the past decade, social media platforms have gradually infiltrated all segments of everyday life—from making friends to debating politics—and have impacted the fabric of social institutions—from law enforcement to journalism. Particularly in the field of television, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube affect both the social practice of television and its cultural form, while also disrupting broadcaster’s conventional production and distribution logistics (Williams 1974). Television around

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the globe is gradually integrating social media logic in its already established mass media logic (Altheide and Snow 1979; Van Dijck and Poell, 2013). Tweets, likes, and favorites are becoming a vital part of television's sound bite and celebrity culture, while the tube itself gets extended by second screen applications. Attaching "social" as an adjective to television increasingly means braiding the conversational and creative strengths of networked platforms with the mass entertainment and audience engagement abilities of broadcast networks. "Social TV," though still in its early stages, is evidently changing commercial broadcasting; it also has visible impact on its public counterpart.

This article investigates how the rise of social media has affected European public service broadcasting (PSB), particularly in the United Kingdom and The Netherlands. We will explore the encounter of "social" and "public" on three levels: at the level of *institutions*, *professional practices*, and *content*. The first level, explored in the next section, outlines how national organizations for public broadcasting have faced the rapid emergence of major social platforms with a mixture of bliss and reserve. PSB understandably wanted to profit from the new opportunities offered by social media to promote user participation and encourage independent audiovisual creations, but the increasing commercialization of social network services such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter threatened to compromise public value. As we will argue in the second section, public service broadcasters in response tried to balance off commercial pressure of social media by redefining public value, not only by setting new standards for professional practices but also by producing its own version of "public" social television content. The third section illustrates how various national public broadcasters started experimenting with "public social TV" experiments to attract a new generation of viewers and appeal to a different type of producer. We will examine in more detail two such experiments geared specifically toward an audience of young adults: *Up For Hire*, broadcast by the BBC (2011), and *Upload TV* (2013), produced by the Dutch VPRO.

After investigating the three levels of impact, we want to relate these insights to the more reflective question of how public television can profit from the abilities of social media to engage new audiences and makers without compromising public values. A major challenge for public television is especially to engage teens and young adults, the future citizens, who increasingly spend their time on social platforms. We will argue that it is extremely important for PSB to help restyle the meaning of "public" vis-à-vis "social" in an emerging ecosystem of connective media that is overwhelmingly corporate. As PSB inevitably adapts and internalizes social media mechanisms, the question whether or not PSB should extend the creation of public value outside its designated space becomes newly relevant. While the boundaries between public and corporate online space are becoming progressively porous, the meaning of "publicness" is contested and reshaped on the various levels—institutional, professional, and content—of European public broadcasting.

PSB and the Rise of Social Media

PSB's mission has always been to produce television as a form of speaking to, and engaging with, viewers as *citizens*. The institutional space granted to public

broadcasting systems in most European countries came with the obligation to inform, educate, and entertain diverse audiences and involve them in public debates. Public television prioritized participation over consumption long before the emergence of Web 2.0. In recent years, social media—defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as a group of Web 2.0 platforms that allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content (UGC)—have started to contest PSB's "exclusive" right to address the viewer as a social participant. The issue raised in this section is as follows: How did public television respond to social media's challenges to its core institutional task?

To answer this question, we first need to situate PSB's confrontation with social media against the historical background of public broadcasters' late-twentieth century's struggle with commercial broadcasting, which put an end to a long period of relatively privileged programming space (Syvertsen 2003). After the deregulation of television markets in the 1980s, commercial broadcasters quickly gained market shares in the European mediascape. A number of European public broadcasters responded to this threat by imitating successful commercial tactics and formats, such as shows, quizzes, reality TV, and talent contests (Gripsrud and Weibull 2010; Wieten et al. 2000). Commercial broadcasters complained that public broadcasters were competing unfairly through programming content void of "public value." As Syvertsen (2003, 170) poignantly summed up PSB's dilemma after the first round of battle with free-market regulation, "The more successful public broadcasters become in competing with commercial companies, the more they will be under fire from competitors that claim that they are abusing their position and that their privileges should be terminated once and for all." Indeed, the comfortable presence of a privileged public *space* that heretofore formed an intrinsic justification of public *value* was no longer self-evident; it left PSB shaken on its foundations. At the end of the millennium, the institutional severance of public space from audience engagement and public value was a fact even before the next confrontation had begun (Gripsrud 2010).

That next round in the battle over public value and participation came sooner rather than later, as the early 2000s gave rise to a multitude of interactive platforms. Early manifestations were trumpeted in terms of their democratizing potential; the promises of online services for UGC and unlimited two-way communication understandably appealed to public broadcasters as the technological empowerment of users and citizens (Benkler 2006; Jenkins 2006). Social networking services (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter and UGC services such as YouTube and Flickr offered everyone the ability to chat, text, blog, send pictures, and distribute short videos in real time. Platforms gave users unimpeded and free access to the online production and distribution of audiovisual and textual content (Van Dijck, 2013; Hannaa et al. 2011). To public broadcasters, social media initially appeared to have Janus-faced qualities: while some were suspicious of any medium that defined citizens as media professionals, others regarded the new platforms as like-minded allies in their focus on user engagement. This duality of suspicion and attraction would mark PSB's institutional embrace of social media for the years to come.

While still in their developing stages, most social platforms lacked distinct business models; showing few signs of commercial exploitation except for a few banner ads,

they were regarded predominantly as “friends sites” and facilitators—helpful stimulants for users’ engagement and creative “produsage” (Bruns 2008, 2012; Shirky 2008). Social network sites commonly promoted their services as neutral “utilities,” akin to water pipes or electricity, even when their owners began to metamorphose into online conglomerates hosting hundreds of commercial applications. Facebook and YouTube, as many public broadcasters saw it, constituted a new public square where (public) mass media simply *had* to be present to join citizens’ attempts to reinvent media space.

However, the equations of “social” to “neutral” and of “user-generated” to “public” turned out to be tricky when public broadcasters started testing the efficacy of social media after 2005. These media soon developed into commercially exploited data-driven platforms. Consequently, the ecosystem of connective media quickly began to be dominated by a handful of large global networks—Facebook, YouTube (bought by Google), LinkedIn, and Twitter featuring prominently among them. After a decade of exponential and unprecedented growth, there is little, if any, public space left in the world of networked platforms (Lovink 2012; Vaidhyanathan 2011). In sharp contrast to the generous allocation of airwaves and funding to public broadcasters in the twentieth century, states never considered Web 2.0 as needing a designated space for independent, nonprofit content creation. At best, net neutrality—a fiercely embattled concept to this very day—allowed the coexistence of a variety of players. Several large social media corporations (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter) followed Google in going “public” on the stock exchange. The concept of “social” in social media moved away from “public” as in “public broadcasting” and aligned itself with “public” as in “public company.” Notwithstanding a few exceptions, most notably Wikipedia, the space for Web 2.0 platforms (SNS and UGC) is now entirely commercial (Van Dijck, 2013).

Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, European public broadcasting services retained their privileged institutional positions, in spite of neoliberal attacks on their status aparte and substantial budget cuts. Expansion of PSB’s position across online platforms was all but self-evident, in part due to the fact that the Internet has become a *global* communication system that is fairly impervious to *national* regulation. In some countries, such as The Netherlands, public broadcasters’ abilities to expand their public services online are also in part limited by legal constraints: the law prohibits unfair (subsidized) competition with corporate occupants of this space to secure a level playing field. While public space in Web 2.0 is increasingly scarce, public broadcasters have to cope with corporate social media invading their own public turf, not in the least because the power of social media *logic* impacts all kinds of institutions besides broadcasting (Van Dijck and Poell 2013). This logic, pushing the principles of programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication onto all sectors of public life and sociality, made it virtually impossible to keep social media’s intrinsic commercial forces at bay. Besides, avoiding Twitter or YouTube entirely on account of their proprietary algorithms and business models would be disastrous because it would surely result in the loss of particularly a younger generation of viewers.

Even worse than losing those viewers, PSB would arguably risk deterring a young generation of *makers*, many of whom are attracted by the innovative potential of multi-platform production and distribution. After all, the quick rise of a new Internet space

promised to be a boon for independent producers for whom “television’s perceived weakness in the multichannel transition opened a rhetorical and economic space for entrepreneurs eager to curate and distribute web programs” (Christian 2012b, 341). For producers wanting to develop a niche outside of conventional public broadcasters and independent from commercial social platforms, the years 2008 to 2013 mark a period of experimentation. The promise of new multi-platform, cross-media modes of production stimulated a host of young entrepreneurs, both in the United Kingdom and other European countries, to break away from institutional distribution channels, instead relying on UGC and crowd funding (Bennett et al. 2013; Christian 2012a).

Unfortunately, the ecosystem of connective media leaves little or no space for non-commercial, nonprofit, or even public platforms; commercial operators such as YouTube and Twitter offer promising propositions to independent makers, specifically the ability to distribute their content globally and to monetize their programs through targeted advertising (May, 2010). Cross-media producers, as it turns out, are caught up in the paradox of exploring a new public space and achieving professional growth in a corporately ruled “social” online environment. However, without the institutional support of either public or commercial distribution systems, the viability of multi-platform “indies” operating from a public mind-set remains questionable (Chitty 2013). We will return to this paradox in the last section; first, we will focus on how social media tools and platforms are becoming integrated in the professional practices and content of European public broadcasters.

Incorporating Social Media in PSBs Professional Practices

As already mentioned, public broadcasters welcomed the new Web 2.0 platforms that seemingly subscribed to the same principles of audience engagement as citizens. In 2004, the BBC issued a policy report embracing digitization for public broadcasting as a means to encourage co-creation of content and the growing involvement of users (BBC Report 2004). Online participation was considered a key-strategy for public broadcasters in an attempt to regain their position in national arenas (Enli 2008). The BBC enthusiastically endorsed the possibility of including more UGC in their programming. In 2005, BBC News started the “Hub,” inviting citizens to send them audiovisual footage as well as commentary, which they did in large numbers (Wardle and Williams 2010). Although Web 2.0 platforms helped spike the contribution of digital audience material, Wardle and Williams conclude it did not substantially change the editorial practices or values of BBC News producers over the years.

PSB employees were often among the early adopters of social media, integrating Facebook and Twitter in their professional routines and judgments as editors or producers of media content. As Norwegian media scholar Hallvard Moe (2013, 118) has meticulously inventoried for the Scandinavian countries, public broadcasters resorted en masse to Facebook and YouTube to reach their audiences, and “social networking sites were starting to get more seamlessly integrated with the remaining public service content.” In 2010, when public broadcasting and social media increasingly became uneasy bedfellows due to the latter’s growing commercial ambitions, the Swedish

Media Authority intervened in PSB's incorporation of social network sites. The regulator argued that Facebook and Twitter are commercial sites rather than public squares where journalists need to be present. PSB employees, both in Norway and in Sweden, entered a new stage of guarded social media use. By 2012, Facebook buttons, Twitter logos, and YouTube extensions had been removed from the broadcast organizations' sites and, according to Moe, a revised set of internal guidelines regarding social media use for employees was put into place.

A similar dilemma of PSBs wrestling with the incorporation of social media in journalistic and television production practices can be witnessed in other European countries. The BBC gradually became more cautious in its social media use over the years. In 2010, it first implemented a set of "social network guidelines" that helped employees walk the tightrope between public BBC content and Facebook or Twitter's commercial intentions. These guidelines were carefully crafted and regularly updated to underwrite the powerful positive amenities of social media in general but alerted professionals to the commercial mechanisms embedded in these tools (BBC. "Social Networking, Microblogs and Other Third Party Websites: BBC Use Guidance in Full 2013).

The BBC guidelines divulge the pervasive influence social media have on the professional values of producers, editors, and journalists working in the public realm. Not surprisingly, the guidelines pay ample attention to the BBC as a brand—a beholder of public values—instructing its employees to use BBC's own tools whenever they can. If they nevertheless have to resort to social media (e.g., using Twitter because the BBC does not have its own microblogging platform), staffers are warned for the technical and commercial conditions inscribed in "following," "trending," or "retweeting" buttons. For instance, staffers are not supposed to simply retweet a message on Twitter without adding additional comments because this may be understood as endorsing someone else's message. Another guideline welcomes social media's ability to support communities, but as turns out, the word "community" carries a different meaning on social media platforms than it does in the context of public television:

We should take care not to give users the impression that we are interested in setting up a fully interactive profile or page if that page is then neglected or abandoned after it has achieved a one-off short term purpose. This is particularly true if a community of interest has formed around the page or profile. It may be possible to hand a limited-life BBC page or profile over to the community which has grown around it, after a broadcast-led engagement has come to an end. This needs thinking about before the page is created. (BBC. "Social Networking, Microblogs and Other Third Party Websites: BBC Use Guidance in Full)

In contrast to YouTube or Twitter, where "communities" are typically fan pages or public relations pages that are as easily started as they are abandoned, the BBC protects the public notion of community by applying this term only to groups it serves in relation to certain programs and which are durable rather than evanescent.

In The Netherlands, the wager between public broadcasters and social media is reflected in public stations' weighing social media's potential for audience engagement against the commercial intentions and technical interventions that are incompatible with public values.¹ Google's YouTube is considered the most cannibalistic of all

UGC platforms, because the platform tends to “re-brand” public audiovisual content on its own terms. In the wake of the BBC guidelines, there is a growing consensus among Dutch and other European public broadcasters that a maximum of five minutes of any PSB program can be streamed on YouTube, on the condition that the snippet is clearly branded and linked back to public channels for at least a year after the broadcast. The same rule applies with regard to audiovisual contents streamed on Twitter and Facebook. In contrast to the BBC, Dutch public stations have not yet issued strict guidelines for their employees in terms of Twitter’s and Facebook’s editorial use.

In sum, it is undeniable that YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook have genuinely impacted editorial and other professional practices and standards at European PSBs. The dual attraction–suspicion attitude toward social media as *public* platforms has resulted in a cautionary approach toward their monetizing intentions, varying from an outright ban on “social buttons” on PSB platforms to professional sets of guidelines on how to use them responsibly. The struggle between “social” and “public” did not only take place at the institutional and professional levels but also played out at the level of content. As said before, social media not only affected PSB stations’ abilities to lure young generations of viewers to the television set but also to attract a demographic of young makers. The next section examines how public broadcasters experimented with incorporating elements of social TV into public broadcast formats to engage young audiences as well as to allow young makers a “public” space to experiment with the “social.”

When Public Meets Social: Experiments in Television Content

Social media have introduced new formats and aesthetics, which are gradually mingling with forms of mass media content (Müller 2009; Peters and Seiers 2009). Formats culled from social media are typically programmed across platforms where they combine short texts, video-fragments, images, and audio. They tend to privilege brief forms and ephemeral links: tweets (140 characters), snippets (two- to three-minute videos on average), “likes” (intuitive evaluations), and snapshots (casual images). These innovative cultural forms appear a good fit with formats typically produced by commercial mass media; for instance, live talent contests on television often include short video clips and increasingly involve viewers through Twitter voting and online conversations with fans via second screen applications. But what happens when these popular social media forms are integrated in *public* television programs? The appeal of these formats stimulated some European public broadcasters to experiment with their own public version of “social TV.” We will describe two such experiments—one produced by the BBC in the United Kingdom and another by the VPRO in The Netherlands—and will explore how both programs attempt to balance “social” with “public.” These two examples are illustrative of public service programs experimenting with new forms and techniques inspired by social media.

In 2011, the BBC launched *Up for Hire*, a television format that explicitly incorporated social media elements. *Up for Hire* was a live event addressing one of the biggest social issues tormenting the U.K. economy: youth unemployment. Featuring five live

TV shows within one week, the event concomitantly played out on BBC3, Radio 1, special blogs, a Facebook page, and a live Twitter feed.² During live studio debates, television hosts interacted with the in-studio audience and people at home, trying to fuel a conversation about opportunities and challenges for young people entering a competitive job market. Four young recruits competed for real jobs—the reward for winning the shows' contest element. Each of the five shows focused on a specific theme, such as starting your own business and finding a job with no prior experience. Raising questions such as “Does business take young people seriously?” and “Is personality more important than qualifications?” the audience was drawn into the conversation. During the five broadcasts, studio audience members were also invited to contribute their views. Most elements of this format had been tested out in live shows over the years.

The confrontation between social media elements and mass media format played out in various ways. Interspersed with studio conversations and contest format were video clips—also accessible through the site—featuring advice from industry experts and celebrities on how to boost your job seeking skills. Another element was the inclusion of viewers' voices through a live tweet stream, featured on a big screen behind the studio hosts, who occasionally read some tweets aloud. These comments often served as counterpoints to the many positive stories brought up by youngsters in the studio. For instance, live stories of successful young entrepreneurs were alternated by tweets such as “I would love to go out working for myself but as a single parent I feel it would be too big a risk.” The tweet stream, even though presented in real time as a seemingly random series of comments, was carefully edited to offer only counter-voices in line with the encouraging tone of the program—not too critical, never outrageous or angry, and if desperate, only mildly so. Clearly, the taming of the tweet stream signifies the BBC's prioritizing of its own editorial logic over Twitter's algorithmic logic, stressing the broadcasters' public mission while adopting social media's form.

We can also witness the clash between social media's form and public television's content in *Up for Hire*'s attempt to reconcile the popularity principle ingrained in Facebook's “liking” and YouTube's “favoriting” buttons with the BBC's mission to address serious public issues. Indeed, the popular format uncomfortably fitted with the program's focus on youth employment. Some critics found fault with the format and accused the BBC of sensationalism, exposing struggling job seekers to the vagaries of public voting. To the charge of taking advantage of jobless youngsters, the BBC retorted that *Up for Hire* was a “documentary” rather than a contest and that the recruits in the program were prudently guided and counseled, much in line with their public responsibility (*Daily Mail Online* 2011).

Inevitably, the mixture of social media format and public television content forced the BBC to make choices regarding how their production values extended to online services. For instance, *Up for Hire* was supported by several second screen applications, such as a website featuring nine short “how to find yourself a job” video clips. These videos were produced by BBC Learning and embedded in a proper BBC context rather than distributed through YouTube. In addition, the BBC also collaborated with Lab UK to create the Get Yourself Hired Test for the *Up for Hire* website. In

accordance with the BBC guidelines, as discussed in the previous section, this website has been up for several years and is proof of the station's commitment to building and maintaining relationships with the community generated by the program.

The BBC's efforts to combine a multi-platform, user-centered format with the editorial judgments of public television resulted in a hybrid, experimental form. It is precisely this contentious mixture of "public" and "social" elements that also surfaces in the Dutch example. In the spring of 2013, public broadcaster VPRO aired four live editions of the experimental show *Upload TV*.³ The purpose of the four programs was to familiarize the television audience with the finest selection of web-based videos and to promote user-generated audiovisual productions as a new cultural form. Much like BBC's *Up for Hire*, the format tried to combine features of social media—Twitter feeds, showing uploaded content from viewers, live chats via Google Hangout—with typical live television ingredients, such as conversations with studio guests, contest and game elements, as well as prerecorded videos featuring interviews with prominent YouTube stars. In contrast to the BBC example, *Upload TV* focused particularly on producers of cross-media content as to inspire and attract a young generation of makers.

In an attempt to reconcile "social" and "public" ingredients, *Upload TV* paired off instances of commercially successful social media stars with examples of citizen participation. For instance, an eighteen-year-old student ("Fitness Jerome") explained in the first program how he successfully monetizes the exercise videos he regularly posts on YouTube. A topic more amenable to the goals of public broadcasting was an interview with one of the founders of Moroccan-Muslim TV, who boasted their community-based channel to attract almost one million monthly viewers. The careful mix of "social" and "public" content choices was mirrored in the program's blend of format elements. Two young studio hosts alternately interviewed the nation's favorite bloggers and prominent videomakers—a format typical of a television talk show. However, a "social" element was inserted into this conventional TV-form through a wall of screens in the studio, each screen featuring an active "uploader" with "big screen ambitions"—whether making it in Hollywood or appearing on Dutch television. Through online voting, active viewers decided which uploader would become the next sidekick in the program.

Unlike the BBC example, the Dutch program *Upload TV* explicitly addressed the differences between mass media's and social media's clashing production styles and logics. An independent producer of online content, who once was a freelance television producer, explained in *Upload TV* how he took refuge to online cross-media productions after his work had been repeatedly turned down by (public and commercial) broadcasters. He articulated his plea for independence and creative autonomy launching provocative statements such as "We no longer trust the professional," "No more TV bosses," and "Internet makers need to take over TV." Ironically, his claim that a young generation of video adepts turns away from television because TV is unsuitable for cross-media production is undermined by his very need for television to propagate this point. Along the same lines, several independent online producers used the opportunity offered by this program to advertise their search for sponsors. They emphasized the Internet's possibilities for crowd funding, while downplaying (public) television's

ability to play a meaningful role in the creation of multi-platform content. As one interviewee states, “The old TV is dying. I want to decide for myself what I produce and it is up to the viewers to judge me.”

In more than one respect, the experiment to combine social media with public television results in hybrid content. It is therefore no surprise that *Upload TV* harvested both criticism and praise from reviewers and viewers. Some lauded the experiment for its courage to promote entrepreneurship in video production and for stimulating young people to make their own content. Others loathed the VPRO’s attempts to package television content in a popular “social media” format. The format itself, they argued, prohibits serious reflection, rendering *Upload TV* into a YouTube sales pitch for the most popular videos (Bakker 2013). Yet others alleged that many questions that would have made this topic interesting for television viewers remained unasked; and for public television, the popularity of YouTube stars is simply not enough to warrant serious public television treatment (Beerekamp 2013).

While the Dutch VPRO struggled to tailor social media formats to make them fit the public value framework, they heavily relied on platforms such as YouTube and Twitter for promoting its content; some critics even called *Upload TV* a “YouTube advertorial”—implicitly critiquing its commercial overtures. Part of the problem is obviously the mixture of an older generation’s expectations about public television’s content and social media’s appeal to a young generation of makers and viewers. On the level of content, the two PSB experiments show that there is a perceived tension between what ingredients of social media fit in with “public social TV.” As explained in the previous sections, public broadcasters struggle with a meaningful incorporation of social platforms into their institutional mission and daily practices as well as with the integration of social media elements into television content. To avoid “public social TV” turning into an amplifier for YouTube or Twitter, PSBs are obviously challenged to rearticulate the adjective “public” as a self-evident set of values; these values were traditionally carried by its makers and viewers, but appear increasingly at odds with those of a new generation growing up in a media landscape dominated by social media and its pervasive logic—a landscape where public television has lost its privileged niche.

Redefining “Publicness” in a Social Media Environment

If we look at the current predicament of European broadcasters trying to redefine their position in the larger ecosystem of connective media—an ecosystem comprising everything from conventional mass media to social media, and from commercial television to alternative websites—two questions need to be answered. First, how may public television engage with social media and use their tools without compromising PSB values? Second, and perhaps more poignantly, what happens to public value outside the designated space of public television, in a cross-media environment where boundaries are porous? Now that the Internet has evolved into a connective media landscape almost entirely dominated by American companies, it becomes more urgent to identify “public value” outside the self-legitimizing boundaries of PSB. If European broadcasters want to sustain a meaningful proposition of public value, they need to

look into effective ways to make it spreadable outside its own safe harbor. Both questions redress the issue of public value at the institutional level as well as at the levels of professional practice and content.

To start with the former question, the previous sections have tried to explain how PSBs are tackling the dilemma of deploying social media's powerful tools to reach and engage young audiences without compromising their intrinsic nonprofit and participatory principles. There is no single recipe for proper social media use as each national PSB regulates the professional practices of its producers and editors differently. With regard to content, the examples from Britain (*Up for Hire*) and The Netherlands (*Upload TV*) demonstrate the delicate balancing act involved in integrating platforms such as YouTube and Twitter as well as social-media-inspired forms and styles into a justifiable public television program. However awkward the hybrid results, these two experiments offer a poignant window on the dilemmas faced by public television's limitations vis-à-vis the incorporation of networked platforms. It is only through struggles with guidelines and content experiments that channels may find out to what extent public values can be reconciled with the amenities of social media. Of course, these two examples are mere illustrations. More experimental formats produced in various European countries could be compared and evaluated to find out how social media may be deployed to strengthen PSB's mission and yet appeal to a generation with a cross-media mind-set that is basically agnostic to its (public or commercial) context (Murphy, 2011). The boundaries between these contexts have become increasingly permeable as a decreasing number of young viewers have no more historical framework for understanding the distinction between public and commercial in spatial terms (Lunt 2009).

In the face of this growing contextual agnosticism, the second question may become more urgent: What happens to public value *outside* the designated space of PSB, in a multi-platform environment? There are several possible ways to address the issue of public value at the institutional and professional level, and each answer is colored by ideological as well as pragmatic principles (Hawkins, 2013; Burns and Hawkins, 2013).

One line of argument proposes to change "public service broadcasting" (PSB) into "public service media" (PSM), underscoring the importance of extending public services beyond radio and television to encompass the full specter of the Internet. As some argue, the Internet can be employed within a public service environment to involve and activate citizens, while making sure that core public service values of deliberation, reciprocity, and free and universal access are realized (Coleman 2004; Lowe and Bardoel 2007; Moe 2008, 2010; Murdock 2005). A more radical proposal to extend PSB into PSM comes from Australian-American media theorist Mark Andrejevic (2013, 123) who argues that the public sector needs to broaden the scope "beyond content production and distribution to include social media, search, and other information-sorting and communication utilities." He urges the public sector to invest in an alternative media-ecosystem by building upon existing initiatives and create connections between "media-centered domains that serve the public interest: public service broadcasting, libraries, community centers, public museums and so on" (Andrejevic 2013, 131). In other words, expanding PSB across various established

institutional domains and organizations should help safeguard the standards of public value—an ambition that has been explored in a BBC policy document (BBC Trust 2011).

Other scholars have been skeptical of the possibility to reform the public service system as a safeguarded institution. Elizabeth Jacka (2003, 188), for example, claimed, “Positions that give [PSB] an automatically privileged position with respect to quality, democracy, and citizenship can no longer be sustained.” Other skeptics warn that tax-funded media, just like subscription-based legacy media, will face hardships in a media world saturated by “free” or “freemium” business models (Newman 2012). Besides the business model of exchanging data for free services (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) and data-driven advertising platforms (e.g., YouTube), we have witnessed the surge of all-you-can-view experiences offered for a low monthly fee (e.g., Netflix). In addition, it is not unthinkable that future budget cuts warranted by long-term government overspending leave the entire public sector permanently underfunded (Collins 2011). Most scholars agree that public broadcasting requires new forms of justification, not simply to save PSB as a public institution but to educate a generation growing up in a global multi-platform world—a world where the institutional providence of much content is often vague—about the meaning of “publicness.”

As stated above, the current media system has rendered boundaries between institutional spaces even more porous than before. Media organizations can decreasingly be divided into clear-cut private, public, or corporate enterprises. And while *all* media users and producers (not just professionals) are now part of a global information and communication exchange, most of us are still mired in dichotomous thinking: public versus commercial, independent versus advertising driven, quality content versus entertainment value. Therefore, it may be necessary to strip down the institutional concept of public broadcasting to its core “naked” public value. What exactly do we mean by public value and how can it be produced outside a designated space?

Here we would like to highlight the six core values of PSM, as defined by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU 2012): universality, independence, excellence, diversity, accountability, and innovation. “Universality” refers to the need to address issues that are both locally and globally relevant. “Independence” means impartiality from commerce, government, and specific audience demands. “Excellence” stands for standards in quality content and expertise. “Diversity” anchors the principles of democratic representation and equal opportunities for all civic groups to express themselves. “Accountability” obviously denotes a high level of trust in the accuracy and relevance of information. “Innovation” entails a pledge to the exploration of new technological, aesthetic, and cultural forms. To this set of values, we would like to add “not-for-profit,” which refers to using surplus revenues toward achieving its public goals rather than distributing them as profit or dividends. To ensure that these seven core values affect public communication at large, all of them should be produced inside as well as outside the *institution* of public broadcasting.

So how can public value be produced outside a designated PSB space? It should be noted that the notion of public value or “publicness” resounds powerfully with individual producers who, as we noticed in the third section, are driven by the prospect of

working outside the channels of professional media organizations (Couldry 2009). A number of start-ups—not just civic organizations but also small companies—are currently developing new online spaces where they try to create public value content that is produced independent from audience ratings, television channels, and advertisers, and which is produced at a (minimal) profit. Media scholars Bennett and Medrado (2013) inventoried British organizations that produce content at a profit without compromising public service value. They explore two examples of multi-platform producers (Keo and Maverick) that manage to integrate television and digital platforms into cross-media content (Bechmann, 2012). In line with the British examples, The Netherlands counts several start-ups aimed at the creation of public value content, including Fast Moving Targets, Submarine, Seven Digits, and Ximon. These companies are either privately funded or organized as nonprofits, but they all aim at producing and distributing content with a public value mind-set. It is important for public broadcasters to keep up its role as facilitator and promoter of cross-media content, even if, as some researchers have pointed out, “increasing competition and diminishing security of PSB funding may reduce the commitment of independents to producing content with PSB characteristics” (Bennett et al. 2013, 111).

The production of public service content outside PSB proper is not novel at all, as independent production firms have produced content for public broadcasters for many years. European public broadcasters commonly acquire their content from three main sources: they either produce content themselves (in house), they outsource production to (commercial) companies, or they buy content from foreign producers (commercial or other public service broadcasters). Hence, PSBs have historically not only played a role as creators of public programs but also as *promoters and facilitators* of public value outside their institutional space. If expansion is impeded, it may be a good idea to start spreading public value beyond PSB compounds. The power of “spreadable media,” as Jenkins et al. (2013) called them, lies in their ability to promote audience engagement and push public value content through the transnational flows of media circulation. The challenge in this new online environment is to develop and nurture, through financial incentives and institutional support, opportunities for producing and distributing content informed by key public values. Such productions can involve public broadcasters and independent producers as well as commercial social platforms. Of course, the “spreadability” of content never guarantees a neutral transmission of public value because the ecosystem as a whole is principally inflected by corporate and algorithmic mechanisms. But even if the export of public values uncomfortably fits corporate infrastructures, it is essential to keep testing its limits and negotiate the very definition of what counts as public in an environment increasingly shaped by social media logic.

While the future of PSM need not depend on the survival of public broadcasting service as a content-producing institution, it is unlikely that the conventional role and functions of PSB will disappear from the radar of European policy-makers any time soon (Debrett 2010; Hendy 2013; Kackman et al. 2011). Nevertheless, it goes without saying that in the current neoliberal political climate—aggravated by a sustained period of economic distress—it is essential to discover ways of promoting public

value beyond traditional confinements. These shifts from PSB to PSM, from public space to public value, and from content production to content selection and distribution require an international dialogue between creative producers, policy-makers, and academics to develop new perspectives on public value and on the technologies and practices through which such values should be created and facilitated. Supported by the EBU, national PSBs have to face these profound challenges, perhaps at the expense of their current institutional status, but they may come out of this process more robust and more “public” than before.

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1. Personal communication with Eric van Heeswijk, head digital production for the Dutch public broadcaster VPRO (Vrijzinnig Protestantse Radio Omroep). The Dutch public broadcast system consists of several different broadcasters, of which VPRO is one. The combined Dutch public broadcasters are currently negotiating with their European counterparts in the European Broadcast Union (EBU) how to align professional practices and institutional guidelines.
2. *Up for Hire* was broadcast from October 17 to 20, 2011, on BBC3, the channel targeting an audience aged eighteen to thirty-two years. Viewer-submitted social media comments were harvested using never.no’s Social TV technology, and read out by studio hosts and also displayed on air using real-time graphics systems by Mammoth Graphics. Viewers were asked to send short messages through the hashtag “upforhire,” by e-mail, website “bbc.co.uk,” or through a special Facebook page. *Up for Hire* was advertised by the BBC (2011) as follows: “Five shows in four days, 30 work placements, four happy recruits who completed the work experience of a lifetime and hundreds of thousands of you who took part in the conversation online.”
3. The first edition of *Upload TV* was broadcast on April 5, 2013, and three subsequent editions were aired on Friday nights that same month. Each edition lasted about fifty minutes; Dagan Cohen, founder of Upload Cinema, hosted the show.

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