

Public Service Media on Social Networks: The European Case

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to show the evolution of public service media (PSM) on social networks -especially Facebook and Twitter-, as a response to the challenges imposed by the new media market. Constant technological changes and the audience fragmentation have put PSM at the crossroads, so they should design long-term strategies and change management models in order to justify their existence, funding, indispensability and value. Within the frame of governance on the Internet, and characterized by horizontal relationships and dialogue, it seems that PSM have faced the challenge, opening up the path to more active publics. Results obtained show, however, that PSM in Europe have a strong presence on Facebook and Twitter, although less than 10 % of them are supported by social media guidelines. The number of followers is constantly increasing, but it does not result in an improvement of users' engagement.

Keywords:

PSM; Social networks; Digitisation; Public value; Public service media

1. Theoretical Framework

The legitimacy of Public Service Media is compromised across Europe. On the one hand, management and control systems have progressively lost weight because of internal and external pressures; on the other side, PSM's stakeholders do not trust anymore their media, opting for other alternatives (Jakubowicz 2007).

Public criticism on this point led commercial companies to add more arguments against public service media: (1) the traditional "unfair competition"; the "mediamorphosis" conflict (Fidler 1998); the service digitization (Moe 2010); the unsustainability of the more stable funding source (Campos 2013); the abundance of contents and services, together with the choice enabled by technological innovation, which empower individuals to obtain whatever they need; and the offer is not distinctive enough and sometimes beyond the PSM remit, hindering private initiative (EBU 2015).

But, while there are still major obstacles in the way, PSM can "play a critical! Role in sustaining a vibrant public sphere while making good use of the affordances of digital media" (Burri 2015). In fact, the launch of innovation departments-known as MediaLabs of InnovationLabs-might be seen as a sign, while they aim at strengthening the relationship between the organization and the digital environment, serving as experimentation laboratories, and increasing stakeholders' engagement. Experimentation tools -Periscope, Instagram- (Saikalis 2015) are joining to traditional social networks (Facebook and Twitter), on which large part of public media have implemented strategies-especially in that related with the life cycle of the news.

As Hujanen (2004) notes, if PSM are to survive in the new media scene, they have to concentrate efforts on their role as content and service providers, while the EBU (2015) states that PSM have to change their positioning from content to service providers. PSM have to adapt to the media environment and the society they sit within, extending their public value into the new areas and services their audience demand and have right to expect (IBEC 2011). At present,

audience are assuming a more active and prosumer role (Jenkins 2006) thanks to social media, but, while this is undoubtedly positive, user engagement did not just evolve spontaneously, but turned out to be the result of mediated interaction in a growingly complex ecosystem of connective media. It should be noted that the concept of "public service broadcaster" is not used anymore, since the new media arena requires a paradigm change towards "public service media". Once these services have started to offer contents in various digital platforms, the term "broadcasting" seems to be inappropriate to designate all the services and platforms offered by these media, which go beyond radio and television.

2. Methodology

The work is based on the analysis of the use of social media-Facebook and Twitter-in the 28 European State PSM, as well as the strategies for implementing in the digital arena. Results were obtained in three periods: October 2014, March 2015, and July 2015. Principal accounts of public broadcasters have been chosen as subject of study. Variables analysed are related to the number of followers, followed,

daily posts, and kind of interaction (tweet and retweet, in the case of Twitter). It should be noted that this analysis serves as a general setting of PSM activity on social networks. Cultural, social, and economic values are not analysed, as well as how deeply social networks have been adopted by television producers and audiences across Europe.

3. Results

It is not only a requirement of their mission, but also a key for their strategic future. Public service media should not be absent in new digital platforms and social networking sites, in which they directly communicate and interact with their audience. Social interaction networks have four relevant inputs: connections, cooperation, relationships, and virtuality (Boyd and Ellison 2007). These could be supplemented by viral propagation and operational functionality for automated management of contents and objects through digital networks. Table 19.1 show the evolution of the activity of PSM on the two analysed social networks. As regards Facebook, it may be observed a positive trend when it comes to followers, while the activity and posts have remained in the last two years. Any public service media in Europe do interact with audience. Once in a blue moon, the Swedish SVT conducted social talks with its audience, but this was stopped in 2015.

It is worth stressing the BBC case as regards the number of followers, as it manages to achieve 17 million on its own. As for the rest, there are significant differences: while Cyprus does not reach one thousand followers, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Germany exceed 370 thousand. Data collection from March 2015 revealed followers' increase in all European public media. From a Like's average of 507,985 fans, the figured increased in 2015 to 622,326.

The BBC is still the most outstanding, followed by far by the Spanish RTVE, with almost 460 thousand followers, and the German ZDF, with a little more than 400 thousand. Corporations with less "social supporters" are still the CyBC from Cyprus, the VRT from Belgium, the LTV from Latvia, and the ERR from Estonia.

Facebook is widely used as a portal for publishing news, provide further information, and announce channel schedules. No significant changes on data collections between October 2014 and March 2015 were noted. Finland and France make a corporative use of their profiles, which would explain the small number of daily posts. In October 2014, the most active PSM were the PBS from Malta, the RAI from Italy, the RTVE from Spain, and the HRT from Croatia, with 34, 18, 16 and 15 daily publications on average, respectively. In 2015, first place in the ranking was still held by the PBS, followed by the RAI and the Danish DR.

As regards Twitter, the EU28 have corporative profiles, while data from October 2014 showed that VRT from Belgium and PBS from Malta had not an account. The VRT has already created one. As shown in Table 19.2, the average followers were 381,734, and the BBC still leads the ranking, followed by the German and the Spanish corporations. On the other hand, public media from Greece and Cyprus do not reach one thousand followers, while Hungary does not get one hundred. In March 2015, the average was 462,989 followers. The BBC reached 9 million, followed by the RTVE and the ZDF. Public media from Greece, Cyprus and Hungary remain the least active.

When it comes to interaction, i.e., creation and management of media conversation, European PSM have not yet made a big step forward. They confine their actions to retweets, without answering messages and opening dialogue with audiences. Also, more than a dozen corporations do not engage in any activity in this regard.

4. Conclusions

Results obtained from this work, which belongs to a deeper research, could be summarized as follows:

1. PSM are aware of how the important are social media in the new digital, convergent and increasingly complex scenario.
2. However, the high presence of PSM on social networks does not result in an increase of interactivity, which denotes an under-utilisation of social media's potential.
3. Also, social media are generally used as platforms for pasting contents broadcasted and published on their official websites, leaving behind the new forms of audience' s engagement.

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Table 1. European PSM on Facebook (Prepared by the authors)

Facebook										
RTV	Account	Followers			Daily posts			Interactions		
		oct-14	mar-15	jul-15	oct-14	mar-15	jul-15	oct-14	mar-15	jul-15
ZDF	ZDF	376.888	403.525	413.416	10	7	8	No	No	No
ORF	ORF	18.669	24.630	31.009	4	5	4	No	No	No
RTBF	RTBF TV	35.527	40.044	43.062	4	4	4	No	No	No
VRT	VRT	1.288	1.759	2.248	No	No	No	No	No	No
BNT	BNT	40.662	54.796	63.000	8	15	12	No	No	No
CyBC	Cyprus broadcasting corporation	897	967	973	No	No	No	No	No	No
HRT	Novi mediji, Hrvatska radiotelevizija	27.774	30.831	31.972	15	4	4	No	No	No
DR	DR Nyheder	97.909	121.128	154.303	10	20	17	No	No	No
RTVS	RTVS	17.445	20.082	22.615	1	3	2	No	No	No
RTVSLO	Uradna stran RTV Slovenija	14.526	16.543	17.844	5	6	5	No	No	No
RTVE	RTVE	429.106	459.622	474.497	16	15	15	No	No	No
ERR	Eesti Rahvusringhiialing	6.981	7.293	7.346	5/month	No	No	No	No	No
YLE	Yleisradio	46.155	50.667	53.233	2	5	5	No	No	No
FR	France television	46.992	51.607	53.127	1	Eventual	Eventual	No	No	No
ERT	ERT	-	-	1.310	-	-	No	No	No	No
MTYA	MTYA	11.160	13.368	15.421	Eventual	Eventual	Eventual	No	No	No
RTE	RTE news	44.550	63.484	87.844	9	11	10	No	No	No
RAI	RAI.TV	374.840	391.173	391.726	18	22	21	No	No	No
LTV	latvijasTV	1.510	2.303	2.933	Eventual	8	10	No	No	No
LRT	LRT.LT	63.575	71.114	76.781	Eventual	6	8	No	No	No
PBS	TelevisionMalta	21.093	28.352	48.106	34	50	45	No	No	No
NPO	NPO.nl	6.959	13.322	14.350	1	2	2	No	No	No
TVP	Tvppl	47.689	56.645	67.138	1	4	3	No	No	No
RTP	Rtp	374.124	389.005	381.885	4	4	4	No	No	No
BBC	BBC News	11.914.878	14.885.573	17.036.010	10	13	12	No	No	No
CT	Ceskatelevize	61.972	69.732	74.592	1	1	1	No	No	No
TVR	televiziunea.romana	67.703	69.954	72.608	6	5	6	No	No	No

SVT	SVT	68.007	81.496	92.568	3	5	5	Yes	No	No
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Table 2. European PSM on Twitter (Prepared by the authors)

Twitter													
RTV	Account	Followers			Following			Daily posts			Interactions		
		oct-14	mar-15	jul-15	oct-14	mar-15	jul-15	oct-14	mar-15	jul-15	oct-14	mar-15	jul-15
ZDF	ZDF	503.000	577.000	648.000	220	226	264	24	18	11	Retweet	Retweet	Retweet
ORF	ORF	7.041	9.980	11.300	-	-	-	6	4	3	No	No	No
RTBF	RTBFtv	35.300	37.300	39.600	1.273	1.276	1.265	8	5	5	Retweet	Retweet	Retweet
VRT	VRT		10.800	12.200		399	246		3	2		Retweet	Retweet
BNT	BNT_1	5.915	-	8.330	107	-	121	5	-	6	No	-	No
CyBC	cybc2012	874	898	919	47	47	47	No	No	No			
HRT	HRTvijesti	-	-	5.198	-	-	191	-	-	20	-	-	Retweet
DR	DR Nyheder	20.800	97.100	128.000	116	13	15	30	Eventual	Eventual	No	No	No
RTVS	RTVS	2.545	3.207	3.897	29	28	29	1	1	1	Retweet	Retweet	Retweet
RTVSLO	RTV_Slovenija	23.000	30.600	35.200	1.546	1.307	1.343	4	7	5	Retweet	Retweet	Retweet
RTVE	RTVE	739.000	795.000	842.000	255	260	267	30	85	42	Retweet	Retweet	Retweet
ERR	err_ee	4.352	4.922	5.255	40	45	48	7	6	8	No	No	No
YLE	Yleisradio	27.300	31.900	38.900	332	344	366	5	6	4	No	NO	No
FR	francetele	57.500	70.300	82.000	110	123	205	4	3	4	No	No	No
ERT	EPT			47.000			560			75	No	No	No
MTVA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
RTE	rte	91.600	164.000	206.000	20.900	21.600	22.200	23	20	30	No	Retweet	No
RAJ	rai.TV	274.000	328.000	368.000	247	268	304	23	21	19	Retweet	Retweet	Retweet
LTV	latvljasTV	4.152	5.469	6.408	413	564	577	4	4	5	Retweet	Retweet	Retweet
LRT	LRTinklas	3.994	4.493	4.825	78	68	78	11	4	5	No	No	No
PBS	TelevisionMalt	1.190	2.062	3.053	142	700	863	31	40	53	No	No	No
NPO	PubliekeOmro	15.000	19.500	21.400	506	505	470	8	10	6	Retweet	Retweet	Retweet
TVP	TVP Info	-	269.000	348.000	-	870	932	-	50	50	-	Retweet	Retweet
RTP	rtppt	230.000	274.000	310.000	10.430	10.500	10.500	14	12	9	No	NO	Retweet
BBC	BBCWorld	7.800.000	9.180.000	10.600.000	61	61	61	40	50	50	Retweet	Retweet	Retweet
CT	CzechTV	47.300	83.700	106.000	8	10	10				No	Retweet	Retweet

TVR	_TVR	1.548	1.797	2.063	170	170	170	7	4	5	No	No	No
SVT	svt	21.200	25.500	29.300	6.786	6.800	6.766	4	6	Eventual	Retweet	Retweet	Retweet