

## **What is Public Service on the Internet? Digital Challenges for Media Policy in Europe**

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### **Abstract**

Almost all public broadcasters in Europe nowadays face serious challenges in order to remain as central media actors in dramatically changing media environments. Concepts that have recently come into the audiovisual scenario, such as digitalization, deregulation and convergence of the European media markets help to explain why many public service broadcasting companies have to fight for their survival. The main reasons are the more competitive media environment and the subtle, blurred lines among public and private broadcasting and other media platforms. The core challenge facing public service broadcasting today is the transition to public service media.

Different media policy options are discussed in this paper. Firstly, an expansive strategy may be implemented, aimed at allowing public service to use public funds and license fees for Internet operations and also by accepting additional revenues such as sponsoring or advertising to secure online activities. Secondly, a preserving strategy is possible where public service may use its existing revenues freely on different media, but without receiving any extra money for Internet operations. Thirdly, policy makers may adopt a restricting strategy, accepting public service presence on the Net, but only with special kinds of content. Fourthly, it is possible to imagine a free-market strategy where public service on the Net is allowed as long as all its operations are financed by commercial revenues from the Internet activities.

### **Public Service in a Digital Age**

Paradoxically, public service media studies could be described as being both dominant and disregarded within the academic field of media and communication. Obviously, public service media is a very well researched area and has attracted a large number of media scholars in recent decades. Their contributions to the academic discussion are significant both with reference to the understanding of the theoretical fundamentals of the concept of public service and regarding the more empirically oriented studies of public service conditions, content and reception (Blumler, 1992; Humphreys, 1996; Tracey, 1998).

However, at the same time, nearly all research on public service media has so far been focused on broadcast media radio and television in national settings. This is not surprising as public service radio and television have been very distinctive features in most national media systems in Europe for a very long time (Kelly et al., 2004). Accordingly, the media policy arguments for and against public service broadcasting have to a large extent been based on the broadcast media structure: the technical limitation of available frequencies, the political need for pluralism, diversity, minority representation, education, the cultural objective towards promoting national identity or the economic benefits of cost-effective media management of publicly funded national media (Katz, 2005).

However, the recent years of digitalization and convergence of the media sector in Europe imposes a significant challenge to these hitherto predominant public service ideas. The current media development in most European democracies has been described as a situation where public service media companies have to fight for their survival. The main reasons are the more competitive media environment, and the increasingly blurring lines between broadcasting and other media platforms. Because of a widespread consensus on liberal market theory among most contemporary European governments, these tendencies raise many new questions regarding the benefits of publicly funded and subsidized media organizations (Barnett, 2006).

Furthermore, the new media technology in itself contributes to confusion. As new media platforms emerge almost instantly and as the public service media enters new platforms, and thus new markets, a number of problems arise. Is radio on a mobile phone or on a pod-cast still radio? Is interactive television on the web or on other digital networks still television as we think of it within the framework of traditional public service broadcasting? Additionally, what about news and other services published on the Internet? What kind of professional values should guide the broadcasters in this new field? Should there be a public service Internet? Should the state intervene on the net in a manner similar to that during the establishment of public service broadcasting?

One particularly interesting trend involves the rapid development, and the increasing importance of the Internet, both in consumer terms of media use and with reference to the enlargement of the broadband infrastructure in many European countries. The Internet has diffused around the world and more rapidly and thoroughly than any other form of media in history, and it will surely affect modern societies in many different ways (Chadwick, 2006).

Furthermore, the substantially increased possibilities involved in using the new technology platforms as mobile phones, laptops and mp3-players confirm that the classic public service media prerogatives – based on technological limitations – are now to a large extent overplayed in the emerging new media landscape. In the digital era, there are no specific limitations to the number of frequencies available, thus reducing the necessity for state regulations to guarantee public media and to keep private media out of the media system.

Additionally, the digital media world, at least theoretically, allows all views and opinions, as well as access to all kind of information from all kind of sources. The Net may raise hitherto unaddressed questions about media accountability and credibility, but offers, at least theoretically, a diversity of thoughts and a wide range of news that have not been features of the previous media systems.

Generally speaking, there is a continuous and intense public debate about the democratic functions of the Internet (Hill & Hughes, 1998; Chadwick, 2006). Notwithstanding, the questions about its implications for

the public service media functions are not that well covered within studies of political communication. Thus, the objective of this paper is to introduce some theoretical points of departure in the discussion about the future of public service media. Basically, the public service media role in the digital age is discussed as a function of the interplay between media technology development and media policy options. The main areas of interest in this paper are how to define the concept of public service in the digital age, to discuss possible democracy functions for public service media in the future and to analyze different media policy options available for the promotion of public service in the new media landscape. At a later stage the analytical framework introduced here will be used for more extensive empirical and comparative studies of contemporary media systems and media policies in Europe.

The paper consists of three different sections. Firstly, media technology development and its implications for public service media operations and perceptions in European media systems are discussed within a historical perspective. Secondly, alternative available media policy options in the new digital media landscape are presented and compared. Finally, a general discussion about the democratic functions of the Internet in general, and in particular that of public service media functions of the Internet, is offered.

### **Monopoly, Competition and Digitalization: Three Eras of European Public Service**

Generally speaking, broadcasting systems can be differentiated into public service systems and commercial systems. When broadcast media first appeared on the European scene, national public service broadcasting systems were soon established. Public service broadcast media has been a cornerstone in European media policy during the last 50 years. The model of radio and television in the BBC, British Broadcasting Corporation, has functioned as an inspiration for many other countries in Europe in their efforts to establish a national media system acting in the public interest. The BBC Model was copied by most Western European countries during the last century, but has more recently also become an important inspiration for the newly emerging new democratic media systems in Eastern Europe (Tracey, 1998; Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Content diversity in public service broadcasting was initially supposed to be achieved by means of well-defined rules for the broadcast companies, aimed at guaranteeing objective and impartial news reporting. The neutrality of broadcasting coverage has been the product of the politically required principle of balance between different political viewpoints. In contrast to the public service media content, it appears to be more interesting to analyze the resource allocation to public service. Three different options – government funding, licence fees and advertising – may affect public service operations in different

directions regarding orientation (elite or mass audience) or communication mode (generalistic or particularistic) (Votmer, 1993). Until recently, most of public broadcasters in Europe have relied on mixed funding, in order to minimize unilateral dependence on political actors or commercial interests (Kelly et al., 2004).

During great parts of the last century – lasting in most European countries from about 1920 to 1980 – public service media companies were operating under such monopoly regimes. Generally, national governments were eager to control and regulate the then new media radio and later television. Initially, the arguments for public service media were based on technological considerations rather than political beliefs. In most countries, the limitation of available frequencies forced governments to secure broadcasts in the public interest. They were basically concerned that radio and television should be left to private interests, and that access to the new media would be limited. The very early American experiences, with a more or less ruinous competition concerning frequencies among private business, intimidated political actors in Europe and made them more decisive in taking control of broadcast media and regulating their operations through general charters between the state and the individual media company (Katz, 2005).

However, historically the objectives of public service monopoly media have been more closely associated with intentions to strengthen democracy and the national culture rather than with technological and economic arguments, by guaranteeing a national media structure with independent public service media providing all citizens with relevant information and education. In most European countries a majority of the political parties in the Parliaments accepted these perceived benefits of public broadcasting. Thus, the core principles of public service have been based on its democratic functions as an independent and reliable information provider and public discourse platform, caring about diversity and accountability, and reaching the entire country population (Blumler, 1992; Syvertsen, 1999).

The monopoly era was not however, destined to last forever. In a second phase of media development during the period from the 1980's, most European media systems were deregulated as a result of liberalization and market trends among national governments. The liberal arguments focused on the ineffective management within public service media companies, and the lack of interest in meeting the desires of their audience (Keane, 1991). This new liberal media policy was basically made possible by the contemporary media technological development, in particular satellite and cable television, which offered new choices and increased competition in the dualistic national media markets between traditional public service media and new private media (Kleinstüber, 2004). In all European countries public service monopolies were dismantled. As could be expected, public service media lost substantial audience market shares, even if this development was less distinct in some countries than in others (Kelly et al., 2004).

Media studies of the competition era include content analyzes of news and programmes, comparing private and public service television, as well as audience studies focused on market share development or daily reach of the competing channels (cf. Holtz-Bacha & Norris 2000; Vettehen et al. 2006). Within this competitive media context, there has also been a more theoretical discussion about a possible convergence between the channels: either with public service media attempting to adopt more commercial values or with private media adjusting to existing and broadly accepted public service values. However, empirical studies have been somewhat ambiguous in their support of the convergence hypothesis (Seaton, 1988; Schatz, 1994; Pfetsch, 1996).

The changing conditions of the broadcast markets also affected media policy strategies in single countries. The former monopoly era considerations concerning democratic values and educational functions were to a considerable extent overplayed by a new media market situation, in which public service media is just one possible media option for the audience. In such a competitive media system public service media has to seek its legitimacy from the audience and is much more dependent on its choice of programmes. Thus, public service legitimacy has been, in general, transformed into an economic value for policy makers, which must be compared to the market distortions produced by public service media (Sondergaard, 1999). Accordingly, the media policy debate during this second phase has focused more on whether public service in the new media landscape should be complementary ('narrow') or full-scale ('broad'), providing something the commercial channels do not offer (as documentaries or political debates) or to maintain the ambition to reach a bigger audience by means of a greater variety of programmes (including more commercial formats such as entertainment shows and comedies). The competitive era has also introduced new economic arguments against public service media. From a market-liberal view, the system license fees or state funding are criticized for distorting market conditions and imposing unfavorable constraints upon private media companies (Sondergaard, 1999; Syvertsen, 2004).

Monopoly and competition have been followed by digitalization. In the third age of public service in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the dualistic broadcast media systems have existed for decades and their prerequisites are to a large extent overplayed. Technologically, the analogue systems are gradually being replaced by digital systems for radio and television, DAB and DTT, in all European countries. Furthermore, new media platforms such as pod-radio and web-TV are rapidly developed and existing new media such as the Internet and mobile phones are becoming more important for information and interaction. This media development affects all media, including public service media. Beside its traditional broadcast platforms, public service radio and television must be present in new media formats in order to attract an audience that simultaneously becomes more individualized and fragmented than was the case previously. By

offering on-line services for young users, public service media could have the possibility to reach previously difficult population segments.

An overview of European public service media companies show that most operators are seriously involved in developing their on-line activities, not by abandoning the broadcast sector but instead by attempting to apply a 'cross-media'-approach where old and new media support mutually each other. However, there are significant variations in the digital strategies adopted by the national companies. Public service media in Sweden and the UK offer a comprehensive news service on the Net and still seek their legitimacy by referring to societal functions, while their corresponding companies in France and Hungary offer less advanced websites mostly promoting radio and television programme output (Aslama & Syvertsen, 2006). Obviously, all public broadcasters in Europe are nowadays facing serious challenges in their efforts to remain as central media actors in the dramatically changing media environments. Thus, it may be accurate to describe the situation as if European politics and public service media are in the middle of a possible reinventing process with regards to the concept of public service. In addition, consideration should be given to reconsidering whether and to what extent the existing institutions in the digital era are still serving their basic concepts as it was first formulated over 80 years ago. Multimediality may primarily not be seen as a technological problem, but rather as a management challenge at the crossroads of business and politics. Depending on the manner in which these challenges are handled, multimediality may cause the public service media to be prone to damaging criticism from commercial competitors or, on the other hand, actually improve the legitimacy of their licence to operate.

The first step in public service broadcasting development from public monopoly to market competition was definitely extremely large, but the second step from broadcast competition to digitalization and new media platforms competition is even more crucial and challenging for hitherto major media players. In the current situation, public service media does not only struggles with dozens of new private broadcasters but it now faces an unlimited supply of competing media outlets in all kind of media offering the public a boundless range of information, entertainment and opinions. To summarize, these development of public service media in a historical perspective can be described as follows (tab 1.):

**Table 1. Three Ages of Public Service**

<b>PSB-phase</b>	<b>Technology</b>	<b>Politics</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Audicene</b>	<b>PSB</b>	<b>Idea</b>
Monopoly (1920-1980)	Frequency limits and demands for order from chaos	License fees and ads	Regulations Social responsibility Consensus	Breadth Depth Education	Homogenous Total Loyal	"Something that is good for most people and the nation"
Competition (1980-2000)	Satellite and cable TV "threat" to national media	License fees, ads Efficiency Market logic	Deregulation Liberalization Conflict	"Broad" or "narrow"	Heterogenous Reduced Segmented "Core actors"	"Something different not offered by others"
Digital-ization (2000-)	PC and broad band Convergence DTT, DAB	?	?	A la carte Cross- media	Individualization of media Fragmentation	"Everything for everyone, anytime"

**Source:** Table elaborated from discussion in Katz (2005) and Roppen et al. (2006).

The development described above clearly imposes a huge challenge for existing European media policies. Over a very brief period of time, it has been possible to observe a tremendous paradigm shift, during which basic public service media mission has been transformed from offering 'something special for the whole audience sometimes' into giving 'everything for everyone any time'. The extensive political debate using well-known arguments concerning the conditions of public service broadcasting, has so far not generated a similarly thorough discussion referring to the more urgent considerations regarding the objectives of public service within a digital media context. In general, European national media policies have so far not been particularly focused on the principles or guidelines regarding public service presences on the Net. However, in the following paragraphs different available media policy options in this area will be further discussed.

### **Future Public Service Media Policy Options**

The present public service media in European countries differ significantly with regard to financing, program profiles and audience popularity. There is a great variation between European countries in the manner by which public service media is regulated (Kelly et al., 2004). Notwithstanding, a general regulatory framework of public service media has so far been widely accepted by most European governments regardless of their ideological preferences (Norris, 2000; Holtz-Bacha & Norris, 2001; Hallin

& Mancini, 2004). The legitimacy of public service media has, to a large extent, been based on its obligation to improve public discourse by providing audiences with relevant information regarding current affairs and in offering alternative viewpoints on controversial issues. The basic tenet of public service radio and television has been to offer the public a mixture of information and entertainment for special occasions that attracts as large audience as possible.

Thus, media policy regarding public service has been widely accepted by most political parties. However, recent media technology developments (cable and satellite TV) and an increased ideological polarization (liberal market model) have gradually resulted in more diverse views with regards to the media policy strategies and objectives within Europe. Furthermore, categorical political positions have been overplayed. Left wing and socialist parties in the Scandinavian countries, previously opponents of deregulation, have been forced to accept so-called 'hybrid' media solutions since the early 1990's (Roppen et al. 2006). These include commercialization of public service by allowing advertisements or reorientation of private media by allowing commercial operations on public service-like conditions (as Danish TV2, Norwegian TV2 and Swedish TV4).

At the same time, right-wing and non-socialist parties, have replaced a categorical opposition to public service media with a more pragmatic view, accepting public service as an indispensable part of national media systems. In this new media landscape the new political controversy concerns the role of public service in a competitive media environment. Until the present time, the main position of leftist parties has been to argue for a 'broad' public service attempting to reach as large an audience as possible by offering a great variety of content. On the other hand, rightist parties have favored a 'narrow' public service, focusing on offering a media content that cannot be found on commercial channels.

These past perceptions and the newer, and increasingly, different ideas concerning public service in the broadcasting era have now been overtaken by an increasing political disagreement about the role of public service broadcast media in the digital era, as well as a growing political uncertainty about public service roles' regarding new media platforms. As public service media enters multimedia markets old and possibly settled issues arise in new shapes:

- State-owned public service broadcasting as a market-regulating force.
- Competition regulated by cultural (media) policy-based intervention.

Only a limited amount of research has been conducted into these issues and there are a number of reasons for this which includes a lack of relevant data – in particular data suitable for comparisons between countries. Furthermore, media economics is barely established as a field of research in some



European countries. Existing media research dealing with public service broadcasting has, to a large extent, been occupied with media politics and public service organizations as important, and almost, sacred institutions – and to a lesser extent been concerned with public service broadcasting as a market force in itself.

In an overview of media policy possibilities on the Internet Nordic media researchers Minna Aslama and Trine Syvertsen have suggested five different strategies. Policy makers may allow public service media to develop Internet activities freely, they may demand certain restrictions for public service operations on the Net, they may forbid public service to engage in new media, they may finance engagement in new media or they may protect public service media by imposing regulations guaranteeing the development of certain Internet activities (Aslama & Syvertsen, 2006). One current example of diverging perspectives with regards to old and new public service media formats is the decision by the Norwegian government to allow advertisements on the public service website, while forbidding all kind of ads in broadcast outlets (Roppen et al., 2006).

Consequently, different media policy options are possible for public service operations on the Net. At least four approaches can be identified (tab. 2).

**Table 2. Media Policy Options for Public Service in Different Phases**

Phase	"Left-wing media policy"		"Right-wing media policy"	
<u>Monopoly:</u> Limited frequencies Regulation of broadcast media	Public service only media allowed Basically license fee financing			
<u>Commercialization:</u> Limitations, but increased supply of cable and satellite television due to technology and deregulations	PSB protections on a partly deregulated market by 'hybrid' solutions (c f ads in PSB or PSB-alike conditions for private media		PSB operates on market conditions and competes with private media for advertisers and audiences or becomes a high-quality 'niche' channel	
<u>Digitalization:</u> Unlimited supply, media convergence and multi-channel publication	Public service on the Net protected by government money and extra support for new media operations (PSB Company Position)	Public service on the Net protected by government money, and the PSB company decides about media priorities (National Government Position)	Public service on the Net allowed and paid by government money, but only for specific operations (European Union Position)	Public service on the Net allowed if all operations are financed in a commercial way (Private Media Company Position)

**Source:** Based on discussion in Nord (2008).

Firstly, an *expansive* strategy may be implemented, aimed at allowing public service to use public funds and license fees for Internet operations and also accepting additional revenues such as sponsoring or ads to secure online activities. Secondly, a *preserving* strategy is possible where public service may use its existing revenues freely on different media, but without receiving any extra money for Internet operations. Thirdly, policy makers may adopt a *restricting* strategy, accepting public service presence on the Net, but only with special kinds of content. Fourthly, it is possible to imagine a *free-market* strategy where public service on the Net is allowed as long as all its operations are financed by commercial revenues from the Internet activities.

Obviously, all these strategies diverge when referring to different media policy standpoints, business interests or audience perspectives. Those who argue in favor of political protection and public financing for public service on the Internet – such as public service organizations in general and most national governments – refer to traditional core values and the legitimacy argument that public service media requires a huge audience attracted by a variety of content. From this perspective, public service on the Internet may be a tool for promoting these core values and legitimacy. Those who argue in favor of restrictions for public service – such as the European Commission, market liberals or private media organizations – think that it is more appropriate and ‘market-friendly’ to produce a narrower content not offered by other media. In this scenario, public service basically serves minor interests in society and more exclusive tastes.

Accordingly, media actors, political parties and governments have so far expressed varying, and not completely consistent, views with regards to public service media functions on the Internet. Generally speaking, the most critical opinions have, at present, been articulated by commercial media organizations, both broadcast media and printed media. The main reason for their standpoints has been concerns about future unequal competition on the Internet, as public service media may use state money to develop their activities on the Net (Nord, 2008). One example of such critical standpoints come from the British debate where both major newspaper conglomerates such as Associated Newspapers, News International and the Telegraph Group, as well as the British Internet Publishers Alliance have expressed worries over what they call the BBC’s ‘digital empire-building’. Furthermore, they argue that the public broadcaster is given an unfair advantage in the digitalization process, and that public service on-line activities are an inappropriate use of license fee money (Barnett, 2006).

Thus, commercial media generally argue strongly for strict commercial conditions for public service operations on the Internet. A slightly more positive position has so far been expressed at the international level by the European Union, stressing the need for general open competition in all industrial sectors, but also acknowledging a particular role for public service media in member countries. The European Union

has recognized the duality of broadcasting in Europe and named public service broadcasting as a cornerstone of democracy in the Protocol to the Treaty of Amsterdam on public broadcasters. However, with reference to Internet operations the European Commission has so far been open and receptive to viewpoints expressed by commercial media actors complaining about unfair competition on the Internet by public service media. The existing official European Union view with regards to this matter tends more towards allowing public service on the Internet, but to regulating the operations in such a way that commercial competitors are not placed in an unfavorable situation or are prevented from increasing within the media market. It is interesting to note, that the European Parliament and the Council of Europe have consequently expressed less market-oriented approaches with regards to this matter.

Finally, the more public-service friendly viewpoints have so far been associated with most national governments and the public service media companies. As public service media has been an important integral part of all European national media systems they are also seen as being the obvious actors on the Net. The left-centre position has been to support public service presence on the Internet and to allow these companies to allocate their public resources freely within the various available media platforms. At the same time, more liberal parties have generally leaned to a slightly more market-oriented position and endorsed a variety of restrictions for public service Net operations. Accordingly, public service companies have underlined the importance of a strong public service presence on the Internet as a counterweight to the huge quantities of 'less reliable' content providers and commercial interests. Thus, these companies have also argued that they should also be provided with extra money to support digital development without jeopardizing traditional broadcast activities.

This somewhat restless search for accurate media policy positions in the new media landscape may partially be explained by the rapid media development, which has caused political standpoints to become more or less obsolete. However, one alternative explanation of media policy uncertainty may be a lack of political vision with regards to possible public service functions on the Internet. In the following paragraphs, some reflections on the role of public service on the Net are further discussed.

### **Possible Public Service Internet Roles**

There are a number of significantly diverging perspectives with regards to the benefits of the Internet revolution. The most optimistic visions emphasize the mobilization functions of the Internet, as well as its ability to develop a digital public sphere, facilitate communication and encourage political interest in general. On the contrary, more pessimistic views forecast a 'digital divide' where privileged segments of

the population use the Internet in a more informative way than non-privileged citizens, who turn to completely different entertainment-oriented content on the Net. Thus, the Internet is supposed to disadvantage deliberation and undermine the politics of democratic participation (Hill & Hughes, 1998; Norris, 2000; Chadwick, 2006). Furthermore, critical perspectives have addressed the risks associated with an increased owner concentration in both old and new media, turning the Internet more to a market place than a forum for political discourse (Murdock, 2005).

However, theoretically the Internet has distinctive advantages compared to traditional mass media outlets and a basic capacity to enhance the public sphere. The Net offers unlimited reach access to boundless information and good opportunities for political participation and interactivity, at least for the motivated groups in society. In comparison to classic democratic functions normally applied to old media as newspapers, radio and television Internet definitely matches and exceeds other media outlets (tab. 3).

**Table 3. Democratic Functions in Different Media Types**

<b>Democratic Function</b>	<b>Printed and Broadcast Media</b>	<b>Digital Media</b>
<b>Information</b>	Truth Relevance Knowledge	+ Speed + Access
<b>Investigation</b>	Independence Critical approach Accountability	+ Transparency
<b>Debate</b>	Pluralism Current Representativeness	+ Interactivity

**Source:** Own elaboration.

As shown above, different democratic functions can be further developed on the Internet. There are also other advantages: One is the symmetry between sender and receiver considering the distribution (every sender can be a receiver of messages and vice versa). Another advantage is the flexible use of the Internet both as synchronic media (as broadcast media) and as non-synchronic media (as printed media) (Finneman, 2006).

At this moment, it appears relevant to ask some basic questions concerning public services on-line activities. Firstly, the former limitations of space and frequencies, once a basic assumption for public service, no longer exist. There may be disputes concerning the content on the Internet, but it is not possible to deny that all formal diversity requisites are fulfilled.

Notwithstanding, there are still convincing arguments for a public service presence on the Internet. A need may still exist in the new media for public orientation by well-known and respected news providers such as the public service companies. It is difficult to find any reason as to why public service companies should be completely excluded from operating within new media formats, when they are reaching an increasing and possibly younger audience.

Thus, the idea that public service companies should not be allowed to be present on the Internet appears to be almost fundamentalist. However, one important subject for further discussion is of course whether this public service Internet presence may be achieved without distorting market conditions, or without public service media using (or misusing) their hitherto dominant position in broadcast media in future digital media operations.

Consequently, four different roles for public service media as an actor and/or an arena on the Internet can be identified. The differences between the perspectives are, to a large extent, dependent on the varying perceptions of the existing content diversity on the Internet and the need for the provision of independent content (tab. 4).

**Table 4. Public Service Roles on the Internet**

<b>Public service on the Internet</b>	<b>Character</b>	<b>View of existing media diversity</b>	<b>View of public service independence</b>	<b>Basic Internet tool</b>
<b>Passive arena</b>	Navigator to other websites	Sufficient	Unimportant	Links
<b>Active arena</b>	Editor and evaluator of other websites	Sufficient, but need for interpretation	Fairly important	References
<b>Passive actor</b>	Supporter of broadcast public service	Sufficient, but need for direction	Important	Downloads
<b>Active actor</b>	Autonomous and exclusive content provider	Insufficient	Very important	Multiple tools

**Source:** Own elaboration.

In its simplest role public service Internet media can function as a *passive arena*. In this role it works as a coordinator or navigator to other websites, or as a convenient starting point for discovering new information. The role is then basically to offer reliable guidelines for further Internet searches, and provide visitors with useful links to other web sites. Thus, public service from this perspective is defined as a

trustworthy navigator function, particularly essential and crucial in a digital environment characterized by enormous and muddled flows of information.

A slightly different possibility is to develop a public service Net presence as an *active arena*. In this alternative, the basis is that public service uses information provided by external sources. However, this material is professionally edited and rewritten in order to be more in line with traditional public service ideals. Thus, public service functions more actively, and is more reliant on internal evaluations and considerations before publishing. In this role, the independent role of public service is more strongly articulated than in the previous case and the need for public orientation is more emphasized.

The more the distinct features of public service media are acknowledged, the more active the role on the Internet may be defined. One option here is to think of public service as a *passive actor*, relying only on internal and exclusive content on the web site, but mainly redistributing material for public service radio and television. In this scenario, the public service web sites functions mostly as cross-media promotion of public service content originally produced on other platforms but now offered instantly to web consumers. Accordingly, public service is defined as making traditional public service content more easily accessible in the new media by providing download possibilities and web versions.

Finally, the most developed and advanced public service role on the Internet is as an *active actor*. Accordingly, public service operations on the Internet in this scenario are autonomous and exclusive in their character. The web sites are developed independently from broadcast media operations, and public service news departments are working independently on all available media platforms. The ambition is to establish public service presence on the Internet with well-developed web sites that attracts as large an audience as possible. The argument for such a strong Internet presence is basically the need for independent public service media in a digital environment, which is mainly dominated by commercial interests. Thus, public service is defined as a comprehensive Internet service with multiple functions. Public service digital media is not different to public service broadcast media and should not be considered as being of lesser interest than the traditional mass media.

These four different possibilities of defining new public service functions on the Internet may be adopted at some future date within media policy development in Europe. However, at present government positions have not been consolidated within this area, but it is reasonable to think that there will be less coherence and harmony within the policies as opposed to the case during the broadcast media policy era. The basic question – what should public service do on the Internet? – will be answered at same future date, but in a variety of ways.

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