

# Public Service Media Initiatives in the Global South

Edited by  
Anis Rahman & Gregory Ferrell Lowe

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Anis Rahman & Gregory Ferrell Lowe (eds.)

**Simon Fraser University Library**

July 2016

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*Editors*

Anis Rahman & Gregory Ferrell Lowe

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**Yang Lee** is a New Media Producer at the Taiwan Public Television Service Foundation (PTS). During 2008-2014, he was an Associate Research Fellow at R&D Department. His research interests included public service media, communication policy and new media technology. He was also a Project Leader of High-Definition Television Transition Plan and Digital Switchover Project. In the end of 2014, he joined New Media Department to launch PTS' new streaming video services. He has published several research papers for RIPE 2012, 2014 and 13th Chinese Internet Research Conference at University of Alberta in 2015.

**Gregory Ferrell Lowe** (Ph.D. 1992, University of Texas at Austin) is Professor of Media Management at the University of Tampere in Finland. He worked as Senior Advisor in Corporate Strategy and Development (1997-2007) for the Finnish public service broadcasting corporation, Yle: Lowe founded the RIPE international initiative for the development of public service media in 2000 as a network for collaboration between media scholars and strategic managers in the public service media sector (<http://ripeat.org>). He has been the editor or lead editor for the RIPE book edited series published by Nordicom. The entire series through 2013 is now available as free downloads in PDF format, courtesy of Nordicom. Lowe served as President of the European Media Management Association from 2012 through 2016 and was lead editor for the recent book from Springer-Verlag titled: *Managing Media Firms and Industries: What's so special about media management?*

**Anis Rahman** is Instructor and PhD candidate at the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University, Canada. Previously he taught Media Studies and Journalism at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, Dhaka. His doctoral research explores media democratization, policy reform, and journalism issues in Bangladesh. His research interests also include political economy of media, development communication, and public media in the Global South. Rahman holds Masters degrees from the Goldsmiths, University of London (Television Journalism) and University of Rajshahi (Mass Communication). He received a Chevening Scholarship from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK (2007-2008). He has published in *Asian Journal of Communication*, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *MediaAsia*, and *Eptic* Online journals, and a chapter in the book, *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Bangladesh*.

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# Preface

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# Preface

**Gregory Ferrell Lowe\***

**University of Tampere, Finland**

Public service broadcasting has a long history in some countries and is particularly significant in the UK and Scandinavia where PSB organisations have been active since the 1930s and continue to be foundational in broadcasting systems. This region is the historic 'heartland' of the public service approach. PSB came later to southern Europe (1970s) due to military dictatorships in Greece, Portugal and Spain, and later still to central Europe (1990s) due to authoritarian control during the Soviet era. PSB was instituted in Germany and Japan by the Allies after World War Two, a preference advocated by the United States – not only England and France. PSB launched in the later half of the 1960s in the USA as one accomplishment of President Lyndon B. Johnson's drive to build the American Great Society. Today, PSB is under increasing strain and heightened uncertainty in the West, but at the same time there is growing effort to develop public service provision in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This dynamic was an emergent theme in the RIPE@2011 Reader (Lowe & Steemers 2012) and is thematic in the RIPE@2015 Reader (Lowe & Yamamoto 2016).

I want to highlight three implications that link the reports in this collection on PSB in the Global South.

The first implication highlights the importance of public service broadcasting for the development of democracy. The Allies could have chosen the private commercial model as the framework for broadcasting in post-war Germany and Japan. They did not due to the higher priority of securing the development of democracy in both countries. The United States did not need PSB due to any lack of competition in radio and television, or any problem (at that time) with commercial profitability of media. The reasons hinged on democratic principles and priorities. Outside the West, interest to cultivate PSB among advocates, activists, and pro-democracy politicians and parties is squarely focused on developing democracy. PSB is under fierce attack in Europe today and it is especially worrisome to see an accelerating return to 'soft state' broadcasting in central Europe. Too many in Europe's 'developed' democracies have unfortunately forgotten or wilfully reject the continuing need for a non-state and non-profit media sector to support the democratic interests of civil society. The Amsterdam Protocol recognises this as the essential role and function of PSB. It requires vigorous defence today.

The second implication is a corollary to the first. The development and vitality of PSB cannot be taken for granted. PSB is orientated to resist the vested self-interests of political and commercial elites that rely on media as a tool for maintaining and exercising power. From the beginning, the public service ethos prioritised serving people as citizens first and foremost, and therefore on as fair and equal a basis as possible. This is evident in the principle of 'universalism' – i.e., the mission to ensure access of all content to all people without discrimination. Further, it is a core value of public service journalism that is premised on the 'arm's length' principle – i.e. news and current affairs content must not be unduly shaped by

or beholden to the interests of either the State or Industry. Contrary to the popular belief that media are not powerful today, and that there is such abundance that special provision is no longer necessary, media content clearly has a decisive role in shaping public opinions and facilitating discourse that comprises a public sphere. Those effects are not usually direct, but they are persistent and cumulative. Moreover, media channels and services that address people in their role as citizens of a collective public with shared interests in the conditions, directions and characteristics of a society as such, actually are not available in abundance. In many countries they are comparatively few and in decline (Lowe & Stavitsky forthcoming). This points to the ceaseless nature of socio-political struggle that is required to establish PSB where there is no heritage of this practice and approach, and to recreate where it is already established but in need of development. In all cases, the struggle is about preserving, protecting and defending principles that are foundational for PSB's social legitimacy.

The third and final implication highlights the importance of cultural context and conditions in determining appropriate policies, structures, and practices for PSB. The contributors in this report recognise the historic value of the 'European classical model' as a source of inspiration in contemporary efforts to establish a genuine public service practice in countries without this heritage. At the same time, it is highly unrealistic to suppose that the ways and means by which classical PSB has structured, financed, organised, managed and operationalised are viable elsewhere. In fact, PSB has been variously handled in the West, as well; to a degree that suggests there is no 'Western' model outside of abstract theory. In the United States, for example, funding is largely provided by individual donors and corporate underwriting, and the licence fee system for funding is in decline even in northwest Europe. Commercial advertising has been a characteristic revenue stream for PSB in southern and central Europe where a core challenge is successfully transitioning from institutions premised on a heritage of state broadcasting to public broadcasting for civil societies. That challenge is equally characteristic of struggle to establish PSB in much of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Thus, one needs to be self-critically careful about assumptions regarding the 'right way' to do public service broadcasting. In the West, received heritages, comparatively big and influential legacy institutions, and socio-political cultures that facilitate PSB in affluent countries with long-established democratic structures are not conducive for achieving what is needed in other countries with far less resources, more uncertain identities, fragile democratic institutions, uneven support for PSB, and popular suspicions that it's really only state broadcasting with better cosmetics.

The RIPE initiative unequivocally supports the development of public service in media of all types, in all places, and in every respect that is conducive for strengthening democracy and ensuring the wellbeing of citizens in healthy civil societies. Our network is thoroughly international and increasingly global. Speaking personally, I believe there will be as much and more the West can learn from efforts and experiences in developing PSB (or PSM) among the Rest, as the Rest has learned in drawing inspiration from the West. This report is one contribution to a shared struggle to secure a sector and practice in media provision that prioritises public service as the core mission and social responsibility as the principled foundation. The commercial media industry will always be able to take care of its own self-interests, and political actors control the levers they use in the daily exercise of power. Our mission is to support those who can't otherwise secure their legitimate self-interests in the

provision of media contents and services that are genuinely in the public's interests as citizens, both in the West and among the Rest.

As indicated in this report, there is no greater scope of challenges in this regard than the work that is essential to establishing PSB in the Global South.

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11 April 2016  
Tampere, Finland

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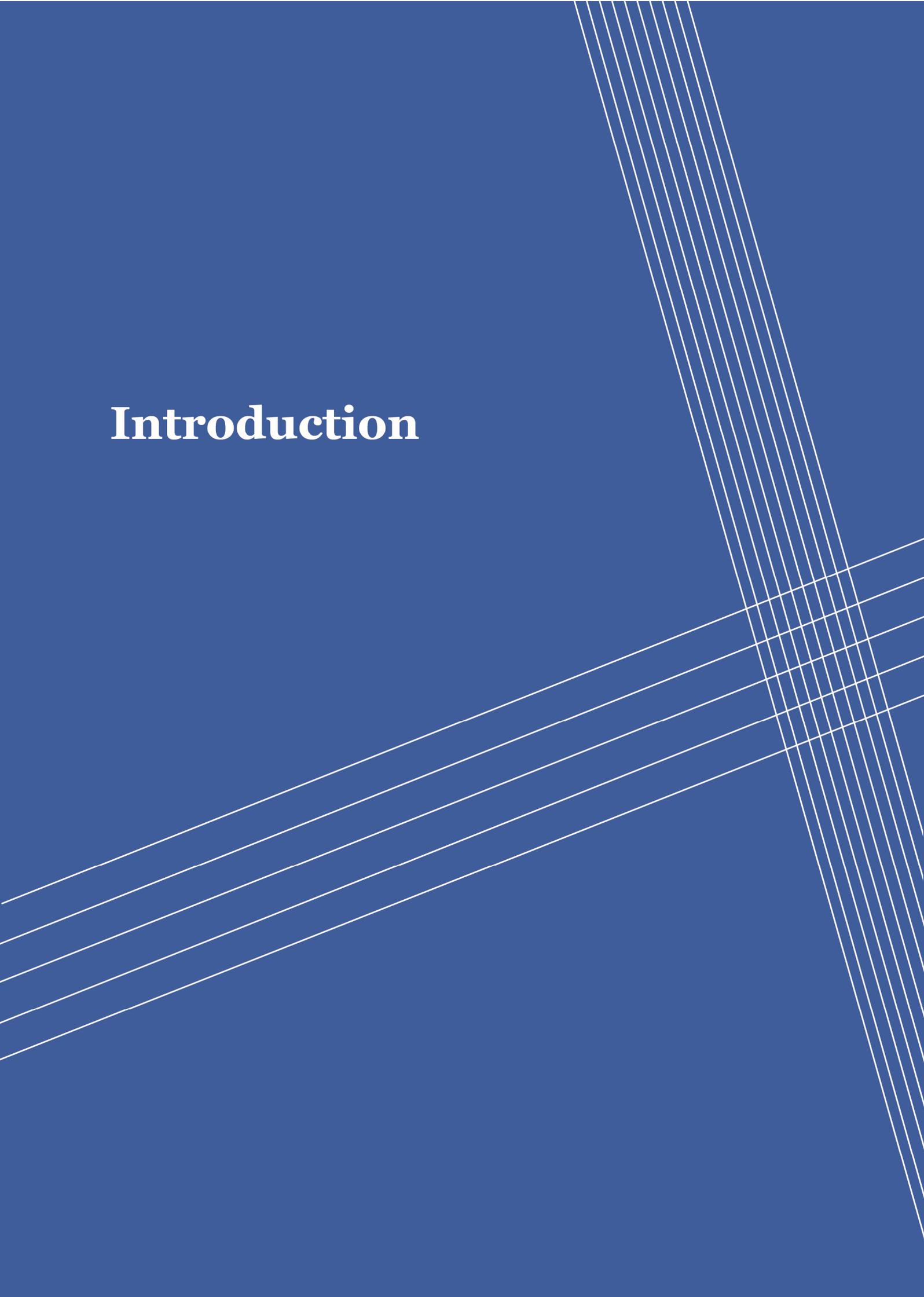
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# Introduction

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# Introduction

## Public Service Media Initiatives in the Global South

**Anis Rahman\***

**Simon Fraser University, Canada**

The past two decades have seen a significant practical and scholarly interest in the development of public service broadcasting (henceforth, PSB) as the meaning and narrative of both ‘public service’ and ‘broadcasting’ have been challenged, sometimes extended, largely transformed, and continually renegotiated in response to changing circumstances. Defining PSB has always been a daunting task and is arguably even more difficult today given that distinctions between public service broadcasting, state-administered broadcasting, and often, commercial broadcasting are increasingly blurred.

UNESCO (2014) offered a simple definition, “Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) is broadcasting made, financed, and controlled by the public, for the public. It is neither commercial nor state-owned, free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces.” A mature model of PSB, in this definition, implies an autonomous organization that is supported by the state but controlled and managed as an independent public corporation, funded by public money either via licensing fees or via taxes (e.g. CBC in Canada). PSB is often equated with public broadcasting in the USA (independently owned, financed, and managed by the public via donations, e.g. Pacifica radio in the US) and elsewhere conflated with state broadcasting services (entirely owned and controlled by the state, e.g. CCTV in China). In this volume on PSB in the Global South we adopt an *inclusive* vision of media as public enterprises, which brings state-administered and public service broadcasting (and their services provided on nonbroadcast platforms), community broadcasting, grassroots media, and civic journalism on public issues together under a broad umbrella that we characterize as Public Service Media (PSM).

Academic study about PSB, and activism for this, are not new. A comprehensive literature and diverse case studies have been produced over the decades since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. But here we especially note the significant contributions made in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by the RIPE initiative: Re-Visionary Interpretations of the Public Enterprise (<http://ripeat.org/>). Beginning in 2000, hundreds of media scholars from dozens of countries around the world have been working to investigate, clarify and chart the variety of approaches to PSM, similarities across contexts, and innovations. The series of RIPE Readers published by NORDICOM since 2003 are now available as free downloads (PDF format) on the publisher’s website. Some have been particularly important for scholarship and activism in the Global South (e.g. Lowe & Yamamoto, 2016; Lowe & Martin, 2014; Lowe & Steemers, 2012; Lowe & Bardoel, 2007). Media scholars and activists are increasingly invested in rethinking, reassessing, and internationalizing PSM discourses (e.g. Horowitz & Nieminen, 2016; Horowitz & Car, 2015; Abbott, 2016).

A vibrant volume of research reports, columns, and blogs on a diverse PSB and PSM-related issues are being produced and published online (e.g. see, [mediapowermonitor.com](http://mediapowermonitor.com), Global PSM Experts Networks Facebook Group, Public Media Alliance updates, and #publicbroadcasting or #publicservicemedia). Recent topics of discussion range from debate on the future of the BBC, to jobs cuts at CBC in Canada, to the mobile strategy of PBS News Hour in the USA, to heightened political control of Polish public media, problems of public broadcasting in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the independence of the Croatian public broadcaster, and the rise of a new PSB network in Latin America.

While the fora of research contributing to this increase in global awareness and visibility of PSM, aside few exceptional work (e.g. Tambini, 2015), largely showcases institutional models and practices of PSM that originated in and are characteristic of in the Global North. That has been the essential focus steering the agenda on research about the present and for future development. Indeed, the dominating epistemology of PSM is deeply rooted in the northern European context and traditions of social democracy. The orientations and practices elsewhere have been under-researched and even sometimes ignored. Given that state-administered type media have been historically dominant in the Global South, the struggles to establish public media and to open new opportunities for developing public values in the vast and highly diverse terrain of the Global South is a pressing contemporary challenge for media scholarship. Linguistic barriers and lack of support for research make research more difficult for media scholars here.

This volume brings together insights from a cohort of emerging scholars and practitioners from Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Mexico, Morocco, Taiwan, and South Africa, all of whom participated in the RIPE@2014 Conference in Tokyo and agreed to delve deeper into the national and regional aspects of publicly funded media initiatives in the Global South.<sup>1</sup> Here we employ the term *public media initiatives* as an inclusive phrase that connotes the public service values present in all publicly funded media enterprises, including state-administered and public service broadcasting, community broadcasting, and a varieties of emerging civic media practices. We do not intend to flatten all PSM ventures into a homogenous category, but on the contrary employ the term *public media initiatives* as a contextual, relative, and plural ontology, in which the degree of public service and nature of ownership may vary among enterprises and across regions.

The authors of this volume primarily explore answers to two key questions. First, what are the common dilemmas and biggest hurdles for developing public service media in the Global

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nation Development Program (UNDP, 2013) defines the term “South” or “Global South” as “developing countries, which are located primarily in the Southern Hemisphere.” There are plenty arguments against such simplistic categorization of the North-South divide (see, Global South Studies Center, 2015). Obviously, Australia and New Zealand are located in the South Hemisphere but they are not developing countries. Same argument can be applied to Malaysia, Taiwan, or Argentina. Numerous attempts have been made to make classification of the global South and the global North objective (such as applying 1980s Brandt Line – latitude 30° North, or classifying with recent UNDP’s Human Development Index), but any blanket terms would prove to be inadequate or inaccurate to capture global diversity, historical complexity, and increasing interconnectivity. Some acknowledge that the term *Global South* is not perfect, but it is favorable than its predecessors, “Third World” or “Developing World” (see, Rigg, 2007). Agreeing with this view, and acknowledging the imperfection of the terminology, we refer to the term *the Global South* not necessarily as a fixed geographical or economic entity but as a dynamic political and cultural imagination that connects and reflects the realities of the countries we explore in this project.

South, and what interventions may help advance the cause in a non-Western and emerging contexts? Here we are especially interested to understand what we can learn from each other. Second, what is being done already, not only formal institutional terms but also especially in practice? This volume does not claim to represent a comprehensive comparative view of all public media initiatives in the Global South, but rather offers a selective collection of case studies that reveal overlapping commonalities as well as dissimilarities across the treated cases – which are diverse enough to suggest an important range of shared aspirations and also challenges. Our goal is to support RIPE’s ongoing efforts to develop dialogue, research and advocacy in a complex and constantly evolving network of communication scholars and practitioners. The motivation is to encourage and promote mutual learning that can facilitate the development of public service media in the Global South.

## **Research Methodology**

The Mapping Digital Media (MDM) Project conducted by the Open Society Foundations (2013) provides a useful research template for this project. We adopt several indicators from the MDM project that fit within the more targeted and also more limited scope of our project, while introducing some indicators of our own (see Annex at the end of this chapter). In addition to bringing in secondary data from existing local and regional sources, the authors enrich their insights by employing small-scale in-depth interviews with key-informants engaged with PSM development in each case, and drawing on especially relevant archival research. The scope and depth of research vary across chapters, but each contributor provides a brief overview of one region and investigates a case country to exemplify. They collectively focus on state-administered/public service broadcasters to address common issues and concerns, including public service provision, ownership, funding models, the impact of politicization, commercialization in journalism, the potentials of online, and community-based initiatives, with a shared goal of fostering alternative avenues for the development of media policy that can facilitate building public service media in broadcasting and online.

## **Chapter Summaries**

The chapters of this volume are organized in the order they were proposed. The first chapter provides a synoptic account of how a state-administered broadcaster maintains its power in the face of changing media landscapes. While the chapter is specific to Bangladesh, it shows that South Asian countries contain a diverse array of media systems with varied degrees of public service mandates and ongoing reforms. In many parts of the Global South (especially South Asia, Southern Africa) the colonial public media became state administered media after independence. The author argues that as a postcolonial media institution, the Bangladeshi state broadcaster (BTV) is deeply submerged in political subservience but also projects an image as being a public media provider in its promotion of Bangladeshi culture and heritage. The author stresses that BTV needs a complete overhaul to function as a proper independent public media organization. But the case begs the question as to whether institutional and policy reforms are enough to transform a state-broadcaster into a functioning PSM if there is no supportive political environment and economic incentive?

Regardless of the political systems, be they more or less democratic or authoritarian, the ruling class in much of the Global South is willing to reform state-administered broadcasting systems only up to a certain extent – only so far as doing so doesn't compromise or threaten to destabilize the status quo, which is to say the power of governors to control media content when and as they see this as a necessity for various reasons. This message is made quite clear in chapter 2 where Bouziane Zaid argues that over the last decade, the regulatory body in Morocco (HACA) enabled an apparent transformation of the state-owned broadcaster. The ostensible goal was to encourage an autonomous public enterprise. But in fact, the government has retained control through repressive legal codes. Despite the presence of supportive legal provisions, as Zaid identifies, PSB in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) remains a "pseudo public system" in a kind of game played by "competitive authoritarian regimes." Although the legal frameworks and institutional structures are in place, the political culture in Morocco (and elsewhere), makes it impossible to materialize public service practices as genuinely independent, properly critical and purely produced in the public interest. The mission to establish PSB is, therefore, still in an embryonic stage in Morocco – and the same goes for the other more liberal nation-states in MENA, e.g. Jordan, Tunisia, and Lebanon. Zaid's chapter is especially important in demonstrating how and why this is characteristic.

A different category of PSM initiatives is explored in chapter 3. Here José Antonio Brambila explores a range of PSM-initiatives in an aspiring cultural environment, but these initiatives, as he argues, must survive alongside a highly concentrated and hegemonic commercial media system. The author entertains us with cautious optimism that with complex varieties of PSM under development (e.g. nearly 596 stations and channels), Mexico is stepping towards the right direction to foster a functioning PSM system, but he acknowledges there is a long way still to go. With a high concentration of commercial media in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, combined with lack of editorial independence and high degree of government control and interference in state or public organizations, there is very little room for more genuine public media initiatives to grow. Brambila makes the important point that public service models do not simplistically 'flow' from the Global North to the Global South. Quiet the contrary, PSM must be adapted (not adopted), and this suggests it can only emerge in alignment with a very complex mix of locales with distinctive situations, values, ideas, experiences, and necessities, all of which ultimately shape both the nature of the journey and the likely destination. Brambila is hopeful that the novel institutional reforms underway in many countries in this region, and encouraging incentives to support the development of existing institutions in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico, may see a transformation in the region as a promising socio-cultural environment for genuine public service media.

James Curran (2002) noted that PSB does not mean only public broadcasting because a commercial media outlet can serve public service role if it complies with mandates and regulations to fulfill public objectives (as for example with Sweden's TV4 and Finland's MTV). Instead of dealing with the state-broadcaster, Roslina Abdul Latif takes a different tact in Chapter 4 to explore whether a PSB model of the independent editorial process can be exercised in Malaysian commercial media newsrooms. Badrul Redzuan Abu Hassan joins her in the research by adding insights from PSM practices in neighboring Indonesia. The authors provide an overview of media systems and regulatory regimes in each country, juxtapose the findings from both countries, and conclude that newsroom decision-making processes would be less biased if truly independent regulatory bodies set the rules and enforce regulations.

These considerations beg the question as to whether it is possible for a state to develop a new PSB organization without controlling it. Although the term Global South does not fit very well with the geographic and economic positions of Taiwan, it is appropriate to historic conditions in the relations between the state and media, which have been highly politicized. In the past decades or so, Taiwan has made a promising effort to establish a public service system. Chapter 5 by Hamilton Cheng and Yang Lee shows that it is possible to have a state-supported media sector without turning it into a state-administered media operation, and that achieving this depends strongly on popular support that is both deep and sustained.

PSB in Taiwan was born as a government initiated media development project to secure and reinforces national identity in the conflicted context of relations with the People's Republic of China. With ample funding from the government, Taiwanese PSB was re-structured on the basis of technological advancement and institutional reforms. Surrounded by strong media markets (e.g. Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and mainland China) and troubled by "foreign cultures" (notably Korean Wave), the government equipped the media industry with its own public service sector. Despite considerable resources and generally widespread support, the work is far from complete and this case illustrates why it is important for scholars and policy-makers to exercise both caution and patience when analyzing a situation. The Taiwanese case illustrates a complex and dynamic process that can require decades to unfold, and that can only succeed when there is sufficient grassroots support to force the issue when push comes to shove – as it inevitably will because media are clearly political institutions.

The last chapter investigates the political, regulatory, and technological implications of the digitization of PSB in South Africa. Author Nomonde Gongxeka walks us through a maze of post-apartheid institutional reforms that enabled a public service mandate to emerge, and focuses on the institutional struggles of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) as it is transforming from PSB to PSM. The analysis reveals how a high dependency on commercial funding coupled with increasing political insecurity and aggravated by rapid technological changes now pose enormous difficulties in maintaining the historic and now threatened editorial independence of SABC as a public media enterprise. While this picture looks all too familiar given the characteristic and chronic ills of state-broadcasting elsewhere, there is reason to be hopeful about SABC's role as a public broadcaster, given its core strengths in popular programming contents, producing locally, and delivering to a multitude of linguistic and ethnic audiences.

### **What can we learn from each other?**

The complex architecture and perhaps dizzying varieties of PSM structures, organizations and practices in the Global South cannot be captured in one volume and should not be subjected to simplistic reductionism. That said, and even within the limited scope of research for this project, the chapters of this volume reveal a great many similarities as well as significant dissimilarities shared across countries and regions. The similarities are mostly political, economic, and historical, and tied to postcolonial structures and contemporary forces associated with global capitalism. The dissimilarities are largely institutional and cultural, and keyed to the geographic, linguistic, socio-cultural and conditional specificities of each region and nation-state. Some observations can be highlighted.

***First, public service and state-administered broadcasters are remarkably resilient against odds***

The public service and state-administered broadcasters in many countries in the Global South are not dying. Contrary to some apocalyptic predictions, state-administered broadcasters are remarkably resilient against versatile challenges, which certainly include shifting audience habits, evolving technological platforms, competition with growing private media powers, and, most significantly, being forced to defend and also compromise public service values in the face of growing political, economic, and ideological pressures, instabilities, and insecurities. In fact, this is not unusual or unique. Even in Western Europe, public service television is stubbornly successful in many countries, and they are surviving against the odds. Des Freedman (2015) argues that changes in viewing and consumption habits are often overstated. Despite forecasts that PSB would lose viewers and interest in the digital transition and to social media, public service channels in the UK (i.e. BBC, ITV, Channel 4, and Five) still claim the largest audience shares. These channels have invested significantly in producing original contents to stay relevant to a range of audiences across different demographics and platforms. Many state-administered broadcasters in the Global South are catching up with such trends.

***Second, political interference is the biggest obstacle for a PSM both to develop and to function properly***

Political influence and resulting lack of independence appears to be the biggest hurdle in most cases, and is especially problematic in contexts where there is a history of state broadcasting with characteristic high political control over content as well as operations. The country case studies of Bangladesh, Morocco, Mexico, Indonesia, and South Africa demonstrate how the state-administered broadcasters in these countries are struggling to build and to maintain editorial autonomy in the face of strong and persistent, if sometimes subtle, political meddling. Again, this is a global trend, and by no means confined to the Global South. The BBC is continually challenged with the need to fend off political intervention of various types and to differing extents, and in much of west Europe today historical PSB institutions are under fierce political attacks that are apparently motivated by neoliberal constituencies. PSB in many central and eastern European countries is challenged by overt political efforts to exert renewed state control over news and programming operations.

Even private television channels are not immune from political influence, however much their advocates insist otherwise. Indeed, the autonomy of many state-administered broadcasters in the Global South is caught in the complex crosscurrents of a colonial heritage, the postcolonial quests for nation building, and the governments' growing anxiety to lose its grip over the informal economy of public broadcasting arises from the neoliberal restructuring of global communication.<sup>2</sup> The governments are reluctant to grant autonomy also because of the fear that if media are truly independent they would become critical of the state. This is why ruling parties are typically so inclined to ensure regulations that bestow on them relatively

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<sup>2</sup> I have argued elsewhere that if we want to understand why state broadcasters in the Global South did not emerge as a full-fledged PSB, as in many European countries, we have to see the historic circumstances in which the state broadcasters in many postcolonial nation-states came into being (see, Rahman, 2014).

unhindered power to appoint the managers and set the resource limits on 'public' broadcasters. The organizational hierarchy for many broadcasting institutions makes sure that the chain of command extends all the way to the newsroom, and that oversight remains continually vigilant. Taiwan is an exceptional case here, against demonstrating important differences. Cheng and Lee inform us that Taiwan's PSB Employees Union can nominate its own candidate to sit on the Board of Governance of PTS.

***Third, the existing PSBs are financially broke and the new PSM initiatives seem to be better off when they are self-funded***

The lack of funding, and ensuing dependency on commercials, is an endemic challenge for the development of a fully functional public media. Governments have increased funding in most cases, however not to an extent that helped much to meet the growing costs and expenditures caused by digitalization and inflation. Public service media initiatives in Mexico competing with one of the most concentrated commercial media systems in Latin America. Although the public media in Mexico is subsidized in principle, in practice they remain vulnerable to budgetary manipulations. Bangladesh Television (BTV) strives to maintain its prominence by charging the highest rate for television advertising during the primetime news program, yet it suffers incessant losses. The news and current affairs programming in South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), on the contrary, are barred from receiving any form of sponsorship from commercial entities and the growth of political influence on editorial work is significant, in part by controlling the purse strings. Which way, then, to survive?

High amounts of advertising funding does not guarantee the political freedom of a state broadcaster. That is clear. With all the state's support and heavily funded by advertising, China Central Television (CCTV) remains the most tightly controlled television station in the country (Zhao, 2004, p. 183). On a relevant note, Gregory Ferrell Lowe and Christian Berg (2013) argue from a European perspective that debate about funding public broadcasting is not only about funding; but about wider issues only partly rooted in the current economic malaise. The global financial crisis increases the financial insecurity of PSB but also presents an opportunity for restructuring the funding model of PSBs with welfare resources.

***Fourth, PSB and PSM policy reforms are needed, as are related political and structural reforms***

In most of the cases discussed in this volume, state-administered broadcasters are tied to a barrage of red tape and colonial era regulations, made stricter in postcolonial times. Any progressive change, therefore, must be earned through significant policy reforms. However, media policy reform alone often achieves nothing in terms of practical change. For change to materialize in practice, media policy must be synchronized with wider political and structural reforms. The Audio-visual Communication Law in Morocco, for example, assigns public service obligation to its state broadcasters. However, as Bouziane argues, the primary function of the law is to sustain the legitimacy of the monarch and to garner public consent to rule the media rather than to foster avenues for public service. This implies that changing political culture is key to changing media performance.

Brambila brings out another important example from Latin American perspective, arguing that the right political, economic incentives, and policy reform measures can actually transform a propagandist state-broadcaster into a transparent, diverse, and financially independent public media (for instance, TVN in Chile). On a relevant note, proving Brambila's prediction correct, very recently (June 2016) seven Latin American countries - Chile, Uruguay, Peru, Mexico, Paraguay, Costa Rica, and Colombia - signed a joint agreement to create the first Public Television Network in Latin America (see, <http://www.cntv.cl>). The new network will promote the exchange between public channels on the topics of information, journalism, children's programs and other content, and will promote the creation of a joint pool of program. Such regional collaboration may prove to be exemplary for Asian and African public service and state-administered broadcasters.

***Fifth, the impact of digital switchover on public media varies across cases but it threatens the universal access characteristic of PSM, especially in low income countries***

The digital switchover marks the end of traditional broadcasting, therefore state-administered and public service broadcasters must cope with its consequences. While digital transition has opened new prospects for PSM (e.g. TV UNAM in Mexico) it has also created risk for local analog broadcasters whose equipment is becoming obsolete. Our study shows that the digital switchover jeopardizes a core characteristic of public service media: universal access. Low penetration of digital receivers appears to be a death penalty for universal access to PSM, and this is a significant challenge in countries with low per capita income. In Mexico only 21 % of the population, mostly urbanites with middle incomes, have access to digital TV. In Bangladesh, the digitization of terrestrial broadcasting, similar to the problems faced by Prasar Bharati in India, will primarily benefit the private TV channels with urban and suburban middle-class audiences. Millions of poor rural residents, who truly represent the majority of citizens in the Global South, will not be able to afford the digital receiver to access public media.

While in a digitally converged media environment, multiplatform content distribution can provide more and improved access to content and increase efficiency in engaging specific audiences, it can also raise multiple risks and uncertainties (Aslama & Syvertsen, 2007, p. 175). Gongxeka asserts that the need for additional capital to fund digitalization has led the South African PSB into a situation where they are directly competing with the commercial sector for capital as well as for audiences. This also changes the public service orientation of the PSB operator as digitalization causes more audience fragmentations, resulting in tighter commercial orientation for survival.

***Sixth, state-administered broadcasters are not lost causes***

Some of the findings in this volume suggest that state-administered broadcasters are not failing to provide public service media to the degree that some think. Mexico stands out for its vast network of government operated and university initiated terrestrial TV stations with cultural interests that continue to serve local publics. Bangladesh Television (BTV) and Bangladesh Betar are internationally famed for their documentaries and programs to create

public awareness on agricultural prospects, environmental disasters, family planning, maternity health, child trafficking, and HIV/AIDS issues. One interesting feature of Taiwanese PSM is the creation of citizen journalism based video portal *PeoPo* where ordinary citizens were trained by the broadcaster to contribute their own video programs.

The state-administered broadcasters in Bangladesh, Morocco, South Africa, and Malaysia can learn from experiences of Mexican and Taiwanese public media initiatives and from many other PSM innovations exists around the world. A more comprehensive research is needed to explore such innovations. But one point that is key in this finding is the extent to which public support, that is to say grassroots popular support, is a critical success factor. Where PSM development has been most successful is precisely where popular support has been more persistent. This leads us to the seventh and last finding:

***Seventh, nongovernment and community initiatives are the future of PSM in supporting democratic development in the Global South***

Publicly or community funded nongovernment media initiatives (most notably, community radio) are emerging with new constituent possibilities. Web-based media projects make various locales of the global South living laboratories of protest and democratic development. Shahbag Movement in Bangladesh, for instance, was initiated by the bloggers. Around the same time, multiplatform initiatives (such as web and mobile content strategies of BBC Media Action) have gained considerable visibility and popularity as proxy public media in South Asia. A range of online tools such as QQ, Weblog, online forum, vlog, Weibo, and WeChat have been used by the workers in China to create and to circulate ‘worker-generated content (WGC)’ during times of industrial strikes (Qui, 2016). Media scholars need to respond and redefine the notion of public media in the light of these ecological changes in the media systems.

While state-administered and public broadcasters alike seem well able to support domestic cultural life and interests, democracy is a more complicated and challenging dimension. There, it remains rather doubtful as to the degree that formal institutional arrangements that are steeped in an authoritarian heritage of media control are able to break free, or actually allowed to break free, to a degree that can facilitate robust, persistent and continuous democratic development. More research is certainly needed to investigate de facto public service in media.

## **Conclusion**

We have to stop thinking of public broadcasting as a stand-alone organization and see it as the principal mode in an emerging network of public and civil initiatives that, taken together, provide the basis for new shared cultural space, a digital commons, that can help forge new communal connections and stand against the continual pressure for enclosure coming from commercial interests on the one and the new moral essentialism on the other. (Graham Murdock, 2005, p. 213-214)

No media operates in isolation from the politics and economy of the state. This is especially so for the public service media, precisely because it is 'public'. In the UK and to a lesser extent, Canada, left-wing labor movements have cultivated a social democratic political culture, and helped to instill, maintain, and enhance public service broadcasting traditions (Hackett & Carroll, 2006, p. 200). Unfortunately, in the countries we have surveyed here, there is no clear indication of a vigorous leftist or progressive movement demanding, much less actively working, to liberate public broadcasters from the enclosures of the state or the market. The academicians, researchers, and the practitioners of the Global South should step forward to fill in the gap and be far more vocal in vigorously advocating a about major overhauling the public communication systems in the most of the world, which will contribute to the creation of alternative avenues and discourses of PSM provision.

The familiar complaints about a lack of funding and political corruption and control suggest that a decentralized, locally financed, self-managed, and community-operated public media system is likely to have a far better chance to survive and to flourish with limited resources and low tech set-ups than any attempt to replicate systems in the Global North. The Bolivian miners' radio may offer an exemplary case of such community-operated participatory public media initiative. Despite the repeated shutting down of the radio stations by oppressive military regimes and the miners' tenacious struggle for their restoration is a historic testament of social movements of decentralized means of communication, democratically organized at the grassroots level, with limited economic and technological resources (Bresnahan, 2007).

Perhaps we need less of a large broadcasters with a single public sphere and more smaller broadcasters serving a multitude of public sphericules with a variety of public media. It is clear that public media scholars and practitioners need to promote mutual dialogues and an intensification of collaborations of media initiatives particularly on a South-to-South basis, as well as South to North. The RIPE international initiative for the development of public service in media, and the Global PSM Experts Networks affiliated with that as well as the EBU and OSF offer a promising platform of goodwill efforts with practical features to enact dialogue, encourage debate, and conduct collaboration. We enthusiastically invite you to join the discussion and contribute your own unique perspectives and insights.

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## **Annex: PSM Initiatives in Non-Western Contexts: Framework for Research**

**Key research questions:** The researchers will primarily explore answers to two key questions:

- 1) What are the common dilemmas and biggest hurdles for PSM to function in a non-Western and emerging contexts?
- 2) What interventions may help the PSM cause? What is being done already, institutionally and in practice? What can they learn from each other?

The following framework can be adopted to answer to the above mentioned questions.

### **Sections:**

- A. History and background
- B. Organization and structure
- C. Transition from PSB to PSM
- D. Critical Issues of PSM
- E. Assessment and applied recommendations

### **Subsections**

#### **A. History and background**

- a. Overview of media industry, market, and audience share, and comparative regional data
  - i. Number of media outlets and platforms
  - ii. Viewership/readership/online users
  - iii. Media consumption habits and preferences
- b. Major transformations and growth of media
- c. Development of PSB/PSM – most significant turning points and emerging factors
- d. Absence or presence of public service provisions, mandates, and obligations
  - i. in formal legal, policy, or constitutional forms
  - ii. as informal norms or practices

#### **B. Organization and structure**

- a. Media outlets (channels, numbers, centers, etc.)
- b. Ownership structures (state-administered, independent/autonomous, semi-autonomous)
- c. Relevant regulatory bodies and authorities (ministry, commissions, divisions, offices)
- d. Funding models (tax, subsidy, license fee, subscription, or public-private partnership etc.)
- e. Business models (advertising, sponsorship, branding, quota, mandatory airing provisions)

#### **C. Transition from PSB to PSM**

- a. State of digitization and convergence broadcasting and telecommunications
- b. Varieties of digital media, content delivery models, and consumption patterns
- c. Prospects of new media based delivery of public service contents
- d. State of digital divide and its impact on media diversity
- e. State of digital switchover and its impact on present and future of PSM

#### **D. Critical Issues of PSM**

- a. Political and commercial influence on broadcasting, self-censorship, exploitations, etc.
- b. Strengths and weaknesses of production and programming, primarily news services
- c. Quality of news production and values of journalism (public versus market imperatives)
- d. Audiences of PSM, inclusions and exclusions, dominant and marginalized
- e. Linguistic and cultural diversity of content, censorship, extreme measures
- f. Potentials of PSM initiatives to engage multiple publics and foster public avenues,
- g. PSM initiatives by government and local and international NGOs, examples of best (successful) and failed (if there is any) public media experience in your region
- h. Independence of PSM: policy issues surrounding broadcast and digital media
- i. Pluralism of voices: existence of PSM community/network/activism
- j. Importance of PSM reform movement and advocacy - presence, absence, visible impact

#### **E. Assessment and recommendations**

- a. Summary of the main issues
  - i. Key challenges of PSM to grow or to function in the specific country context
  - ii. The most common hurdles faced across the countries within a region
  - iii. Values of existing PSM practices/initiatives
  - iv. Opportunities to grow and to strengthen
- b. Policy recommendations: Suggestions for required policy intervention or policy reform
- c. Suggestions for socio-political reform:
  - i. Suggestions for short term and long term practical initiatives to nurture and strengthen public service values
  - ii. Suggestions for priority for future PSM researchers
- d. Normative assessment:
  - i. Contribution to global view of PSM based on specific local knowledge (what can other regions learn from this context)
  - ii. Need to revise the traditional view/theory or understanding of PSM
  - iii. Minimum requirements for PSM that can be applicable elsewhere
- e. Conclusion

Note: This is a simplified and tentative framework for further comparative research based on the research guideline presented here. It is a pilot framework and will be revised and improved as the research goes on. It does not claim to be complete, nor does it claim to be universally applicable.

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A. Rahman & G. F. Lowe (Eds.), *Public Service Media Initiatives in the Global South*



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# **1** **Public Media Initiatives in Bangladesh and South Asia**

*Politics and Prospects*

A decorative graphic consisting of several parallel white lines that intersect to form a grid-like pattern, set against a solid blue background. The lines are oriented diagonally, with some running from the bottom-left towards the top-right, and others running from the top-right towards the bottom-left.



# Public Media Initiatives in Bangladesh and South Asia

## *Politics and Prospects*

Anis Rahman

Simon Fraser University, Canada

### Abstract

The multidimensional growth and transformation of state broadcasters in South Asia indicate that television occupies a major and significant space in the cultural politics of the region. Based on in-depth interviews and secondary data analysis, this paper examines how the state broadcaster in Bangladesh maintains its power in the face of changing media landscapes. Drawing specific attention to Bangladesh Television (BTV), the paper explains how the forthcoming digital switchover may impact the transformation of broadcasting. The paper surveys the consequences of political and commercial influences on state media, and subsequently highlights its efforts for public service. It also shows that non-state actors, such as community radio, transnational multiplatform initiatives, and online blogging are making significant contribution to public media prospects despite their limitations. The paper concludes with brief remarks on required institutional and policy reforms.

*Keywords:* Bangladesh, South Asia, state broadcaster, Bangladesh Television, digital switchover, community radio, public service media

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# Public Media Initiatives in Bangladesh and South Asia

## *Politics and Prospects*

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### **History and Background of Broadcasting**

Bangladesh is uniquely located between South and Southeast Asia, surrounded by a diverse archaeology of media systems. State broadcasting is a remarkable feature of the region, and has long been foundational to power and prominence. This paper explores how state broadcasters in Bangladesh continue to reorganize in efforts to maintain power in the face of an expanding media market on the one hand, and the growing demands for public service on the other. The paper begins with a terse account of the origins of state-administered broadcasting in South Asia and their ongoing transformation towards public service media organizations. This helps situate state or state-administered broadcasting in Bangladesh into the larger context of public media in South Asia. The paper then briefly outlines the major turning points in the media landscape of Bangladesh. Drawing specific attention to Bangladesh Television (BTV), the paper explains how the forthcoming digital switchover may impact the transformation of broadcasting here, notwithstanding persistent digital divides. The later sections delve deeper into the political and economic issues of state broadcasting, and exemplify efforts to develop public service. We also consider non-state actors, particularly community radio, transnational multiplatform initiatives, and online blogging, as significant contributors to the prospects for public media and public service development, albeit with limitations that are also discussed. The paper concludes with brief remarks on required institutional and policy reforms to achieve a more mature and genuine public service provision in the media landscape of Bangladesh.<sup>1</sup>

#### **State Broadcasting in South Asia**

The grounds for broadcasting in South Asia began in the period of British rule when Bangladesh was administered as East India. In 1937, All India Radio (AIR) was established according to the BBC model of public service broadcasting, but as a network of stations rather

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<sup>1</sup> The paper is based on in-depth interviews and secondary data analysis as part of doctoral research in progress at the School of Communication in Simon Fraser University. This paper summarizes findings from interviews with six senior executives and mid-level journalists at Bangladesh Television (BTV) to collect data about news production, organization, and programming strategies. In addition, the author consulted a variety of research reports, statistical sources, and survey data, and incorporated relevant information from research done by other South Asian scholars to enrich the significance of the findings and to contextualize the overall trends. Some discussions have appeared in previous publications (see, Rahman, 2014, 2014 June, and 2016). The author would like to thank Byron Hauck (Simon Fraser University) and Dr. Gregory F. Lowe (University of Tampere) for their suggestions for revision.

than a centralized service. In the post-Partition era (after 1947)<sup>2</sup>, AIR as well as Radio Pakistan and later Bangladesh Radio (from 1971), played a central role in shaping national identities and reinterpreting colonial and also pre-colonial histories (Page and Crawley, 2001, p.26). Broadcasting was crucial to government programs related to improvements in general education, health, family planning, agriculture and other development issues across thousands of villages (Agrawal & Raghaviah, 2006).

Thus, colonial public broadcasting became state broadcasting in postcolonial South Asia. Broadcasting continues to be a powerful national project, although the degree of state control and efforts to develop a public service emphasis do vary from one country to another. Over the decades, extensive efforts have been made to transform India's state broadcasting services, Doordarshan and All India Radio (aka Akashvani), into fully-fledged PSB operators. In the 1990s the Indian government granted autonomy to AIR and Doordarshan to Prasar Bharati by passing the *Prashar Bharati Act 1990* and establishing an autonomous body to govern these broadcasters. With the support of the Indian government, Prashar Bharati with its 31 television channels has emerged as one of the largest terrestrial broadcasting networks in the world (Parthasarathi & Chotani, 2015, p. 66),<sup>3</sup> although the government continues to exercise financial, administrative, and editorial controls (Jain, 2015, p. 149).

Pakistan took a different route and kept the inherited public corporation but operated these channels within a national framework, and later opened new radio stations under this hybrid approach. Within a few decades, the state-owned Pakistan Television (PTV) and Pakistan Broadcast Corporation (PBC) had become a mega-media operator that monopolized the airwaves till 2002, after which the government liberalized the media market. But PTV and PBC still reach the biggest audience terrestrially.<sup>4</sup>

Among the smaller states of South Asia, Nepal and Bhutan followed another path altogether. Nepal has become a pioneer in South Asian community radio. With approximately 350 radio stations, of which most are independent and community owned, community radio is the principal source of news for most people in Nepal (*The Conversation*, 2015, May 5). After a decade-long assessment, the Japan Overseas Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Radio Nepal are currently formulating policy and legal provisions to transform Radio Nepal into a genuine public service broadcaster (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2016). For its part, Bhutan's transition to PSB stands out as an example of movement towards independence and democratization of the media is taking place today (Abbott, 2016, p. 19). Bangladesh's Southeast neighbor, Myanmar, has been investing heavily to strengthen its state broadcaster,

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<sup>2</sup> At the time of partition in 1947, the AIR network had six stations (Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, Chennai, Lucknow, and Tiruchi) in India, while Pakistan got the share of radio stations in Lahore and Peshawar (in West Pakistan) and Dhaka (in East Pakistan, which later became Bangladesh) (All India Radio, 2016a).

<sup>3</sup> Prasar Bharati's television arm, Doordarshan (DD), primarily broadcasts in terrestrial analogue mode and covers about 92 percent of the population and 82 percent of the country's territory (Parthasarathi and Chotani, 2015, p. 66). Akashvani has 415 radio stations across the country, reaching nearly 99.19 percent of the population, and offering programming in 23 languages and 146 dialects (All India Radio, 2016b).

<sup>4</sup> PTV broadcasts two national channels, three regional channels, and one international channel, PTV Global. PBC operates 64 stations broadcast across the country in 22 local and 11 foreign languages. PBC also owns 22 FM-based community-oriented radio stations, and operates nine commercial FM stations (Yusuf, 2013).

MRTV, as it struggles to maintain a presence in ethnic states. There is a reform proposal to transform MRTV into a public service broadcaster and this is gaining momentum, while a new law will allow community radio to emerge in Myanmar as well (Dragomir, 2016).

This gamut of institutional transformations across a variety of media infrastructures indicate that, first, the resilience of state broadcasters in this region is high and that they are not likely to disappear soon, and second that we see a remarkable trend to transform these institutions and systems into public service organizations. State broadcasters are being forced to adjust to new media environments, creating new opportunities for media reforms and development.

### **Major Turning Points in the Media Landscape of Bangladesh**

Bangladesh Television (BTV), which is the focal case of this article, launched in 1964 in East Pakistan as a channel of the Pakistan Television Corporation. After Bangladesh independence in 1971, the Awami League government changed the status of BTV from a public corporation into a state broadcaster under the control of the Ministry of Information, thereby fundamentally altering its direction and operation (Shoosmith, Mahmud, & Reza, 2013, p. 237-238).

Since the 1990s the adoption of free market economic policies and subsequent deregulation and privatization have changed the media landscape across South Asia, effectively ending the absolute domination of state broadcasters in most of these countries. Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka have all opened their media markets to private ownership and foreign investment. Liberalization has enabled the proliferation of commercial media channels in this region, including Bangladesh. The history of print media is more than two centuries old in this region and its growth over the last 30 years, and its impact on the overall media industry in Bangladesh, is phenomenal. As of late 2014, there were 358 daily newspapers and 82 weekly magazines (Bangladesh Department of Film and Publications, 2014).

The rise of private television was a major turning point for the media landscape in Bangladesh. State-broadcaster Bangladesh Television (BTV) was the dominant medium for televisual news and entertainment for three decades until the advent of cable television in 1992, and subsequent to this the arrival of private television in 1997. In the past decade the number of satellite television channels in Bangladesh has rocketed to 44, although only 26 are currently on air. Growth in the cable and satellite television industries has been driven by massive growth in the telecommunications sector. Giant cell phone companies are competing to invest in media advertising and branding. With more than 110 advertising agencies, the media industry is thriving in Bangladesh, whereas many other industries are facing lay-offs (Rahman, 2016, p. 326).

Since 2008, community radio has emerged in Bangladesh, with high potential for public media intervention. The government has also allowed 28 commercial FM radio channels (12 are active), which rapidly became popular among urban listeners. Once a popular station, Bangladesh Betar, the state broadcaster, is losing audience in both urban and rural areas, despite having 12 regional AM stations and 12 FM stations. While the popularity of radio and cinema has declined, television has consistently ranked as the most popular media in

contemporary Bangladesh. According to Media and Demographic Surveys (ACNielsen 2015, 2013, 2006), access to television in the urban areas has increased from 69 percent to 96 percent over the last decade. By 2015 access to television surpassed 85 percent nationally (see Figure 1).

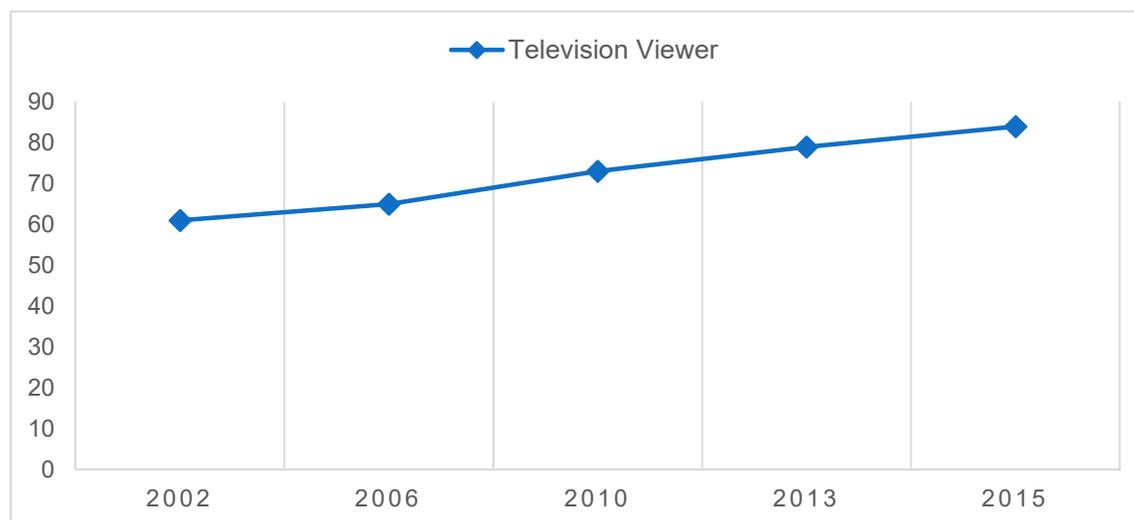


Figure 1. Growth of Access to Television Media in Bangladesh (2002-2015) (sources: ACNielsen, 2015, 2013; 2006).

Consequently, television has become the most popular news source in Bangladesh and is watched by 95 percent of television viewers, followed by drama series (77.6 percent) and Bangla cinema (74 percent) (ACNielsen, 2015). These multidimensional growths and transformations indicate that television occupies a major and significant space in the cultural politics of the nation, not only as a popular medium but also as a powerful institution. It also shows that the state broadcasters are no longer at the center of Bangladeshi cultural space.

### **Organization and Structure of State-broadcasting in Bangladesh**

State broadcasting in Bangladesh consists of two major platforms, radio and television, which operate under authority of the Ministry of Information. There are also three state-owned and state-managed terrestrial and satellite television channels; Bangladesh Television (BTV), which is terrestrial, BTV World, a satellite channel, and Sangshad TV, the terrestrial Parliament channel. BTV claims a potential coverage of 95 per cent of the territory and is reaching 95 percent of the total population (see, Table 1). BTV boasts 92 percent original content. Employing more than 1568 permanent 1667 temporary staff, BTV is a giant state run organization that, "... aims at the development of the lives of the people and socio-economic progress through its creative programs" (Bangladesh Television, 2016a, 2016b).

Table 1. Bangladesh Television (BTV) at a glance (2016)

Scopes	Specifics
<b>Broadcasting centers</b>	1 Centre (Dhaka), 1 Sub Centers (Chittagong), 14 Relay Stations
<b>Potential coverage</b>	Terrestrial (BTV): 95 % of the territory, 95% of the population Satellite (BTV World): Asiasat 3S-5, C- BAND transponder, covering Japan in the far-east New Zealand and Australia in the South Cyprus & Egypt in the West and Russia in the North.
<b>Transmission</b>	Terrestrial: 18 hours per day, Satellite: 24 hours per day
<b>Program</b>	Self-produced: 92 % Outsourced: 8 %
<b>Total manpower</b>	Permanent: 1568 Temporary: 1667
<b>Newsroom personnel</b>	Over 100 (including Guest Artists)
<b>Major affiliations</b>	Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) (Administrative Council) European Broadcasting Union (EBU), Switzerland Public Media Alliance (PMA), UK

Sources: Bangladesh Television, 2016a, 2016b.

The institutional authority of state broadcasters in Bangladesh is protected by legal provisions. While BTV claims that it is “accountable to the mass people of Bangladesh,” its administrative and financial management is controlled by the government. As per the National Broadcasting Authority Ordinance (1988), Bangladesh Television Authority Act, 2001, and Bangladesh Betar Authority Act, 2001 the topmost executives of BTV and Bangladesh Betar (Director General) are appointed by the Prime Minister. According to Preservation for BTV of Terrestrial Television Broadcast Facilities Act, 2009, only BTV has the right to broadcast terrestrially.

## **Transition from State-broadcasting to State Media**

### **From Mono-platform to Multiplatform Mediation**

By the turn of the new millennium, the world’s media ecologies were rapidly evolving into a complex site of struggle with multidirectional impacts on public broadcasting, even in the peripheries of economic production. Rapid economic growth in South Asia laid the groundwork for a remarkable expansion of digital media consumption in India and Pakistan (Watts, 2014, p. 293). Bangladesh too, with arguably 55 million Internet users and 132 million people with access to cell phones, has emerged as a thriving hub of new media audience engagement (Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, 2015). The recent trends show that approximately 90 per cent of the Internet users access the Internet through mobile phones, while the rest use broadband Internet from Internet Service Providers (ISP), Public Switched Telephone Networks (PSTN), and private Wi-Fi providers (WiMax).

As a result of such technological developments and changing media consumption habits, BTV is now reorganizing to be a multiplatform media institution, adapting to the booming digital media landscape. Facing fierce competition from private television channels and online media platforms, BTV has turned global with its satellite channel, online streaming, and IPTV services. In the past decade, Bangladesh Betar reinvented itself with Internet radio streaming services, broadcasting AM and FM stations live through its online portal, apps, as well as a dial-in listening service for the Bangladeshi diaspora.

Such metamorphosis, however, is not exclusive to Bangladesh. It is a global, as well as a regional trend. For instance, the Indian PSB Prasar Bharati is enhancing viewer/listener experience on multiple platforms such as webcasting, podcasting, SMS, and mobile.

### From Analog to Digital Broadcasting

It is noticeable that despite the rapid digital transformation the standard of broadcasting in Bangladesh remains analogue. Bangladesh will miss its initial target for completing the digital switchover in 2016. In fact, the switchover process is yet to begin (Table 2). India has taken the lead in South Asia, completing digital switchover in 2015 and benefiting from it, whereas Pakistan appears to be the least prepared country for this transition (Baig & Cheema, 2015).

Table 2. Status of the transition to Digital Terrestrial Broadcasting in South Asia

Country	DSO date	TV Standard	Status
Bangladesh	2016	DVB-T2	Not started
Bhutan	2020	DVB-T2	No information
India	2015	DVB-T	Ongoing
Maldives	2020	DVB-T2, ISBD-T	No information
Nepal	2017	DVB-T2	No information
Pakistan	No information	No information	No information
Sri Lanka	2017	DVB-T2, ISBD-T	No information

Source: International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2016, as of March 24, 2016

With a view to accelerating the pace of digitization of public broadcasters, the governments of India and Bangladesh have agreed to allow BTV to join Prasar Bharati's DTH (Direct to Home) platform (Prothom Alo, 2015, June 7). Although the economic and technological potential of the digital switchover cannot be overlooked, it is worth asking what benefit it will bring for public media in a country with high income disparity and digital divides? That is impossible to answer, but it is a legitimate concern.

## From Digital Divide to Further Socioeconomic Divides

There is an interesting debate about the digital divide. At present, fixed-broadband is well beyond the means of most citizens in Bangladesh, especially in rural areas where nearly three-quarters of the population live. According to World Bank's most recent study, Bangladesh has the fifth largest offline population in the world, with about 148 million still not connected to the Internet. Going by their figures, only 12 million Bangladeshi's are connected to the Internet today. However, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) reports that the country's total active Internet subscriptions surpassed 54 million by the end of 2015, of which 51 million were from mobile internet operators (BTRC, 2015; *The Daily Star*, 2016, January 18).

It is almost shocking how greatly the government (BTRC) data contrasts with the baseline survey. According to ACNielsen (2015), about 82 percent people (out of 10672 respondents) were not even aware of the Internet. In rural areas this number is greater than 85 percent. As per the survey, the Internet is most known to upper-class urban young residents (lesser than 35 percent) and least known to lower income rural middle-older age people (greater than 92 percent). Indeed, the hype of digital revolution in Bangladesh is greatly exaggerated, at least from the perspectives of age, class, and urban-rural divides. There are certainly further divides in term of gender, literacy, and ethnicity.

In line with the "Digital Bangladesh" project<sup>5</sup>, the government has taken several initiatives to increase the broadband penetration by as much as 50 percent by 2021 by launching the *Bangabandhu-1* satellite by 2017 and converting 8,500 post offices into e-commerce centers (*The Daily Star*, 2016, March 20, and March 19). There is little indication of how these initiatives would make fixed-broadband more affordable for the poorest peasants and working class people, and how this in turn will improve their quality of life. It appears that "Digital Bangladesh" is a discursive construct to promote the interests of private capital in the information sector. One critic has suggested that "Digital Bangladesh as the Bangladeshi version of information society may be seen as a move toward transforming Bangladesh into a neoliberal capitalist society" (Bhuiyan, 2014).

There is no doubt that very soon Bangladesh will overcome the bandwidth supply shortage, but unless the socioeconomic capacity of rural populations improves the cost and distribution of bandwidth will create new forms of digital exclusion for the public in the coming era of digital broadcasting, which is especially problematic for *public* media initiatives. The digitization of terrestrial broadcasting, similar to the problems faced by Prasar Bharati in India, may not bring benefits for multiple publics because a vast portion of the population are living below the poverty line and will not be able to afford a Set Top-Box (STB) to access digital terrestrial television.<sup>6</sup> Top private TV channels will be the primary beneficiaries of

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<sup>5</sup> As a signatory of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Declaration, the present Awami League government is actively promoting a variety of "pro-poor" e-enabled public service initiatives (e.g. Union Information and Service Centers, Multipurpose Community Telecenters, Access to Information/A2i program, etc).

<sup>6</sup> The researchers of "Mapping Digital Media in India" project argue that the policy formations that favored digital switchover in India were driven not by a public interest rationale. They wrote, "Policymakers have ignored the fact that few citizens have the requisite mobile handsets and broadband connections; this

digitalization as they will have more precise access to the middle-class urban and suburban populations who have disposable income and surplus time to consume pay-per-view content. There is no policy direction yet on how the spectrum will be allocated and who will benefit from it, or whether the STBs will be subsidized for those with low income. In sum, the transition from state-broadcasting to public media and the envisioned benefits for the public remain quite uncertain in Bangladesh. Obviously, the digital divide issue is a major challenge for public broadcasting, but it is a low priority compared to other hurdles BTV have faced for decades. It is useful to assess what paralyzes BTV's prospect as a public service media.

## Critical Issues of State-broadcasting

### Lack of Autonomy – The Biggest Challenge

Since the restoration of democracy in 1990 due to a mass uprising against the autocratic ruler, HM Ershad, each successive government has pledged to give autonomy to Betar and BTV. With the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1991 the issue of 'public broadcasting autonomy' gained momentum that has persisted. The two major political parties (Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party) continued to promise autonomy for BTV and Betar during election campaigns, but when they were in power both parties have failed to demonstrate this commitment in practice. Contrary to their promises, each has continued to use these media as propaganda tools for their own self-interested political gains.

Responding to popular demand, in 1996 the Awami League government constituted a Radio-TV Autonomy Commission (aka *Asafuddowlah Commission*). However, instead of forming a National Broadcasting Commission as recommended, the Awami League government formed two separate authorities under Bangladesh Betar Authority Act, 2001 and Bangladesh Television Authority Act, 2001. The government retained the commanding heights of political control, given that under these draft laws (approved by the cabinet) the government can recruit and terminate executive managers, including the chairperson of both BTV and Betar – and can do so without giving any reason. Demand for the autonomy of public broadcasting has thus given rise to grave despair for civil society activists in Bangladesh.<sup>7</sup>

This lack of autonomy is a primary obstacle to BTV functioning as a public service media operator, as the cause of politicization of the administration and polarization of most of the journalistic staff along party lines. BTV lacks credibility due to its structural and on-air bias in favor of ruling parties.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, news gathering, production, and treatment procedures at BTV manifest a comprehensive and systematic publicity effort focused on the activities of the

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suggests the wider digitization of the state broadcaster will benefit only certain sections of society" (Open Society Foundations, 2012, p. 119). In the same vein, Vibodh Parthasarathi and Supriya Chotani (2015, p. 63) argue that the marginal sections of society, for whom Doordarshan is the sole affordable TV outlet, will be the most challenged by this mandatory transition.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion on this matter, along with a brief political history of television, and policy limitations, see, Shoosmith, Mahmud, & Reza, 2013; Rahman, 2012 and Khan, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> ACNielsen (2015) survey shows that BTV ranks lower in terms of trustworthiness (26.4 percent) comparing to private TV channels (51 percent) nationally. Another survey run by MRB Bangladesh reports that BTV has very few viewers in the capital city Dhaka (Sharifuzzaman, 2014).

government, and BTV hardly pretends to camouflage this. Although BTV claims that 78 percent of total programming is about public interest issues, a close examination of the 'Daily News Assignment Schedule' (December, 2013) of BTV News reveals that the majority of news (nearly 52 percent) was pre-determined on the basis of political proximity to the government (e.g. covering activities of ministers, secretariats, bureaucrats, ruling party parliament members, party presidiums, and even BTV high-officials themselves). In most cases the presence of (a) political figure(s) or the reference or request of (b) politically important person(s) has tended to be the key impetus behind the production of news.

Such politicization of news production is not the fault of the Awami League administration alone, but this deformity has been normalized and naturalized in the newsroom through daily routine practice over decades. Consequently, there is no sign of investigative reporting in BTV, except on rare occasions when it comes to 'exposing' maleficence of the opposition party.

### **Finance – The Usual Suspect**

It is nothing new to observe that state media are becoming increasingly reliant on advertising. Aiming to compete with private TV channels for revenue, BTV uses its superior access to audiences to charge the highest rates for advertising (up to 90,000 BDT= 1160 USD per minute) during the news. Until the 1990s, BTV was heavily reliant on importing foreign programs to fill its transmission hours (Riaz, 1993). Although the growth of domestic production houses and the increasing popularity of local artists have enabled BTV to reduce its dependency on foreign programs, the reliance on advertising remains vital. BTV, although fully funded by public sources, profiteers from its self-subordination to the market. This epitomizes a reinforced ideological contradiction facing public media in the neoliberal era (Rahman, 2016, p. 332).

It is ironic that despite high dependency on advertising, BTV has become a losing investment for the government, which is causing it to become more reliant on advertising. About a decade ago (2003-04) BTV was making an annual profit of Tk 520 million, whereas in 2014 it was submerged in losses of nearly Tk 300 million (equivalent to 3.87 million USD). Media columnists suggest that BTV could survive the competition with private television channels if it just kept the news and one talk show in its own control and maintained a good standard and neutrality for the remaining programs (Sharifuzzaman, 2014).

### **Efforts for Public Service**

Taking into consideration the conditions, one must acknowledge BTV's and Bangladesh Betar's efforts to function as public service providers. These state broadcasters have been particularly recognized for their developmental role by some researchers, notably in public health, family planning, agriculture, and on climate change issues (Hasan & Baten, 2005; Islam & Hasan, 2000; Rahman, 2010). BTV's three-decade long contribution to delivering agricultural information to rural farmers through its popular magazine show, *Mati O Manush* (Soil & Men), is particularly commendable. Bangladesh Betar offers a variety of agro-based programs that no commercial radio would.

Both urban and rural television viewers give BTV due credit for its glorious past when it outshined all other forms of entertainment through its ultra-popular drama serials and magazine shows, especially during the weekends. A columnist of *Dhaka Tribune* writes with nostalgia, “The Friday neighbors would again arrive during nights after the news in Bangla at 8 O’ clock. Such social engagement had profoundly influenced us. We may not have realized how BTV had helped us bond with our neighbors and families” (Islam, 2015). Indeed, BTV has a unique past that no other TV channel matches here. Before the dawn of corporate talent shows, BTV opened its doors for hundreds of young talented Bangladeshis with its program *Notun Kuri* (a national cultural talent hunt show). BTV has always been sincere about telecasting educational programs for children, such as *Meena* and *Sisimpur*, award winning drama series that highlight gender inequalities, maternal health issues, and efforts to raise public awareness regarding child marriage. Despite a plethora of TV channels, BTV is still the only channel that has a mandate to broadcast programs for the religious minorities and aboriginal populations.<sup>9</sup> And BTV is perhaps the closest television channel to Bengali cultural roots as it pays consistent attention to local folk cultural events and indigenous festivities.

These examples signify that BTV is not a basket case or great failure as a public service broadcaster, as some might think and argue. Critics who want to see state broadcasting dead and gone are either unaware of the degrees to which such have sometimes fulfilled an important range of public service roles, and often also overlook the lack of public service offered by private enterprises in the media business.

## **Alternative Avenues of Public Service**

### **Community Radio at the Forefront**

Community radio in Bangladesh is perhaps the only type of broadcasting that can claim status as genuine public broadcasting – i.e. not only for the public but also by the public. The community-oriented culture of Bangladesh is favorable for fostering community media. Community Radio (CR) as a “third tier” in Bangladeshi media has the potential to address critical social issues at a community level and provides a platform for marginalized voices (Reza, 2012a). In South Asian context, community radio is not immune to government control, however.<sup>10</sup> Licensing CR to ruling party members is not uncommon in Bangladesh.

Responding to a decade of advocacy, Community Radio Policy (CR Policy 2008) was first enacted by the Caretaker government in 2007-2008. In 2011, the Sheikh Hasina government authorized 12 community radio stations. By the end of 2013, 125 organizations had applied for permission to operate CR broadcasting. Progress is slow, however. At present there are 17 on the air, broadcasting altogether 125 hours of information programming per day, reaching nearly 5.6 million rural listeners, and employing about a thousand local women and youth [Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC), 2016].

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Abdullah Al Malun (Producer, News) at BTV Newsroom in Dhaka

<sup>10</sup> In Indian case, for instance, the licensing process of community radio is controlled by bureaucratic red-taping. As Pradip Thomas (2014, p. 474) observes that the government in power enjoys ample opportunities to “delay or reject an application if the applicant is not seen to be fit enough.”

Community radio brings new hope for regional diversity and may mobilize support for the decentralization of public information in locales. For example, *The Guardian* (2013, February 22) reported that Radio Mahananda, within its 17km radius, “helps farmers share their own crop research with listeners and even invites farmers to participate in studio discussions on capacity development, cultivating improved varieties of seeds, promoting use of organic fertilizers, using less water for irrigation and improving yields”. Community radio has large developmental prospects for serving marginalized populations in remote rural habitats, particularly in arid expanses, riverine acres, perennial islands, and coastal areas where state or private media barely operate. A majority of community radio stations are supported by local and international NGOs at the initial stage. While the government has approved 16 more community radio stations, there is no clear roadmap or policy indication as to how these stations will survive once donor support is depleted.

### **Multiplatform Initiatives: A Proxy PSB in Bangladesh?**

Over the past decade, European donor agencies and media development organizations have recognized the potential offered by multiplatform strategies to deliver public services to broad and targeted audiences not only at home but also in developing regions. For example, with funding from the British government (Department for International Development, DFID) BBC Media Action uses television (e.g. talk show, *Bangladesh Sanglap* that shows public debates on governance, corruption, and accountability issues; drama series *Ujan Ganger Naiya* that addresses maternal and newborn health issues), an interactive English learning website (BBC Janala), as well as mobile, social media, and newspaper platforms, to educate and to promote public dialogue in Bangladesh (BBC Media Action, 2012). While the multiplatform media initiatives have gained considerable visibility and popularity in here and elsewhere, their strategies to reach target groups and the impacts of these strategies upon development are not yet reliably understood and often remain unscrutinized.

The Internet has extended opportunities for cyber communities to engage a diverse array of people through blogs in the Bangla language (notably, Somewhereinblog, Sachalayatan, Istishon, and Mukto-mona). There are plenty of examples of bloggers who are the most active community media actors, proactively responding to socio-economic and political issues (Haq, 2013). In times of crises, such as the BDR mutiny in 2009, blogging served as a proxy source of information for many people. During the *Shahbag Movement* (February 2013 in Dhaka) several thousand protestors gathered to demand the execution of accused war criminals. Unlike the ‘Arab Spring’, the protestors demanded transparency from the judicial authorities rather than challenging the legitimacy of the political regime. This political protest was sparked and actively organized by a secularist blogger/activist network through Facebook.

The *Shahbag Movement* provides an example of how social media has presented an unprecedented ability to draw the attention of the media beyond national borders. Thus, online communities can develop a form of alternative citizen journalism through blog sites and social media that is hard for commercial or political powers to control or censor. Although the future potential of the Internet for civic engagement cannot be overlooked, the public service role of blog sites is marginal at best because less than one percent of Bangladesh’s Internet users blog (ACNielsen, 2015).

## Assessment and Recommendations

Due to variations in their complex histories, it is difficult to categorize state broadcasters in South Asia and, equally, to distinguish between what is and is not public service media. It would be naïve to deny to their public service roles, although it is fair and potentially beneficial to be critical of state broadcasting per se. In this region where state broadcasters have characteristics of both state control and public service, state power still dominates over public interests. Independence from political influence is one of the most important prerequisites for public media to function as a service to publics in the South Asian context. In this context, state broadcasting in Bangladesh has to face up to a choice between two fates: either become extinct or become relevant as genuine public service media. The scope and pace of change in media and in these societies is too sweeping to forecast a ‘safe’ middle ground.

The key findings of this paper suggest several core problems with the existing structures and processes of state broadcasting in Bangladesh, especially, that impede its ability to function as an effective public service media operator. The biggest challenge is BTV's lack of autonomy from state control as a public organization. Worse, BTV is reluctant to gain that needed autonomy from the state out of fear of losing job security if BTV becomes independent (Rahman, 2014). Bolstered by its terrestrial superiority in reach, BTV is deeply submerged in the culture of political subservience and acquiescence. Unfortunately, there is no easy remedy for such malpractice. This requires a complete overhaul of BTV as a public corporation.

To be a genuine public service media provider, BTV must cut its umbilical cord to the Ministry of Information. That is long overdue. In order to regain its sinking popularity and to earn public trust, BTV must take a critical stance towards the government, whoever is in power, and address social anomalies and state-level aberrations, while dedicating more attention to rural populations and ethnic and religious minorities.

The increasing commercialization of television programs replaces the public value of broadcasting in exchange for market value, which cripples its role for the publics it sets out to serve. Instead of depending more on advertising, BTV and Bangladesh Betar can achieve and maintain financial stability by downsizing its monolithic structure and curtailing further expansion, and by eliminating corruption in purchasing processes by enabling greater transparency. Policy makers could help by levying a television sales tax. In the eventual digital switchover, the government must orientate to serve the public's interests. Stakeholders should agree on a policy to subsidize public access to digital channels at private TV owners' cost, not the other way around. A potential integrated broadcasting policy would address the challenge and opportunities of new media and technological switchovers. A comprehensive policy can be undertaken that will provide guidelines on operational aspects of traditional broadcasting, as well as for new systems of broadcasting such as IP TV, mobile TV, and post-digital switchover audio and video broadcasting (Reza, 2012b).

South Asia has immense potential for the development of decentered and de-institutionalized forms of public media, most specifically through community and folk media. Most ethnicities are deeply rooted in oral cultures, traditions, and festivities. Public media researchers should be aware of inflated promises of Internet-based alternatives to broadcasting. They should also pay more attention to community and folk media with a focus on a culture-centered approach

to development that highlights dialogue and reflexive participation to create entry points for listening to the voices of marginalized communities (Dutta, 2011). Future researches should also study the overall prospect of media reform in relation to grassroots movements fighting against social inequalities in this region and elsewhere, and the contours of development that are specifically related to the absence or presence of public service media as both an orientation and in operation.

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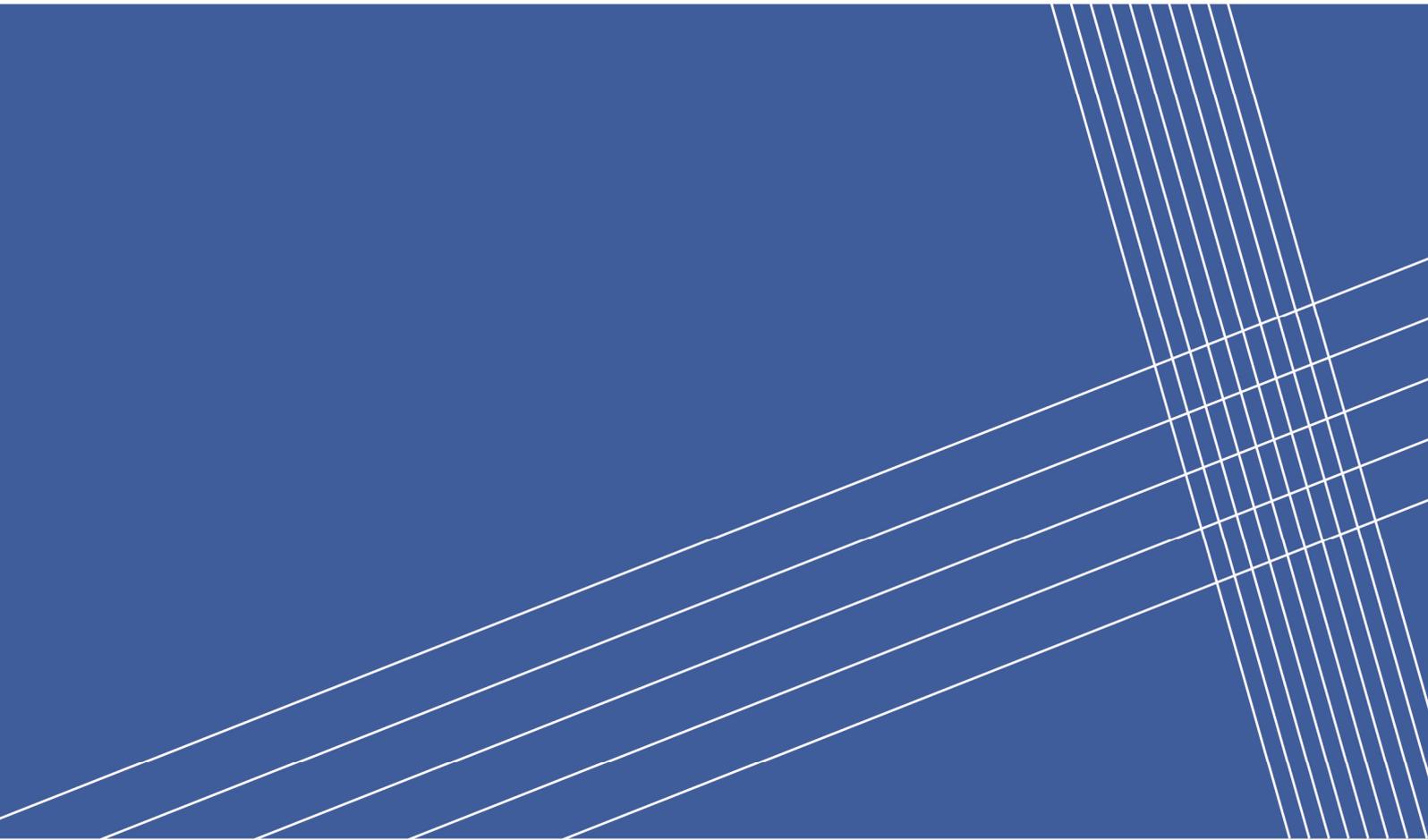
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**2**

# **Public Service Broadcasting Structure and Performance in Morocco and the MENA Region**





# Public Service Broadcasting Structure and Performance in Morocco and the MENA Region

Bouziane Zaid

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## Abstract

As in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region, public service broadcasting (PSB) in Morocco suffers from the existence of authoritarian forms of governance that hinders PSB performance. Technology is also a factor. TV and radio stations still rely on analog terrestrial and digital satellite broadcasting and their online presence are extensions of their analog versions, rather than new digital multiplatform distribution systems. In Morocco, the wave of political liberalization and democratization that marked the second half of the 1990s resulted in major media reforms especially in the broadcasting sector. The High Authority for Audiovisual Communication was created in 2002 as an independent public institution to establish the legal framework for the liberalization of the audiovisual sector and to oversee the PSB sector in the country. The paper analyzes the legal environment to assess the extent to which PSB is safeguarded from political influence. The study found that the overall non-democratic cultures within Morocco and the countries of the MENA region are the main determinants of performance. In some MENA countries, the legal framework and the institutional structure were created to provide the conditions for public service to materialize. PSB performance in this region remains weak, however. The study argues that unless there is political will at the highest level, a public service system will be nothing more than a pseudo 'public' system bouncing back and forth between milder and stronger forms of authoritarianism.

*Keywords:* Public service broadcasting, Morocco, MENA region, competitive authoritarianism, broadcasting law and regulation, media reform

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# Public Service Broadcasting Structure and Performance in Morocco and the MENA Region

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## History and Background

With the exception of post Arab Spring Tunisia, the Middle East and North African region is characterized by the predominance of authoritarian regimes. International organizations such as Freedom House and Reporters without Borders consider this region's media systems as the least free in the world. Freedom House ranks Tunisia and Israel as free, Morocco, Kuwait, and Lebanon as "partly free," and ranks the rest of the countries as "not free."<sup>1</sup> In January 2014, the Tunisian Constituent Assembly voted a democratic constitution that affirms the people's sovereignty and the country's attachment to the principles of separation of powers. Article 127 of the Constitution establishes HAICA as the regulatory body for audiovisual communication and assign it the role of ensuring independence, diversity and pluralism in the sector. Given the novelty of these initiatives, the results are still to be seen. For the rest of the MENA region, broadcasting continues to be under government control where state officials dictate media policy and interfere with editorial decisions. In Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan, and Bahrain, there is a mix of state and private ownership. In the rest of the MENA region, broadcasting systems are owned by the states (Rugh, 2004).

The history of the Moroccan broadcasting system has many similitudes with the history of broadcasting in the MENA region. Morocco, a protectorate of France from 1912 to 1956, inherited a media system built by the French who used radio and television as instruments of colonial rule (Zaid, 2010). The French handed them over to the newly independent government instead of private owners, because of their experiences at home with state owned broadcast media (Rugh, 2004). Like many countries in the post-colonial era, Morocco perceived the role of media to be in the service of nation building (Mowlana, 1985). Nation building is also a central rationale for government interference in media, also in mature democratic countries. Nation building provided justification for media regulation, and for the legitimacy of PSB in Western Europe. However, the newly independent post-colonial countries considered normative principles such as social responsibility and media in the service of public interest as secondary to a more essential national building project. The political and historical contexts of these countries during the Cold War era was characterized by competing ideologies vying for political power and public support. To ensure political stability, these states argued that they had to control the flow of information in their countries to maintain public order by controlling the public sphere. Because of the Cold War, Western countries were more concerned about East/West alliances than requiring these countries to meet their commitments of the protection of human rights (Thussu, 2004).

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<sup>1</sup> Freedom House, Middle East and North Africa, retrieved from, <https://freedomhouse.org/regions/middle-east-and-north-africa>, (accessed 29 February 2016).

Until the mid-1990s, and much like the rest of the MENA region, the culture of media in Morocco was authoritarian, administrative and partisan (Zaid & Ibahine, 2011). The Moroccan state controlled the financing, regulation, production, and distribution of broadcast media, which are considered the most powerful media. Print media were much more developed with a dozen publications issued by various political parties. Opposition leaders used the print media as chief weapons of expressing dissent and for political agitation because they had no alternative for articulating their challenges against the regime.

The relationship between the regime and mass media took a radically different turn when the opposition and Socialist-led government was elected in 1997. The new government's mission was to enact political reforms aimed at promoting human rights, civil liberties, an open and a pluralist media, and establishing the rule of law. The wave of political liberalization and democratization that marked the second half of the 1990s resulted in major media reforms especially in the broadcasting sector. The High Authority for Audiovisual Communication (*Haut Autorité de la Communication Audiovisuelle*, HACA) was created in 2002 as a public institution to establish the legal framework for the liberalization of the audiovisual sector and to oversee public service broadcasting (PSB) in the country. In January 2005, the Moroccan parliament adopted the Audio Visual Communication Law, which put an end to the state's monopoly in broadcasting management. As a result of these initiatives, the structure of broadcast media was re-defined, a regulator was set up, public sector broadcasting was reformed, and a framework for private broadcasting was created.

Today, television and radio are the most influential media platforms in Morocco and represent the most important sources for news and information. This is due to low cost, the ability of TV and radio to supersede illiteracy, and universal access. Thus, television is the dominant media platform, accounting for 60 percent of total advertising expenditure; with 2M taking the lion's share of the TV ad spend (Oxford Business Group, 2013). Finally, according to Marocmétrie, the official Moroccan audience ratings firm, TV channels had a combined audience share in February 2013 of 40.4 percent, with 22.0 percent for 2M and 18.4 percent for Al Oula.<sup>2</sup> However, for high-quality international and global news, educated and urban Moroccans turn to quality content channels, including Al Jazeera and other Arab satellite channels, and European global media players such as the BBC.

Internet access in Morocco has increased steadily in recent years, although obstacles remain in parts of the country. But internet penetration grew from just over 21 percent of the population in 2007 to 55 percent in 2013, according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2013). By end of 2013, more than 2 in every 100 inhabitants possessed a fixed-broadband subscription, or around 14 percent of all subscribers.<sup>3</sup> Internet use among Moroccans is characterized by an interest in social media and user-generated content, as well as domestic news portals.

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<sup>2</sup> Numbers presented by Younes Alami, director of Marocmetrie at the conference on "Data collection on television and on-demand audiovisual services in the countries of the partnership of the Euromed Audiovisual III programme," organized by the European Audiovisual Observatory and the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU), in the ASBU headquarters in Tunis, September 23-24, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> "Fixed (wired-) broadband subscriptions," ITU, 2000-2012, retrieved from, <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>

One of the structural problems in Moroccan print media is the low rate of newspaper and magazine primary circulation and pass-along secondary readership. But newspaper circulation is miniscule at 300,000 daily; less than 1 percent of the population.

The Audiovisual Communication Law assigns public service obligations to Morocco's state-administered TV and radio stations.<sup>4</sup> There are no specific public service obligations for commercial media, but the sector must abide by the general philosophy and recommendations in the 2005 audiovisual law. The preamble of the Law states that the general philosophy is founded on the Kingdom's constitutional principles of Islam, monarchy, and national unity. It also states that programs must appeal to all regions of the country and must respond to the audiences' needs. Broadcasters must provide an objective and balanced coverage of news events, while not taking sides with any political party, ideology or doctrine. They must promote Moroccan arts and culture and encourage local production. All broadcasting companies must preserve neutrality and not serve the interests of a political party, an ideology, an ethnicity, or particular economic or financial interests.

With the exception of Jordan, Tunisia and Lebanon, which have created broadcasting regulatory bodies, the rest of the MENA region continues to exert direct state control over broadcasting. But the mission of PSB is at an embryonic stage in Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia and Lebanon. While the legal framework and institutional structure provide the conditions for a public service practice to materialize, they do not guarantee its performance, given the nature of the political systems in these countries (Sakr, 2012).

This study adopts a multi-method approach that combines document analysis and qualitative in-depth interviews with HACA personnel in the Monitoring department, which is in charge of monitoring the contents of radio and TV stations to make sure they are in compliance with the laws and regulations stipulated in the audio-visual communication law, and with the provisions in their licensing obligations documents (LODs) that include public service mandates. The sample criterion was purposive (Patton, 2002) because the interviewees were selected on the basis of their expertise, and on their willingness to speak openly in private.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The TV stations are Al Oula, 2M and Medi 1 TV. The list of SNRT radio stations: Idaa Wataniya (general interest station in Arabic), Chaîne Inter (general interest station in French), Idaa Al Amazighiya (Amazigh language and culture station), Mohamed VI du Saint Qoran (religious channel), and Regional radio stations (Agadir, Agadir, Casablanca, Dakhla, Fes, Laâyoune, Marrakech, Meknes, Oujda, Tanger, Tétouan, Rabat, El Hoceima and Ouarzazate).

<sup>5</sup> The interviews lasted from one hour to one hour and fifteen minutes. All interviews took place between October and December 2013. I interviewed fourteen employees from HACA. They all work in the Monitoring department. Four are managers in various services and ten are mid-level employees. I had the opportunity to conduct two intensive training sessions over two weekends in October and December 2013 for the monitoring department personnel on content analysis. I had 20 trainees and I managed to get to know them and what they do. When I approached the interviewees, I promised them confidentiality so that they are comfortable discussing HACA's monitoring of content. As a result, all the interviewees insisted to stay anonymous for fear of losing their jobs.

Although semi-structured interviews as a methodology do not lead to generalizable results, the quality of the information provided by the interviewees given their expertise in the subject matter and their proximity to decision making on media content within HACA renders the findings of very general importance. How HACA interferes with content is at the core of the boundary crossing from state control to public service, and these interviews provide solid evidence to illustrate that.

## Organization and Structure of PSB

HACA was established August 31, 2002 as an administrative body in charge of regulating the audio-visual communication sector. HACA is the Higher Council of the Audio-Visual Communication, a nine-member council with three major missions. First, it provides advice for the King, the Prime minister and government, and both chambers of the Parliament on issues related to audio-visual sector. Second, it authorizes the creation of audio-visual companies, and grants licenses and the use of radio frequencies. Finally, it monitors compliance with the laws and regulations applicable to the audio-visual sector, as well as pluralism (in particular in the matter of political parties access), and compliance to advertising regulations. HACA also consists of the General Directorate of Audio-Visual Communication (*Direction Général de la Communication Audiovisuelle*-- DGCA), which is run by the HACA's Director General and represents administrative and technical services. The DGCA includes research and development, program monitoring, technical infrastructure, and the legal department.

HACA receives many bids from private individuals or companies seeking new licenses and oversees compliance for TV and radio stations with their Licensing Obligation documents (called *Cahier des Charges*). The *Cahier des Charges* constitutes a written agreement between the HACA and broadcast media outlet and the HACA, and through its mechanism of monitoring and surveillance makes sure the media outlets comply with their obligations.

Two years after the creation of HACA, the Moroccan parliament adopted the Audiovisual Communication Law in January 2005, which put an end to the state's monopoly in broadcast management. This is the law that regulates radio and television in Morocco. Like most broadcasting policies around the world, broadcasting is supposed to be accountable to the public and must promote democratic ideals, should enhance national audio-visual communication production, and preserve the national cultural heritage. The most positive development introduced by this law is the establishment of the legal framework for private ownership. Before this law audiovisual communication in Morocco functioned in a legal void. The existing radio and TV stations could only be created via a Royal decree, which meant one had to convince the King himself to approve a request for a license.

The Audiovisual Communication law carries the same restrictions of freedom of expression that the Press Code<sup>6</sup>. Article 9 states that TV and radio programs must not question Morocco's dogma, Islam, monarchy, and Western Sahara.<sup>7</sup> The law does not stipulate jail sentences, but that is not needed because the Press Code does. Regarding ownership, Article 21 stipulates that any broadcasting company or shareholder can own or control another broadcasting company as long as he/she/it does not exceed 30 percent of the shares of the other company. This is intended to prevent any individual or company from controlling more than one media outlet. Only the Moroccan state can do that.

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<sup>6</sup> The Press Code is the law that regulates print media in Morocco. It is called a "code" but in fact it is a law that contains provisions to imprison journalists. Although meant primarily for print media, the Press Code applies to broadcasting and the internet because Article 38 stipulates that the law applies to all forms of communication, whether written, printed, audiovisual, or electronic.

<sup>7</sup> The Western Sahara refers to the southern province in Morocco. The legal status of the territory and the question of its sovereignty remain unresolved; the territory is contested between Morocco, Algeria and the Polisario.

In April 2005, three years after the creation of HACA, Moroccan Radio and Television (*Radiodiffusion et Television Marocaine*), the institution that managed state TV and radio, was transformed from a subsidiary of the Ministry of Communication to the National Company of Radio and Television (*la Société Nationale de Radiodiffusion et de Télévision—SNRT*). The SNRT is a public company, self-proclaimed as independent, that manages public service radio and TV stations, and is no longer subject to the financial control and supervision of the Ministry of Communication. It is the largest broadcasting company and controls the nine formerly state-owned television stations and six radio stations.<sup>8</sup>

The Law assigned public service obligations to Al Oula,<sup>9</sup> 2M,<sup>10</sup> and Medi 1 TV,<sup>11</sup> the three nationwide public service TV stations, and to the SNRT radio stations. In May 2014, Medi 1 TV became private and HACA issued a new *Cahier des charges* (licensing obligations document) which no longer defines the station as a public service broadcaster but as a “general television service for news, knowledge and culture.”<sup>12</sup> Medi 1 TV must abide by the general philosophy and recommendations in the 2005 audiovisual law.

In terms of funding, PSB television and radio stations receive public funding via a tax added to the electricity bills that every Moroccan household and business pays.<sup>13</sup> This state subsidy is meant to allow the public broadcasters to compete with satellite TV and private radio. The two public service TV stations Al Oula and 2M also rely on advertising as a main source of income. One of the cornerstones of PSB ethics (and media more broadly) is the independence of editorial content from advertisers’ influence. Although there is no indication that the SNRT and 2M stations bias their contents to benefit advertisers, the fact that they receive advertising money presents potential conflicts of interest with their public service functions.

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<sup>8</sup> List of SNRT Stations: for TV, Al-Aoula (general channel), Arriadia (an all sports channel), Arrabiaa (education and cultural channel), Al Maghribia (channel for the Moroccan community abroad), Assadissa (religious channel), Laayoune (regional TV of the Southern region), Assabiaa (fiction, films and TV series channel), Amazighiya (Amazigh channel). For Radio: Idaa Wataniya (general interest station in Arabic), Chaîne Inter (general interest station in French), Idaa Al Amazighiya (Amazigh language and culture station), Mohamed VI du Saint Coran (religious channel), and Regional radio stations (Agadir, Agadir, Casablanca, Dakhla, Fes, Laâyoune, Marrakech, Meknes, Oujda, Tanger, Tétouan, Rabat, El Hoceima and Ouarzazate).

<sup>9</sup> Launched on March 3 1962, Al Oula (formerly known as RTM) was the only television station available for Moroccans until 1989 when 2M was launched. It was state-owned and controlled.

<sup>10</sup> 2M started off in March of 1989 as a private TV station, and due to financial hardships, the state bought 72 percent of its shares in January 1996. Today it is state-owned.

<sup>11</sup> Created in 2005, Medi 1 was initially owned by the state. Its radio affiliate was launched in 1981 as part of a Moroccan-French partnership comprising associates from banks and major enterprises of the two countries. Medi 1 TV, the third national public channel, turned private when two Emirate investment groups (Nekst Investments and Steeds Medias) bought 54 percent of its shares. HACA granted Medi 1 TV a license for private broadcasting in May 2014. See *Cahier des Charges* Medi 1 TV (document detailing the legally binding licensing conditions), retrieved from <http://haca.ma/CC/Medi1TV.pdf>, (accessed on 12 August 2015).

<sup>12</sup> See *Cahier des Charges* Medi 1 TV (document detailing the legally binding licensing conditions), retrieved from, <http://haca.ma/CC/Medi1TV.pdf> (accessed on 12 August 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Media Sustainability Index. Retrieved from <http://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/u115/Morocco%202012%20MSI.pdf> (accessed 20 January 2015).

## Transition from PSB to PSM

The digital switchover in the MENA region was set for 2015.<sup>14</sup> According to the ITU, digital terrestrial broadcasting service is available in Morocco, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Mauritania, and Sudan. It is planned in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Syria, and the UAE. The service is unavailable in Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, and Yemen. The Moroccan national broadcaster SNRT carried out the digital switchover in 2015. Morocco has witnessed the development of new platforms and avenues to communicate public service broadcast content in digital format. In March 2007, the Ministry of Communication introduced DTT – Digital Terrestrial Television (*Television Numerique Terrestre*, TNT) to transmit the state-administered TV stations in a digital format.

The DTT service allows audiences to watch all the state-administered televisions stations and is meant on the one hand to package the Moroccan channels for households without access to satellite TV, and on the other hand to offer an alternative for households with access to satellite TV. An even less significant digital platform (in terms of audience share) is TV via ADSL, a digital TV service provided by Maroc Telecom. Only Moroccans with access to fixed-broadband internet subscription can take advantage of this service.

Current debates on broadcasting focus on the impact of the configuration of new digital and multiplatform distribution systems on traditional broadcasting structures, business models, and reception patterns (Lowe, Jauert, & Bardeel, 2008; Lowe, Jauert, & Steemers, 2012). They also focus on the difficult conditions and uncertain future of PSB including growing political hostility, increased competition for revenues, and the progressive fragmentation of audiences. In Morocco, radio and television are still distinct media with a life of their own. Due to low literacy levels and lack of access to online media, broadcasting companies have not yet crossed the boundaries of their own media and transformed themselves into cross-media organizations with new digital multiplatform distribution systems. The main PSB TV stations receive funding from the state and revenue from advertising, they rely on digital satellite broadcasting, and their online presence are extensions of their analog versions, rather than new distribution systems. As the next section will show, in Morocco political control represents the main constraint for PSB.

## Critical Issues of Public Service Media

An initial examination of the legal framework and the institutional structure that the Moroccan state set up shows that the media reforms illustrate a deeply conflicted orientation. On the one hand, the reforms sought to relieve broadcasting from political control by turning the state broadcasting system into public service system. On the other hand, the state established a system that limits that realization for fears that the results could destabilize the status quo. The state controls media content directly through repressive laws and through a regulatory institution that lacks independence. The conflicted orientation is

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<sup>14</sup> ITU, Switching from analogue to digital television. Retrieved from <https://itunews.itu.int/en/2346-Switching-from-analogue-to-digital-television.note.aspx> (accessed 29 February 2016).

the result of the nature of Morocco's political regime which is a competitive authoritarian regime, not a transitional democracy. Levitsky and Way (2002) introduced this framework into the comparative study of authoritarianism where they challenged the "democracy bias" embedded in much of the literature on the post-Cold War regimes. When seen through the lens of democratization, hybrid regimes were categorized as flawed, incomplete, or 'transitional' democracies." Various terms were used to describe these transitional democracies such as "evolving democracy," "nascent democracy," "ongoing democracy," and "would be democracies." Levitsky and Way argue that these characterizations are misleading. They propose, in line with scholars such as Guillermo O'Donnell (1996) and Thomas Carothers (2002), to stop treating these regimes as transitional but to conceptualize and theorize them for that they are, as distinct and non-democratic regime types.

Competitive authoritarian regimes utilize elements of democracy to ensure domination over the other opposition forces in the country. Levitsky and Way (2002) define competitive authoritarianism as civilian regimes in which "formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which fraud, civil liberties violations, and abuse of state and media resources so skew the playing field that the regime cannot be labeled democratic" (p. 4). These regimes are competitive in the sense that the democratic institutions are real and that "opposition forces can use legal channels to seriously contest for (and occasionally win) power; but they are authoritarian in that opposition forces are handicapped by a highly uneven—and even dangerous—playing field. Competition is thus real but unfair" (p. 4). Competitive authoritarian regimes are characterized by the presence of some democratic institutions and some democratic practices such as elections, multi-party system, and in our case, self-proclaimed independent media regulator within the authoritarian state. Morocco's media reforms are in line with this vision of governance whereby the state creates democratic institutions to use them as a site of struggle with opposition forces while maintaining control through establishing an uneven playing field.

The media represent an important site of contestation. In competitive authoritarian regimes, both private and public media system exist. Political parties and opposition groups have access to print and online media, and in today's digital world, bloggers and internet users can serve as watchdogs and may act as a Fourth Estate in monitoring political abuses. Authoritarian regimes, however, try to limit the exposure of citizens to alternative information and views by placing "restrictions on means of communication, media content and media consumption" (Schedler, 2009). They have at their disposal an array of choices in terms of how they can strategically contain the flow of information, from repressive laws and restrictive broadcasting regulations, to blocking and filtering internet content, and imprisoning journalists. The state established a 'PSB' system it can control through regulatory structures that allows it to tilt the playing field to its favor. A look at the media law and the regulatory institution shows some of the mechanisms the state uses to maintain an uneven playing field. The PS broadcasting could as readily mean Political Service instead of public service.

The Audiovisual Communication law carries restrictions on freedom of expression and therefore allows the state to interfere with content. Article 9, as noted earlier, is clear about this. A close look at HACA sheds doubt on its self-proclaimed independence from

government, as illustrated in how the members are selected, i.e. seven of the nine members are appointed by the King and the prime minister.

It is clear that the state holds all the power within HACA's highest decision making apparatus. This law and the regulatory institution are sites of conflicted orientations. On the one hand, they open the door for more pluralism and diversity in media, while at the same time empowering state regulatory institution to make decisions on content that interferes with editorial independence. As a competitive authoritarian regime, the regime utilizes democratic institutions to simultaneously reform its media system and to entrench these institutions within authoritarian laws. The result is the maintenance of the status quo while giving the impression that a democratization process is in progress.

With regards to content, the old practices of using broadcasting as an integrated component of the mechanisms for repression and control remain in place. The news output of the two PSB stations did not change with the liberalization of the audiovisual sector, and HACA interferes with private radio stations that attempt to provide a venue for open political discussions, disabling editorial independence and squashing such initiatives. For many of the interviewees,<sup>15</sup> the "holiness" of Royal activities and the amount of air time they occupy on public service channels is a clear violation of their public service mandate. "We are incapable of flagging such things, we risk losing our jobs," says one of the interviewees who has worked at HACA since its creation in 2002.

HACA displays more potency when it monitors political discussions on private radio stations. In May 2010, the Monitoring department flagged a statement made during an interview of a film producer in a talk show in Radio Mars, a non-political sports and music radio station. When asked about his dream job, the film producer responded saying that he would like to be the first Moroccan president if Morocco were ever to be a republic. Immediately, HACA ordered the station off the air for 48 hours (from Thursday 3 June to Saturday 5 June), levied a fine of 57,000 MAD (6500 USD), and demanded the station make a public apology for the statement. One interviewee said this was unexpected by his superiors because it is an entertainment radio station, and "the interview was casual; there was nothing political about it." He had to signal the statement because instructions from the Monitoring department are clear: they *must* signal any statement made on radio or television that question the monarchy *in any way*. To utter a phrase on the airwaves that associates the identity of Morocco with a republic is considered extremely dangerous, the interviewee said.

Besides, the oppressive nature of the media laws, the language is vague and allows a wide margin of interpretation. Words and phrases such as "prejudice" or "offense" can be interpreted in many ways. It is difficult to interpret Article 9 of the Audiovisual Communication law, which states that radio and TV contents must not "harm or defame" (*porter prejudice*) the country's dogmas (the Monarchy, territorial integrity and Islam). It is hard to determine if a statement represents harm or is defamatory in any sense.

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<sup>15</sup> Interviews conducted with fourteen employees from HACA. They all work in the Monitoring department. Four are managers in various services and ten are mid-level employees.

## **Assessment and Recommendations**

A healthy democracy depends on the quality of news and on the existence of a culture of dissent and debate. PSB must give citizens access to information and provide them with a platform where they can discuss ideas and form public opinion. In the MENA region, most countries do not yet have a structure in place for this to materialize, and thus rules out genuine public service broadcasting. The state continues to own and control TV and radio contents and uses the media as part of their apparatus of political repression and control. In countries where structures are in place in the form of regulatory institutions, public TV and radio institutions, and laws, PSB systems have the potential to be an adequate structure for ensuring an efficient public service media provision. However, the existing political systems do not provide the conditions that are necessary to facilitate a democratizing environment where PSB could materialize. Morocco provides a poignant example that illustrates.

The broadcasting system in Morocco can be seen as promising in the sense that the state laid out a structure that, if truly implemented, has the potential to ensure an efficient democratic public service media system. However, the old practices of using broadcasting as an integrated component of repression and control hinder this. The news output of the PSB stations did not change with the liberalization of the audiovisual sector. And when private radio stations attempt to provide a venue for open political discussions, HACA interferes to squash such initiatives. In the international history of PSB, some state control has been necessary to manage broadcasting also in democratic countries, but it has not extended to control over content and editorial independence. Licensing radio and TV stations was bound by obligations to provide public service (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009). Therefore, the question is not whether the state wields power in the management of broadcasting, but rather what kinds and how much. In democratic countries, the state exercises authority over licensing, policy and regulations, and usually the appointment of executive managers in the broadcasting stations and the regulatory agency, but not over content (with the exception of indecent content such as violence, prurient nudity, racism, hate speech, etc.).

In Morocco, the locus of power in broadcasting goes beyond licensing and policies to directly impact editorial decisions. The state did not hand over power to media institutions to do their job of informing and educating the citizenry. Instead, it maintained control over the media landscape through a series of restrictive laws that allow it to interfere with editorial independence of media organizations.

Moroccan PSB provides historical evidence that there is no real political will to liberalize and democratize the country as a whole. Thus, the legal framework and the institutional structure provide the conditions for public service to materialize, but they do not guarantee performance. The overall non-democratic culture within the country is arguably the main determinant and obstacle to progress. From a political economy perspective, any study of PSB in non-democratic countries should examine the nature of the political regime to get a clear sense of where the locus of power is and how much the state yields (and wields) in its management of broadcasting.

As a competitive authoritarian regime, the Moroccan state utilizes democratic institutions to reform its media system while entrenching these institutions within authoritarian laws. The result is the maintenance of the status quo while giving the impression that democratization process is in progress. As such, unless there is political will at the highest level of the political pyramid, public service system will be nothing more than a pseudo system bouncing back and forth between milder and stronger forms of authoritarianism.

## Recommendations

1. The appointment process in HACA's Higher Council and the criteria for nomination should be more transparent and should be open to public debate. There are important stakeholders that are not represented in the council including media professionals, unions, courts, civil society, and consumer groups.
2. National media laws must comply with Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which Morocco signed and ratified on 3 May 1979. An examination of the existing laws (the Broadcast Law, the Press Code, and the Penal Code) indicates the weakness of these rights. The restrictions in the existing laws go beyond those expressed in Article 19 such as "respect of the rights or reputation of others" and "the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals."
3. The language in the laws must be more precise. Terms such as "offense" or "public order" are vague and the authorities retain the right to define and interpret such vague terms as they please, thus opening the door for abuse.
4. The laws must not give the state the right to interfere with editorial independence of PSB.
5. As history shows, the most powerful guarantees for political stability are democratic forums of governance and respect for basic human rights. In a world where information is available to citizens, the MENA region states can no longer use broadcasting as an instrument for propaganda and political control.

## Acknowledgment

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# **3 Public Media Service in Mexico and Latin America**

*Recent Improvements  
and Future Challenges*

A decorative graphic consisting of several thin, white, parallel lines that intersect to form a grid-like pattern. The lines are set against a solid blue background and extend from the right side of the page towards the left, creating a sense of depth and movement.



# Public Service Media in Mexico and Latin America Recent Improvements and Future Challenges

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## Abstract

As in Latin America generally, public service media (PSM) has struggled in efforts for development in Mexico due to a lack of editorial independence, economic precariousness and absence of widespread availability as well as popularity. Nevertheless, Latin American social, political, economic and technological landscapes have changed significantly in the last two decades. In this context, the paper addresses the question of what this has meant for PSM development in the region. The study focuses on the case of Mexico, drawing on official data, interviews with experts, and providing specific examples of the situation in the country. This paper offers an overview and update of the state of PSM in Mexico and argues that despite challenges, problems and complications, improvements have been achieved and there is hope that development will continue.

*Keywords:* Public service media, new media policy, organizational adaptation, Latin America, media reform

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# Public Service Media in Mexico and Latin America

## Recent Improvements and Future Challenges

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### History and Background

The media model that Latin American countries have adopted has been very similar to the commercial-entertainment media project in the USA. It consists of private companies funded by both private and public advertisements, with high levels of media concentration and very few public media initiatives. In addition to this commercial approach, state intervention in broadcasting and communication industries aims to reinforce governmental control rather than promote democratic communications. In this context, public service media lacks financial resources and sufficient editorial independence, and has been concentrated in urban centers. More recently, there are also technological challenges in achieving digitalization (Waisbord & Mastrini, 2015).

The history of broadcasting in Latin America began at the end of the 1920s with the first radio stations administered by government in the Dominican Republic (1928), Uruguay (1929), and Bolivia (1933). The first television channels were launched in Venezuela (1952) and Chile (1959) (Torres, 2015; Toussaint, 2010). Mexico launched radio in the 1930s (*Radio Educación* in 1931 and *Radio UNAM* in 1937), and television at the end of the 1950s (*Once TV Mexico* in 1959). As was the case for the majority of countries in Latin America, with a few notable exceptions of Colombian Consejo Nacional de Television in the eighties (Fox & Anzola, 1988) and *Televisión Nacional de Chile* since the nineties (Fuenzalida, 2009)<sup>1</sup>, broadcasting was developed by governments with a propagandist logic to support either dictatorships or democratically-elected governments (typically populists or neoliberals), mainly the former (Arroyo *et al.*, 2012).

Thus, broadcasting in Latin America began in the same period as elsewhere but took with an approach that was essentially government controlled and propaganda oriented, that is to say authoritarian in complexion. Although sometimes referred to as public media, especially by apologists, in more precise terms the history of broadcasting in the region reflects a strong orientation to state broadcasting.

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<sup>1</sup> With regards to the Colombian case, academics (Fox & Anzola, 1988) have pointed out that Colombian public television has performed a relatively independent function for most of their life, especially because was constituted as a mixed system, in which the State owned the transmissions facilities, and time were allocated to private companies. On the other hand, the Chilean governmental broadcasting, TVN, suffered a profound political, legal and economic reforms during the first years of democratization in the 1990s, that transformed it from a propagandistic machine to a more transparent, diverse and truthful channel in the following years. The reform also included a new financial scheme (which allows TVN to elude governmental dependence and commercialize some contents), as well as a very successful programming offer, which maintain competitive rating with commercial channels (Fuenzalida, 2009).

## What Does PSM Actually Mean in Mexico and Latin America?

Despite the long history of broadcasting in the region, there is no consensus about what ‘public media’ means in Mexico, or in Latin America generally. According to the Argentine scholar Martín Becerra (2013), the distrust that governments created by handling everything related to broadcasting fueled alternative initiatives by proponents of a more democratic media system in civil society, largely activist citizens and intellectuals. Such would include two Brazilians, Luis Gonzaga Motta and Ubirajara da Silva, the Peruvian Rafael Rocagliolo, and the Mexicans Beatriz Solis and Aleida Calleja (2005), among others (Becerra, 2013). These and others embraced the idea of public media and encouraged developing independent, diverse and self-financed media (i.e. *community media*). This has been important to media and democracy development (and in their connection) in the region, despite financial and technical limitations. Although there are important differences, especially when thinking about institutional aspects, *community media* is congruent with Western ideals about public service media (Waisbord, 2013; Lugo-Ocando *et al.* 2010).

The Venezuelan theorist, Antonio Pasquali, proposed in 1961 what is considered to be the first and most influential definition of public media in the region. For him, this means that media do not belong to private agents, are financed by government (i.e. public money), enjoy financial and editorial autonomy, operate under the supervision of an independent body appointed by government, and offer a universal and pluralistic range of services (Safar & Pasquali, 2000). Although laudable, 50 years later public media remains very far from Pasquali’s ideas (Waisbord & Becerra, 2015). Nonetheless, Florence Toussaint<sup>2</sup>, a prominent Mexican scholar, argues that public media in Mexico (and this equally applies to most of Latin America) are public institutions with a rather long history and sense of permanence because they transcend each successive administration, are persistently financed by governments (even if not consistently), and offer alternative programming to commercial media<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, despite criticisms that are warranted, the picture is more nuanced than many critics from the West, mainly, have presumed. One also needs to be careful not to lump all of the diverse countries in the region into a common category, as if the situation for public media (indeed for media systems more generally) are undifferentiated. There are regional characteristics, of course, and the most pronounced of those are 1) the tradition of government control and interference, and 2) a (somewhat) countervailing commercial orientation. But there are also indications of a genuine interest in developing public media as a service for and to civil society. As we shall see, these tensions are highly evident in Mexico.

## Organization and Structure

With a whimsical and discretionary history of granting licenses, the public media in Mexico comprise a complex and somewhat miscellaneous assortment of stations and channels that

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<sup>2</sup> (2015, September) Personal interview with author in Mexico City.

<sup>3</sup> Even for Silvio Waisbord (2013), there exists historical terminological confusion between official, state and public media in the region. In this paper I refer to PSM as all media initiatives financed by the State, including the so-called state media, which is financed by the Judicial or Legislative powers.

include public and private university initiatives, those launched by cultural interests with an artistic focus, and many of which program for children or indigenous peoples. They operate at diverse levels from the Federal to the regional to the local. And there are a lot of them – altogether 596 stations (one third of Mexico's total number) with a combined estimated audience of 25 million people (Juárez Escalona, 2014). But Mexico's public media does not represent robust competition for private media, partly because as a whole they do not cover all of the national territory or reach a majority of Mexicans – about 122 million in total. These stations are not up to speed with digital media development and from time-to-time some have been associated with corruption scandals and administration wrongdoing<sup>4</sup>. As in the rest of Latin America (again with the exception of TVN in Chile), government subsidies are their primary source of income.

The problems in providing a genuine public service alternative to the dominant players in Mexico's highly commercial media system are keyed not only to the lack of any real PSM legacies here, but also to fragmentation, limitations in reach, poor infrastructure and incompetent management – i.e., a mixture of structural, technical, resource-related and managerial features. This suggests that future development will require addressing – indeed, redressing – each and all of these features.

In Mexico public radio includes two national networks (*IMER* and *Radio Educación*), fifty University stations (such as *Radio UNAM*, *Radio U de G* and *Ibero90.9*), sixteen state government stations at local level, twenty-one indigenous stations (including *Sistema de Radiodifusoras Culturales Indigenas*) and a single international digital radio station (*Radio México Internacional*). Public television has four national channels that broadcast from Mexico City (*Once TV México*, *Canal 22*, *Educa TV y Una Voz con Todos*); four University stations (in the states of Sonora, Nuevo Leon, Guadalajara and Mexico City); twenty-four state television stations and two digital channels for the Judicial and Legislative authorities. Mexican government also runs one information agency (*Notimex*), with correspondents in many Mexican states and abroad (Hernández López, 2014; Gómez y Sosa Plata, 2012).

Thus, there is no shortage of channels that can secure the public interest in Mexico, but the observed problems make the system quite problematic. There is cause for some optimism, however, because change is in the wind.

### **New Regulatory Framework, New Opportunities**

After half a century of a legal *impasse* in the broadcasting sector, a new institutional design emerged from the 2014 bill on telecommunications. Approved by the Mexican state (LSPREM, 2014), it has created opportunities for public broadcasters to enhance and consolidate core public service values. Importantly, this new regulatory framework has finally and formally recognized that media financed by the government are not official media but media for the public, that is to say independent. This is one of the historic civil society demands.

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<sup>4</sup> Just in the last two years there have been corruption scandals in the most important Mexican public channels, including but not restricted to the following TV channels: *Canal 22* (Villamil, 2015), *Canal Judicial* (Aranda, 2015) and *Once Tv México* (Hernández, 2014).

Another important step forward to establishing an independent and impartial public media service in this reform package is the mandatory adoption of internal regulatory bodies to regulate content (Sosa Plata, 2014), including especially the code of ethics (Baydar, 2008, p. 22) and a news ombudsman (Maurus, 2008, p. 71). Regarding the provision of news, recent empirical evidence (Brambila, 2014) demonstrates that the adoption of internal checkpoints in Mexican public media contributes to providing political news coverage characterized by veracity and balance, and importantly avoiding sensationalism and *tabloidization* (Hallin, 2000), one of the most common features in news framing among the region.

Although the incorporation of these internal checkpoints is a broad practice among public media (*Once TV México* and *Canal 22* in 2007; *Radio Educacion* and *the IMER* in 2008 and 2009, respectively; *Canal del Congreso* in 2014 and SRP in 2015), the former Ombudsman for *IMER* and current Ombudsman at *Once TV Mexico*, Felipe Lopez Veneroni<sup>5</sup>, said the mandatory implementation of self-regulatory bodies has been a very tough task – especially at the local level – and there is still a lot to do. While the public increasingly acknowledge these internal bodies, many people don't know about them and quite a few see the ombudsman as a governmental censor.

### **The New Mexican Public Broadcaster: A True Public Media Agency?**

The reform also led to the development of the *Sistema Público de Radiodifusión del Estado Mexicano* (SPR)<sup>6</sup>, an agency that attempts to group, coordinate and help in the transition to 'digital' across national public television networks (*Once TV México*, *Canal 22*, *TV UNAM*, *Canal del Congreso*, *Canal Judicial* and the recently created *Una Voz Para Todos*). But Toussaint<sup>7</sup> believes the incorporation of these institutions into the SPR network or system represents a potentially damaging association with the political regime because this body depends upon the Executive branch of government. The new basis provides SPR with a civil council (the *Consejo Ciudadano*), that is composed of nine civil society members appointed by two-thirds of the Upper Chamber of Congress. But this group only has the authority to issue opinions, and their decisions are not binding. So Mexico is making an uneven progress here.

From the technical point of view, SPR attempts to fulfil one of the traditional goals of a public media service: Universality (McQuail, 1992). This has been a long-term problem. There are still regions that cannot access public media, national channels (for this more than a third of the country's territory) or even local public media. The northern state of Tamaulipas<sup>8</sup> is one such region. SPR attempts to achieve the goal through ownership of a nationwide network of transmitters operated as a public television network. The goal is to improve the free-to-air availability of public channels throughout Mexico. Currently, SPR's transmitter network currently broadcasts from 14 of the 32 states and reaches 56% of the Mexican population, which indicates the scale of the challenge that remains.

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<sup>5</sup> (2015, September) Personal interview with author in Mexico City.

<sup>6</sup> In July 2010, the Mexican government established by decree the *Organismo Promotor de Medios Audiovisuales* (OPMA): a mission to ensure that more Mexicans could receive a wider range of public television channels. Four years later, the Mexican telecommunications reform transformed OPMA into the SPR, which allowed the expansion and greater co-ordination of public broadcasting across the country.

<sup>7</sup> (2015, September) Personal interview with author in Mexico City.

<sup>8</sup> (2015, September) Personal interview with author in Mexico City.

### Between Financial Limitations and Budget Cuts

The 2014 reform contemplates limits on advertising for public media airtime (not more than 5 seconds per advert) and ensures little sponsorship would be received. This is quite problematic and accounts for the lack of personnel, material and new technology. This limitation prevents these public service providers from gaining additional resources and restricts them to dependence on the government budget. This explains the chronic problem in successive budget cuts and re-assignments that damage their ability to make long-term plans of operation and programming, and to pursue digitalization.

For example, in recent years a notable Federal budget cut for public media as imposed despite the fact that the transition to a fully digital system was scheduled for 2016 and is still not finalized. In comparison to the previous administration (see, Figure 1), which increased the budget for public radio and television (*Radio Educación, IMER, Once TV México and Canal 22*) by up to 100%, since 2012 the budget has not kept up with technical and operational requirements (Sosa Plata, 2014b). Even worse, in the past three years the government has reduced *Canal 22's* subsidy, which resulted in lay-offs (Animal Politico, 2015) and programming cuts at a scale that is without precedent (Canal 22, 2015). Fired media workers claims governmental censorship in this case.

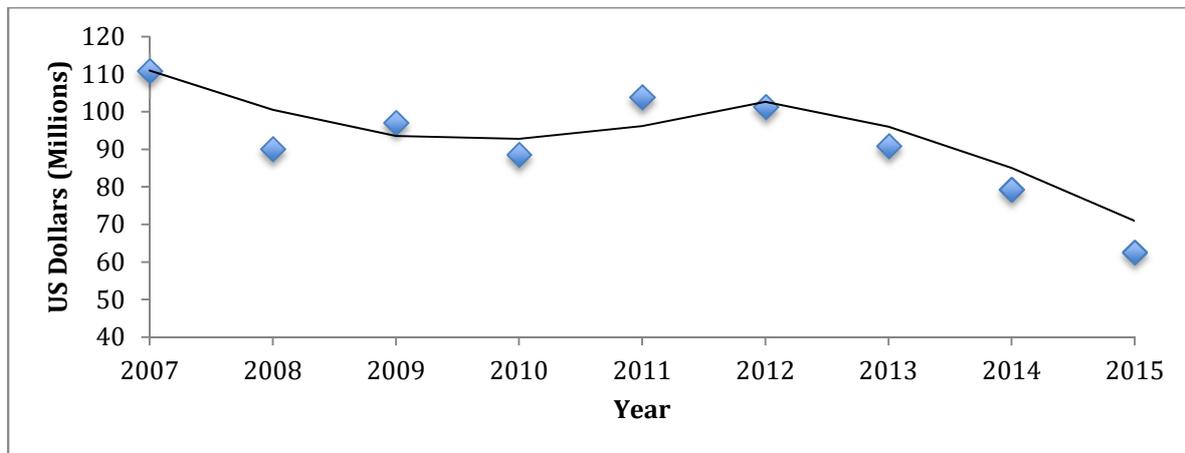


Figure 1. Public media service budget (from 2007 to 2015) (Constantans US Dollars) (source: Public Budget (Secretaria de Hacienda y Credito Publico 2007-2015). Federal budget for *Once Tv México, Canal 22, SPR, Dirección General Educativa, IMER and Radio Educación*).

In contrast to the reduction in the public media subsidy, during the first two years of the current administration (2013 and 2014), for each US dollar the Federal government allocated to public media the President's office spent five US dollars on private mass media and advertisements (Fundar and Article 19, 2015). So although PSM is supported in principle, in practice it is kept weak and remains vulnerable to budgetary manipulation.

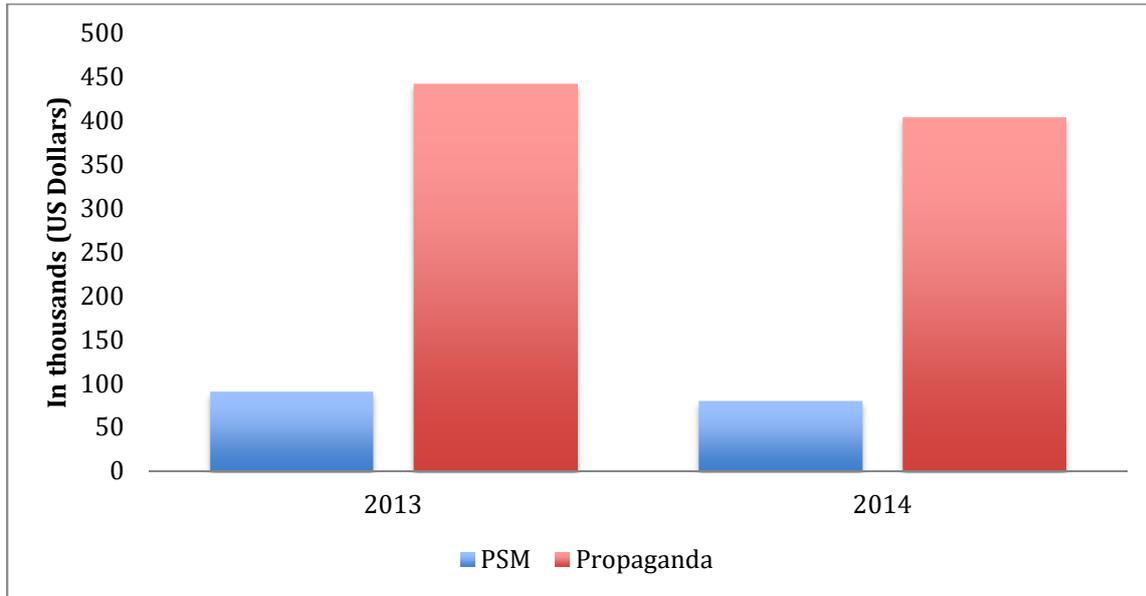


Figure 2. PSM Budget VS federal government's expenditures on official advertisement, 2013-2014 (Constant US Dollars) (source: Fundar and Article 19 (2015) and Secretaria de Hacienda y Credito Publico). \* PSM budget only includes SPR, Once Tv Mexico, Radio Educación, Notimex, Direccion General de TV Educativa and IMER.

## PSM: State of the Art and Digital Transition

In this section of the chapter we examine the characteristics and performance of public media in Mexico, highlighting advances so far accomplished and limitations to be overcome.

### Public Radio

About 40% of Mexicans think public radio is an independent source of information that provides useful services for education and cultural life (Parametría, 2015a). Given the fact that public media is not a legacy approach here, and the heritage of state-run control that understandable breeds suspicion, this suggests hopeful promise for growing popular support. Despite the already noted limitations, the two primary national public networks are largely fulfilling these expectations.

IMER (Mexican Radio Institute) is the most successful public radio network in Mexico. They have 20 stations and an audience of 20 million, especially concentrated in and around Mexico City (Rosas, 2012). Of course success is relative. In fact, only 30% of Mexicans have heard of IMER, that is still nearly one-third and this audience recognizes the Institute as a source for diversity of information and topics, and an alternative range of music – largely *Jazz*, *Blues* and variations of *Rock* (Parametría, 2015a). With 30 years of experience, IMER is able to sell expertise in production and engineering services as an alternative form of funding. By 2012, IMER became the first radio network in Mexico to be fully digitalized (Rosas, 2012). IMER's budget was USD 10 million in 2015. But IMER and the second important national network, treated next, recent years faced declines in resources that are fairly sharp.

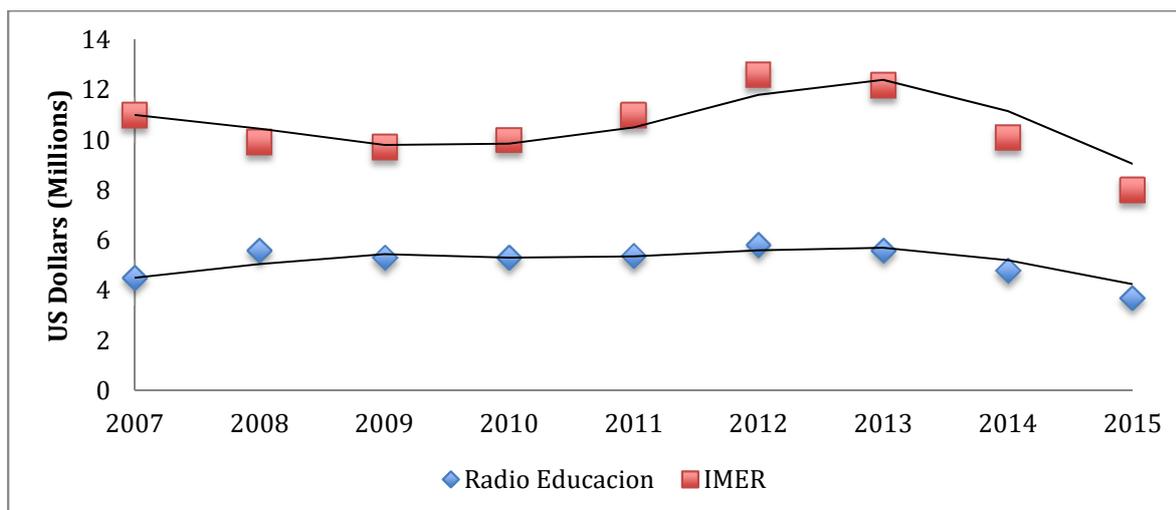


Figure 3. Radio Educación and IMER annual budgets 2007 – 2015 (Constantans US Dollars) (source: Secretaria de Hacienda y Credito Publico 2007-2015).

*Radio Educación* provides educational programming for Mexico City and half of the states in the country. The network produces audio books on their website and more than five thousand programs a year. It also broadcasts to the wider region via satellite, as far as the northern region of South America and the southern region of the United States. This organization has more than 85 years of experience and, since 2010, has been digitalizing their abundant archive of documentaries (Conaculta, 2010). In 2015 the *Radio Educación* budget was USD 5 million – which means they are doing a lot with a little. That indicates commitment to public service ideals, and importantly also an operation that is fairly efficient and certainly productive.

### Terrestrial TV Channels

Since their establishment in 1959 and 1993 respectively, *Once TV México* (Eleven TV) and *Canal 22* (Channel 22) have been recognized as national territorial channels with *public service vocations* (Navarro and Amezcuita, 2007). Both channels are broadcast digitally from Mexico City and have a strong presence on the web, largely through the use of social media (*Facebook* and *Twitter*) and their *YouTube* channels (Brambila and Juárez, 2015).

Administrated by IPN (National Polytechnic Institute), a prestigious public university in Mexico City, *Once TV México* was the first university channel on the continent and is the most recognized public media operator in Mexico (Parametría, 2015b), with a potential audience of 70 million people (Once TV México, 2015), although it attracts just a few portion of the potential audience and reach has been declining. Despite lower audience levels (Gomez and Sosa Plata, 2011), *Once TV México* produces more than 75 per cent of its content, including educational programming and high quality children's programs (for this they have received international prizes). The Channel also produces news and editorial programs that represent a diversity of viewpoints. Currently, the channel broadcasts in High Definition Quality and had

4.5 million visits to their Internet site in 2014. In 2015 they launched *Once TV Niños*, the first digital terrestrial channel completely dedicated to children’s programming (Once TV México, 2015). In 2015 *Once TV Mexico* budget was USD 36 million. Given the content characteristics, the organization clearly demonstrates keen commitment to public service values and mission. But the decline is worrying.

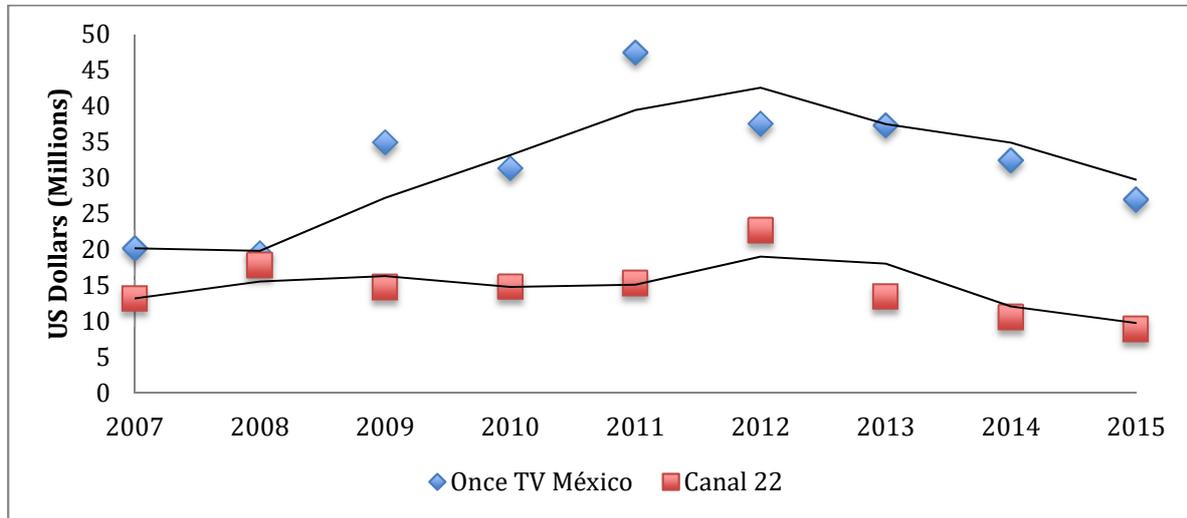


Figure 4. *Once TV Mexico* and *Canal 22* annual budgets 2007 – 2015 (Constantans US Dollars) (source: Secretaria de Hacienda y Credito Publico 2007-2015).

Since it was founded in 1993, *Canal 22*, which belongs to the CONACULTA (National Council for Culture and the Arts), has promoted Fine Arts and Haute Couture, as well as native and popular culture.<sup>9</sup> It has a potential audience of 36 million people, mostly in the metropolitan area of Mexico City (Conaculta, 2011a). Its programming offers cultural news, concerts, plays, art films, documentaries and cultural television series from international networks that include the *BBC and TV Española*. Through 2014, *Canal 22* increased its production output by 50 percent (Conaculta, 2012) and made successful programs, such as the reality show *Opera Prima en Movimiento*, that captured one of the biggest audience ever for public television in Mexico – about half million people followed the reality show (Conaculta, 2011b). *Canal 22*’s budget in 2015 was USD 12 million. Again, the channel fulfils an essential set of public service functions related to culture and the arts, but its resources have similarly been in decline in recent years.

### Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT)

At the beginning of the 21st century, three digital terrestrial channels emerged that would escape the orbit of control by the Executive branch of government: *TV UNAM* (2015), *Canal*

<sup>9</sup> Since December 2015 a constitutional reform transformed CONACULTA into the Secretariat of Culture, the governmental department responsible for Mexico’s cultural policy.

*del Congreso* (2000) and *Canal del Poder Judicial* (2006). The first is administrated by UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico), which has autonomy over its budget and management. The others (*Canal del Congreso* and *Canal del Poder Judicial*) are managed by the Legislative and Judicial powers, respectively. All three transmit from Mexico City and each of them reaches 18 million homes through paid television service. In the near future these channels will transmit free-to-air digital signals (*Canal del Congreso* already does), which will represent a potential audience of between 18 to 24 million people (El Universal, 2015).

In its first 10 years, *TV UNAM* has distinguished itself by offering a diversity of scientific, cultural and educational programs. UNAM has its own productions and also international agreements with *Arte* in France, *Canal Encuentro* in Argentina and *TV Española* in Spain (Yglesias y Velazquez, 2015). Despite receiving 170 national and international rewards, its budget has been reduced in the past few years.

Due to the fact that the Congress and Supreme Court of Justice (SCJN) were under the control of the Executive and the one party system during the PRI dictatorship (1928-2000), launching the Congress and Judicial channels represents efforts to grow transparency and accountability. Inspired by the *BBC's Parlamento* and *TV Senado* of Brazil, *Canal del Congreso* (Congress Channel) emerged 15 years ago. It transmits live sessions from both the Senate and the House of Representatives, forums and parliament workshops, as well as productions (news and analysis content) linked to the agenda of congress. *Canal Judicial* (Judicial Channel), on the other hand, transmits SCJN sessions, analysis and news programs dedicated only to this government agency, as well as the international programs of the German public broadcaster, *Deutsche Welle*.

Despite the rapid growth of DTT channels in Mexico, one of the most important obstacles in the near future is the low penetration of digital receivers in the country. According to official source (Inegi, 2014), digital technology is available to no more than 21 percent of the population, with most of those viewers concentrated in urban centers (Mexico City) or border-cities (Tijuana). This suggests a digital divide in media quite generally in Mexico, which is especially problematic for public media given the intentions to provide a universal service. The problem needs to be remedied, but that is unlikely so long as budgets are being cut and support is lagging.

## Local Public Media

Like the German and Colombian models of public broadcasting, the Mexican model also favors decentralization and regionalization of public media initiatives. Although the first regional public radio and television networks started in the 1950s and 1960s (in the southern states of the country), the great majority of the 32 states in Mexico acquired frequencies in the 1980s and 1990s. The growth in TV happened mainly in the 1980s and levelled off in the 1990s, while radio growth has been more cumulative in nature (see Tables 5 and 6 below).

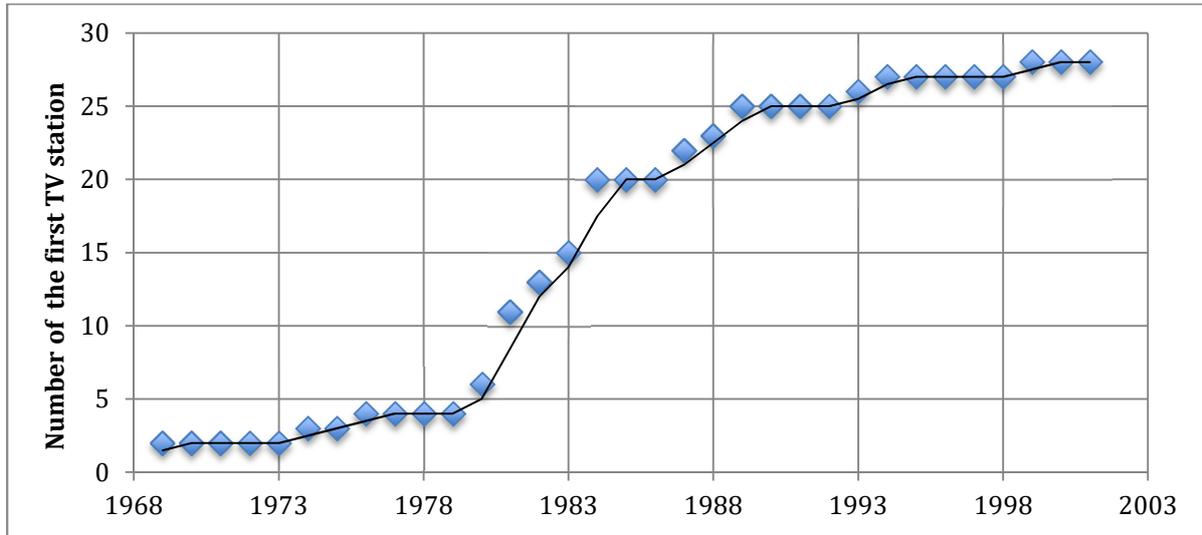


Figure 5. Mexican states with TV public stations per year of origin (1969-2001) [source: Toussaint (2009b), Ortega (2006) and Rebeil (1988)].

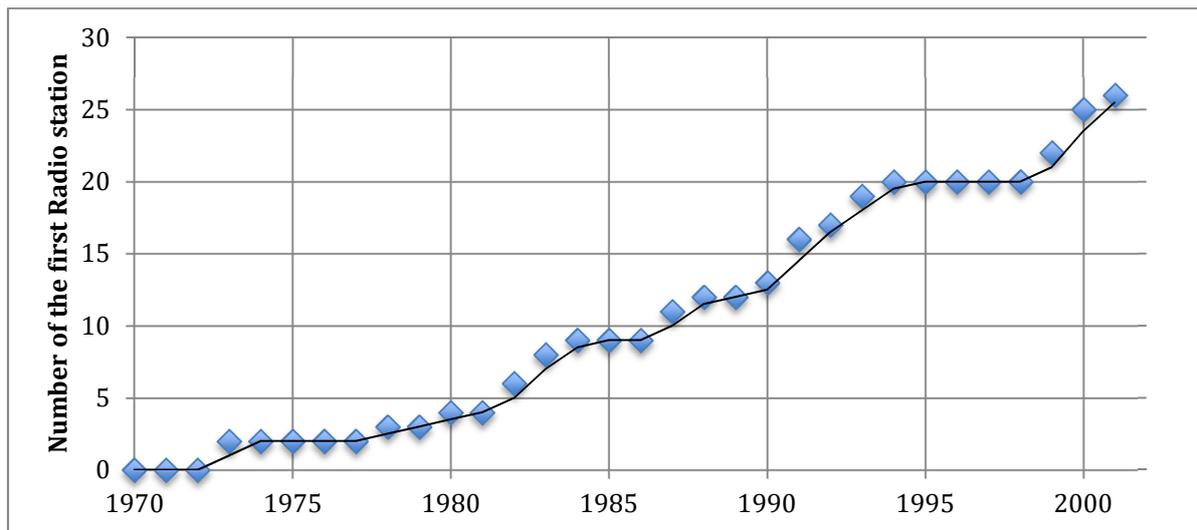


Figure 6. Mexican states with public radio stations per year of origin (1972-2001) [source: Toussaint (2009b), Ortega (2006) and Rebeil (1988)].

Nowadays, local public media is handled in 25 more or less separate systems for local and regional broadcasting. The financing for these systems is discretionary and depends on the will of the local incumbent (Toussaint, 2007). According to official information, half of the 25 systems operate with a budget between USD 0.5 and 3.5 million annually (for 2014 and 2015). A few are economically stronger (from Mexico City, Veracruz, Puebla and State of Mexico), with between USD 6 and 12 million per year.

Although these stations transmit national and international public media programming and produce content that supports pre-Hispanic culture and native traditions, according to

Toussaint<sup>10</sup> practically all of them operate under the editorial controls of the local incumbent. During election periods these stations are used as propaganda tools by the current administrations (Hughes and Lawson, 2004). Likewise at the Federal level, the lack of resources, problems with corruption and short-term planning hold back public broadcasters from developing with the latest technology and building digitalization. With only one year until the 2016 analogue blackout, the network of *RED México* (Cultural and Educational TV and Radio Networking), which co-ordinates the majority of local public initiatives, has announced that 29 of the 57 members require a massive intervention in order to transmit digitally, or they could disappear (Martinez, 2015). Nowadays, only a few public systems broadcast in digital, including but not restricted to Mexico City and the states of Oaxaca, Nuevo León and State of Mexico.

## **Assessment and Recommendations**

In Mexico, as in Latin America generally, PSM faces similar challenges in the shadow of the mercantilist-broadcasting project (Arroyo *et al.*, 2012), struggling for financial resources and editorial autonomy (Waisbord, 2013), and coping with uncertainty in finding their place in the emerging digital environment (Mastrini, 2013). Of course each country in the region has unique dynamics and a particular history, but much is quite similar as well.

Latin America is a region where broadcasting has been developed partly as a commercial project and this is an important factor in explaining the poor performance of public media initiatives. Latin American commercial houses are powerful (the *Clarín* in Argentina, *Globo* in Brazil, *Grupo Santo Domingo* in Colombia, *Televisa* and *TV Azteca* in Mexico). Media tycoons have hoarded concessions, and protect their shares of audiences and advertising with the help and collusion of Latin American governments (Guerrero & Márquez, 2014). This situation has remained the same even in countries that have carried out media reforms in efforts to limit problems in media concentration (Waisbord & Becerra, 2015).

In Mexico, the commercial tycoons (such as billionaire Carlos Slim, and TV barons Emilio Azcárraga Jean and Raul Salinas Pliego) control one of the most concentrated media markets in the hemisphere (Huerta-Wong & Gómez, 2013). They have been active in preventing any attempt to give more legal tools and administrative faculties to PSM, especially efforts to commercialize airtime or garner sponsorships. In short, they work hard to limit competition. In the Latin American region, only the Chilean *TVN* (and the Colombian mixed system) have a legal guarantee to self-finance, which has allowed economic freedom and resulted in better audience ratings, sometimes better than commercial initiatives (Mastrini, 2013).

Besides living at the shadow of commercial broadcasting and the economic uncertainty, public media has suffered from poor management and a lack of editorial autonomy. On various occasions the President of the Republic has personally intervened and infringed on press freedom. And what can happen from the top happens quite a lot more moving down the political pyramid of power.

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<sup>10</sup> (2015, September) Personal interview with author in Mexico City.

In recent years, many Left wing Latin American governments (Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia) have reinforced the structure of public service media (Arroyo *et al.*, 2012; Waisbord, 2013), although populism is a persistent problem that calls into serious question the degrees to which this is actually ‘public service’ versus state interest. However, according to Waisbord (2013) public media in these countries has diversified content, offers information that is absent in commercial channels, and is expanding the presence of minority groups (e.g. indigenous minorities) who have previously lacked access. So, again, the picture is more nuanced than sometimes thought.

Learning from the Chilean and Brazilian experiences (Arroyo *et al.*, 2012; Fuenzalida, 2009), Mexican experts such as Florence Toussaint and Felipe Lopez Veneroni<sup>11</sup> propose giving the state institutions full constitutional autonomy (as they have been given to the central Bank and the electoral body) so they could decide on their internal resources and self-administration without governmental intervention. Thus far, however, the prospects are highly uncertain at best – and seemingly improbable due to the vested self-interests of commercial media and the chronic misuse of broadcasting for government propaganda, which benefits from keeping these operations dependent and thereby weak.

So far, Mexican experience shows that even when exist true commitment with public service provision from civil society and political elites, it becomes really hard to overcome inertial forces coming from the past (what Douglas North calls *path dependence*), which are embedded in the structures and practices that remind from the authoritarian period. In that sense, the most recently media reform approved in the country and the raised of the SPR in 2015 constituted some steps in the right direction, especially to ensure a more plural and transparent media service in the country. But, as I discusses above, there is a very long pathway to follow in order to endow Mexican public media with the economical and institutional provisions need it to fulfil their duty in the long-term.

At the end, Mexican and Latin American experience demonstrate that public service institutions did not travel from the West to the Global South, quiet to the contrary, they emerged in a very complex mix of values, ideas, experiences and necessities, which configured its features and determinate its functions. Nevertheless, novel institutional reforms and the right incentives to develop public media initiatives (in Brazil, Chile, Colombia or Mexico) may indeed contribute to establishing a true and genuine public service media within the region.

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<sup>11</sup> (2015, September) Personal interviews with author in Mexico City.

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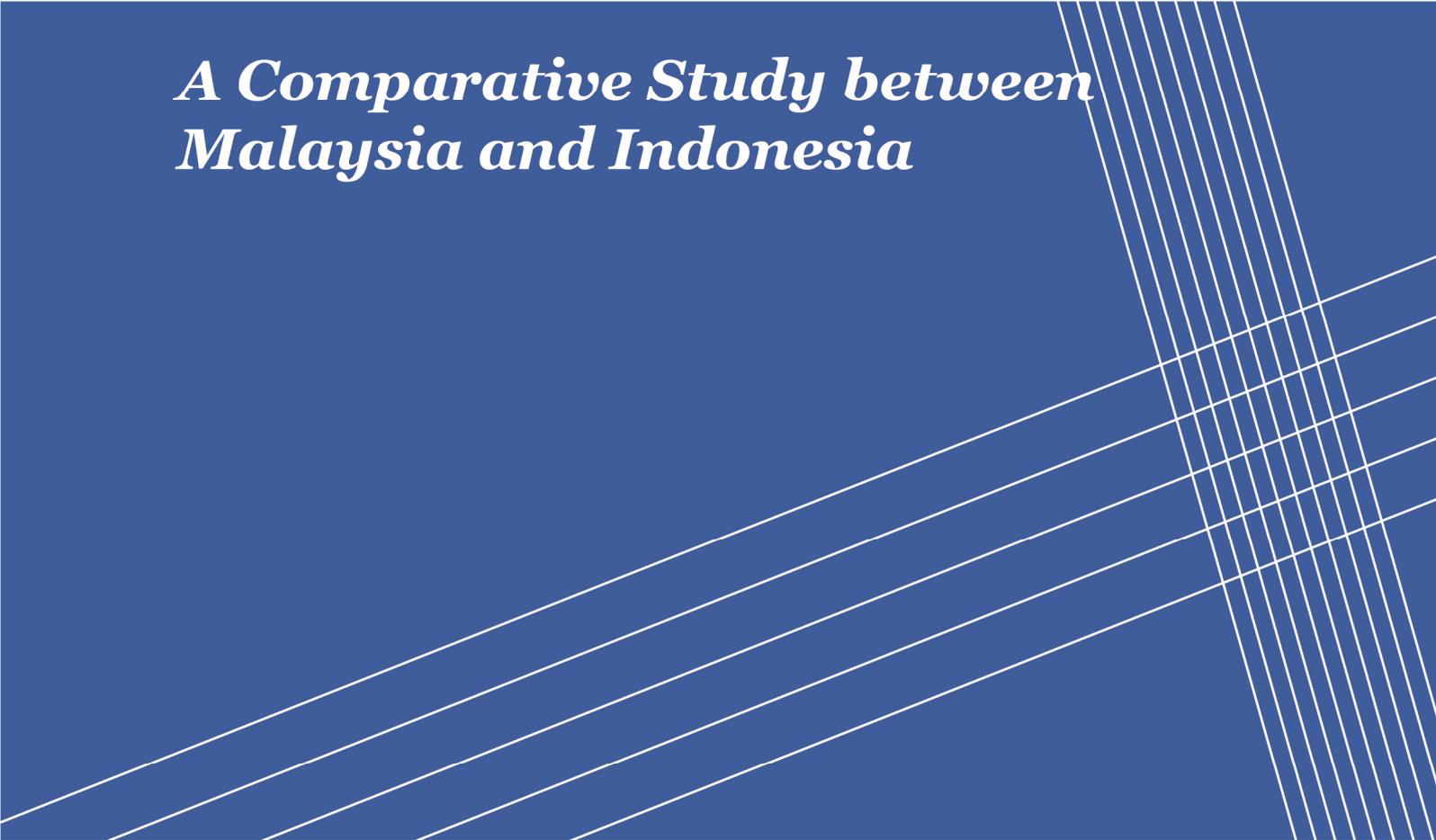
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# 4 PSM Initiatives in the Southeast Asian Region

*A Comparative Study between  
Malaysia and Indonesia*

A decorative graphic consisting of several parallel white lines that intersect to form a grid-like pattern, set against a solid blue background. The lines are oriented diagonally, with some running from the bottom-left towards the top-right, and others from the top-right towards the bottom-left.



# PSM Initiatives in the Southeast Asian Region

## *A Comparative Study between Malaysia and Indonesia*

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### Abstract

Most journalism in the Southeast Asian Region not about facts but about the interpretation of what seem to be facts. In recent years, the interpretation, influence, and pervasiveness of the news from different media organization are beyond doubt. Yet there are disagreements and conflicting views about just how the public is influenced by the media in general by the news. Journalism is often called the news business – the gathering, the processing and delivery of important information and further developments is inextricably entangled in commerce. Story selection is a decision-making and choice-making process and a hurried one no matter what the framework the newsroom adopts. As a result, considerations must be handled quickly and choices must be easily applicable. The objective of this study is to identify the challenges to the PSM development in systemic terms, which are examined in relation to two cases: Malaysia and Indonesia. Interviews were conducted with notable editors, chief editors and group editors from Malaysia and the Head of the Press Council and its members. This produced rich data on the current scenarios on how the issues 'dampen' the process of nation building in shaping the trajectory of the news, hence, sustaining a potentially transformative public sphere in tandem with their respective government policies.

*Keywords:* Malaysia, Indonesia, journalism, choice-making process, PSM development, KPI

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# **PSM Initiatives in the Southeast Asian Region**

## ***A Comparative Study between Malaysia and Indonesia***

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### **History and Background of Broadcasting in Malaysia and Indonesia**

The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines public service broadcasting (PSB) as “Broadcasting made, financed and controlled by the public, for the public”. PSB is neither commercial nor state owned nor it is supposed to be free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces (UNESCO, 2005). It is clear that neither Malaysia nor Indonesia practices public service broadcasting in the way the UNESCO defines it. While PSB in Malaysia is a state controlled national broadcasting with a developmental agenda, in Indonesia it is funded by the state government but is more open in terms of ideas and regulations. UNESCO (2005) attests that when PSB has “pluralism programming diversity, editorial independence, appropriate funding, accountability and transparency”, it can serve as a cornerstone of democracy. This view of PSB is relevant to media in the Southeast Asian region. Alternatively, it would be good to consider whether a public service broadcasting model of editorial process would produce more independent news judgments in the process of nation building in shaping the trajectory of the news for both countries (Roslina, 2014).

We begin this article with the description of Malaysia and Indonesia in terms of broadcasting history and the rules and regulations that govern these industries. Interviews<sup>1</sup> were conducted with notable editors, chief editors and group editors from Malaysia and the Head of the Press Council and its members.<sup>2</sup> In Malaysian context the key inquiries are drawn towards the processes and practices in the newsrooms of commercial media and how the

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<sup>1</sup> We employed in-depth interview method to collect data for the purpose of this study, with three of active members of the Press Council and KPI from Indonesia, and another three informants representing the three broadcasting houses in Malaysia. Two sets of questions were prepared for this research. The reason is because Malaysia does not practice PSM, so the questions were more drawn towards the practices in the newsrooms and its implication with government rules and regulations. The main questions that we asked the Indonesian informants from PSM industry were: a) what are the dilemmas and biggest hurdles for PSM to function in Indonesian contexts? And b) what interventions may help to advance the PSM cause? What is being done already, institutionally and in practice?

<sup>2</sup> List of informants:

Informant A: Group Deputy Managing Editor (TV3 – Malaysia)  
Informant B: Executive Editor for Strategy (Astro - Malaysia)  
Informant C: Deputy Director of News and Current Affairs (RTM - Malaysia)  
Informant D: Head of the Press Council (Indonesia)  
Informant E: Corporate Department, the Press Council (Indonesia)  
Informant F: Corporate Department, KPI (Indonesia)

government's rules and regulations inhibit these processes. Malaysia in short does not practice PSM but there is still hope as neighboring countries like Indonesia has embraced PSM practices and is moving forward to implement PSM practices in tandem with broadcast policies and regulations of the country. The Indonesian part reveals that media practitioners want media freedom that gives members of the public a much needed opportunity to be actively involved with the practice of media governance and co-regulation in accordance with democratic principles. The following sections explain these findings in detail.

## **The Malaysian Scenario**

This section provides a backdrop and context to broadcasting in general and the broadcasting stations in Malaysia in particular. As a fairly new democracy, Malaysia offers three major broadcasting houses either government or privately owned, such as, private company, Sistem Television Malaysia (TV 3); Astro, a pay-tv entity, and Radio Television Malaysia (RTM), the government owned television. They are as described briefly below.

### ***Sistem Television Malaysia (TV 3)***

Despite liberalization and privation of media, a free press without government restrictions is difficult to imagine in Malaysia. The government controls<sup>3</sup> the press and the publishing enterprises throughout Malaysia. Control is also achieved through ownership of the media itself as all media companies practice self-censorship for all news be it print or broadcast. This has always been a standard practice for all TV stations regardless of ownership (Informant A).

There are also strong political and economic ties between the government and the media. One of the initial efforts to transfer media ownership from the government to the private sector was to privatize Sistem Television Malaysia Berhad (STMB) or better known as TV 3 in 1983. Today this company is known as Media Prima Berhad, which is listed on the Main Board of Bursa Malaysia, is the leading integrated media investment group. It currently owns 100 per cent equity interest in TV 3, NTV 7, 8 TV and TV 9. In addition, Media Prima now owns 100 percent equity interest in The New Straits Times Press (Malaysia) (NSTP) Berhad, one of Malaysia's largest publisher which publishes three national newspapers; *The New Straits Times*, *Berita Harian* and *Harian Metro*. It also owns three radio networks, Fly FM, Hot FM and One FM (Media Prima Berhad, 2010).

### ***Astro***

Astro is the brand name of the Malaysian direct broadcast satellite pay television service which transmits digital satellite television and radio to households in Malaysia and Brunei. Astro is also an acronym for "All-Asian Satellite Television and Radio Operator" and is owned and operated by MEASAT Broadcast Network Systems, a wholly-owned subsidiary of

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<sup>3</sup> The Malaysian media is controlled by the government through a series of enactments and draconian laws such as the Printing Presses and Publication Act (1984), the Broadcasting Act of 1988 and its successor, Multimedia and Communication Act (CMA) 1998 (amended 2002), the Sedition Act (1948), and Official Secret Act (1972) and the famous Internal Security Act (1960).

Astro All Asia Networks plc. This company was de-listed from the Main Market of Bursa Malaysia Securities Bhd on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2010, following a successful take-over offer by Astro Holdings Sdn Bhd, a company owned by Tegas Sdn Bhd and its affiliates and Khazanah Nasional Berhad. It has operations at the All Asia Broadcast Centre located in Bukit Jalil, Kuala Lumpur and MEASAT in Cyberjaya (Astro, 2011).

The government issued a license to tycoon Tan Sri Ananda Krishnan<sup>4</sup> in 1995 to operate MEASAT. MEASAT in turn launched ASTRO, Malaysia's digital direct broadcast satellite service (*The Malaysian Times*, 2015).

Five of the seven stations are owned by Airtime Management and Programming Sdn Bhd (AMP). AMP additionally operates four 'FM' services that are available only via digital direct broadcast satellite (ASTRO). AMP is also a division of Krishnan's ASTRO. Not to forget, Krishnan also has control over the telecommunication company Binariang Bhd that owns two satellites Measat-1, Measat-2 and now Maxis Communications Berhad (S) (Shriver, 2003) which he recently sold 64.97 percent stake worth RM 34,13 billion (equivalent to USD 8.10 billion). After the launch of the Measat-1 satellite as part of Malaysia's commercialization of space, Astro commenced broadcasting in 1996 with an initial bouquet of twenty-two television and eight radio channels, which are its own channels (Astro, 2011).

### ***Radio Television Malaysia (RTM)***

Radio Television Malaysia or better known as RTM is a government owned television network. It broadcasts from its headquarters in Angkasapuri, Kuala Lumpur. RTM owns and operates a number of radio and television stations. At present, it runs six national, two international, 17 state, 11 district radio stations and two television channels – TV 1 and TV 2 (RTM, 2011).<sup>5</sup>

*Radio Malaysia* later became '*Rangkaian National*' (National Channel) on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1971 and became the nation's first 24 hour radio station. In 1978 '*Rangkaian Satu*' (Network One) was renamed '*Malaysia Television Satu*' (*Television Malaysia One*). A year later *Rangkaian Dua* was renamed '*Malaysia Television Dua*' (*Television Malaysia Two*). New separate logos for both networks were launched the same year. The following year, '*Televisyen Malaysia*' and '*Radio Malaysia*' merged to become '*Radio Television Malaysia – RTM*' (Penyiaran, 1987).

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<sup>4</sup> Krishnan is a long-time member of the board of Bank Negara and operates Malaysia's 'Sports Toto' (owned by Berjaya Group currently). He is also estimated with a net worth of over US \$9.7 billion. Malaysia's privately owned FM stations exhibit similar ownership patterns as television, and is largely controlled by Krishnan (*The Malaysian Times*, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> When it started transmission on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1946, RTM was established as Radio Malaya operating out of Singapore. On 31<sup>st</sup> August 1957 when Malaya received its independence, Radio Malaya was split into two with the original studios in Singapore taken over by a new station called Radio Singapura while Radio Malaya moved to Kuala Lumpur going on air from the new location on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1959 (RTM, 2010). Radio Malaya was later named Radio Malaysia on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1963 with its signature transmission trademark words '*Inilah Radio Malaysia*' (This is Radio Malaysia). Services rendered under Malaysia Television (Malaysia TV) started on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1963 in the Klang Valley and Selangor. The 10 month old Television Singapura (Singapore Television) which was launched on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1963 became part of Televisyen Malaysia (Malaysia Television) till 1965 when Singapore broke away from Malaysia (Penyiaran, 1987).

As of 2007, RTM controlled 17 percent of the television viewership market (in terms of audience reached) in the country behind Media Prima with 54 percent and Astro with 29 percent. But of late, neither RTM or Astro has made the top 20 television programs (AC Nielsen, 2011). This is important as the top 20 programs as rated by AC Nielsen will also determine the advertising patterns for the broadcast stations. The higher the stations sit in the rating system, the higher the rates are for advertisers and this would mean higher revenue for the stations.

## **The Indonesian Scenario**

The Indonesian television history illustrates a medium finding its own way, going from one state-produced official channel to a multiplicity of commercial channels. It includes periods of time when advertising was banned as contrary to traditional values.

### ***Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI)***

Beginning its operations in 1964 as the state's broadcaster, *Televisi Republik Indonesia* remained a major player despite the growing importance of commercial television. Since it enjoyed a longstanding monopoly with a mission of promoting the official viewpoint, it long remained in a state of stagnation. The Indonesian government early on recognized the importance of television as a policy instrument and a tool to promote national unity in their far-flung islands. This insight drove the program to provide free television sets to villages. In 1974 Indonesia launched its communications satellite, *Palapa* (Sanskrit for unity) to be able to reach the entire country, (Indonesia, 2015). TVRI was always hampered by a small budget, and the budget situation became even tighter in 1981, when the administration banned advertising from television. This was in reaction to the effect that the Western, urban, and consumer-oriented advertising were having on village life (Indonesia, 2015).

### ***Popular Private Television Stations in Indonesia***

The rest of the television stations introduced in this paper are privately owned and follows the highest ranked in terms of viewership. It is worth noting that the five of Indonesia's private, Jakarta-based television stations - SCTV, RCTI, Indosiar, Antevision, and TPI - had ties to the Suharto family but despite that, the new openness created bolder programming, even before Suharto stepped down. The stations also did investigative reporting on ongoing issues and political talk shows that would have been unheard of in the New Order (Indosiar, 2013).

- a. ***Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia (RCTI)***. Indonesia's first commercial television station, *Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia (RCTI)*, began operations in March, 1988, broadcasting first in Jakarta but later throughout the country. In comparison to TVRI, advertising was the very backbone of its existence. RCTI based its operations on corporate investments in the country and a huge consumer market with increasing amounts of money to spend. This gave them a greater advertising budget for their maneuvers. Since the only legal source of news was still TVRI, RCTI, and other private broadcasters created what they called 'information programs' until the Broadcast law of 1996 legitimated their news programs. RCTI carried several daily programs - *Morning*

*Nuances, News at Noon throughout Indonesia and Evening Bulletin.* These news programs, which had to compete for advertisers, carried higher entertainment values than TVRI which made them also, more popular (RCTI, 2012).

- b. *Surya Citra Television (SCTV).*** SCTV began broadcasting a few years later, on August 24, 1990 in Surabaya, East Java. Its news programs focused on national news, with international news accounting for about 10 percent. In August 1990, a third private station was licensed with the proviso that it focus on education. This station was *Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia* (TPI). It cooperated with TVRI extensively, with some of its advertising revenue going to TVRI (SCTV, 2012).
- c. *Andalas Televisi (Anteve, ANTV).*** A fourth commercial station was licensed in 1993, *Andalas Televisi* (Anteve, ANTV). It attempted to profile itself in the areas of news, sports and music, and it reached a smaller audience than the others (ANTV, 2014).
- d. *Indosiar.*** It was the newcomer in 1995 and had to struggle for a viewer share. There was fierce competition among these stations as they were quite a bit homogenous.
- e. *Metro TV.*** An all-news TV channel, Metro TV, began in Jakarta in November, 2000. Besides the normal programming, it carried programs in Mandarin, reflecting the easing of restrictions on Chinese language and cultural media.

## **Organization, Structures, and Policies of Media**

The organization and structures of the Malaysian channels are simple with the usage of several main languages as in Malay (TV1, TV2, TV3 and Astro Awani), English (TV2, TV3 and Astro Super Sports), Chinese and Cantonese for (TV2, Astro Asian Entertainment Channel, and Astro Loh Wai Toi), and Tamil (TV2 and Astro Vaanavil). The usage of these languages also caters to the diverse Malaysian audience (see, Appendix 1).

In terms of viewership (AC Nielsen), TV3 under Media Prima is standing as the main station that the people prefer at 26 percent. The TV9, another Media Prima channel has 8 percent viewership, followed by TV2 under RTM with 7 percent viewership. The rest of the channels are 8TV (Media Prima), 6 percent; TV1 (RTM), 5 percent; NTV7 (Media Prima), 5 percent. And lastly Astro Ria, Astro Prima and Astro Ceria, all Malay channels under the Astro umbrella with 4 percent, 3 percent, and 2 percent respectively (see, Appendix 2).

In comparison, Indonesia has 41 television stations to date with an approximate 13,750,000 viewership. A few of these television stations have undergone changes with the times in terms of name and ownership especially the privately owned television stations for example RCTI, Global TV and SCTV, just to name a few. Almost all the private television stations focus on general entertainment with an exception of TVOne and Metro TV that gives focus on news (Appendix 3). TVRI as per RTM, as state broadcasters have not changed much in recent years. The viewership for Indonesia is averagely distributed across the board with RCTI and MNCTV, which is under Media Nusantara Citra, receiving 14.9 percent and 14.1 percent respectively, while SCTV which is under the banner of Surya Citra Media has 13.6 percent viewership (see, Appendix 4).

## Malaysian Regulations and Acts

As it is with the local press, so evidently, local television has seen remarkable changes taking place over the past decade. Television was first introduced in December 1963 with the help of technical consultants from Canada. The initial set-up comprised of a single channel national network, under the control of the RTM or the department of broadcasting which, in turn, was one of three departments under the control of the Ministry of Information. In October 1969 a second channel was launched, also under the direct control of the Ministry of Information and guided by the same directives as those which governed the operations of the first channel (Karthigesu, 1991 in Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani). The directives are:

- i. to explain in depth and with the widest possible coverage, the policies and the programs of the government in order to ensure maximum understanding by the public
- ii. to stimulate public interest and opinion in order to achieve changes in line with the requirements of the government

These directives have remained virtually unchanged and have informed broadcasting policy. For the discussion of this paper, the researcher has quoted only two acts which are specific to the broadcasting in Malaysia, which is the Broadcasting Act 1988 and the Multimedia and Communication Act (CMA) 1998 that governs the online media that currently all broadcasting stations subscribe to as the need to be savvy is paramount in order to capture the online audience.

### **a. *Broadcasting Act of 1988***

The Broadcasting Act 1988 continues to play a crucial role in the development of Malaysian broadcasting. The act as it stands is both stringent and inflexible, and bestows enormous powers on the government to determine the type of television made available to the Malaysian public. The introduction of the act in 1988 was clearly in anticipation of the further commercialization of broadcasting, especially television. Indeed, in the midst of the supposed 'deregulation' of broadcasting, the broadcasting act now gives the Minister of Information or now renamed the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia, virtually total powers to determine who will and will not broadcast and the nature of the broadcast material. Under the act, any potential broadcaster would need to apply for a license from the minister beforehand. On paper, this means that one individual has the power to decide. Further, part III, section 10, sub-section (1) of the act (emphasis added), states that 'it shall be the duty of the licensee to ensure that the broadcasting matter by him complies with the direction given, from time to time, by the minister.' The October 1996, amendments made to this already stringent piece of legislation were aimed at taking into account the introduction of new services, such as cable and satellite television, satellite radio, pay-tv and video-on-demand.

### **b. *Multimedia and Communication Act (CMA) 1998***

The Broadcasting Act of 1988 was changed to the Multimedia and Communication Act (CMA) 1998. To date it has been amended twice, once in 2002 and again in 2004 (the Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia, 2004). The scope and coverage for this act are strictly for: (a) Direct to Home (DTH) subscription broadcasting

and/or video on demand services, whether via satellite or cable, and (b) Terrestrial Free-to-Air TV and Radio (The Malaysian Communications & Multimedia Act Content Code, 2004).

The main objective of these specific broadcast guidelines is to ensure continued reliable standards of content dissemination by broadcasters by accordance with expectations of audience and internationally recognized good practice of electronic media and journalism. This Code is a manifestation of a paradigm change that was brought about by technological advancements in the broadcasting industry. It is acknowledged that compliance with the Content Code is what sets the standards for Content and not the other way around whereby content takes precedence over standards. Malaysian Broadcasters recognize that creative freedom carries with it the responsibility of ensuring that not only are the rights of the children protected but also that of viewers and listeners in general. This necessitates the upholding of ethical and professional practices in the conduct of their business operations toward fulfilling social responsibility.

Currently in Malaysia, there has not been any initiatives towards PSM or have they been and demand for it. In the future if Malaysia were to embrace the idea of PSM like our neighbor, Indonesia, much must be done in terms of rules, regulation and also mindset for the idea to work and more importantly for transition to happen smoothly.

### **Indonesian Regulatory Bodies**

Media governing bodies and machineries were established to monitor the media and creative industry such as the Council of Journalism (*Dewan Pers*) and the Broadcasting Commission of Indonesia (*Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia, KPI*). They are effectively perhaps the most important and influential independent regulating bodies today. The appointees in these agencies are elected through an annual voting system from three professional groups namely, journalists, media owners and academicians.

Since 1966, *Dewan Pers* has been predominantly formed by three professional associations: Indonesian Journalists Association - *Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia (PWI)*, Journalistic Television Bond - *Ikatan Jurnalistik Televisi (IJTVI)* and Indonesian Journalistic Association - *Asosiasi Jurnalistik Indonesia (AJI)* (Abu Bakar, A. 2008). The main purpose of *Dewan Pers* is to serve all public interests as collectively defined by the Indonesian media laws but more specifically, because of their 'independent' nature, they are expected to ensure the freedom of the press, uphold ethical media practices, mediate and provide solution to any media-related crisis involving the public as well as promoting media education and literacies [*Buku Kecil Wartawan, 2013 (A Journalist Pocket Book)*].

Meanwhile, the KPI was founded in the aftermath of the Indonesian Reformation which marked the end of the New Order. Its conception was the brainchild of UU32/2002, a set of broadcasting laws that provide, amongst others, an opportunity for/call for the formation of the broadcasting commission to govern and regulate the broadcast media systems in two broad capacities. One, as KPID, which is responsible for the regulation and development at the district level including awarding broadcasting rights and permits; the other as KPI, which

is responsible for the issuance of broadcast licenses to radio and television stations; and it reports to the House of Commons (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat RI) and the President on media violations particularly related to journalism (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 11 Tahun, 2006). Both KPI and Dewan Pers have a working MoU with regards to enforcement of broadcasting laws and code of ethics (Ndolu, 2009).

### **Critical Issues of Media Freedom**

In Malaysia, the decision making process in the Malaysia newsroom could be unique to this country but they are also characteristics to other newsroom studies done internationally (Faridah, 1995; Faridah, et. al. 2012; Gaziano & Coulson, 1988; Joseph, 1983; Lowrey & Chang, 2010; Gans, 1980). In the traditional practice of the newsrooms here in Malaysia, decisions on what is going to make the news lies in the hands of the management. Although the reporter and the editor might have their personal biasness and/or professional news judgement, the organizational news-gathering routines that have been long established limits of time and space in the news gathering process. This coupled with the economic constraints on news production, the flow of information, communication technologies and most importantly the ideological factors and ownership issues also ‘dampen’ the decision making process of the newsrooms.

The adage of editorial independence therefore is non-existent as there are underlying issues between editors and their superiors, sideways (between departments) and downwards (with reporters acceptance of editorial change). However, despite the lack of editorial independence, these news organizations continue to pursue the aim of objectivity in news reporting – of disinterested, unbiased and factual reporting of the news.

It is clear that RTM follows the government model in which public broadcasting is controlled directly by the government or by the political majority. This system is similarly practiced in France, Western Europe, Greece, Portugal and Spain. TV 3 and Awani on the other hand use the professional model epitomized by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), where a strong tradition has developed that broadcasting should be largely insulated from political control and run by broadcasting professionals.

The Malaysian media to a certain extent is pressured by the structure and the people who make up the structure, to be biased and virtually silent on issues critical of the government and those deemed sensitive to the general public, especially on race and religion. With all this going on in the media industry in Malaysia and people who assume the on goings in the newsroom, it is not surprising that it is ranked amongst the most stringent in the world.

In a nutshell in terms of ownership, TV3 and RTM stakeholders are clear cut and there has been much change in terms of decision making and news presentation with the change of Prime Ministers especially in TV3 as they have an appointee from the Prime Minister’s office that sits in the newsroom to ‘help’ make decisions. Nevertheless having said that, Informant A feels that the powers that be “*do not micro-manage the newsroom*”.

In Indonesia, the common dilemmas and biggest hurdles for PSM to function is that the media practitioners want media freedom that gives members of the public the opportunity to be actively involved with the practice of media governance and co-regulation in accordance with democratic principles. Although the informants claim that the process of liberating the Indonesian media started since the beginning of the New Order in 1966 but it is still an ongoing process.

The amendments to the rules and regulations that are done by the Press Council (Dewan Pers) and the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia, KPI) are effectively perhaps the most important and influential independent regulating bodies today that work for this system (Dinas Syariat Islam, 2009). The appointees in these agencies are elected through an annual voting system from three professional groups namely, journalists, media owners and academicians. Their main goal of regulation of the media content is to achieve an ethical and independent freedom of press, of expression along the legitimacy of existing Indonesian laws on media, broadcasting and human rights.

The Press Council and KPI are both tasked to oversee a series of progressive media laws doing their job to protect the interests and independence of various parties in the industry regardless whether it is PSM or broadcasting as a whole. There are clear officially written rules and regulations for both the Press Council and KPI.

They also ensure ethical journalistic codes are being practiced in the broadcast media industry which in turn will promote greater sense of media governance and regulation; and ultimately public satisfaction. All informants (D, E, and F) appear to agree that there ought to be better informal coordination between officials, the broadcast media industry and members of the public whereby co-regulatory decisions may be made through joint discussions but still along the established statutory rulings of each organization.

The Press Council and KPI clearly accommodate difference in opinions as a style of governance. They both hold special meetings depending on the case or current issues for both the PSM and the broadcasting media industry. Interestingly, they have different modes of meetings as well as frequency of meeting. The former has lesser meeting frequency than the latter. However, the former seems to be making up for it by holding monthly plenary meetings which the latter does not commit to. The formality and frequency of their meetings are dependent on the types of case or current issues that arise.

Overall, most of the informants think that the media should be free but also be responsible. Importantly, they believe that there must be some limits on how much freedom of expression should be allowed to the Indonesian broadcast media. It is apparent that most of the Press Council and KPI informants feel that it is time to revise the media law in Indonesia again.

## **Assessments and Recommendations**

Clearly the Malaysian and Indonesian broadcasting systems move on different platforms. Even after fifty-eight years of independence, Malaysia is relatively a young democracy where

the founding fathers felt, either rightly or wrongly, that the fourth estate needed to be guided in the early years. The important fact that the first indigenous Malayan government came into power in 1957 against the backdrop of a nine year old communist insurgency, must be remembered as it had arrived at the heels of the Second World War. The nascent Alliance Government had to maintain calm and harmony in a multi-racial and multi-religious society that had been rent in more ways than one, hence the curb on media. The media, print and broadcast alike has not neglected journalistic values or been intolerant of the stand of those oppose to the government of the day.

In truth, the media has found it difficult to wean itself of news affecting the government or its view point, given this important historical background. Therefore, in general, the traditional practice within the media organizations that most editorial and other decisions lie in the hands of the management. And when the management's hands are tied by the policies that camouflage the newsroom practices which in turn dictate the decision making process, it becomes less democratic. Most often than not, not adhering to these 'guidelines' would mean treading on thin ice.

While in the neighboring front, although this preliminary study has shown an important aspect in media policy studies, that is, whilst the laws are seeming enforced, they do not necessarily benefit the media regulating bodies as informed by lamentable comments by, for instance, Informant D, "*The Government is reluctant to hand over the authority to KPI as an independent body,*" and Informant F, "*In Indonesia, the so-called independence of the KPI is merely a lip-service for the Government to be seen as democratic.*" When the state is in control of the structure and financing of the Press Council and KPI, it seems inevitable that those designated policies and laws to safeguard media 'publicness' as it were, will not be as effective as they can be. The failure to regulate the broadcast media industry is really frustrating the officials who, if it can be suggested here, are feeling cuckolded and demoralized by the state's wrong-doing.

Informant F whilst candidly expressed the dilemma of Indonesian regulators, is urging them to remain 'aggressive' "*The Press Council must be courageous to be vocal with the Government*" whilst at the same time work harder to "*develop communication between the press, the public and the government*". The most heartening resolution is certainly their struggle against media collusion in the broadcasting industry. Informant F's call for the government to improve its broadcasting laws is deafening because it suggests that the regulators have "*never been capable of discharging its executive powers like a truly independent body*". This is the paradox of the governance and regulation on the overall Indonesian broadcasting industry.

The public broadcasting system which comprises of the state-owned radio (Radio Republik Indonesia - RRI) and television station (Televisi Republik Indonesia - TVRI) have been the official media channels of the State since independence. Of the two, TVRI has had more structural transformation but like most developing nation-states, it is considerably outnumbered and outclassed by private media enterprises' pay-per-view system. It appears today that the state-owned TVRI and RRI have lost their roles as the nation's 'official voice'; overlooked by the public/stakeholders; trapped by institutional issues like interdepartmental coordination and commitment and the flaring ethos of corruption and collusion (Nugroho,

Siregar, & Laksmi, 2012). The 'absence' of a clear state media policy to regulate the commercial/profit-driven logic of media industry have resulted in the inevitable, that is, its 'displacement' by the ever-growing media privatization due to market forces, symptomatic media monopoly and oligopoly and gradual liberalization of the public sector and weakening of the public sphere – (for example, public may get more channels but less content options). Therefore it is still an uphill climb for the PSB in adjacent Indonesia be fully realized or even move towards PSM.

To conclude, transformation in the PSM system in Indonesia as in any transformation program demands agility, adaptability and efficiency not only from communication professionals but also regulators that 'rule' them.

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## Appendices

Table 1. List of local television channels in Malaysia, January–September 2012

Channel	Name	Language	Owner	Group	Type
1	TV 1	Malay	RTM	Free-to-air	Terrestrial
2	TV 2				
3	TV 3		STMB		
4	Astro Ria				
5	Astro Super Sports	English	Astro	Astro Channels	Satellite
6	Astro Asian Entertainment Channel	Chinese			
7	Astro Loh Wai Toi	Cantonese			
8	Astro Vaanavil	Tamil			

Source: AC Nielsen (2011). "TV Viewership Report," proprietary data not published.

Table 2. Viewing patterns in Malaysia, January–September 2012

Position	Channel	Group	Share of total viewing (percent)
1	TV 3	Media Prima	26
2	TV 9	Media Prima	8
3	TV 2	RTM	7
4	8 TV	Media Prima	6
5	TV 1	RTM	5
6	NTV 7	Media Prima	5
7	Astro Ria	Astro Holdings Sdn Bhd	4
8	Astro Prima	Astro Holdings Sdn Bhd	3
9	Astro Ceria	Astro Holdings Sdn Bhd	2

Source: AC Nielsen (2011). "TV Viewership Report," proprietary data not published.

Table 3. List of local TV channels in Indonesia, January–September 2012

Channel	Name	Owner	Genre	Type	Notes
1	TVRI	Indonesian government	Government	Public	
2	RCTI	Media Nusantara Citra	General Entertainment	Commercial	
3	MNCTV				Formerly known as "TPI" from 23 January 1991 until 20 October 2010
4	Global TV				Formerly known as "TVG" from 8 October 2002 until 15 January 2005
5	SCTV	Surya Citra Media	General Entertainment	Commercial	Formerly known as "Surabaya Central Televisi (SCTV)" from 24 August 1990 until 23 August 1993
6	Indosiar				
7	antv	VIVA Media Asia	General Entertainment	Commercial	Formerly known as "ANTeve" from 1 March 1993 until 28 February 2003
8	TVOne		News		Formerly known as " <a href="#">Lativi</a> " from 30 July 2002 until 14 February 2008
9	Metro TV	Media Group	News	Commercial	
10	Trans7	Trans Media Corporation	General Entertainment	Commercial	Formerly known as "TV7" from 25 November 2001 until 15 December 2006
11	TransTV				

12	RTV	Rajawali Corporation	General Entertainment	Commercial	Formerly known as "B-Channel" from 1 November 2009 until 2 May 2014.
13	NET	Indika Group	General Entertainment	Commercial	

Source: Nielsen, "TV Viewership Report," proprietary data not published.

#### Appendix 4

Table 4. Viewing patterns in Indonesia, January–September 2012

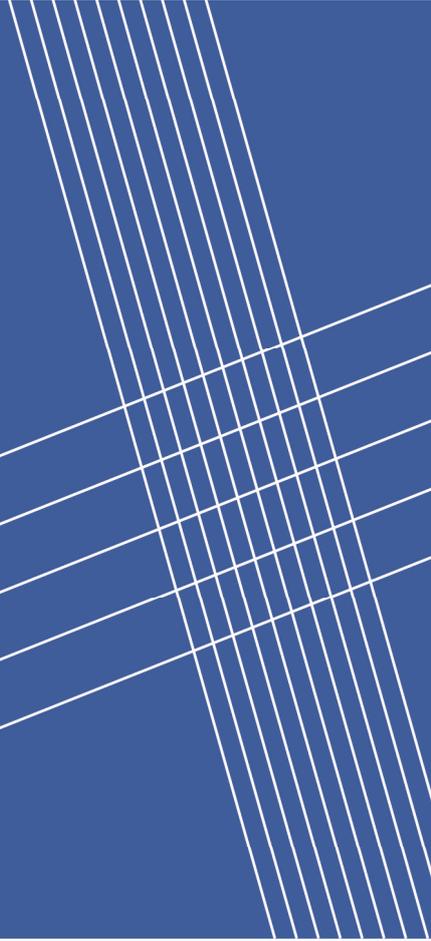
Position	Channel	Group	Share of total viewing (percent)
1	RCTI	Media Nusantara Citra	14.9
2	MNCTV	Media Nusantara Citra	14.1
3	SCTV	Surya Citra Media	13.6
4	Trans7	Trans Corp	12.1
5	Trans	Trans Corp	11.6
6	IVM	Emtek	11

Source: Nielsen, "TV Viewership Report," proprietary data not published.



# 5 Taiwan's Public Service Broadcasting

*Devoted Professionalism,  
Representative Civil Society,  
and Weak Governance*

A decorative graphic consisting of several thin, white, parallel lines that intersect to form a grid-like pattern. The lines are set against a solid blue background and extend from the right edge of the page towards the center.



# Taiwan's Public Service Broadcasting *Devoted Professionalism, Representative Civil Society, and Weak Governance*

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## Abstract

Public broadcasting in Taiwan was originally one over-the-air with generalist channel characterized by the impartiality, diversity and knowledge-driven programming the channel has provided. Although the fixed-amount of state appropriation limits what is possible to achieve, today the Public Television Service Foundation (PTS) seeks every opportunity to transition into public service media (i.e. not only broadcasting, but also online). This project has gained momentum through a national Special Budget for bridging the digital gap, and supports accountability of Taiwan's media system to the public. The National Development Fund has been a sustainable funding mechanism that is intended to extend to 4K Ultra HD programming. This paper shows that despite the external challenges still to be overcome, the internal reform of PTS highlighted several management issues. PTS introduced international standards for operations and practice in governance, journalistic ethics, worker participation, and the nomination process for its governing body. In the conclusion, we offer recommendations for optimal reform that will ensure Taiwan PSB as a distinctive approach in the landscape of East Asian public media, with the potential to be a useful model elsewhere too.

*Keywords:* Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union, broadcasting regulation, digitization, media ecosystem, public service broadcasting, state broadcasters, Taiwan, trade union

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A. Rahman & G. F. Lowe (Eds.), Public Service Media Initiatives in the Global South



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# **Taiwan's Public Service Broadcasting *Devoted Professionalism, Representative Civil Society, and Weak Governance***

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## **History and Background of PSB in Taiwan**

For more than 20 years, Taiwan's broadcasting has been dominated by cable and positioned as an extremely commercialized system. Taiwan public service broadcasting was founded in 1997 to support achieving media democratization and tackling a crisis of identity and diversity as part of the government's media development. A bipartisan political consensus was reached in 2006 that resulted in adopting a corporate group system whereby several service providers and operators co-exist under an umbrella arrangement called the Taiwan Broadcasting System Group (TBS), and the new corporate structure is governed by Public Television Service Foundation (PTS), although it continues to claim a small portion of the total audience share market (0.13%, 0.29% respectively, for two TBS' main channels, TVR).

Taiwan's media system has been structured by technological advancement and users are increasingly tech-savvy since 2000. The broadcasting system did not take the leading role in developing digital service expansion. The weakness of broadcasting is shown by comparing Taiwan with other East Asian countries (Television Asia, Satellite & Cable Annual Guide, 2003/4). The popularity of analog cable broadcasting has persisted since 2003, and even in 2014 is nearly 60% (NCC, 2015). There is not much room for the broadcasting system as such to leverage the transition into digital broadcasting today. Moreover, the terrestrial over-the-air TV broadcasting market share is diminished by a highly competitive pricing structure for cable service, which offers many more channels as well. Even when DTT was fully launched in 2012, it lacked a business model for multimedia and interactive TV services.

## **The Expanding Media Landscape**

The independence of media in Taiwan is satisfactory according to Reporters without Borders in the *World Press Freedom Index 2014*. On the contrary, the involvement of Chinese investors and allied entrepreneurs has been an impending threat to quality journalism, meaning an independent press. The revenue of mass media has severely eroded in recent years (Carat Media, 2015). While the Internet is claiming its growing share of ad revenues, (NCC, 2014), the largest share of revenue still belongs to television. A recent phenomenon is

streaming video and video on demand (VOD), which is taking the lead in preferred means of reception for entertainment, information and news for the younger generation.

Mobile media is growing rapidly. According to a recent survey, Taiwan’s mobile internet activities indicate about one-fifth of the population is using it to watch television (see, Figure 1). Searching for information is approaching one-third of the population, and social media use now exceeds half the population.

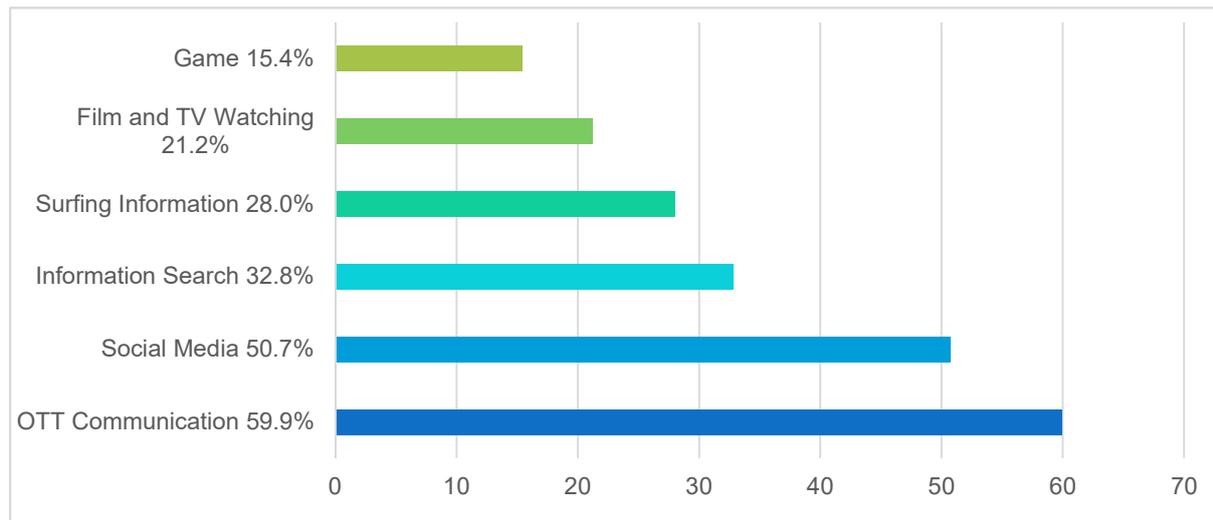


Figure 1. The Major Activities adopted by Mobile Internet Users in Taiwan (source: Institute for the Information Industry, 2015)

The demography of the user profile is studied by the Taiwan Network Information Center (TWNC). The 2014 survey results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Activities of Broadband Users above Age 12 in Taiwan (Selective)

(%)	On-line Film	Transaction	E-mail	Social Media	Communications	TV Program	Game
	23.30	1.12	13.61	64.31	51.45	2.81	15.47
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	21.22	1.17	12.85	60.45	46.46	2.53	22.05
Female	25.40	1.07	14.38	68.18	56.46	3.08	8.87
<b>Age</b>							
12-14	44.07	--	5.14	79.72	49.79	3.55	43.34
15-19	38.23	--	9.95	85.08	58.69	4.74	30.77
20-24	42.03	1.62	11.35	80.24	56.04	2.57	13.49
25-34	23.81	1.14	14.13	72.51	59.66	3.03	19.01
33-44	16.09	1.05	17.19	63.82	54.99	2.04	10.45
45-54	15.80	2.33	13.73	50.56	45.39	2.79	8.18
55 up	11.40	0.53	14.34	36.77	32.08	2.19	7.14

Source: Taiwan Network Information Center, 2014.

The data show that Taiwan's TV industry is losing viewers because users are watching films online for free, even if the action is often illegal (i.e. without paying a subscription). Traditional TV and video service delivery networks registered with National Communications Commission (NCC) are not growing in the digital age, as Table 2 shows.

Table 2. Brief Statistics of TV, Radio and Multimedia Platform Operators (Q1/2015)

Enterprise Classification	Radio	Television	Direct Satellite Broadcasting Service Operators	Satellite Broadcasting Program Suppliers	Cable Radio and TV Industry	Multimedia Content Transporting Platform Service
No. Operator	171	5	6	112	3 (MSO)	1 (IPTV)
Sub-system	--	--	--	--	56	--
Channel	171	20 (5HD 15 SD)	--	173 (Domestic) 115 (Foreign)	100-150	178
Set Availability	100%	14.24%	0.38%	--	80%	12.3%

Sources: NCC, 2015; NCC, 2013.

Liberalized in 1997, Taiwan's telecommunication system has been moving gradually and smoothly into the convergence age since 2010. Table 3 compares Taiwan with a range of important Asian markets and indicates the share of digital subscriber line (DSL) subscribers with broadband households is now much larger than for Cable.

Table 3. The Asia-Pacific Comparisons on Broadband Penetration

Markets	TV HHs	Multi-channel Subscribers	BB HHs	Multi-channel Subs/TV HH (%)	BB HHs/Hs (%)	Share of Cable BB HHs	Share of DSL BB HHs
China	398,840,300	253,681,280	155,703,000	63.6	37.1	4.4	70.7
Japan	49,414,644	14,572,118	37,450,112	29.5	75.6	17.2	10.9
S. Korea	18,328,206	24,911,586	17,771,964	135.9	96.1	27.0	10.4
Philippines	15,864,339	2,466,785	2,575,995	15.6	12.3	5.2	64.5
Taiwan	8,097,102	6,426,310	4,855,477	79.4	70.6	19.6	45.0
Hong Kong	2,375,532	2,216,859	2,160,799	93.3	90.0	9.1	20.9
Singapore	1,211,174	958,474	1,154,837	79.1	95.0	46.5	22.8

Source: ContentAsia, 2014, originally provided by SNL Kagan as of December 2013.

## Organizations, Structures, and Regulatory Reforms

During this revolution in Taiwan's media system, social critics requested the State to tackle the challenge of foreign audiovisual culture, the so-called Korean wave, and to strengthen media democratization. At the same time, broadband has been associated with increasing piracy and digital theft, etc. In their first ruling term, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) decided to transform the state-owned broadcasting organization into a public-owned corporation in 2004, according to the *Presidential Candidate White Paper of Communication Policy*. The merging of PTS with the Chinese Television System (CTS, a state-controlled TV with commercials) was finally effected by a compromise reached among different political parties, academics, non-governmental organizations, and media professionals in 2006 (see Table 2 in Appendices).

To reshape the public service broadcasting sector, the *Bill for Transferring Official Shares of Broadcasting Enterprises* was born as a featured aspect of the Public Television Act in 2006 (named the Taiwan Broadcasting System, TBS). The mandate for PSB was extended into entertainment while continuing the emphasis on educational and informational content, as well: "Article 11" (*Public Television Act*, amended by Dec. 30, 2009) defines the purposes of PTS to be non-profit and educational, and the service belongs to all citizens. The baseline was incorporated complementing to "Article 14" (*Bill for Transferring Official Share of Broadcasting Enterprises*). The bill contained the following clauses:

1. PSB shall incorporate and integrate the resource of PTS to facilitate the digitalization of terrestrial TV, and to utilize the digital TV frequency efficiently.
2. PSB shall deliver programs and channels that are diverse, high-quality, and in the interest of the public. The programs and channels shall cater to children, women, seniors, disabled, and other special interest groups' demands, and fulfill a lifelong education goal. It may set up dedicated channels if necessary.
3. PSB shall not have commercials during children programming slots.
4. PSB shall have no placement of programming and commercials by any political party or religious organization.
5. PSB shall allocate disbursements to specified purposes.
6. PSB is obligated to report its appropriation and performance while evaluation and review are conducted by the supervising body.
7. The state tendering Hakka TV, Indigenous TV, and Taiwan Macroview TV should be exclusively allocating concessions for the PTS Foundation.

The ten-year struggle to expand public service broadcasting from a complementary role to a leading role was temporarily realized after the transfer. The local interpretation of PSB was characterized by the following interventions:

1. Support local productions
2. Keep abreast of digital broadcasting technology
3. Provide diversity of programs
4. Be accountable to the public
5. Take responsibility for research and training
6. Represent Taiwan's audiovisual industry and culture internationally.

To reassert, Taiwan's PTS was established by this Act that came into effect in 1997 and was intended to facilitate media democratization. Its size was halved by a political decision regarding the multichannel cable service and freedom of press, which was glorified at the time. Politicians and academics adopted American-style PBS in the legislation: government appropriation should be reduced by 50 percent by the 5th fiscal year, and fundraising by civilian donations should be the main source of income. Taiwan's PTS successfully passed the first three-year assessment, but turned to follow the European Style because donations were not sufficient. Currently, the revised Public Television Act in 2001 has demonstrated its strength in following the mandated principles points and complying with international standards (Mendel, 2000). The standards include:

1. Fiscal guarantee (Article 2, set the minimum, USD\$ 26 million)
2. Journalistic autonomy protection: (Article 27, covered the primetime news became part of the public services in 2001)
3. Collective appointment of the Board of Governors (Article 13)
4. Clear mandate for public service (Article 11)
5. Trustee for comprehensive business activities (Article 10)
6. Accountability request (Article 34).

After setting PTS as an ideal model, similar functions of the government-owned broadcasting service were also transformed. Those services include education, overseas provision, public services for traffic, emergencies, publicity, official press releases, etc. The whole picture of Taiwanese PSB is evolving into PSM with comparative unity.

### **Transitioning from PSB to PSM**

The digitalization of PSB is the first step to transform public service broadcasters from a one-to-many model to a two-way interactive model. According to the *Presidential Candidate White Paper of Communication Policy* in 2000, before digital TV arrives Taiwan needs to overhaul its TV industry. The policy was first aimed at two state-owned TV stations, TTV and CTS. These operations were to be transformed into a public television system as a PSB entity. Many technocrats criticized this policy and emphasized that diversity and freedom of speech should be introduced by digital media. However, the lack of investment and effort on digitization in terrestrial TV service needed for the digitization would not come down naturally.

The private sector failed to lead the digitalization of terrestrial service, and the Democratic Progress Party (DPP) government reconsidered Taiwan's terrestrial TV structure and digitization strategy in 2003. According to several commissioned research studies funded by the Government Information Office (GIO), and aligned with recommendations from the Advisory Group of Broadcasting Law Amendment and Taiwan DTV Committee, a consensus was reached for the following proposal:

1. Put more public funding into digital terrestrial broadcasting to subsidize revenues;
2. Dismantle the vertical integration of the terrestrial TV industry in the long run and create a neutral platform for new service providers; and
3. Innovate digital contents and services before switching hardware from analog signals.

Kicked off by this proposal, PTS was commissioned by the GIO under the approval of the Legislative Yuan (Parliament) with a budget of US\$10 million. This fund was divided by three sub-projects: US\$8.3 million on the common platform (including network, mast and site engineering), US\$0.6 million on the Multimedia Home Platform (MHP) trial plan, and US\$ 1.1 million on programming cost used on mobile and interactive digital services.

The purposed projects were extended to High-Definition TV (HDTV) program later. Following the technology trend, Taiwan’s government decided to develop HDTV in 2005. PTS was commissioned to be a national project titled “Public Broadcasting, Cultural Creation and Digital Television Development.” One of the objectives was to build the HDTV network. This was the second national project handled by PTS after accepting “The Project of Constructing a Common Transmission Platform.”

PTS secured the channel line-up, the budget of HD channels, the Digital Video Broadcasting-handheld (DVB-H) mobile channel, a digital archive and the second single frequency network building project. It was a ten-year span of development led by public service broadcasting as a national transformation project subsidized by government grants, as indicated in Table 4.

Table 4. The Government’s Finance for PSB’s Digital Broadcasting (2003 to 2012)

<i>Year</i>	<i>The Projects</i>	<i>Budget (USD)</i>
<b>2003-2009</b>	The Project of Constructing a Common Transmission Platform (including DTT network, MHP testing, mobile TV system)	40 million
<b>2006</b>	The Project of Public Broadcasting, Cultural Creation and Digital Television Development	83 million
<b>2011</b>	The Project of Building HDTV Network in Eastern Taiwan	1.5 million
<b>2011</b>	The Project of Upgrading 21 Gap Fillers from SD to HD System	2.5 million
<b>2012</b>	The Project of Producing HDTV Programs	6 million
<b>Total: 133 million</b>		

Source: Cheng and Lee, 2012.

The digitalization project brought resources and platforms to PSB professionals to enable new and different ways of production. However, the real contributing platform to move PSB onto the internet and associating this with Web 2.0 was the goal of “citizen journalism.”

In April 2007, PTS established a training program for citizen reporters and a web portal to publish resulting stories. The new internet video portal is called “PeoPo”, a site for exchanging information and featuring local stories, public interest issues and the stories ignored by commercial TV. The site is presented in the style of exploring along with bloggers and leading with opinions, viewpoints, and a diversity of newly established Creative Commons content. Half of the registered citizen journalists are between the ages of 21 and 30. Based on their profile, the younger generation is less likely to utilize print media and scheduled television news.

“PeoPo” is collaborating with over 200 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in agenda-setting, and 15 college news centers for training. The footprint complements the limits of PTS local news dispatches. The success of citizen journalism has been proven by rapidly filing disaster and breaking news reports. The powerful reach of “PeoPo” is enforced by connecting with social media and relaying on smart phones and tablets for distribution. The annual operational cost is about US\$200,000. According to Lin (2012), the launch of video journalism on Web 2.0 is a perfect match with Taiwan PSB for three reasons, first, the amount of finance is manageable for a small PSB operator; second, the majority of users are in young segments of the audience who not watching as much terrestrial TV; and third, the integration of user participation programming is being realized.

Thus, the transformation of Taiwan's PSB has been activated by the digitalization process to converge with multimedia, telecommunication, and the internet. A diverse delivery network was achieved in a decade of PTS digital project implementation. The universality of online media is realized by the generations of digital natives now growing to adulthood. The PeoPo platform is a timely way to reach the otherwise unreachable. This also pushes PSB to deliver programs through on-demand access rather than exclusively via linear flow.

### **Critical Issues of Public Service Media**

The channels operated and managed by the Taiwan Public Television Service Foundation are credited as the sole PSB provider. In recent years was Taiwan ranked number four in Asia for freedom of the press by Reporters without Borders. The “Global Findings” Report of Mapping Digital Media (MDM) notes that “several countries (such as Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, South Korea, and Chile) that have developed independent—albeit small—public service broadcasters” (Tambini, 2014, p. 77).

Taiwan has a healthier climate for media to fulfill the goals of professionalism and to maintain independence. A recent figure shows that PTS is continuously contributing to fulfilling its mandate and mission as a platform for “serving information, non-profit, the disadvantaged, knowledge, all kinds of artistic creation, diversity, and balancing ethnicity.”

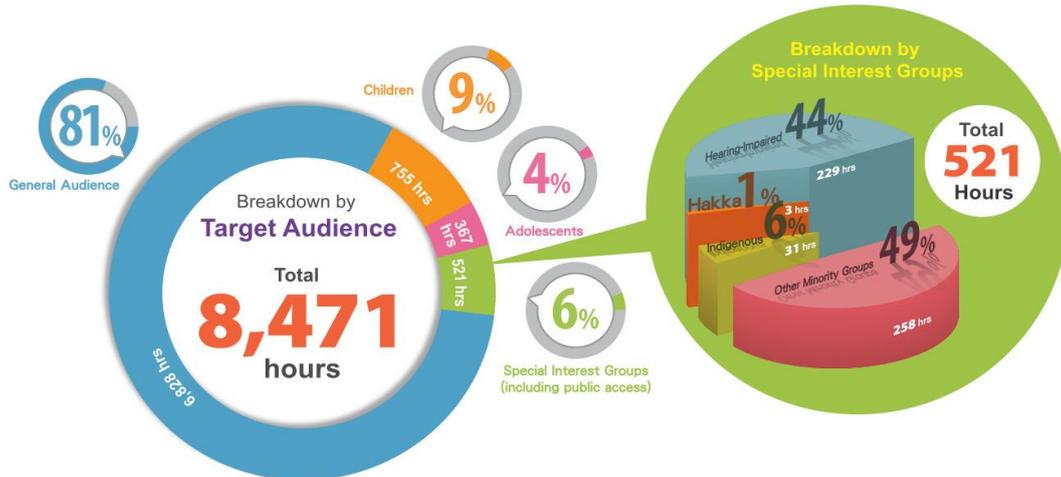


Figure 2. Total Broadcast Hours of 2014 by Target Audience (source: PTS, 2015b)

However, further analysis of the “broadcast hours” (see Figure 2) shows the limit of Taiwan PSB in serving the public comparing with PSBs established after the end of WWII.

### Audience of PSM

The 2014 statistics regarding genres of programming shows many aspects except entertainment. PTS is functioning in a complementary role with generalist (commercial) channels. As the result, the annual appropriation excluded the cost for entertainment and daily-news production, and the enlarging mandate was offset by lacking enough funds for entertainment and sports broadcasting (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Total Broadcast Hours of 2014 by Program Type (source: PTS, 2015b)

The lack of entertainment strengthened the idea of educational TV as a frozen image of public service broadcasting at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The branding has been cultivated into the current audience profile of PTS consisting of aging people as the majority (55 year-old and above).

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of Production and Programming**

With nine 24-hour news channels, nineteen national evening newscasts, one hundred and twenty cable channels, over 85 percent cable penetration rate for a population of 23 million, Taiwan has the highest density of news media in the world (Lin, 2012). However, another survey says that Taiwan ranks last in Asia for media credibility (Edelment Asia-Pacific Stakeholder Study). *Foreign Policy*, a magazine founded by Samuel Huntington at Harvard University that focuses on global issues and news, lamented on this recently: “Over the last decade, Taiwanese media have come to be known for in-your-face, no-holds-barred reporting that manages to be simultaneously sensationalist and mundane” (Fuchs, 2014).

As a result, the TV news totally lost its credibility with the people in Taiwan. The only hope is to rely on PTS with a global standard mandate. Based on the scheme of U.S. public broadcasting, the designated annual appropriation is too little to sustain PTS as the watchdog for civic journalism. There is not enough news crew to handle the daily news and prime time news, no capacity for breaking news reporting during night shift, and no dedicated news channel to compete with commercial stations. The highest rating of prime time news (0.36-0.38) is still below those of specialized news channels via the cable service, although PTS is credited as the most trusted news media by several consecutive years survey – as in the recent Taiwan Media Watch Report (2015, p. 6).

### **Pluralism of Voices: The Existence of PSM Community**

Looking back on media democratization in Taiwan, scholars from East and West agree that “public television has provided a legitimate institutional structure through which this emerging civil society may attempt to influence government, scrutinize and challenge its decisions, demonstrate the authority of the democratic culture, and thus facilitate the consolidation of democracy” (Rawnsely & Rawnsely, 2005).

However, other literature points out that the civil society organizations (CSO) in Taiwan after the lifting of martial law interlock with the interests between the DPP and their own positioning (Rampal, 2011, p. 92). This issue is partly rooted in notions about public service broadcasting in a welfare state. Left of center parties and organizations were affiliated stakeholders for public service broadcasting in the beginning stage of institutionalizing television. Once the governorship and president of PTS were secured by civil society organizations during 2008-2010, the integrity was breached, the model became a chaotic structure (Cheng & Lee, 2014; Galtung, 1999).

## **Importance of PSM Reform Movements and Advocacy**

Taiwan's PTS is yesterday's success. The total revenue has been stagnant for almost fourteen years. There is no fine-tuning mechanism for annual appropriation of PSB operation. The government appropriation is a fixed amount without long-term planning. PTS is still not ready to transition fully into PSM. The first priority of all reforms is the financial structure, which is a well-known reality among stakeholders. This has been much discussed. The acceptable choices to select in order to achieve reform are:

1. License fees from household electricity bills
2. Taxation based on a sustainable PSB operation requirement
3. Government appropriation with a minimum amount guaranteed (referring to the amount at the inception year)

The second reform issue is aimed at the governance structure. The current selecting process for PTS governors' appointment is not accountable to the civil society. The temporary selection committee is appointed by parliament members without transparent and democratic deliberation. The selection committee is run without regulation and liability for the outcome of their appointment. This problem causes the lack of good governance.

## **Assessment and Recommendations**

The critical issue is developing a sustainable PSM. These recommendations must be practical and achievable bilaterally, meaning not only for Taiwan's internal interest but also in the light of Chinese politicization. The prominent issues to tackle are presented in three parts.

### **Key Challenges toward PSM**

The basic challenges for Taiwan PSM are typical to a highly-developed Asian state: one is technology, and the other is political. The rapid and enormously broad adoption of communication technology forces PTS into a struggle over platform implementation to earn its legitimacy and survival as a PSM enterprise. According to AGB Neilson in 2014, the audience profile of PTS television channels is around 55 years old and continually reveals that the audience between 18 and 35 have gradually moved to internet-based video platforms, such as YouTube or other over-the-top (OTT) services. The transformation from PSB to PSM has no real room for compromise.

Although iPlayer, the Video on Demand (VOD) service of the BBC in the UK, is well-known and successful, the business model can't be globally adopted because it has to firstly finance a giant Content Delivery Network (CDN) to cover the data usage of video streaming before anything else. In this regard, alternative thinking was adopted by PTS to cover the CDN cost, which decided to develop its online service through the YouTube platform. The next big debate is waiting in the wings: Should we choose between YouTube type CDNs or one we can manage more automatically and independently?

Beneath the spending debate, there is a test of political will for ruling party to support the expansion of PSB in Taiwan. PSB in the East Asia region has strong history that is relevant for Taiwan in positioning this in the political process. According to Kwak (2012), Leung (2007), and Krauss (2000), the major regional PSBs (in Japan, South Korea, and Hong Kong) were established after WWII and have enjoyed long-term support from state policy and financing that condones their intervention role. In contrast, China, Vietnam and Singapore talk about PSB but are strictly under authoritarian control – i.e. state broadcasting, really. For its part, the People's Television Network, PSB for the Philippines, is part of the state communication system. Taiwan PSB was born trailing the third wave of democratization in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. PTS is well-defined by its representativeness, participation, and alternative approaches, but is weakened by lack for good governance, legislative support, and state-administrative assistance.

Taiwan PSB legislation is searching for a democratic governance approach among the Executive Yuan (the central government), regulators, the Board, and NGOs. The rest of East Asian systems are asking for the arm's length norm for journalistic professionalism and public service. These reform movements are two sides of one-coin. The major issue is how broadcasting politics for PSB works in the interests of nation-building and democracy. The fate of East Asian PSB during the modernization, was never clarified enough before the “Bangkok Declaration 2003+10”, ratified by the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD, 2012, 2008). This resolution delivered the aims of PSB to develop a nation, a) Regularly review the mandate and purposes of public service broadcasting in the light of national, regional and global events in order to foster mutual understanding, tolerance and trust; and b) Continue to upgrade broadcast as well as broadband infrastructure, with a view to ensuring universal and affordable access to information.

For fulfilling the above aims, there is urgent need for a political process in Taiwan. One approach is to treat this as a culturally oriented issue for solving the conflict between Taiwan and China, for example, the resentment of the Sunflower Movement toward economic integration of Mainland and political cooperation behind that. The alternative is treating this as a technically-oriented issue about releasing local or indigenous programs to offset the infiltration of foreign and dominant ones through new communication technology. From digital television, mobile reception, to internet, Taiwan PSB keeps upgrading in the discussion about 4K, Hybridcast, TV-connected, OTT Communication, etc. This is the “must do” for a flourishing future of PSM in Taiwan.

### **Policy Intervention and Reform Taken to Strengthen PSM**

The future of PSM will be healthy in Taiwan if the movement is based on the renewal of past democratic collaboration and ignites the consolidation internationally. PTS is working on reforming the codes of ethics for Governors to block the revolving door between managers, directors and executive officers in NGOs. The internal check-and-balance system will be effectively embraced by the PTS Employee Union, which established a procedure to nominate its own candidate to be represented on the Board in exchange for the good will from Central Government democratic selection. Externally, the union has already facilitated its intervention successfully by receiving the joint-support from Union Network International (UNI) based in

Switzerland. The protective mechanism has been ratified already by the Media Committee of Taipei Confederation of Unions. Professional groups are now united together to defend PSB from the threat of interference by the state and by some civil society organizations that are not supportive of a free and critical media.

Secondly, PTS should work closely with government to initiate talks with the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) of China to recognize Taiwan PSB. A model was adopted by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the World Health Assembly (WHA) respectively. Such a critical breakthrough would bring international PSB movements to bear on Taiwan broadcasting policy, particularly the United Nations (UN) related PSB organizations, the Asian-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU), the Asian-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD), the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

Thirdly, Taiwan PTS has already been an affiliate member of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association since 2002. In 2014, this was transformed into the Public Media Alliance (PMA) that affirmed Taiwan as a full member. There is a new trend to group international PSBs to form some policy alliances. Moreover, based on the documentary co-production credits PTS earned internationally for last ten-year, International Public Television Screening Conference (INPUT) and Asian Pitch (fund original HD documentaries produced by Asian documentary makers) passionately invite PTS to be a part of their organizers for this attractive platform to creators and curators. Taiwan PSB should leverage continuously on these connections.

### **Normative Framework of PSM in the Regional Context**

What can the quite local and late-comer experience of PSB in Taiwan contribute to a normative reconsideration of PSB in the big picture? Actually, Taiwan has continuously faced challenges from China even recently, without trust in the past due to mutual historical confrontation. In the media industry, the problem is more significant than from the public diplomacy viewpoint.

Thanks to its mandate and professional commitment, PTS is equipped by rule of law and media democratization to gradually engage with international society more or less from scratch. The construction of Taiwan PSB as a PSM enterprise is vital for tackling the needs of this country for nation-building and disaster relief. The PTS mission goes far beyond the formulation of working “to inform, to educate, and to entertain”. The challenges faced in Taiwan are very similar to those faced elsewhere in Asia, especially, and in key respects far beyond. Referring to Bangkok Declaration, recommendation 10 specifies that the contribution of PSB in “Countries of Conflict and Transitional States” (i.e. in Taiwan and elsewhere), strengthen the media’s role as a means of communication between elected governments and their constituents and as a peaceful platform for analysis, discussion for communities to better understand, participate in and decide on conflict related and developmental issues.

The Taiwan PTS is on a journey to become PSM, and is doing that in a way that is incremental and practical. Digitalization and convergence are eroding traditional radio and TV broadcasting. The speed and significance of that is emphasized in the highly developed technology conditions in much of East Asia. In 2015, the Ministry of Science and Technology,

coordinating with Ministry of Culture, contacted PTS to evaluate the possibility for launching future services. It continually believes the experience so far learned by PTS, functioning with the media governance model, has significant value for PSB at home and abroad. The current policy conversations advocating for the OTT service model should re-allocate resources from linear TV (such as digital terrestrial television, aka DTT, and cable TV) to a non-linear video platform. However, there are several pre-conditions needed to achieve this:

1. A full-fledged governance structure of PSB established by concentrated efforts focusing on the PSB corporate group;
2. PSB professionals should work closely and seamlessly with creative industry and curators to develop a workable and beneficial way for building PSM;
3. Permission to breakthrough with a PSB broadcast emergency warning message to all mobile devices when a real natural disaster hits to facilitate a successful evacuation;
4. The international standards and best practices endorsed by the UN system and PSB unions should be integrated into the Taiwan PTS internationalization mission;
5. Peace journalism developed by Taiwan PTS should reconcile the tension between China and Taiwan in fluctuated economic, political maneuvers and the competition.

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## Appendices

Table F1. The Audience Share of Public Service Broadcasting within Major Channels Market (Q2/2015, Selective)

Ranking	Channel	TVR%	Average/000	Share
1	FTV	0.94	208.4	7.08
2	SANLI TW	0.88	194.4	6.61
3	TVBS-N	0.55	120.5	4.09
4	SANLI News	0.49	107.8	3.66
5	ET-News	0.46	100.7	3.42
6	CTV	0.42	93.5	3.18
7	FTV-News	0.39	86.1	2.93
8	TTV	0.38	83.9	2.85
9	ERA-News	0.35	77.4	2.63
10	Cti-News	0.33	73.2	2.49
12	CTS (PSB-Commercial)	0.29	63.8	2.17
20	STAR Chinese	0.17	38.4	1.31
29	HBO	0.14	30.8	1.05
33	PTS (PSB-Main)	0.13	29.3	0.99
34	Disney	0.12	27.3	0.93
40	DaAi TV (Charity, Religion)	0.10	22.9	0.78
49	Animal Planet	0.07	15.7	0.53
56	NGC	0.06	12.7	0.43
63	CTS News (PSB News)	0.04	8.9	0.30
65	CTS HD (PSB)	0.04	8.1	0.27
75	MTV	0.01	2.2	0.08

Source: PTS, 2015a, originally surveyed by AC Nielsen Media International, Broadcasters

Table F2. Taiwan Public Service Media at a Glance

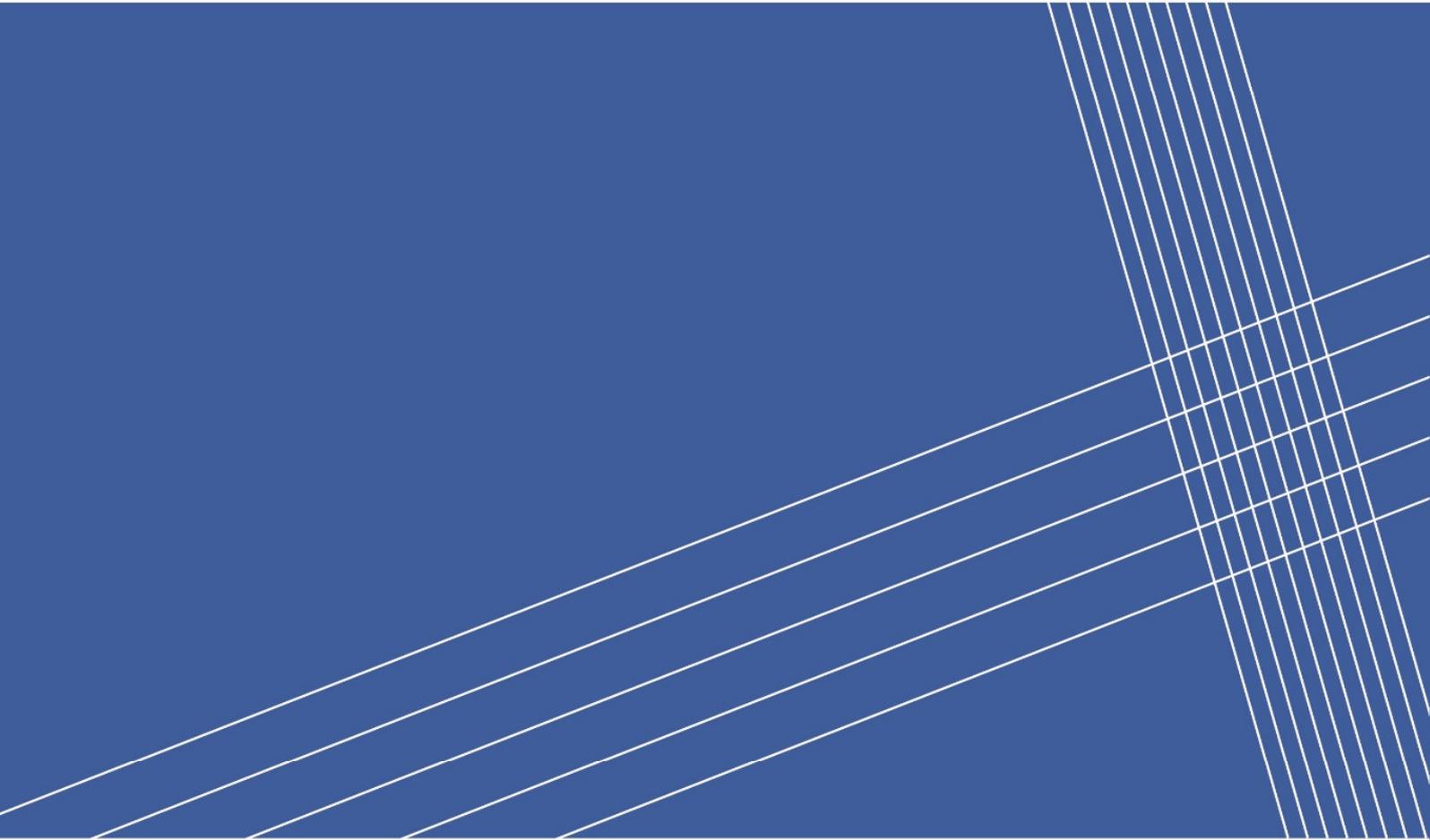
Entity	Channel	Ownership	Regulatory Body	Funding Models	Business Models
Public Television Service Foundation (PTSF)	(UHF) PTS PTS2	Public-owned	Ministry of Culture	Government Appropriation Contribution from Cable Broadcasting Enterprise Fund	Product Sales Commissioned Programming Corporate Donation
PTSF	PTS HD (UHF)	Public-owned	Ministry of Culture	Special National Grant	Channel broadcasting right fee
PTSF	PEOPO (citizen journalism website)	Public-owned	Co-regulation	Funding by PTSF	Non-profit orientation

<b>PTSF</b>	PTS YouTube (12 channels)	Rent	Self-regulation	Funding by PTSF	AdSense earnings
<b>PTSF</b>	Hakka (UHF)	Public-owned	Ministry of Culture Hakka Advisory Committee Hakka Affairs Council	Annual bid for “Production and Broadcasting of Program”	Non-profit orientation
<b>Chinese Television System (CTS)</b>	(UHF) CTS CTS-Education CTS-News & Info CTS-HD	PTSF-owned	Ministry of Culture	Commercials	Free to Air Broadcasting right sales Rental
<b>CTS</b>	CTS News MOD (IPTV)	PTSF and Chunghwa Telecom. jointly owned	National Communications Commission	Production bid	Program sales
<b>Indigenous Peoples Culture Foundation</b>	Taiwan Indigenous TV (TITV) Satellite Broadcasting	Government-owned	Council of Indigenous Peoples	Government Appropriation	Non-profit orientation
<b>Overseas Community Affairs Council (OCAC)</b>	Taiwan Macroview TV (Satellite TV International Broadcasting)	Government-owned	OCAC PTSF	Annual bid for “Production and Broadcasting of Program”	Program sales
<b>Radio Taiwan International</b>	Shortwave Podcasting Internet DAB	Government-owned	Ministry of Culture	Government Appropriation	National Radio Museum Rental
<b>Central News Agency</b>	Video journalism website KRTC Hello TV (IPTV)	Government-owned	Ministry of Culture	Government Appropriation Special Grant	Publishing
<b>Police Broadcasting Service</b>	FM AM RDS-TMC (Traffic)	Government-owned	Ministry of Interior	Government Appropriation	Non-profit orientation
<b>National Education Radio</b>	FM AM	Government-owned	Ministry of Education	Government Appropriation	Non-profit orientation
<b>Voice of Han Broadcasting Network</b>	FM AM RDS-TMC (Emergency)	Government-owned	Ministry of Defense	Government Appropriation	Non-profit orientation

Source: compiled by authors through various annual reports and government publications.

# 6

## South Africa's Experience with Public Service Media





# South Africa's Experience with Public Service Media

**Nomonde Gongxeka**  
**Independent Researcher, South Africa**

## Abstract

This study explores the advances made by the Department of Communications (DoC) in transitioning South Africa's communications sector from the Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) to a Public Service Media (PSM). The changes are caused by disruption from evolving technologies and evolving political influences. The study documents efforts to secure the public service approach in South Africa, but also clarifies why practical progress has been difficult. It shows that despite its shortfalls PSB remains crucially important for democratic advancement in this region. Efforts for digitization are underway, however, the process is slower than hoped. The author explains the reasons and presents South Africa as an important case for examining the development, and identifies problems in development, for the public service model in the region. The article reflects on the prevailing position of PSM as advocated by the African Union (AU) and Southern African Development Community (SADC). The results indicate promise for the development of public service broadcasting in the region, and especially in South Africa, but also demonstrate persistent problems keyed to the influence of commercial funding, political insecurity, and difficulties in maintaining editorial independence that is crucial for popular trust in PSM as a public enterprise.

*Keywords:* Digital media and migration, public service broadcasting, South Africa, media policy and regulation, democracy, editorial independence, commercialization.

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A. Rahman & G. F. Lowe (Eds.), Public Service Media Initiatives in the Global South



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# South Africa's Experience with Public Service Media

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## **History and Background of Broadcasting in South Africa**

Our broadcasting policy and regulatory framework is still focused on the traditional structures of the 1990s as many of the policies were developed as far back as during our transitional era in 1993. These frameworks now run the risk of inhibiting the evolution of communications and media services. The convergence of technologies presents significant opportunities but also potential threats for traditional broadcasting systems. (Media Statement by Minister Muthambi<sup>1</sup>, 12 November 2014)

For decades the apartheid state's communication culture and machinery had been characterized by censorship; the banning of media channels that aligned themselves with the struggle for equality; physical attacks that terrorized progressive media operations; state control of 'public' broadcasting; and misinformation campaigns and propaganda from media sympathetic to apartheid (SA Media Landscape, 2014).

This is the succinct history and evolution of South African media under the apartheid rule of the Nationalist Party (NP), when television and radio were controlled by the state and there was little media diversity. Today, 21 years on, the media scene in South Africa reflects a post-democracy journey that began in 1994.

The country's new found freedoms led to the democratization of broadcasting, transitioning it from an apartheid State service to a more genuine form of public broadcasting as a service-oriented endeavor. The government and policy makers have grappled with how to transform South Africa's media to reflect the factual demographics of the country.

The democratization of South African broadcasting became a crucial aspect of the country's liberation. Two decades later, the Constitution guarantees media freedom; there is increasing diversity; there are many community radio stations; there are industry bodies to ensure media accountability; and journalists are able to work without intimidation or fear (SA Media Landscape, 2014, p. 4). But a lot remains to be done and, as this article documents, there are persistent problems that are partly rooted in commercial influences and partly in political meddling.

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<sup>1</sup> Muthambi was appointed as Minister of Communications in May 2014 by South Africa's President Jacob Zuma.

During South Africa's apartheid rule regime, Radio 702 (a commercial radio station) and Bophuthatswana TV (Bop TV<sup>2</sup>), were the only competitors for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), which also owned the signal distributor Sentech. The country at the time had only two licensed television operators that offered five channels to an audience of around 14 million. In 2015, South Africa boasts sixteen licensed television operators delivering television services across more than 170 channels to an audience of around 40.1 million people (National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), 2014 Report, p. 5), and there are over 250 licensed radio stations with a combined weekly audience of around 33.2 million listeners. Thus, it's clear that broadcasting has enjoyed tremendous growth in South Africa in the democratization period, and without question broadcast media have been and continue to be an instrumental factor in the process.

Reg Rumney stated that in 1994 there were four big media groups, mostly print based but with some interest in the nascent electronic media. They still exist in 2015<sup>3</sup>. But two decades on, the press in South Africa has experienced astonishing decline in newspaper circulation, paralleling conditions in the West, and the transfer of advertising revenue has moved decisively to favor broadcasting. Television is now the leading medium for advertising and audiences enjoy more services and programs in more languages and genres than ever before.

## **Institutional Frameworks The DoC, ICASA, and SABC**

The post 1994 era can be described as the most intense policy process ever undertaken in the country, where South Africa had to repeal about 700 laws in order to create a constitutional state founded on democratic principles. Governing is about law making, which must later translate into practice. Each and every law had to be redefined in a very complex process, and the first step was to repeal the 1976 Broadcasting Act. (Mjwara<sup>4</sup>, 2014)

The impressive gains that broadcast media have made in the past twenty years are partly owing to legal supports and policies that have encouraged the development of an institutional framework to facilitate development – and most importantly, here, the transition from state broadcasting towards a more genuine form of public service broadcasting at the SABC.

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<sup>2</sup> Bop TV remained independent until it was absorbed into the SABC in the 1990s.

<sup>3</sup> These media groups are namely: Times Media Limited (TML) now renamed Times Media; the Argus Group now renamed Independent Newspapers; Nasionale Pers now renamed Naspers and Perskor was replaced by Caxton-CTP (SA Media Landscape, 2014, p. 40).

<sup>4</sup> Respondent interview with the Advisor to Minister, Department of Communications, South Africa. The author employed qualitative research methodology (semi-structured in-depth interviews) to collect some data for this research. Four respondents were interviewed as a part of her thesis in Master of Management Degree in ICT Policy and Regulation at the University of Witwatersrand. Existing literature was also examined, and subjected to secondary data analysis.

The period from 1991 to 1993 can be best described as the pre-transition phase in the politics of South Africa, when a foundation was laid for new institutional arrangements in the broadcasting and telecommunications sectors. This reform process led to the formation of the Department of Communications (DoC) for policy making and separate regulatory bodies for oversight – the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), which was responsible for broadcasting, and the South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SATRA), which was responsible for telecommunications. The reform process culminated in the adoption of South Africa's 3-tier broadcasting system (public, community, and commercial), the entirety of which is premised on public service mandate and seeks to enable a diverse broadcasting industry.

The institutional structure has been a crucial factor to facilitate the development of media in South Africa, and more precisely efforts to cultivate a democratic media system in broadcasting. The structure is illustrated in Figure 1.

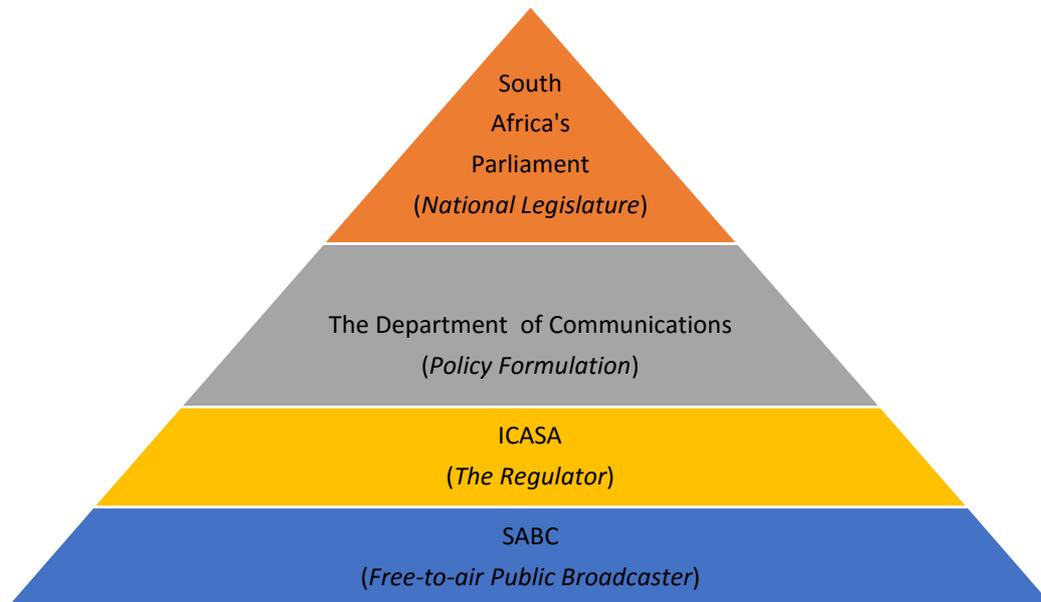


Figure 1. The Doctrine of Separation of Powers (CISHE, 2013).

At the time, whilst determined to liberalize the media landscape, the DoC created the necessary space for convergence and this was enabled by a good policy foundation which created the necessary space to maneuver (Mjwara, 2014).

By 1996, the Constitution of South Africa was in place as the framework for the country's young democracy. By 2000 the convergence of technologies led to changes in the regulatory framework, which saw the amalgamation of the once separate regulatory bodies (IBA and SATRA) merged into a single regulatory body known as the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), as pictured in Figure 1.

However, following South Africa's fifth democratic elections in May 2014, President Jacob Zuma reshuffled the Cabinet. This resulted in the splitting up of the DoC into two separate

ministries, in essence reverting to the analogue era arrangement. This move baffled the sector and industry practitioners and no explanation was provided for the split by the Presidency. The DoC was divided into the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services (DTPS) led by Minister Siyabonga Cwele, and a new “reconfigured” DOC overseen by Minister Faith Muthambi. In the run-up to South Africa’s democracy, the African National Congress (ANC), crafted the ruling party’s “Ready to Govern” policy document, which identified the communications sector as a critical growth sector. Notably, the National Development Plan (NDP)<sup>5</sup> envisioned that by 2030 a high quality communications infrastructure, services, content and applications would be in place, seeing this as key to rapid economic, social and cultural development for the country<sup>6</sup>.

### **The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)**

Broadcasters globally are undergoing profound transformation, caused by shifts in the world economy, new technologies, changes in audience behaviors and increasingly complex competitive environments. Within this context, the SABC seeks to reshape its future with a strategic plan that provides a clear sense of direction towards a digitalized infrastructure:

The future of the SABC can no longer be based on radio and television, the public broadcaster needs to be a multimedia organization and utilize the prevailing technologies and platforms that exist in order for it to be relevant, hence the SABC must redefine itself. The risk is that if you do not respond to changes around you as a business you then become irrelevant. (Mjwara, 2014)

The public broadcaster’s ‘core business’ is to deliver a variety of high quality programs and services through television and radio, which inform, educate, entertain, and support the public interests at large. This was enshrined in the Broadcasting Act 4 of 1999, and it reflects the general, historical orientation that classically describes a public service ethos in broadcasting. In her foreword outlined in SABC’s 2014 Annual Report, Zandile Tshabalala (Chairman: SABC Board) said that the SABC is aware that rapid and fundamental changes will take place in the media landscape during 2014 to 2017, the most significant of which would be the launch of Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT). This poses significant challenges to the Corporation as a project and for funding (SABC Annual Report, 2014).

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<sup>5</sup> The National Development Plan is an Economic Policy framework which is “geared towards the improvement of South Africa’s economic growth and prospects. It aims to fulfil the objectives of reducing poverty and inequality in South Africa by 2030. The main objectives of the NDP are: job creation, a more equitable distribution of wealth, and improving education.” (Gazava, 2013)

<sup>6</sup> The NDP specifies that “public services and educational and information products will be accessible to all, and will build on the information, education and entertainment role envisaged for public broadcasting”, and says the sector “will continue to reduce spatial exclusion, enabling seamless participation by the majority in the global ICT system, not simply as users but as content developers and application innovators.” (Minister of Communications, 2013, p. 13)

## **Operationalizing the SABC and the funding model**

Operating a 24/7 broadcaster has huge operational costs. The SABC had to devise funding strategies to keep its operations afloat, and this is the reason for today's mixed funding model. The general economic conditions for the population as a whole means there would not be much potential for increasing public funding, and thus the heavy reliance on commercial revenue.

Since the 2008 global economic downturn, commercial funding has been in decline – as has been the case in most countries. But in South Africa so far, there are no signs of an upswing in the near future. Continued reliance on commercial funding is proving to be quite challenging for the public broadcaster, especially in light of costs to finance the development of a South African multi-channel digital media environment.

The pursuit of targeted audiences in the fragmented media landscape will force commercial companies to spread their budgets across all available multi-media platforms. As elsewhere, the Internet will thin the funding base. Streaming is already viewed as a serious competitive threat, not only to public broadcasters but for all broadcasters in South Africa. This has not happened yet due to the high costs of communication and lack of broadband availability. Internet access and penetration in South Africa remains low at 34 percent (MyBroadband, 2014). But this will all but certainly change in the near future. Given its reach and popularity, television is so far the pre-eminent advertising platform, with the advertising spend<sup>7</sup> highest during the evening prime-time slot between 18h00 and 21h00 (NAB 2014, p. 11). So the threat of disruption is the cause of great concern among broadcasters of all types.

## **Broadcast ownership in South Africa**

As noted earlier, at the dawn of 1994 media in South Africa had for decades been controlled by white interests and the National Party government clampdown on the press was relentless in reporting about the apartheid past. Radio and television were in state hands and there was little media diversity. The unfolding post-apartheid legislation and regulations led to the liberalization of the airwaves, which over the past 21 years has seen exponential growth of broadcast platforms leading to new players entering the sector and new licenses being issued. What, then, is the situation today for broadcasting in South Africa? In short, the country has a number of television and radio channels and there are three tiers or types of services: public service (via SABC), community broadcasting, and commercial broadcasting. The details are provided below in Figure 2.

Thus, the overall situation for TV, and for television advertising is rather good, but that is not likely to last. As for the SABC, the need for additional capital to fund digitalization has led the PSB operator into a situation where they are directly competing with the commercial sector for capital as well as audiences. This raises questions about the corporation's priorities and is causing complications both in the public service orientation and in relations with private broadcasting companies. In light of the likely decreases in spending on television advertising

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<sup>7</sup> The increase in revenue has led to increased profits translating to increased contributions which between 2012 and 2014 saw tax contributions rising from R2.3 billion to R3.3 billion.

as digitalization causes more fragmentation and raises costs, the prognosis is worrisome. Nonetheless, it is clear that South Africa has made tremendous progress in developing its media system to create a diverse mixture of operators and approaches, all of which have been keenly important to the development of democracy.

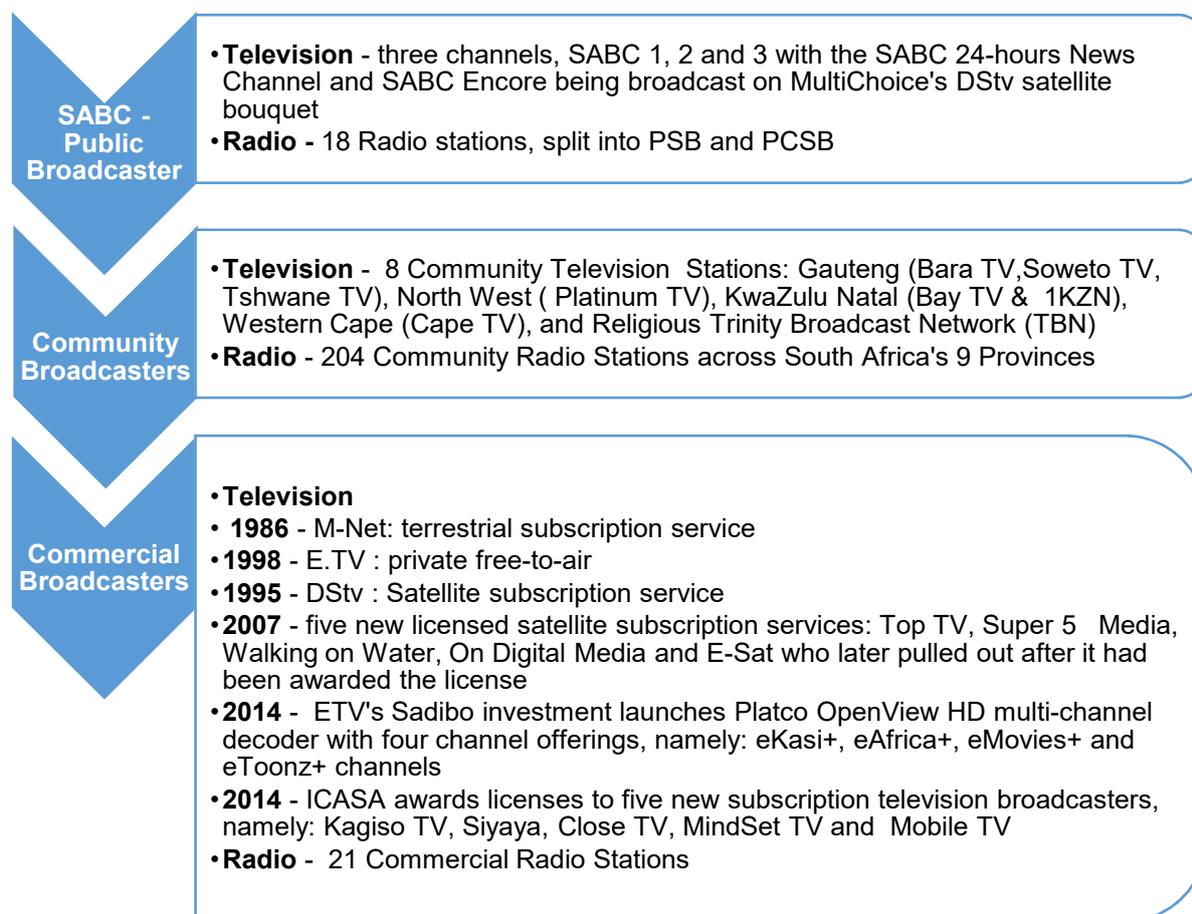


Figure 2. Licensed Broadcast Operators in South Africa (source: Gongxeka, 2015).

## Transition from PSB to PSM

When analyzing and reviewing the evolution of policy making in South Africa, we ought to be mindful that the sector was very small, the IBA only had to deal with the SABC and SATRA had to deal with one entity, namely Telkom. At that time the focus was just on democratizing the sector. However, with convergence and digitalization, the landscape has become more complex. This is the history that we must keep in mind as the DoC undertakes its policy review process. (Mjwara, 2014)

In April 2012, under the leadership of Minister Dina Pule in the DoC at that time, a decision was made to undertake a policy review process. “The ongoing technological changes and innovations that are envisaged in the future coupled with the fact that most of the communication related policies were drawn up in the beginning phase of our democracy, necessitate a review of these frameworks and the development of a new policy” (Minister of Communications, 2013, p. 7). This review sought to analyze what had worked in the past with a view to crafting a way forward in deciding how to take South Africa into the digital future. The DoC’s strategic plan states that ICT policy development remains an important output of the department and embarking on an ICT Policy Review<sup>8</sup> represents a paradigm shift [(The Department of Communications (nd), Strategic Plan: 2013/14 – 2017/18, p. 8)].

South Africa’s 2013 proposed National Integrated ICT Policy Review Framing Paper, which is in line with the NDP, says that in the short-term the government should conduct a full policy review that should link policy objectives to specific strategies. The Framing Paper set out the objectives and principles that underpinned the policy environment and laid the overall foundation for the discussion paper.<sup>9</sup> Figure 3 outlines the processes embarked on when undertaking this policy review, to be tabled in March 2015.



Figure 3. The National Integrated ICT Policy Green Paper Process (source: The National Integrated ICT Policy Gazette 2014)

Minister Pule’s tenure was short-lived. She did not stay long enough to see the policy review process through and was replaced in 2013 by Minister Yunus Carim. In 2014 President Zuma made a cabinet reshuffle and Minister Carim was also replaced, by Minister Faith Muthambi who was at the helm at the writing of this article. In the period between 2004 and 2014, the DoC has had six Ministers. This leadership churn has been viewed as an obstacle to South

<sup>8</sup> The long overdue policy review process was seeking to separate the frameworks which had guided the sector since 1994, whose relevancy was under question. It was envisaged at the time that an integrated ICT Policy will assist the DoC to give an unambiguous direction to the sector.

<sup>9</sup> The review process was seeking to analyze and review all the existing policies and later culminate in the adoption by government of a new White Paper after its recommendations had been considered by the ICT Policy Review Panel, a panel which was announced in November 2012. The Review Panel comprised of 22 experts and was divided into six focus areas; Broadcasting, Telecommunications and Information Technology, Postal Content Development, Digitizing Government, and Investment and manufacturing (Screenafrica.com, 2012, December 10). The Review Panel’s scope of work included but was not limited to making recommendations on the appropriate ICT policy and regulatory framework that sought to support the growth and development of the sector.

Africa's successful roll-out and implementation of the Broadcasting Digital Migration<sup>10</sup> (BDM) process. This frequent turnover most certainly contradicts the requirements of long-term policy making (Ngcaba, 2012, p. 4).

It must be noted, however, that since the beginning of the policy review process, and from the articulations which were first made by Minister Pule right through to her predecessors including all the documents reviewed for this study, there has not been any mention of PSM as a concept. When questioned about the DoC's silence on its position regarding the transition from PSB to PSM, Mjwara (2014) said the precise terminology actually does not matter, but that more thinking is required about how the PSB definition will contrast with PSM – and most importantly, how the Ministry can encourage the development and deployment of PSB content and ensure that across the available digital platforms.

Technology does not change our objectives as a Ministry, but it provides us with the means to fulfil our objectives. The question then becomes, does technology change the remit? No, the remit remains the same. What changes is how the remit can be extended to other platforms and the way audiences consume media. As the DoC, we are aware that technology is changing things. We are also aware that when we construct the future it will no longer be about public broadcasting but it will be public media, hence the adoption of a multi-media approach to things. For now as a Ministry, we still call it PSB. Perhaps in the future we may call it PSM. (Mjwara, 2014)

Currie<sup>11</sup> (2014) recalled there was once some mention of PSM in the now abandoned PSB Draft Bill of 2009, but said that he was not certain when the concept discussion ended. So the question we should perhaps be asking is how the PSM concept can find a way back into the current Green Paper process. "Certainly these are the kinds of things that need to resurface in the current policy review", added Currie.

South Africa's digital migration process began in 2008 when the DoC published the BDM Policy. It was a priority in the 2009 Draft PSB Bill tabled in Parliament. In 2010, due to internal leadership strife at the DoC the battle<sup>12</sup> for digital standards ensued. What followed in 2012 was a litigious impasse when e.tv<sup>13</sup> took Minister Pule to court over the Set Top Box (STB) control pertaining to the inclusion of Conditional Access (CA). This matter was later resolved by the courts in June 2015, ruling in favor of the DoC. South Africa, along with other SADC broadcasters and the rest of the continent, failed to meet the 17 June 2015 Analogue Switch Off (ASO) date.

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<sup>10</sup> The BDM Policy was approved by Cabinet in 2008 with the pilot test launch having been implemented in November 2008. The policy was aimed at enhancing the lives of citizens through migration from analogue to digital television technology by ensuring national digital coverage and also to bridge the digital divide.

<sup>11</sup> Councilor, Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA). Respondent interview.

<sup>12</sup> This was a battle between DVB-T standards and ISDB-T standards, the matter was later resolved when the DoC reverted back to the DVB-T family of standards in line with the Geneva ITU GEO6 Agreement and as was originally agreed upon within Region 1.

<sup>13</sup> Free-to-air commercial broadcaster licensed in 1998.

But in fact, Mjwara's point is well taken. Succeeding in the transition to a fully digitalized and mature modern media system is certainly important. And yet it is not in itself, that is to say as a technology project per se, the most important thing for South African democracy. The most important thing is the preservation, development and extension of the public service mission, approach and ethos in South African media. Whatever the type of system, or the conditions of that system in technological terms, the focus and orientation is the crucial concern.

## **Regional Inter-Governmental Organizations**

Because of the evolving technologies and social context, globally strides have been made to transition public broadcasters from PSB to PSM. This transition is partly a move away from traditional linear broadcasting in an effort to create relevance in today's increasingly non-linear media environment, and partly to take advantage of new possibilities for improved two-way communications and related advances in technology development. As a continent, Africa has been lagging in this regard for all of the usual reasons: lack of capital, illiteracy rates, poor infrastructure, etc. But it would be a mistake to think that Africa is not making progress to ensure that citizens across the continent are not left behind in the technological wave. Progress is typically slow and certainly uneven, but there is political will and growing interest in prioritizing this aspect of development quite generally.

Over the years, countries across the continent have grouped themselves into Regional bodies, namely the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The rationale for these formations was to set objectives and common goals in respective regions and strive to build strong regional ties. To operationalize this, various steering committees were formed to address the differing issues that affect the regions, with ICTs being one important issue.

Outside the regional groupings, an agreement was reached at the Africa Union's (AU) 23rd Ordinary Session, which was held on 30 June 2014 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. The AU agreed to adopt a Common African Position (CAP) on digital migration. In this context, and importantly for our interests, the Member States agreed they should work in unison to protect the interests of the PSB remit in Africa. The focus is on PSB rather than PSM, but this makes sense in light of the general situation as earlier observed. The pace of digital migration has been slow across the continent, but three countries have accomplished analogue switch-off: Tanzania, Rwanda and Mauritius. Another 19 countries have launched DTT of some sort, and eleven more have launched pilots as of June 2015 (see, *Balancing Act Report, 2015*). Thus, there is progress in developing DTT in Africa, and it is encouraging to find support for the public service ethos and approach within the highest body of intergovernmental relations for the continent.

The SADC Ministers Responsible for Communications, ICT and Postal Services held their own summit on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2015 in Walvis Bay, Namibia. Mr. Remigious Makumbe, the Executive Secretary and Director of Infrastructure and Services, noted that within the SADC Region, three Member States have met the ITU's deadline for digital switch-over: Malawi, Mauritius,

Namibia. The rationale for this Ministerial gathering<sup>14</sup> was to take stock of the progress achieved with various strategies as set out in the regional shared vision Digital SADC 2027 policy (A plan aimed at creating a digital SADC Region by the year 2027).

### **Critical Issues for Public Service Media**

As signaled earlier in our discussion, there are significant challenges to the development of PSB in Africa – and arguably even more challenges in developing PSM. The core challenges include political and commercial influences that undermine editorial independence, self-censorship and the erosion of journalistic standards and exploitation and instances of corruption.

The new media corporations have an overriding objective, and that is to distribute their products to the largest number of consumers. The profit logic is driving system development in South Africa (and beyond). Competition is already tough and it is increasing. The SABC cannot be completely divorced from these contextual realities. But the trends are worrisome for a genuine public service orientation. As Buku (2015) lamented, the media are supposed to be an arena for rational-critical debate, which is a vital need in African societies today, rather than a stage for advertising – which is largely what we see at this point.

For the PSB remit to claim its space and retain its relevance, the SABC should strive to preserve its tradition of critical thinking and be bold to ask pointed questions, which citizens are often afraid to ask. But the 2006 ‘blacklisting saga’ exposed the SABC’s lack of independence, or at least commitment to that, when the corporation refused to invite various expert guests as commentators, primarily including those who would have advanced independent critical views of the government and its policies that are clearly in the public interest. This stance laid bare the fact that SABC managers decided to ignore the broadcaster’s editorial code and license conditions, as noted by Currie (2014). The prevailing perception these days suggest that the SABC has lost not only its editorial independence, but also increasingly the sense of credibility it once enjoyed.

The SABC now relies heavily on commercial funding, although news and current affairs programming are barred from receiving any form of sponsorship from commercial entities. This is specified by the public broadcaster’s license conditions. Contemporary PSM organizations provide news across platforms because news is a vital service to and for democracy. That principle is deeply embedded in PSB heritage and of broadest continuing importance. It is important to observe that public service news is unique in casting an equally critical eye on economic actors, as well as political actors, and due to their non-profit status in so far as public funding and editorial independence are secure (MC-S-PSM, 2008, p. 19).

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<sup>14</sup> The meeting was aimed at reviewing the status of the digital migration process among member states especially after the ASO date had lapsed. Across the continent there are other broadcasting affiliates who undertook or are planning to undertake a similar exercise, the regions in question are East Africa (East African Communications Organizations - EACO), Nigeria (Broadcasting Organization of Nigeria), and SADC (Southern African Broadcasters Association – SABA) and as a collective their core focus is to get their broadest media affiliates migrated from analogue to digital. (SADC Media Statement, 2015)

Again, editorial independence seems to have been compromised in the SABC's news room in 2013 when its Chief Operating Officer (COO), Hlaudi Motsoeneng, called for the production of "70 percent Sun Shine News" (Dibetso, 2013). Motsoeneng's declaration was met with fierce resistance and rightly viewed as editorial interference. The SABC management had to be reminded by journalist of the core ethical principles of journalistic practice, i.e. to tell the truth as fully as possible, to act independently, to minimize harm and to be accountable.<sup>15</sup>

There is proof that South Africa's newsrooms more generally suffer declining independence and are seemingly under siege. This was exemplified in an open letter written by Steven Motale titled "I'm sorry, President Zuma", that was published in *The Citizen*. Motale admitted to being party to 'the sinister agenda' against President Zuma, and apologized for it (IOL News, 13 August 2015). The essence of the article suggests that independence in the newsroom has been compromised for some years, and this has happened at the behest of media owners who most often want to set the agenda for the politics of the day.

Buku (2015) suggested this apology brought to light the reality of concentrated media ownership in South Africa, where a handful of companies rule the industry. "The apology reveals that many, if not all, newsrooms are managed through careful manipulation confirming that we are swimming in the sea of gutter and gossip journalism. There is everything wrong with propaganda, even in the form of oppositional or sunshine journalism" (quoted in the *Daily Maverick*, 8 August 2015). Weingarten of *The Washington Post* described the current state of media as a frantic and undignified campaign to economize while at the same time attracting "eyeballs", which is a dangerous situation. South Africa is sadly an illustrative case.

Buku suggested that South Africa's newsrooms are editorially independent in theory, but the profit motive is driving content to a great degree. Reliance on advertising revenue will limit the provision of content that serves public service obligations, concluded Buku. We see, then, that PSB in South Africa is caught on the horns of a dilemma. The majority of South Africans rely solely on the SABC for most of their programming contents, including news programming. When the PSB mandate is undermined by the lack of editorial impartiality, then the public sphere for discussion is thwarted and the premise of promoting and upholding a democratic society is threatened. Also, when the remit is foregone for commercial reasons, then the interests of the public does not get serviced adequately and the PSB obligations are neglected.

## Diversity of Content, Censorship, and Extreme Measures

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart - Nelson Mandela.

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<sup>15</sup> These principles are broadly reflected within the SABC's existing editorial policy, SABC Sunshine News Strategy 'deeply concerning', said policies said Lethabo Dibetso (Mail and Guardian, 30 August 2013 – mg.co.za).

South Africa is best described as ‘the rainbow nation’<sup>16</sup>, a term made official by Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu when describing the country’s post-apartheid era. South Africa’s eleven official languages<sup>17</sup> are proof of the multiracial and multicultural society, as enshrined in the Constitution.

PSM is crucial for building social capital by ensuring intercultural understanding and cross-cultural dialogue (Jauert & Lowe, 2005). In South Africa, content is broadcast in a multitude of languages covering the country’s major language groups, even more successfully in radio than in television. The most watched programs are locally produced in South Africa. Audiences resonate with them and these programs will always find a place with audiences [Bulbulia, 2014, CEO, National Association of Broadcasters (NAB). Respondent interview].

As part of the SABC’s strategy in its pursuit to grow and retain audiences, SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3 have tried to revive and revamp their programming pillars. The channels introduced fresh titles in genres such as drama and comedy, informal knowledge building and entertainment programming. The public broadcaster made a cash investment of R937m in TV programming, of which 74 percent (R693m) was for local content – an unparalleled achievement (SABC Annual Report, 2014, p. 22). SABC continues to provide the most watched channels in the country, and audience loyalty has remained strong, particularly with respect to local dramas.

### **The Importance of the PSM Reform Movement and Advocacy**

Because of the politics of South Africa’s apartheid era, the country had a robust civil society – to a degree that some might find surprising. This was due to the need to organize resistance, and thus much of what was done happened underground. This cultivated some mastery of organizational skills (Thorne<sup>18</sup>, 2014). The robust nature of this accomplishment was evident in 1991 during the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA)<sup>19</sup> negotiation process, which garnered widespread public participation. However, since then we have seen a gradual deterioration. Twenty years ago during the analogue terrestrial landscape things were much simpler, of course; the environment was not as technically complex for broadcasting and telecommunications.

Today things are too complex for ordinary activists on the ground to provide meaningful input during participatory stakeholder engagements. The only people with a strong voice today are lawyers and business people who have the deep pockets and technical support to exert influence. This could threaten South African democracy, suggested Thorne (2014), who also lamented the aging of yesterday’s activist generation.

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<sup>16</sup> South Africa’s colorful flag also depicts a rainbow nation, comprising of a diverse population, with different races, cultures, heritage, religion and languages.

<sup>17</sup> The official languages are isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, Siswati, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, English and Afrikaans. Chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights, No 30. states that, everyone has the right to use their own language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice, it is in this spirit that South Africa’s media is shaped (The Pan South African Language Board).

<sup>18</sup> Association of Community Television and Cape Town Community TV. Respondent interview.

<sup>19</sup> It is the Convention for a Democratic South Africa, a negotiation forum that was set up in 1991.

Perhaps Thorne goes too far, however. There is active advocacy on a smaller but persistent scale, and industry organizations<sup>20</sup> are striving to engage with the issues affecting the sector. In recent years these organizations have been very active and have held the DoC, ICASA and the SABC to account, sometimes to the extent of staging protests. These advocacy groups play an important role in South Africa's media, ensuring that informed and media literate audiences are empowered to hold media accountable for what they do and fail to do.

## **Assessment and Recommendations**

Policy practices travel across borders and lessons can be learnt from Europe and other more developed countries in efforts to 'leapfrog' South Africa, the SADC Region and the rest of the continent into a more mature condition. For our interests here, this has particular relevance to the development of PSB (first) and, eventually, PSM because this clearly matters for successful democratization.

To maintain relevance in the era of the always connected yet increasingly fragmented society, this era of the Internet of Things, public broadcasters must reengineer their operations to adapt to this fast paced, technologically charged environment where audiences have the 'tyranny of choice'. In order to attract and retain future audiences, and most specifically today's youth who seem to have less contact with public broadcasters, PSB must devise strategies to reach across generations. Their content must transition from an era of family viewing to an era that is more individualized, and they will have to adapt to the preferences of the digital native youth – where a clash of taste and preferences is characteristic.

But more fundamentally, it is vital that PSB organizations ensure the ethic and advance the mission of public service. The lack of editorial independence in too many news rooms caused by the self-interested meddling of media owners, corrupt practitioners and governments pose an existential threat to the future and significance of PSB in Africa today, and therefore to PSM tomorrow. In fact, it is in the self-interests of public broadcasters to guard against interference and dilution, both, as the best means to safeguard their relevance. This is a core challenge and requirement for today's SABC managers. Failing that, the entire enterprise will become a failure.

Funding for all broadcasters in the wake of Over-the-Top (OTT) operators are also challenged. OTT operators provide an alternative for audiences and consume a growing proportion of the media space without having to commission new content and without having to deal with policy makers and regulatory bodies. Many of them are transnational operators and do not actually care about Africa's societies or their development as anything other than markets, and mainly only in that to the extent that the profits accrue to themselves.

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<sup>20</sup> Some of these organizations are to name but a few; Save Our SABC (SOS) Coalition – Support Public Broadcasting, Association of Community Television –South Africa (ACT-SA), Media Monitoring Africa (MMP), Independent Producers Organization (IPO), South African, Digital Broadcasters Association (SADIBA), South African Communications Forum (SACF) and Section 27 a public interest law center promoting human rights.

A multiplatform environment poses challenges, as well, in achieving healthy degrees of social cohesion. This, too, is especially important for the SABC to prioritize. More funds will be required by broadcasters to ensure suitable content across all their channels and devices and to produce local content, which has proven to be the most watched by audiences. PSB has a heritage mission that is still vital for South Africa, and indeed for most of Africa, in supporting the growth of civil society, the health of social relations between diverse peoples, and the collective interests that are essential to a shared quality of life.

African countries are not resisting the digital transition. It is coming and has already arrived in some of these countries. It is also encouraging to find such consensus in principle, at least, about the need for PSB and an emerging understanding that PSM is an extension of PSB tenets and values. Although South Africa, the SADC Region and the rest of the continent are still deeply challenged by development of many kinds, including especially the migration to digital media system, most seem ready to embrace the challenge. This is an opportune moment to discuss, to debate and to advocate development in broadcasting (and online) because, having missed the ASO date of 17 June 2015, many African countries are again focusing on policy reviews and digital migration processes.

Economic development and democratic development go hand in hand here. There is much that Africans can learn from the historic experience of PSB where that has been most successful and remains important, i.e. Europe. There should also be much for everyone to learn from what happens now in Africa. In that regard, South Africa is a particularly important case for achieving potentially enormous advances that could be influential for the region. How the challenges treated in this article are addressed, or not, has implications for South Africa and beyond.

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## *Public Service Media Initiatives in the Global South*

This book makes an important and timely contribution to an increasingly global discourse on the meanings, values and roles of public service in media provision today. While acknowledging the significant contributions of the public service broadcasting heritage in the Global North in efforts to establish such provision in the Global South, the contributors explain why simple imitation is unlikely to ever work well enough across such a diverse range of countries and regions with crucial differences in their histories, languages, cultures and experiences. The substance demonstrates the crucial importance of socio-cultural and politico-historical context as the decisive issue to keep firmly in mind when devising policies to facilitate media practice in the public interest. The case countries are well selected to represent a cross-section of experiences in Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia and southern Africa. The similarity of challenges is a particular interest, but equally the significant differences that signal the importance of adaptation to local and national conditions. The lessons highlighted in the introductory chapter merit fair consideration by policy-makers, scholars and researchers, and advocacy foundations with an interest to support the development of media as democratic institutions and democracy in practice. This project began during the RIPE@2014 conference in Tokyo, Japan with support from the Open Society Foundations, and has now culminated in this open-access publication from the Simon Fraser University. Speaking as the Continuity Director of the RIPE international initiative for the development of public service in media, I am pleased with the results and impressed with the quality of this work. If you care about the social responsibilities of media in the 21st century, especially the roles and functions of media as a public service for the development and practice of democracy today, this book is highly relevant.

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Understanding public service in today's media environment requires analyses of its three basic characteristics. The most obvious is [the possibility of] digital multimedia presence beyond broadcasting. Another is the institutional remit and legitimization of public service in the era of abundant content and multiple avenues of access. The third characteristic is its nation-bound nature in global, borderless media markets.

This collection of studies is an important and fresh contribution to the debates that address these three characteristics outside of the well-researched terrain of public service institutions in the Global North. This book continues the work of the Mapping Digital Media project of the Open Society Foundations, by providing invaluable and rare comparative outlooks, while deepening our understanding of public media in each featured country.

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