

## CHAPTER 5

# The Future of Public Service Media and the Internet

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### 5.1. Crisis and Utopia

We are at a crossroads. Society is in a crisis. The Internet is in a crisis. Public Service Media are in a crisis. In crises, the future is uncertain. We face the prospects for both great problems and great opportunities. There are potentials both for a brighter and a darker future. **This Manifesto is a manifesto for saving and advancing democracy, democratic communications and a public service Internet.** We are asking the public to join in the quest for the renewal of Public Service Media in the 21st century and the creation of a Public Service Internet.

The idea was simple and changed everything: Media for everybody. Independent. A trusted source of information. In Great

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Britain, public service broadcasting stimulated this idea at the beginning of the 20th century. More than twenty years later after the devastations caused by the Second World War, the idea reemerged in Germany where it helped in restoring democracy. Public service broadcasting helped creating the backbone of the **public sphere and quality journalism**.

In 2021, the world suffers from a global pandemic. Alarming scenarios of climate change, social crisis, fragmentation and polarisation affect humanity severely. Digital technologies' dominant forms and uses are destroying traditional media structures. The current crisis endangers the social basis of our democracies, including the established infrastructures of PSM. Neoliberalism and authoritarianism might result in a truly **dystopian scenario for PSM's future**. We need utopias as alternatives. We need to renew Public Service Media and realise the utopia of creating a Public Service Internet.

### *The Way Forward*

The **Internet and the media landscape are broken**. The dominant Internet platforms have broken democracy. They have harmed citizens, users, everyday life and society. Digital giants such as Apple, Alphabet/Google Microsoft, Amazon, Alibaba and Facebook form monopolies whose tremendous economic, political and cultural power colonises the world. The Internet and the media are today dominated by commerce, digital surveillance, targeted and personalised advertisements, fragmented online publics, filter bubbles; the lack of human listening, engagement and meaningful debate; a highly individualistic attention economy where a few influencers dominate visibility and voice, false news, post-factual politics, authoritarianism; online hatred in the form of digital fascism, right-wing extremism, racism and conspiracy theories that spread on the Internet and social media; algorithmic politics where bots try to control political communication and so on. The Internet has become a network that separates and divides instead of bringing together humanity. The Internet has become a threat to democracy. We are convinced that we urgently need

an alternative Internet to save democracy and humanity from its own demise.

We have a dream. **We dream of a revitalisation and renewal of Public Service Media.** Public Service Media that are fit for the 21st century. We dream of a different Internet and a different media landscape. We dream of a concrete utopia that could be realised already tomorrow when enough people demand such an alternative. We dream of a Public Service Internet. An Internet that serves the public. An Internet of the public, by the public, and for the public. An Internet that advances instead of threatens democracy and the public sphere. The Public Service Internet is best realised by PSM that operate a variety of Internet platforms. The Public Service Internet consists of Public Service Media platforms. Whereas corporate Internet platforms primarily promote their owners' profits, Public Service Internet platforms promote public purposes. Public Service Internet platforms take the public service remit into the digital age. Public Service Internet platforms advance democracy, citizenship, civil society, education, learning, information, creativity, participation, political understanding and communication as well as entertainment on and through the Internet. They take the Internet to the next level and form a future-oriented Internet that enhances the public sphere.

It is time that we put this dream of a Public Service Internet and revitalised Public Service Media into reality. The realisation of a Public Service Internet and the renewal of PSM are urgent. Because it is urgent that we save democracy and the public sphere. While the contemporary Internet and the contemporary media landscape are dominated by monopolies and commerce, the **Public Service Internet and Public Service Media serve democracy.**

## 5.2. PSM's Challenges

Public Service Media (PSM) currently faces many challenges. The rise of global digital platforms and the COVID-19 pandemic crisis have created new ones and exacerbated some of the old ones. PSM faces societal challenges as well as internal obstacles.

### ***PSM and Society's Big Challenges***

PSM's old mission of informing, educating, and entertaining remains as relevant as ever. During the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, a huge number of individuals turned to PSM for these purposes. PSM is the best available media platform for addressing society's big challenges. There are three major challenges society faces.

1. *Platform capitalism and the promotion of unsustainable hyper-consumerism:*

The dominant online platforms are massive engines of **product promotion** fuelling a culture of **unsustainable hyperconsumption**. They act as digital monopolies that exploit digital labour and try to manipulate consumers. It is essential to maintain a strong Public Service Media presence at the centre of public culture that does not address and package people primarily as consumers but as citizens. PSM play a key role in this context

2. *The destruction of deliberation, the public sphere and democracy:*

A key task for PSM is to restore a functioning public sphere. **Deliberation, the public sphere, and democracy are today eroded, colonised, and undermined** by algorithmic- and data-driven commercial digital platforms, ultra-partisan unregulated news media outlets, false news, surveillance society, far-right, authoritarian and nationalist ideology, a highly accelerated and tabloidized attention economy where the power of voice, communication and visibility is asymmetrically distributed, the lack of time and space for debate, individualism, post-truth politics, automated algorithmic politics, and fragmented publics that have created filter bubbles.

3. *An accelerating climate crisis and periodic pandemics linked to environmental degradation:*

PSM have a responsibility and an opportunity to deliver accurate and accountable information on **environmental and social sustainability**, which can help to establish better awareness. PSM should distinguish themselves from the commercial media by being the first to develop a strategy to reduce emissions and energy consumption, aiming to increase the use of green energy sources.

While PSM are best placed for addressing society's big challenges, at the same time they also face a number of external challenges that threaten their position. Next, we are listing some of them.

**The rise of far-right parties:**

In recent years, far-right parties and groups have vocally accusing PSM of editorial bias and waste and have questioned the existence of both the licence fee and PSM as such. PSM and the public should vividly reject attempts to destroy the independence of PSM and their journalists.

**Regulatory constraints:**

In a neoliberal environment, PSM organisations are often subject to regulatory constraints to technical innovation and to the development of their online services.

**Changing media habits, especially among young people:**

PSM experienced an upsurge in viewing during the COVID-19 crisis, though the longer-term trend has been one of falling viewership. In particular, PSM are struggling to engage and retain younger audiences whose screen time is increasingly devoted to types of content other than traditional “mass media” genres, including e-sport, short videos on TikTok, Snapchat and Twitch, influencer- and user-generated content on YouTube and Instagram, as well as on-demand content from streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Apple TV/Music and Spotify.

**Digital platforms:**

PSM compete in global markets. They face a kind of “total” competition by super-dominant global tech. These digital giants can buy up any production company, premium rights, writers etc. They control existing and future gateways to the audience. Some are barely regulated. It is a key question to what extent PSM should develop their own platforms or use existing capitalist platforms. Should PSM compete or co-operate with commercial streaming, video, music and social media platforms? Take podcasts for example: should PSM use Spotify’s proprietary podcasting service to reach more listeners? And/or should PSM build their own platforms?

**Commercialisation:**

The dominance of commercialisation poses a clear threat for PSM organisations. There have been PSM operations to be downsized

in the name of market freedom and efficiency. Such calls have been backed by commercial broadcasters and newspaper publishers claiming that PSM organisations distort competition and “steal” viewers and paying customers with their free services.

### **Declining funding:**

Often, the political unwillingness to endow PSM organisations with adequate funding makes it very hard for them to innovate, attract on- and off-screen talent and compete with the giant global digital platforms and transnational media corporations that have much deeper pockets. The level of resources available is a key determinant for PSM’s ability to change and innovate.

### **Internal Obstacles:**

#### *Internal bureaucracy and a conservative mindset:*

In big organisations, there is often resistance to change. **Bureaucracy** tends to slow down any process of innovation. As big organisations, PSM themselves are often seen as fairly conservative organisations. For example, technically oriented PS personnel often needs to invest considerably in convincing senior management that the projects they pursue are worthwhile. There is a lot of focus on “legacy” products that are overall (still) popular but not attractive to young people.

#### *Lack of workforce diversity:*

The lack of sociodemographic **diversity** in PSM organisations, in terms of class, gender, age and ethnicity of its personnel, translates into a lack of diversity in on-screen representations, voice and opinion.

#### *Skills deficit:*

The **skills needed for equipping PSM to transform themselves into platforms and networks** fit for the 21st century, are scarce. The workforce holding these skills is difficult to retain because it often has far more lucrative job offers in the private sector. Often, PSMs lack of technical in-house expertise is a serious obstacle to innovation. Attracting new and dynamic talent in the face of declining funding and growing competition is a real challenge for the future.

### 5.3. PSM-Visions

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that PSM are a trusted source of objective and impartial information; a reliable provider of high quality and cultural content; a guardian of pluralistic and minority views; and, above all, a reference point in times of crisis. The way for PSM to survive is to strengthen its core mission and to update the means by which it brings that mission to life:

- PSM must promote **equality** in all possible ways;
- PSM must provide **opportunities for participation**;
- PSM must be the trailblazer of **new content and services** and not a conservative maintainer of established content and services;
- The survival of PSM is based on **understanding the environment we are living in and new partnerships**.

#### **PSM must promote equality in all possible ways.**

Throughout its history, PSMs have managed to turn the tide on urgent social issues such as gender representation. PSM should give opportunities to new and underrepresented genres and creators. It is equally important to guarantee equality within PSM organisations as well as in their contents and services.

PSM must fight information inequality and provide universal access offline and online.

PSM must remain a vital source of social, ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. In order to produce a service for all members of society it has to be relevant for all. This is why PSM also has to address fragmented parts of society, like less educated individuals and minorities of all kind.

PSM must represent diversity to stay relevant for society as a whole.

#### **PSM must protect its independence.**

In the midst of an overwhelming flood of news and messages in the global internet, PSM should insist on its accountability. In order to be a credible and trusted source of information, PSM's independence from governmental as well as business interests is crucial. Editorial and ethical guidelines and the protection of the

rights of journalists are needed to safeguard the accountability of PSM's role as independent news provider.

**PSM must reject commercial requests that it should become a niche provider.**

Just like in the past, also in the digital future, entertainment and sport events will form important elements of society and the public sphere. The way we live, what we appreciate, the way we suffer or laugh, how we compete in sport events, and the emotional side of individual and social life, should not be limited to a business model for the commercial broadcasting sector. In order to connect with all members of society and all layers of individual and civic life, PSM should use all means of communication including entertainment formats and sports events. Such programmes should be produced based on high-quality criteria and standards.

**PSM must provide opportunities for participation.**

There is a long history of participatory budgeting and collaborative production. PSM can adapt and further develop the most successful forms of participation and engagement so that PSM audiences to become involved in creating content and services and turn from mere consumers into active, producing consumers ("prosumers"). Instead of the obscure, opaque, dark algorithms used by YouTube, Google, Facebook, public service algorithms should in a transparent manner shape PSM's schedules, contents, and services.

**PSM must be the trailblazer of new content and services and not a conservative maintainer of established content and services.**

In terms of datafication, automation and AI in the newsroom, PSM should strive for singularity of purpose, interdisciplinary teams all over the news outlet, and flexible newsrooms structures, and the representation of user needs. All these have to be accompanied by a long-term strategy.

PSM must increase its production so that there is more room for educational, informational and children's programmes, content



and genres. PSM must dare to produce and be allowed to produce and provide more thorough, time consuming, critical content. It should not have to compete for clickbait and attention for sensationalism.

PSM should offer alternative nodes for news, interaction and entertainment. It should actively define new values to resist current models of datafication on commercial platforms. PSM could define new values together with civil society groups and not-for-profit communities that have already created relevant principles and practices.

**The survival of PSM is based on understanding the environment we are living in and new partnerships.**

There is a need for a common public arena for common identity-building and connection-building. This PSM environment must be based on a new understanding of how democracy works and the changes of democracy in the context of digitalisation and the climate, health and political crises.

PSM requires stable and adequate funding; investment in news, information and high-quality content; and the public support of its strong democratic, cultural and social roles in society. The future PSM environment requires new forms of collaboration and common platforms. Future PSM have to build on the successes of PSM in a new context.

#### 5.4. Digital PSM: Towards a Public Service Internet

While the contemporary Internet is dominated by monopolies and commerce, the **Public Service Internet is dominated by democracy**. While the contemporary Internet is dominated by surveillance, the Public Service Internet is privacy-friendly and transparent. While the contemporary Internet misinforms and separates the public, the Public Service Internet engages, informs and unites the public. While the contemporary Internet puts economic profit first and over humans, the Public Service Internet puts humans first.

**Data privacy** is a core aspect of the Public Service Internet. The Public Service Internet provides role model practices of data processing. Public Service Internet software and content is a common good that can be reused for noncommercial purposes. On Public Service Internet platforms, users can manage their data, download and reuse their self-curated data for reuse on other platforms.

The digital giants store every click and every online move we make on vast server farms to monitor and monetise usage behaviour. Public Service Internet platforms in contrast **minimise and decentralise data storage** and have no need to monetise and monitor Internet use. Public Service Internet platforms experiment with new forms of content licencing that advance the cultural and digital commons for not-for-profit and non-commercial purposes.

Realising the Public Service Internet requires **new ideas, new technologies, new policies and new economic models**. PSM have in the history of 20th century communications been great innovators. The social and technological innovations that will shape the future of the Internet should not be left to corporate giants. PSM have the potentials it takes for becoming the key force that advances democratic communications in the digital age. Public Service Internet platforms develop new platforms, services, formats and content. We need new policies that enable the creation of Public Service Internet platforms. Legislators have too much focused on enabling the power of the digital giants and have not enough done for enabling Public Service Media to become Internet platform providers. This situation has to change if digital democracy and the digital public sphere shall have a future. Although the power of the digital giants needs to be curtailed, Public Service Media and their Public Service Internet platforms need support and enablement. Public Service Internet platforms should not operate for profit and should be kept free from advertising. They need funding models that are different from the ones the digital giants use. The licence fee that sustains PSM is not a mechanism of the past but one for the digital future. The digital

licence fee will extend and transform PSM's licence fee in the digital age.

Public Service Internet platforms **treat users and workers fairly**. They are independent from corporate and political power. They are spaces where critical, independent journalists make high-quality news and where creative professionals make high-quality programmes that educate, inform and entertain in ways that reflect the affordances of the digital age. They engage citizens in new forms that build on the experiences, structures and content of the public service broadcast model. They combine this model with and go beyond it by making full use of and transforming the participatory and creative potentials of user-generated digital content and user participation. PSM's remit will thereby be transformed into a new digital public service remit.

On the Public Service Internet, **Artificial Intelligence (AI) is used for public purposes**. On the Public Service Internet, AI enhances the convenience of the Internet's, does not replace but support and augment journalists, while respecting data privacy and minimising the data stored about users.

The Public Service Internet's algorithms are **public service algorithms**. Such algorithms are open source and transparent. They are programmed in ways that advance the digital public service remit. Public service algorithms are algorithms by the public, for the public, and of the public. Public service algorithms help organising the platforms, formats and contents of the Public Service Internet by making recommendations and suggestions based on transparent procedures and without advertising, commerce and surveillance.

The Internet is global. The public sphere is global. Also the Public Service Internet and its platforms should be **global**. Such platforms can be accessed by anyone at any time and from anywhere. Public Service Internet platforms minimise the data stored about users and at the same time maximise the availability and permanence of Public Service Internet contents that contribute to humanity's cultural heritage. For challenging the power of the digital giants, Public Service Internet platforms are ideally operated as

international networks of multiple PSM organisations. For operating PSM organisations, PSM organisations co-operate with others, including public organisations (universities, museums, libraries and so on), civil society, civic and community media, artists, digital commons projects, platform co-operatives and so on. As a result, PSM organisations together with public interest organisations form public open spaces that are mediated by Internet communication and that together form the Public Service Internet.

The contemporary Internet is the Internet of the corporate digital giants. An **alternative Internet** is possible. A Public Service Internet is possible. A Public Service Internet is needed. We dream of, envision, and want to live in a world where the Internet serves the public and advances democracy. Humans, let's together transform the Internet.

### 5.5. Imagining PSM Utopias in 2040

Big Tech and commercial data giants successfully gained dominance on the global communications market. In some countries, PSM are kept hostage by authoritarian regimes. In other countries, PSM suffers from a lack of resources or is marginalised by serving only small audiences and producing content that commercial media outlets do not want to provide. Some PSM still produce high-quality content, but operate in niche sectors with an elitist mindset and without any relevance for societies.

But such a **dystopian scenario** is by far not the only perspective for PSM. Different scenarios can be realised. An alternative Internet and renewed Public Service Media are feasible and possible in the near future.

**Imagine that in 2040 we live in a fair, just, democratic society** where individuals have learned from the societal, environmental, social and health crises of the past, and where the full democratic potentials of digital communication are realised so that all benefit.

To cope with the future, **PSM** will need a powerful answer **beyond the defence of the status quo**. It will need a vision that is powerful enough to attract and fascinate people, create innovation and new horizons.

PSM's public purpose, public value and the common good need to be adapted, renewed and transformed.

**Imagine 2040: PSM has undergone a series of radical reforms. How will it look like?**

In 2040, a new, radical governance structure has made **PSM independent from any external influences** like government and business interests. The legitimacy of PSM is no longer contested. There is transparency. There are public hearings. There is an external evaluation process. There is quality control. Individuals feel represented by PSM and its programming. They feel that PSM's reporting is as neutral as possible, not influenced by any external pressures and featuring public opinion.

In 2040, PSM is **impartial**. Society is less polarised. PSM is not labelled as being biased or elitist. It reaches out to all parts of society, including fragmented and less educated audiences, info-avoiders and minorities.

In 2040, PSM operates on the **national, regional and global level**. It invests into quality journalism, including investigative journalism and innovative formats for different groups in society. Young people see public service journalism as an attractive and viable environment of information, communication, collaboration and participation.

In 2040, entertainment is an **essential part of the culture of everyday life** that the PSM environment enables. PSMs are wealth creators for the creative sector that provide visibility to many artists such as musicians and filmmakers.

In 2040, PSM's quality is **distinctive from commercial media and data companies**. It reaches the majority of the population. It serves humans' daily personal and societal needs. It addresses their role as citizens and not just their role as consumers.

In 2040, PSM will have remembered its future. It has adapted and transformed its **public service** mission to inform, educate and entertain. It advances cultural citizenship and the needs of the digital society. It renews its contract with the society.

In 2040, PSM's **workforce is highly diverse** in terms of social class, ethnicity, gender, ethnicity, age and geographic origin. PSM's hiring mechanisms are inclusive and transparent.

In 2040, PSM is present, accessible and discoverable on all relevant platforms. In 2040, PSM is fully present in the digital sphere and provides the right content at the right points of time tailored to a plurality of devices and user habits. PSM stays connected to and closely listens to all of its audiences and stakeholders. It answers to society's important challenges and issues. It effectively communicates its own contribution to society, its public value.

In 2040, PSM is a platform where **professionals and users** produce, engage and communicate based on the public service remit.

In 2040, PSM has increased its investment in **technology infrastructures** and the **digital skills** of its employees.

In 2040, PSM has developed a **collaborative programme** with schools, focusing on media literacy and digital literacy through online courses and educational kits developed by PSM.

In 2040, PSM has transformed from one-to-many-broadcasting institutions into a **network infrastructure** that is guided by principles of public network value. It is a networked infrastructure that advances the digital commons and digital citizenship. It strengthens universal access, communication, participation, co-operation, inclusion and unity in diversity.

In 2040, PSM uses **alternative success metrics** that are focused on PSM's impact on democracy and the public sphere.

In 2040, **journalism** will be a core aspect of PSM. Investigation, unique storytelling and entertainment will be important human aspects of PSM.

In 2040, PSM are **sustainably funded** and based on a **reformed licence fee** that is accepted by citizens. The licence fee is progressive, that is, based on income. In addition to the mandatory licence fee, people can make donations based on a crowdfunding scheme combined with participatory budgeting that allows the users to allocate a small portion of their fee to specific programmes and services.

In 2040, PSM still faces problems and challenges. Society is not perfect. But in 2040, society is **more sustainable, resilient, fair and just**. What if the current crises created a tipping point

where risk turns into change, consumerism turns into citizenship, despair turns into opportunity, and dystopia turns into utopia?

**IMAGINE 2040.** Imagine positive transformations of society. Imagine a transformed media system. Imagine the PSM system of the future. We need visions of the future that guide our actions in the present.

We invite all audience members, users, readers, experts and non-experts, inside and outside of PSM, in fact all citizens who care for the future of democracy in our countries to **participate in the quest for strengthening Public Service Media and creating a Public Service Internet.**