PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA VERSUS DIGITAL MEDIA PLATFORMS: A THREAT OR AN OPPORTUNITY?

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ABSTRACT:

Public service media (PSM) are continually facing challenges on many fronts; one of them is the expansion of digital media platforms and new technologies in general. Based on the current scholarly literature, digital media are generally perceived either as a threat to PSM legitimacy or as an opportunity to support their social value by engaging their audiences more effectively. The study focuses on the potential of digital media as of a tool enhancing audience participation. It presents results of a pilot quantitative research on a representative sample of Czech population (N = 1,500), mapping the frequency in usage and trust respondents have in various information sources. Also, it analyses the perception of selected representatives of PSM and digital media platforms, particularly the *Czech Television* and *Facebook*, which were analysed in terms of their general perception, perception of their content, and engagement potential. The aim of the study is to identify strengths and weaknesses of digital media platforms compared to PSM to map their engaging potential. The author also analyses some significant differences among various socio-demographic groups, which indicate that PSM should pay special attention to audience segments especially according to their age and level of education.

KEY WORDS:

audience engagement, Czech Television, digital media, Facebook, public service media

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Introduction

Much has been said and written about public service media (PSM) over the past decades. There are many studies aiming at a comparison of PSM in different countries, comparing the mechanisms to ensure their independence, financing, licensing or managerial procedures. However, any clear or definite definition of PSM still seems to be hard to come by. PSM show quite different characteristics related both to their organisation and functions from country to country being determined by various political, cultural, and economic factors. Significant elements here are also historical experience with state-owned media and what had been labelled as public service in the past. While analysing the attempts to define PSM,[1] it is clear that the most typically

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[1]   For more information about the attempts to define PSM, see: BENINGTON, J.: From Private Choice to Public Value. In BENINGTON, J., MOORE, M. (eds.): *Public Value: The Theory and Practice.* Basingstoke : Palgrave, 2009, p. 1-36; BLUMLER, J.: Public Service Broadcasting before the Commercial Deluge. In BLUMLER, J. (ed.): *Television and the Public Interest: Vulnerable Values in West European Broadcasting.* London : Sage, 1992, p. 7-21; BURRI, M.: *Public Service Broadcasting 3.0: Legal Design for the Digital Present.*

mentioned characteristics might be divided into three areas:

1. **institutional:** PSM should be free from both commercial and political power; their only reason to exist is to provide public service, not to make profit. PSM should take risks and be a source of innovation and high standards that can set the tone for other broadcasters;

2. **content:** PSM should provide the audience with quality information; they should be educating but also appealing and entertaining with a concern for quality and ideological balance. They should develop knowledge, broaden horizons and enable people to better understand the world and public issues;

3. **creating the public (sphere):** PSM should be accessible to all and address audience as citizens, not consumers; PSM should be a meeting place where all citizens are welcomed and considered equal regardless of their social or economic status. PSM should also encourage active citizenship and participation in public life and provide citizens with some sense of belonging and trust that the political system can actually work for them.

Moreover, somewhere between those issues the process of bringing the information to the public is present implicitly. It seems particularly important in the era of the digital media to follow the new forms or channels used to do so. One point of view is to bring the content to people in a way they want and need, to use the digital media platforms and follow current technology development. On the other hand, it is necessary to also think of groups of people who are not yet able or willing to use the digital technologies.

As Brevini,[2] Burri[3] or Tremblay[4] state, it is often argued that PSM legitimacy is most heavily undermined by the increase of digital media platforms and new technological trends in general. There are basically three points of view to cover:

1. Digital media may cause a declining need for PSM in the 21st century since they cover some of the PSM key functions.
2. PSM are being forced to reflect new technology trends and include platforms their audience uses or wants to use into its services.
3. Digital media can support PSM's relationship with the audience.

In this study, attention will be paid mainly to the third topic, which means how digital media platforms can strengthen the relationship between PSM and its audience and possibly influence audience engagement.

Justifying PSM by Promoting Their Values

To address the arguments about PSM losing their importance in today's society, it seems necessary to bring to mind the essential reasons of PSM foundation. Contrary to the idea that PSM are institutions of the past, Hendy[5] sees the services of PSM as more important than ever describing it, above all, as an *ethos*. Some of the authors argue that the PSM approach as it is normatively described is more an ideal than a reality.[6] But for many others, it is not a reason to question their legitimacy. Paulino, Guazina and Oliveira[7] argue that PSM are often guided particularly by the idea aiming at promoting the values of accessibility of information, diversity, social inclusion or participation of citizens in public debate. Unarguably, even if there was no other role of

PSM but the role of an ideal or source of desired values media should deliver, it is an important role for society. Supporting this argument, some of the authors express the hope that *"parts of the new digital landscape will be cultivated with public-service values in mind"*.[8] Even though the debates of whether PSM should be further supported and maintained today are still alive, there is a general consensus about the core values of PSM. And in this sense, PSM in Europe have been considered as a *"tool of expression of fundamental European values"*.[9]

Nevertheless, Hoynes points out that the current discourse around PSM *"lacks a core sense of the urgency with which this non-commercial broadcasting system can contribute to a democratic public sphere"*.[10] And this occurs at the core of the problem; the lack of urgency in the current discourse is thus interconnected with the lack of popular appeal. Even the arguments related to neoliberalism in the academic sphere question the PSM funding and mention possible disadvantages of private broadcasters. Those arguments stress mostly the fact that the PSM are situated 'off the market', not sufficiently reflecting the needs or wants of the public since the public has no power to express them; for instance, as Coase famously stated, by the price signal.[11]

It is even argued that fulfilment of democratic values expected from media is only possible when citizens have access to the media and can influence them. As Splichal puts it, *"without an effective power of citizens to have access to the media and to also influence media in terms of their values, interests, and preferences, the idea of a public sphere is necessarily deprived of its constitutive principle of publicness"*.[12] In other words, there is a need for more extensive communication with the public, based on its actual needs and the possible barriers to relationship building. Tremblay agrees with that, suggesting that journalists, union organisers as well as intellectuals should all participate, and launch an informational campaign that would explain the importance of PSM to the public.[13] Correlatively, DeCillia and McCurdy argue that the normative ideals of PSM seem to be hidden away in academic literature and it is necessary to reflect how the public can actually learn about them. The authors note that academy must play a larger role and more actively participate in the public discourse about PSM and their ideals. They suggest that it is not only exposure to those ideals but also an active discussion about them that can enable the public to appreciate the role of PSM in society.[14]

The concern described in the previous paragraphs is related preferably to the fact that the discourse about PSM does not sufficiently reflect the essential values PSM are supposed to deliver. PSM, if we agree it is their responsibility, are seemingly not able to effectively communicate those values and deliver them to the public. It is a problem particularly because these values build the strongest argument that PSM have in the discussions of its legitimacy in today's society.

Firstly, it is argued that the support from academy should be stronger and PSM, as well as intellectuals, should try harder to participate in the public discourse about PSM and explain its role in an understandable way so as it is no longer just hidden in academic papers. Secondly, the audience should be not only exposed to the values, it should be actively engaged to be able to appreciate the role of PSM and become supportive. Following this presumption, Jakubowicz suggests that those shortcomings stem from the societal change that (preferably Western) society has gone through and which affected the public's approach towards institutions. This change needs to be reflected and lead to a fundamental transformation of the PSM's relation to the public.[15]

In general, even though we can hardly talk about a single mediated sphere as a monolithic object when examining late modern media, we can still assume that the traditional kind of mainstream mediated sphere consisting of TV, radio stations, daily newspapers and their websites are still generally considered the most

London : Routledge, 2016; DAHLGREN, P., SPARKS, C.: *Communication and Citizenship Journalism and the Public Sphere*. London : Routledge, 2005; LOWE, G. F., MARTIN, F.: *The Value of Public Service Media*. Göteburg : Nordicom, 2014; ARTZ, L.: Introduction. In McCAULEY, M., LEE, P., ARTZ, B. (eds.): *Public Broadcasting and the Public Interest*. London : Routledge, 2015, p. 31-37.
2   BREVINI, B.: *Public Service Broadcasting Online: A Comparative European Policy Study of PSB 2.0*. London : Palgrave, 2013, p. 5.
3   BURRI, M.: *Public Service Broadcasting 3.0: Legal Design for the Digital Present*. London : Routledge, 2016, p. 11-12.
4   TREMBLAY, G.: Public Service Media in the Age of Digital Networks. In *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 2016, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 204.
5   HENDY, D.: *Public Service Broadcasting*. New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 4.
6   See: McQUAIL D.: *Media Performance: Mass Communication and the Public Interest*. London : Sage Publications, 1992; HOFFMANN-RIEM, W.: Protecting Vulnerable Values in the German Broadcasting Order. In BLUMLER, J. (ed.): *Television and the Public Interest: Vulnerable Values in West European Broadcasting*. London : Sage Publications, 1992, p. 43-60.
7   PAULINO, F., GUAZINA, L., OLIVEIRA, M.: Public Service Media and Public Communication: Concept, Context and Experiences. In *Comunicação e Sociedade*, 2016, Vol. 30, p. 79-80.

8   McCAULEY, M. P. et al.: Introduction. In McCAULEY, M., LEE, P., ARTZ, B. (eds.): *Public Broadcasting and the Public Interest*. London : Routledge, 2015, p. 25-26.
9   BREVINI, B.: *Public Service Broadcasting Online: A Comparative European Policy Study of PSB 2.0*. London : Palgrave, 2013, p. 8.
10   HOYNES, W.: The PBS Brand and the Merchandising of Public Service. In McCAULEY, M., LEE, P., ARTZ, B. (eds.): *Public Broadcasting and The Public Interest*. London : Routledge, 2015, p. 69.
11   COASE, R.: *British Broadcasting: A Study in Monopoly*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1950, p. 190-191.
12   SPLICHAL, S.: Does History Matter? Grasping the Idea of Public Service Media at Its Roots. In LOWE, G. F., BARDOEL, J. (eds.): *From Public Service Broadcasting to Public Service Media*. Göteborg : Nordicom, 2007, p. 237.
13   TREMBLAY, G.: Public Service Media in the Age of Digital Networks. In *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 2016, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 204.
14   DECILLIA, B., McCURDY, P.: The Sound of Silence: The Absence of Public Service Values in Canadian Media Discourse about the CB. In *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 2016, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 560.
15   JAKUBOWICZ, K.: PSB 3.0: Reinventing European PSB. In IOSIFIDIS, P. (ed.): *Reinventing Public Service Communication. European Broadcasters and Beyond*. Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 9.

important or having the largest audience. And it is assumed that this mainstream mediated sphere is dominated by elite sources, most typically by politicians and corporate representatives.[16] PSM institutions are supposed to be free from political or corporate pressure, but Scannell argues that PSM are from the beginning founded on an asymmetrical relationship with their audience since the real power over the service is in the hands of the culture's elites, not the public which they should serve and represent. Scannell further mentions that this setting was legitimated by the social situation at the time of PSM foundation but is no longer relevant today, at a time of much higher levels of education and democratisation.[17]

Jakubowicz also describes that PSM are criticised for their belief that they know what is good for the public and what will improve the public sphere. This belief makes PSM, as Jakubowicz states, look supreme or superior. And even though that PSM in general have come a long way since the paternalistic beginnings, the relationship between PSM and their audience seems to be still fairly asymmetrical. There seems to be a clear need to redefine this relationship and recognise the role of the public as an active partner, not only a receiver.[18] The following chapter describes the thoughts seeking to connect this aim to reduce the parenting guidance principle with digital media platforms usage.

Using Digital Media Platforms as an Engagement Tool

There is a common agreement that PSM cannot be indifferent to the fact that the audience heavily turns its attention to the digital media platforms which are frequently their main source of information and content. It is a crucial challenge for PSM which are suggested to extend their remit to the new platforms in order to reach the audience and fulfil their mission rather than to be stuck in the environment from which the audience is moving away.

Even though many paths that PSM could take to fulfil their mission in the new digital era are discussed in academic circles, often surrounded by controversy, there is a broad agreement that PSM should remain true to their traditional values, goals, and objectives. It is argued that the traditional set of values can be interpreted through the lenses of the current digital media environment. In other words, there is no need to come with new sets of values; the traditional ones are still valid and applicable, we just need to go through their definitions, and they just need to be re-examined.[19] Iosifides points out that to attract people, PSM services should be available on all digital platforms. They should also actively promote digital literacy, in other words, support the awareness of those platforms and act as a reliable guide in the online environment. PSM should extend traditional broadcasting by online and interactive content.[20] They should also develop a strong and recognisable brand and serve as a beacon on the market.

The new digital technologies are sometimes described as a threat to PSM; on the other hand, they offer many new opportunities, particularly regarding their role in enhancing public participation. Digital technologies offer not only new delivery mechanisms or platforms to distribute the content but also new ways of social interaction and dialogue.[21] At the same time, it may increase PSM accessibility and enable them to more effectively reach their audiences, especially young people.[22]

Digital Media Defined by the European Institutions

The most significant shift in the European Union policy since 1990s is related to the technological changes leading to the expansion of services provided by PSM. According to the Communication from the Commission:

1. the state aid requires transparency, which mainly requires a precise definition of the public service remit;
2. the digitalisation and diversification of distribution platforms should be used as an opportunity to benefit society.[23]

Also, the Council of Europe expressed a similar view when stating that the specific role of public service media should be a uniting factor which can offer a wide choice of programmes and services to all groups of the population.[24] The new digital environment then is perceived as an opportunity for public service media to do so more effectively. In the latest document, the Council of Europe explicitly describes the goal of promoting *"broader democratic, social and cultural participation, inter alia, with the help of new interactive technologies."*[25]

Importantly, the European Union also states that PSM may use state aid to provide their services via digital distribution platforms to address both the general public and groups with special interests. However, it highlights that these 'new services' should be fulfilling the same democratic, social and cultural needs of society and should not entail unequal effects on the market, effects not necessary for the fulfilment of the public service remit. This condition is perceived as crucial and the European Commission, therefore, introduces a specific test for those new services that should be performed before the services are launched and conducted by an independent subject. The goal is to explore the overall impact of the new service on the market by comparing the situation when it is present or absent on the market.[26]

Among the evaluated factors are: the existence of a similar service, overall market structure, market position of the PSM organisation, the level of competition or potential impact on the private subjects. The general idea of the presented test appears to be to:

1. ensure that the impact and value of the service are balanced and at the same time;
2. justify the state funding for those services by proving their democratic, social or cultural value.

According to Burri, this test is modelled along the lines of the BBC Public Value Test (PVT) and entails the same challenges. On the one hand, it can provide a solid ground for PSM to expand in the online environment while being able to monitor this process; on the other hand, this test actually brings an external body into the process of creating a new service to decide how meaningful it is even before it actually exists.[27]

It is argued there might be a tendency in such an evaluation to restrict PSM organisations from providing services that commercial players could provide. And as the Council of Europe describes, it is definitely true since the goal of the test is to *"avoid an uncontrolled expansion of public service activity to areas where no*

16   ÖRNEBRING, H., JÖNSSON, A.: Tabloid Journalism and the Public Sphere: A Historical Perspective on Tabloid Journalism. In *Journalism Studies*, 2004, Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 285.
17   SCANNELL, P.: Public Service Broadcasting and Modern Public Life. In *Media, Culture and Society*, 1989, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 163-164.
18   JAKUBOWICZ, K.: PSB 3.0: Reinventing European PSB. In IOSIFIDIS, P. (ed.): *Reinventing Public Service Communication. European Broadcasters and Beyond*. Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 9-10.
19   See, for example: BURRI, M.: *Public Service Broadcasting 3.0: Legal Design for the Digital Present*. London : Routledge, 2016; TREMBLAY, G.: Public Service Media in the Age of Digital Networks. In *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 2016, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 191-206.
20   IOSIFIDES, P.: Digital TV, Digital Switchover and Public Service Broadcasting in Britain. In *Javnost/The Public*, 2007, Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 17.
21   BREVINI, B.: *Public Service Broadcasting Online: A Comparative European Policy Study of PSB 2.0*. London : Palgrave, 2013, p. 5.
22   PAULINO, F., GUAZINA, L., OLIVEIRA, M.: Public Service Media and Public Communication: Concept, Context and Experiences. In *Comunicação e Sociedade*, 2016, Vol. 30, p. 82.

23   EUROPEAN UNION: *Communication from the Commission on the Application of State Aid Rules to Public Service Broadcasting, 2009*. [online]. [2019-02-27]. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52009XC1027%2801%29>.
24   COUNCIL OF EUROPE: *Recommendation Rec on Measures to Promote the Democratic and Social Contribution of Digital Broadcasting, 2003*. [online]. [2019-02-27]. Available at: <https://www.ebu.ch/CMSimages/en/leg_ref_coe_r2003_9_digital_broadcasting_280503_tcm6-5032.pdf>.
25   COUNCIL OF EUROPE: *Recommendation Rec of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Public Service Media Governance, 2012*. [online]. [2019-02-27]. Available at: <https://www.ebu.ch/files/live/sites/ebu/files/Publications/Reference%20texts/CoE%20-%20PSM/CoE%20REF%20-%20CM-Rec(2012)1.pdf>.
26   EUROPEAN UNION: *Communication from the Commission on the Application of State Aid Rules to Public Service Broadcasting, 2009*. [online]. [2019-02-27]. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52009XC1027%2801%29>.
27   BURRI, M.: *Public Service Broadcasting 3.0: Legal Design for the Digital Present*. London : Routledge, 2016, p. 34.

public-service interest is at stake and where viable commercial operations might be endangered."[28] Summing up, besides the challenge to adequately reflect the new technological principles, EU legal bodies express the need to follow traditional PSM values.

However, those must be precisely defined to enable a proper evaluation of their fulfilment, or in other words, greater transparency and accountability. And even though the impact of EU interventions is considered to be substantial for the future of PSM organisations, it is crucial to underline that even according to the essential EU legal documents,[29] the bodies in charge of setting a precise definition of the public service remit are the Member States themselves.

The national states should be more qualified to reflect cultural, social or historic differences contributing to the understanding of the desired role of the PSM. But practically speaking, this national level of definition is often still not clear enough to set particular tasks or expectations from PSM organisations. At the same time, it is essential that the national legislation defines the PSM mandate again only in general terms not to tie down PSM organisations to too detailed instructions.

In general, both the EU and Member States' legislative frameworks do offer enough space for PSM institutions to reinvent or extend their services for the digital era within the traditional values and define the details of the remit themselves. It implies a greater role of other documents defining the PSM remit. Those documents might include various self-regulatory or implementation documents or specific short-term contracts between the state and PSM organisations. To sum up, both the EU and national states create and push legislative frameworks that generally offer enough space for PSM institutions to reinvent or extend their services for the digital era within the traditional values and define the details of the remit themselves. This presumption is also described in the EU document titled *Communication from the Commission*, which suggests a two-step process of PSM adapting to the new conditions:

1. the precise definition of the public service remit (leading to transparency);
2. using the digitalisation and diversification of distribution platforms as an opportunity to reach and engage society.[30]

Methodology

The potential of digital media platforms in various areas was measured in a pilot audience perception research conducted in the Czech Republic. Particularly, it was a quantitative research on a representative sample of Czech population (N = 1,500) which was conducted online in November 2018 through a public panel of respondents (*Populace.cz*).

The questionnaire itself had two parts; the first was focused on frequency in usage and trust in various information sources. Television, radio, print, online news, social media, friends and family, and official information provided by companies and institutions were compared. Respondents also had the opportunity to choose the 'other' option and quote another information source of their preference.

The following part of the questionnaire focused on the comparison of the audience perception of different attributes of services provided by a chosen representative of PSM in the Czech Republic and a chosen representative of digital media platforms. *Czech Television (Česká televize)* was chosen as the representative of PSM, and the social network *Facebook* was selected as a representative of digital media platforms. In this part, each respondent was asked to evaluate to what extent they agree with the statements describing different aspects of the *Czech Television* and *Facebook* services.

The evaluation was based on a four-point scale (from strongly agree, agree, disagree, to strongly disagree), giving the respondents a possibility to choose the option of "I don't know, not relevant" if they do not use the services of those media or do not feel competent enough to evaluate them. Particular statements were based on the literature review to briefly cover the overall relationship towards the two media, the perception of their content and most importantly, the perception of their openness and engagement potential. The statements were particularly defined as following:

Q1: I trust information which I get from the *Czech Television/Facebook*.

Q2: *Czech Television/Facebook* has a lot to offer me.

Q3: The *Czech Television/Facebook* makes news and current affairs interesting to me.

Q4: During the last month, I have learned new things from programmes or online content on the *Czech Television/Facebook*.

Q5: I perceive the *Czech Television/Facebook* as an organisation which is friendly and open.

Q6: I feel the *Czech Television/Facebook* cares about my opinion and I might be able to influence its services.

Q7: The *Czech Television/Facebook* coverage has often got me talking about it with somebody else.

Attention was paid to possible differences among various population groups based on socio-demographic characteristics, preferably age (especially young adults up to 26 years were compared to the rest of the population) and level of education achieved by the respondents.

Nonetheless, the results must be interpreted with caution since a questionnaire with close-ended questions was used, providing the outcomes representing the reality in a generalised form. In this case, the respondents had limited options of responses and also, we did not have full control of the interpretation of the evaluated statements. Combination with qualitative research methods, preferably with individual interviews or focus groups, would mitigate those negatives. Also, usage of the above-mentioned online panel of respondents limits the sample structure, excluding respondents that are not actively using the Internet, which might potentially influence the results in favour of online platforms; on the other hand, the research sample size (N = 1,500) can be considered representative and the statistical results can be generalised to the Czech population.

Findings

The first question in the research focused on the frequency of usage of various information sources; the respondents were asked to select up to three information sources they use most often in their life. As visualised in Figure 1, the most frequently used information source in the Czech Republic according to this research are online news websites followed by television. But as we can see from the detailed summary in Table 1, it is not true in the case of young adults up to the age of 26 years. In their case, social networks are the second most frequently used source of information (reaching 70% compared to 40% in total sample or 23% stated by the oldest interviewed group aged 54 – 65 years). In total, social networks placed third, followed by radio, friends and other people we are in contact with, the traditional press, and official information provided by particular companies or institutions closing the survey.

28   COUNCIL OF EUROPE: *How Member States Ensure the Legal, Financial, Technical and Other Appropriate Conditions Required to Enable Public Service Media to Discharge Their Remit, 2009.* [online]. [2019-03-29]. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680483b19>.
29   EUROPEAN UNION: *Communication from the Commission on the Application of State Aid Rules to Public Service Broadcasting, 2009.* [online]. [2019-02-27]. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52009XC1027%2801%29>.
30   EUROPEAN UNION: *Communication from the Commission on the Application of State Aid Rules to Public Service Broadcasting, 2009.* [online]. [2019-02-27]. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52009XC1027%2801%29>.
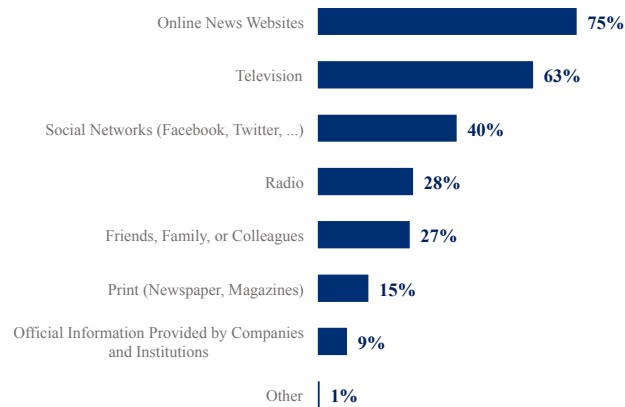
Figure 1: Frequency of usage of various information sources (N = 1,500). Each respondent could select up to three information sources they use the most often (multiple choice question)

Source: Own processing

Besides television and social networks, significant differences in information sources usage among various age groups can be observed also in the cases of radio and friends, family or colleagues. Radio is much less frequently used by young adults up to 26 years (19%) compared to 28% of respondents in total. On the other hand, young people significantly more often look for the information or simply take it from people around them; 38% of young people stated it is one of the three information sources they use most frequently, compared to 27% in total or 21% among people aged 45 – 53 years and also 54 – 65 years. It is reasonable to expect that taking information from people around might be connected to social networks' usage (also heavily dominated by young people), which is based on the principles of mutual information sharing.

Table 1: Frequency of usage of various information sources. Each respondent could select up to three information sources they use the most often. Detailed summary of answers in % is divided into five age groups

| | | Total | Age in years | | | | |
			18 – 26	27 – 35	36 – 44	45 – 53	54 – 65
Online News Websites	%	75.3	74.6	77.2	73.8	75.8	74.9
Television	%	62.6	40.7	58.2	60.9	68.2	73.8
Social Networks (Facebook, Twitter, …)	%	40.3	70.3	55.8	35.4	33.2	23.4
Radio	%	27.7	18.7	23.5	27.2	33.2	31.9
Friends, Family, or Colleagues	%	26.7	37.8	29.5	30.5	20.6	20.8
The Press (Newspapers, Magazines)	%	14.7	10.5	12.3	14.6	16.2	17.6
Official Information Provided by Companies and Institutions	%	8.5	8.1	9.1	7.3	9.0	8.9
Other	%	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.7	1.1	0.2
Total	Count	1,500	209	285	302	277	427

Source: Own processing

When analysing the trust people have in various information sources, compared to the frequency of their usage, the most dramatic shift is the drop of social networks, which fell from third place to seventh. Only 13% of the respondents selected social networks as one of the three information sources they trust the most

compared to 40% who stated it is one of the information sources they use most often. And even among young people aged up to 26 years, who use social networks significantly more often (70%), trust in this information source is very low; social networks were selected as a trusted information source by only 14% of them.
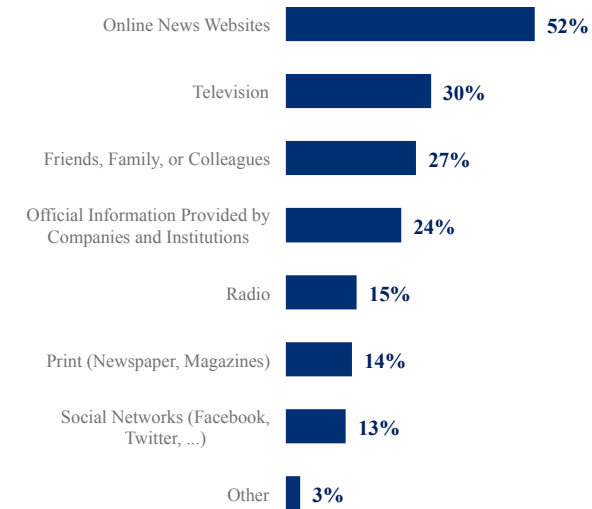

Figure 2: Trust in information sources (N = 1,500). Each respondent could select up to three information sources they trust the most when looking for reliable and objective information

Source: Own processing

As we can see in Figure 2, the most trusted information source are online news websites followed by television, which corresponds with the frequency of their usage. On the other hand, we can observe a dramatic difference in case of young people again; only 17% of them selected television as one of the three information sources they trust the most, compared to 30% in total. Young people significantly more often stated they trust official information provided by companies and institutions (35% compared to 24% in total); moreover, their trust in people around them is higher (37% compared to 27% in total). See Table 2 for detailed results.

Table 2: Trust in information sources (N = 1,500). Each respondent could select up to three information sources they trust the most when looking for reliable and objective information. Detailed summary of answers in % is divided into five age groups

| | | Total | Age in years | | | | |
			18 – 26	27 – 35	36 – 44	45 – 53	54 – 65
Online News Websites	%	52.1	55.0	53.7	50.3	49.1	52.9
Television	%	30.4	16.7	30.5	33.1	32.5	33.7
Friends, Family, or Colleagues	%	27.3	36.8	25.3	23.8	25.6	27.4
Official Information Provided by Companies and Institutions	%	24.1	35.4	24.6	20.2	22.4	22.2
Radio	%	14.8	14.8	11.2	12.9	18.8	15.9
The Press (Newspapers, Magazines)	%	13.8	17.2	15.8	15.2	11.9	11.0
Social Networks (Facebook, Twitter, …)	%	12.5	14.4	17.2	10.9	12.6	9.6
Other	%	3.0	3.3	2.1	1.7	3.2	4.2
Total	Count	1,500	209	285	302	277	427

Source: Own processing

Moving to the second part of the questionnaire, we can see a comparison of the *Czech Television* and *Facebook* as the representatives of PSM and digital media platforms. We can compare how Czech people perceive those two media in seven areas formulated into evaluated attributes. In Figure 3, we can see the percentage of people who strongly agreed and agreed with the statements about the *Czech Television* and *Facebook*. Those, who do not follow the services of those media platforms at all or did not feel competent enough to evaluate them, were instructed to select the "I don't know, not relevant" option.

The most important result from the point of view of the presented literature overview and theoretical background in general is the gap in the evaluation of trust in information people get from the two media. 64% of the respondents stated they trust information they get from the *Czech Television*, 34% of all respondents stated they trust information they get from *Facebook*. The comparison of the two media in the area of feeling that they make the news and current affairs issues relevant to the respondent is also interesting; the *Czech Television* scores significantly higher (67% compared to 48%).

In terms of engagement as an important potential benefit of digital media platforms compared to the PSM, we can actually observe that the percentage difference characteristic for all the other attributes is not present; in the case of caring about the respondents' opinions and possibility to influence services of the media, the *Czech Television* and *Facebook* score exactly the same (27%). In the case of the attribute referring to the content of the media making respondents talk about it with somebody else, *Facebook* scores higher (46% compared to 39% in case of the *Czech Television*).
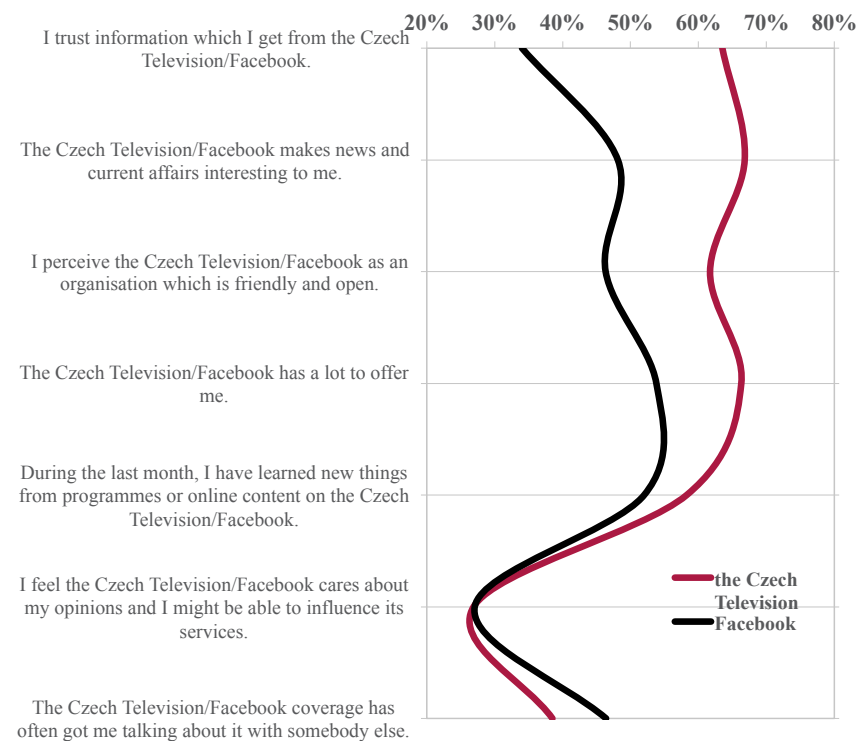

Figure 3: Perception of the Czech Television and Facebook services (N = 1,500); % of people who said they strongly agree or agree (TOP2BOX) with the following statements are shown. The attributes are sorted by the % difference in the evaluation of the Czech Television and Facebook
Source: Own processing

If we have a look particularly at *Facebook* perception among the Czech population and at the differences among five age groups (Figure 4), we can observe that especially the youngest people (aged 18 to 26 years old) evaluate *Facebook* more positively compared to other age groups. 71% of young people agree with the

statements "*Facebook* has a lot to offer me" and "*Facebook* makes news and current affairs interesting to me" (compared to 54%, respectively 48% in total sample). In general, the younger the respondents are, the better their perception of *Facebook* in the rated areas is. The only exception is trust in information people get from *Facebook*; first of all, the perception among age groups here does not differ significantly; moreover, the youngest group does not rate *Facebook* the most positively in this area (33% of them stated they agree they trust in information on *Facebook* compared to 34% in total).
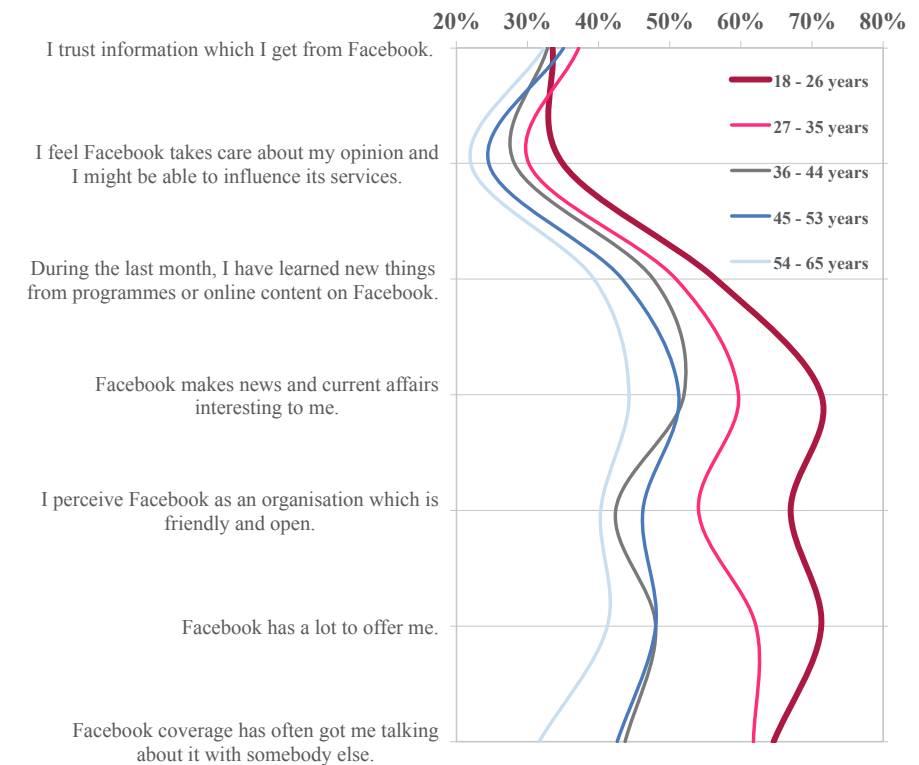

Figure 4: Perception of Facebook services (N = 1,500); % of people who said they strongly agree or agree (TOP2BOX) with the following statements are shown divided into five age groups. The attributes are sorted by the % difference between the youngest and the oldest age group. 18 – 26 years (N = 209), 27 – 35 years (N = 285), 36 – 44 years (N = 302), 45 – 53 years (N = 277), 54 – 65 years (N = 427)
Source: Own processing

Significant differences were observed also when we compared groups of respondents based on the education level they achieved. Respondents with elementary education perceive *Facebook* significantly more positively compared to participants with any kind of higher education. They trust the information they get from *Facebook* more often (45% compared to 34% in total or 28% in case of people with university education).

The biggest gap among those with elementary education and university education is in the area of talking about content they saw on *Facebook* with somebody else. 65% of people with an elementary level of education often talk about what they consume on *Facebook*, compared to 46% in total or 42% among those with university education. In terms of engagement, particularly in the case of feeling that *Facebook* cares about respondents' opinions and gives them the possibility to influence its services, 40% of those with an elementary level of education stated they agree, compared to 27% in total and 18% in the case of those with university level education.
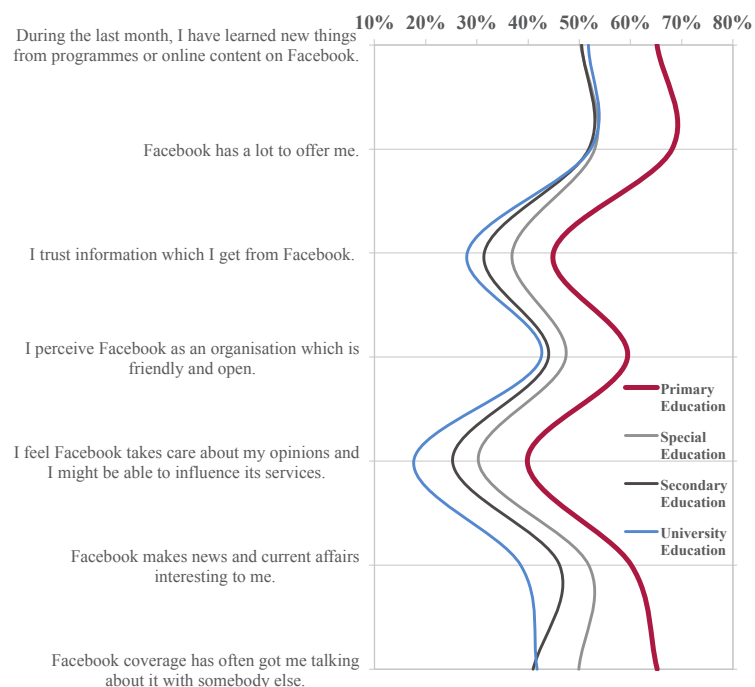
Figure 5: Perception of Facebook services (N = 1,500); % of people who said they strongly agree or agree (TOP2BOX) with the following statements are shown divided into four groups according to the level of education. The attributes are sorted by the % difference between the primary level of education and university education. Primary Education (N = 138), Special Education (N = 515), Secondary Education (N = 598), University Education (N = 249)

Source: Own processing

Conclusion

Public service media (PSM) around the world face solid pressure to reflect the expansion of digital technologies and media platforms. There are three key topics present in the current literature focusing on the topic. Digital media can be perceived as a threat to PSM while they are said to cover some of their key functions (such as general accessibility, plurality of voices, or democratisation). PSM are also forced to include new technologies and new media platforms into their services to reach the audience in a relevant environment. Last but not least, digital media in this sense can be perceived as an opportunity to support PSM and the relationship they have with their audience, enhance audience engagement and higher level of participation.

In general, even though the legitimacy of PSM might be questioned, especially regarding their financial support from public resources, there is a consensus about the importance of the key values PSM represent. The core challenge expressed also by European Union legal bodies is to promote those values enough to make it understandable for the public, to add a certain sense of urgency to the values PSM should be delivering. In this sense, digital media platforms might be perceived as an appreciated tool and opportunity to engage more effectively with the public.

In the pilot research conducted on a representative sample of Czech population (N = 1,500), we briefly outlined the perception of the main information sources, starting with the frequency of their usage and trust people have in those information sources. In the second part of the research, we covered in detail how people perceive selected representatives of PSM and digital media platforms, particularly the *Czech Television* and *Facebook*. We analysed the two media outlets by comparing their perception in selected areas formulated into seven statements focusing on their general perception, perception of their content, and openness or engagement potential.

We observe online news websites being the most frequently used information source (73%), followed by television (63%) and social networks such as *Facebook* or *Twitter* (40%). Social networks are even more frequently used by the youngest age group of people up to 26 years; for them it is the second most frequently used source (70%). When compared to the level of trust people have in those sources, there is a significant shift in the case of social networks; people use them very frequently, but they do not tend to trust them that much. Regarding trust, social networks even score the worst among all evaluated information sources.

Focusing on the second part of the research, we observed that the *Czech Television* scores better in almost all evaluated areas, except the respondents' belief that it cares about their opinions and gives them the possibility to influence its services (here the *Czech Television* and *Facebook* score exactly the same with 27%), and except for making the respondents talk about its coverage with somebody else (here *Facebook* scores higher with 46% compared to 39% in case of the *Czech Television*). The major gap, positive for the *Czech Television* as a representative of PSM, is in the trust people have in information they get from the two media. Trust people have in the *Czech Television* is significantly higher compared to *Facebook*; the difference here is exactly 30 percentage points. Also, content the *Czech Television* offers is evaluated more positively, as well as its general perception as an institution. Even though a further analysis of other media representatives or more aspects of their services should be definitely carried out to validate the results, based on the data we have, we can state that the benefit of digital media platforms truly might lie in their potential to engage the audience more effectively; for instance, to support perceived transparency and communication activities of an organisation or to make the audience talk with people around them about current public issues more often.

We also see some significant differences among various socio-demographic groups, mostly in case of the age and education level of respondents. In general, we observe the perception of *Facebook* is significantly more positive among younger people up to 26 years and among those with a lower (elementary) level of education. This indicates PSM should pay special attention to those groups of young and less educated people as they seem to absorb media content differently when compared to other groups following their specific preferences and needs.

Based on the literature overview, we can state that it is generally important to make information about public issues more understandable and accessible, especially among the less informed or politically interested public. Also, digital media platforms and entertainment are undoubtedly very powerful tools to attract the public and make the presented information appealing. It is a crucial task for PSM to smartly implement those tools, but also to keep their trustfulness as it is undoubtedly undesirable if potential changes would lead to a lower quality of content, lower objectivity or lack of context.

The presented pilot research aims to inspire further detailed research and analysis of specific attributes of engagement or test potential PSM activities to map where exactly is the potential for PSM to use digital media platforms as an engagement tool and how to effectively reach various socio-demographic groups considering their specific preferences and needs. The data might also enable the public service media to shape their communication strategy or programming based on insights gained during the analysis. At the same time, in-depth statistical analysis including attitudinal segmentation can be used based not only on demographics but also behaviour. This might help the public service media and also academics to uncover and understand motivations and needs of specific groups of people and help to effectively target those specific groups while supporting the public service media legitimacy.

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