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Public Service in the Age of Social Network Media

Stig Hjarvard

Abstract

This chapter addresses how, and to what extent, public service obligations and institutions may be redefined and extended to facilitate information flows and public deliberation using social network media as a remedy for democratic deficiencies of both older mass media and newer forms of network media. I make a case for three public service functions that have particular importance in social network media: curation, moderation, and monitoring. Building on a critique of the individualistic perspective underlying both cyber-optimist and -pessimist accounts of the potentials of social network media, an alternative and institutional perspective based on mediatization theory is introduced. I focus on the ongoing restructuring of societal spheres through which strategic and sociable forms of communication are challenging deliberative forms of communication. Based on recent studies on public service media's use of social network media in efforts to enhance public deliberation, the chapter examines how networked media can be a focus for intervention in the public interest.

Keywords: curation, cyber-optimism, democratic deliberation, mediatization, moderation, monitoring

Introduction

Social network media such as Facebook and Twitter have become increasingly important means by which citizens learn about public issues; they have also been praised as platforms for individuals and organisations to engage in deliberations on private and public affairs. Their growing importance is evident, for example, in a series of digital media reports published annually by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. The latest (2016) reports extensive use of social network media for news consumption. In countries with very high internet penetration, such as Denmark and Sweden, no fewer than 56 per cent of the population reported using social network media as a news source during the past week, and 12 per cent considered social network media their most important source. Among 18-24 year olds, the percentage is typically much

higher, as in Denmark where 30 per cent of young people said social network media are their primary sources for news. In the USA and across the EU as a whole, at least 10 per cent of the population indicate social network media as their primary source (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism 2016; see also Schröder et al. 2017). This shift is motivating legacy news media, including public service media (PSM) organisations, to transform their news services (and other programme genres) to accommodate changing user behaviours (Sehl et al. 2017).

Social network media have been praised for their potential to boost participation in public affairs, both as fora for discussion and as tools for political action. Their role in mobilising people during the Arab Spring and in the Occupy Movement is offered as evidence of their potential. But the optimistic tone of discourse about Web 2.0 and social network media's presumed ability to facilitate citizen participation in public debates, and to communicate information that is both relevant and sufficient among users, is increasingly questioned. There is growing concern that fewer people engage with a comprehensive range of information, which is important for opinion formation. Public deliberation may be jeopardised by the compartmentalisation of publics into cliques of like-minded individuals as 'polarized crowds' (Smith et al. 2014) who participate in 'filter bubbles' (Pariser 2011). Such concerns are also linked with growth in strategic communication practices that instrumentalise public deliberation (Morozov 2011; Curran et al. 2012) and produce manipulative content and false information spread through social media networks.

This chapter discusses the role of PSM in relation to social network media in pursuit of improved understandings of the notion and reality of a 'networked society'. I consider how, and to what extent, PSM may extend their democratic service obligations by facilitating improved information flows and public deliberations through social network media in efforts to remedy the historic problem of democratic deficiencies in mass media and the current democratic problems of social network media. Discussion about public service obligations relative to the rise of digitalisation has emphasised both opportunities and potential threats to public service broadcasting (PSB). This encourages reconsidering their remit in an era of digital networks, especially with regard to how they might survive in an increasingly global, commercial and convergent media environment (e.g. Lowe & Yamamoto 2016).

In this chapter, however, our point of departure is not from the perspective of the PSM organisations, although they will become the focus as we proceed. Here the point is to consider challenges and possibilities of social media for sustaining an informed citizenry in the deliberation of public affairs. That is central to the theory and practice of public service in media, and therefore pertinent to understandings of PSM in the networked society context. In other words, I am largely dealing with functions rather than organisations, but both are rooted in public service principles.

From an academic perspective, the colloquial term 'social media' can be construed as a misnomer because it suggests that such media are especially social and, by implication at least, more social than other media (Papacharissi 2015). In fact, all media

are inherently social in nature and function. The distinctive characteristic of the new platforms, especially Twitter and Facebook, is their ability to create social *networks* of communication instead of one-to-one or one-to-many forms of transmission-oriented communication (Ellison & Boyd 2013). But that doesn't mean that traditional media such as the telephone or radio are less social than 'social media'. Thus, the term 'social network media' is more precise (Klastrup 2016) and therefore more useful for our analysis.

Social network media clearly have a role in the dissemination of publicly relevant information and in facilitating participation in public affairs, but they are insufficient for these purposes in their present form because they are weak in social commitments and civic virtues. In social network media, the 'social' aspect is dominated by particular forms of sociality that have not so far involved direct responsibility towards the public or society at large. Their combined commercial and socio-technical nature therefore favours some dimensions of 'the social', most notably sociability and strategic forms of communication, but largely excludes broader societal goals that are related to enlightenment and democracy. This is also due to the fact that the global tech companies controlling social network media platforms have refused to consider themselves as media having editorial responsibilities and insist on being treated as distribution technology companies.

PSB was invented in the context of radio and television's emergence in the first half of the twentieth century as an approach to ensure realising the greatest public benefit from the new media technologies of that era. This is a timely period for deeper consideration of how social network media in the twenty-first century may similarly be subject to policy intervention to secure the greatest benefits in the public interest. PSM's roots in broadcasting provide a legacy of experiences and tools for addressing the important issues and concerns today, although we should be wary of trying to replicate past experience under different conditions when working to address contemporary problems. It is especially important not to imply that a call for public service in social network media should be solely, or even mainly, governed by the self-interested rationale of public service organisations in their efforts to survive in the digital era. This chapter focuses on the need for public intervention in the development of social network media to compensate for existing and persistent social and democratic deficiencies in the converging media environment.

Networks of optimism and pessimism

Discussions about social and democratic benefits of social network media often feature a tone of cyber-optimism concerning the internet's potential to influence an individual's possibilities for self-expression and participation, and a general enthusiasm for the emergence of 'networks' to replace an antiquated 'mass society'. In considering the potential social network media have for satisfying public service

obligations, we should critically examine, and deconstruct, the cyber-optimistic vision. In turn, we also need to do the same with cyber-pessimistic ideals about social network media.

In a study of US digital media pioneers, Turner (2006) found that the revolutionary fervour over cybernetic technologies has roots in ideas that were borrowed from the counterculture of the 1960s. The rise of Web 2.0 and social network media are usually considered the next step in an evolutionary process that is producing a networked society, now signalling a widening and deepening of potentiality ushered in by Web 1.0. Cyber-optimists such as Nicholas Negroponte (1995), co-founder of the MIT Media Lab, and American poet John Perry Barlow (1996), author of *A Declaration for Cyberspace Independence*, envisaged human emancipation through digital network outside or beyond the capacity of nation states and institutionalised authorities to govern. Across techno-optimistic publications, one finds a peculiar blend of ideas adapted from libertarianism, communitarianism, and anarchism in which ideals about social governance in ‘cyberspace’ are based on voluntary agreements among networked individuals. This cyber-optimistic view has informed political action in the Occupy Movement, for example, and serves as a normative foundation for research on the social influences and potential of digital networks.

A recent prominent example is *Networked* by Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman (2014). Here, the authors argue that networks are “the new social operating system” based on the notion of ‘networked individualism’ that positions the individual and the network as the two most prominent social entities in a ‘networked world’: “In the world of networked individuals, it is the person who is the focus: not the family, not the work unit, not the neighbourhood, and not the social group” (Rainie & Wellman 2014: 6). From this perspective, collective demands and obligations towards other social entities are mainly construed as obstacles to the emancipation of the individual. Historic barriers to shared social prosperity seem less important if the individual acquires the competence to develop his or her network to pursue personal prosperity, which is presumably shared in so far as every individual seizes the opportunities presumably entailed. They believe the networked world “provides opportunities for people to thrive if they know how to manoeuvre in it. Arguably, the emerging divide in this world is not the ‘digital divide’ but the ‘network divide’” (ibid: 255).

Rainie and Wellman provide an interesting analysis of the ways in which the internet and mobile media combine with already changing patterns of social organisation in signalling a shift from formal and close-knit organisations to looser and networked forms of association. This is thought to facilitate new structures of social organisation and communicative interaction. However, they tend to overemphasise digital technology’s liberating potential and demonstrate a limited understanding of the constraints that are structural and institutional. Furthermore, theirs is a highly individualistic perspective in which social ties – and associated obligations and dependencies – are primarily seen as barriers to individual freedom and personal fulfilment.

Thus, digital networks have inspired optimistic prognoses of societal development. They have also prompted critical and pessimistic diagnoses of the social consequences of new media technology, for instance as regards social media surveillance (Trotter 2012) and the emergence of filter bubbles (Pariser 2011). Sherry Turkle (2011: 1) criticised the ways in which digital media encourage socially and psychologically unrewarding relationships and dependencies: “Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other. We’d rather text than talk”. Her analysis suggests there is little self-fulfilment to be had through the internet or mobile media. Instead, individuals submit themselves to activities and relationships that are exhausting and divert them from engaging in potentially far more rewarding social experiences.

It is interesting that although Rainie and Wellman (2014) and Turkle (2011) reach opposite conclusions, they do not disagree on the actual changes taking place. Both highlight a proliferation of weaker forms of social ties, which allow individuals to disembed (Giddens 1984) from socially stronger ties. They present different normative evaluations of the implications, however: Rainie and Wellman (2014) emphasise constraints of ‘the cocoon’ of bounded groups, while Turkle (2011) emphasises social pressures accompanying digital media’s demand for the individual to be in perpetual contact with an extended network. When applied to our interests here, the two positions present radically different solutions for PSM in their engagement with social network media.

If the cyber-optimists are correct, the new online environment may render PSM superfluous as users take an active role in being their own educators and facilitators of public debate. If the cyber-pessimists are correct, PSM should develop online activities outside social network media, if possible. Most problematic for PSM, from a sociological perspective, is the individualistic perspective which neglects social demands and collective obligations. That orientation is questionable given the absence of a structural perspective that necessarily brings into consideration the wider cultural contexts and deep social institutional frameworks within which social network media operate. Lacking this perspective, one cannot qualify either diagnosis – i.e. optimistic or pessimistic. Both diagnoses direct attention to real opportunities and actual problems, but the experience of having new opportunities and/or being subjected to new demands depend on social variables that certainly include the individual’s social and cultural background (class, age, gender, etc.), the institutional context of media use (business, education, entertainment, politics, etc.), and the dominant logic of the media in question (commercial, political, professional, etc.). Thus, a structural and institutional perspective is *necessary* for deciding *under which conditions* each and both diagnoses may be correct (or incorrect). This directs our inquiry into the role of PSM in a different direction.

Mediatization: Networks of social change

Mediatization theory provides a necessary holistic perspective on interdependencies between media and wider culture and societal conditions (Hjarvard 2013; Lundby 2014). This perspective shifts attention from communicative processes of ‘mediation’ (the use of various media for communication) to social processes of ‘mediatization’ (changes brought about in the wider culture and society due to the growing presence and importance of media). Most research has typically located media influence at the level of communication processes, as evident in the considerable body of work on how media messages can persuade audiences or set the public agenda. Although an important aspect of media’s influence, the taken-for-granted presence of media across an expanding range of domains of cultural and social life renders this perspective insufficient. Mediatization theory emphasises the integration of various media into the very fabric of culture and society as an important influence in and of itself (Hjarvard 2017a). Media have become integral to the functioning of many aspects and most domains of society, including politics (Esser & Strömbäck 2015), religion (Hjarvard & Lövheim 2012), and sports (Frandsen 2015). Media consequently exert influence from inside society as indispensable tools for social interactions.

The mediatization of culture and society has a diachronic dimension and a synchronic dimension. It is diachronic because mediatization is a *historical and transformative process* through which other societal domains become increasingly dependent on the media and their modus operandi. For example, journalism and news media exercise important influences on ways of ‘doing politics’ today, not just in formatting political messages. Today, media are present in all levels of society from ‘the big society’ level of dominant societal institutions such as politics and public administration, to ‘the small society’ level of myriad life-world encounters between individuals and groups in informal social settings. They have become a natural resource for ‘doing family’, ‘doing work’, ‘doing sports’, etc.

The synchronic dimension of mediatization highlights the ways in which media have come to *condition social interaction*. Media logics co-structure the ways in which individuals, groups and organisations interact, not as a determining factor but precisely as a conditioning factor that *enables, limits, and co-structures* social interaction. ‘Media logics’ is pluralised to indicate there is not a singular logic behind all media. Mediatization investigates the varied ways in which technology, aesthetics, and the institutional dimensions of media exert a combined influence on broad cultural and social affairs (Hjarvard 2017b). Mediatization research is not an attempt to build a closed theoretical fortress to replace existing theory. It is properly understood as an attempt to provide a synthesising perspective that should include insights from existing research, including political economy of the media (Murdock 2017) and public sphere theory (Habermas 1989) especially. Political economy is important because social network media feature a global and commercial model that is subject to limited political regulation. The former mass media structure was based on a national and

mixed public-private model with variable degrees, often high, of domestic political intervention. Public sphere theory is especially important because Jürgen Habermas' study of the structural transformation of the public sphere may be understood as a precursor to mediatization studies in his efforts to combine historical and sociological approaches to investigate the restructuring of societal spheres, which is exemplary of mediatization research.

From the perspective of mediatization theory, we should regard social network media as implicated in social and cultural changes that restructure institutions and social realms, including the public sphere at large and the organisational and technological frameworks that support the functioning of the public sphere in practice. In the Nordic countries, the public sphere has been underpinned by a combination of PSM institutions (originally monopolies) and private news media, largely commercial. But the public sphere in each country is increasingly influenced by global, commercial actors that especially include Facebook and Google. Through mediatization processes, existing institutional structures are being partly disrupted and reconfigured.

Dijck (2013) emphasises how social network media are engineering new forms of sociality by merging pre-existing life-world phenomena (e.g. 'friends' and rules of politeness) with algorithmic operating principles such as popularity rankings (based on 'likes', network size, etc.). This restructuring of social interaction involves a blurring of earlier boundaries between public and private forms of communication, as well as between strategic and non-strategic forms. On Facebook, much communication has a half-private, half-public character. What one learns about public affairs through Facebook is knowledge communicated in a modality of sociable conversations within a personal network of close and distant acquaintances.

Thus, the logics of social network media differ from the logics of mass media (Klinger & Svensson 2015). Dijck and Pool (2013) highlight four social network media logics: programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication. In their view, these are operating principles that not only influence interactions on social network media but are increasingly entangled with mass media logics. As mass media and social network media converge in many aspects, e.g. technically, commercially and through daily use, the logics of different (or formerly different) media become intertwined and interdependent. This entanglement of logics is clearly at work in the sharing of news from professional media, including PSM's news services, through social network media. From the user's perspective, the sharing of news is part of an everyday social conversation with 'friends.' From the news media's perspective, producing shareable news has become a strategic priority. The success or failure of a news item to gain traction on social network media has been internalised as a new 'quality' benchmark in newsrooms. In the logics of social network media, news media content and user activity are both integral to the business model.

The entanglement of life-world norms of interaction, the logics of news media, and the logics of social network media creates a new context for engaging with public affairs. The ways in which people share and discuss news on social network media are

influenced by this hybrid social environment, which is partly public and partly private. Marwick and Boyd (2010) believe this environment is characterised by a ‘context collapse’ that makes unclear what kind of social situation the user is engaging in. We are describing a fluid situation with repercussions for the ways in which people engage with news and discuss things. This represents a significant challenge for PSM, and other traditional legacy news media, because social network media are not only new competitors, potentially diminishing their historic capture of audiences, income and political legitimacy, but also represent a new way of constructing ‘publicness’ when compared with how this was done in the broadcast era. The techno-social infrastructure of the public sphere is gradually shifting and, as a result, PSM must consider how to engage citizens in public matters under new networked conditions.

The place *not* to discuss controversial issues

Given the purported democratic potential of social network media to engage people in dialogue about issues of common concern and public interest, several studies have shown that social network media are not always suitable for such discussions. This is especially the case for controversial issues. A Pew Research Centre (2014) study in America found that people are less willing to discuss controversial issues on social network media compared to offline situations, i.e., at the family dinner table, work, or a public community meeting. The study further documents that “social media did not provide new forums for those who might otherwise remain silent to express their opinions and debate issues” (Pew Research Centre 2014: 4).

The Danish Agency of Culture (2015) conducted a comparable study in Denmark and came to similar conclusions. Only 6 per cent of Danes would be ‘very willing’ to discuss controversial issues on social network media, compared to 12 per cent who would be ‘very willing’ to do so at a public meeting. Fully 25 per cent would be ‘very willing’ to discuss such issues at work, and 38 per cent at the family dinner table. A recent Norwegian study regarding citizens’ willingness to discuss the publication of controversial religious cartoons concluded that social network media are not a preferred arena for most people to discuss such issues (Fladmoe & Steen-Johnsen 2017). Thus, the idea that social network media are a public communicative space for an otherwise ‘silent majority’ appears generally to be incorrect.

Reluctance to express controversial opinions has been described as a ‘spiral of silence’ effect (Noelle-Neumann 1993). The more one expects other people to disagree (or feels unsure of their opinions), the less willing s/he is to discuss controversial issues. Social network media are potentially more likely to reinforce majority positions in a debate because people with a minority viewpoint are more likely to refrain from voicing a contrary opinion. This reluctance triggers a spiral of silence because the lack of dissenting voices leads like-minded participants to believe their viewpoints are more widely, generally shared than true. The spiral of silence is not specific to

social network media; it is a feature of all kinds of communication situations. If we want to explain people's reluctance to discuss controversial issues on social network media, we need additional explanatory factors. I will discuss two here, and there are likely others.

The aforementioned 'context collapse' creates an ambiguous social situation that makes other participants' potential reactions less predictable, including uncertainty about to whom one is actually speaking in social network media. The spiral of silence effect may thus become more prominent on social network media because the platform and context encourages users to save face in the eyes of 'friends' with a variety of backgrounds and relationships with the user. The algorithmic push by Facebook and other social network media to enlarge the user's network typically makes them not only bigger but also more heterogeneous, thereby increasing the likelihood of context collapse. A study by Storsul (2014) supports the influence of this on political engagement among (even) youth politicians in Norway who often use social network media to organise political events. The evidence indicates they were reluctant to express themselves politically on Facebook. Moreover, the mixed social context in this environment "causes teenagers to delimit controversies and try to keep political discussions to groups with more segregated audiences" (ibid: 17). Thus, the first factor is that social network media are as likely to aggravate the spiral of silence problem as potentially rectify it.

The second factor explaining limited interest to use social network media for public deliberation of controversial issues is the at-times harsh climate of online debate, which includes 'flaming' behaviour and outright hate speech. This pertains to social network media and other online fora, including online comments for news media sites. If people experience hate speech online, this understandably has a detrimental effect on their willingness to participate in debates (Fladmoe & Nadim 2017). Lacking actual hate speech, the very harshness of tone that is characteristic in many online debates may deter people from speaking out in such fora.

There are complicated implications for PSM. If PSM facilitates online debates on their own websites or via social network media platforms such as Facebook, they may have a civilising influence on debate through the practice of moderation. But this poses challenges for PSM organisations because they must accommodate themselves to the more liberal norms of conversational etiquette compared to established editorial practices in broadcasting. There is also the problem of courting accusations they are curtailing freedom of speech, particularly pointed for a 'public service' media organisation. The opportunities and challenges are rather closely 'balanced', which indicates the complexity of the problem for PSM in particular.

Social network media's deficiencies must be compared with mass media in particular. Opportunity to participate in public deliberation is more constrained in mass media, and many people are unwilling to participate even when asked to do so. They don't want to be in the public spotlight. On the other hand, questions about whether equal access enables representation of diverse viewpoints, and about the role

of moderation in discussions to ensure the quality of debates, are of equal relevance in mass media and social network media. However, compared with mass media, the internet and social network media *per se* are suggested as arenas that are inherently more democratic, more inclusive, and more likely to give voice to people who would otherwise be unlikely to express their opinions. Reviewing the evidence, none of these claims seem to be true. This doesn't necessarily inhibit the use of social network media for deliberation of issues of public concern, but their ability to fulfil such functions does not derive from the 'nature' of social network media. It can only be derived from obligations they are expected to fulfil in the service of society. This is where PSM has an important role to play in the era of social network media – a role with functions of historic and continuing importance.

Using social network media in the public's service

To illustrate the potential benefit of public service obligations for the democratic performance of social network media, we draw on two recent analyses conducted with Mattias Pape Rosenfeldt (Hjarvard & Rosenfeldt 2017, forthcoming). We studied the public debates following two television series about Islam, immigration and cultural values in Denmark. The programmes were aired by the Danish public service broadcaster, DR, and debates took place in both traditional mass media and on Facebook. The Mohammed cartoon crisis of 2005 and 2006 demonstrated that discussions about Islam, immigration and cultural values are often heated. This crisis was not an exception, but rather a particularly intense episode in a debate that began in the 1980s and continues to have political traction, especially given the 2015 European refugee crises and an upsurge of populist movements.

Many analyses of media coverage of immigration and Islam have demonstrated that news media generally provide a critical and even negative image of both, particularly of immigrants with Muslim backgrounds who are often associated with crime, terrorism, unemployment, and gender discrimination (see Hervik 2002; Jacobsen et al. 2013). Respective news stories may be factually correct, but the cumulative effect indicates a media agenda that singles out 'Muslim immigrants' as a key problem. This can create a deep divide between the majority 'us' and a minority, 'them', which may prove detrimental to integration efforts and actually alienate immigrants. It may deter them from participating in public discussions about issues related to their own political and cultural life in the host society. This situation has become increasingly acute with the resurgence of populist movements that typically target Muslim immigrants as the root cause of many societal problems.

Against this backdrop of contentious conflicts, we wished to address the potential for not only engaging with the issues but actually trying to make a difference by altering how the debate is framed and engaging immigrants in the discussions. In particular, we wished to follow the debate across a range of media, including Facebook. We

examined public debates surrounding two very different types of television series. One was a comedy show titled *Still Veiled* (2013) that featured four women with an ethnic minority background who make fun of the prejudices and stereotypes of both the majority population and Muslim minority communities. The other was a factual documentary titled *Rebellion from the Ghetto* (2015) that addressed generational problems between ethnic minority youths and their parents over marriage, sexuality, homosexuality, etc. Both programmes were commissioned by DR and produced by private production companies, and both prompted debates in mainstream media (radio, newspapers, etc.) and social network media.

The results of our analyses (Hjarvard & Rosenfeldt 2017, forthcoming) show that the debates provided a wide array of framings of the various issues, and partly transcended the 'us versus them' dichotomy that has been characteristic in mainstream news media. Furthermore, people of ethnic minority backgrounds were very active in the debates, both on social network media and in mainstream media. Benchmarked against the traditional ratio of representation for ethnic minority voices in news media coverage, they played a prominent role. In doing so, they made publicly visible a diversity of positions among ethnic minorities in Denmark. That this happened was the result of conscious and combined efforts by DR and the private production companies. By consciously downplaying particular framings and not singling out a definitive cause for problems, they fostered a more diverse debate and more voices felt invited to participate. For instance, problems were not framed as religious issues but as cultural and generational problems with which people could identify irrespective of religious orientation.

The documentary series, especially, made conscious efforts in planning the debate through a number of pre-screenings of the programme in particular social settings (e.g. schools with high percentages of ethnic minority students). Ethnic minority opinion leaders were invited to see the series and comment in advance. This initial priming of key audiences provided a different point of departure for the debate when the series was subsequently broadcast on public television. Debates were intense and there was no lack of fierce rhetoric, but the professional moderation of official Facebook pages for the TV series ensured a reasonable level of civility. In addition, participation was robust because debates involved many people from the various ethnic communities. Debate preparations and moderation alone would not have ensured a more diverse debate, but happily several other mainstream media followed DR by making space for more diverse voices and thereby helping debates develop in line with the programmes' overall aims.

The two case studies demonstrate that social network media, despite various deficiencies we have discussed, can be an arena for public discussion about serious and contentious issues in ways that expand argumentation and involve new people rather than foment a spiral of silence. This presupposes that PSM is knowledgeable about how to make the most of social network media's potential. Importantly, it also suggests this works in *conjunction* with their legacy mass media professional repertoire. The

studies indicate that PSM should not think of social media in isolation but rather as part of a wider, converging media infrastructure in which PSM *and other media* jointly influence information flows and debates that unfold in and between various media. PSM may, therefore, have an important role to play outside their traditional realm, a role that is keenly relevant to the networked society context. Finally, it is important to observe that without the obligations and resources that pertain to PSM in particular, the debates we observed would have been unlikely to occur and develop as they did.

Public service obligations for social network media

In light of my critique, I want to highlight three important public service tasks that PSM already perform that should be extended: curation, moderation and monitoring. *Curation* is important because the acquisition of quality content with public relevance is not only important for the performance of PSM per se but also necessary for information flows and public discussions on social network media overall. Social network media rely on their users to produce or share content from other sources and few users systematically generate quality content of public relevance. So, the various media industries play a vital role as providers of content as input. The analysed cases suggest it is unlikely that purely commercial media companies would have taken on such productions or committed themselves to raising public debates on these critical issues without DR taking the lead. Because such productions can be commercially unviable, it is important for initial agenda setting that they are resourced and aired by a prominent broadcaster with the strength to market the programmes and the capacity to accept higher degrees of risk. And without DR, it is unlikely they would have initiated significant debate.

Using curated content means PSM doesn't need to produce all of the content in-house; much can be achieved by commissioning and buying content in a commercial market. In the aforementioned cases, it is important to observe that both the broadcaster and the production company demonstrated commitment to public service values. This suggests that curating not only involves the curation of content *for* social network media, but also curation of content *within and by* social network media, taking advantage of the network's crowdsourcing capacity. The success of the two cases relied on PSM's ability to create synergy between traditional productions and online contributions.

Secondly, PSM plays a vital role through *moderation*. Social network media comprise many forms of communication and conversation. Sociability is a dominant form of conversation in which communication is performed primarily for enjoying company and affirming relationships. Another dominant form is strategic communication by which commercial and political interests seek to influence public opinion and behaviour, using online posts that mimic the sociable modality of communication between 'friends'. If social network media are to be valuable for discussing public concerns,

they must transcend the sociable and strategic forms of communication that are currently prevalent. As Schudson (1997) persuasively argued, conversation – including sociable conversation – is not inherently democratic but may be used for a variety of purposes: authoritarian or democratic, manipulative or deliberative. He argues that democratic conversations require a commitment to *publicness* and *civility*, and need a certain amount of *norm-governedness* to succeed. In short, democratic conversations on social network media platforms require moderation. This applies both in the limited sense of screening posts for hate speech and forward planning to ensure the quality of the debate by inviting relevant participants to join the conversation to ensure a plurality of voices and perspectives, etc. This suggests a contextualising role for PSM.

Finally, PSM can play a vital role in *monitoring*. Social network media can be a rich resource for a wide range of information that has private and public relevance, but the more significant they become as information distributors, the more important it becomes that this information flow is subject to scrutiny and quality control. In the wake of concerns about the rise of ‘fake news’, news media firms are strengthening fact-checking procedures, and political institutions are pushing social network media to introduce procedures for countering various forms of misinformation. Facebook, for example, announced initiatives for implementation prior to national elections in France and Germany (Kerr 2017), and from 2018 the German NetzDG law demands stricter scrutiny of hate speech and fake news on social network media. Such initiatives may be useful, but they should not be limited to news stories and passive damage control after publication. Public service media and other knowledge-processing institutions, such as universities, public institutions and NGOs, should take an active role as monitoring institutions that *validate* and *qualify* information and work to distinguish between *relevant* and less relevant information. An increased presence and active monitoring activity in the sphere of social network media would not only make it more difficult for questionable information to flourish, but also set standards for what is understood as valid information. This role would align with the traditional PSB obligation to serve as a benchmark for quality standards.

These three public service tasks are not restricted to PSM organisations, but they have comparatively unique knowledge and professional experience to take on these functions effectively today. And these three tasks provide a framework for advancing an agenda to enable citizens to better use social network media as resources for sharing and developing publicly relevant information and discussions about public issues. Social network media have the potential for this, but without democratic governance this potential can be circumvented by the spread of misinformation, spiral of silence effects, and commercial pressures.

A profound problem in relation to the idea of democratic governance is the global control that dominant tech companies such as Facebook and Google exercise in the field of social network media. National political regulation and the initiatives of national public service institutions have only limited reach and influence on the practices of the dominant players. Hitherto, policy measures at national levels have mostly been

reactive rather than proactive in relation to technological and business developments. There is clearly a need for supranational intervention to regulate the practices of big tech companies in the field of social network media, for instance at the level of the European Union. This far, the European Union seems to be one of the few supranational bodies that demonstrate some will to engage with the growing power of global tech companies. Nevertheless, national public service media and other organisations, including civil society groups working to strengthen the public interest in the media, can make a difference through conscious efforts to curate content, moderate discussions, and monitor social network media.

Through processes of mediatization – in conjunction with other processes that especially include globalisation and commercialisation – we are again experiencing a structural transformation of the public sphere (Habermas 1989). Social network media are restructuring relationships between personal, private, and public arenas, and between strategic, deliberative, and sociable forms of communication. Their growing importance as distributors of publicly relevant information and fora for public engagement makes it vital to subject them to public service obligations to ensure public interest benefits for societies as such. This mandate is natural for PSM due to historic, legal and institutional reasons, and therefore can be considered immediate, contemporary tasks that have essential importance for the role of PSM in the networked society.

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