The mobile media platforms and the PSM challenges in the media convergence era[1]

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Abstract: Confronted in different geographies with an identity crisis, public media operators are facing new challenges every day: the distribution of content on different platforms and the development of mobile peripherals. Here is an opportunity for the public service media (PSM) to rediscover their path. In this work, we have developed an analysis to the applications for smartphones from the British broadcaster, BBC, and the Portuguese one, RTP.

We tried to comprehend what kinds of contents are presented on the apps for the iPhone and the possibilities created there for the citizens' integration and the distinctive features between RTP and BBC.

The adaptation of public service operators to a new digital paradigm is a challenge that will require its reinvention in the context of media convergence, a feat that coincides with other structural changes in several European countries. From a communication made at a national level, through broadcast media such as radio and TV, there is a need and an opportunity to operate on a more global scale, leveraging the potential of digital, which allows publishing content on multiple platforms, targeted to more diverse publics, opening a new set of possibilities for citizens.

The work that we present is part of our PhD project that has, as one of its premises, to monitor the adaptation of different media to the emergence of mobile media communication in the information society.

Key Words: Public service media; BBC; RTP; mobile media; smartphone; tablet.

From Broadcast to the digital new challenges

IN most Western European countries, the Public Service (PS), in the media field, was born while the radio was claimed as the first mass medium, in the early twentieth century (Moe, 2010). The development of television and its rapid transformation as a means of communication all over the world, forced PS managers to enlarge its diversity and embrace a new set of challenges. With the emergence of computers, and consequently the Internet, the notion of PS and its area of operation have been widely discussed. When we look, in a particularly way, at the development of television, we come to understand the challenges inherent to PS. Some of us can recall when television had only one channel available; others remember a time when there were only PS operators and channels supported by advertisement. There are still people who remember when basic services and paid broadcasting satellite services were available for the very first time:

> "Whatever the length of our memories, we are all aware that the number of channels is growing, that the switch to digital broadcasting has added more services, that many of us are spending significant amounts of money for pay services, and that we can now watch streaming television and television programmes on many types of devices" (Picard, 2013: 3).

Joaquim Fidalgo also describes the changes that PS has experienced at the end of the last millennium until the present day, in an undertaken research on TV. The researcher from Communication and Society Research Centre, at University of Minho, states that, among other changes, it is possible to prove the emergence of:

> "(…) new technological possibilities for broadcasting TV (satellite, cable, Internet, broadband) which is no longer dependent on the allocation of a scarce and public airwaves, and that also makes it cheaper to have access to the television activity" (2005: 25).

Originally, these ways of broadcasting began to use the Internet as a providing system to obtain extra information related to the television or radio main programs. Gradually, and with the development of network, the PS's Websites started offering more extensive information services, native content and the possibility to contact with the producers of the programs or with other viewers.

It is in this recent scenario that authors point a new way for PS operators, working in the media sector:

"In order to maintain a reasonable level of audience reach, broadcasters will decide to extend their portfolio of platforms and channels. The first step is thematic channels, and these will, to the extent that they prove to be successful, change the function of the open channels to showrooms for programme supply on thematic channels and on 'on-demand' platforms. Gradually these media and platforms will be linked as part of deliberate cross-media strategies that try to keep the viewer's and listener's attention as long as possible. In general, brand-building across media and platforms will become more and more important" (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2008: 342).

Hendy (2013) goes even further in making a proposal for the role of PS in the context of communication within the digital platforms. The researcher begins by explaining that the concept of broadcast was implicitly associated with the transmission of fitness-oriented programs towards extensive and fragmented audiences. However, with the development of a less hierarchical information network, where users travel freely in all directions, looking for radio and television as independently incorporated entities becomes incongruous. In addition, these two traditional media represent, increasingly, a small portion of the existing media supply. It is at this level that the teacher at the University of Sussex says: "We must stop talking about the Public Service Broadcast and move to the Public Service Media and Public Communication Service" (2013: 106).

This position, regarding the way the PS should operate from the perspective of digital communication is shared by Petros Losifidis (2011: 634). He explains

that this is why PSB should reinvent itself into PSM – multimedia institutions restructured to produce and distribute content digitally and to take full advantage of opportunities offered by the new platforms. In order to survive in the new media reality, the PS should stop putting up with a media-oriented logic and start developing multimedia-oriented strategies (Jakubowicz, 2007: 35).

We are not talking about the end of traditional and linear services, but the presentation of new content for special audiences and for different platforms. It is, at bottom, this idea that supports the transition from B (broadcast) to M (multimedia).

The inherent challenges in the Public Service Media idea

However, the PS was put into question when confronted with the proliferation of new channels and the loss of a clear sense for its mission. Among the most critical organizations to the activity of PS operators, in the context of new media, are regulators and private operators. Yngvar Kjus reflects on this issue and raises questions about the legitimacy of the PS in the digital environment, particularly when it operates at the level of multi-platform (Kjus, 2007: 147). It is a field where the private and commercial media companies are developing a satisfactory work.

It is also important to enhance the questions concerning the rising costs. While digitalization may achieve lower costs in distribution and storage, it is important to remember the investment need to: networking hosting, new application systems and software rights. The multi-platform and multimedia elements, for example, are often considered expensive since the business models created for this land are not yet fully established or developed (Medrado, *et al.,* 2012). This same issue is also addressed by former BBC chairman, Gavyn Davies (2013), who states that nowadays, one can find several examples of high-quality content to be widely distributed in different formats and platforms. Yet, these contents are extremely expensive for users and not always able to garner a large number of audiences.

Despite all the investment that PS operators, a bit all over Europe, have made in the digital universe, Brevini (2010: 354) presents us some particular problems. The online Websites developed by PS operators in Italy and Spain recorded a number of hits so low that makes us to question the validity of the investments in audio-visual and digital material. In addition, we may also reflect on the lack of preparation of many PS operators, here illustrated in the particular case of RAI, which makes it impossible to think of a common strategy for the content distribution at the level of online platforms (Brevini, 2010: 355).

The feeling that these changes turn PS mission less relevant; the idea that PS, as it stands now, has the serious risk of failing, increasingly lowering the level of audiences; and the critics that claim that PS operators are approaching the private profile of other media companies are the main points related to the presence of PS operators in new media territories (Fidalgo, 2005).

However, in the start of this new millennium, marked by media convergence and multi-platform reality, the PS, all over the world, was identifying a new set of opportunities to reinvent itself. This coincides with the discussion on media ecology in the 21st century. Leurdijk (2007) inquires about this point, stating that a media environment characterized by a wide range of content without barriers - physically or temporally - makes the role of PS gains a new and important relief. With this informative universe in constant boiling, the PS must be the citizen's guide: "In addition, given the immense volume of information available, the public broadcasters could serve as guides for the citizens-guides characterized by quality and credibility" (Moe, 2008: 230).

In the E-book 'A Realidade (ainda) mora aqui?', which results from a research project conducted at the University of Minho and coordinated by Felisbela Lopes, the importance of a Public Service Media is strikingly defended. The researchers believe that the satisfaction of collective needs, a vital target in a context like ours, characterizes by a financial crisis and the saturation of mass media content are important elements. These arguments separate the authors from the neoliberal idea that coincides with the end of public intervention in the media sector (Lopes, *et al.,* 2013: 69).

It is also at this level, and taking into account the presence of private operators in the digital reality, that Jakubowicz argues that PS operators should

be operating as a regulator in order to ensure the interests of citizens (2007: 35). If we have previously demonstrated concern about the presence of PS operators in a territory marked by the presence of private operators, this author explains that PS must continue to renew itself, independently of the field.

The media convergence is another factor that legitimizes the presence of PS operators in this field (Jenkins, 2006; Neto, 2014). Media consumers have the opportunity to receive different contents in one single platform. In our study we give a particular attention to smartphones, but we can also enhance the potential raised by computers. Citizens have the possibility to access information in the platform that best suits their interests. Where they are willing to.

Bardoel and Lowe (2007: 18) use the "singularity principle" and the "functional equivalence" concepts to explain that each medium occupies a particular niche or niches series, in the social practices of everyday life, that other mediums do not complete for various reasons, usually economic or technical. This same idea his supported by Losifids (2011: 629):

> "Cross-platform strategies help PSM retain audience share, reach new audiences and develop on-demand services, while enabling them to create a stronger partnership with civil society and serve an extended form of citizenship. Expanding into emerging digital media technologies and platforms is a difficult task and brings new challenges, but social change and new technologies require these public institutions to evolve from basic broadcasting services into an engine that provides information and useful content to all citizens using various platforms".

According to the covered points, it is conceivable to understand that PS operators have a good opportunity to reinforce their role in a multimedia and multi-platform environment. The emergence of mobile communication devices, as informative tools, is a new challenge and can be the missing piece of the Public Service Media puzzle, in the convergence era.

New opportunities for a media citizenship

As it was possible to understand, the digitalization of the media sector, with the Internet being its powerful motor, has been one of the main motes related to the PS new functions. Another of the aspects that deserves attention is the new possibilities given by the new information technologies, where we can include the mobile technologies, to a more active attitude by the consumers.

Internet and Social Networks - such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook – are becoming an indispensable medium for the realization of a media citizenship. To these tools, we can add the camera, microphone and apps available on smartphones and tablets. They allow a closer and dynamic relationship with and among citizens. In this context, the information society tends to be increasingly less restricted to a purely informative profile, becoming closer to what is understood as interactive (Bardoel & Lowe, 2007).

The original model of PS was based on a process of asymmetric relations among audiences. In the dominant side was possible to find operators who relied on collaboration with cultural elites and the government itself. In this specific context, elites used to dictate the information and journalists, who passed messages to the public, seems to be unquestionable. However, in the digital culture, users can assume a more active role in creating products and have the ability to filter more and more services. Citizens have the opportunity to choose what they really want to receive. Whatever the means by which the SP is affirmed, its role is played not only by content issues, but also by the processes and methodologies of relationship with the audiences that they promote (Pinto, 2005: 44).

Thus, it is raised the necessity of rethinking the structures of the PS. So, it maybe possible to incorporate the participation of the users while the credibility of its services is safeguarded. Taking in count this same idea, Flew (2011) identifies several causes that have contributed to the change of the relationship between producers and consumers, especially when we deal with the particular case of PS operators. Consequently, it is necessary to consider some changes related to the passage of Mass Communication for more personalized and individualized systems characterized by participation, promoted by the advent of the Internet

and other digital technologies. In the same way, it is equally important the fall of the authority lines that used to separate consumers and producers. Currently, consumers have an increasingly active role in the production and dissemination of information. In this new media environment, which is characterized by the abundance of information and empowered users, new challenges are raised to the ideological authority of journalists and media professionals, which play the gatekeeper role. People, who until very recently were passive audiences, use, increasingly, social networks, blogs and other digital tools for developing practical news and conversation around news (Flew, 2009).

Hendy uses BBC as a good example in this situation (2013: 114). First, it is possible to observe that BBC allows users to construct their own informative diet. Examples such as iPlayer and podcast concretize this opinion. Through Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, for example, it is possible to share or comment informative content. As we will see ahead, there are also different platforms to access information. The author also explains that journalists working for BBC are receiving specific formation to work in these new media platforms.

Even in Portugal, we can find some particular situations where RTP tried to encourage their users to have a different role in the information society. On RTP's Website it was possible for citizens to set up their own news alignment, choosing their own diet, piece by piece (Loureiro, 2009).

At this level, it is also important to perceive the different profile between private and public operators. While private operators – with a commercial shape – allow users to have an active role during entertaining programs, PS operators tend to keep this kind of activity in a more educative programs, like newscasts (Leurdijk, 2007).

We can also understand the opportunities raised for professional journalists. The online world gives them access to a number of alternative sources, which can contribute to a broader horizon with different perspectives on different issues. Terry Flew (2011: 223-224), using the particular situation in Australia, explains these opportunities. Taking into account the cultural diversity of this country, PS can produce information that arrives from citizens. We are not saying that citizens will perform journalist's work, but can be a source of valid and unique information.

Despite all the listed possibilities, PS operators cannot forget their role of reference. On the one hand, it is extremely important the contribution for a more democratic public sphere with multiple and diverse voices. On the other hand, it is also relevant to guarantee that this participation is for a good purpose. The PS system, independently of the used medium, must be a tool for the development of society.

Methodological approach

In order to understand how the PS operators are adapting to the emergence of mobile media platforms, such as smartphones and tablets, we have chosen the apps developed by BBC News and RTP to iPhone. The smartphone developed by Apple is one of the most used all around the world.

Our aim was to understand different realities from different geographic regions. With BBC, from United Kingdom, and RTP, from Portugal, we shall be able to comprehend the national realities and also compare how both PS operators are working. During the month of September 2013 we have selected 180 news – 90 for each – and submitted those news, after a screenshot, to three different variables: content, offered services and gateways to citizens engagement. It is important to explain that all the pieces presented in this work appeared in the top news of each app. We have chosen different periods of the day to select those news in order to have a more diverse sample.

In the first level, our main intention was to understand what kind of content was available among all the news. Text, Images, Video, Sound and Infographics were the elements that we were able to observe during this particular research.

	Text	Image	Video	Infographics	Sound
BBC	90	68	55	23	0
RTP	90	17	16	0	18
Total	180	85	71	23	23

Table 1- News content

Despite all the technological potential supported by the smartphone developed by Apple, we can easily understand that the most common content was the text. In fact, all the chosen news comported text. After the text, it becomes possible to understand that Images, like photos, were used in 85 pieces, while video and Infographics emerged in 71 and 23, respectively. The last content type presented in our research was Sound with only 18.

If we go further, we can see that the most used news type by RTP, after the text, was the Sound. The Portuguese PS operator was even the only one using Sound information on its app for iPhone. Comparing it with the reality from BBC that, after text, used Images in 68 news, we understand that the British operator offered Infographics elements on its app. This kind of content was not available on the RTP's app.

Without forgetting that the mobile reality is an ideal local for media convergence, we tried to recognize the situations where it was offered more than one type of content.

	BBC	RTP
Text + Image	68	17
Text + Video	55	16
Text + Infographics	23	0
Text + Sound	0	18
Text + Infographics + Video + Image	15	0

Table 2- Multiple content

Even thought text is present in all the selected news from both apps, it is still possible to notice some particular features from both apps. The most common combination on BBC's and RTP's apps for iPhone is Text and Image. However, for example, RTP is the only app that uses Text and Sound. At the same time, BBC uses Text and Infographics. The most developed situation found during our study put together in the same screenshot Text, Infographics, Video and Image. BBC offered this possibility on 15 different situations.

The size of news is an important factor, mainly to understand how both PS operators are adapting their actions to the possibilities coming from smartphones and tablets. In this point, we have identified three different categories: large, for news occupying more than the offered space by the iPhone main screen; medium, for news occupying the exactly space on the iPhone main screen; small, news occupying less than the available space.

	Large	**Medium**	**Small**
BBC	81	9	0
RTP	25	54	11
Total	106	63	11

Table 3- News size

As it is possible to confirm, in a global scale, most of the news identified in our study tend to be large. It means that the two media operators do not respect the iPhone limits. Nevertheless, RTP has a much more satisfactory approach than BBC, in this particular situation. First, RTP uses more medium news than large. Second, 11 small news were offered.

During our study, we have considered important the analysis of the services that these two apps are giving to their publics. Before we go into the comparison between the two apps in this particular variable, we must highlight an important point. The BBC's app chosen for this article is just a small part of the entire universe that BBC has in the iTunes Store. In this web store we can find other services from BBC. On the other hand, during our research period, the app from RTP used here was the only one from the Portuguese PS operator.

The app from the British operator allows, apart from the news, listening to the radio and adapting the news to our own choices. Users can have a news *à la carte experience*, receiving information related to what they really want. Going through RTP we can find all the radio and TV channels of this company. Once again, it is extremely important to explain that this is the only app available in the iTunes Store at the time of this research. Similarly to BBC's app, users can have a personalized experience by selecting the themes to be followed according to their preferences.

The last variable subjected to our study is related to the opportunities raised for citizens to have a more active role in the informative reality.

	BBC	RTP
Share	Email Twitter Facebook Copy link	Copy and Share link Twitter
Creation	Send a story Send a photo	

Table 4- Citizen's engagement

Both apps make an effort to allow their users to share news among their contacts. While BBC uses Email and Facebook or Twitter, RTP only uses the possibility of Twitter. Additionally, together they encourage users to copy and share the links. BBC goes further in this question and invites citizens to have an even more active role. It is possible through this app to send a full story or even a single photo that can be reported by BBC's journalists.

However, during our work we did not find any piece developed by citizens. All selected news were entirely developed by professional journalists.

Final notes

During our research we intended, in a first stage, to highlight the debate related to the presence of PS operators in new media territories. It is clear that on the one hand we have supporters of the presence of PS operator in the digital environment. Citizens must have the same services independently of the devices used to access information. On the other hand we have voices claiming that this is an environment where private operators are performing a good job. In this order, there is no need for PS operators to be present in this territory.

Another important point that has emerged during our work is the role that citizens may achieve with new technologies. From a passive media consumer, with no choices, citizens have new platforms that allow them to have a much more active posture. They do not need to be constrained to their sofa receiving all the information without any choice. For example, social networks when combined to other platforms allow people to share information and also to choose what they really want to receive, avoiding certain contents. If we consider a deeper range of possibilities, we must be aware about the potential that citizens have to be part of the informative process.

In this order, we have selected two apps for iPhone, from two different European countries – Portugal and UK. Our main goal was to understand how PS operators – RTP and BBC - are adapting to the potential that emerges with this new technology.

We have reached some important conclusions. It is possible to understand that the two operators are making an effort to have a presence is this universe. There is also a network between apps and other digital platforms, especially with social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter. Through these tools, citizens can perform an active role, like sharing and posting news among their contacts. BBC goes even further in this question and allows citizens to send stories and photos.

However, there is a long path to be done in this territory. We can see in our analysis that news are not suited to the iPhone possibilities. This platform has a tremendous range of possibilities that are not explored. The convergence of different content is not achieved and from what we have seen a lot of news come directly form the websites of these two operators.

It is our intention to carry on in the future this kind of research. We will pay a particular attention to the way PS operators will, or will not, step up their position in this universe. It will be our concern the possibilities that will emerge for citizens with mobile media devices.

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