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Value indicators for regional broadcasters: accountability in EITB, CCMA and CRTVG

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Abstract

The European Broadcasting Union presented in 2014 a report on PSM values in order to establish a self-assessment framework of intangible indicators for Public Service Media. Value and impact indicators have become one of the present challenges for public services and organizations. The article presents a proposal based on the EBU tool, comparing and assessing accountability strategies of three Spanish regional broadcasters: EITB, CCMA, and CRTVG. All of them report on financial, management, and governance data via their corporate websites, while also increasing transparency measures for institutions and competitive markets. However, findings show a lack of accountability to their main stakeholder: society.

Keywords

Value indicators, public television, proximity television, public service, public value

1. Public Service Media today

The remit and genesis of Public Service Media –PSM- may be outlined as the need to preserve and enhance democratic pluralism and socio-cultural and linguistic diversity within an audiovisual context, in compliance with the competition rules and the principles of the single European market. Regional televisions across Europe are particularly strengthened by their role as drivers of local audiovisual industries and particular languages.

As noted by the UNESCO (2012), "a vigorous public broadcasting structure that complies with international best practices is the ideal complement to the private and community actors that form media ecosystems, which, in turn, is of the utmost importance for democracy". The same institution also points out some elements which define –or should define- Public Service Media: editorial and financial independence; self-reliance of governance bodies; pluralism, diversity, and impartiality in programming; defined remit; and accountability to all stakeholders.

One of the main concerns of the media sphere is the maintenance and recovery of the public media sector. Data support the assertion: more than 5,000 indexed publications addressed the issue of Public

Service Media over the last seven years. Add to the funding downturns in public corporations, there is a major crisis of values, trust and credibility in the case of PSM (Campos, 2013). Many of the challenges facing Public Service Media –funding, management, and governance- depend to a large extent on the lack of consensual tools for the assessment of their social profitability (Arnanz, 2002).

All these corporations, though, have recently changed their cultural and educational logic. Over the last 20 years, Public Service Media have undertaken strategies based on economic and competitive goals, audience maximization, and channel branding (d'Haenens & Saeys, 2007; Lawson-Borders, 2006; van Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2003; McQuail & Siune, 1998), at the expense of their socio-cultural and democratic remit.

The provision and management of services by public service media is an "ethical imperative" when associated to fundamental rights and freedoms (Splichal, 2006). This is the golden age of television (EBU, 2014), as more than 9,000 channels through various platforms (OBS, 2016) are consumed daily by 87% of Europeans (CE, 2013). Nevertheless, the universal role of Public Service Media is contested within and increasingly complex digital arena.

The pillars behind the mass media par excellence (Scolari, 2008), conceived as the "open window to reality [and] at society' service" (Puyal i Ortiga, 2011), are being shaken. On the one hand, management and monitoring systems have been gradually undermined by external and internal pressures; and, on the other hand, audience and stakeholders are withdrawing their support and switching to alternatives (Jacubowicz, 2007).

The essential role of public regional broadcasters in the present media arena is closely linked to local information, key piece of identity formation. However, external factors as the continuous emergence of new technologies, and internal issues, such as inefficient management and organization, the lack of pluralism and the problems of funding, have led national and international institutions to propose tools for the improvement of media policies.

Formerly considered social giants but economic dwarfs, PSM have acquired a main private role in national economic contexts (Bustamante, 2009). This compromised the public sector and, inevitably, encouraged competition. The establishment of a framework of value indicators for regional televisions may be a fundamental piece for reconfiguring these media.

Local and regional television in Europe, which is mainly terrestrial, represents one quarter of total existing channels -3,977 of 9,068- (OBS, 2016) in the EU28. The local dimension in the new globalized context takes on a meaning as an essential element of journalism (Guillamet, 2002) and communication. Local information provides exclusivity as regards news production –proximity-. This closeness is an active link with daily experience within a unique and specific geographical space (Díaz Nosty, 2013).

2. What is a synthetic value indicator?

Any public service, rather than being a response to market shortcomings or to a natural monopoly, must offer added value, which should be assessed and monitored (Moore, 1997). And that added value is linked to the strengthening of the audience as citizenry (Jacubowicz, 2009) and the empowerment of society (EBU, 2012).

In the mid-XX concerns arise about the need to assess the media for analysing their role in promoting democracy and, specially, how media development programmes have an impact on democratization processes. However, "no clear consensus exists as to what to assess and how to assess it" (De Frutos, 2014). From then on, various media assessment tools arose. The study of these mechanisms, which was unprofitable until the last years of the past century, has become a major business that generates million euros (Mosher, 2011).

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Monitoring and evaluation plans should be aware of the relationship of media systems with civil society, the economic growth, and the governability of analysed environments (De Frutos, 2014), giving attention to the efficiency and impact of communication activities and tools (Interact, 2014).

The ongoing loss of trust, the emergence of new technologies and the funding crisis have forced PSM to develop external and internal evaluation, accountability and value strategies. In this context, the media begin to become familiar with concepts such as corporate social responsibility.

In the nineties, the creator of the Media Accountability Systems, J.C. Bertrand, listed over 50 M.A.R.S. (*Moyens d´Assurer la Responsabilité Sociale).* These tools included any non-governmental tool that encouraged the media and journalists to follow quality and ethical standards. One decade after, international organizations –UNESCO-, along with representatives such as the European Broadcasting Union, developed their own assessment tools for media outlets. The challenge, though, is to define composite indicators, that is, the aggregation of partial indicators into a unique indicator, using statistical techniques.

Composite indicators "are formed when individual indicators are compiled into a single index, on the basis of an underlying model of the multi-dimensional concept that is being measured" (OECD, 2016). Also, they should comply with the requirements of sustainability, opportunity, periodicity, utility, reliability, accuracy, and relevance.

As far as accountability as a composite value indicator, the EBU chose three simple indicators built from an only variable: audience, reporting and transparency. Besides the EBU tool, there exists many mechanisms of partial indicators: Media Sustainability Index (MSI); Corporate Social Responsibility (RSC); Quality Indicators for Public Broadcasters (UNESCO); social impact assessments; DAMIAN method of convergence; the EBU tool (*PSM Values Review*); and other mechanisms proposed by private consultants and academic research projects.

Also, ex ante test or public value tests are part of this new way of managing public service media (Donders & Raats, 2012). Operating mechanisms of ex ante tests are simple: they analyse the potential of a new service paying attention to its public value and its possible impact on the market and competence. Results analyse whether it is worth for a new service to be developed, after taking into account the characteristics of the broadcasting market, as well as the existing programming (Ridinger, 2009).

The EBU report is a self-assessment tool for corporations (*PSM Values Review: The Tool*), with the aim of establishing a framework of measurable intangibles of quality, transparency, accountability, innovation, universality and independence. It belongs to one of the five goals of *Vision2020*, a set of short-term measures designed to deal with the challenges of audiovisual services. The report bets on the networked society, without forgetting the PSM remit, while supporting independence, transparency, and sustainability as essential principles for their governance.

National and international institutions have entrenched positions on the way to establish the essential values of public service media, as well as to define each of them. They agree, though, on the need of public organizations to be accountable and to engage in meaningful debates with their stakeholders. Relational and position changes of the main social actors (Van den Bulck, 2015) have placed accountability as one of the key elements of PSM strategies.

Considered by some parties (Bovens, 2005; Day & Klein, 1987) as the hallmark of modern governance, accountability is used in the media arena to refer to the process by which organizations are required to be accountable to their stakeholders (Pritchard, 2000). Used as a synonym of some political and vague aspirations as transparency, democracy, efficiency and integrity (Dubnick, 2005), accountability may be understood as a mechanism for assessing management (De Bustos, 2013).

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The Council of Europe (2012) states that PSM must be subject to public scrutiny when carrying out public service obligations. In other words, PSM should keep a permanent debate with their stakeholders, as well as publish reports on editorial guidelines, performance and policies, and act in accordance with good governance principles (EBU, 2012).

The term accountability, linked to governance and transparency, is defined today as any mechanism that forces PSM to respond to their audiences (Mulgan, 2003). Bovens (2010), though, distinguish between two notions of accountability: (1) the North-American, where it is seen as a virtue, an attribute of public actors; and (2) the European and Australian, where accountability is conceived as a mechanism, an obligation to justify behaviours.

However, it seems pertinent the question posed by Van den Bulck (2015): Who has to be accountable to whom? In this regard, the author points out three different practices of PSM in Europe:

- In Spain, France, and Italy, PSM are accountable to the relevant ministry. They must also be accountable on a political basis to appropriate Parliament's control committees, as well as be open to audit by State Courts of Accounts.
- In Sweden, the Flemish VRT and Poland, PSM "need to render account to externalized government agencies such as media regulators and media councils" (Van den Bulck, 2015).
- In the United Kingdom, Germany and Denmark, PSM have self-regulatory mechanisms, the ex ante test.

According to Bouckaert and Halligan (2008), empirical analyses show that accountability and transparency strategies improve organizations´ performance and governance. In the case of PSM, however, that is a generalization which requires a few observations.

There are three actors to whom PSM need to –or should need to- report on their performance: Governments/Parliaments (lawmakers, public bodies, regulators and councils); markets (competitors in the media arena); and society as a whole (audience, elites, professionals, and civil society organizations). However, many of them have yet to be accountable to the most important stakeholder: the audience.

Accountability and citizen participation, within the framework of PSM governance, are closely linked, as "they are two sides of the same coin. The quality of accountability strategies depends on the quality of public participation" (Azurmendi, Llorens, López & Bas, 2015).

In Spain, Public Service Media –national and regional- started to report on their performance in 2014, once the Law 19/2013 of 9 December, was published. The act introduced requirements on transparency, access to public information and good governance, which was a step forward in the accessibility to governance control and the potential improvement of PSM management.

3. Goals

Main objectives of this paper can be summarized as follows:

- Make the case for PSM in Europe, in order to justify the need for value and development indicators for these services.
- Define accountability applied to PSM, taking into account the contributions from the main European audiovisual institutions.
- Analyse accountability and transparency strategies carried out by the historic regional broadcasters in Spain (EITB, CCMA y CRTVG).
- Make comparisons between the three broadcasters.

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- Reflect on accountability measures undertaken by PSM, analysing players and how PSM are opening discussions with their stakeholders.

4. Methodology

This paper analysed the main assessment and evaluation tools for the media, taking as sources the IRIS and MAVISE databases from the OBS, Scopus, EBU's publications, the European Commission and the corporate websites of the three analysed groups (www.eitb.eus, www.ccma.cat, www.crtvg.es). The three cases of study (Euskal Irrati Telebista, EITB; Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals, CCMA; y Compañía de Radio Televisión de Galicia, CRTVG) are the oldest and the most established corporations, representing the historical communities in Spain.

A content analysis of the information provided in their corporate reports and website, to assess at what extent accountability strategies are reflected. Findings show information provided by each corporation, so as then to be able to make comparisons between them. Figure 1, the comparative table, is based on the simple accountability indicators of the EBU tool. Some of them are adapted, as it is not an internal evaluation, but just one step along the way towards an external framework of intangible indicators for PSM.

There are three key factors to be considered: transparency in accounts and editorial guidelines, the role of the audience in decision making processes, and the way of reporting on the corporation´s performance and the influence of stakeholders.

5. Results

5.1. *Accountability in EITB*

The Euskal Irrati Telebista (EITB) has a document section in its website, subdivided into: Business Organizations (Structure, Organization Chart, Governing Body); Corporate Planning (Operating Budget, Strategic Plan 2013-2016, Programme Contract); Applicable Regulation (Legal texts); Professional documentation (Social Media strategies, Handbook of good practices, Declaration on journalism without questions); and Results (Annual accounts, audits, RSC reports, Performance Indicators (GRI), Correspondence of information).

The Basque corporation publishes information on social media guidelines (decalogue, handbook of good practices, and presence), content labelling, and editorial charter. Also, it facilitates access to annual accounts (starting from 2011). The EITB does not have an ombudsman or mediator, and it does not provide information on complaints, doubts and suggestions. Nevertheless, the corporation has an online portal, *EITB eres tú*, in which it publishes live comments on the group using Twitter and Facebook, while it is not reflected whether these comments have an impact on EITB's decision making.

As regards information, EITB provides content on public value (via its Strategic Plan 2013-2016), annual reports, goals of energy efficiency (via the *Table of Performance Indicators 2013-2014*), and a list of companies with which EITB works and collaborates. The role of the government in decision-making processes is not disclosed.

5.2. *Accountability in CCMA*

The *Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals* (CCMA) provides information on the corporation through the Transparency Portal, subdivided into: Corporate information (good government, statues, structure); Performance (plan, corporate strategy, reports, services, participation channels); Management (budgets, reports, asset management); Procurement (tendering and contracting, contracts, statistics); Employment information (remunerations,

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staff, agreements); and Monitoring and Evaluation (compliance with public service obligations; reports of the Court of Accounts).

The CCMA has an online portal –Style Guide- in which it publishes editoral guidelines, principles, treatments, and user´s manual on the use of Catalan. Costs, funding, results, and budget monitoring are also reflected on public-access reports. Users have an Audience Service, accessible via various platforms. Information on the ombudsman´s profile is also provided, as well as all comments and complaints. Also, the portal gives access to audience annual reports, impact of comments, statute of the ombudsman, and the deontological code of the Association of Catalan Journalists.

The corporation also reports on compliance with public service obligations. The monitoring plan was designed by the Catalan Audiovisual Council (CAC). There are no specifications as to the role of the government in decision-making processes. The CCMA does offer comprehensive information on the profile of companies and consultants with which it works.

5.3. *Accountability in CRTVG*

The *Compañía Radio/Televisión de Galicia* (CRTVG) discloses annual accounts, performance and value reports via the Transparency Portal, subdivided into: Institutional Information (description, management board, organization chart, strategy); Corporate performance (annual budget and accounts, contracting, human resources, social return); Social Responsibility (Global Compact, programming general principles, self-regulation; and users (contact, frequent asked questions, documentation service).

As far as transparency, the Galician corporation provides comprehensive information on its editorial guidelines. Social media and style guidelines are publicly accessible. Also, all costs and budgets are specified, as well as the institutional and financial evolution, management and auditing reports –since 2013-.

The reference to the audience as citizenry and society is an issue to improve in the years to come. While it offers contact by email, postal mail, phone and social networks, as well as a section of FAQ, the CRTVG does not move forward on involving the audience in decision making processes and on disclosing comments, suggestions and complaints. The report on Public Service (2015), the corporation mentions the CRTVG mailbox, providing the number of received messages in 2014: 1,240.

As far as accountability reporting, the corporation publishes data on public value, but the role of the government in the corporation is not specified. Furthermore, the CRTVG provides information on partner and contributor companies. A report on public value "*The Importance of Regional Public Service Media: A strategic view of the role of regional public media in Europe*" is also disclosed. The document was prepared partly by the CRTVG and CIRCOM, the European Association of Regional Televisions, of which the Galician corporation is an active part.

5.4. *Accountability in CRTVG, EITB and CCMA: comparative perspective*

The analysis of transparency portals allows a comparison between the three regional broadcasters, in order to answer these three open questions:

1. Are regional broadcasters in Spain accountable to their stakeholders?
2. Is audience an active part in decision making processes?
3. Do they report on public value?
4. What is the role of the government in public regional broadcasters?

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The figure below shows an evaluation sheet based on the EBU´s tool for reviewing PSM values (2012). As noted in the methodology section, the value "Accountability" is adapted in order to carry out external analysis of corporations.

Figure 1. Accountability strategies in the historic regional broadcasters (CRTVG, EITB and TV3)

ACCOUNTABILITY			
INDICATOR	**CRTVG**	**EITB**	**CCMA**
Transparency			
Editorial guidelines	Yes	Yes	Yes
Social media guidelines	Yes	Yes	Yes
Access to guidelines	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reflection of best practice	Yes	Yes	Yes
Financial transparency	Yes	Yes	Yes
Report on costs	All	All	All
Vision/goals document	Yes	Yes	Yes
Complaints committee/Ombudsman	No	No	Yes
Ombudsman - Independence of the board	-	-	-
Number of complaints	-	-	Yes
Nature of complaints	-	-	Yes
Right to reply	Yes	Yes	Yes
Listening			
Role of regulator	No	No	Yes
Engagement in debates with stakeholders	No	No	Yes
Audience involvement	Suggestions box	Phone/email	Contact form / Phone
Inclusion of audience feedback	-	Yes	Yes
Advisory council with representatives of the audience	No	No	No
Trust assessment	No	No	No
External reports	No	No	No
External system for complaints	No	No	No
Follow up on audience feedback	No	No	Yes
Reporting			
Public value/service reports	No	No	Yes
Role of the government	No	No	No
Goals of energy efficiency	No	Yes	Yes
General annual reports	Yes	Yes	Yes
Accountability strategies	Yes	Yes	Yes
External companies and consultants	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: own elaboration (September 2015)

The comparative table reflects accountability strategies carried out by the three Spanish broadcasters. All of them report on their editorial guidelines, both at a "traditional" and a digital level –new platforms and social media-. As far as funding, they also provide a breakdown of costs, as well as information on recruiting, budget, and financial performance.

The three corporations specify the right of complaint, while only the CCMA puts at the disposal of the user an ombudsman, who belongs to the corporation. The Catalan broadcaster provides reports on the number and nature of complaints, as it is also the only that reflects its engagement in debate with stakeholders, as well as the role of the regulator.

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It includes, together with the EITB, comments of the audience via reports, social networks and blogs, while any of them assess users trust and have external complaints systems.

As regards information on public value and the rest of stakeholders –government and market-, the CCMA is the only broadcaster giving data on its performance against remit. None of the three companies specifies the role of the government on decision making, while all of them report on companies and consultants working and collaborating with them, as well as corporate responsibility measures. EITB and CCMA set goals of energy efficiency, according to the indicators of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).

6. Conclusions

When analysing accountability strategies of Public Service Media, Van den Bulck (2015) highlighted:

> Most of all, it seems that none of the existing accountability arrangements solve the question of how PSM (and other media for that matter) can finally come to render account to their main stakeholder: the audience or public. Being made accountable to the market (through ex ante tests) and its consumers (through performance benchmarks based on audience reach) does not provide any guarantees for being made accountable to the citizenry and thus for promoting democracy. In a society dominated by concerns for the economic rather than the social, political and cultural well-being of citizens, PSM should more than ever render account of the ways in which they contribute to the latter. As such they can become a counter-voice rather than part of the hegemonic system.

Accountability is understood, within the PSM arena, as a process by which corporation are accountable on their performance to their stakeholders, as they are subject to public scrutiny and transparency criteria. According to the EBU (2012), accountability is closely linked to debate with stakeholders, as well as the reporting on editorial and political guidelines and financial performance.

The analysis of accountability strategies carried out by CRTVG, EITB and CCMA confirms the author´s claim: any of the three corporations have found a successful formula to be accountable to their audiences. While they publish reports and have transparency portals, there is no debate nor direct dialogue with citizenry. Only the CCMA has an ombudsman who takes into account audience´s comments and suggestions. The EITB also makes available users´ comments, while they have an advisory nature. Any of the regional broadcasters assess audience´s trust, which supports again the statement of Van den Bulck. Regional broadcasters in Spain are only accountable to the government.

But quality should take priority over quantity. The proliferation of reports on funding, assessments, CSR strategies, legislation, and editorial guidelines are steps forward in the search for accountable and transparent PSM, but fail to address fundamental problems. Citizenry, the main stakeholder of public organizations is the basis on which the new Public Service Media should be built. The time of monopoly is over, as well as the dual system.

In a period of media convergence, in which new players, competitors, and complex elements, Public Service Media have to change their attitude towards markets, governments and, most of all, the audience.

Ultimately, the key issue lies in answering the question: Why do we deserve the money of our citizens? PSM´s governance is aware of the question, as it tries to apply it to its management, but it has still not focused on fully assess its social impact and be accountable to citizenry. But, in order to improve these evaluations, the setting of operating composite indicators is almost compulsory. It is a challenge that the EBU has already brought to the agenda of the new PSM governance, starting from those six values of universality, excellence, innovation, diversity, and accountability.

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