

An Impossible Challenge for Public Service Media?

The Intellectual Context of the Networked Society

Peter Goodwin

Abstract

This chapter examines why public service broadcasters have been marginalised in the network society by examining some of the key literature about the network society concept, especially the works of Castells and Negroponte and, more recently, Jenkins and Shirky. The ways in which this literature characterises the network society and some of the aspects of reality that reflects leave public service broadcasting on the margins, or deliberately constrained. The issues explored include globalisation, neo-liberalism, participatory culture and start-ups, and the place of PSB as publicly owned national corporations in the face of these issues. The chapter concludes by suggesting that the only way for PSB to find a way out of this increasing marginalisation is to reconsider its relationship to the recent ‘left-populist’ challenge to neo-liberalism.

Keywords: public service broadcasting, neo-liberalism, left populism, globalisation, legacy mass media, Americanisation, start-ups

Introduction

This chapter begins with the observation that legacy public service media (PSM) providers have been increasingly marginalised in the development of the networked society. ‘Legacy providers’ means those organisations that were once, and still are, more commonly called public service broadcasting (PSB) – organisations, such as the BBC in Britain, NHK in Japan, and RAI in Italy (etc.). ‘Increasingly marginalised’ doesn’t mean their traditional audiences have disappeared. On the contrary, in many cases those audiences have to date held up rather better than many pundits of the 1980s and 1990s expected. Nor have these organisations been stuck in a technological rut, failing to keep pace with developments. On the contrary, many established a significant web presence early on, and most have successfully innovated new ways to deliver their core products and services.

What I mean is that legacy PSM providers are becoming marginalised in networked society development. They have become increasingly marginal as compared to what are now the mainstream actors in the networked society – the platform giants and

Goodwin, Peter (2018). An Impossible Challenge for Public Service Media? The Intellectual Context of the Networked Society in Gregory Ferrell Lowe, Hilde Van den Bulck, Karen Donders (eds.) *Public Service Media in the Networked Society*. Göteborg: Nordicom.

their surrounding galaxy of start-ups. Perhaps more importantly, they have become increasingly marginal to debates addressing what are widely seen as the deficiencies of that network mainstream – threats to privacy, the commercialisation of data about private behaviour, market domination, fake news, etc.

I propose several reasons to explain why this has happened. I approach the task by examining prominent, influential strands of theoretical discourse legitimating the network/networked society construct since the mid-1990s. I want to reflect on core realities that characterise the changing economic, social and communications environment this discourse captures in order to contrast these strands of discourse with the intellectual make-up and institutional reality of legacy PSBs in the project of developing into PSM. This chapter builds on earlier critical analysis and discussion about this development trajectory (Goodwin 2014), characterised by Bardoel and Lowe (2007) as the ‘core challenge’ for the public service enterprise in media today.

To anticipate my argument, while the intellectual make-up and institutional reality of legacy PSB organisations was sufficiently robust to enable some to respond surprisingly well to the communication ‘revolutions’ of the late twentieth century, especially multi-channel television and the early online environment, the ways in which the networked society has been conventionally framed, and much of the environment in which it is being developed, systematically exclude the very legacy that would be necessary to legitimate their transformation to PSM. This therefore presents a seemingly insuperable challenge to their institutionally constructed intellectual make-up. I say ‘seemingly’ because the chapter ends with a discussion about what would be necessary for legacy PSB providers to effectively reinsert themselves in discourse(s) about PSM in networked societies.

More than just the internet

What, precisely, is implied by characterising society as a ‘network’ or ‘networked’ society? Would some other description be more illuminating? This is a matter of considerable debate. Equally debatable is deciding when this ‘reality’ came into existence, or if it really has fully come into existence yet. What is clear is that both the term and the emerging reality it attempts to describe became important in the 1980s with roots in earlier discourse about the ‘information society’. This discourse is closely associated with developments in computing and telecommunications, in particular the rise of the internet, the rapid diffusion of internet access and improvements in the quality of that access, and advances in internet-enabled (and enabling) devices and services. The network society notion and reality have (both) already gone through several qualitatively different phases of development. ‘Web 2.0’ is the popular term for characterising a newer phase in contrast with earlier ones.

From the beginning, most authors on the subject have understood the network society (or networked or information society), as being about considerably more than

changes in technology. Discussion has emphasised the importance of understanding changes in information technology in relation to major economic, social and cultural changes. This was pointedly articulated early on by Manuel Castells in his seminal 1996 volume *The Rise of the Network Society* – the first volume of a trilogy, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. As Frank Webster (2014: 106) recently observed:

Manuel Castells is the stand-out scholar of information issues and has been so for a generation. His trilogy [...] offered a systematic understanding of what Castells conceives of as the “network society”. *The Information Age* was reprinted often and has been translated into over twenty languages. Reviewers even ranked Castells alongside the classics of social thought [...]. [M]any regard Castells as a fitting successor to Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim.

There are at least three specific reasons why it is worth starting our survey with Castells’ volume. First, because *The Rise of the Network Society* was highly influential in popularising this notion (although Castells did not invent the term). Second, because it was written in 1995 when the World Wide Web had only just begun to take off and, in that regard, could be considered prescient. It was written at a time now seen as a crucial turning point in reality rather than being merely speculative (which may well explain why its second edition had to be extensively revised – things change fast in this field). Third, because Castells consciously adopted a tone of enquiry based on empirical evidence which produced useful questions for further consideration, rather than presenting a more typical case of shrill advocacy and hype that has infected ‘futurological’ contributions on the subject.

Regarding this latter point, Castells took a nuanced position on technological determinism, as evident in how he described the subject of his study: “...the emergence of a new social structure... [which] is associated with the emergence of a new mode of development, informationalisation, historically shaped by the restructuring of the capitalist mode of production towards the end of the twentieth century” (1996: 14). The restructuring of capitalism is the key idea here, resulting in what he termed a new “techno-economic system”, summarised as *informational capitalism* (ibid: 18). Castells argued that “the most decisive historical factor accelerating, channelling and shaping the information technology paradigm, and inducing its associated social forms, was/is the process of capitalist restructuring undertaken since the 1980s” (ibid).

In Castells’ view, this process originated in the crisis of the “Keynesian model of capitalist growth” in the 1970s, which resulted in a continuing series of institutional and management reforms intended to achieve four main goals:

1. Deepening the capitalist logic of profit-seeking in capital-labor relationships.
2. Enhancing the productivity of labor and capital.
3. Globalizing production, circulation and markets.

4. Marshalling the state's support for productivity gains and competitiveness of national economies, often to the detriment of social protection and public interest regulations.

Thus, he concluded that “without new information technology, global capitalism would have been a much-limited reality [...] *informationalism is linked to the expansion and rejuvenation of capitalism, as industrialism was linked to its continuation as a mode of production*” (Castells 1996: 19, emphasis added).

So, Castells' thesis argues that the network society is not merely about the spread of networked information technology (IT), but rather represents the creation of a new form of societal structure in a post-Keynesian restructuring of capitalism, of which IT was crucial but only one part. From this perspective, it is scarcely surprising that established PSB organisations would sit rather awkwardly in the new context. After all, PSB was established as, and has continued to be, a set of publicly owned national organisations as treated in earlier work (Lowe, Goodwin & Nobuto 2016).

Although some PSB organisations were established before the Keynesian era, their glory days were in that era, i.e. during and after World War II until the 1970s. PSB organisations had the very specific remit to do broadcasting, very often as a monopoly. This remit was easily extended from radio to television as a newer form of broadcasting. Unlike in the USA, the universal take up of television in Europe was largely led by PSB organisations. Television is the mass medium par excellence and was a phenomenon of the 'Keynesian era'. Its key features include one to many communication, a limited number of channels and therefore restricted choice, and the mass audience perspective. These attributes mirror key characteristics of the Keynesian era and, we might note from a different theoretical perspective, are also seen as defining characteristics of 'Fordism' – a mass orientation embodied in mass production, mass markets, etc.

We should also observe that the fundamentally *national* constitution of PSB has run counter to the increasing *globalisation* of production, circulation and markets in media, which Castells (and others) identify as a cornerstone of the new informational society. Although few writers on the network society directly referred to PSB, Castells did note that the “new technologies transformed the world of media” (1996: 337). In Europe, that 'world' featured legacy PSB institutions. In the 1970s and 1980s, the rapid diffusion of cable, satellite and the VCR, and a multiplicity of new private commercial channels, segmented and diversified audiences. In one notable case, France's TF1, a major publicly owned channel was privatised. Everywhere “investment has poured into the communications field as mega-groups have been formed and strategic alliances have been established to carve out market shares in a market in complete transformation” (ibid: 340). Here too Castells' position was nuanced: “While the media have become indeed globally interconnected, and programs and messages circulate in the global network, *we are not living in a global village but in customized cottages globally produced and locally distributed*” (ibid: 341, emphasis in original). In his nuanced position on global production and local distribution, it is evident that PSB has little

space as a nationally-based enterprise. By their very constitution, PSB organisations are and have always been tightly engaged with and focused on national production. While that provides some advantages, as discussed later, it is a significant problem for PSB in the globalised environment of media enterprises, contents and services that are characteristic of a networked society.

Neo-liberalism and Americanness

Another aspect of the multi-faceted network society identified by Castells should also be emphasised. Although he did not use the term ‘neo-liberalism’, the process of “capitalist restructuring” links the rise of the networked society with the growth of neo-liberal philosophy that has become the dominant ideology and generally accepted norm in mainstream politics and policy since the 1980s. As David Harvey (2005: 1) observed, writing explicitly about neo-liberalism, the turning point that established this dominance was between 1978 and 1980, with the elections of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Regan in the USA. In the same period, Deng Xiaoping launched increasingly significant economic reforms in the People’s Republic of China. We need to recognise this obvious but hugely important fact: The network society has developed and come of age entirely during the period when neo-liberalism has been the dominant and official world view. This fact has enormous implications for the role (and lack of a role) that PSB can have within the network society.

For the most part, PSB has been and remains a group of publicly owned corporations – precisely the sort of organisational form that neo-liberalism set out to get rid of, with considerable success. Although privatisation has been comparatively rare so far (TF1 being the most notable exception), neo-liberal policy has aggressively sought to restrict state activity on the premise that state aid causes ‘unfair’ competition that stifles ‘natural’ commercial opportunities for private enterprise. This has made it very difficult for PSB organisations to expand into activities beyond a strict rendering of their ‘broadcasting remit’. In practice, this means PSB is intentionally constrained from fully participating in the network society. PSB, like all remaining public organisations (apart perhaps from the military), has increasingly been squeezed financially. This, too, is in keeping with neo-liberal orthodoxy and has made expansionary development more difficult.

Finally, we should note Castells’ observations about the historic origins of the “new technological paradigm” of the network society, which is important enough to merit an extended quotation:

That the constitution of this paradigm took place in the United States, and to some extent in California, and in the 1970s, probably had considerable consequences for the forms and evolution of new information technologies. [Despite the earlier role of military funding], the technological blossoming that took place in the early 1970s can

be somehow related to the culture of freedom, individual innovation and entrepreneurialism that grew out from the 1960s culture of American campuses [...] in regard to breaking away from established patterns of behaviour, both in society at large and in the business world. The emphasis on personalised devices, on interactivity, on networking, and the relentless pursuit of new technological breakthroughs, even when it apparently did not make much business sense, was clearly in discontinuity with the somewhat cautious tradition of the corporate world. (Castells 1996: 5-6)

In my view, it is important to understand the essential ‘Americanness’ of the network society notion and subsequent developments. Necessary because public service broadcasting has always been, and continues to be (with due apologies to NPR and PBS) far more marginal to media and culture in the United States than other OECD countries. Public broadcasting is not unimportant in the USA, but it has nowhere near the political weight or social and cultural influences that the BBC has in the UK or NHK has in Japan, for example. Given the fact that (as Castells who is European notes) the network society framework was born in, developed by and is discussed overwhelmingly within an American sensibility, it is scarcely surprising that PSB has struggled to find a role in it – even as the actual network society in practice has engulfed non-American audiences.

The individual versus media; small versus large

Two further aspects of PSB are relevant to how these organisations might see themselves fitting (or not) into the network society. The first, as alluded to earlier, is that they are (and always have been) *mass media* organisations. One striking trait in much of the early rhetoric about the network society is a contemptuous view of mass media. Nicholas Negroponte’s book (1995), *Being Digital*, is a notable unexceptional example. He notoriously predicted that “what will happen to broadcast television over the next five years is so phenomenal that it’s difficult to comprehend”, and “media barons of today will be grasping to hold on to their centralized empires tomorrow” (Negroponte 1995: 54, 59).

Twenty-two years on, it is easy to mock these predictions, as Henry Jenkins did (2006: 5). In August 2017, the media conglomerates built by Rupert Murdoch and Sumner Redstone are very much alive, as are Time Warner and Disney – and it should be added in this context, also the BBC, NHK, ZDF, etc. Negroponte made the not very novel mistake of believing that the rise of a new form of media would drive out the old, rather than expecting their co-existence and reflexive evolution (the very point Jenkins makes in his convergence thesis). Although clearly an error in hindsight, the widespread anti-mass media rhetoric of early new media evangelists would understandably encourage PSB organisations (along with their commercial colleagues) to worry about having any future in a network society to the extent that they remained

fundamentally about broadcasting. Despite Negroponte's unfortunate rhetorical predictions, he made a substantial point that is highly relevant here:

In the post-information age, we often have an audience the size of one. Everything is made to order, and information is extremely personalized. A widely-held assumption is that individualization is the extrapolation of narrowcasting – you go from a large to a small to a smaller group, ultimately to the individual. By the time you have my address, my income, my car brand, my purchases, my drinking habits, and my taxes, you have me – a demographic unit of one. This line of reasoning completely misses the fundamental difference between narrowcasting and being digital. In being digital I am *me*, not a statistical subset. Me includes information and events that have no demographic or statistical meaning. Where my mother-in-law lives, whom I had dinner with last night, and what time my flight departs for Richmond this afternoon have absolutely no correlation or statistical basis from which to derive suitable narrowcast services. (Negroponte 1995: 164)

Leaving aside the fact that Google and Facebook have since developed massively successful business models utilising the digital activities of *me*, Negroponte made a shrewd point about the ineffectiveness of using the broadcasting-derived concept of 'narrowcasting' to think through potential developments in the network society. It was precisely that way of approaching network society opportunities that came most naturally to broadcasting and other mass media organisations, commercial and public alike. Thus, despite impressive exceptions (such as iPlayer at the BBC) it should not be surprising that most of the important new developments in network society media have come from start-ups rather than established mass media organisations. PSB was never primarily about serving the particular interests of individuals, but rather meeting the broad, shared (often presumed) needs of societies overall. That was Media 1.0. This perspective is engrained in PSB practice and embedded in its organisational mandates.

The second obvious fact about PSB is that in general these organisations have been comparatively large in their domestic contexts. That might be thought to offer a special leverage for intervening in the emerging network society, but one complication is that so much of the rhetoric about the network society has emphasised possibilities open to small start-ups unconstrained by the need for an established distribution infrastructure. A more nuanced version of this rhetoric was presented by a leading journalist for the *Economist*, Frances Cairncross, in her 2001 book titled *The Death of Distance 2.0: How the Communications Revolution will Change our Lives*. In the introductory section, 'Trendspotters Guide to New Communication', Cairncross bullet pointed a number of "important developments to look out for". One is especially important here: "More Minnows, More Giants". She suggests:

Many of the costs of starting a new business will fall and companies will more easily buy in services. So, small companies will start up more readily, offering services that in the past only giants had the scale and the scope to provide. If they can back

creativity with competence and speed, they will compete effectively with larger firms. At the same time, communication amplifies the strength of brands and the power of networks. In industries where networks matter, concentration will increase. (Cairncross 2001: xii)

This implies that PSM organisations are not well positioned for success in the network society context. They are not small start-ups – indeed, small start-ups are often considered a serious threat to established mass media players (and perhaps an even larger threat to established national commercial media firms). At the same time, PSB organisations have little or no opportunity to take advantage of international concentration which greatly benefits larger national commercial media organisations. Again, PSB is nationally constrained even if their brand is often an asset at home. But unlike commercial competitors, they are being politically constrained from refreshing themselves through acquiring or bankrolling start-ups. Thus, from the very beginnings of the network society as a substantial reality since the 1990s, both the rhetoric surrounding this and much of the reality have been particularly un conducive for PSB playing a positive role.

One of the few areas in which (neo-liberal) governments did briefly flirt with giving PSB organisations some positive task in constructing the network society was the development of digital terrestrial television (DTT). Many observers in the mid-1990s were unconvinced that take-up of the ‘information superhighway’ (i.e. the internet) would spread from a relatively small elite of educated and youthful people to the broad mass of populations. In both the UK and Italy, for example, DTT was seen briefly as an alternative route to the information superhighway. Despite an early government preference in the UK for commercial broadcasters, PSB organisations proved rather more effective in dealing with the development of DTT. However, as domestic internet penetration continued to grow rapidly, without hitting the anticipated barriers, this ‘alternative route’ was abandoned.

Having discussed the pessimistic perspective on PSB as PSM in the networked society context, we should also consider important developments that PSB has made in this regard.

Several public service broadcasting successes

Without very much government encouragement – and sometimes despite outright government opposition – PSB organisations have accomplished three things that have made a positive intervention in the early stages of network society development.

First, PSB increased the number of channels they operate in an expanding multi-channel environment produced by satellite, cable and digital terrestrial distribution. Most, if not all, have produced specialist channels, for example in news and for children’s programming, and even international channels. Second, like their newspaper counterparts in mass media, they have often been pioneers in the early creation of

websites to publicise their conventional programming and to provide another outlet for their often highly respected news and other programming services. Ironically, however, this has brought them into fairly direct competition with commercial newspaper publishers as sources of online news, leading to considerable complication with competition authorities. Third, and more recently, PSB organisations (along with, but sometimes in advance of, commercial broadcasters) have pioneered web-based ‘catch up’ services (like the BBC iPlayer), thus moving away from the linear broadcasting model.

Several things should be noted about these PSB successes, however. Importantly, all these developments are directly related to PSB’s traditional broadcast remit. The focus is on the core products and services, albeit in more flexible and varied ways. Moreover, these developments were accomplished without additional revenues. This has caused financial complications and some of the ventures, particularly international ones, were primarily designed as revenue earners rather than as public services per se. This creates contradictions that matter for PSB legitimacy. Finally, in some cases even these ventures – for instance news websites, or putting traditional PSB educational functions on the web – were viewed by both commercial rivals and neo-liberal governments as creating ‘unfair competition’ or ‘stifling commercial initiative’, and therefore restricted. In some cases, they have actually been terminated, as with the BBC’s online educational service (BBC Jam) that was ended by the BBC Trust after one year as a result of complaints by commercial rivals (BBC News 2007).

Thus, even the early successes of PSB in the network society context have been constrained by the inhibiting factors earlier discussed. Meanwhile, we have seen rapid development of the network society since 2000 in both the diffusion and capacity of internet access and quality (especially due to broadband). We have seen enormous developments in the quality of and take up of internet enabled devices, especially the rise of the smart phone, and an explosion of social media. While in principle ‘Web 2.0’ presented a tremendous range of opportunities for PSM development, the inhibiting factors we have identified constrained this potential in practice. And these factors were compounded by powerful new ones. Two prominent and influential books addressing Web 2.0 illustrated what was new.

Henry Jenkins 2006 work *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, and Clay Shirky’s 2008 work *Here Comes Everybody: How Change Happens When People Come Together*, are important for the focus of discussion in this chapter.

Both begin with anecdotes to illustrate and dramatise the arguments each develops (neatly encapsulated in their respective subtitles). Jenkins’ opener is the story of how a high school student created a Photoshop image of a Sesame Street character with Osama Bin Laden, how he posted it on his homepage as part of a series he called ‘Bert is Evil’, and how that image was picked up by a Bangladeshi publisher for an image of Bin Laden that was printed on anti-American signs, posters and T-shirts, which were in turn filmed and broadcast by CNN (Jenkins 2006: 1-2). Shirky opens with the story of a woman who left her expensive mobile phone in a New York City taxi,

how she asked a programmer friend to help get the phone back, how he mobilised online to accomplish that, how the phone turned up in the hands of a teenage girl who refused to give it back and how, after much collective involvement and discussion (and some online threats and racial abuse, extensive press coverage, and a hasty policy turn around by the New York Police Department), the teenage girl was arrested and the phone returned (Shirky 2008: 1-11).

Jenkins' story illustrates his theme of "convergence culture, where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways" (Jenkins 2006: 2). Shirky's tale demonstrates

how dramatically connected we've become to one another. It demonstrates the ways in which the information we give off about ourselves, in photos and e-mails and MySpace pages and all the rest of it, has dramatically increased our social visibility and made it easier for us to find each other but also to be scrutinised in public. It demonstrates that the old limitations of media have been radically reduced, with much of the power accruing to the former audience. It demonstrates how a story can go from local to global in a heart-beat. And it demonstrates the ease and speed with which a group can be mobilized for the right kind of cause. (Shirky 2008: 11-12)

Jenkins and Shirky offered different takes on what they both saw as a new networked environment, but they equally emphasised the bottom-up participatory culture that new environment facilitates. Neither was unaware of problems such a participatory culture might involve, as their observations on the respective opening case studies show. But the overall emphasis of their books was to value and celebrate this. From the perspective of PSB, however, Jenkins' and Shirky's opening anecdotes look rather different.

Both authors demonstrate rather dramatically the perils that PSB might face by involving themselves in this participatory culture. These would include copyright infringement, promoting vigilante justice or racism, and association with terrorism, to name but several. For PSB this makes for a particularly frightening vision, for two reasons. First, because the traditional make up of PSB has prioritised top-down responsibility. Controversial matters are referred upwards and, if possible, avoided. Second, despite some loosening of heritage mindsets and structures as a result of the cultural revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s, in recent decades PSB organisations have been politically-besieged institutions, mindful that any 'slip' could have disastrous political (and financial) consequences. Letting control out of their hands by engaging themselves in the bottom-up participatory cultures celebrated by Jenkins and Shirky would inevitably increase the chances of such 'slips' happening.

What I have argued so far is that both the rhetoric and, to a considerable degree, the reality of the network society has been extremely unfavourable to the intervention of PSB. From every angle surveyed here, these legacy providers find themselves blocked or inhibited from being full participants in this environment. Historically and

rhetorically, the network society paradigm has been bound up with the political and economic environment of neo-liberalism, in which publicly owned PSB organisations are, at best, begrudged survivors. Being fundamentally national organisations they are prevented from engaging in the globalisation of networked societies, and as broadcasters they lack the mindset to successfully intervene in its far more individualised forms of communication. And, with PSB's traditional remit being tightly specifically formulated on broadcasting, hostile governments and commercial rivals find it easy to argue they shouldn't be intervening in these new forms of communication in the first place. Finally, fostering and intervening in the live mass bottom-up participatory cultures of the network society is both extremely problematic to their traditional sense of top-down social responsibility and poses all sorts of dangers (both perceived and real) for upsetting their precarious relationship with government.

What is to be done?

What would it take for the established PSBs to play a central role in the network society? At the very least it would clearly require a substantial change of internal corporate mindset, as sometimes recognised by prominent figures within PSB organisations – particularly those who are responsible for 'new media' development. Intriguingly, Jenkins favourably quotes a speech at length from Ashley Highfield, Director of BBC New Media and Technology in 2003, talking about the coming break down of the relationship between “the traditional monologue broadcaster” and the “grateful viewer” (Jenkins 2006: 242). Fourteen years later there is little evidence that the corporate mindset inside PSB as a whole has put aside this broadcasting heritage. Why not? In the light of all that I have discussed, it should be clear what would be required for PSB organisations to fully grapple with the challenges and opportunities presented by the network society. Three requirements are particularly important:

1. Public broadcasters would have to invest substantial resources in areas quite outside their traditional (and often legally-mandated) broadcasting remits. And they would have to do so in the full knowledge that even with the best planning it's possible that many of the new initiatives will turn out to be failures or dead ends.
2. They would have to adopt a far more democratic and participatory attitude to those involved in new public service networked initiatives. But democracy and participation inevitably bring their own headaches, even to institutions that are thoroughly used to them, never mind for 'traditional monologue broadcasters.'
3. They would have to make a 'political' (with, for the moment, a small 'p') case to their viewers and license payers about why they were doing these things rather than leaving network initiatives to the market and instead concentrating on their traditional (and often much loved) broadcast programming.

They would have to do these things under adverse conditions, when budgets are squeezed and in political environments where governmental and regulatory actors are, in general, deeply hostile to PSB expanding into fields many believe should be properly left to the commercial sector. That sector would itself be vocally hostile to PSB ‘muscling into’ territory it considers its own. The commercial sector has had and would continue to have the ear of government and regulators on this issue. And commercial media would be more than happy to magnify their own message to the general public – a general public which is still, to a considerable degree, accepting of neo-liberal ‘common sense’ when it comes to networked information technologies. Thus, those inside PSB who are trying to change their mindset to foster new initiatives for full involvement in the network society face a number of very powerful external obstacles, and are likely to be seen internally as taking politically provocative and costly risks.

I hope there are managers and makers in PSB organisations who are willing to defy the external and internal obstacles, and willing to take those risks. But unless and until there is a significantly changed political climate, it will require enormous bravery. And yet, such bravery might pay off just now because in the wider world outside debates about PSB as PSM there are significant stirrings against the neo-liberal order. Although ‘right-wing populists’ are probably even more hostile to PSB than the neo-liberal establishment, ‘left-wing populists’ would potentially be far more sympathetic to the sort of initiatives I have described. Another problem for PSB organisations, however, is that they have long been seen by ‘left populists’ as part of the neo-liberal establishment (and have probably been rather relieved to be so seen). So, while defence of established public initiatives like healthcare and social services are a prominent part of the ‘left populist’ agenda, defence of PSB has not been. For established PSB organisations or, more likely, brave souls within them, to play a central part in opening space for PSM in the network society will require engaging with this ‘left populism’. There is no escaping the need to move from a focus on the small ‘p’ form of the political to the big P Political form. Correction: There is an all too easy escape – continued stagnation and decline.

References

- Bardoel, J. & Lowe, G.F. (2007) From public service broadcasting to public service media: The core challenge. In Lowe, G.F. & Bardoel, J. (eds.) *From Public Service Broadcasting to Public Service Media*. Gothenburg, Sweden: Nordicom: 9–26.
- BBC News (2007) BBC suspends net learning project. 14 March 2007 [Accessed 18 October 2017 at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/6449619.stm].
- Cairncross, F. (2001) *The Death of Distance 2.0: How the Communications Revolution will Change Our Lives*. London: Texere, London.
- Castells, M. (1996) *The Rise of the Network Society* (first edition). Volume 1 of *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Goodwin, P. (2014) The price of everything and the value of nothing? Economic arguments and the politics of public service media. In Lowe, G.F. & Martin, F. (eds.) *The Value of Public Service Media*. Gothenburg, Sweden: Nordicom: 77–86.

- Harvey, D. (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2006) *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. NY: New York University Press.
- Lowe, G.F.; Goodwin, P. & Nobuto, Y. (2016) Crossing borders and boundaries in PSM: Heritage, complication and development. In Lowe, G.F. & Nobuto, Y. (eds.) *Crossing Borders and Boundaries in Public Service Media*. Gothenburg, Sweden: Nordicom: 11–27.
- Negroponte, N. (1995) *Being Digital*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Shirky, C. (2008) *Here Comes Everybody: How Change Happens When People Come Together*. Londong: Penguin Books.
- Webster, F. (2014) *Theories of the Information Society* (fourth edition). NY: Routledge.