Public Service Media in the Networked Society
What Society? What Network? What Role?

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 Abstract

The 'networked society' has become a popular idea in national media policy and corporate strategy, including for public service media at national and European levels. It is equally notable in academic discourse about changing media-society relations as the emerging media structure of the twenty-first century de-emphasises mass media and prioritises networked communications. This transformation is generally considered to be important and urgent, but also rather vague and fraught with hype that is typical for buzzwords and catch phrases. This chapter provides a context for the collection that comprises this book. We clarify and critique the networked society notion with specific focus on the role and place of public service media. Our contribution situates the public service orientation in media historically in order to demonstrate contradictions and challenges involved with development of the enterprise in the networked society framework and context.

Keywords: networked communications, media markets, globalization, buzzwords, public service broadcasting, macro theory

Introduction

The emerging media structure of the twenty-first century de-emphasises mass media and prioritises networked communications. The facilitators especially include Google, Facebook and Twitter, which have a leading role globally. Networked media are fundamental to the development of 'networked society', as suggested by Manuel Castells (1996), with important economic ramifications as elaborated by Yochai Benkler (2006). The role and place of public service media in the emerging structure is uncertain and an issue of central importance for the character and affordances offered to all citizens (or not) in a networked society. The uncertainties are linked with three factors of fundamental importance (see the chapter by Peter Goodwin for insight):

1. PSM is rooted in the broadcasting heritage of PSB and steeped in a mass media mentality.

2. PSM is tightly focused on domestic media services and lacks opportunity and (often) the inclination to 'go global'.

3. Push-back from commercial media against PSM development online is already strong and increasingly influential.

There is a great need for critical reflection and careful thought because the validity of a public service orientation in tomorrow's media systems is at issue.

We are talking about the evolution of media, but not only that and not mainly. Of greatest importance are the roles and functions of media as understood in the networked society concept, that "depicts and promotes a vision of a society that is thoroughly interwoven with information and communication infrastructures, which (re-)shape the practices and structures that constitute all facets of social life" (vom Brocke et al. 2016: 159). Operationalising the concept depends on the digitisation of media, which is characterised by audience interaction as users, rather than merely as receivers, and with growing fragmentation due to media abundance. The networked society is paradoxical in that people are both more connected and unconnected at the same time, but there is growing risk of a new period of centralisation that could be facilitated by ending the policy of net neutrality (Wu 2010).

The focal idea (and ideal) of a networked society hinges on multidimensional interconnectedness: of technologies, economies, media industries and companies, and, above all, communities. The latter is especially complex because the interconnectivity is partly geographic (towns and nations) and largely sociocultural, given diverse communities of interest that transcend traditional boundaries. Interconnectivity depends on a sophisticated but opaque international configuration of networks – a network of networks that furnishes the infrastructure of a networked society in practice.

Contemporary media markets are in a disrupted state due to high uncertainty and volatility in market structures and modes of communication. The project of Modernity in the twentieth century emphasised the importance of mass media institutions (Van den Bulck 2001) and PSM is rooted in that heritage. The transition from PSB to PSM is a transformational project because it is not simply a change in services or options for service, but in orientation and identity. This has been the defining focus of strategic development in public media institutions since the late 1990s, especially in Europe, and the core concern of pertinent scholarship.

At issue is not simply what happens to broadcasting and how online services develop. The issue is fundamentally institutional in both of the ways that term is used (see Lowe 2010). Will PSM organisations as institutions have continuing importance as a primary node in a network of media organisations of many kinds for citizens in each country? This concern was treated by Graham Murdock (2005) who focused on PSM and 'the digital commons'. His thesis is updated and further developed in his contribution in this volume. For Murdock, a small group of global 'digital majors' are creating a virtual oligopoly of internet control that has worrisome implications for the future of diverse public cultures and the information needs of democracy in practice.

This underscores the importance of the second way the term is used – the institution as a cultural norm that is fundamental to a way of life. To the extent that equitable development of networked media systems matters, it is vital to extend and redevelop a public service orientation in media.

Our interest is not merely about organisations as such. To an important degree, the notion of a central organisation for PSM contradicts the networked society framework, which is characterised by media abundance, hyper-connectivity and anticipated decline in market failure. In that light, the fullest degree of public interest needs in a networked society are arguably best served by de-centralising public service functions across a range of media and other organisations and initiatives (Donders & Raats 2015). On the other hand, it remains entirely unclear how to *guarantee* provision of vital public services in media without a mandated and accountable institutional provider. If media are solely commercial in orientation, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to guarantee this. That point is crucial in the chapter by Dirk Wauters and Tim Raats, who argue that PSM organisations should be a hub for facilitating collaborative partnerships that are essential to the sustainability of public services in networked media 'ecologies'.

In a sense, then, we have two contending perspectives. These are variously treated by our contributors. Corinne Schweizer and Manuel Puppis provide a robust comparative assessment of the state of play across 17 European countries. They do not take a position on either perspective, but this research provides a nuanced view that is empirically grounded of PSM in a networked society. Given the contrary views and diverse realities entailed by the concept and practice, our authors adopt a critical stance. In our collective estimation, the 'networked society' notion has merit but has become an overworked catch phrase and buzzword. As Mjøs, Moe and Sundet (2014) noted, buzzwords originate in a particular field but are quickly adopted as a popular reference for a phenomenon that is broadly important and yet increasingly imprecise. The historic roots of the networked society concept can be traced to scholarship on information and communication technologies (ICT) that have long been characterised by optimistic expectations of an 'information age' in 'post-industrial societies' (see Bell 1973). This vision was embraced in the 1990s when national policies began to describe the internet as an 'information superhighway'.

In becoming a buzzword, a term takes on new connotations. Although less precise, the significance is often imbued with a greater sense of urgency (Mjøs, Moe & Sundet 2014). The networked society notion is an influential catch phrase for legitimating media policy changes and industry investment in forms of 'participatory' media. In Europe, this focus in media policy was prioritised in 2015 as an imperative for developing a "digital single market" (European Commission u.d.). The networked society is expected to greatly benefit individuals as citizens and spur robust economic development. There is little empirical evidence that the former is true, and the latter has mainly benefitted the handful of global digital majors reaping enormous financial profits due to big data proprietorship.

PSM is equally vulnerable to the use of buzzwords (see Donders et al. 2012; Moe & Van den Bulck 2014). In recent years, the 'networked society' has become a notable feature of PSM corporate strategies and policy documents at national and European levels, to a degree that it is now of considerable importance in legislation and academic analyses alike (see Glowacki & Jaskiernia 2017). A 2014 policy brief from the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) titled *Vision 2020* specifically endorses "connecting to a networked society" for "continuous improvement of trust and return on society" in PSM. We are clearly dealing with something that is very important, but quite vague. The networked society notion, and the role and place of PSM in that, merits critical examination of several essential questions this book attemps to answer:

- What is the networked society?

- How real is a networked society in both established and emerging media economies?

- How does a networked society affect PSM's heritage roles and functions, and what might it portend in new requirements?

- What indications are there that a networked society either expands or lessens the position of PSM as an institution?

- How practical is it to think of PSM as a central hub for public services in media, i.e. as an important but no longer exclusive (if it ever was) node for this via decentralised networks?

- Is market failure in the provision of mediated public goods still valid, or will this be largely solved by alternative provision via grassroots initiatives and in distributed forms?

Answering these questions is not only important for the future of PSM organisations, but importantly for the future of democratic development in twenty-first century societies.

In this chapter, we begin with an examination of the networked society as a context for contemporary debate about the role of PSM today. We critically evaluate the promise and reality of the networked society as the basis for positing a range of key questions regarding the potential of PSM in the emerging media structure for society. We connect our discussion with contributions that comprise this collection.

What is a 'networked society'?

Manuel Castells proposed the network society concept in the late 1990s to explain how new information and communication technologies facilitate the restructuring of capitalist economies (1996, 2000, 2004). His perspective is treated by several authors and in useful detail by Peter Goodwin. Castells' perspective was adopted by influential

media scholars. Denis McQuail (2007) considered the thesis a useful macro theory for understanding the next historical step in the evolution of media-society relations. In his view, this is sequential to three earlier stages as suggested by Marshall McLuhan (1962): Oral Communication, the Guttenberg Galaxy (print) and the Global Village (broadcasting). McQuail (2007) believed Castells' ideas are important for understanding what is new about the 'fourth phase'.

Castells was not especially interested in media, but rather in a new type of societal organisation in which social structures are increasingly de-centralised, non-hierarchical and comprised of complex networks. The importance of media is central, however, as he explained (1996: 34):

> A network society is a society where the key social structures and activities are organized around electronically processed information networks. So, it's not just about networks or social networks, because social networks have been very old forms of social organization; it's about social networks which process and manage information and are using micro-electronic based technologies.

This aligns with Arjun Appadurai's multi-dimensional view of globalisation that was published the same year, which resists the cultural imperialism thesis and proposes a complex assortment of semi-overlapping, semi-autonomous 'scapes' (1996) that co-determine the globalisation process. Globalisation is an underlying dynamic that drives development of dispersed but connected networks across national boundaries. This is a focus of the chapter by Hermann Rotermund.

Castells understands networks as an instrumental feature of every sphere in contemporary society, not merely as technological infrastructure. The ubiquity of networks in politics, economics and cultures account for the rise of a networked society. This is not to underestimate the vital role of digital communications technology or information production and processing. It is to say that a networked society as such is not that primarily because of media but because of social arrangements and dynamics that involve media. This points to the importance of mediatization, treated in the chapter by Stig Hjarvard as "a holistic perspective on the interdependencies between media and wider culture and societal conditions" that "shifts attention from communicative processes of 'mediation' (the use of various media for communication) to social processes of 'mediatization' (changes brought about in wider culture and society due to the growing presence and importance of media)."

Although elevating the social over the technical, Castells put digital media and communication technologies firmly at the intersection. The networked society is a complex communications network, described by Monge and Contractor (2003: 39) as a "pattern of contact […] created by flows of messages among communicators". This can be understood as a system of links and hubs that connect networks and facilitate their interaction in an endless flow of information, capital and culture exchange.

In our view, the Networked Society is an *internetified* phenomenon. Drawing on Dutton's (2008) idea, this kind of society is a meta-network comprised of networks

of networks. Individuals and societies are dealing with a complex constellation of networks that are not very transparent or accountable, but the internet is where the net *works*. Public networks, commercial networks, oppositional networks, gated networks, and dark networks are linked in varying degrees of openness, closedness and hiddenness with political networks, activist networks, cultural networks, corporate networks and social networks. Networks function online and offline, in real time and virtual time, and do so within, across and outside every kind of boundary.

Benkler sees these developments in socio-economic terms, in the light of globalisation and the restructuring of capitalism as argued by Castells. In Benkler's view, a networked information economy primarily benefits *individuals* who he presumes to be generally critical of commercial mass media for limiting participation and creating bottlenecks that benefit wealthy oligopolies. Benkler celebrates non-institutional development, described as an "innovative ecosystem made of public funding, traditional non-profits, and the newly emerging sector of peer production" (2006: 15). His primary focus is non-market players and, to a lesser but significant degree, non-state actors. He emphasises this development as a fierce, high-stakes "clash between incumbent institutions and emerging social practices" (ibid: 56), i.e. between the vested interests of mass media firms and non-institutional forms of mediation. Benkler is deeply interested in the implications of this shift for developing the public sphere – which has particular relevance to the development of PSM as such. It is unclear how much of his prioritisation will be proven true in the long run, but he is certainly right in noting the central importance of an economic focus in networked media development.

In a globalised networked society, time is timeless, at once becoming more complicated and simpler than earlier understood, shrinking and becoming more dispersed. Digital media networks are not bound to a particular space, but characterised by a "space of flows" – as Castells wrote.[1] The 'position' of an individual or organisation is determined by their location in the network information flows, rather than a physical location. The networked society is inextricably contextualised by media as a globalised 'scape' (Appadurai 1996). Key nodes in the networked society are therefore largely outside the control of national legislation or regulation.[2]

PSM organisations are inescapably meshed in these trends, pushed by and struggling with the same issues that shape, affect and complicate a comprehensive environment in which media-society relations are practiced. This environment is unstable, unpredictable and, for now, still unknowable. The key question regarding the role of PSM has great significance for understanding the potential of services for publics in the future.

What place for public service media in a networked society?

Benkler (2006) conceives the transition to a digital media environment as a shift from the mass media era of an industrial information economy to a networked informa-

tion economy. As (mostly) national institutions, public service broadcasting (PSB) was characterised by the aims and features of Modernity which prioritised the utility of mass media (see Hall 1992; Scannell 1996). Although frequently lumped together as 'European' PSB or PSM, there are significant national differences. The historic 'heartland' of the classical approach is North-West Europe (Lowe & Steemers 2012) with great similarities in structures, regulations, mission and operations. How PSB was understood and operationalised there has been broadly influential elsewhere.

In this region, public service provision in broadcasting was organised in centralised institutions with strong government support and structured as national broadcasting monopolies. This structure was legitimated on the premise of spectrum scarcity and to guarantee universal coverage. Funding was acquired via licence fees on receiving devices, with outright bans or strict limitations on advertising. PSB organisations were mandated to inform, educate and entertain the Public (with a capital P in the twentieth century era of High Modernity), targeting a broad general audience. Over time, they were also expected to satisfy various minority interests (Horsti & Hultén 2011).

The nation was the PSB 'universe' and the exercise of citizenship was the focal interest. PSB was expected to cultivate enlightenment and grow cultural capital, and to strengthen a collective identity among all citizens of the nation-state (Van den Bulck 2001; Price & Raboy 2003). PSB was expected to provide high quality content and to embody the highest professional standards. This orientation was paternalistic, but with good social intentions (Van den Bulck 2001). And PSM was accountable to government through oversight bodies appointed by parliaments, which the late Karol Jakubowicz (2003: 148) described as a configuration of "broadcasters, politicians, intellectual and cultural elite". Construed as a project to maximise political empowerment, PSB was supposed to be deeply committed to citizen emancipation (Murdock 2005).

However well or poorly this orientation was performed in practice, since the introduction of commercial broadcasting in the mid-1980s PSB has been in a near constant state of flux at the confluence of social developments in technological, economic, political and cultural environments. The transformation to PSM has been embattled with challenges for funding, recognition of goals, deciding the proper framework for remits and, ultimately, for social and political legitimacy in a media environment that has become increasingly commercialised and digitalised (Doyle 2006). PSM accountability still follows 'upward lines' (Jakubowicz, 2003), but the organisations are accountable primarily to national authority although multilevel governance has become a pressing issue in the EU. The challenges and dynamics are insightfully treated in the chapter by Mercedes Muñoz Saldaña and Ana Azurmendi Adarraga. Many politicians seem not to understand that most commercial media companies are owned and operated on a global scale by a handful of wealthy conglomerates (Lawson-Borders 2006; d'Haenens & Saeys 2007; Donders & Raats 2012).

In the context of networked communications, public service provision is less limited to and constrained by institutionalised structures, which nonetheless continue

to have reasonably high degrees of influence. But the rapid growth and widespread popularity of social networked media is an essential feature of meditization, as Hjarvard discusses. As noted, Benkler (2006) is keen on the potential of non-market, non-state players to grow participation. The latter increasingly features the mediated practices of social activists, as treated in the chapter by Christina Horz in her perspective on 'PSM challengers'. While significant challengers are located in institutional(ised) structures (commercial and non-commercial, both), it is important to recognise the rise of self-organising activists who use networked media to pursue socio-political goals that are typically grounded in a human rights perspective and reflect a public service ethos. Non-institutionalised forms of public service provision are a feature of networked societies that depend for their functional performance on networked media of communications. For many of these activists, PSM is part of the problem they are struggling against, rather than an ally or compatriot.

PSM organisations are struggling to remain meaningful and relevant, and to recreate a viable place in the flux of convergence dynamics that mitigate against their centrality. That is why they must engage with a complex assortment of stakeholders in governments, among competitors and with users in relations that are sometimes competitive and sometimes co-operative. It is why they grapple with requirements for high accountability and the need for ample affordances (Van den Bulck 2015) without sacrificing the independence that is necessary to serve civil society rather than state or market interests. It is why they must continuously reinvent the substance and parameters of their remits to address persistent claims of market distortion with new development (Van den Bulck & Donders 2014). Meeting these challenges is difficult because PSM organisations must do more without additional resources, accommodate increasingly dispersed, active and varied users, and achieve a high degree of reach in an environment that makes this problematic. The chapter by Maria Michalis provides a fruitful overview about this in her treatment of distribution dilemmas.

The legacy values of PSB are especially uncertain for younger media users (Just, Büchi & Latzer 2017). While young people often support the ideal of public service in media, many do not find PSM channels or content of personal interest and value. The challenge of serving a generation that uses media quite differently from their elders and is not as tightly connected to PSM provides the focus of the contribution by Gisela Reiter, Nicole Gonser, Markus Grammel and Johann Gründl. They present findings from a large-scale study in Austria that indicates the potential value of PSM for young people, but also worrisome indications that young people think these organisations are too focused on self-interested political and economic concerns.

The framework and dynamics of an increasingly networked society are not especially friendly to PSM. The new media structure can more easily bypass traditional institutions and weaken their historical roles. Far from being a central 'hub' in the new environment, PSM may become at best just another node in a decentralised and globalised networked media system. At worst, developments may render these organisations obsolete. The networked society construct de-emphasises core values

in the legacy system, rendering them less appealing or even doable than often hoped. PSM roles and functions face significant challenges in being taken on by other agents, in a decentralised, networked media system that is largely commercial and highly competitive, and at a scale that dwarfs most national contexts – especially in Europe. The chapter by Ruth McElroy and Caitriona Noonan focuses on this problem in applying a small-nation perspective to the challenges for public service media in a global media environment.

We next interrogate the buzz surrounding the networked society notion as the basis for questioning both the veracity of the presumed magnitude of this phenomenon, and the euphoria that permeates it. That is important for grounding the critical contributions in this book that have a bearing on media policy and corporate strategy alike.

Beyond the buzz

Like other grand narratives about the relationship between media and society, the theory of a networked society is compelling because it encourages wonder and excitement about something new that presumably signals dramatic changes for the better. Although an abstract notion, this narrative feels valid due to personal experiences in social media, online shopping, mobile media and WiFi networks. But the theory of an all-encompassing networked society merits critical scrutiny because the construct is becoming dominant in policy discourse and serves to legitimate industry investment. Figuring out what is true and what is hype matters to the theoretical value of the construct and for its practical application.

We do not set out to undermine the contributions of Castells and Benkler, or others (e.g., Negroponte 1996; Shirkey 2008; Jenkins 2009). Neither do we entertain an ambition to provide a definite evaluation. Rather, we want to critically assess the ways in which the networked society construct has taken on a life of its own that functions as a catch phrase and buzzword also in PSM research. Critics of Castells' ideas typically focus on his analysis of the role of information in contemporary society and assumptions about governing dynamics in relations between labour and capitalism in the 'information age' (see Garnham 2004; Weber 2004). We focus on a critique of the notion in connection with the position of PSM in contemporary media systems.

As a macro theory, the networked society construct is useful. But it tends to over-generalise what is happening in some places and overlook others. What is happening is to different degrees at different speeds. This first criticism is about the 'grand' nature of the narrative, which assumes a total and irrevocable change is happening everywhere at once. In fact, media-society relations are evolutionary and unfold in ways that are incremental, dispersed and uneven. The chapter by Davor Marko provides a timely illustration of PSM in the Western Balkan countries. In fact, online media hubs and nodes have not replaced the media structures and markets of the mass media anywhere, nor done as much as often presumed to upend broadcasting structure.

Garnham (2004) understands the network society as a further development of (late) industrial society rather than a radically new society. Castells made that point, too, although it has been neglected. In developing a more insightful understanding, it is useful to underscore the economic basis of a 'networked economy' or 'economy of networks' (see Rifkin 2000; Anderson 2006; Benkler 2006). This view provides an evolutionary perspective that encourages analyses from a long-term perspective to explore changes in relation to continuities. While the networked society adds an important layer of media affordance and performance, legacy media structures and agents remain highly relevant for most people in everyday practice everywhere.

Taking an evolutionary perspective encourages questioning the extent to which the networked society is in fact a global phenomenon. From an economic perspective, this matters to the vested interests of media and telecom corporations in the developed world even more than elsewhere. It is also unclear regarding the extent to which the network society is manifest in a similar manner in all types of societies, even where it has traction – in liberal, authoritarian and competitive authoritarian media systems. Further, it is uncertain if this alters fundamental characteristics of media systems as categorised in the influential work of Dan Hallin and Paolo Mancini (2004) and others (e.g., Levitsky & Way 2010). Significant differences clearly remain when one examines the orientations and organisation of diverse societies even within Europe, much less beyond. These patterns persist however much or little they are networked through media. In short, there are serious problems with the presumed scope of application for this grand narrative, and the scale of broader changes that networked media are assumed to cause.

A second criticism hinges on the popular use of the networked society that emphasises something entirely new and quite unprecedented. In fact, all societies in every age have been networked and stratified (both) in various forms and ways: by tribal affiliations, by guilds, by class, by markets, by extended family networks, by 'secret societies', and by the routine needs of the governed and the governing in processes to work out on-going relations. Media organisations, too, have long been networked, as evident in historic printing guilds and contemporary journalist unions, news agency wire services (e.g., the Associated Press and United Press International), affiliate structures (in the American broadcasting system), and in persistent tendencies to form oligopolies and practice collusion in media industries (Wu 2010).

PSM institutions have been networked for decades too, as evident in lobbying by the EBU and building programme exchanges such as Eurovision (EBU 2004; Van Rompuy & Donders 2013). To be fair, Castells (2000) later recognised that networks are nothing new as forms of social organisation. What mattered to him was the shift to networks as the centre of *all* social practices, which although dispersed comprise a centralised system of interconnected nodes that include traditional mass media institutions. In Europe, which wasn't a focus of his analysis, this certainly pertains to PSM.

Legacy mass media, including PSM, continue to enjoy a pronounced presence in online network architecture. While platform providers and programmers are power-

ful intermediaries, PSM institutions are more trusted and often the preferred sources for a variety of content genres, especially news and domestic production. Alexander Dhoest and Marleen te Walvaart's discuss this in their chapter on PSM children's programming. (The importance of PSM as a collaborative hub and co-operative partner in overall domestic audiovisual production is treated in the chapter by Wauters and Raats, as earlier mentioned.) Many PSM organisations are networked media players that provide a needed counterweight to the potentially negative consequences of powerful, global and commercial intermediaries that are involved with everything and take a slice from every side, but so far resist taking responsibility. Indeed, a key problem of networks as such revolves around taking responsibility for irresponsible actions and ensuring healthy correctives. We think PSM can and must play this role. In practice, they are doing so already with positive results as exemplified in the cases reported by our authors.

A third problem with the networked society notion is the tendency for technological determinism, which suggests technology autonomously causes consequential things to happen *to* society – often to a degree that is overly optimistic or pessimistic with presumed impacts that affect humankind as a whole. As noted by Webster (2004) and Garnham (2004), this remains a persistent strand of discourse in academic research and policy work related to media and ICT (see Servaes 2014). In treating the transition from PSB to PSM, academic discourse has been rife with technological determinist arguments both for and against (Van den Bulck 2008; Donders 2012).

The belief that new media of communication cause fundamental changes to existing media and radically change the ways people interact and live is nothing new. Wildly optimistic or bleakly pessimistic predictions rarely come true, however. While changes in media systems can become fundamental, the impact on society relations tends to be incremental and only makes a significant difference over longer periods of time. Digitalisation is causing momentous changes in and for media, but to what ends and in which ways and degrees is still unclear. We think it unlikely this will transform the nature and identity of humankind any more than previous 'revolutions' in media. The deep roots grounding peoples and cultures will not disappear, nor will 'interactive' media replace interpersonal interaction. Raymond Williams' (1974) original contention that societal changes lead to technological developments, that human needs and dynamics shape technology (i.e. 'technological relativism'), puts the buzz about a networked society in a useful intellectual context. Although it is debatable whether technological determinism and relativism are a continuum or a duality (Taragas & Lin 2016), networked society proponents typically suppose the technology push is inevitable and all policy makers or anyone else can do is try to direct it. We disagree. The only thing inevitable is that humans will decide and determine our future.

Fourth, the influential strand of academic and activist discourse focused on building a technological democracy often consider networked media as the alternative needed to give voices to those who have been unheard and oppressed (e.g., Cammaerts & Carpentier 2007). This idea hinges on hopes that the paternalistic, top-down, elitist

orientation of legacy mass media (partly presumed and partly valid) will be overcome by community-based, bottom-up, democratic networked media that are open to all and used by everyone. The latter is questionable in the light of continuing disparities as evident in persistent problems with a growing digital divide, which might actually widen if the principle of 'net neutrality' is upended. Beyond this, the discourse hinges on a celebration of personalisation and individualism in media and all else. This is assumed to be useful for collective democracy but, so far, has not been proven.

This view is especially pronounced in Negroponte's (1996) book, *Daily Me*, which makes a case for personalisation tools helping people become better informed and emphasises new opportunities for accommodating diversity. In a similar vein, the (presumed) end of linear television is expected by adherents to open the way to highly personalised video consumption for improved entertainment (Barkhuus & Brown 2009). As Jannick Sørensen and Jonathon Hutchinson discuss in their chapter, the new media environment does provide opportunities for PSM to develop personalised services, but doing so hinges on using algorithms and bots that carry significant risks because the public service ethos and core values are perhaps impossible to encode, and such development may damage transparency, thereby eroding legitimacy.

In fact, there are mounting concerns about the impact of digital disruption on media's democratising role in societies, with worrisome signs in news and information services especially (i.e. fake news and propaganda). Growing online fragmentation was treated by Cass Sunstein (2001) who fretted about the balkanisation of 'public' opinion as private opinions to the detriment of public debate, and by Eli Pariser (2011) who observed the development of 'filter bubbles' when examining the consequences of growing fragmentation and polarisation linked to personalisation. Although these concerns may prove as exaggerated as the euphoric-utopian discourse, a strong focus on individualism raises important questions that are relevant to the need for PSM to help rectify negative effects.

Fifth, the networked society notion can be criticised for neglecting the problem of persistent as well as emerging social inequalities, and for failing to fulfil promises to empower individuals in practice. The inequalities between social groups in majority / minority populations are as evident today as ever, despite nearly twenty years of 'network society' development. We doubt there is a technology fix for engrained social inequities. On the contrary, given economic and literacy disparities that constrain full participation, it strikes us as odd to think social inequities could be resolved merely by providing more possibilities to link on proprietary networks. Furthermore, a network is by its very nature paradoxical because it simultaneously enables and constrains every participant and node that is linked with it (see Virta & Lowe 2017). What is good for the network as a whole might not be in the best interests of the individual, and vice versa. Nets not only connect but, like a fishing net, also trap.

Moreover, networks are not stable structures; they are transient and amorphous. In principle, an individual can tap into, activate, build or link with a network, but none of that is guaranteed. Networks collapse when a central node crashes, and are prone

to deliberate disruption through hacking and geo-blocking. Networks are continually changing, which means participation is in a continual state of flux. This suggests the importance of stable anchors because, as Castells and others recognise, the development of a networked society facilitates new forms of inclusion and exclusion. Those lacking the economic, educational or social means, or technical skills and access, will be left behind because they cannot use the network. Connection is a power issue, not only of the electrical kind. From their inception as PSB, the principle of inclusion and compensating for socio-cultural inequalities have been core values that continue to explain the mission of universalism for PSM. There is no convincing reason to think this role is less important today.

Sixth and finally, the networked society framework suffers from several problems observed in critiques of so-called 'creative industries' (Garnham 2005; Flew & Cunningham 2010). The heart of the networked society rationale is essentially economic rather than democratic, cultural or social. Its development is conceived as an inevitable result of managing creativity as an industrial factor linked to expectations for growth in national prosperity. The networked society construct is less about the society than the networks, and especially who owns them and to what ends. The primary intention of policy and investment in media in the online apparatus is for harvesting economic value (Porter & Kramer 2011). There are powerful vested interests in the telecom industry, among platform intermediaries, and for a plethora of corporate and state practices related to surveillance, data scraping, social monitoring and the covert influences of algorithmic structures. In the envisioned 'Internet of Things' (see Greengard 2015) as well as people (i.e. the networked society), power may no longer reside mainly in political institutions but rather in proprietary codes that are embedded in and direct networks – a point Castells acknowledged (2000: 25). In all of this, economic interests are a top priority.

This book takes a different perspective in pursuing more careful consideration of the public interest in the networked society as a construct, in policy, and in media's operational practices. The contributions comprising this volume explore a society's shared interest in networks, consider media networks' responsibilities to societies as owners, operators and governors, and examine the role of public service media companies and organisations in the emerging, often contradictory and paradoxical context. The authors deliberate on what is new and different in comparison to the heritage mission of PSB, and what is the same in PSM. And they collectively consider what is most pressing and of highest shared importance. Our departure point is both sceptical and aspirational, both analytical and normative, both forward-looking and historically-grounded. While by no means the last word on the issues we deliberate, we hope the book provides a good starting point.

Notes

1. Anthony Giddens' notion of 'time-space distanciation' (1981) and David Harvey's ideas about 'time-space compression' (1990) align rather well with Castells' understanding of networked society development as a phenomenon that encourages a "high-level cultural abstraction of space and time with dynamic interactions" (1989: 23).
2. An exception is made for states that are disposed to apply highly restrictive censorship and controls, which are not acceptable in Western democracies, so far at least. The future could be more uncertain in the West, however, given concerns about fake news and sophisticated propaganda and cyber warfare.

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