

Chapter 10

Public service media in the era of information disorder

Collaboration as a solution for achieving universalism

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Abstract

Viral false information, siloed information habits, and growing distrust in the media are amongst today's most alarming challenges to digital media markets. These phenomena impact trust in media at all societal levels – global, regional, national, and local. They are enabled by economic, sociocultural, and technological transformations that have destabilised media systems and involve commercial, governmental, and civic stakeholders. The consequences significantly impact the lives of ordinary citizens. In today's context, the ability of public service media organisations to fulfill a mandated universalism mission and counter these trends requires a new approach that prioritises and operationalises collaborative efforts.

Keywords: multi-stakeholder, propaganda, media capture, collaboration, information disorder, trust in journalism, universalism mission

Introduction: Familiar concerns in new times

Decreasing trust in the media and increasing false content are challenges that have been at the centre of public debate and academic research in recent years. Efforts to combat “fake news” account for a significant amount of research, as well as international policy reports and responses.¹ The concerns are familiar because disinformation, propaganda, and fake news have a long history (Ananny, 2018). But today's digital platforms combined with the lack of clarity about rules and requirements for their owners and users have created a context that is eroding trust in media, in journalism especially. New strategies and techniques for producing and distributing propaganda, combined with lack of editorial accountability, coincide with the development of online opinion-leaders as human “influencers”, viral marketing through online sharing, and automated content creation and distribution (Nedeva et al., 2018).

Combatting the multiple and complex challenges that have culminated in a proliferation of disinformation and growing distrust in the media provides

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a timely case for discussing what continues to matter in public service media (PSM), what is new that also matters greatly, and opportunities for renewing relevance and heightening beneficial impact. Rooted in the heritage of public service broadcasting (PSB), PSM's mandate includes the historic PSB principle of universalism. Ensuring the availability of and access to content and services for everyone in a national context remains a core feature of the legacy mandate for public media as a public service.

Regrettably, this principle is not faring well in today's context of globalised giants, fragmented audiences, unregulated platforms, and viral disinformation. Although the defining characteristics of PSB were not initially geared to counter a commercial media system suffering from political interference and characterised by "filter bubbles" (Pariser, 2011), as Per Jauert and Gregory Ferrell Lowe (2005) noted, this has become an increasingly important part of discussions about the PSM remit.

This chapter contributes to debates about the contemporary relevance and value of PSM. We first offer a framework for understanding the proliferation of disinformation that is co-related with growing distrust in the media, here situated in relation to the universalism mission. We then discuss why and how today's complex and complicated context provides new opportunities to increase collaboration with other stakeholders in order to address the problems, especially including audiences and co-creators. Although we focus attention on Europe, the problems of fake news and declining trust in media are not confined to these countries. Their manifestations – as well as configurations of PSM – vary country by country.² A focus on these issues in countries where PSM institutions are "mature" institutions is especially helpful to illustrate dilemmas in accomplishing the historic and always problematic universalism mission today. Our analysis is based on a policy brief that was produced for the Council of Europe (CoE) and a related white paper (Horowitz, 2018) authored for the Central European University's Center for Media, Data and Society.

The context: An era of multiple challenges

Problems in today's media environment are not easily categorised. From the perspective of both societies and individuals, we are experiencing a shift in our relationship with knowledge. The historically respected notions of objectivity and truth are no longer prominent in public debates about media, and even the legitimacy of such notions is called into question by phrases such as "truthiness" and "alternative facts". This is indicative of a cultural shift that signals growing distrust for elites and institutions of all types – political, religious, journalistic, and scientific. At the same time, the economic conditions for media of communication have become increasingly market-based and -dependent, and cor-

respondingly marked by escalating competition for both attention and revenue. Technological advances have facilitated more choice but have also contributed to increasing fragmentation amongst publics as media audiences. New patterns for accessing information are based on the use of algorithms, micro-segmenting, and the pursuit of viral content-sharing in media (McNair, 2018).

For journalistic institutions, the erosion of trust has much to do with disruption caused by the emergence of digital markets. A 2018 report published by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU, 2018b) highlights several especially pertinent reasons. Amongst these reasons are local and national news producers being forced to compete with Internet giants for advertising revenue and attention. The resources of these global competitors greatly exceed those of even the wealthiest local providers. The need to compete is equated with a shift in priorities for commercial providers that increasingly involves blurring the line between opinions and facts, and higher accommodation of advertisers' preferences. This development is encouraging a prioritisation of negative news and a focus on simple narratives that cannot do justice to complex issues.

Another challenge hinges on the reality that many of these phenomena are both global and national. On the one hand, we live in an "attention economy" (Wu, 2016) under conditions that have been described as "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff, 2015, 2019). Search engines and social media platforms generate revenue by selling predictions that are based on enormous, cumulative amounts of data the parent companies collect. On the other hand, we are also challenged by the problem of "media capture" (Schiffrin, 2018), which happens when governments take over media outlets or unduly influence content. This problem is becoming acute in social media, as the 2019 Freedom House report on Internet freedom makes clear (Shahbaz & Funk, n.d.). Governments are increasingly harnessing social media as a highly effective tool for disseminating propaganda. The report notes that instead of serving as a platform for civic discussion, social media are now used to spread misinformation and to monitor citizens.

False news, disinformation, and misleading propaganda are a real concern. The 2018 Reuters Institute *Digital News Report* surveyed 37 countries (Newman et al., 2018) and found that more than half of all surveyed news audiences agreed or strongly agreed that they are concerned about not being able to distinguish between what is real and fake on the Internet. A Eurobarometer report from March 2018 found that nearly 40 per cent of the EU population comes across fake news either every day or almost every day, and more than 80 per cent of respondents considered fake news as a problem in their country and for democracy more generally, both at home and abroad.

Disinformation is at the heart of every explanation for declining trust in news amongst citizens, and for news media overall. The EBU recently completed a study on trust in the media (EBU, 2019b) that combines data from a series of Eurobarometer surveys with the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report*. They

found that 44 per cent of Europeans generally trust the news, which means that more than half do not. More than half trust whatever news sources they personally use. Unfortunately, news shared on Facebook and Twitter tend to be primary or significant sources for many news consumers. Overall, young people tend to trust news less than older generations. At the same time, search engines and social media are less trusted sources for news than legacy media for more or less everyone in Europe, even more amongst younger than older generations (Shearer & Matsu, 2018).

The concept: Information disorder

Academic and applied analyses have grappled with the challenges from various perspectives. In recent years, near countless research projects and policy documents have been produced that focus on different dimensions.³ A study by the European Commission Joint Research Centre (Martens et al., 2018) summarises the different approaches. A narrow approach focuses on recognising verifiably false information, which is fairly easy to identify and can be countered by, for example, hiring fact-checkers, tagging suspicious postings, and removing false news posts. A broader approach focuses on identifying deliberate attempts to distort news in order to promote preferred ideologies, cause confusion, foment polarisation, and in some cases produce disinformation to earn money without necessarily intending to cause harm. While some efforts are politically motivated, others are commercially motivated as evident in click-bait practices and the intentional filtering of news to attract targeted audiences. This approach is more difficult to study empirically, and to verify. It pertains to economic models for funding news markets and there is wide variation in the quality of news.

As serious as this is, the challenge is even broader than the issue of quality because it goes to the deeper concern about trustworthy news. In this chapter, we use the term “information disorder” to characterise a panoply of pertinent issues, challenges, and questions that are widespread and have serious implications for society and democracy. The term was first employed in a report for the CoE (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017) targeted to researchers and policy-makers, and positioned as an “information disorder framework”. The proposed model includes: 1) types of information disorder based on intent, ranging from unintentional false content to disinformation (i.e., false or manipulated content and context, or a broader social use) with an intent to harm; 2) phases of information disorder (creation, production, and distribution); and 3) its elements, meaning the agents (i.e., who created the message and why?), the message (i.e., what was the content?), and the interpretation (i.e., how was it interpreted?).

This framework is useful for steering discussion about universalism in PSM today because it highlights contextual features that are necessarily involved with

efforts to combat information disorder in market-driven or politically contested communication environments. The framework highlights ways in which PSM can help to distinguish between types of false information; to offer a guaranteed chain in creation, production, and distribution; and to supply content that addresses audiences as citizens instead of targeted audience micro-segments.

Information disorder and the universalism mission today

The challenges under discussion are relevant to the principle of universalism, which has been a foundational ideal for PSB from the start – especially important in Europe. Normative characteristics assigned to PSM by key stakeholders demonstrate considerable uniformity. The EBU, the Public Media Alliance (PMA), the CoE, and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have all observed that universality in access and content is a cornerstone of the public service mission in broadcasting and beyond (CoE, 2004; EBU, 2012).

This is the ideal. In practice, PSM organisations vary in how much relevance and impact they have in their respective societies and are enormously varied in institutional arrangements, reach, and budgets (Radu, 2017). From the start, PSB development was a national project with significant differences in reach and impact. For instance, in the Nordic countries and the UK, public media services have long dominated their respective audiovisual markets, while in Portugal and Italy, PSM companies have minor market shares for both television and radio services (Radu, 2018). As for institutional configurations, in Europe these vary from the global presence of the multi-channel, multi-platform, multi-project British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (often considered a benchmark model for PSB, but in fact a comparative outlier), to the multiplicity of independent organisations defined by political-religious history that comprise the public broadcasting system in the Netherlands, to the newly established (as public broadcasters rather than state organs) PSB organisations in the Balkan region (KAS, 2019; Psychogiopoulou et al, 2017).

At the same time, issues addressed in the framework of information disorder are all components of what PSB has aimed for in advocating the ideal of universalism: a comprehensive, trustworthy chain of content production that is accessible for all, that can be trusted, and that unifies rather than segments citizens. The core ideals that have legitimated PSB speak to societal ambitions of ensuring progress in social development, respecting rationality as a prerequisite for a healthy democratic process, and the need for a relatively high degree of autonomy to be at arm's length from both political and commercial pressures.

The purpose of PSB is articulated in principles that require the institution to care for the information, education, and entertainment needs of a host society,

even if the approach to accomplishing this was admittedly paternal. Hannu Nieminen (2014) views PSB as part of the components of the European tradition of an “epistemic commons”, keyed to an ideal that knowledge and culture are a shared domain and relatively free of restrictions. The importance of civic education and universal literacy are at the heart of this idea, and mass media are facilitative. In his view, the epistemic commons is in danger partly due to challenges under discussion here. Indeed, the multitude of threats to democratic communication, including violations of privacy by the Internet giants (Zuboff, 2019), persistent digital divides (International Telecommunications Union, 2018), and the problem of exploitation and inequity created by algorithms (Eubanks, 2018). This impacts people’s abilities to be well informed, to engage in debates about issues of shared importance, and to act as responsible citizens in a democracy.

Information disorder is adding a new dimension that is relevant to the idea of universal multi-platform access. A study of Yle (Finland), France Télévisions and Radio France (France), ARD and ZDF (Germany), Rai (Italy), Polskie Radio (Poland), and the BBC (the UK) indicates that PSM organisations are struggling with a set of characteristic tensions between their strategic priorities, remit, and organisational imperatives, and those that are characteristic for commercial platform companies. Although PSM organisations continue to see social media as an important opportunity for increasing their reach, especially amongst young people and other hard-to-reach audiences, they are becoming wary of these platforms due to a growing chorus of blame and concerns about their culpability in facilitating information disorder (Sehl et al., 2018). This is of pressing concern because although global trust in the media is at an all-time low, research has found a remarkably strong and stable degree of trust in legacy media – and particularly notable for mature public broadcasters even as trust is generally evaporating for online platforms and social media (Newman et al., 2019).

In addition, the traditional universalism mission for PSB is challenged by specific – and controversial – developments such as personalisation. For instance, can automated solutions deliver the kinds of diversity that manual decisions about programming deliver? Does the coding an algorithm employs embody the ideals of guaranteeing the inclusion of minority voices and a diversity of voices, or prioritise issues relevant to public interest? Intertwined issues include concerns about creating filter bubbles and intruding on privacy in PSM’s involvement with the wider transformations in datafication and personalisation. PSM organisations are involved in developing algorithms to make their content findable via recommendation systems, and some are developing their own recommendation systems to ensure more exposure and personalised services for their users (Sørensen & Hutchinson, 2018). PSM companies are engaged in projects to develop digital personalisation that vary by type of engagement

and can result in tools that could threaten rather than strengthen their missions, including the pursuit of universality (Van den Bulck & Moe, 2018).

A role for PSM today

In policy-making circles, PSM is frequently mentioned, and sometimes emphasised, for its importance as part of the solution toolkit for combatting false news and information. For instance, the *Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and 'Fake News' Disinformation and Propaganda*, published in March 2017 by Special Rapporteurs, is comprised of several intergovernmental bodies and suggests that PSM has an important role (OSCE, 2017). The CoE holds a similar view (Horowitz, 2018), as does a recent report by the European Commission multi-stakeholder high level expert group (HLEG) (European Commission, 2018). These expert organisations recognise the need for a robust and diverse media ecosystem and acknowledge the beneficial role of PSM in ensuring that. In addition, the CoE has on many occasions recognised the democracy-enhancing influence of PSM. Recently, Resolution 2255 highlighted the importance of PSM in combating disinformation and propaganda today (CoE, 2019).

Unfortunately, PSM is not strongly supported in most of the world, and is taking hard hits even in Europe where the legacy of PSB is comparatively strong. The decline is especially worrisome in central and southern Europe where PSB has struggled to emerge from the constraints of a state media heritage. A comprehensive overview of the situation in south eastern Europe (KAS, 2019) characterised the PSM dilemma as a “pillar of democracy on shaky ground”. Many countries in central Europe are in the same general situation.

Even in countries with mature public service traditions, including Austria, Denmark, and Switzerland, PSM is weakened by political and commercial opposition to the ethos, ideals, and practice of public service in media. The reasons are mainly self-serving and advanced by interest groups with commercial and political underpinnings, although usually framed as concerns over a higher-ground issue related to safeguarding public funding (Wilson, forthcoming). In fairness, one should also acknowledge sceptical voices warning against putting too much trust in established PSM companies, such as the BBC, due to their dependency on and connections with power elites that may limit the degree of independence needed to address a “crisis of journalism” (Freedman, 2019). This problem has greater pertinence yet in much of the world where the connection between political power and media is direct, especially where broadcasters have struggled with making the transition from captured state organs to independent public service providers.

One unifying trend across Europe is a growing preference for abandoning the licence fee system of financing and instead pay for PSM with taxpayer-

generated funding. While that might make sense on paper, in practice it has already encouraged more and higher degrees of state intervention with chilling effects on editorial independence, and has also weakened possibilities for investing in research and development that is needed to counter challenges posed by information disorder (Dragomir, 2018; Gjerding Nielson, 2018). This is not to discount limited evidence that PSM may also be manipulated to spread content that borders on disinformation (Nolan & Walker, 2018).

Due to persistent and often high commercial pressure within media markets, even in countries with well-established PSM organisations – especially Denmark, Finland, and Sweden – there has been harsh criticism from commercial competitors, which charge PSM with allegedly creating market distortion, especially in the digital news market (Newman et al., 2018). The trends indicate shrinking political support for PSM, as observed by the Council of Europe in 2017, that demonstrates growing threats to the independence of public broadcasters and regulators, including direct political interference in editorial practice, lack of legislative safeguards against political bias, and concerns about the appointment, composition, and dismissal of regulators and managers. These problems are aggravated by insufficient and declining funding (CoE, 2017).

Policy is one thing; performance is another. Do audiences think PSM is a remedy to false news, and is PSM distrusted as well? Recent EBU studies (2019a, 2019b) demonstrate the centrality of PSM in Europe as a trusted source for content and as a pillar of a healthy functioning democratic system. According to a survey by the 2018 Reuters Institute *Digital News Report* (Newman et al. 2018), most respondents globally think the responsibility for information disorder rests with both new media platforms and legacy media operators as publishers. Similar views emerge from the Eurobarometer (2018) on fake news. In the view of those respondents, journalists, national authorities, and the press and broadcasting management should be made responsible for stopping the spread of false news and disinformation.

Nonetheless, a study on PSM news audiences in the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, and the UK (Schulz et al., 2019) indicates that even in mature public service contexts, PSM news does not matter universally to all citizens. In the digital era, the reach of public service news is still largely via broadcast channels, and those who access news through online services tend to be the same people who also watch broadcast news on television. These “faithful” audiences consist largely of educated older people who are avid news consumers. Younger audiences and those who are less educated tend to rely (if “rely” is an accurate term here) on news distributed via social media, and PSM news organisations struggle to reach these populations.

Thus, the evidence indicates ambivalent sentiments about public broadcasters and their multi-media reiterations in different (all commercial) platforms. The lack of universal relevance for PSM news services and the still strongly

national basis of PSM pose serious challenges to the potential for achieving even approximate universalism in an internationalised media environment.

New universalist solutions through collaboration

Given the complexity of the information disorder, it would be irrational to expect any one entity to offer a universal remedy for the situation. Thus, collaborations have been at the heart of policy efforts and plans in recent years. For instance, the European Commission HLEG included the participation of public service broadcasters via the EBU (European Commission, 2018), and in late April 2018, the EBU published its own position paper, titled *'Fake News' and the Information Disorder*, that advocates for a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach to solving the problem (EBU, 2018c). PSM organisations have developed innovative solutions that are seldom acknowledged, on the basis of collaborating with other organisations – ranging from civil society organisations to universities, technology companies, and even their commercial competitors. PSM institutions and their partners are providing sustainable and universally meaningful solutions to the problem of information disorder.

From a conceptual perspective, this is not a new development. For some time now, scholars have observed that public services in media are delivered by varied sources. Some are certainly from PSM organisations as legally mandated institutions – that is, public service from the *de jure* perspective (in law). But there are also many public services in media that are not provided on the basis of institutionally designed and mandated operations – the *de facto* perspective (Bajomi-Lazar et al., 2012; Clark & Horowitz, 2014; Horowitz, 2015). The potential value of collaboration has been envisioned beyond media-related organisations and groups, extending from the level of individual programmes to the level of policy-making practices (Wauters & Raats, 2018). A variety of motivations encourage PSM to collaborate with a variety of partners, some more strategic than others (Raats, 2019). There is evidence that collaboration can affect appropriate and effective solutions for addressing information disorder and pave a way forward for accomplishing a renewed universalism mission today.

A relevant proposition concerning collaboration to promote individual rights and PSM's role in that was voiced in the white paper, *Public Service Media and Human Rights*, from the CoE (CoE, 2011; Horowitz & Nieminen, 2016). In their view, PSM should be premised on treaties and legislation that mean to guarantee human rights, and in particular to safeguard human rights in content and services as an organisation. A special feature of this model is the inclusion of several stakeholders in accomplishing this mission via PSM. These institutions, national governments and regulators, and audiences each have important roles in developing and monitoring PSM in practice.

Another broad and concrete initiative is the European Public Open Spaces (EPOS) project that conceptualises open public spaces in the digital networked public sphere. EPOS wants to create networked public spaces that are free of state and market interference and with a Europe-wide scope. Drawing on the traditional PSM remit, EPOS seeks to provide access to information, education, and culture, but also to festivals, universities, civic education, and peer-to-peer curation in the production of knowledge and software. One central aim is to provide a space for civic deliberation (EPOS, n.d.). A technological counterpart to EPOS is the Public Media Stack initiative that plans to co-create a sustainable ecosystem of ethical, independent applications of technologies to support public media projects without exploiting the data, content, or relationships that are critical to being and performing PSM (Storythings, 2019).

At a more practical level, numerous collaborations are already addressing the problem of misinformation in efforts to provide “universally” vetted content on the basis of effective and comprehensive fact-checking. This is perhaps the most visible response by PSM to disinformation and misinformation. In this pursuit, PSM organisations have engaged in various collaborative fact-checking efforts. For example, ZDF of Germany has chosen to work with Truly Media, a collaborative platform developed by the German PSM organisation dedicated to media development, Deutsche Welle, and a Greek technology company. Sometimes collaborations happen with (otherwise) competitors. In Austria, for example, ORF joined with a variety of partners in the Austrian Press Agency to raise awareness across news providers and platforms (Körber, 2017). Other public broadcasting companies, such as Germany’s BR and Italy’s RAI, have used the browser extension FactFox to enhance services, which is a product that supports managing and responding to user comments.

In Norway, Faktisk, an independent fact-checking organisation, was created in 2017 by a consortium of media companies that included the public broadcaster NRK (Mantzaris, 2017). Similarly, the Swedish public service television (SVT) and radio (SR) partnered with the two largest daily newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*, in a collaborative fact-checking project there. The stakeholders conducted a joint training programme for journalists, and the participants collaborated on a fact-checking method that is based on the guidelines from the International Fact Checking Network (IFCN) (Funke, 2018).

Perhaps the best-known multi-stakeholder collaboration is First Draft, hosted at Harvard University. The project has over 40 members that include commercial and PSM firms from around the world (e.g., ABC of Australia, ARD, Deutsche Welle, and ZDF of Germany, BBC News, France Télévisions, as well as Eurovision), not-for-profit journalism organisations such as Global Voices and ProPublica, and platforms from Facebook to Twitter (First Draft, 2020). In addition to its collaborative fact-checking efforts (most notably around the French elections in a project called CrossCheck), and its contributions to

analyses of information disorder as a complex phenomenon (including the aforementioned report for research and policy, commissioned by the CoE), a recent contribution is the free online course for journalists and the general public for learning to identify misinformation (Rinehart, 2018).

Efforts by the EBU⁴ are, by nature of the organisation, highly collaborative. They have ranged from core activities such as the Eurovision News Exchange (EBU, n.d.), to business innovation involving big data (EBU, 2018a), to journalism training and toolkits, to focused workshops and annual events, to supporting research, and to policy advocacy to support the provision of quality media to counter disinformation (Lovell, 2018). In 2017, the EBU created a cooperative system of verification for user-generated content that functions on a networked basis with various members' newsrooms and other quality news partners collaborating in a decentralised (i.e., distributed) fact-checking process (Bowler, 2019). In addition, the EBU is a partner in the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI) with Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Agence France Presse (AFP), and the Global Editors Network (GEN). JTI is designed to promote journalism through adherence to an agreed set of trust and transparency standards that are being developed and will be implemented collaboratively (Goodman, 2018).

A renewed opportunity for public service media

The case of information disorder in relation to PSB, and especially to PSM, highlights factors that are at the heart of the universalism mission, both in terms of relevance and impact. There is clearly a need to rethink the foundational principle of universality in light of new opportunities to engage in collaborations at the national and global levels in today's media landscape. There are policy implications that can strengthen PSM. Assessed through the lens of the information disorder framework, PSM offers an antidote to most types of false content, whether motivated commercially or politically. PSM can guarantee a professionally vetted and ethically informed practice in the creation and production of media services, as well as universal distribution of trustworthy content and services. It can also provide citizens with tools for understanding information disorder and interpreting media to ascertain agency and determine the trustworthiness of content. Each of the described initiatives target some of these aspects, reflecting renewed need of the universalism mission for PSM in the era of information disorder.

PSB and PSM are, as institutions, part of media policy toolkits for countering market-driven challenges such as the concentration of ownership, overheated competition and diminishing content diversity, and inequalities of access to media (Bajomi-Lazar, 2017). Information disorder, scholars argue, is the result

of a complex storm of combined commercialisation, globalisation, and political interference (see Martens et al. 2018). The original premises of PSB emphasise a still ideal construct – it is non-commercial, nationally local, and at an arm’s length independent from the self-interested influences of markets and governments. Today, that construct is highly pertinent to what is needed to effectively combat problems caused by our contemporary information disorder. The historic ethos of PSB needs updating in concept and practice, but the cornerstone principles are needed more than ever. As Daphne Wolter, a media policy expert at the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, posits:

In these frantic times, there is a need for trusted content like never before. Albeit a great challenge, this is also an opportunity for shaping the content profile of public service media. Where public discourse derails repeatedly, public service media must guarantee that it remains democratic and cannot be controlled by any party, thereby preventing the emergence of media segregation. (KAS, 2019: 7)

Emily Bell, Director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, argues:

Existing political systems and public service broadcasters need to be free to imagine the kinds of information ecosystems that they’d want at the nation/state level and then real freedom to experiment with and find new paths to deliver that. And also to think about themselves oriented in a world where it could well be that large-scale technology platforms — designed, built, operated in America — will be taking over much of what your information ecosystem looks like over the next decade. (Hofseth, 2018: para. 26)

There is a precondition. As noted earlier in the EBU research on media and democracy (EBU, 2019b), this requires safeguarding a relatively stable political situation and citizen’s rights to active participation in political life, which coincide with a robust PSM system. The study on PSM news audiences (Schulz et al., 2019) shows that public service news does reach people everywhere on the political spectrum. So, while the traditional mission of PSB should endure, strategies and tactics need to accommodate a far more complex and complicated media-society environment.

Regaining trust in journalism and educating publics about disinformation is a reasonable amendment to the mandates and remits for PSM. Their accomplishments will depend to a great extent on the ability of PSM institutions to work in partnership with other stakeholders, including media companies, cultural institutions, and civil society organisations, an example specifically pertinent to the case of disinformation. As has been highlighted by numerous fact-checking initiatives which showcase the ability of many (resourced and mature) PSM organisations to effectively respond to viral disinformation, this chapter clarifies and amplifies the role of PSM as a cornerstone partner in col-

laborations to solve global and local challenges in the abundant and chaotic context of information disorder.

Although the problems are global, the national context is the theatre of operations for misinformation, disinformation, and false news that is intended to undermine democracies and destabilise social relations. PSM is ideally positioned to combat this within and across national contexts. Policy-makers need to recognise the necessity and practical value of preserving a mixed media ecosystem, which is obvious to a unique degree in Europe and is instrumental for ensuring that a plurality of media and content co-exist and compete. A review of international standards and PSM concluded that, “If PSM are to realize their full potential in the future, then renewed attention needs to be given to these foundational principles established in the past” (Psychogiopoulou et al., 2017: 1949).

A renewed practice and revitalised concept of universalism will have instrumental importance in countering information disorder. This can be accomplished with a proven foundation of ideals and principles that legitimate the public service approach and social responsibility model of media provision. The ethos of public service in media is an essential part of the solution to the problem of information disorder, and not part of its cause.

Notes

1. These questions are addressed, for example, in the EBU’s annual and ongoing *Trust in Media* reports, the Knight Foundation’s *Trust, Media, and Democracy* projects in the US, and The Reuters Institute’s annual and ongoing *Digital News Reports* (see also, e.g., Hanitzsch et al., 2018). The fluid and many-sided question of how to understand fake news has been addressed by scholars and policy-makers alike, and there is also already a vast amount of studies on the spread and impact of fake news (for overviews, see, e.g., Horowitz, 2018, 2019).
2. For example, fake news and disinformation in Eastern Europe (<https://en.ejo.ch/specialist-journalism/fake-news-and-disinformation-in-eastern-europe>).
3. For example, a rich resource for research and activities on misinformation and fake news by different stakeholders is the Open Access, crowd-sourced repository, Misinformation Research – Public Bibliography, initiated by the Director of Research at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Professor Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HdOvjfNJAfQqKKNKUwoltA3B-gZcXdmTm6amaZFYqjY/edit?usp=sharing>).
4. The EBU coordinates the efforts of its members in digital and media literacy initiatives (<https://www.ebu.ch/fr/contents/news/2012/03/empowering-citizenship-through-m.html>).

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