**Participating Publics: Implications for Production Practices at the BBC**

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**Including the Public in Public Service Media**

The BBC, one of the largest public service broadcasters in the world often

acts as a model for other public service media enterprises. It is therefore likely to be useful to examine how the BBC has been adapting to emerging participatory practices. The corporation has been particularly reassessing its relationship with the public since the launch of its website, [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), in 1997, and the subsequent launch of a suite of ‘online communities’ services (from 1998 onwards). Two production and audience studies (firstly located in the BBC New Media and secondly in the BBC Children’s’ department), *Participatory Public Service Media: Presenters and Hosts in BBC New Media* (Jackson, 2009) and *Children in Virtual Worlds – ‘Adventure Rock’ Users and Producers Study* (Jackson, Gauntlett, and Steemers, 2009), argue that a reorientation towards a creative, innovative, and interactive public is necessary in order to maintain currency in the present media landscape.

Together, the two studies offer insights over a critical seven-year period when the BBC was establishing systems to ‘manage’ (a parental orientation) and ‘facilitate’ (a more egalitarian orientation) public activity within the participatory media. Overall, the central question posed is what adaptations to management and production practices are necessary in order to facilitate a participating public? To locate myself, I was the BBC’s Online Communities Editor from 1998 to 2002 before becoming an academic, responsible for launching and overseeing all the BBC’s message boards, live chats, and chat rooms. In addition, I assisted the BBC’s Senior Editorial Policy Advisor to develop policies associated with message boards, live chats, and chat rooms.

Participatory Public Service Media: Presenters and Hosts in BBC New Media (Jackson, 2009) deconstructs how the relationship between the BBC and the public changes through the addition of participatory media. The project began in 2002 and concluded in 2009, a critical time when the BBC’s website was becoming an established service. Theories connected with interaction (Goffman, 1981), the inherent sociability of media (Scannell, 1996), and the overall nature of participatory media (Jenkins, 1992) informed six months of experimental production workshops The workshops deconstructed a range of media forms such as websites, forums, and live chats, but also user-generated content and community video, testing the relationship between producers and the public. The findings indicate changing power and control structures within public service media connected with the adoption of interactivity, also commented on by others (Castells, 2009; Corner, 2011; Laughey, 2009). Furthermore findings indicate an increasing fluidity of media assets and flows (Jenkins et al., 2013; Kadushin, 2012). In addition the public expect a level of reciprocity from producers, partly due to the BBC’s labelling of ‘new media’ forms as being ‘interactive’.

The second study, *Children in Virtual Worlds – ‘Adventure Rock’ Users and Producers Study* (Jackson, Gauntlett, and Steemers, 2009), was jointly funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the BBC as one of eight projects undertaken by a range of researchers from across the UK investigating new forms of public media content and services (2007-2009). The joint investment (£500,000) indicated a wish to deconstruct existing interactive services to identify the public value and contribution to the public good, potentially before developing future strategies. *Children in Virtual Worlds* looked at the value of Adventure Rock (AR), a virtual world for children developed by the BBC’s Children’s’ department. Ninety children of mixed socio-economic backgrounds from five UK cities critically examined a trial version of AR, a solo play 3D virtual world for children aged 6 to 12 launched in April 2008. Drawing and mapping workshops (for 7 to 9 year olds and 10 to 11 year olds) were organised to encourage the children to say what they liked and disliked about Adventure Rock. The children also kept media diaries to chart their avatar’s progress through the virtual world and to write down how AR compared to a small selection of commercial virtual worlds for children. The findings showed the service was flawed, as it failed to reflect both younger and older children’s’ online behaviours (Buckingham, 2007, 2008; Livingstone, 2009; Merchant et al., 2013) by not offering sociability and sharing. Children’s’ BBC (CBBC) adapted its website as a result of the study to offer content in ‘clusters’ for younger and older children and indicated it would explore how to involve children in the development of services as creative consultants going forward.

Bardoel and Lowe suggest “the soul of the PSM [Public Service Media] ethos is communication in the public interest” (Bardoel and Lowe, 2007:17). Communication is reliant on an interconnected cycle of exchange: speaking and listening, acting and reacting. The current challenge for public service media globally is now to reciprocate and acknowledge thousands of participants, and this requires a fundamental review of the mediation model. Shirky (2008) argues that the ability to contribute user-generated content (UGC) both disrupts the ‘filter then publish’ model of broadcasting, and – more critically – the idea of having organised institutions that wholly control the media-making process. This suggests there needs to be a shift in the distribution of rights and responsibilities; “Interactivity is (…) closely related to the shift of power balance in the communication process as electronic media are reorganised into two-way communication systems” (Kim and Sawhney, 2002:221).

Participatory media are defined here as iterative content produced by a collaborative and creative activity that takes place within a shared space facilitated by private or public media outlet or by the public. The rules and outcomes are negotiated between the producers and participants, who may be prosumers. This is in partial opposition to Henry Jenkins’ definition of engagers being “participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands” (Jenkins, 2006a: 3). Participatory media are typified by, for example, message boards, blogs, online archives, immersive environments and worlds, games, digital storytelling, and interactive dramas. Such platforms may enable the publishing of user-generated content such as text, audio, video, and photographs. The term *social media* refers to Internet Protocol (IP)-enabled communication services that foreground a sociable relationship between publics; social media are therefore framed as a genre of participatory media.

A number of separate theoretical approaches have been connected with the deconstruction of the producer – audience relationship since the 1950s. Horton and Wohl identified the existence of a Para social relationship between announcers and viewers (Horton and Wohl, 1956), and Paddy Scannell and the Broadcast Talk Group of the 1990’s reviewed the sociable nature and power plays of live talk shows on radio and television (Scannell, 1996). Person perception theories were drawn on by Livingstone and Lunt to show how viewers of soaps, such as the long-running series *Dallas,* identified and felt empathy with favourite actors (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994). These studies reject the idea of the audience as every having been passive uncritical receivers. Participatory media are therefore seen as an amplification of the sociability inherent in broadcast media. However, the mediation practices of ‘new media’ are distinctly different as they involve more active engagement by producers (Jo Kim, 2000) and transference of power and control (Castells, 2009) from producers to participants.

The BBC began searching for a deeper ‘two-way’ relationship with the audience from 1998 when it began to experiment with message boards, live chats, chat rooms, instant messaging (‘Chat Around Content’ – a service that never launched), the ‘Action Network’ (a service facilitating local action groups), interactive dramas, and so on. The BBC continues to experiment with new forms of public service media, for example, by opening their large archives of content to the public. The BBC has “about a million hours of video and audio content, plus a wealth of documents, including the original scripts” (Zubrzycki, 2012). The BBC wishes to digitise, metatag, and open the use of this archive as ‘The Digital Public Space’. The Multimedia Classification Project will research automated techniques to allow the public to search through the archive. This service, like all the others, will require facilitation by producers (moderation, hosting and curation). Since 1997 these skills developed in a rather piecemeal fashion due to the size of the corporation (which has approximately 20,000 employees) and the number of autonomous departments, each having its own culture and financial and production processes. This arguably inhibits collaborative or ‘swarm’ innovation and creativity (Gloor, 2006; Miller, 2010; Shirky, 2008).

The BBC’s online message boards were the first trial of a new kind of producer-public (and institution-public) relationship. They offered the possibility for debate and the growth of an ‘online community’ or fan base (Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 2006b) around well-known television and radio brands. The message boards were hosted by television and radio producers and moderated by moderators; presenters were less likely to engage in such a direct way with the public. To further define terms used here: *Hosting* is engaging with the public, for example offering additional comment or suggesting new topics of conversation; *moderating* is the removal of unsuitable content that has broken the ‘house rules’ that all participants agree to when they register for an interactive service. The BBC’s moderators and hosts also managed online community members’ accounts, and they acted as a point of arbitration where necessary, serving as the first point of an ‘escalation chain’ if any action needed to be taken against common infractions of the house rules, such as spamming, racism, bullying, or libel and defamation.

At first this worked well as long as the online community remained small, but as the number of participants grew the level of hosting and moderation also increased, doubling each quarter year (Jackson, 2009). By 2002 the question of whether the BBC could afford to offer such services became critical. As it was clear that only a very small percentage of the public posted content (most ‘lurked’ – read comments without posting), the number of actual participants was much greater than appeared. Overall, it was clear the public wanted to communicate with the BBC and with each other and that this was something that was increasing rather than decreasing. In 2012 the wish to engage with the BBC was noted by Bakker:

The efforts of the BBC in this area do not seem to suffer from a lack of interest on the part of the audiences. The number of emails, photos, videos, and other contacts continues to grow. This suggests that UGC is indeed an interactive phenomenon where two-way communication is a necessary feature. But merely facilitating UGC options – allowing comments, offering reader blogs, having a Twitter account or Facebook page – is not enough. It needs active participation from the organisation to succeed, and apparently also a different attitude amongst the journalists involved (Bakker, 2012:247).

This engagement appears to be at both producer and institutional level. During the period of the two studies outlined here (2002-2009) BBC producers who enjoyed engaging with the public were in the minority; most did not feel user-generated content was valuable or contributed much to the quality of producer-generated material. Over the past fifteen years the separation between programming that is typical of the ‘broadcast’ paradigm largely continues. Explorations into multiplatform media as a solution to the predicted (but not realised) demise of television, for the BBC and for other UK public service content providers such as Channel 4, have often been the province of the independent production sector (Bennett et al., 2012).

Turning back to the first study offered here, *Participatory Public Service Media: Presenters and Hosts in BBC New Media* (Jackson, 2009) offered an opportunity to deconstruct the nature of the interactive relationship between the BBC’s producers and the public. A series of experimental production workshops were organised by the BBC New Media Live Chat Producer Richard Berry, under the auspices of a new ‘Interactive Presenter’ scheme jointly run by the BBC New Media and BBC Talent departments and myself. Five young trainee presenters had been hired for six months to explore how to present and host BBCi, a brand created by the BBC’s New Media Division to identify the BBC’s interactive services. The experimental production workshops took place in the ‘BBCi Studio’, a glass-walled studio designed to enable emerging hybrid television and new media forms. The studio offered TV cameras for video streaming and banks of computers for the production of live chats and chat rooms in text form.

**Exploring Interactive Presentation at the BBC**

In December 2002 five ‘Interactive Presenters’ were hired for six months to ‘be the face of BBCi’ through a nationwide trawl for talent that yielded 16,000 auditions across the UK. Ashley Highfield, the Director of BBC New Media, wanted to show the public that BBCi was “democratic and that people off the street could assist the mediation of ‘interactive content’” (Jackson, Fieldwork Diary, April 10, 2003). Most of the five rookie presenters had no preconceptions of the industrial processes of broadcasting and, as they were all under 25 years of age, it was (correctly) presumed they understood social media and the Internet.

We designed weekly studio-based experiments to test the facilitation of message boards, live chats, the BBC’s Red Button service (which enabled interactive television), Video Nation (the brand that aggregated and encouraged short biographical films made by the public), and Celebdaq (a mythical online stock exchange that traded in shares in celebrities). As a participant observer I analysed the production processes and where possible the audience reactions. Detailed analysis also took place of producer and Interactive Presenter facilitation and/or other engagement with the public in live situations. The workshops were captured on video for analysis, along with any associated chat scripts, message board threads, and production paperwork. The Interactive Presenters (iPresenters) additionally pursued a policy of ‘active hosting’ over the same six months at placements within BBC departments.

The presence of a host (a producer or iPresenter) within the participatory media increased the level of public engagement, the level of quality (reification), and retention over time. iPresenter Lucy found the posts to the ‘Top of the Pops’ message board (a television programme covering pop music) had increased from 20,000 to 100,000 posts per month. According to the ‘Top of the Pops’ producers “the quality of tending on the TOTP message board has increased dramatically” (iPresenter Lucy, video transcript, February 18, 2003). iPresenter Toby also reported a significant increase in audience engagement after actively hosting live chats on the BBC London website. What had been 5.6% of the total traffic to the BBC London website rose to 29.3% on the days when he was actively reciprocating and facilitating. Overall the ‘hits’ to the social media section of [www.bbc.co.uk/London](http://www.bbc.co.uk/London) increased from 348 to 3,603 participants per week (iPresenter Toby, diary, May 12, 2003).

In the main, however, BBC producers disliked engaging with the public, at times stating that it was a job more suited to broadcast presenters. There was strong evidence in the ‘Celebdaq’ and ‘Liquid News’ message boards that the producers nominated to host the message boards were often absent; “the ‘Celebdaq’ hosts seem to only answer technical questions, [host’s name] doesn’t have time to do much else” (iPresenter Stuart, video transcript, February 18, 2003). Producers disliked running the social media seeing this as an additional task outside of their ‘real’ jobs making television or radio. They also felt ill-equipped to be spokespersons for the BBC; “You have to be aware all the time that you’re the ambassador and that you are the voice of the corporation (…) when an issue comes up I will step into the debate and answer a charge against the BBC” (‘Today’ host, interview, September 22, 2005). The producer went on to admit he felt uncomfortable in this position and that he often qualified this by saying to users “well look, I’m not an official spokesman”.

The need to find solutions to the public’s increasing wish to participate around public service programming is urgent, as the Internet “has transformed large parts of the traditionally passive audience into active communicators willing to engage in debate and expecting a similar willingness on the part of professional media” (Jakubowicz, 2008:5). In order to assist discussion on how engagement could be developed I offer a schema showing the range of key tasks involved in the facilitation and moderation of participatory media. Furthermore, in order to ensure such engagement remains scalable from a time/cost perspective these tasks have been split between producers, the public and technology (the user-interface with its underlying profanity filters and databases). Without dividing the management of interactive media in this way it is unlikely there can be growth or development (see table below).

**Proposed Division of Labour Between the PSM, the Public, and Technology**

**Task Producers Public User Interface**

Moderation Yes No Yes

Hosting (facilitation) Yes Yes Yes

Curation Yes Yes Yes

Membership duties Yes Yes No

Customer relations Yes Yes Yes

Archiving Yes Yes Yes

Quality Control Yes Yes No

Public safety Yes Yes Yes

Technical problems Yes No Yes

It’s clear there are several tasks that the public could undertake on behalf of the public media enterprise, however the terms of volunteering should be well thought through. In the 1990’s America Online (AOL) established a volunteer programme that encouraged the online community to help run their social media. When AOL became successful 2,000 of the volunteers decided they wanted to be paid for their labour. They took AOL to court on May 24, 1999 in a class action. After more than ten years of debate AOL was ordered to pay $15 million to the volunteers (Batten et al., 2010:27).

AOL’s volunteer programme closed in 2005. The lawyers acting for the volunteers believed “…even though the workers were offering their time willingly there was an employer-employee type relationship at play: workers had to complete a training program, had to work for a certain number of hours a week, had to report regularly to their superiors on what they had done, and, if they failed to meet the employer’s requirements, were kicked out of the program” (Kirchner, 2011). The nature of the relationship involved sufficient formality to constitute an employer-employee system:

Volunteers had to apply for a position and, if accepted, sign an agreement to commit three to four hours of work per week. In exchange for their services, AOL provided free internet service to the volunteers. Community Leaders also received special accounts that allowed them to restrict disruptive chat, hide inappropriate message board postings, and access private areas on the AOL service, such as the Community Leader Headquarters (CLHQ) (Batten et al., 2010:25).

Similar volunteer models have been repeated since then (Wikipedia, the Huffington Post), but with those organisations making sure the status of volunteers can’t be construed as anything other than volunteering. In February 2011 AOL “acquired The Huffington Post for $315 million” (Kirchner, 2011) along with an army of volunteer bloggers which indicates America Online believes the volunteer model is – ultimately – successful. From a theoretical perspective *Participatory Public Service Media: Presenters and Hosts in BBC New Media* found social media adds a fourth line of communication the addition to the three previously identified in broadcasting by Scannell “(1) host and participant-performers, (2) host and audience, (3) host and listeners or viewers (sometimes there is an organised interaction between performers and audience)” (Scannell, 1996:25). The fourth line of communication (Jackson, 2009) is between audience members, independent of any broadcast. It is this fourth line of communication that ultimately disrupts the ‘broadcast model’ and that takes public service media the sphere of networks. The next logical step from considering how the public might support the existing public media enterprise is to consider how they might contribute to the creative development of new services.

The second study, *Children in Virtual Worlds – ‘Adventure Rock’ Users and Producers Study* (Jackson, Gauntlett, and Steemers, 2009) explores how children could become involved as consultants. The project aimed to find out what children thought of ‘Adventure Rock’ a 3D solo play virtual world for children aged 6 to 12, launched by the BBC’s Children’s’ department (2007-2012). Launching a virtual world was new for the BBC and the corporation was keen to find out whether children would enjoy and gain benefit from such immersive media.

**User-Centered Design and Public Service Media**

One of the most important functions of public service media is the production of content and services for children and young people. This involves either having the ability to put yourself in the position of a child, having the opportunity to observe children as they consume media, or working directly with children in the design of new services. Producers’ perspectives can therefore range from being institutionally centered to child centered. The former is more common in legacy media and the latter in interactive media. In her project looking at the ecology of preschool television for children Steemers notes media producers often exhibit “different priorities, relating to commercial, creative or audience considerations” at any one time (Steemers, 2010:3). ‘Adventure Rock’ (AR) was launched in April and heavily marketed as being one of a suite of new services that would take BBC’s provision for children into a new ‘interactive’ era, arguably a largely institutionally oriented position.

*Children in Virtual Worlds – ‘Adventure Rock’ Users and Producers Study* (Jackson, Gauntlett, and Steemers, 2009) looked at the final production and testing stages of AR. AR remained live until 2012 when the world was taken down as part of a large reorganisation of the BBC Children’s’ website. The study drew together 90 children aged 7 to 11 from mixed socio-economic backgrounds from across the UK to ask them what they thought of AR in creative workshops.

To introduce the study and its findings it is important to look at the context of the gestation of AR, which was situated under the main BBC website at [www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc](http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc). Children were becoming attracted to an increasing number of commercial virtual worlds and immersive games such as ‘Habbo Hotel’ (an online world), ‘World of Warcraft’ (an immersive online game), and ‘Club Penguin’ (an online world or series of games for younger children). In order to remain current and to retain market positioning the BBC Children’s’ department commissioned ‘Adventure Rock’ from Larian Studios in Belgium. ‘Adventure Rock’ was a development of ‘KetNetKick’, an award-winning world Larian had previously made for the Belgian public service broadcaster VRT. The 3D outside landscape also offered gaming and creative studios in which a child’s avatar could dance and make music, cartoons, animations, and video, and pursue inventing ‘contraptions’.

‘Adventure Rock’ was a visually stunning online environment for solo exploration, accompanied by a tiny, friendly, ball-like robot called Cody who flew next to the child’s avatar as he/she progressed through the various areas of the world. Players could also collect coins that could be swapped in an Upgrade Centre in exchange for new avatar clothes or equipment for Cody. In addition, explorers could find page from a book and strange hieroglyphics that might – at some future time – explain the mysteries of the ‘Adventure Rock’ island in an unfolding story. The social and sharing requirements were, however, only offered by a moderated online gallery and message board launched (*outside* of the world) at the same time.

The production and audience study used creative methods (Gauntlett, 2007), in this case mapping and drawing, to offer children an easy and expressive means to articulate what they thought of AR and other virtual worlds for children from commercial providers. The parents of the children who took part in the study were also given a questionnaire to find out whether they felt the BBC should be launching a virtual world for children. Ninety 7 to 11 year olds from Cardiff, Belfast, Glasgow, Manchester and London were invited to take part in two workshops in December 2007 and January 2008.

The younger children (aged 7-9) were given a separate workshop from the 10-11 year olds in order to see if the younger children responded differently to AR. In the first workshop the children were asked to imagine and draw their own version of an ideal virtual world and to talk about whether they had ever imagined a world when they were younger. This was something the older group found embarrassing; however, up to 50% of the children from Glasgow, Belfast, and Cardiff had created (and role played with friends) imaginary worlds when they were younger. Furthermore in one or two instances children had shared these worlds through diaries and drawings.

One boy had created Stick Land (boy, 11, Glasgow), and he spoke at length about his notebook that documented how Stick Land had grown over several years as he added new areas and objects. Another boy (boy, 10, Belfast) had created Ryan’s Land, a highly complex imaginary land – again of some years’ longevity – which had rules, pets of the future, a metal horse, a robot, and a perpetual motion machine. Creating imagined worlds is, it seems, something we do naturally; however this may become tempered as children become older. The younger children (aged 7-9) drew worlds that were not bound by the laws of science, whereas the older children (aged 10-11) wanted to have a space that reflected adult life by including hotels, shops, a currency to enable buying and selling of objects, a social structure, and transport systems. For the BBC Children’s’ producers having an understanding of this maturation proved to be an important finding.

Over Christmas the children registered for the Beta (trial) version of ‘Adventure Rock’ and they wrote down what they did and where they went in their media diaries. They were also asked to visit a small range of commercial immersive worlds and games for children, returning in January, 2008 for a second workshop. Questionnaires from the parents were also collected at the end of workshop two. Almost all the children and their parents felt the BBC should be offering worlds for children that were comparable to those offered by the commercial media outlets. They also found such worlds valuable from social, cultural, and educational perspectives. However, almost all the children found ‘Adventure Rock’ hard to use. They had to download and install elements of the world on their computers and this often required the assistance of a parent or adult. ‘Adventure Rock’ didn’t operate at all on Apple Macintosh computers, conflicting with the public service requirement for universal access.

The children liked the fact that ‘Adventure Rock’ was an ‘outside’ world, in the open air, and they found the 3D graphics exciting. However, overall, the functionality of the world was poor; the navigation was confusing, and most of the children experienced problems logging in. The children (particularly the older children) wanted to socialise in the world, and as ‘Adventure Rock’ was designed for solo play, this wasn’t possible. The young testers also called into question the overall purpose of ‘Adventure Rock’ which they felt needed to have a mission, a ‘backstory’, and clear goals beyond merely exploring and collecting coins and points.

When ‘Adventure Rock’ launched in April, 2008 some adjustments were made in response to the findings, notably clustering the content for younger and older children separately on [www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc](http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc). The BBC Children’s’ producers also commissioned an instructional video to help children with registration. Stronger links were made to the ‘out-of-world’ website housing the message board and gallery. Overall, the children loved the idea of ‘Adventure Rock’ and they felt it was the kind of thing the BBC should be providing for them. If the children had been involved earlier, for example from the earliest concepting stage, it is likely ‘Adventure Rock’ might have been more of a success. The children were happy to act as creative consultants, and they were highly excited to be asked their opinion.

**Repositioning the Public Within the Public Media Enterprise**

The two production and audience studies have examined how the public might become involved in the public media enterprise. Both studies show a growing maturation of how to facilitate participatory media across the BBC. However, producers often dislike engaging with the public believing such interacting is either not part of their jobs or a task for the more junior production staff; an entry level responsibility. Contributions from the public were usually framed as augmenting professionally produced content and often a limited range of user-generated content was published. From managers’ perspectives user-generated content was often felt to be of low quality, even potentially risky, opening up the BBC to potential bias or defamation.

Both studies have shown the importance of the inclusion of the public as stakeholders and of offering an acceptable level of reciprocity (*reaction* to an action) and reification (the *making of meaning*) within an increasing cacophony of media sources. Over the years the BBC has adopted a range of different solutions to a growing body of participating publics. I offer a current selection here.

**Interactive services that retain the ‘broadcast model’ (sender-receiver):**

1. The ‘BBC Blogs’ written by BBC staff for the consumption of the public ([www.bbc.co.uk/blogs](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs)).
2. The provision of highly editorialised ‘mini-networks’ such as the Film Network, which showcases short films submitted by new filmmakers selected by BBC staff ([www.bbc.co.uk/filmnetwork](http://www.bbc.co.uk/filmnetwork)).

**Showcases of highly selected content from the public:**

1. The BBC News’ ‘Have Your Say’ area ([www.bbc.co.uk/news/have\_your\_say](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/have_your_say)) for the uploading of comments, photos, and video connected with news stories. The percentage of rejected material is high in comparison to that submitted by the public.
2. ‘Memoryshare’ which is used by many BBC programmes as a way of offering some sense of a collective memory. ‘Memoryshare’ also provides a bank of content on which producers may draw ([www.bbc.co.uk/dna/memoryshare/home](http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/memoryshare/home)).

**Online Communities facilitated with a sliding scale of moderation**

1. A message board ([www.bbc.co.uk/messageboards/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/messageboards/index.shtml)) that offer lightly moderated open comment from the public. There is a message board for ‘Points of View’ ([www.bbc.co.uk/dna/mbpointsofview/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/mbpointsofview/)), one of the BBC’s main online feedback channels, enabling the public to have a voice in the way the BBC is run.
2. A small number of pre-moderated message boards for children. Pre-moderation means messages are reviewed before being posted by a BBC moderator.

**Content that offers on demand consumption of professionally produced interactive content:**

1. Quizzes and games.
2. Interactive dramas.

**Externally produced, facilitated, or hosted BBC-branded interactive content:**

1. BBC-branded areas on Facebook and Twitter.
2. Recommended links from the BBC to Digital Spy, *The Guardian* online community, Channel 4, Sky Sports, *The Telegraph* comment, and Yahoo.

In summary, the BBC appears to offer an exciting range of interactive experiences and opportunities. In reality there is very little *direct* engagement between producers and audiences. The understanding of the public largely remains peripheral, patchy, piecemeal, and oriented towards the public as a resource. Alternately, the public are used as a ‘proof of concept’, that is as a measurement of return on investment calculated by audience reach and retention via UK-based agencies such as ABC ([www.abc.org.uk](http://www.abc.org.uk)) and the Broadcasters Audience Research Board ([www.barb.co.uk](http://www.barb.co.uk)). There are many producers at the BBC that are highly enthusiastic about participatory media and about blends of participatory and linear media; however, this is not universal. The emergence of ‘Connected Television’ and ‘Second’ (or even ‘third’) screen approaches arguably draws the broadcast and network paradigms increasingly together.

We are moving towards a media landscape in which there is a more collective approach to production. The public become prosumers and collaborators in the creative enterprise (Botsman and Rogers, 2011; Gillmor, 2006; Miller, 2010; Shirky, 2008; Sonvilla-Weiss, 2010; Surowiecki, 2006). Gloor noted the emergence of concept-driven ‘collaborative innovation networks’ or ‘COINS’, describing them as “a cyberteam of self-motivated people with a collective vision, enabled by technology to collaborate in achieving a common goal – innovation – by sharing ideas, information, and work”: (Gloor, 2006:4). The BBC created a COIN of developers around its ‘BBC Backstage’ blog and online community for computer coders, a five-year project that began in 2007. “Backstage engaged the developer community by (…) offering people a chance to meet, share ideas, work together, and build the sort of strong social bonds that allow online interactions to flourish” (BBC Backstage, 2011). The group ethos was to support the use of open data for the public good, to create over 500 prototypes and to play with technology in interesting ways. BBC Backstage was largely dependent on the energy of Ian Forrester from the BBC’s New Media department and therefore personality-driven; perhaps the new media equivalent of the broadcast talk show host?

Public service media should be encouraged to explore such new forms as ‘BBC Backstage’ and to develop new strategies that enable collaborative evolution in order to transform themselves into ‘communication in the public interest’ (Bardoel and Lowe, 2007:17). There is also a time imperative.

Commercial competition and alternative delivery platforms are undermining [public service media’s] core audience, cultural fragmentation and political disengagement are depriving them of new audiences, and income cuts threaten not just their ability to respond to these new demands but to sustain their existing standards (Lee-Wright, 2008: 249-250).

In 2011 the BBC’s website was cut by 25% against a 20% average reduction in budgets across the BBC. The cuts focused “on 10 areas including homepage, news and sport” (BBC News, 2011). To make such large cuts to the BBC’s online provision forces a retrenchment to the broadcast paradigm. The BBC’s predicament is not an isolated case; “Right across Europe the public sector in media is caught in ‘a perfect storm’” (Lowe and Steemers, 2011:9), seeking strategies to keep pace with commercial media and communications outlets. What is needed is to move towards a more audience/user-driven orientation that facilitates the aggregation of public service communication around audience-user preferences and behaviours – a public service search engine? Public service media have an obligation and opportunity for the making of meaning through the sifting, recommendation, identification, curation, and facilitation from a range of quality sources.

**From Public Service Broadcasting to Public Service Communication**

**From ‘Advanced’ Public Service**

**Broadcasting (Multiplatform) To Public Service Communication**

1. Institution-centred media. People-centred media.

2. Platform-oriented media. Public-oriented media.

3. Aggregation of content into channels. Aggregated and distributed approach with content from professional producers ‘tagged’ or identified.

4. Content from the public is separated Content from the public is

from professionally produced content. blended with professionally produced content in order to enhance storytelling.

5. The public is separate from production. The public are involved in production.

6. Media with ‘externalised’ communication Media blended with

(such as social media or public archives). communications (for

example), enabled by a ‘second screen’.

7. The public as a resource, or (en masse) The public as a creative

as a measurement of success. stakeholder in the public media enterprise.

8. The public are largely ‘silent’ The public have many

stakeholders with the exception of potential roles – crowdfunder,

some provision of audience councils co-concepter, Beta tester,

(BBC) or an ombudsman for the contributor, co-facilitator, co-

public (National Public Radio, US: producer, archivist, etc.

RTV, Slovenia).

Such changes in orientation (see Table) will only happen if the benefits and barriers to change are clearly identified and addressed by public service media leaders, managers, producers, and the public. Jakubowicz notes “PSM [Public Service Media} has so far largely failed to respond, in its organisation, management structures and relations with civil society, to the rise of networked non-hierarchical forms of multistakeholder governance and social relations” (Jakubowicz, 2010:16). New systems that enable public service media to offer facilitative functions and that enable consultation and collaboration will need to be developed.

The value of facilitation will also need to be measurable to prove the return on investment, as the public service media enterprise is strongly situated within existing industrial contexts. Brynjolfsson and Saunders suggest public or collaborative productivity could be measured by *consumer surplus*, ‘the aggregate net benefit that consumers receive from using a good or a service after subtracting the price they paid” (Brynjolfsson and Saunders, 2010:110). They cite Bapna, Jank, and Shmueli (2008) who used consumer surplus to measure the value of eBay for individual consumers, coming up with the median of $4 per auction, and a total value of $7 billion in 2003 (Brynjolfsson and Saunders, 2010:113). The need to be able to quantify the value of “consuming, producing, and sharing” in terms of *cognitive surplus* has been recognised by Shirky (Shirky, 2010:213). He is also aware that “The amount of public and civic value we get out of our cognitive surplus is an open question, and one strongly affected by the culture of the groups doing the sharing, and by the culture of the larger society that those groups are embedded in” (Shirky, 2010:176). However, despite there being a need for future research to identify ways to measure the value of participation many researchers and thinkers agree on the benefits: “we add something of value to a team or organization mainly by bringing something authentic and original to the table” (Miller, 2010:268). To find ways for the public to support the public enterprise, which now exists within a media and communications landscape that is increasingly characterised by network effects appears urgent.

I have argued that public service media are highly connected with reification, the making of meaning, within a fragmented mediascape crowded with media sources, “[m]ost of our worries about the world that is opening up to us come back to the fact that we have little option but to share with people we do not know and cannot necessarily trust” (Leadbeater, 2008:237). As the public spends more time online or accessing Internet-protocol-delivered programming it becomes important to provide robust and appropriate public service media as “although the world is increasingly brought together by digital communication tools the lessons of nonlinearity demonstrate it is the intelligent and creative blending of all these things together where true long-term success lies” (Moore, 2011:223).

The presence of public service media as a trusted broker is just as relevant today if not more so than when the BBC started on January 1, 1927, with a mission “to inform, to educate and to entertain; to report the proceedings of Parliament; to provide a political balance; and in a national emergency to broadcast government messages” (Crissell, 1997:22). The problem is that the public service media enterprise is not longer present universally, across all existing (and emerging) platforms, and in strength. Public service media have also failed to adjust large-scale to participatory practices and to the public as participating citizens.

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