

Facilitating Participatory Audiences:  
*Sociable Media and PSM*

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The chapter contributes to the overall discussions on the public in public service media by considering how two significant PSM organisations in UK and USA approached the idea of participating publics, showing how producers' participatory practices are at the formulative stage. It is important to consider the treatment of engagers by producers as the mediation of content is now at close range; from being 'outside' a public service media firm the public are now 'within' the creative production spaces sharing the making of media.

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). This author disagrees audiences were ever passive but agrees with Jakubowicz that engagers expect professionals to also participate. It is firstly argued here that viewers and listeners have participated in broadcasting programming for many years and that there is therefore also a corresponding body of theory about how broadcast presenters relate to active audiences. Practices employed by broadcast personae when relating to engagers are examined here across both the broadcast and online spheres. Secondly the importance of facilitation by trained individuals in shared space participatory media is argued, particularly in instances where it is valuable (or even necessary) to capture or guide the attention of participants.

Opportunities for the public to play an active part in public service media increased with the advent of internet-delivered content, particularly in message boards, live chats, and archives of photographs and videos created by engagers. User-generated content is often editorialised by producers and is also likely to have been filtered. The discussion therefore is how much facilitation should be offered and how much control should professionals have? Furthermore, where producers are inviting the public to contribute, are they doing it for the public good or to further their own creative efforts?

There is ample evidence illustrating successful mediation requires facilitation, and we have a body of scholarly studies within the ethos of PSM on which to draw. The argument is made here for the development of sophisticated, subtle, and appropriate facilitation practices, particularly for content which requires reification. Reification, the making of meaning, is often the province of public service media. The challenges and opportunities in facilitating engager's participation in multiple ways in the context of PSM will therefore be the focus.

To assist this discussion the development of theories around sociable media will be traced forward from 'old' media to 'new' media. Empirical study is grounded in a comparison of two production systems – the BBC in Britain (2002-2004) and National Public Radio in the USA (2009). In both cases the media outlets are learning to – and struggling with – efforts to engage with active, creative participants.

The term 'audience' is not useful for participating publics, therefore the term 'engager' or 'participant' is used. 'Participatory media' refers to the comprehensive genre of participative content (message boards, blogs, online archives, voting, virtual environments, digital storytelling, interactive dramas, and the publishing of other user-generated content such as text, audio, video, and photographs, etc). The term 'social media' refers to services that especially foreground communication between engagers.

The principal conclusions here are facilitation practices by producers within participatory public service environments, principally online, are nascent; crude and experimental. One of the principal techniques being foregrounded by media professionals is moderation, the removal of content, which is a defensive position. It is suggested producers would be better employed developing mediation practices which motivate and lead creative publics. Finally, professionals are often using public creativity to enhance their own programming rather than to offer participating publics the opportunity to create narratives.

### Sociable media theories

Social media theory is a useful lens through which to view the evolving relationship between professional personae and participating publics. Key strands of thought are brought together here in advance of an analysis of the BBC in the UK and National Public Radio in the USA as they adopt participatory practices, mainly through the addition of social media.

Scholarly attention towards mediators working in broadcasting arguably began in 1956 with Horton and Wohl's influential paper, *Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance*. They identified a 'new type of performer' whose "appearance is a regular and dependable event, to be counted on, planned for, and integrated into the routines of daily life" (Horton and Wohl, 1956: 216). The relationship between the human mediator and the audience was, however, ever para-social because reciprocity was impossible.

Livingstone (1990) also identified an emotional connection between broadcast personae and audiences, in this case soap stars and viewers. In 1991 Scannell advanced the idea of a shared, imagined, sociable space between producers and audiences in the live broadcast sphere. Broadcast-centric thinking, however, became increasingly challenged in the context of online sociability. Mass adoption of the internet, in the late 1990s in the industrialised world, fostered fresh ideas about communicative spaces online. Tolson (1996: x) observed "Mediation offers the possibility of living in at least two communities – that is, both an immediate social network and an infinitely expanding mediated community of people with whom we share forms of communication, but are never likely to meet". Developments in computer-mediated communications began to break down historic geographical constraints on "knowing distant others".

The mission of 'the WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link), one of the first organised online communities, was to facilitate high quality communication in the San Francisco area through online conversation and email. Two of the founders, Matthew McClure and Kevin Kelly, realised this would require facilitators to encourage a 'critical mass' of debate. As Rheingold (1994: 42) reported, "In Matthew's words, we needed a collection of skills who could draw the suckers into the tents". They called these facilitators "hosts", mimicking the facilitator role found in live radio and television talk shows. Within the broadcast sphere Scannell was observing how sociable broadcasts always had "at least three sets of communicative interaction always in play... (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). He believed successful hosting required the right amount of control.

On the one hand there is the danger of too little control leading to disaster and chaos, on the other there is the danger of too much

control leading to an awkward self-consciousness and an air of embarrassment all round. Somewhere in between lies the golden mean of a managed performance that controls with a light touch what's happening in the studio to bring off a collaborative interaction between all present as a sociable occasion produced by them for absent listeners (ibid: 29).

Public service media outlets have learnt over the last seventy to eighty years how to facilitate (or manage) active publics in television and radio studios. New kinds of public service shared-space environments are now being launched online; message boards, virtual worlds, chat rooms, gaming narratives and interactive dramas for example. Many of these environments may require the same kind of facilitation online as Scannell identified in the broadcast sphere. Public service media outlets also have a decision to make, whether to lead, to engage as ratified participants, or to merely observe. Each of those different positions has a strategic and practical implication.

Jauert and Lowe (2005: 29-30) argue public service media organisations “should be a beneficial socialising agent...a robust discursive medium...an essential civil society organisation...[and] about democratic mediation for intercultural communication”. Still more recently Jakubowicz (2008: 24) argued for re-framing public service media as agents of communication: “Now is the time to take the next step and reconstruct PSM into a platform for open societal communication”. The argument then is whether the public service media outlet provides merely the platform or a facilitated platform.

Slevin (2002) was interested in how “deliberative mediated publicness” could be organised online, particularly to assist democracy. He identified a number of techniques to facilitate this, including keeping controversial questions open, being able to question “the rationalization underpinning the actions and projects of others” (ibid: 188), and the “preservation of overall goals, principles and rights” (ibid: 190). Slevin also pointedly suggests public service media outlets in particular could facilitate shared space environments of this kind for the common good.

The role of facilitator or mediator has been identified and found to be of importance in fostering an emotional connection between audiences and public service media outlets; Livingstone (1990) and Scannell (1996) additionally examined how presenters control and lead audiences, with Scannell suggesting the need for nuanced facilitation during live broadcasts. The addition of websites offered a way to make broadcasts ‘interactive’, an aspiration which has remained largely unrealised to date. Social media embedded in those websites, however, began to offer the public the means to communicate to each other and to media firms. It will be argued through the two case studies that public service media firms are not communicating with their publics apart from a few instances. Sociable media theory shows that for a true relationship to develop it must have reciprocity, a level of reification, and participation.

### Facilitating purposeful participatory media

The body of knowledge on the facilitation of participatory media is now drawn together and it will become clear that this is in its infancy. Utopians would dispute that there needs to be any intervention or facilitation at all believing all facilitation is intervention and inherently harmful – if not also unethical. Three scholars who have particularly explored nuanced facilitation, mainly in an online context, are discussed here. Etienne Wenger focuses on communities of practice, Amy Jo Kim researches and consults on sociable gaming, and Gilly Salmon explores virtual learning environments.

Wenger presents a theory of learning for online communities of practice based on the idea that social engagement is an ongoing process through which we learn and form our identities. For Wenger two elements are keenly important: participation and reification. These are interlinked and co-supporting, in his view. Wenger (1999: 58) defines reification as the action of “making into a thing”, observing that “what is turned into a concrete, material object is not properly a concrete, material object. For instance, we make representations of ‘justice’ as a blindfolded maid holding a scale, or use expressions such as ‘the hand of fate’.”

Getting the balance right between control (direction) and freedom (expression) is a key element for Wenger, which again underscores the importance of facilitation. He argues that acts of reification draw on processes which include “making, designing, representing, naming, encoding and describing, as well as perceiving, interpreting, using, reusing, decoding, and recasting” (ibid: 59). If the shared space within which activity takes place is too full of participants or cacophonous chatter, then meaning making and purposeful activity is less likely. Conversely, if the shared space is too directive “there may not be enough overlap in participation to recover a co-ordinated, relevant, or generative meaning” (ibid: 65). Once again, the question comes as to how to effect facilitation properly - and the issue is clearly about striking the right balance.

Like Wenger, Jo Kim (2000) believes purposeful online spaces need ongoing facilitation by human agency. The model she describes is quite linear showing how a first time visitor progresses from novice to regular, and then for some to leaders and, later (for even fewer) to become community ‘elders’. For this ideal participatory development to progress depends on a socialisation process wherein the visitor is welcomed then supported by others in the space, over time becoming a member. The community elder in particular has a ‘profound’ effect on the developing culture of the environment because his or her tone of voice and approach will affect the character and culture of the shared space overall. In Jo Kim’s view professional personae involved in hosting should be experienced because they need to understand how the social space operates. If the tone is too directive members are more likely to interpret comments as offensive authoritative pronouncements.

They must be properly selected, trained, and then empowered to do their job effectively. This is not a trivial process: to start with you need to choose people who are genuinely enthusiastic about the community and eager to improve it, rather than those just seeking social status and power. (Jo Kim 2000: 146).

Salmon feels the qualities necessary for a facilitator of virtual learning environments includes knowing when to control groups and when to let go (Salmon, 2003). Like Jo Kim she believes a progressive ‘settling in’ process takes place, engagers need to understand the technology first before they are able to socialise with others and subsequently begin learning. Facilitators should be able to “act as a catalyst, foster discussion, summarise, restate, challenge, monitor understanding and misunderstanding, take feedback” (ibid: 54-55).

The implication is a facilitated environment is different from one mediated solely by technology. If human mediators are present there is an opportunity to develop a quasi-personal relationship with the media firm, in the second, it is a less personal interaction and there is no opportunity to take into account cultural sensitivity, language, or mood. To find out how public service media firms are facilitating participatory environments the two case studies, the BBC in the UK and National Public Radio in the USA, will now be considered. In both cases they were in the very early stages of adopting participatory practices, exploring how to engage with participating publics.

## Developing participatory culture at the BBC

A brief history of the adoption of participatory media at the BBC is followed by a brief overview of a study which aimed to find out whether mediation by professional personae in the BBC's participatory media was of importance to engagers and the media firm. It took place within the BBC's New Media Division from December 2002-June 2003. The author completed the research project in April 2009.

The development of participatory practise at the BBC has been slow, although the Corporation launched online communities quite early in comparison with public service media companies elsewhere. By 2002 the BBC was offering over 300 message boards, daily live chats and almost daily chat rooms, facilitated by over 600 online hosts who engaged with the public as an additional duty to their production work. By August 2003 the message boards alone were getting 30,000 posts a day, prompting discussions on whether to cap the online communities at a particular size, for example at 50,000 posts a day (Jackson Fieldwork Diary, March 2003). The combination of rising public participation and staff needs led the BBC towards a technologically determinist approach; to seek to automate engagement and to foregrounding moderation (the removal of content) over mediation (facilitation to encourage meaningful content). This was likely to result in a disconnection between the public and the BBC.

Turning to the research study; methods relied on participant observation of developmental production workshops with twenty-two BBC producers and five 'interactive presenters' hired by the BBC's New Media Division to explore new mediation practices for interactive content. The workshop participants tested facilitation practices for message boards, live chats, user-generated content, pan-platform content (brands situated across both television and online) and media players, precursors of the BBC iPlayer. The workshops were recorded on video and these data were augmented by: 1) a fieldwork diary, 2) BBC audience data, 3) a small-scale audience study, and 4) observations of the audience in message boards and live chats.

A broadcast culture was clearly found to be dominant with the participating public being encouraged to cluster around broadcast brands with the participatory media being typically kept in separated silos with few links or in-programme mentions. Facilitators were reluctant to engage directly with the public as people, preferring to editorialise content created by the public as contributors. Active audience members were not usually celebrated or fore grounded in professionally-generated content.

The BBC's online hosts were, however, highly significant for the participating public. 'Lucy', one of the Interactive Presenters working with the Top of the Pops programme (a weekly live television music programme) was encouraged by the producers to run events and to develop 'playful' activities for fans online. Her approach was creative and something of a hit, as she explained:

The experiment I set up was to eat cheese and stare at a poster [of their favourite band] before you go to sleep, chanting their names over and over...It was popular, some dreamt of their fave bods, but a lot complained of having nightmares! The thread still keeps coming back too, under the heading 'Cheese Dreams' ('Lucy', iPresenter, Video Transcript, 18 February, 2003).

The Top of the Pops message board fans developed a sociable and reciprocal relationship with Lucy over the seven months. The connectivity articulated in social

media theory as being of high significance within a broadcast paradigm was therefore found to be equally true in participatory media. This was particularly true of environments where reification was of importance.

Although the participating public valued facilitation, the BBC's hosts were found to be often ambivalent and absent. Suzy (Administration Assistant, aged 30) said the Liquid News message board on BBC3 "hasn't had a host for so long that it only gets around seven or eight posts a week. It really suffers from not having a regular host". The audience would call out to hosts, encouraging them to appear. For example, 'Elizabeth' (Personal Assistant, aged 35) said, "come on [host] sort it out!...All I want is a straight forward explanation of what has happened at least then everyone would know".

Apart from decline in the quality of the online environment, the fact that many hosts were absent had a larger implication for the BBC: The producer-hosts managed the reputation of the firm as a provider of high quality participatory environments. Participants could be unruly at times, posting racist comments, spamming, being argumentative or generally disruptive. The problem in that is legal accountability. The BBC has a 'duty of care' to perform, which has become a particularly relevant issue in shared spaces. The term has legal status and requires that a person should act towards others and the public with what 'watchfulness, attention, caution and prudence that a reasonable person in the circumstances would' (Legaldictionary 2009). If an agent or person is found to be negligent, he or she can be prosecuted. Duty of care falls under the body of law known as 'tort' which both addresses civil wrongs and suggests remedies. A complainant may be able to use tort law to receive compensation from an individual or organisation found liable for injuries. BBC hosts were unclear how far their duty of care extended towards the public in participatory media.

The producer-host of the Today programme on BBC Radio 4 felt giving advice was a difficult role. "We are not doctors and we are not psychotherapists and we are not financial advisors...I think one should really stop and think, 'well, am I really qualified to help in this situation or is it better in fact to refer that person to an organisation'?" (Today Host Interview, 22 September 2004). In addition to responsibilities under duty of care, the BBC had a duty to beware making any negligent misstatement that would also be grounds for legal complaint. They must be careful not to present themselves as competent to advise in matters where they are not in fact legally considered competent (Hedley Byrne & Co. Ltd. v. Heller & Partners Ltd, 1963). Legislation that has long applied to 'real world' activity is beginning to be applicable online, particularly in shared space environments.

Two types of activity were generally provided by producer-hosts: first, there were tasks that were 'editorially-led', such as updating quizzes or challenges, running events, inviting expert or celebrity guests to chat, liaising with moderators, or updating professionally-produced content. Secondly, a level of customer relationship management was (spasmodically) provided, such as offering technical help or acting as a membership secretary for groups. The study recommends the BBC shares out tasks identified in the study between (a) producer-hosts, (b) the participating public, and (c) explore how much of the routine mediation could be undertaken by automation. Higher end tasks such as facilitating debates, commissioning new content or overseeing membership could remain the preserve of hosts. The public could assist by assisting new participants, welcoming and answering some technical queries, and repetitive tasks could be automated. The moderation of content (removal of unsuitable content) has already been partly automated.

Arranging for participants to undertake various tasks will have three beneficial outcomes. First, engagers would have a valued, visible role to play that is explicitly acknowledged and shared. Secondly, this would make participatory media more

scaleable for the BBC, and thus more cost effective. Lastly, hosts would have more time to engage and in a more meaningful and valued way with participants. Whether, how or when the BBC will act on these recommendations is uncertain. Research also revealed a problem of long, deep duration: Overall the BBC was preoccupied with large-scale internal re-organisations. The sociable relationship between staff personae and the participating public was a lower priority very much in the background. The danger with this internal preoccupation is the BBC will not find ways to engage and so relations will remain locked in the broadcast paradigm. This is problematic because the audience is increasingly involved with media making. Negotiating a new partnership with the BBC's stakeholders, the public, must be a priority if the BBC hopes to remain highly relevant in the new context of contemporary mediation.

### Creativity and Ambivalence at National Public Radio

The second case study checks the findings of the first, as the research was undertaken within both organisations, established media firms, as they adopted participatory media largescale. It also offers insights into the development of facilitation practices in a contemporary setting and at a different cultural site. The study of National Public Radio [NPR] was undertaken in May 2009 in Washington, USA. A small number of NPR producers and presenters were experimenting with social media in message boards, blogs, on Twitter, and by inviting the submission of photographs.

NPR is a private not-for-profit network providing radio and new media content to 898 affiliated member stations across the USA. The network reaches 99.6% of Americans, an audience of 27.5 million weekly radio listeners (NPR 2009: 7-9). NPR 'central' offers most of the linked web and radio content at [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org) including podcasts, blogs, Twitter feeds, message boards, newsletters, and newsfeeds. The network began to offer social media in 2007. The strategy is complex and has three dimensions. Firstly, NPR wants to make their website attractive by providing tools for the audience to engage with each other. Secondly, NPR wants to have an official presence on social media services such as Flickr, YouTube and Facebook. Thirdly, NPR is keen to find ways to weave social media into programming to enrich their content.

A week of observations and interviews took place in May 2009 in Washington. This included watching a live daily talk show Talk to the Nation and undertaking semi-structured, forty-minute, interviews with nine staff from different departments including the social media team, producers, presenters and journalists, and the Executive Editor of the network. It should be noted that interviewees were selected by Andy Carvin, the Senior Strategist in Social Media. All the interviewees, therefore, were actively experimenting with social media.

Carvin felt using social media without a clear editorial reason amounted marketing or framing the audience as a resource. Contradicting himself later however, he suggested social media was like having thousands of interns or production assistants on call. Media outlets in the USA, said Carvin, often have "a journalist...do nothing but be assigned to Twitter – to look for breaking news" (personal interview, 11 May 2009). He felt the most interesting use of sociable media tools was the way reporters and presenters used them to inform news stories.

Eyder Peralter, NPR's Community Manager, felt the visibility of NPR staff was important: "They have a blue gradient behind and it says 'NPR Staff'. 1. I think it let's people know that we're listening and 2. it let's people know that we're around" (personal interview, 12 May 2009). Observation of the daily live talk show Talk To The Nation however showed the host role was often perceived as the province of junior staff. The

senior producer screening incoming emails from the public explained that this was usually an intern's job.

Conaway, Editor of the podcast and news desk Planet Money felt the adoption of social media is significant as relationships between NPR listeners are now possible:

I can watch them going to visit each other and watch them setting up blogs together. They are really people who met because my radio project had a Twitter feed and they hooked into it somewhere...this creates this tremendous extra dimension (personal interview, 14 May 2009).

Scott Simon, presenter of Saturday Weekend Edition, felt social media would result in a radical change to the relationship between media firms and publics: "The days of us occupying the podium and the communication going just one way, those days are numbered. I just don't think people are going to be satisfied with that anymore" (personal interview, 13 May 2009).

Like Simon, several presenters and producers were actively exploring a new relationship with audiences. David Greene, a journalist who had covered the White House for many years, went on a road trip to find out how Americans were responding to Obama's first 100 days in office during a recession. 'One Hundred Days on the Road in Troubled Times' sought to actively involve listeners. Greene explained, "We used Google Maps and sort of let our audience track where we were going...We had bubbles on the map and photos and stories. You could link to Facebook and Twitter" (personal interview, 14 May 2009). An email address also collected suggestions on stories to cover enroute:

A mailman in Florida...said 'I am seeing this recession every day through my mail route...Come down with me and walk the streets of Braden...we ended up at a shelter for the homeless. I met a guy who was homeless for the first time. He's lost his job. I met the woman who runs the shelter. Their voices were great and it was sort of letting the story come to me because of one email (personal interview, 14 May 2009).

Greene still believed it was necessary that producers were "making the decisions and judgements about whether this would be a valuable story for our listeners" (personal interview, 14 May 2009). In the same way the BBC was concerned about risk and control Wright Bryan, one of the NPR social media staff, felt: "When you give the power to the audience to talk back, to talk amongst themselves, it's very hard if not impossible to control what they say" (personal interview, 12 May 2009).

The contrasts reported here indicate ambivalence about sociable media in the context of broadcasting tradition. Some professionals see sociable media as a valuable tool for breaking down the historic barriers inherent in monological platforms, while others think their potential over-rated at best and threatening at worst. Clearly there is also a negotiation underway over professional control of content production versus freedom of expression for participant generation at the start of NPR's progression with incorporating social media in their programming. On the one hand this could be understood as extending previous feedback practices (letters, emails and telephone calls) via new and more sophisticated tools. On the other hand what is happening is much different as evident in the provision of permanent archives of content generated by



the public, which called for new practices in the curation of content and, especially important to argumentation in this chapter, demanding development in ongoing facilitation of a more intimate, perhaps more crowded, relationship with the public.

A comment from Gallivan is quite relevant here. He expressed a wish that NPR's role become "less of a producer and distributor...more of a facilitator and an aggregator and a curator of quality stuff, whatever that happens to be" (personal interview, 12 May 2009). In addition to making programmes, a body of work that has by no means decreased in the new media world, producers must now manage a much larger ingest of material from many and diverse platforms (audio, video, texts, tweets, photographs and so on). This larger ingest certainly offers a much larger palette of material from which to draw. One of the most exciting opportunities was the ability to create 'live loops' between those on-air, those present in the studio, those participating at home, and among the listening and participating public, who could also chat with each other about what was going on as they enjoyed the programming.

In common with the BBC, it was clear there is some framing of the audience as a resource. However some producers were excited by the creative possibilities offered by involving the public in public service media. They were also aware of the importance of being seen to be listening and responding, which shows there has been some progression in awareness amongst producers since the BBC study – at NPR at least. The ownership of content associated with NPR remained with the media firm and sociable content was seen, like the BBC, as supporting broadcast programming. Overall a strong demarcation between professionally and publicly-generated content was still found to exist at both organisations.

#### Sociable media theory and practice

The facilitation of participatory media by human agency has been argued here. The 'lens' of social media theory has been helpful to illustrate the continuity of the sociable relationship between the public and public service media firms in both 'old' and 'new' media. Two case studies, the BBC in the UK and National Public Radio in the USA have provided empirical evidence showing the adoption of participatory practice is not a comfortable process for producers. In the 'pure broadcast' era public service firms were able to control the visibility of participants, this is changing rapidly.

It is increasingly imperative for public service media to join in with – indeed to become essential facilitators of – an ongoing conversation that has its own momentum and will go on whether PSM chooses to participate or not. To an important degree the issue today is first in whether to participate in participation – a question already mostly settled in the affirmative – and then to what extent and how. It is these latter dimensions that pose the greatest opportunities and biggest challenges to traditional broadcasting companies, including especially PSM.

Furthermore, the argument has been made for nuanced mediation by human agency in order that culturally specific and appropriate responses are made to the public, something technology is presently incapable of supplying. If there is no reciprocity there is disconnection between the public and the public service firm. Conversely, too much filtering, moderation or facilitation indicates a protectionist stance, expressed as 'filter then publish' by Shirky (Shirky, 2008). This is counter to the sociable practices of the internet and of technologically advanced networked societies.

Both the BBC and National Public Radio showed similarities, (a) a reluctance to engage with the public, (b) 'broadcast-led' thinking, (c) a tendency to use the audience to 'dress' professional content, and sometimes (d) to indicate the popularity of a show or presenter through the demonstration of 'followers'. Having said this, there were a small

number of producers who were exploring how to involve engagers in creative ways. The practical challenge for public service media firms is two-fold, how to confront the considerable ambivalence of producers towards engaging with the public, and how to ensure shared spaces are run in a high quality, ethical, manner for mutual benefit. More radically, a shared caretaking approach is suggested, with producers working with the public to manage (for example) archives of user-generated content. This would entail a radical shift in the governance of public service media at grass roots level.

Sociable media theory becomes even more relevant for the study of public service media in a 'new' media context than in broadcasting. It becomes possible to examine media texts originated by public service firms in aggregated and dispersed forms. It allows us to examine how the public 'play' with media brands. Finally, social media theory places the participating public in a more central position, as the 'glue' between media forms. We are then better able to find out how the public are engaging with an increasingly self-organised mediasphere which is beginning to be characterised by linking, networks, and creative, participating, publics.

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