

**Challenges to Understanding Public Service:  
Globalization, the Internet and the Relevance of a Public Sphere Position  
On Broadcasting and Democracy**

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**Abstract**

‘The public sphere position’ represents the dominant argument for an understanding of public service broadcasting’s functions for democracy. Along with its normative theoretical basis in a Habermasian public sphere theory, the position has been criticised on different terms over the last decades. Increasingly, the criticism is grounded in a description of our societies as multicultural, globalized and highly individualized. The challenge for the public sphere position and an understanding of public service broadcasting is twofold. Firstly, it is gradually more difficult to operate with a national framework. Secondly, legitimating the institutions’ existence with reference to broadcasting gets increasingly problematic. The paper discusses these challenges. It further suggests a conceptualization of public service online, and argues that a re-focus is necessary for the public sphere position to remain relevant for an understanding of public service broadcasting as it faces new conditions.