

Funding Public Broadcasters Facing New Media Platforms: A Comparison of Different Strategies

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Facing a digital media system, Western European public broadcasters have increasingly expanded beyond traditional broadcast radio and television, and embraced media platforms seemingly far removed from their established fields of activity. As the legitimacy of the licence fee is closely connected to some specific characteristics of broadcasting, this development clearly illustrates the fertile soil for seeking alternative means of funding. Which strategies are employed by different public broadcasters? How can we understand differences and similarities between them?

This paper concentrates on elements of, and attitudes towards, advertising and arrangements that promote enclosure across media platforms. Taking a comparative approach, it analyzes how strategies of public broadcasters in three states relate to their contexts. The cases are Germany's ARD and ZDF, the BBC in the UK and the Norwegian NRK. The analysis shows that while the NRK and the BBC have argued intensely for embracing new commercial opportunities, the German organizations have stuck to a less exploratory strategy – explicitly contrasting themselves with commercial providers. This also has implications for their approaches to advertising and arrangements that promote enclosure.

The paper seeks to understand the findings in relation to each society's political system and regulatory climate, historical developments and domestic broadcasting markets. I am interested in mapping similarities and differences across contexts. Gaining a better grasp of the individual cases may inform the wider debate: ultimately, both the future funding, and the form, of public service broadcasting are at stake. Rather than simply labelling one strategy as superior in terms of securing a strong public service, the paper recognizes that despite common challenges, the concrete outcomes need to be assessed in its different contexts. This, in turn, may yield a better understanding of the development of public service broadcasting as it faces new platforms.