

Public Service or Just a Service?

Comparing Public Broadcasters' Approaches to the Internet

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Abstract

Facing a digital media system, European public service broadcasters have encountered increasing scrutiny from both competitors and regulators. At the same time, as these institutions have ventured onto media platforms very unlike traditional broadcasted radio and television, discussions about the scope of their activities have flourished. The case of the Internet clearly illustrates the challenge ahead: do we need public service online? And to what degree should public broadcasters contribute? The article presents a comparative study of three Western European public service broadcasters' online activities, their arguments in support of them, and the actual national and supranational regulatory frameworks they relate to. A main interest lies in the prospects for transposing their remits to the Internet. Based on findings that the Internet is not regarded as an autonomous platform for public service, the article argues for a more fundamental re-thinking of public service online.