

PUBLIC SERVICE INTERNET

Could the BBC create an alternative to YouTube?

Public service media such as the BBC provide information, news and educational content to the public. Their goal is not to make money or sell commodities, but to advance the social, democratic and cultural needs of society.

The BBC is a non-profit organisation that is independent from companies, advertisers, and political interests. It is funded by the licence fee and regulated by government via the BBC Charter and the BBC Framework Agreement. The licence fee is a fee paid by each household that licences it to watch, listen to and download BBC services.

The BBC is present on the Internet with services such as its news website, the iPlayer and BBC Sounds. But public service media face limits in providing non-commercial alternatives to services such as Google, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter that are provided by the digital giants. When we think about the future of the internet, then public service internet and public service internet *platforms* are potential alternatives to the domination of the internet by digital capitalism.

What potential is there to organise the internet as a public service Internet? Are there alternatives to Microsoft, Google, Amazon and Facebook? What might these look like? Could public service media such as the BBC play a role in organising and providing such alternatives? What would a public service YouTube organised by the BBC look like and differ from the YouTube that is owned by Google and sells ads?



KEY IDEAS

There are a number of important concepts that help us better understand what a public service internet could look like; two of them are the public sphere and public service.

Jürgen Habermas is a German critical theorist of society and communication. In his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas developed a theory of the public sphere. A public sphere is a social space where humans come together to inform themselves and communicate about politics and democracy. Everyone has access to the public sphere. Habermas showed that money, the economic power of large corporations, political power and state control of information threaten the public sphere, freedom of speech, opinion, assembly and association and are therefore dangers to democracy.

Public service media such as the BBC form an important aspect of the public sphere. Public service platforms generate the space for the public sphere. They have a number of features including: Being

advertising-free, privacy-friendly, and advancing public value. Public service internet platforms are not privately owned but are publicly financed, owned and controlled. Whereas dominant social media platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) are highly individualistic and focused on the competitive accumulation of likes and friends, public service internet platforms can focus on fostering social debate and social production (groups of users, such as school classes, co-creating and uploading content).

KEY READINGS

Splichal, S. (2007). Does History Matter? Grasping the Idea of Public Service at its Roots. In: Lowe, G.F. and Bardoe, J. (eds.) *From Public Service Broadcasting to Public Service Media: RIPE@2007*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, 237-256. Available from: bit.ly/2DdcZfs

Fuchs, C. (2014). Social Media and the Public Sphere. *Triple-C*, 12 (1), 57-101. Available from: bit.ly/2BQYZHt

Fuchs, C. (2017). Towards the Public Service Internet as Alternative to the Commercial Internet. *ORF Texte*, 20, 43-50. Available from: bit.ly/2Dt1CzS

Fuchs, C. (2019). We need a full public service internet – state-owned infrastructure is just the start. *The Conversation*. Available from: bit.ly/2DqssbU

ACTIVITIES

Can you discover the answers to the following?

A) Public Service Internet

- i. Why is the Internet dominated by for-profit platforms such as Google/YouTube, Facebook/Instagram, and Twitter?
- ii. What is the public service Internet?
- iii. How do public service Internet platforms differ from YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter?
- iv. How could more public service Internet platforms be established?
- v. Why do you think that public service media has not-yet established viable alternatives to the dominant commercial online platforms?

B) The BBC

- i. What are the BBC's Public Purposes?
- ii. How do the BBC's Public Purposes differ from Google's purposes? Google owns YouTube, the world's most widely used online video service. If the BBC were to organise its own version of YouTube (BBCTube), how should it look like and differ from YouTube?
- iii. How could the BBC's Public Purposes be realised in respect to the BBCTube?

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bbc-charter-and-framework-agreement>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/rd/projects/public-service-internet>(accessed 2/1/2020)

Christian Fuchs: Talk "Towards a Public Service Internet", <https://vimeo.com/341734593>(accessed 2/1/2020)