Empowering Citizenship through Media Literacy: the Role of Public Service Media

The issue

In a digital world, learning never ends. Understanding how to use the latest media technology and evaluate its content is fundamental to critical understanding and active participation, which are the basis of every democratic society. Lacking the required skills not only excludes sections of society from making informed choices, it increases the risk of being exposed to harmful, unsolicited, or unreliable messaging.

Public service media (PSM) advance everyday media literacy: the ability to access the media, to understand and critically evaluate its content and communicate over a range of platforms. Nowadays, PSM use multi-platforms to create an intelligent media experience, to reach out to audiences in interactive and innovative ways.

The challenge is to deliver quality PSM content to every section of society: to integrate communities, social groups and generations. Today’s digital world is not only for the privileged or media professionals; it enlightens and entertains the elderly and the young, migrants and those who may be socially disadvantaged or live with special needs.

Some may require training to discern, distil and evaluate the myriad of images and sounds about them. Others may need guidance to identify which sources to trust; how best to protect their privacy or stimulate their creative potential. The aim is to build a network from which a media-literate audience grows.

The promotion of media literacy and digital skills are central to the European Union’s Digital Agenda – Europe’s strategic plan to maximize the social and economic benefits of information and communication technologies by 2015.

Expectations are high, with media literacy identified as a key factor to speed democratic engagement in an increasingly technological world. Against this background, PSM empower citizenship through a range of dynamic programmes and projects in partnership with key stakeholders, in an increasingly sophisticated digital age.

EBU Principles

- **Bridging the digital divide**
  PSM play a central role in promoting media literacy through awareness programmes by ensuring universal access to quality content and modern distribution platforms. PSM help audiences to watch their programmes objectively and to connect and engage with different media platforms in order to effectively benefit from their services.

- **Inform and empower citizens to democracy**
  In an environment where citizens are beset by information, PSM help citizens understand how media work, how they influence our lives and how best they may be used. Through various programmes, online services and initiatives, they enhance critical understanding, participation and active citizenship in the public sphere.

- **Creating a trusted space**
  PSM empower citizens to use evolving media technologies: to stimulate creativity, audience participation and innovation. PSM are particularly committed to creating a safe, creative online digital environment for children and young adults. Campaigns, online tools and cross-media programmes enable children and others to take an active part in the media world.

EBU Viewpoint

European Broadcasting Union (EBU)
Driving universal uptake of digital platforms

Nowadays, audiovisual content is accessed not only via television and radio, but also via computers, mobile devices and games consoles. Audiences obtain content whenever and wherever they want it.

The accelerated pace of technology development, as well as the convergence of media platforms makes the case for media literacy all the more urgent. Against this backdrop, PSM play a valued role in helping audiences understand how new technologies work.

Starting with the digital switch-over, PSM encourage consumer interest in digital services throughout all sections of the population, and show that the target of analogue switch-off across Europe in 2012 is achievable.

The Digital Agenda for Europe includes a range of measures to promote increased access to high-speed broadband. However, better access does not in itself ensure that citizens make use of broadband network applications. PSM facilitate universal public access to online tools by connecting and engaging audiences with the online world.

Encouraging online engagement

First Click, BBC, UK
First Click helps people who would not ordinarily use a computer to access a step-by-step beginner’s guide to computers and the internet. The guide demystifies the internet and builds online confidence.
www.bbc.co.uk/connect/campaigns/first_click.shtml

NRK, Norway
The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation provides audiences with a number of applications to facilitate access to its content using mobile phones. The applications are compatible with iPhones and models that use Google’s Android system.
www.nrk.no/about/

Give an Hour, BBC, UK
This campaign encourages digital-savvy citizens to give an hour of their time to help someone else become media literate. With the support of a users’ guide, people are encouraged to help a friend pursue their passion, whether it be to investigate a family tree or be reassured about online safety.
www.bbc.co.uk/connect/campaigns/give_an_hour.shtml

Quality content for all

PSM invest in media literacy projects not only to ensure that every section of society keeps pace with technological developments, but so that people are able to access and share their quality content.

Audiences look to PSM for varied, trusted and quality programming that ensures access not only for the young generation but also for the elderly, the socially disadvantaged or those living with disabilities.

Around 15% of Europeans have difficulty accessing digital television¹ for reasons ranging from speech or visual impairments to the practical complexities of setting up digital systems. Ensuring universal access to content, whether through subtitling, deaf signing or audio description is an established means through which many PSM provide support.

¹ Digital Television for All: www.psp-dtv4all.org/
Inclusive approach

**DTV4All**
The EBU actively supports the DTV4All project, funded by the European Commission (EC), which facilitates access to digital television for people with disabilities. RAI (Italy), DK (Denmark) and RBB (Germany) have helped develop access services such as subtitles, deaf signing and audio descriptions.
[www.psp-dtv4all.org/](http://www.psp-dtv4all.org/)

**Funkhaus Europa, WDR, Germany**
Funkhaus Europa is a German radio programme offering quality content in 15 languages to the biggest migrant groups in Germany. Focusing mainly on minority issues, the programme serves to help integrate and promote cultural diversity.
[www.wdr5.de/sendungen/funkhaus-wallrafplatz.html](http://www.wdr5.de/sendungen/funkhaus-wallrafplatz.html)

**Radio SR, Sweden**
Swedish Radio actively supports minority groups within its audience, offering news programmes for people with disabilities, migrants and 6 to 9 year olds.
Inform and empower citizens to democracy

Promoting critical understanding

PSM produce programmes to help viewers develop a more objective attitude towards the media and the way in which events are reported. Historically, PSM have been committed to making educational programmes to encourage informed media choices. BBC (UK), France 5 (FR), UR (SE), WDR (DE), and many other EBU Members have launched dedicated channels to actively promote media literacy and serve as a model for other PSM.

By producing programmes about what they do and how they work, PSM encourage interaction and critical understanding which are at the heart of active citizenship in every democratic society.

School visits to broadcasting stations are arranged to promote transparency and highlight the link between understanding the media and achieving full citizenship.

Fostering a media-savvy public

Medialized, UR, Sweden
Svenska Utbildningsradion, the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company, has produced a seven-part TV series for secondary school students which exposes how the media ‘constructs’ reality. Focusing on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the first episode illustrates how the same raw material can be packaged to present conflicting arguments.

Amnesia, Rai, radio 2, Italy
This daily drama unfolds from the point of view of a radio presenter suffering amnesia, who depends on public input to ‘recall general culture and history’. Presented as a ‘true story,’ this multimedia project is fed by live telephone calls from listeners, highlighting the importance to critically follow and interpret media content.

Netidők, MR2, Hungary
The chatshow, which has been running continuously for 17 years, is available from Petofi Radio in MP3 format and social media. Regular contributors, including journalists, linguists, bloggers, and TV or radio editors, debate current affairs from 11pm to midnight every Monday night, targeting young audiences.

Becoming an active participant in the public domain

Enlightenment and active citizenship begins early on. Connecting with media platforms to seek, receive and impart information is central to public engagement.

PSM have developed a variety of projects, not only to understand how the media works, but also to provide a platform to debate ideas and express political opinion at every age.

Initiatives include multimedia programmes for television, radio and the internet and often feature an interactive component that encourages reasoning, debate or a platform for citizen engagement or change. Topics range from current affairs to raising awareness about government policy, political systems and contemporary history.
Platform for expression

**Hyde Park, CT24, Czech Republic**
Hyde Park is a fully-interactive TV show produced by Czech television. Viewers put questions to studio guests and comment on current affairs via telephone, SMS messages, Facebook, Twitter or a video query on YouTube. A mobile research team also seeks out participants from local towns and villages.

**Logo! Wahlcity, ZDF, Germany**
This interactive game encourages young people to form their own political parties and take part in virtual elections. In this way, they become familiar with the German political system and engage in policy-making initiatives. After the launch, the project attracted 2.9 million visitors in its first month.
www.tivi.de/fernsehen/logo/start/index.html

**Rai per i 150 anni, RAI, Italy**
In 2011, RAI launched a campaign on a variety of platforms, including the internet, to highlight the 150th anniversary of the Italian Republic. The project informs citizens about their democratic past.
www.italia150.rai.it/Progetto.aspx

**Battlefront, Channel 4, UK**
This award-winning project follows a group of young campaigners trying to change the world. Over three seasons, Battlefronters have tackled everything from gun and knife crime, to giving autistic people a fair chance to work, to getting better sex education in schools.
www.battlefront.co.uk/what-is-it
Creating a trusted space

Nurturing innovation

Developing and supporting innovation is about establishing the right framework for people to experiment with the latest media technology.

Media literacy is therefore promoted in an increasingly innovative way through exposure to different formats and platforms. Campaigns and online tools provide a platform to share thoughts or to be inspired by others.

PSM also work closely with educational partners— institutions, teachers, schools, universities and parents— to encourage creativity and reflective skills in children within a trusted online space.

Facilitating interaction and creativity

Curiosphere.tv, France Télévisions, France
The educational web division of France Télévisions, which attracts almost 200,000 visitors every month, has developed among other initiatives an interactive internet documentary on the European Parliament based on the success of an earlier project on the obesity epidemic. In classic interactive game style, the ‘web documentary user’ creates a personal construct by negotiating a pathway through a series of film clips and interviews.
www.curiosphere.tv/

Hetklokhuis.nl, NPO, the Netherlands
A website from Dutch TV station NPO, which enables children to create content using the tools Sketchmaker and Gamemaker. The website won the first European Awards for Best Children’s Online Content in 2011.
www.Hetklokhuis.nl

Ketnet.be, VRT, Belgium
Established by Flemish creators, this website encourages children to be creative, and for example to draw or create quizzes. It was awarded third place at the 2011 European Awards for Best Children’s Online Content.
www.ketnet.be

Planet Schule, a joint project of WDR & SWR, members of ARD, Germany
A website that offers high-quality content to teachers, students and other citizens interested in learning through interactive games and other activities.
www.planet-schule.de/
Engaging young minds

People will only engage in online activities if they feel safe. PSM media literacy programmes are designed with care and offer young minds a trusted public space for innovation.

The protection of children as users of online technologies is of primary importance to PSM. Young people and children are among the biggest users of online and mobile technologies in Europe. The challenge is to devise campaigns, online tools and crossmedia programmes that appeal to young minds and yet impart practical instruction: to make users aware of the dangers of the internet and provide practical guidance about how to handle personal data or behave in chat rooms.

EBU Members have achieved success through a variety of programmes that combine the potential for personal development with simple fun. Kids learn as they discover new sites, play games, write blogs and create websites that stretch the imagination.

Establishing trust

**Netiquette, ZDF, Germany**
ZDF strives to improve junior internet skills through the creation of interactive games. The goal is to nurture a trusted public space for kids to explore their creativity.
www.mein-kika.de/netiquette

**2025 Ex Machina, France Télévisions, France**
This four-part literacy game helps young people understand some of the risks linked to the internet and fosters a critical attitude towards the use of social media, mobile internet, blogs and chats or video games. It was distributed on curiosphere.tv as part of the national internet sans crainte campaign.
www.2025exmachina.net/

**Smokescreen, Channel 4, UK**
This 13-part literacy game about online privacy, identity and trust has received positive reviews from press, teens, teachers and online safety experts. Players must uncover a mystery from a fictional social network, thereby learning about some of the risks and opportunities posed by real sites like Facebook, MySpace and Bebo.
www.smokescreen game.com/
European Broadcasting Union (EBU)

The EBU is the leading association of national media organizations in the world, comprising 85 national media organizations in 56 countries in and around Europe. The EBU represents its Members and promotes the values and distinctiveness of public service media in Europe and around the world.

Did you know?

- Within two years, almost 1.7 billion digital receivers are expected to be in use for television worldwide.
- Worldwide, there will be 551 million TV sets connected to the internet by 2016.
- About a quarter of the EU population, aged 16 to 74 years old, has never used the internet.
- Only 3% of public websites fully comply with web accessibility standards, creating additional hurdles for the 15% of the EU population with disabilities.
- EBU Members play a key role in propelling Europe into the digital age by embracing groundbreaking technologies — ranging from the uptake of DTT to hybrid systems, and television beyond HDTV — the success of which hinges on advancing media literacy.