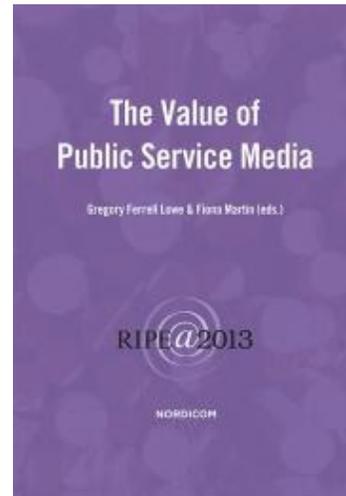


Gregory Ferrell Lowe and Fiona Martin (Eds.), **The Value of Public Service Media**, Gothenburg, Sweden: Nordicom, 2014, 287 pp., 31.00 EUR (paperback).

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In democratic societies, why do we need public service media (PSM)? **The Value of Public Service Media**, a collection of studies on PSM in Asia, Asia Pacific, and Europe, provides in-depth and broad discussion of the legitimacy and necessity of public service media. It defines PSM, explains the several dimensions of its public value, and contains a handful of case studies to demonstrate that value. Along with defending the legitimacy of PSM, the 14 chapters of this book provide a diverse conception of the ways that the media can have public service value. It also introduces a controversial policy concept to readers: dual expectations that create conflicting demands. On the one hand, PSM must fulfill its not-for-profit function and social responsibility mission; on the other hand, governments tend to use economic evidence to measure the value of PSM and to decide whether it is a worthwhile investment.



PSM both provides equal access of information for citizens and produces necessary, important, but not rate-driven information. The key difference between PSM and commercial media is that the former treats its audience as citizens, whereas the latter, because of its profit motive, treats its audience as customers. However, there is a debate about whether society should use public funding to support PSM, since some believe that commercial media is able to inform the public in a socially responsible way and that state-sponsored media might create unfair competition, damaging the interests of commercial media. For example, the PSM in the United States is underdeveloped compared with democracies in Western Europe (Benson & Powers, 2011). Republican lawmakers, including the current Trump administration, have tried for decades to cut funding for the already-impooverished public service broadcast system as a budget-tightening measure (Hooton, 2017).

This book clarifies how classical liberal economic theory supports the idea of a free market for media—no state funding. In their contribution, C. E. Berg, G. F. Lowe, and A. B. Lund explain why certain types of media are bound to fail in a free market:

The issue for commercial media business is the inescapable, implacable requirement to produce profits. When the potential market is limited, as is the case for many types of content including poetry and fine art, religious programming, content for minorities or mainly for educational purposes, the level of provisioning that is provided willingly (at least) by the market will typically be less than considered optimal for society. (p. 115)

The case study of how the Japanese public television network, NHK, handled disaster coverage demonstrates the different roles of PSM and commercial media. A comparison of NHK's coverage of the Great East Japan Disaster of March 2011 with two commercial television networks shows that NHK focused more on safety and public service information, which served public value. Moreover, the public demanded more information from NHK for the reason that it is a publicly funded and oriented media service.

The digital era provides abundant information, a mingling of good and bad quality, accurate and fake. As a result, the promotion of media literacy has become an important form of public value, and the social responsibility of the media to benefit individuals and society as a whole is more important than ever. Leaving the promotion of media literacy to commercial outlets, however, has produced another example of market failure. The market fails to deliver an adequate supply of such educational programming, since individuals do not want to pay the price to cover the cost of production or are unable to afford the expense to access such programming. The recent U.S. presidential election demonstrated some of the consequence of a low level of media literacy: Fake news and propaganda had strong effects on individuals' attitudes and judgments. In Europe, PSM outlets are very active in promoting media literacy. One contributor, S. Radoslavov, argues that such efforts create value for the public along what he calls "the instrumental, substantial and process dimensions of public value" (p. 219). Radoslavov identifies concrete strategies used by PSM in several European countries to promote media literacy and argues that this function adds to the legitimacy of PSM.

The idea behind providing public service broadcasting is that broadcasting can be good for the creation of an informed and enlightened democracy. The original mission of the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) was to fulfill an educational role and to foster the spread of knowledge (Scannell, 1990). Free and equal access to communication systems is the main policy objective for modern communication policy (van Cuilenburg & Verhoest, 1998). At its founding in 1969, the American Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) had a two-part mission: to provide access to information for viewers in rural areas and for people who could not afford private television channels. The idea was that, with public service broadcasting, people would not be left behind because of their social-economic status (Erb, 2012). Several chapters in this book touch on the ideal of equal access to information, which is part of the unofficial mission of PSM. None of the authors, however, manages to emphasize the novelty of equal access of information, especially in the digital age.

The concept and service of public service broadcasting has grown along with the rise of radio and television. Compared with print media, the literacy requirements for audio and visual information are much lower; at the same time, the expense to individuals for audio-visual information is relatively higher. Digital media provide numerous information sources and, in theory, provide equal access through open access. However, Internet information outlets often treat information as a commodity and treat the audience as customers; paywalls restrict access to information along economic lines. Studies show significant drops in number of visits after the introduction of a paywall, especially among younger readers (Chiou & Tucker, 2013). Paywalls on newspaper websites also create a longer tail in content-sharing distribution (Oh, Animesh & Pinsoneault, 2013). Despite these findings, more and more newspapers are introducing paywalls; they are treating Donald Trump's war on the media as a marketing opportunity by persuading people that it is important to support quality journalism that seeks to reveal the truth.

American media scholar Victor Pickard (2017) argues that the "U.S. has conducted an experiment in commercialized journalism by treating news as both a commodity and a public service" (para. 6). Pickard (2017) finds that the experiment has failed: "America's commercial media system might be good for business, but it's terrible for democracy" (para. 8). He argues that the media must be treated as a public good, suggesting that we undo the corporate libertarian paradigm and establish a public-interest norm for the future (Pickard, 2014). PSM is important for a functioning democracy, and this book provides sufficient theoretical analysis and international case studies to support that conclusion; there is, however, no discussion of how best to fund PSM.

There are different models for funding public broadcasting. In the UK, households that own a television have to pay a licensing fee, whereas in Finland, the government abolished the licensing fee in 2013 and imposed a public service broadcasting tax for every adult. In Asia, NHK charges a "receiving fee" for each television owner, whereas the Hong Kong government directly funds its public service RTHK. In North America, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) radio is advertising-free, whereas CBC television uses commercial advertising to supplement its federal funding. In the United States, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) is a private, nonprofit corporation funded by the federal government to support public broadcasting. U.S. public radio and TV are also partly run by donations from individuals and companies. This book is an urgent call for the public to be aware of the importance of PSM and to understand the consequences of how a government regards its PSM and, especially, its decisions about funding.

There are many examples of how policy and political decisions are shaped by the popular media (Dean, 2013). Fake news is everywhere, and the spread of false information is a threat to democracy and undermines confidence in the media. This book offers an opportunity for the public and policy makers to discuss the role and direction of PSM. It is a *new* old question, and this book is both a perfect starting point for an important conversation and a sufficient resource for readers—especially those concerned about the health of their democracy—who seek to understand the value of PSM.

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