



Digital transformation, responsive collaborations, democratic responsibility: three challenges faced by public media platforms

Overview

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Public media platforms can only be defended if they transform radically to adapt to the digital revolution that is underway and to the new practices it is generating. This is the deep-seated belief of Mathieu Gallet, Radio France's current chairman. In this memo, he lists the key points of this transformation: putting users and their practices at the centre of what's being offered, understanding and exploiting data, preparing for voice-activated technology and the Semantic Web, moving towards a cross-platform approach... This change within public broadcast media platforms is being achieved through new methods of management. But it also calls for new measures to be implemented by the public powers: on the one hand, establishing a more empowering regulatory environment for these new digital networks, and on the other, reforming the way public broadcast platforms are financed, not so much to support the existing model as to accompany a medium-term and long-term transition in order to implement a global strategy for public service media platforms.

In presenting this proposal, Terra Nova is opening up the debate on the future of public media platforms and we welcome all contributions to this debate, as well as reactions or challenges to the initiative from stakeholders or union representatives.

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15-POINT PRIORITY ACTION PLAN

1. Achieving the metamorphosis of all public broadcasters into “cross-platform media”.
2. Adapting professional training to respond to “cross-platform media”.
3. Implementing a specific strategy for French-language broadcasting around the world.
4. Reinforcing partnerships and collaborations with other French-language public broadcasters.
5. Bringing about change within organizations via the “project” approach and the “responsive” approach.
6. Developing enticing and intelligent uses of data.
7. Referencing public bids for the “voice-web” generation.
8. Integrating public broadcasters into the fabric of local and national news and events.
9. Ensuring that public broadcasters serve as a reference and act as a bulwark against “fake news”.
10. Devising a new framework of responsibility for these new networks.
11. Guaranteeing that new networks are contributing to the funding of audiovisual production.
12. Securing a European presence and visibility which goes beyond the French media landscape.
13. Adopting a shared medium-to-long-term strategy for public media platforms.
14. Reforming the licence fee to move towards a “German-style” universal contribution.
15. Creating a specific fund dedicated to innovation and the transformation of public service broadcasters.

Introduction

THE NEW REALITY FOR MEDIA PLATFORMS

In recent years, the way that information and cultural output is broadcast and consumed has changed considerably. This is down to two developments:

In the first instance, we have witnessed a generational shift. The children of “Generation Y” have moved away from traditional media platforms and have instead turned towards the internet and social networks. Rebuilding close relationships with this younger demographic is, therefore, an absolute priority in the current media landscape.

In addition to this, studies of media consumption point to a trend in which this behaviour extends to other generations. The internet is now the favoured interface to access all media sources, and this encourages the emergence of new players.

The new technological and competitive environment that the media finds itself in calls for the development of new strategies. Understanding and manipulating information has become a decisive factor when it comes to maintaining access to media content for users (search engine optimization, directives). Likewise, anticipating new practices is key, especially those linked to voice-recognition technology (virtual assistants, self-driving cars, the Internet of Things) and anticipating new and innovative formats linked to sound (3D audio effects, immersive listening experiences) and creative events (crossover projects such as live sound cinema or symphonic hip hop¹).

Digital transformation also affects those working in the audiovisual sector. Going forward, these professionals must be able to understand and master diverse media platforms, as well as various forms of interaction with their audience. Methods of creation, production, promotion and presentation will also be in a rapid state of flux.

It's in this context that public service media platforms must be both reinvented and defended. Or, more precisely, we must reinvent them in order to defend them. Because the changes that are currently taking place have not diminished the need for public service media. On the contrary, these very platforms must now, more than ever, respond to an essentially democratic demand.

¹ A world first in 2016, soon to be repeated on November 30th 2017: the “Symphonic Hip Hop” night brought together major names from French rap and the Radio France philharmonic orchestra in the Radio France auditorium. The initiative sought to break down the social and generational barriers that often separate musical genres and isolate those who listen to them.

That is: promoting improved access to baseline information and a dynamic culture within this new environment, both of which are necessary in the construction of the collective consciousness.

1. Putting the user at the centre of public broadcasting

In the face of the aforementioned transformations, it would appear that institutional media channels have lost some of their legitimacy and their credibility among the younger generations. With the emergence of new modes of broadcast, creation and consumption of content, public broadcasters must be able to reinvent themselves to stay in step with social expectations. To achieve that, the audience must be put at the centre of the content being offered.

1.1. Audience-centred content

The audience develops its own practices. These practices take their lead from what's being offered and how it is distributed. Technological progress has always influenced the structure and the very nature of the media. In the past, the rotary press transformed print journalism. Digital broadcasting has had a profound effect on the press, be it print, radio or television. The adaptation of forms of both radio-based and audiovisual output will only be achieved via an in-depth analysis of new user practices in this domain. User expectations are changing and it's therefore vital to respond to these demands: both with new products and with new ways of accessing and promoting these products.

Winning back the loyalty of these users should be at the heart of this strategy: younger users, who are feeling increasingly alienated by traditional media channels, must be convinced that public service media platforms are relevant to them. Those who live in rural areas and those who experience a certain geographical divide (between urban centres/suburban zones/rural areas) should also be addressed. Public service media platforms must find the means to reinforce social ties where they have, in the past, been stretched to breaking point and manage to restore confidence in the future across the board. This can be achieved thanks to the presence of the France 3 regional television network and the 44 France Bleu local radio stations.

The complementary nature of these two networks is very important when taking into consideration local realities; in efforts to reshape territorial continuity, no region and, on a smaller scale, no district, should feel marginalized or neglected. Nationwide, territorial cohesion can only be achieved via an improved awareness of all socio-economic realities, that is, by the sort of outreach work that local public service media are particularly well-placed to carry out. Those

platforms that allow their audience to identify with the content on offer are recognized as an essential part of efforts towards a harmonious co-existence.

1.2. PUTTING INNOVATION BACK INTO THE CENTRE OF BROADCASTING: TOWARDS A FRESH APPROACH TO THE USE OF MARKETING AND DATA

It's time for a new consideration of the importance of marketing in building relationships with different audiences, even if public service media platforms are still "supply-oriented".

1.2.1. Algorithms and data

International competition and the inescapable importance of algorithms in search engine optimization means that the way we relate to different audiences must evolve rapidly. This is because it's these modes of access that are increasingly influencing the way people seek out information, entertainment and cultural content.

Personalizing the relationship with the internet user means allocating increasing importance to the associated data at each interaction; this data would be aggregated and integrated into the profile of each user. Dealing with the data in this way would lead to the information provided being ranked and prioritized, taking into account the character, preferences and habits of each individual user. When exploited for purely commercial purposes, using data in this way can have an alienating effect and is likely, over time, to prove to be a pointless strategy. If used in an intelligent way, however, it can provide the basis for relevant and enriching recommendations in the form of cultural suggestions or associated services. Public service media platforms should, therefore, establish and promote an open and rewarding use of data as an innovative tool for cultural propagation.

1.2.2. Semantic Web/ Voice-activated technology: voice as the new frontier

The development of the "Semantic Web" will constitute a means for search engines to respond to sophisticated questions and not just simple requests. Using artificial intelligence to mimic the human mind, solutions can be accessed more easily and without recourse to a complex process of sifting through a number of diverse elements. A specific question will be answered with an appropriate response. The revolutionary aspect of this process is that the search engine will, increasingly, provide just one precisely targeted answer as opposed to a disparate selection of information collected around one diversified semantic field. Users will no longer have to navigate a

list of search results to get to their own particular answer; increasingly a personalized and unique result will be offered to each sophisticated demand².

Lastly and most importantly, the major new challenge is voice web. In the United States, 20% of all searches carried out on Google (via mobiles operating on Android) are vocal requests: this figure will increase to more than 50% by 2020. In tomorrow's world virtual assistants will be the norm: a single interface will allow for a synthetic human voice to respond to the human voice of the user, thus providing access to the media that he or she would like to see, read or listen to.

It is quite evident, then, that this third component of the new relationship with media platforms puts radio at the forefront, even if other modes of communication are also concerned. Assuring accessibility via a vocal request such as "I'd like to listen to the news" will be a key priority for media platforms across the board. If the virtual assistant is programmed to give precedence to one specific media platform, a significant sector of the general public will be directed towards that. On the other hand, the ease of making such a request could limit spontaneity in these choices and could reinforce the "echo chamber" effect when it comes to current events. Indeed, it is possible that, at this stage of development, accessing media content via these new tools requires a regulatory approach from public powers if no equitable agreement can be reached with the major search engines which serve as the very backbone of virtual assistants. It would be therefore necessary to develop a digital equivalent of the 1947 Bichet legislation with regards to the printed press: establishing a level playing field for publishers and distributors and, as a result, creating (almost) equal opportunities and promoting diversity. The idea of news pluralism can be summed up as the existence of diverse sources of information: this also implies that users have a better chance of finding and accessing these sources.

Yet the three-fold change that's taking place in search engines and social networks means that public service media platforms must redouble their efforts in research and development when it comes to the generation and exploitation of information linked to internet traffic and their users' practices. Innovation and anticipation in the critical domain of audience engagement cannot be left to the new networks and large digital aggregators. On the contrary, public service media platforms have an important role to play (in partnership with all major players in the digital community) in order to maintain the prominence and visibility of their programs, communications, and their cultural output in this new environment.

² The more complex the demand is, the more likely it is to be followed by a unique response. When this demand takes the form of an oral request, the virtual assistant is able to provide one precise answer in response, as opposed to presenting a range of possible results.

1.3. DEVELOPING AN INNOVATION-FRIENDLY MANAGERIAL APPROACH

Adapting media platforms to these new formats and new practices calls for a revolutionary approach to methods of governance and the implementation of these innovations.

1.3.1. The “Project” approach

This starts with, quite simply, the adoption of a “project-focused” management approach. The editorial and technological objectives of the new services to be put in place must be clearly defined; the teams working on these projects should exploit their professional experience and in-depth knowledge of the media platforms with which they are already proficient. As such, the efforts towards adaptation that are being carried out must be defined as common projects that will unite and motivate all of those involved in bringing them about. This will allow for not only a supported transition but also the invention of new working methods as these new media platforms are being designed and developed. Those working in public media love their jobs and, consequently, adopt and implement the necessary changes in their respective lines of work. Due to the specificities of the public sector and thanks to their professional loyalty, these individuals are the best placed to define the working models of the future.

1.3.2. The “Responsive” approach

The adoption of a “responsive approach” is the second dimension of a new management style which must be implemented in order to lead the transformation of public service media. Since these adaptations must be swift and efficient, the working model must favour an ongoing dialogue within the team, as well as regular feedback and appraisals, a collective approach to the creation of new services, and a reciprocal rethinking of the working methods at every stage of production. This methodology would allow both technical and editorial concerns to be addressed simultaneously, with digital evolution as the driving force to serve media demands. This is not about discarding the strongest features of public media platforms in favour of a fashionable technological phenomenon, but instead capitalizing on what the digital world can offer in order to promote and show off the quality of public service scheduling and programs.

By way of example, both the “project” approach and the “responsive” approach were adopted by France Bleu radio when redesigning their digital interface in 2015: web developers, journalists, scheduling managers and marketing professionals worked together hand in hand for six months with one common goal: improving local services by the fixed regional deadlines of December 2015.

The proven success of this new digital interface is directly linked to its method of conception which - with improved efficiency- broke down vertical hierarchies and brought in actors with different skill-sets at the relevant moment in the project's development; these individual experiences and specializations were deployed judiciously, and were brought together around a common project.

The result was that between September 2016 and June 2017, monthly visits to the site leapt to 8.1 million (that is, an increase of 57% over one year and 219% over two years), the number of podcasts downloaded increased by 151% over two years and digital streaming increased by 202% over two years. France Bleu boasts the second-largest Facebook community of Radio France's stations (behind franceinfo) with 1.5 million fans and 550,000 followers on Twitter, which goes to show that improving digital presence can be a fantastic growth enabler for local services.

2. THE NEED TO FOSTER THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW TYPE OF MEDIA: GLOBAL, CROSS-PLATFORM MEDIA

2.1. CROSS-PLATFORM MEDIA, A 360° INTERFACE

Traditional media must evolve so that the aggregation of different user practices can allow for a multifaceted experience for those accessing content via multiple channels: cross-platform media means making scheduled programming available across various formats, be it live or recorded, regular shows or VOD, print, photographic, sound-based or video content across all networks and especially digital networks. In this way, the content itself (news, fiction, documentary, comedy, analysis...) is re-worked to fit this multifaceted approach: enriched, rationalized and reinforced and, as a result, it is more attractive to all categories of users.

Public media platforms must undergo a rapid transformation to catch up with other cross-platform providers and must offer their news content, as well as other information-based content - including access to culture and heritage - in order to meet the demands of new user practices without neglecting their fundamental objectives.

Indeed, Franceinfo - a cross-platform provider - has been able to establish itself as one of the leading French-language news sources on the internet. This is because it decided to evolve from a live radio service (established thirty years ago) to become the first multimedia platform to aggregate information that has been gathered, verified and processed by the major public audiovisual structures, from Radio France to France Télévisions, from the France Médias Monde holding to the National Archives. In the months of April, May and June 2017, franceinfo emerged

as the leading digital media platform, with 17.9 million unique visitors across its three domains, 100 million total visits and 15.9 million active live streams opened around the world.

The adaptation of all public media platforms should be driven by the development of this very strategy: a move towards a global media, be that in France or elsewhere. Action was taken on an international level exactly one year ago with the creation of the alliance of “French-speaking public media” (“Médias Francophones Publics” - MFP) including television and radio, and bringing together public media platforms from French-speaking countries of the northern hemisphere: Belgium, Canada, France and Switzerland. Within the alliance, the same dynamic has been created to consolidate baseline information adapted for new digital networks. Given that each one of these groups has committed to significant restructuring, this allows us to move forward together more quickly towards the adaptation of our professional fields while also building new relationships.

In this way, editorial boards from each member of the MFP are working together very closely within the domain of information. Communal communication platforms allow for an exchange of references, and investigative work undertaken in a collaborative manner have allowed individual members to benefit from peer-led verification and fact-checking from other members, even in the most complex of cases. Information can be cross-referenced more rapidly, events can be flagged up in real time and credible sources can be shared between collaborators. The use of new technological developments in communication, therefore, has bolstered the quality of the information that constitutes the output. Indeed, the quality of the output on all and any platforms is the fundamental end goal of public broadcast media.

2.2. THE EXPERIENCE IN PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA AS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE CURRENT CHANGES

Be it in Switzerland, France or Belgium, it's easy to find many examples of transformation within public media platforms that are moving towards a global model. The comedy radio show “120 seconds” broadcast on RTS (Swiss public radio) has become “26 minutes” in its television incarnation, and franceinfo’s “Les informés” as well as “Tarmac” shown on RTBF (the Belgian French-language public broadcaster) exist in both radio and video formats, all the better to attract a young, urban audience. These changes are part of the transformative dynamic pulsing through public platforms: evolving output, new forms of audience engagement and changing roles for those working within the sector. The radical change in working practices is part of an increasingly far-reaching plan, and one that's been widely adopted. The fact that Radio France's audience share is steadily increasing (and at 14.3 million listeners represents 26% of the French population)

is not coincidental and record audience figures across all broadcast channels are being spurred by these changes, and the commitment of those bringing them about.

The integration of social networks as a new source of local content is certainly a part of a strategy seeking to enhance the engagement of certain sectors of the general public, eg. young people. In this way, “new generation” radio networks like Mouv’ integrate tools such as Facebook live and Snapchat as platforms for content generation as well as the dissemination of “events” which make up part of their output, in keeping with their wider mission.

Digital transformation affects media activity in every domain: it calls for professional changes that will allow for multi-skilled roles, roles in which individuals will be proficient with diverse modes of expression and different ways of interacting with the audience. These changes should be part of the personal trajectory of each post, and should come about through the extension of professional experience and a spirit of self-improvement via the acquisition of new skills.

The rapid implementation of training schemes to complement and support the deployment of these new services is therefore necessary, drawing on individual wishes for professional development and supporting the individuals during this process.

Implementing global media platforms also involves a learning curve for professionals when it comes to relating to the audience. This is a new way of offering them the media content that we produce; updating our approach to the creation of cultural output, its production and presenting our programs in their best light means they’ll thrive on social networks in their various manifestations.

2.3. CROSS-PLATFORM MEDIA: A GLOBAL ATTITUDE

The shift towards digital media will also entail major changes when it comes to the media marketplace. Up until now, media platforms were defined by the channels by which they were distributed. Today, however, with the help of a strong brand identity, cross-platform media can be made available across all possible outlets.

This is what “global brands” are all about: thriving in the digital domain across a variety of markets, notably the French-language markets. Areas of expertise in public broadcasting- such as, for example, cultural content- should be exploited. The launch of France Musique’s new platform at the end of 2017 should see this new ambition realized. This platform will provide online access to all of the Maison de la Radio’s musical output, including filmed concerts and recorded radio programs. Other established brands within the public broadcasting landscape should also be exploited as global media platforms in this way.

Beyond fundamental concerns regarding content, public media platforms should seize upon these new methods of distribution for all of their scheduled programming, in order to better

promulgate their productions, to ensure their work is disseminated more widely and, in turn, to spread our values, lifestyle philosophy and cultural characteristics.

This cultural and pedagogical mission is at the centre of the public broadcaster's role and has led France Télévisions, Radio France and the National Archives (INA) to build a new project together centred on their common capital of culture and knowledge, found in the back catalogue of France Culture's Culturebox show and in the televisual and radio archives of the INA. The singularity of French public radio in a European context is that it produces all of its programs in-house and owns the rights to these programs (in particular in French-speaking countries) and can make them available internationally thanks to the internet. This being said, as a venue for live music, including its own philharmonic orchestra, the site of the Maison de la Radio itself is unparalleled.

As we have seen, digital media is not only the central crossroads where other existing modes of expression meet as part of a coordinated editorial strategy. It also allows for geographical barriers to be overcome, and provides new opportunities when it comes to the output itself.

This autumn a new Radio France service was launched, "A World of Radio France" which gives listeners - particularly French-speaking listeners - access to the best of Radio France, wherever they live in the world. As of 2018, this service will allow each listener to create his or her "personalized" radio by selecting programs produced and broadcast across all of the stations of the group. This will improve navigation between various sources of content, and will showcase the diversity and quality of the audio output that is created by public service broadcasters every day. The service will constitute nothing short of a revolution in the listening experience.

Once again, the challenge faced by traditional media platforms is one that exists on a European level: the safeguarding of copyrights and the bodies that collect and distribute those rights and royalties is an essential part of the sector's economy. The existing directive pertaining to copyright, which is currently being revised, will come under pressure from various parties. It is essential that a healthy balance is struck between the safeguarding of these rights on the one hand, and, on the other, the ability for producer-broadcasters to be able to distribute content around the world, thanks to the agreements with those who hold the copyright. France's position on this will be key, as well as our capacity to rally nations who would otherwise be favourable to a devaluation of intellectual property, which would seriously jeopardize European audiovisual production. The international strategy of French public service broadcasters is currently being studied by the Association of French Radio Broadcasters (GRF) with whom we are carrying out a joint project; this group acts as a representative at the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) which is a key vector of influence within Europe and a bearer of our own convictions related to public service broadcasting.

3. PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA: ALLOCATING RESOURCES FOR THIS TRANSFORMATION

3.1. DESPITE A LACK OF CONFIDENCE, REINFORCING THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

Given the extremely rapid rate of evolution in user practices, it is vital to anticipate the changes to come in the near future. Public media platforms will need to guarantee:

The longevity and the dissemination of public service content in the face of competition from other digital stakeholders.

The visibility and legitimacy of their content in an environment in which algorithms have a significant amount of control over what people consume in terms of news, entertainment and cultural content.

These issues are all the more crucial when considered in the context of a general sentiment of decreasing confidence in traditional news journalism. Recent elections around the world have seen the most respected media platforms called into question in an unprecedented way. In the United States, some have been accused of propagating “fake news” and of lacking objectivity; in France, their peers have been criticized for unfair treatment and demonstrating a media bias.

These accusations run parallel to a climate of suspicion surrounding the notion of a singular mindset, ie. that of the elite and of traditional figures of authority. The rejection of these structures, fed by general anxieties and a distrust of globalization and its social consequences, fuels, in turn, the feeling that social networks provide better and unbiased access to information.

The level of transparency that social networks infer has had a notable effect: political interventions within newsrooms are no longer possible. Any attempt to exert political or economic pressure in this way has become instantly apparent. It's therefore highly likely that certain detrimental practices of the past are beginning to disappear

Another trend has, nevertheless, seen the public challenge the legitimacy of traditional media platforms: the development and the widespread dissemination of a simplistic discourse. Its purveyors spread so-called “fake news” using the new methods of communication as arms for manipulation and destabilization. These stories are then relayed by the self-sustaining process operated by algorithms and robotic search engine optimization. The truth is neither sought out nor established: it is imposed, without any prior reflection, by the tyranny of immediate repetition. In lieu of verification, the new rules favour instant propagation and “popularity”. Therefore, an era of suspicion has given rise to what's been called the “post truth” age; the concept is itself

contradictory since it posits as “real” a nonexistent or incorrect fact, established only by its constant repetition on social media.

Populist discourse surfs on this wave of generalized mistrust, pandering to a fear of the future and sowing doubts about the mainstream media representation of current affairs. Calling into question traditional media platforms is at the heart of this movement and endangers all representative systems, including political representation. Media platforms must adapt more than ever to respond to this threat.

A need for renewal and adapting to the new expectations of the public are, thus, the two major issues that political powers and public broadcasters are having to address. Rebuilding credibility in a democratic way will be impossible without a sea change in traditional public media platforms. These two movements go hand in hand and are indispensable for the healthy functioning of the public space.

3.2. ADAPTING MEDIA RESPONSIBILITY STAKES IN THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

The fundamental difference in legislation pertaining to telecoms and that which is attached to the media is the application of civil liability where public communications are concerned. In a private conversation, for example, the confidential nature of these exchanges is a fundamental principle. In this case, absolute liberty prevails. No one may be party to that conversation and, as a result, no one can stifle it. By contrast, when information is addressed to a general public, the party transmitting these remarks takes full responsibility for their nature. As such, the party in question can expose him/herself to judicial procedures if these remarks are erroneous, misleading or false or if they can be likened to defamatory or libelous statements.

The responsibility of media platforms has never been as great as today. Our belief is that they cannot assume this responsibility unless they embrace the digital realm. At the same time, editorial and ethical standards must be established and implemented for these new communication networks.

The current crisis stems from the metamorphosis of social media networks into mainstream mass media platforms, without the application of any real notion of civil liability.

The centralized web aggregation services provided by the major search engines and the larger networking platforms propagate information over which they have no control: relinquishing any responsibility they might incur as “publishers” by positing themselves as simple “hosts”, they are thus exonerated from any judicial procedure which content published by third parties might provoke, thus shirking any specific obligations.

Yet, the fact that they are not - strictly speaking - publishers of content does not mean they are exempt of all responsibility. This has been emphasized by a number of incidents recently: having denied that a problem existed, Facebook ended up collaborating with American authorities on an investigation into Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election; having spent years shielded by the principle of “neutrality”, Twitter finally shut down hundreds of thousands of accounts linked to jihadists.

Indeed, these new networks cannot wash their hands of the upheavals taking place in the world by hiding behind the pretence of blamelessness due to their status as content “hosts”. And they are beginning to sit up and take notice. To a certain extent, they are saying goodbye to a more innocent time, when they were simply tasked with bearing the torch of technological progress as a tool for the exponential growth of a space favouring liberty of expression.

This global wake-up call, however, must lead to regulatory norms. The major search engines and prominent social media networks have asked the media to help them police content and help implement verification tools such as CrossCheck to aid in the fight against “fake news”. It’s up to them, however, to install the necessary editorial safeguards in the event that their civil responsibility is recognized as equivalent to that of other mass media. Furthermore, since April 7th 2017 Google has been rating the veracity of search results. Only the most controversial or sensitive results are taken into account: once a search is carried out regarding this type of data, Google shows the results that have been fact-checked. This level of attention to detail is praiseworthy, but since the verification itself is carried out by a third party, Google can distance itself from the process and, once again, evade a certain amount of responsibility.

All of the above underlines the relevance of the current debate at the European Union regarding the reform of directives governing the development of electronic media. The challenge now is to apply a regime of civil responsibility to these parties- not only to the content that they host but also to the hierarchy of search engine results, ie. the prioritization of sources.

Google has somewhat anticipated the consequences of this new certification, demonstrating a degree of caution and “responsibility” when it comes to its own users. Despite this display of goodwill, it is still essential to ensure that this trend progresses in the right direction by establishing a judicial and mandatory dimension to the business of fact-checking. As a European challenge, this calls for substantial mobilization.

The need to create a new regulatory framework has, incidentally, already given rise to important public initiatives that have encouraged the new digital economy to contribute directly to the financing of audiovisual output. On September 21st 2017, the French government extended a decree that obliges international operators – whether they propose free or paid audiovisual content- to invest in digital production in the same way that national platforms are required to do

so. This is the so-called “Netflix tax” or “Youtube tax”, revenues that are managed by the CNC (National Centre of Cinematography) and which are part of measures implemented to finance French audiovisual production, the burden of which has been borne, in the past, by cinemas, television channels and pay-per-view network operators.

The amendment adopted by French members of parliament was studied by officials at the European commission who concluded that it could be applied. Over the coming months, Brussels is drawing up a new framework concerning the sharing of videos as part of a general overhaul of the Directive on Audiovisual Services (known in France as the SMA directive) which should result in a harmonization of regulatory measures regarding cultural diversity, obliging these services to ensure that a minimum of 20% of the content offered is European.

3.3. ADAPTING THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND FINANCIAL MODEL OF PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

In this context, public service media platforms must transform in order to maintain their status as guarantors of pluralistic information of incontestable quality, as an important support system for creative output and as influential broadcasters of knowledge. These historical structures are now operating in a climate which is not limited to other national competitors nor by the scant resources of terrestrial broadcasting: without the constraints of physical barriers nor technological ones, the domain is global. Make no mistake: France Télévision’s competitors are no longer TF1 or M6, nor Radio France, RTL or Europe 1. National media platforms – both public and private - are now pitted against international players from the United States and will eventually face competition from China (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent). The disproportionate economic clout of these operators comes not from their capacity to produce and distribute content, but from their capacity to monetize the immense amount of information and data which they have at their fingertips. The question that French public powers must now be asking themselves is the following: do we wish to have French audiovisual companies producing and broadcasting content that has been made in France, written in French and which is the product of minds shaped by the education system in this country? This question is all the more pertinent with regards to publically-funded media platforms, which must function as key vehicles of soft power and influence for France and French-speaking cultures, beyond their original and legitimate missions of informing, educating and entertaining their audiences.

If our governments share the ambitions of public media platforms in the new competitive global climate, their transformation must be achieved within the framework of a common strategy, carried by a medium-term and long-term vision (5- 10 years) and supported by stable and reliable means. The first requirement must be a clear and shared strategy geared towards output, user practices and different audiences. This involves gathering contributions from all possible distribution

channels – both terrestrial and digital – to develop and publish a range of complementary programs that can reach the widest and most diverse audience possible. If a public media platform wants to be strong and effective, it must reach the largest audience possible. The output on offer must take into account the nature of the audience but also that audience's practices, now and in the future. The strategy will therefore consist of ensuring omnipresence on all distribution and content-sharing platforms and on all social networks. This will mean modifying the format and the way this content is written to adapt to these specificities (as well as to the audience and user practices involved).

The second requirement is that public media platforms have the opportunity to partner with key players in the domain to ensure that they have access to future innovations and developments. These platforms must be able to act in the manner of a well-informed investor if they want to defend their current interests and nurture new projects in a rapidly-changing environment, including the acquisition of holdings and even creating their own start-up incubator. Common investment in research and development is vital for medium-to-long-term prospects and must be carried out via structures that are entirely separate from traditional companies to maintain the flexibility and innovative approach necessary for fledgling entrepreneurs.

Finally, the transformation of public media platforms rests on the crucial condition of ensuring the financial transparency of both their investment programs and the operations of these corporations. The financial reform regarding public service broadcasting is vital not only to ensure its survival but beyond that to provide the means with which to transform these platforms.

In France, the shift from the old system of the public broadcasting "licence fee" has not been taken to its logical conclusion. In reality, each individual home or workplace should be eligible to pay this fee: the notion of a tax related to the simple presence of a television set is no longer applicable to the contemporary world, given that people consume media content in a variety of ways (on smartphones, tablets etc.).

Furthermore, the licence fee is currently linked to the collection of council tax which does little to boost its popularity. Looking ahead to the proposals to abolish this tax for the majority of those concerned, we are arguing for an adoption of something akin to the German system, in which the licence fee is part of a universal contribution paid by every eligible household and by every business once their profits surpass a certain threshold. In this way, public service broadcasters would be guaranteed a basic level of universal finance which would constitute a sustainable solution since it would no longer be tied to the presence of a television set in the house. The sum payable by individuals could even be lowered if it were to be applied in this way.

Indeed, it's not a question of demanding extra funds to ensure that public service media platforms continue operating in the way they always have done up until now: the new financial

guarantees required are linked to the urgent need to invest in digital development quickly. It would even be a good idea to develop a new “strategic” mode of state intervention in order to boost synergies between public broadcasters, allowing them to better collaborate on digital development.

The reform of the licence fee should also provide new resources which will speed up the transformation of public media platforms by positing it as a priority issue. This will be an opportunity to rethink the deployment of these resources and, at the same time, provide a level of stability to the funding of projects.

It seems possible that a foreseeable rise in resources thanks to these contributions could be advantageous for public sector broadcasting, in that it could constitute a financing fund to be allocated on an ad hoc basis. These funds could then be dedicated to the transformation of these organizations, to responsive collaborations and to innovation. The common strategy that seeks to transform these public media organizations, therefore, must be supported by specific and incentivizing financing plans to aid each corporation within the public sector to effectively collaborate with other players in an associative way.

The issue here is not about promoting a sort of institutional Meccano but first and foremost about defining a strategy – and thus an ambition – for public sector media platforms. In order to bring that to fruition, public powers must first answer this question: do we want to have poorly-financed, limited and ailing organizations that are withering within the traditional media landscape on a national level? Or do we want a dynamic, open and innovative public sector, investing in the future and with the resources at hand to implement the radical transformation necessary to remain in step with its audience, now and in the years to come? In choosing between these two scenarios, what’s at stake is not only the future of the media but also that of society, culture and politics.

Conclusion

Before any sweeping reform is implemented, public use and the challenges of such a project must be carefully examined in the context of a globalized media landscape with its own rules and regulations, however urgent that reform may be.

Secondly, it’s crucial that the move towards global, cross-platform media proceeds quickly yet without obliterating the core values and strengths of traditional media platforms. As in the past, they must continue to generate social dialogue and shared references while conveying the wealth and diversity of our cultures. They must ensure that our vision of the world – cultural, democratic and open - is promoted within our societies.

This implies adapting the modes of financing for our public media platforms, with a clear-eyed vision of the necessary means to ensure their swift transformation. This includes adopting strong incentive schemes to facilitate these fusions and collaborations.

The state has committed itself to a democratic transfer that is integral to the ongoing transformation of media platforms: the increased responsibility of public media platforms in the wider media landscape must drive public powers to nurture this new ambition and provide the means to enhance and expand their output – especially cultural content – to achieve the sort of transfer that allows them to address a wider audience, an audience that is more diverse and more demanding.

The future of the media is critical: it must prevail in both a national and international dimension and with it the shared values which form the cornerstone of our social model.