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## Public Service/Interest Journalism in Transition

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# **Public Service/Interest Journalism in Transition: Greek media professionals' perceptions of broadcasters' mission in the platform era**

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## **Abstract**

Since the mid-1990s, the evolving digitalisation of communications has given rise to new challenges for public service broadcasters (PSBs) and privately owned broadcasting organizations (POBOs), which have turned into media platforms by extending their services beyond traditional radio and television broadcasts. Considering several transformations, instigated by the platformisation of communication, this study raises the question concerning to what extent is there a policy defense of legacy broadcasting media in Greece against a background of growing competition, thriving in an environment dominated by technology-led companies (e.g., Meta) and Over the Top (OTT) subscription-based models of television content's distribution (e.g., Netflix). Taking as a case study the Greek media market, this paper aims to discuss the wider operational challenges faced by contemporary broadcasting organizations attempting to serve the public service/interest journalism mission. The research draws on traditional and newly established theoretical concepts - like public interest/service journalism (Europe), public or civic journalism (USA), and ongoing platformisation of communication - and its findings are based on a questionnaire survey, conducted through the online participation of media professionals from the Greek media market.

**Keywords:** platformisation of communication, public service/interest journalism, media platforms, digital platforms culture.

## **Introduction**

The public service broadcasting (PSB) system in Europe was created based on the philosophy of BBC organization's first Director-General, John Reith. Although over the years it has been reasonably adapted to the evolutionary pressures of the communication field, it strongly connected the idea of PSB with a series of core values: educating, informing, and entertaining the public, promoting democratic principles and domestic culture, promoting pluralism and social cohesion, ensuring universal public access to services offered by broadcasters of non-commercial nature (Banerjee and Seneviratne 2005; Mendel 2011; Ofcom 2005). Since the 2000s, scholars have argued that the idea of PSB cannot remain entrenched in the traditional framework of radio and television services but should also include the new online media

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services (Trappel, 2008) with the relevant media organizations turning into public providers of digital entertainment and information services (Arino & Ahlert 2004).

From this perspective, in the new digital field, the old notion of “public service broadcasting” (PSB) has expanded under the new term “public service media” (PSM) which describes the enlarged presence of broadcasters in new online audiovisual platforms. In this context, they have been regarded as providers and aggregators of public value content for diverse digital platforms (Leurdijk, 2007). According to scholars, it seems that in the new media environment the transfer of PSM services, namely communication services of a public-social nature, is considered a collective venture to which many "players" contribute at the same time, and therefore the cooperation between them needs to be strengthened (Donders 2012: 42).

In the new digital media field, PSM services can be considered all those actions that regardless of the medium of origin (radio, television, internet, mobile device) fulfill public interest objectives that have been established legally (Donders & Pauwels, 2012: 83). This argument is enhanced in the platform-dominated environment in which even commercial broadcasters provide the public with a wide range of online (video-on-demand/streaming) services. Therefore, the question raised is whether the provision of content of public-social value remains the exclusive prerogative of traditional PSBs, or whether it has been extended -in some respects- to media organizations serving commercial interests.

The notion of public service has been widely discussed and analysed by media scholars in various countries (Donders 2021; Moe & Syvertsen 2009; Murdock 2005). Scholarship projects of such type usually adopt either a normative stance, seeking to examine the values that should be incorporated into the mission of PSM, or a policy perspective exploring the compliance of PSM with their remit, framed by potential changes in the regulatory framework required because of technological advances. Nevertheless, in previous research, Urbániková (2023) highlighted the scarce literature concerning the perceived ideal of public service by journalists and managers working for PSM organizations. Literature is even more scarce as to whether and how the public service ethos is interpreted by the media professionals of privately owned broadcasting organizations (POBOs). This study addresses this research gap by taking as a case study the particularities of the Greek broadcasting system and by setting a twofold contribution as an objective.

Specifically, it examines the concept of public service/interest journalism from the perspective of those media professionals whose job is to apply this concept in practice, namely journalists and managers working for the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT), but also from the viewpoint of peers working for privately owned broadcasting organizations. By illuminating this under-researched area, we aspire to reach potential suggestions or recommendations regarding how the coexistence between the PSB and privately owned media organizations can combat the increasing dynamics of the powerful worldwide digital intermediaries.

In Greece, even though typically the privately owned broadcasters are not required to operate under the burden of a public service mission, as applied in the case of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT), there is a Constitutional article indicating that the direct control of the state to which radio and television are subject " aims at the objective and equal transmission of information and news, as well as speech and art's products, ensuring the quality level of the programs imposed by the social mission of radio and television and the cultural development of the country, as well as the respect for the value of the human being and the protection of childhood and youth" (Constitution, Article 15; Stratilatis 2023). In this regard, commercial broadcasters' operation, despite their profit-driven status, is closely related to a social (public interest) mission whose implementation ensures the healthy evolution of the media ecosystem overall. In this research, the terms "public interest" and "public service" are employed interchangeably to refer to news media output aimed at serving the good of all citizens.

### **The core values of European public service/interest journalism vs US public or civic journalism**

Public interest/service journalism (PSJ/PIJ) refers to news output that serves the community and advances democratic societies. The beginning was made in Europe by John Reith, the first Director-General of the BBC, articulating the triad of "informing, educating, and entertaining" the public through miscellaneous content of PSBs addressing all portions of the audience. This distinctive value-related infrastructure was enriched over time, as exemplified by the EBU, which put forward six core principles for PSM of the digital era: universality, independence, excellence, diversity, accountability, and innovation (EBU 2014). In this regard, journalism practices incorporating impartial, trusted news and current affairs serve objectives that empower individuals to participate in the public sphere (Iosifidis 2011) and confront their needs even in unstable circumstances (Chasi and Rodny-Gumede 2022). Transplanting the values of PSJ from Western to Eastern Europe has proved a great challenge (Stewart 2012).

In the American news industry, theorizing the main notions related to the PSB system reflect an evolving but not identical approach to that of Europe. Public journalism (or civic journalism) in the 1990s was perceived as a media operating model aimed primarily at cultivating engagement with the audience (Merritt 1998, Rosen 1994). Other principles related to this model were establishing open dialogue mechanisms with the audience, the potential of ordinary citizens to influence news media outlets' agendas, news-making on a more comprehensible basis, and reporting that mobilizes citizens toward positive issues (Nip 2008).

Despite its decline at the beginning of the 21st century, internet technologies are argued to have facilitated some of its principles to be applicable even in the new media age (Ferrucci 2017: 356). A revised practice of public journalism, called "public service journalism", was observed by Ferrucci (2015a) in a new market model of the news industry, exemplified by the digitally native news nonprofit (DNNN) organizations, whose operation is based on alternative revenue

sources compared to those employed by traditional media (e.g., donations from the public, grants, corporate sponsorships). Other advantages lie in that they also tend to cover community-building stories (Konieczna & Robinson 2014) and present news by emphasizing the context, the diversity of sources, and the potential solutions, to a greater extent than traditional media (Ferrucci 2015b).

From this perspective, US public service journalism refers to a news-making process in which citizens' participation is vital, and the emphasis is placed on topics impacting citizenship and democracy (Ferrucci, 2015a). The difference between public journalism and public service journalism lies in the degree of citizens' participation in setting the news agenda: in the former case the objective was equal participation in news agenda building between citizens and journalists, whereas in the latter case, the active role of citizens is framed by the predominance of journalists in maintaining the role of final decision-maker in news agenda setting (Ferrucci, 2017: 359).

According to Ferrucci (2017: 367), PSJ is currently applied by digitally native news nonprofit (DNNN) organizations through digital technological means which facilitate citizens' involvement in news-gathering procedures without prioritizing a space to create their content. In this model of news agenda-setting, journalists aim to serve the entire public - not merely a loyal audience - and advocate open lines of communication with all citizens, through regular community meetings, whose input is vital to news production processes. Every day citizens are encouraged and requested to argue, comment, correct, enhance, and affect news-gathering procedures.

The divergent approaches between Europe and the USA indicate that the potential of journalism to promote and advocate the public good is interpreted differently among societies, according to the political, cultural, and ethical context in which journalism practices are set in force. Even if we consider case studies beyond Europe and the USA, it is observed that PIJ serving the common good takes on new patterns of implementation. For instance, in South Africa, where the notion of community is valuable, journalism that contributes to the public good is perceived as decolonial storytelling that supports the establishment of peaceful and just societies for all and invests in the redefinition of practices addressing a diverse nation (Chasi & Rodny-Gumede 2022: 1629 & 1635).

### **Perceptions of Public Service Media (PSM) Mission**

The perceptions related to PSM mission differentiate between academics, institutions, audiences, media organizations managers, and journalists, as different emphasis is placed on a wide range of core values. A study investigating how journalists and managers, working for the PSB of Slovakia (RTVS) perceive the essence of public service mission and journalism, against a backdrop of clashes between reporters/editors and newly recruited managers, reveals that both

professional groups emphasize independence from market pressure rather than autonomy from political power. Their perceptions lack the elements of high-quality entertainment and current affairs related to interpretations-explanations as part of the public service mission, and at the same time, limited acknowledgment is given to news output aimed at closely examining power holders. They discuss PSM mainly from a market-failure perspective, meaning that they see them as a precious counterbalance against commercial media by providing niche content considered important despite its unpopularity (Urbániková 2023: 1366-1368).

A study exploring the extent to which PSJ in Spain contributes to developing the public voice of citizens, by analyzing the perceptions of TVE's news programmes audience, reveals a lack of recognition of their status as citizens requesting "neutral" information. Research participants described media as an instrument of the system offering citizens limited freedom in giving or withholding consent as to the conditions of the system generally. More diversity in journalism content is requested accompanied by the need for citizens' voices to be considered in news-making processes (Graván, Mateos, & Broullón-Lozano 2020).

As to the case of the USA, the research of Beam et al. (2009) is indicative of US journalists' commitment to informing the public and serving the public interest by addressing all socio-economic groups in their communities even in conditions of economic pressure and technological turmoil. The maintenance of PSJ as a core professional value is also reflected, albeit to a lesser extent, in journalists' perceptions of media owners' and media managers' stances, who are believed to embrace the principle of serving the public as a quite important or extremely important organizational objective.

Quality journalism is another aspect of the communication field, challenged by the shift to a digital, mobile, and platform-dominated media environment. Quality journalism's understanding varies in the relevant literature, and different features of news coverage have been associated with it. Six of them have been articulated by Urban and Schweiger (2014) who emphasize principles like diversity, focus on issues with social impact, comprehensible content conducive to public opinion formation, neutral and balanced storytelling, accuracy, and ethics in news reporting.

In the digital environment, quality news content and popularity are not considered to be antithetical values. The perceptions of managers, editors, reporters, and business staff members of local and regional newspapers in four countries refer to a definition of quality journalism incorporating traditional news values, like proximity in the sense of serving a local audience, particular emphasis on producing public-service reporting revolving around local news and targeting a wide audience (Jenkins & Nielsen 2020).

### **Innovations and public service media (PSM) content in the platform era**

Due to the digitization phenomenon, reflection on the mission and importance of PSBs has been rekindled, including opposing views (Donders, Raats, & Tintel 2020, Harrison & Wessels 2005,

Jakubowicz 2006). To be more precise, the debate about PSM has expanded, incorporating, among others, video-on-demand (VOD) platforms which, combined with interfaces in general, are considered an integral part of the media systems (Distelmeyer 2018, Kelly 2020, Kelly & Sørensen 2021).

As PSM organizations undergo a new phase of digital transformation within a networked field of communications convergence, they are proposed to shift their mission to big data aimed at offering personalized services with an emphasis on young audiences and integrating data journalism into the newsroom (Murschetz, 2020: 82, EBU, 2019). Moreover, the increasingly competitive environment of the media market, intensified by the rising popularity of subscription-based audiovisual content distribution of international appeal (e.g., Netflix), has urged PSM to adopt datafication processes, i.e. systems of algorithmically curated content selection (e.g. the VoD platform DRTV of Danish PSB, Sørensen 2020).

Amid these innovative initiatives, the strategies developed by PSM in the online environment are heterogeneous in terms of their degree of maturity and targeting (Donders 2019: 1012) with the relevant research confirming that there is no linear response process to new trends in the audiovisual field (D' Arma et al. 2021; Kelly & Sorensen 2021). Some of them refer to indulging in co-productions with video-on-demand service providers in their quest to achieve international sales (D' Arma et al. 2021: 695) with the choices of young audiences perceived by media managers as vital to the sustainability of PSM (Lowe & Maijanen, 2019: 14).

In today's networked communication field, PSM organizations are believed to have the potential to resist phenomena harmful to the public sphere, such as fake news dissemination, and at the same time preserve the variety of their news output regardless of ideological and moral patterns. This mission is called by d'Haenens (2021: 452) "responsive diversity", a concept that includes not only the highlighting of diverse and heterogeneous issues, opinions, and attitudes but also the distance of individuals from their ideological frameworks aimed at raising their awareness towards the process of critical dialogue.

The rapid development of algorithmic technology has led PSM to employ news bot practices within newsrooms based on the collaboration of technologists and journalists. This is exemplified by the BBC's experimentations with chatbots for chat-like interaction with users or with one-way distribution bots primarily for news publishing during the period 2015-2017. The aim was to improve audience reach and engagement, particularly among young digital users, by providing a personalised tone for news and an individualised, interactive, conversational mode of address (Jones and Jones 2019).

## **Research Questions**

This study assumes that in Greece despite the different operational value-related infrastructure between the Hellenic public service broadcasting corporation (ERT) and the privately owned media, significant convergences occur in media professionals' views when it comes to the

challenges afflicting the implementation of the social mission of journalism. Even though the two sides of the media industry are motivated by different aims when implementing journalism practices, the embracement of a public mission in journalism may be counterfeit from both camps reflecting a structural crisis of the whole media ecosystem.

Based on the theoretical framework, as developed above, the research questions raised can be summarised as follows:

Q1. What perceptions do media professionals working for the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT) and privately owned media corporations hold concerning journalism in the platform era? Are the attributes associated with the journalism profession aligned with a public interest/service rationale and to what extent do they indicate a policy defense against the challenges of the platform era?

Q2. Do the perceived working patterns in the two types of media organizations reflect considerable divergences between them?

Q3. To what extent do media professionals' perceptions of contemporary newsrooms' editorial decisions indicate shifts in the core values related to public service/interest journalism under the pressures of the platform era?

## **Research Methodology**

To examine the research questions about PSJ implementation in public broadcasters as opposed to commercial ones, an online survey was conducted based on a sample of availability, whose participants filled in the digital questionnaire uploaded on the shout.com platform. The questionnaire was dispersed through email to all journalistic staff members of the Hellenic public service broadcasting corporation as well as to commercial media journalists belonging to the Journalists' Union of Athens Daily Newspapers (JUADN) during the period April-June of 2023 and 2024 respectively.

The research participants' views regarding media organisations' contribution to public service/interest journalism were investigated based on 22 variables, constructed according to an 11-point scale (zero to ten). Before data analysis implementation, the 11-point scale was converted into a 3-point scale (1. Zero or minimal contribution/importance/threat, 2. Moderate contribution/importance/threat, 3. Very strong or outstanding contribution/importance/threat), serving better the purposes of the research project. The questionnaire also included several open-ended questions based on which the respondents articulated in detail their viewpoints on major operational features of the news division where they offer their services. Besides, to enhance the research findings with qualitative data five semi-structured interviews were conducted with journalists and managerial executives working for the Hellenic public service broadcasting corporation and for mainstream commercial broadcasters.

The research sample consists of both male and female journalists with a slight predominance of the former (Table 1). In terms of age, most of the participants belong to the middle age category (35-44 years old) or an even more mature age group (45-54 years old) reflecting media professionals with a long career in journalism (mostly over 20 years). In the case of ERT public service broadcasting corporation, most of the participants are either television journalists or editors-in-chief in radio, television and web services sectors, whereas in the case of privately-owned media organisations the sample comprises mostly journalists contributing to all types of media output, followed by editors-in-chief and journalists working exclusively for the web, printed media or television sector.

**Table 1:** Research participants' main features (%).

	<b>Hellenic Public Service Corporation (ERT)</b> (N= 60)	<b>Privately owned / Commercial Broadcasters</b> (N= 81)
<b>Gender (%)</b>		
Men	57	59
Women	43	41
<b>Age Category (%)</b>		
Up to 24 years old	0	0
25-34 years old	0	4
35-44 years old	22	17
45-54 years old	40	36
55-64 years old	35	35
65+	4	9
<b>Years of Media Services Experience (%)</b>	(1 <sup>st</sup> column in ERT broadcaster 2 <sup>nd</sup> column in media field overall)	
Up to 5	7 0	0
6-10	9 0	0
11-15	4 5	10
16-20	9 13	10
Over 20	71 82	80
<b>Current Position in Media Organisation (%)</b>		
• TV Journalists	36	11
• Radio Journalists	5	2
• Web Journalists	9	14
• Printed press Journalists	0	10
• Journalists in combined media types	7	25
• Editors-in-chief	19	14
• News production team members	7	2
• Head of News Division	2	5
• Administrative positions (e.g. press office services, editorial consultant, proofreading employee)	13	17

Source: Author's research.

## Research Findings

### *Innovation and news output contribution to public service/interest journalism*

The research findings reveal that the media professionals of the privately owned media outlets acknowledge the innovative level of the news organisation in which they work to a greater extent than the employees of ERT, both in terms of its informative and web services sector (Table 2). This reflects not merely a great divergence in the self-perception of the two camps, but also the greater challenges with which the PSB is persistently faced (e.g. interventionism culture in news editorial practices and staff positioning). From this perspective, it can be argued that the ERT broadcaster, first and foremost, needs to convince its human resources of its initiatives' relevance, otherwise convincing the audience of its overall value as an institution seems wishful thinking.

**Table 2:** Perceived innovation in the information output and online services of the Greek broadcasting organizations.

On a scale from zero to ten, please rate how innovative you consider the media organisation you work in, compared to its competitors, in terms of...	weighted average	no or little innovative (ratings 0-3)	Quite innovative (ratings 4-6)	Very or extremely innovative (ratings 7-10)
<b>ERT broadcaster's employees</b>				
<b>its information services</b>	4.04/10	47	33	20
<b>its online services</b>	5.14/10	27	39	34
<b>Privately owned broadcasters' employees</b>				
<b>its information services</b>	5.69/10	22	34	44
<b>its online services</b>	5.84/10	15	43	42

Source: Author's research.

Moreover, the perceived contribution of news output to public service/interest journalism is -to some extent- a point of divergence between the professionals of the Hellenic public service broadcaster (ERT) and those of privately owned media organisations (Table 3). The employees of ERT seem to applaud mostly the extraordinary potential of radio content to serve public service news values, followed by online news, as opposed to their competitors from commercial media who seem to favor primarily online news in terms of the influence they can exert in this direction. On the other hand, television output is considered the least useful in ensuring public service news values by both categories of media professionals, signifying that the once adorable medium has now lost its dynamism among the news professionals' circles. Nevertheless, regardless of the corporate identity of a media organization, both sides overwhelmingly acknowledge the relevance of producing and disseminating content that aligns with public service core values on the part of all media outlet types of the country (public service or commercial ones) by employing appropriate journalism practices (91% and 79% of the sample respectively evaluate this aspect of high or outstanding importance).

**Table 3:** Perceived contribution of television, radio, and online news services to public service/interest journalism.

On a scale from zero to ten, please rate to what extent you consider that the following services offered by the media organisations you work in contribute to public service journalism	weighted average	zero or minimal contribution (ratings 0-3)	moderate contribution (ratings 4-6)	very strong or outstanding contribution (ratings 7-10)
<b>ERT broadcaster’s employees</b>				
<b>Television News</b>	5.68/11	34	35	31
<b>Radio News</b>	6.63/11	21	33	46
<b>Online News</b>	6.16/11	25	35	40
<b>Privately owned broadcasters’ employees</b>				
<b>Television News</b>	4.17/11	60	29	11
<b>Radio News</b>	5.86/11	31	41	28
<b>Online News</b>	6.02/11	33	30	37

Source: Author’s research.

The special value placed on online news by research participants does not seem to pay off equally for all audience categories. Particularly in the case of the ERT broadcaster, the media professionals appear mostly pessimistic and wary of the potential to appeal to a young audience as opposed to their peers in commercial media who express a quite more optimistic view on the matter. As to the digital news sector’s future development, the employees of broadcasters, which comprise the research sample, intra-organizationally share differing perceptions of the management's readiness to adopt new strategies or profess ignorance of the matter (by 31% in the ERT case and 20% in commercial broadcasters’ case).

Journalists working in privately owned media organisations are more convinced about the potential of the newsroom in serving the values of PSJ compared to ERT broadcasters’ journalists. Nevertheless, media professionals of both sectors acknowledge the challenges that act as a deterrent to serving the public service ethos. The employees of commercial media highlight the inhibiting factor of the media organisation’s editorial policy (“the line of the media outlet” as defined in the Greek context), which may be amendable from time to time, censorship in general, the insufficient knowledge of journalists on several topics, the perception of news as a commodity, as well as the adoption of “churnalism” in news processing and dissemination. The occasional trend of covering superficially current affairs in the sense of "journalists dealing with fluff instead of the substance that affects citizens" is another major weakness that is expressed. Despite these challenges, commercial media employees are, for the most part, moderately or highly optimistic about the editorial strategies adopted within newsrooms claiming their focus on serving public service values.

By contrast, ERT broadcasters’ employees rate very low the potential of the newsroom in contributing to public service values, criticizing persistent and intertemporal vulnerabilities of

the broadcaster, among which stand out the following: the governmental interventionism in news-making and administrative matters (such as the appointment of managers and other executives based on nepotism values), lack of staff members' evaluation governed by civil servant mentality, self-censorship of journalists in agenda-setting process as well as avoidance of permanent staff renewal. This negative perception of ERT broadcaster's employees does not incorporate the organisation's ability to respond to technological developments. The journalists of the Hellenic public service broadcasting corporation rate themselves almost equally with the commercial journalists in terms of multimedia capabilities (6.14/10 and 6.09/10 weighted average respectively), claiming that the ERT broadcaster "should provide high-quality services without adapting to the general meanness that prevails".

#### *Criteria of news agenda-setting*

Traditionally the news agenda-setting process adopted by PSM organizations and commercial news outlets has been driven by different criteria following the mission of each media category. Specifically, the goal of universality in serving the needs of the entire public is believed to push PSM to a more multi-prismatic selection of news flow compared to commercial media organisations. However, our research findings do not reflect a clear divergence between public service and commercial media in terms of how the news agenda of the day is configured (Table 4, Appendix). For instance, the criterion of "what the public likes most" seems to be frequently employed as a decisive factor in the news agenda-building process by both types of media organizations (in the ERT broadcaster very frequently used by 45%, while in commercial media very frequently used by 53% or always by 17%).

The distinctive presence of the "audience preferences" criterion in how newsroom members select the news agenda for public dissemination, partly explains the convergences in the thematic categories of news output released into the air. Journalists derived both from the ERT broadcaster and privately owned media outlets acknowledge the daily coverage of topics regarding civic life, politics, economy, society, environment, culture, athletics, and international affairs. In terms of the news agenda configuration, the only divergence lies in the enhanced emphasis placed on celebrity topics by the commercial broadcasters, whereas in the case of the public service channels the coverage of such issues is argued to be mostly rare.

In many respects, the news agenda-building process is based on an almost identical prioritization of criteria between public service and commercial broadcasters (Table 5, Appendix). Among the criteria that stand out in terms of weight, during the editorial decision task, is the connection of an event with institutional authorities, the public personalities it incorporates as well as the selections of the competitors regarding the news topics that deserve special prominence. The latter criterion is considered of outstanding relevance even by the ERT broadcasters' employees who are ideally expected to serve the principle of thematic diversity addressing the needs and preferences of all audience categories. The findings reveal that commercial media organizations, compared to their public competitor, set additional criteria as

decisive, to a greater extent than the ERT organization, such as the potential impact of a news topic on society and its connection to human interest storytelling.

*News editorial practices*

Media professionals both from the ERT broadcaster and commercial media organizations primarily evaluate themselves as highly capable of utilizing multimedia tools in journalistic practices (50% and 56% respectively describe themselves as multimedia users to a great extent). Nevertheless, this positive self-assessment does not ensure a quality-driven news output. Journalists from both types of media outlets mostly criticize contemporary news editorial strategies as having deteriorated in quality compared to the past, even though this common perception is based on differentiated rationales. The ERT broadcaster’s news professionals frequently associate the qualitative decline of news editorial practices with the need to serve the government's communication policy, while those working for commercial media raise the issue of increasing difficulties when it comes to the task of news verification in a context of a professional ethos which currently deprioritizes the news editorial policy aimed at public service values. Minor exceptions are believed to appear in an admittedly contradictory media landscape. This perception is reflected in the argument raised by a journalist working for a privately owned media organisation, who sees a few news digital ventures oriented to investigative journalism as a counterbalance:

“The picture is contradictory. In mainstream media, editorial strategies tend to turn for the worse. For the first time, however, recently a small but distinct community of independent - mainly online - media has appeared, moving in the field of independent investigative journalism, which adopt, with considerable success, new editorial strategies that, as a rule, tend to serve the public interest”.

Overall, media professionals from both types of broadcasting organizations evaluate quite low the potential of newsroom practices in service public service/interest journalism values (table 5).

**Table 5:** Perceived integrated newsroom model’s and editorial strategies’ contribution to PSJ, according to broadcasters’ employees (%).

On a scale from zero to ten, please rate to what extent	weighted average	zero or minimal contribution (ratings 0-3)	moderate contribution (ratings 4-6)	very strong or outstanding contribution (ratings 7-10)
• <b>the current way of organizing the newsroom contributes to serving PSJ</b>	4.2/10	41.8	34.5	23.6
• <b>do you consider that the editorial strategies currently adopted by the broadcaster contribute to serving PSJ</b>	3.91/10	47.3	34.5	18.2

Source: Author’s research.

As to the recommendations proposed with the aim of improving the existing editorial strategies applicable in the newsroom, journalists from both sectors - PSM and privately owned news organizations - emphasize the need to work on the claim of independence from governmental influences and guided editorial policies imposed by the media owners respectively. This unanimous perception of how contemporary journalistic practices are implemented is indicative of the plight or of the unfavorable position of inefficiency in which journalism in Greece has fallen. Journalists ask for a radical change in the way news coverage is implemented putting forward, in different ways, the imperative need to make the media more multifaceted.

In this regard, ERT public service broadcaster's journalists propose "more research on social topics, more emphasis on the daily problems of the citizens", framed by a non-exclusion policy regarding article writing and dissemination, whereas commercial journalists suggest that "since the world is changing, journalism is expected to adopt a polycentric perception of things", accompanied by a rise in reporters' knowledge level. The question of the pursuit of greater objectivity in news coverage is directly raised by ERT journalists, while their peers working in the commercial sector emphasize the necessity of the privately owned media sector to transform the processes based on which the personnel is selected, upgraded, or evaluated.

#### *Threats endangering public service/interest journalism ethos*

In terms of the threats afflicting media organizations' pursuit to serve PSJ, the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT) and the privately owned media are informed both by shared features and differentiations (Table 6, Appendix). Interventionism in journalistic practices and the lack of meritocracy in journalistic staff selection are perceived as the greatest challenges in both types of media organisations. From a comparative perspective, the interventional policy in journalistic operations is emphasized as a very strong/outstanding threat mostly by the media professionals of the commercial media sector - rather than the PSB sector - indicating an admittedly lack of independence in how the commercial newsrooms perform their tasks. Indicative of the seriousness of the problem is the viewpoint of a journalist arguing that "one of the most considerable challenges that may determine the future of journalism is asserting independence from the boss line and power systems". Based on a similar rationale the media professionals of the ERT newsroom seek to claim independence from the governmental line considering equally important the pursuit of renewing the journalistic staff with younger and more active journalists".

Another shared threatening factor affecting the mission of public service journalism is argued to be the insufficient training of journalists on new media developments coupled with the reduced journalistic staff. These are also challenges perceived as outstandingly unfavorable for the journalism profession to a greater extent by commercial newsroom professionals rather than by ERT broadcaster's employees. Nevertheless, in the case of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT), the threats rated as extremely important are more numerous - compared to those of the privately owned media -referring to the limitation of resources allocated to the

public service broadcaster or the possible replacement of the licence fee with other forms of financing.

## **Conclusions**

In contemporary media markets in which large-scale digital intermediaries have provoked the digital disruption phenomenon, the developments in public service/interest journalism are worth coherent assessment by considering the platformisation of communication that has raised new challenges pertinent to the healthy operation of the (small) national media markets. This study raises the crucial question of the sustainability of public service/interest journalism mission based on the perceptions of media professionals working for legacy broadcasting organizations in Greece (for Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation ERT and commercial media).

Both categories of news professionals perceive television as the least dynamic medium in serving the public service/interest journalism values. This is a considerable finding that can be related to the commercialization features embraced by the newsrooms in Greece since the savage deregulation of the broadcasting sector. The hard-to-attract youth audience, which prefers social media platforms as news sources or often belongs to the news avoiders' category, is a challenge for both types of media organizations with the employees of the public service broadcaster (ERT) expressing stronger concerns about this matter despite its great strides towards digitization.

The multidimensional threats articulated by research participants as a deterrent to public service/interest journalism mission point to a structural crisis faced by the journalism field in Greece. Media professionals derived from both types of media organizations highlight the regime of independence-lack in which they perform their journalistic tasks against a backdrop of limited or non-meritorious staffing of media organizations. Their common perceptions of the journalism profession as suffering from overt interventionist forces and self-censorship trends are related to the distorted development of the broadcasting system, stigmatized by governmental control over its operations against a background of long-lasting interrelationships between media, politics, entrepreneurship, and the state (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2021).

These findings align with previous research confirming that journalism in Greece has failed to act as the fourth estate (Wiseman, 2023). Examining the perceived threats comparatively, it is noteworthy that despite the shrinking advertising market that has led to layoffs of journalists and the closure or reorganization of historical media titles (Karadimitriou, 2020), research participants do not perceive the declining revenue as the primary threat to journalism sustainability. Instead, they highlight interventionism and lack of meritocracy in staff handling, challenges that reflect long-standing vulnerabilities of the national media system. The cultivation of renewed knowledge and skills, based on retraining sessions in new media practices, combined with the fight against self-censorship or interventionism is considered a way out of the threats facing contemporary journalism.

Despite the deep awareness of the structural crisis that Greek journalism is going through, the voices of resistance or recommendations to reverse the existing problematic working setting are hardly visible in Greek journalists' responses. This comes in contrast to the stances held in other countries such as Slovakia, which represents a fragile democracy, nevertheless, PSM organizations are believed to claim the vitality of the journalism profession. The relevant research has revealed the resistance practices used by journalists, when their autonomy is endangered, incorporating several internal and external collective initiatives based on mutual support, through which journalists' voices are articulated and heard even at the cost of their jobs (Urbániková, 2021).

The high importance given to “what the audience likes” in combination with “what the competitor is promoting” as predicting factors in the news agenda-building process of both public service and commercial broadcasters is a special feature indicating a uniformity of strategic mindset among the highly ranked media professionals that hardly ensures the principle of diversity in news coverage. Moreover, despite the integrated model of newsroom operation, confirmed by most research participants, this innovation is mostly perceived as impotent or limited efficient in safeguarding public service/interest journalism objectives. This entails that in the platform era quality journalism addressing all audience categories is not reliant so much on familiarizing with technological advancements but rather on releasing the long-lasting vulnerabilities of the past.

To meet this objective broadcasting organizations should consider carefully the enhanced role of journalism education in cultivating new models for professionalism and media entrepreneurship (Lowe & Stavitsky 2016: 323). In the platform age, the success of such a plan seems to prerequisite the synergy of all types of news organizations under the rationale that the traditional values in journalistic practices must be consistently reclaimed and put into renewed force aimed at making news production of a public service ethos combined with the related journalistic values a feasible task. The resolution of the crisis in Greek (public service /interest) journalism necessitates systemic reforms by broadcasters and a broader transition towards transparent and meritocratic media organizations, eager to adopt strategic plans of policy enhancement and editorial strategies' reinvigoration in alignment with the demands of the platformised era.

The analysis reveals that the perceptions held by media professionals do not amount to a rejection of what the concept of public service/interest journalism stands for; however, the core values of the concept are mis-practiced under a media market tied to long-standing dependencies of the past and newly imposed threats of the platform society. The responses of research participants seem to challenge the assumption that a strong commitment to public service/interest journalism can be served more efficiently by the public service media rather than by privately owned media organizations. The research findings show that a reconsideration of those arguments excluding public service/interest journalism from profit-driven news

organizations is imperative based on the rationale that each media marketplace, due to its particularities, needs to be examined on an ad hoc basis.

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Appendix

Table 4: Perceived relevance of criteria applied to news agenda-setting process (%).

	ERT Broadcaster	Privately owned broadcasters	ERT Broadcaster			Privately owned broadcasters		
On a scale from zero to ten, please rate the importance of the following criteria in the news selection process adopted by the public service broadcaster (ERT)	weighted average	weighted average	criterion of zero or minimal importance (ratings 0-3)	criterion of moderate importance (ratings 4-6)	criterion of high or outstanding importance (ratings 7-10)	criterion of zero or minimal importance (ratings 0-3)	criterion of moderate importance (ratings 4-6)	criterion of high or outstanding importance (ratings 7-10)
<b>What the public likes most at a given time</b>	6.02/11	7.27/11	27	47	26	22	23	55
<b>News topic's association with a social media influencer</b>	3.95/11	4.64/11	59	29	12	50	28	22
<b>Whether an event is related to institutional authorities</b>	9.0/11	8.09/11	9	15	76	14	20	66
<b>Public figures involved in a news event (except for persons related to institutional authorities)</b>	7.89/11	7.46/11	9	35	56	19	26	55
<b>The impact of a news topic on society</b>	6.93/11	7.64/11	18	39	43	17	22	61
<b>Whether a news event contains a human-interest story</b>	6.86/11	7.32/11	17	41	42	15	33	52
<b>The dramatization that encapsulates a timely news topic</b>	6.95/11	7.11/11	23	30	47	21	26	53
<b>What the competitors / the rest of the country's news organizations are disclosing</b>	7.79/11	7.73/11	18	15	67	17	19	64

<b>The current topics (trending topics) being discussed on social media platforms</b>	6.23/11	6.54/11	28	29	43	32	24	44
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Source: Author's research.

**Table 6:** Perceived threats afflicting public service/interest journalism mission (%).

	ERT Broadcaster	Privately owned broadcasters	ERT Broadcaster			Privately owned broadcasters		
	weighted average	weighted average	zero or minimal threat (ratings 0-3)	moderate threat (ratings 4-6)	very strong or outstanding threat (ratings 7-10)	zero or minimal threat (ratings 0-3)	moderate threat (ratings 4-6)	very strong or outstanding threat (ratings 7-10)
On a scale from zero to ten, please rate to what extent you consider the following to operate as a threat to public service journalism								
<b>Reduced journalistic staff</b>	7.71/11	7.59/11	21	15	64	20	17	63
<b>Interventions in journalistic work</b>	8.8/11	8.6/11	15	11	74	18	4	78
<b>Social media platforms utilization in the context of journalistic work</b>	5.55/11	6.26/11	43	33	24	31	26	43
<b>Limitation of resources earmarked for the broadcaster</b>	8.45/11	6.81/11	14	13	73	25	31	44
<b>Possible abolition of the licence fee and application of an alternative form of funding</b>	8.4/11	NA	15	17	68	NA	NA	NA
<b>Lack of meritocracy in the way journalistic personnel is employed</b>	9.29/11	8.4/11	10	8	82	13	18	69
<b>Frequent changes in administrative-managerial staff</b>	6.86/11	6.23/11	22	32	46	32	32	36
<b>Limited technological means available to journalists</b>	7.46/11	6.84/11	23	22	55	25	25	50

<b>Insufficient training of journalists regarding the new media developments</b>	7.73/11	7.77/11	19	22	59	17	19	64
<b>The competition emanating from commercial broadcasters</b>	NA	NA	35	29	36	14	45	41

Source: Author's research.

