Editorial policies of European public broadcasters
for the use of new social media

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ABSTRACT
The use and management of social networks by public broadcasting services is one of the key issues underlying the
current field of communications. The present work analyzes the presence of European public broadcasters in social
networks and the adjustment of editorial policies to the new digital context. In starting from a decalogue of aspects
considered relevant to manage accounts in social networks, we also analyze among the seven countries leading the
process whether or not they are counting on such rules and tools.

Keywords: social media, social networks, public broadcasting service, public corporation, digital convergence.

1. Introduction
The interest and the debate around democracy and new digital media (Casero Ripollés et
Gutiérrez Rubí, 2014) are here combined with concerns about the future of audiovisual public
service in the context of a redefinition of the connections between democracy and
communication (Castells, 2009), the relations between civic networks of cyber democracy and
counterpower (Sampedro, 2014), the demands for transparency (Kane et Feenstra, 2014),
deliberative and democratizing power of blogosphere (Ugarte, 2014), the resources management

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within the public ambit (Habermas, 1991, Garnham, 1992) and the necessity of social theory to understand what is social in social media (Fuch, 2014).

Online communication and sociability have increased exponentially in the last decade through new direct cognitive, interactive and cooperative tools (Boy et Ellision, 2007, 2013) which have complemented or relegated to traditional media in the public ambit. Studying and understanding such new modes of communication and sociability is interesting not only for the academy but also for the traditional media organizations and for civil society as “the public ambit is an interface that connects culture, economy and politics” (Fuchs, 2014; Gripsrud, 2007). Therefore the mission and function of public service cannot be exempted.

The present and future of public broadcasting in Europe are strictly linked to a better adaptation to the current demands of society, to the reformation of governance, to the stabilization of its financing system and to the great challenge of its competitive position in new media and social networks. These four strategic perspectives are essential for the compliance with the main demands attributed to audiovisual public service: contributing on the increment of the contrast in democratic pluralism, cultural diversity, the counterweight to the marketing negative externalities and the asymmetries in the circulation of contents, fortifying social cohesion, promoting quality, promoting transparency and independence and propelling innovation and independent production (Blumber, 1992; Mendel, 2000; Palacio, 2001; Missika, 2006; Bustamante, 2006; Caffarel 2007; Moyses et alt., 2009; Ridinger, 2010; Jost, 2011; Paracuellos, 2011; Bucci, Chiaretti y Fiorini, 2012).

The arrival of European Union’s public state broadcasters in social networks occurs in a context marked by the oscillation of systems of production, programming, emission and broadcasting and for an increasing multiplication of the offer2.

Utilizing the politic economy logic and the criticism to the obstacles put by European and Spanish policies in the last decade to the development of online digital media in the European public broadcasting, Christian Fuchs (2014) proposes to public service the retrieval of space through social media in order to strengthen democracy. “What we need is no longer marketing,

2 The European Audiovisual Observatory (Yearbook OBS 2013) registers in Europe 2,240 television channels, among which 560 are of free access, 580 are paid and 1,100 of regional or local character. The direct-to-home satellite broadcasting (DTH) is the hegemonic system of access in Europe, covering more than 68 million homes, followed by digital terrestrial television (DTT) with almost 59 million homes, cable is connected to 28 million residences and the telephonic network (DSL) other 20 million. In Europe there is a total of 122,755 audiovisual companies, earning 130.768 million euros and counting on 639.450 employees.
advertisement, social media trading or Internet; we do need more platforms based on parity and on public service logic. We need more visibility and resources for them. We need world decolonization and Internet decolonization as well in order to make them less based on economic and bureaucratic power and more on communicational rationality and on the public ambit logic. Public services institutions, such as television channels, museums, libraries and archives are enormous repositories of sharing cultural notions” (Fuchs, 2014).

From the legislative perspective, the first directives in the audiovisual communication service in the European Union\(^3\) in 21st century have left outside of regulations much of online media. The policies that arrived in the second decade, the 2010 Digital Agenda and the first report from the Commission to the European Parliament, to the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and to the Committee of the Regions around the enforcement of new audiovisual services, from 2002, are apart from the articulation of online and social digital media within the dual system combining public and private services.

As a consequence, there is no general regulation made by European Union itself that materializes a normative form of how to use social media. Such absence meets the lack of will from broadcasting corporations in providing themselves proper mechanisms for regulating their own presence in networks.

In this investigation we present an analysis of the presence of state public broadcasters from European Union in social networks and of the editorial norms published by eight of such agents on their websites. The corporations mentioned are from Austria, Belgium (Flemish Community), Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, United Kingdom and Romania.

The study has been executed in October 2014, and its methodology consists in a double perspective: from one of them the direct observation of the presence of the twenty-eight public state broadcasters in social networks and, from the other one the analysis of contents from the editorial guidelines of the eight ones mentioned.

Vaast and Káganer (2013) ensure that the companies started to appreciate the positive aspects of social networks, even than cautiously. In fact the authors consider symptomatic that in recent years, departments and specialized teams have been created in this field for the purpose of professionalizing the organization’s relations with autocommunication systems. In addition, they

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point that even though the most recent guidelines continue to prioritize risk control, they also value the advantages based on the capacity of encouraging transparency in order to promote positive relationships with audiences and strengthening the community. These authors detect four opportunities to social networks: visibility, traceability, editability and association.

As it is an imperative for its mission and for its strategic future projection, public audiovisual service cannot be absent from such new platforms and social networks wherein its audiences increasingly communicate and interact. Social interaction networks on Internet involve four relevant aspects: connections, cooperation, linking relations and virtuality (Boyd et Ellison, 2007). They can also aggregate other two further characteristics represented by its high capacity of viral propagation and its operating functionality to automated (robotizing) content management (CMS) as well as of objects through digital networks.

It is necessary to contemplate new media and social networks but also the norms and forms by which one may act through them, from the regulation ambit (frail or absent) to the co-regulation or auto-regulation aiming at materialize the mission associated to public communication media.

2. Editorial norms to social media in European public broadcasters

The irruption of new technologies and the allocation of Internet on the center of the communication board force communicatory companies, both private and public, to equip themselves with using and controlling mechanisms and tools in order to succeed with their strategies in social networks.

Technological movement in recent years, when both traditional and digital native media had to come together, foresees a constant changing panorama that will increasingly count on more elements, fields, and networks interlaced (Lopez et Otero, 2005).

The European Broadcasting Union published in 2014 the report *Media Online*, in which it is pointed the necessity of public broadcasting services to implement strategies in social networks, interactivity and multiplatform journalism fields. To face such challenges it proposes

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4 The European Broadcasting Union (2014) defends that public service updating demands universality, excellence, independence, diversity, innovation and accountability. Some of these principles are not possible without transparency and the active participation of the audiences who make such platforms possible.
the Vision 2020 strategy, an European long term project that encourages public media to continue to be strategic pieces in the reconfiguration of the new digital mediatic space.

Public broadcasters’ presence in social networks is guaranteed, yet the same is not true to the existence of editorial norms for guiding their strategies and setting light on the constant challenges that autocommunication media present to users.

2.1 European public broadcasters’ presence in social networks

Public state broadcasters in the European Union have found themselves pushed to adapt to a new technological context and to expand their offers to audiences thirsting for new services. It all happens in a space full of uncertainty, marked by the continuity of an economical-financial crisis in 2007 and for digital convergence.

Internet and mobile telephony are the containers wherein public corporations have presented their new contents and services that meet analogue radio and television channels. All of the twenty-eight public state broadcasters in the European Union (excepting Greek NERIT, operating since May, after ERT’s closure on behalf of Troika’s commands) count on mobile applications and Internet platforms.

When it comes to social networks, by the moment they act as content routers of what such companies present on their webpages or as programming reminders. The networks with the greater flow are Twitter and Facebook, even though public broadcasters in general often utilize Google + and LinkedIn with a more corporate character.

Image 1 - Public broadcasters and number of social network accounts

The activity in social networks varies according to corporations and their strategies. We take as an example the use of Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Image 2 - Facebook Usage

Every public broadcasting corporation investigated presents a main Facebook account, yet two of them (CyBC from Cyprus and VRT from Belgium) have not published any contents
for one year. Others, such as ERR from Estonia, CT from Czech Republic and YLE from Finland, use their account occasionally.

In relation to their contents, the majority of companies utilize Facebook for posting news and promoting their own contents. Nevertheless, there are exceptions: Finland and France use the network for corporate information. In relation to the information flow, PBS from Malta is noteworthy as the one with most daily publications among all, counting twenty, followed by RAI from Italy, with eighteen, RTVE with sixteen and Croatia with fifteen.

*Image 3 - Twitter Usage*

All twenty-eight corporations analyzed are registered on Twitter social network, even though Belgian VRT’s profile is not in use and PBS from Malta owns only one account about sports. The average number of followers is 381,734 users, an inflated quantity on account of the United Kingdom’s BBC that counts on almost eight million followers. ZDF from Germany and RTVE from Spain surpass the average, whilst Greece, Cyprus and Hungary do not reach a thousand followers.

The same happens on Facebook, the accounts’ main thematic are current affairs, even though Finnish and French corporations are distinct in dedicating their profiles to corporate information. It is also noteworthy Romanian TVR’s case, in which much of the published content brings information attached to corporate videos on its YouTube account.

### 2.2 Editorial guidelines as style manuals

The uncertainty generated by facing the unknown has not proved to be sufficient for making all the public broadcasting corporations in European Union to adopt directives in order to establish operational strategies within social networks’ ambit.

Among the twenty-eight broadcasters analyzed, only eight count on editorial guidelines as style manuals.

*Image 4 - Social media regulation in public broadcasters from the EU*
Less than fifty percent of corporations have concerned in getting any editorial support whereupon establish their operations from the perspective of content and writing, interaction and feeding mechanisms for the informational flow. The guidelines are essential to face new communication models. We present below a decalogue with minimum premises that any means of communication should comply with, on its editorial guideline concerning social networks.

*Image 5 - Decalogue for Editorial Guidelines concerning social networks*

### 2.2.1 Editorial Guidelines of public broadcasters in the European Union

Based on the proposed Decalogue for Editorial Guidelines concerning social networks, we analyzed the guidelines of the eight public broadcasting corporations from the European Union that count on regulatory documents for such communication model: ORF from Austria, VRT from Belgium, YLE from Finland, FT from France, RTÉ from Ireland, BBC from the United Kingdom and TVR from Romania.

*Image 6 - Social Media Editorial Guidelines' Contents*

The *Social Media Guidelines* of the Austrian public broadcaster (ORF) consists of ten points presenting many other recommendations directed to the corporation’s journalists, essentially in regard to social media personal use. In this sense, it advert that their personal accounts have double perspective: one personal and one of the ORF’s employee.

Notwithstanding the recommendation of avoiding subjective opinions and values around newsworthy issues, it insists that it is preferable to manage a single account than two, one personal and one professional.

Among the recommendations, we highlight: avoiding personal pictures, insulting or defamatory declarations and topics related to sexual preferences; not using informations that may impair the company’s credibility in regard to political and economical issues; guaranteeing proportionality and plurality of followers and friends, such as distinct political parties, different economic trends, etc.; not emphasizing events that may reverberate in future; shunning from any sort of commentary that a journalist would never dare to make at a round table; taking care of privacy setting; publishing and responding politely; and not infringing copyrights.
Attempting to count on a social network editorial guideline, VRT from Belgium has been content in publishing a Decalogue of short premises as advices for journalists. Nevertheless it is not a document that elucidates the strategies to be developed on matters such as interaction, crisis communication, parlance or publicity.

The Decalogue’s ten points are: 1) what is said in an individual perspective will be associated to VRT; 2) do not discuss on political preferences or aversions; 3) balance groups, likes and retweets; 4) only retweet from trustworthy sources whose authorship is confirmed for avoiding to give rumors any credibility; 5) do not publish corporate confidential information; 6) use social media for calling witnesses of events; 7) verify the veracity of the information transmitted in social networks; 8) avoid impairing and offenses; 9) avoid endless discussions; 10) do not use Facebook or any other website pictures without permission.

The Finnish YLE’s Activities Guidelines of Social Networks is the most complete editorial guideline among the analyzed, following BBC and RTÉ. Firstly, it presents as objectives: modernizing action on social networks, developing new goals, ensuring that the activities do not impair corporate reliability and independence, improving effectiveness and aligning to partners. It also specifies that they intend to use social network as a journalistic tool to access audiences difficult to reach through traditional channels. Yet social networks’ characteristics in relation to corporate market are not inconsiderate.

As for the integrity and independence, it encourages professionals to take care of the corporation’s values, distinguishing information from publicity and strengthening YLE’s image based on common objectives and measures. The guideline also adverts employees on the necessity of delimiting personal and private dimensions in order to avoid misconceptions between subjective opinions and values and facts.

From the operational perspective, the guideline encourages networks to produce their own versions of contents aiming at incrementing their scope and acknowledges the necessity of interaction. Each decision shall be supervised by a sectorial command, which corresponds to the major responsible for every decision making in social networks.

FT from France counts on a Best Practices Guideline for Social Media, consisting of thirteen points centered in the personal use of the accounts, parlance and juridical issues. The first premise requires the compliance of law, essentially in regard to abusive, defamatory and racist comments. For that a controlled, transparent, polite and responsible performance is
prompted, in addition to absolute respect to the Charter of Antennas, the corporation setting point command.

Published content in social network are never discharged, that is the reason why it is demanded precaution on informing and protection on privacy. Through the same perspective, it encourages the observation of associations between individuals and corporate identity and consequently requests that in case of personal identification as an FT employee, the person must guarantee that both the profile and its contents are consistent and coherent.

As for the parlance, it proposes a good use of words and requests the avoidance of every comment a journalist would never dare to assume whilst on air. Finally it appeals to the preservation of corporate privileged and confidential information as well as to systematically mention contents’ sources in order to ensure copyright compliance.

In its dossier Today, tomorrow, together, RTÉ presents its policies on social media in regard to its staff. The guideline’s 26 pages, divided in three sections, introduction and appendices, convert it in one of the most complete among the member countries. It draws the attention for its visual appeal and the ordination of contents. After the index, the corporation dedicates an entire page to summarize graphically the dossier’s essence: “Think before tweeting, think before posting, think before updating”. More than explaining almost the entire Decalogue proposed in this study, the corporation establishes an account classification: (1) of official services; (2) of official programming; (3) of hybrid use; (4) private. As for the use of social media it proposes moderation strategies depending on the commitment level that each account/employee establishes with the network. It is also important its definition of every parameter discussed by the dossier, so that employees owning accounts in (any) social network(s) will not make mistakes. In appendices 1 and 2 are attached the pair of prints that every user of RTÉ’s official services or programs must consider before opening an account in any social network. The only topic that has not been discussed by the guideline is parlance and the use of emoticons.

In the same sense of RTÉ from Ireland, there is BBC presenting the Social Media Guidance, a complete online dossier about the use and management of social media. The difference from the previous one is that they comply with the formerly proposed Decalogue. The guideline advices to firstly discuss with the editor on how networks will be used before opening any social network account. It emphasizes, among others, the paragraph dedicated to personal
use of social networks and third party websites, modes of interacting in each network and the level of commitment, which will always depend on what the account owner decides. The connection to the group’s corporate page is not necessary at the beginning, unless its logo appears on the profile’s images. As for friendships, “Likes” or retweets, it recommends prevention and, in case of doubt, that the editor of web contents must be consulted.

Romanian TVR has no dossier itself, yet establishes in its webpage, in the paragraph *Reglementari privind blogurile*, 11 principles and obligations in regard to the use of social networks by its employees. They are generic obligations, in the same perspective of Austrian ORF, with no emphasis in any aspects of the presented Decalogue. Indeed, they only partially point the objectives of their presence in social networks, the level of commitment, the personal use and some juridical matter. It does not go deep in any aspect and when it comes to speak about the conduct in social network, it encourages people to behave properly, not giving any specification on what is taken by “properly” or either how to react before certain comments and what posts should or should not include, etc.

3. Conclusions

Social networks have been converted into a key aspect to communication field, as we pointed at the beginning of this article, therefore it is necessary to establish operational settings and editorial policies that enable employees and official account managers to operate according to a set of prefixed norms, considering stylistic, interactive and multimedia freedom characteristic of the new digital mediatic scenario.

Among 28 analyzed countries, all of the broadcasters prove to be present in social networks, yet only eight of them count on a guideline to the use and management of autocommunication media or on a decalogue of principles to manage their accounts. It means that not even thirty percent of public state broadcasters from the European Union have considered important to provide themselves regulations on how to proceed in social networks, destined to be spaces for ensuring democracy and pluralism, wherein receptors acquire for the first time an active role for interacting directly with the company.

The second half of 21st century is witnessing the redefinition of the relations between democracy and communication and the path towards the creation of civic cyber democratic and counterpower networks. All of this, under a context of crescent demand for transparency, which
broadcasting corporations have not succeeded in effectively assimilate yet. They participate on social networks, yet they are not capable of defining the objectives of their presence, the strategies of their operation and the results of their actions. It gives the impression that their profiles exist because somehow society has forced them to make it, but they seem to not understand wherefore. The accountability and the direct relationship with audiences will be a pair of key issues for communication in the next years.

The differences between the countries counting on guidelines are evident both in regard to quantitative and qualitative effects: while BBC, LE or RTÉ present solid, clear and useful norms, ORF or TVR are limited to publish a list of diffuse norms and directives with no use to practical effects. Nevertheless, it is evident that those eight corporations are concerned with the fact that a clear differentiation should appear between personal/private accounts and public/corporate accounts, and that in case of any doubts or before opening an account, the orientation is to consult the correspondent editor.

There is a lot of work to be done, specially to those twenty other corporations that have not even said a word in regard to social networks. It is a latent reality from which public broadcasters may not shun, as if they could ever do it. It is necessary, if not primordial, to establish policies for the use and management of social networks and the presence on web, so that crisis situations can be managed, employees can easily access an useful manual to manage their accounts and people can work supported by a transparent management of such public service. We shall not forget that transparency also performs an important role in such sense.

In 2012, the European Broadcasting Union presented the dossier Social Media at the heart of news, in which the necessity of developing social media strategies was already clearly present. It encouraged the corporation to ask themselves: have you started a solid strategy to the use of social media in your channel/company? What is the evaluation of the success acquired since the implementation? What are your future challenges and what have you learned so far? Almost three years after, questions have multiplied and answers are few and diffuse.

Some European public broadcasters have understood that transparency and the active participation of the audiences enabled by social networks for assuring public service shall count on tools and controlling means, that is, on norms that operate on several ambits of regulation, co-regulation and auto-regulation. Undoubtedly it seems to be a forced decision, a step given on
behalf of society’s pressure. Without such civic demand, steps would be slower as corporations are beginners on direct dialogue and on accountability.

3. Note

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