

**2020 Conference of the International Association of Public Media Researchers / RIPE@2020
October 28-30, 2020, in Geneva (Switzerland)**

Call for Paper Proposals

“Public Service Media’s Contribution to Society”

2020 is an exciting year for public media research: The RIPE initiative is transforming into the International Association of Public Media Researchers and the tenth biennial conference jointly organized by the University of Fribourg’s Department of Communication and Media Research (DCM) and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) will take place on the premises of EBU’s Geneva headquarters. The conference will offer an opportunity for celebrating RIPE’s legacy and the 70th anniversary of the EBU.

Conference Theme

Public Service Media (PSM) organizations across Europe and beyond are increasingly under pressure. Due to digitization, media use is changing rapidly, with streaming services and online platforms gaining in importance and making it harder for legacy media to hold their ground. This affects both public and private media. With users and advertising shifting to search engines and social networks, the business model of newspaper publishers is also under pressure, which, in turn, leads to disagreement about PSM’s online activities. In addition, many policy-makers are highly critical of PSM due to a belief in the efficiency of market solutions or – especially in the case of right-wing populist parties – for political reasons. As a result, both PSM’s role in a digital environment and its funding are under scrutiny. PSM seem to be constantly in the position of having to defend themselves. Following attempts at demonstrating the “public value” of PSM, the discussion is now turning towards the concept of PSM’s “contribution to society”. Communication and media scholars need to critically discuss the analytical value and the usefulness of new concepts that are circulated in industry and policy-making. The 2020 conference of the International Association of Public Media Researchers / RIPE@2020 thus focuses on the concept of contribution to society.

Presumably, it is uncontroversial to claim that PSM need to make a particular contribution to society in order to have a continuous reason to exist in media landscapes characterized by competition and abundance. And it should also be self-evident that PSM’s contribution should be distinct and distinctive from what private media and online platforms (e.g. social media) offer. However, beyond these general statements the concept of contribution to society raises the important question of which contributions to which society. After all, society is changing. Research has focused on a number of trends like transnationalization, neo-liberalization, digitization or individualization that deeply affect modern societies. Audiences in different media systems are not only confronted with more media products than ever before and can become involved in production themselves but are also less homogenous or monolithic than they were in the past. These trends thus radically alter the relationship between professional media organizations and citizens. Moreover, they challenge the notion of an all-encompassing public sphere, nurturing new ideas like, for instance, of a network of public spaces.

Consequently, it is necessary to rethink the role of media organizations in general and PSM in particular in a more fragmented society. On the one hand, this involves refining the societal contribution of public service. Starting from the notion that PSM should, as McQuail (2010, p. 178) put it, “serve the public interest by meeting the important communication needs of society and its citizens”, these needs (e.g., contribution to democratic governance and culture, production of information and knowledge, cohesion and integration, or progress) and the ways PSM can address these needs in

unique ways other media cannot have to be identified. On the other hand, it is also necessary to modernize the ways in which PSM provide their contribution to society. Beyond producing content for all kinds of distribution channels, platforms and usage scenarios (ranging from the living room to mobile consumption), PSM have the chance to involve citizens in production and to evolve the ways in which their content reaches audiences (e.g., personalization based on algorithms). Moreover, it is necessary to discuss how the contribution of PSM to society can be measured.

In order to be meaningful for society and to have an effect on PSM organizations, “contribution to society” needs to be more than just an instrument of legitimacy management by organizations under pressure. While communicating the many valuable contributions of PSM is important, the task at hand is not solving a communication problem. The concept is useless if it is limited to the question of how to better sell the contribution of PSM to citizens instead of guaranteeing that PSM actually serves the public interest and makes a contribution worth paying for and talking about. Seen in this light, critically analyzing the concept of “contribution to society” is not only a worthwhile task for communication and media scholars but also a meaningful undertaking for the future of PSM.

Topics of Working Groups

Scholars from various research fields of media and communication as well as from neighboring disciplines are invited to submit abstracts for both conceptual and empirical contributions addressing one or more of the following topics. The topics will comprise the working group structure for this conference.

(1) Communication Needs of Changing Societies

Starting from the idea that PSM should meet the communication needs of society and its citizens, societal change raises the question of which contributions are necessary today in order to meet these needs. Societies are more diverse than in the past; many democracies witness the ascent of populist parties and illiberal leaders; the amount of media content available to citizens is bigger than ever; the commercialization and concentration of media is uninhibited; platforms and streaming services gain in importance with respect to media use. In light of these changes, it is necessary to rethink the contribution of PSM. What role can PSM play in restoring the trustworthiness of media and institutions? How can PSM mediate between societal groups and integrate societies that are drifting apart? How do PSM contribute to political participation, culture life, and the realization of individuals’ full potential? And how can we measure the impact of PSM and its contribution to society? We invite paper proposals that deal with the contribution of PSM in changing societies, how this contribution needs to adapt, and how it differs from the performance of commercial media.

(2) New Forms of Contribution and Distinctiveness

In order to be able to make a contribution to society and generate positive externalities, the content produced by PSM need to reach citizens in the first place. In today’s media landscapes characterized by a plethora of broadcasting channels and online services this is not necessarily the case anymore. Hence, producing content for linear channels and offering these broadcasts on demand is not sufficient. Many PSM invest in web-only content that they also make available via third-party platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram or TikTok. And gradually, there is an understanding that “the” internet is not simply an additional distribution channel but allows for a personalization of content using algorithms. However, private media show little enthusiasm for these new forms of content provision by PSM and worry about market distortion. Which possibilities exist for PSM to reach audiences in a digital environment? What could a public service algorithm look like? And how should public and private media co-exist and/or collaborate in the online world? We invite paper proposals that deal with new forms of contribution, the distinctiveness of PSM, its relationship to and possibilities for

collaboration with private media and platforms, and the shift from broadcasting to a personalized streaming service.

(3) Involving Citizens, Building Communities

Digitization fundamentally alters the relationship between media organizations and citizens. This change poses a huge challenge for all media organizations. Whereas in the past audiences only mattered when measuring media use, now there is a need to adjust media production: journalism needs to become more dialogic in nature as instant feedback and criticism is now possible; and users can contribute to reporting in various ways, e.g. as informants or via crowdsourcing. Yet beyond media production, the changed relationship to their audience also offers an opportunity for PSM to really become a media organization of the people, by the people and for the people. What possibilities are there to involve citizens in decision-making within PSM or to engage in dialogue that informs decision-making? How can PSM build a community among their users that also strengthens their legitimacy? And how does PSM matter in individuals' lives in ways that metrics of audience research cannot capture? We invite paper proposals that deal with the importance of audiences for PSM, the involvement of citizens within PSM, and ways to reinvigorate the rooting of PSM in society.

(4) Governance, Communication and Legitimacy Management

Recent reforms of media policy have also led to stricter regulation of PSM. On the one hand, in many countries the remit of PSM – especially with respect to online activities – has been defined more firmly and new services require public value tests. On the other hand, while still having better conditions than private media struck by crisis, PSM are expected to be more efficient or confronted with considerable budget cuts. Like other media organizations PSM respond to regulatory pressure and try to influence policy-making in their own interest. Concepts like “contribution to society” thus also can be seen as a strategic instrument of legitimacy management to deal with expectations of stakeholders. Is the concept of contribution an empty PR tool or is it inducing real change within PSM organizations? How does the interplay between policy-makers and PSM work in practice? And what role can communication scholars play in critically accompanying the change of media policy, PSM organizations and their contribution to society? We invite paper proposals that scrutinize the concept of contribution, focus on the politics of media policy, and the role of communication in the governance of PSM.

Submission Requirements

Paper proposals may be submitted via “Easy Chair” at <https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=ripe2020> (starting in September 2019). To do so, you need an “Easy Chair” login. If you do not have one yet, you can create one.

Please enter the following information into the online submission form:

- the name(s), e-mail-address(es), location(s) and organization(s) of the author(s);
- the paper's working title;
- an extended abstract (max. 750 words) explaining the main messages of the paper and how it contributes to the conference theme;
- 3-5 keywords;
- the two working group topics the paper is most closely related to.

Additionally, the abstract needs to be uploaded as a Microsoft Word file. Please make sure that your Word file is anonymized and does not contain any indication of the author(s) either in the text or in meta data.

All submissions will be peer-reviewed (double-blind) by a scientific committee. The evaluation criteria are:

1. Relevance to the conference theme and fit with one of the working group topics.
2. Conceptual and analytic quality as well as theoretical foundation.
3. Clarification of methodology if the paper will report on empirical research.
4. Relevance to PSM management and practice.
5. Generalizability of insights and findings.

Empirical research is highly valued, but we also welcome insightful philosophical, critical and theory-driven papers.

RIPE conferences focus on substance, dialogue and results. We therefore limit acceptance to about 60 papers. Each paper is assigned to a working group. At best we assign 9-12 papers to each group so that every paper has sufficient time for presentation and, most importantly, discussion.

Submissions are due **February 29, 2020**.

Decisions on acceptance will be announced on April 15, 2020.

Full papers need to be submitted by September 1, 2020 via "Easy Chair" at <https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=ripe2020>.

The conference takes place over two and a half days, starting late on a Wednesday morning and ending on Friday around noon. The conference language is English.

The International Association of Public Media Researchers plans to publish a selection of the papers in a peer-reviewed book handled by NORDICOM publishers.

More information about the International Association of Public Media Researchers:

www.publicmediaresearchers.org