


## DIGITISATION MEANS MARGINALISATION OF PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA? CHANGES IN THE FUNCTIONING OF THE BBC

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyse the formal, legal and structural-organisational changes concerning the British public service media, introduced in the light of technological developments, primarily related to the process of digitisation, resulting in the spread of online media, which translates into the gradual marginalisation of the so-called traditional media, including the socially important public service media. The main thesis is based on the assertion that public service media, using the example of the BBC in question, are subjected to increasing pressure from those in power, who see in the process of digitisation the rationale for limiting the activity of publicly funded public media. The choice of the British broadcaster as the subject of the study is dictated by the fact that for years the BBC and the British regulations concerning PSM were considered exemplary and often constituted a point of reference for actions taken by broadcasters and governments in other countries. In order to test the validity of the thesis, an analysis was carried out on the regulatory, structural, organisational and managerial solutions introduced in recent decades in the UK's PSM, which entail changes in the services offered, taking into account their circumstances. The article provides an understanding, based on the example analysed, of what pressures the public media are currently under, what actions they have to take to convince the public and, above all, politicians and those in power of the legitimacy of their functioning. Above all, the article provides knowledge of the interplay between the activities and offer of PSM and the position of political elites, who often influence the shape and offer of media for their own interests, using technological or financial arguments.

**Keywords:** digitisation, public service media, BBC, governance, organisational structure, offer, public mission

## *Introduction*

The future of European public service media has been in question for nearly three decades. The liberalisation of regulatory policy in the media sector, which began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, not only contributed to the pluralisation of media markets and the dismantling of the state monopoly in broadcasting, but also strengthened positions questioning the legitimacy of public funding for public media when some of the tasks and functions they had hitherto performed began to be carried out by commercial media as well (Coppens 2002, p. 15). In addition, technological advances, through the advent of first satellite television, then the convergence and digitisation of the media, the popularisation of mobile and online media services, have helped to strengthen the argument for the marginalisation or even abolition of PSM (Psychogiopoulou, Anagnostou 2012, p. 1). The new era of communicative abundance enriches the media environment, but it also brings serious, often negative consequences, posing a serious threat, not only to the public service media, but also to the other participants in the media market and, importantly, to their audience – citizens and society (Konarska 2021, p. 169 et seq.).

Firstly, the changes described have contributed to multidimensional competition, entailing the fragmentation of audiences, which, in turn, necessitates the constant search for ever-newer forms, genres, and channels for the distribution of messages. Of course, this can and does have a positive dimension in terms of innovation of activities and stimulation of competitive processes, but at the same time it means an increase in the cost intensity of the actors' activities, and this can and does lead to an increase in the concentration of capital in the media services markets, thus threatening pluralism in the broad sense.

Secondly, the transformation of communication systems may result in the erosion of citizens' fundamental human and communicative rights, i.e. the right to information, the right to know, the right to deliberate, and the right to representation and participation (Murdock 2005, pp. 216, 227). Although the pluralisation of media services promotes the development of the public sphere, at the same time it leads to information overload, information chaos and often to misinformation. In addition, access to messages through paid subscription and registration systems, enforced through the oligopolistic positions of media operators, is gradually being restricted.

Finally, technological changes resulting in shifts in media markets and audience culture are also leading to a gradual degradation of PSM, which, with all the baggage of their social obligations, are losing their competitive capacity. Their situation is deteriorating primarily due to underfunding of their operations, limited possibilities to raise public funds for the implementation of social programming, combined with the challenges of the digitisation and convergence process. Increasingly, those in power and politicians, with their changing approach to the role and function of public service media in this highly competitive environment, are also an obstacle.

Therefore, the question that arises when considering the future of PSM is whether there is still a place for these entities in today's digital media environment? And also additional questions about how these media are coping in a digitised environment?

Is digitisation an opportunity or a threat for them? In light of the increasing popularity of social media, online platforms offering wide access to information, education, and entertainment, can PSM defend the legitimacy of their existence? In an age of communicative abundance, can and do they have the right to expect public funding?

It is, of course, difficult to answer all these questions in a simple way, especially as the dynamics of change in the digital age are immense; it is enough to mention artificial intelligence and the recent introduction of the ChatGPT application into widespread use for all these questions to remain rhetorical. Nevertheless, given the social importance of PSM, their role in creating the public sphere, essential for democratic systems, it seems necessary to at least outline some vision of the future of these institutions. At this point, it is worth looking at the entities that were the first to start adapting to technological changes, introducing the latest solutions to their offer, often not only competing with commercial rivals, but often imposing certain trends and solutions on other market participants.

A good example illustrating the described situation seems to be the British public service media, which have been repeatedly referred to as ‘exemplary’, as an example of a missionary broadcaster, organised in accordance with the idea of a public utility institution, operating on the basis of solutions enabling and guaranteeing the fulfilment of designated public tasks and functions. An argument in favour of the choice of the British Broadcasting Corporation as the subject of this analysis is the fact that practically from the time of its establishment, the future of this institution, both at the level of programme offer and formal and structural organisation, was determined by regularly appointed special committees, whose task was to assess the situation and develop recommendations to improve the state of the audiovisual media in the UK (Adamowski 2006, p. 195). Also in recent decades, the time of the technological revolution, the fate of the institution has been bent. In the run-up to renewal of the latest Royal Charter (DCMS 2016), under which the BBC operates, not only were there voices doubting the wisdom of maintaining the broadcaster with public money (as these had resounded well before), but for the first time people began to question whether the institution had a *raison d’être* at all in a situation where all previous arguments in its favour had been exhausted (Burri 2020, p. 65). More significantly, these voices were also followed by decisions which were not as radical in their solutions as the positions of various politicians appearing in the public discussion, but serious enough to make one wonder whether the future of the public broadcaster is by any chance at stake.

### *Research methodology and assumptions*

The aim of this article is to analyse the formal-legal and structural-organisational changes concerning the British public service broadcaster, introduced in the light of the technological developments just now, linked above all to the process of digitisation, the consequence of which is the spread of online media, which translates

into the gradual marginalisation of the so-called traditional media, including the socially important public service media.

The main hypothesis is based on the statement that the public service media, using the example of the BBC in question, will be subjected to increasing pressure from those in power, who see the digitisation process as a rationale for reducing the activities of the publicly funded PSM. This assumption is accompanied by side hypotheses, based on statements:

H1: The process of digitisation is fostering the development of online media to meet societal needs for information, education, entertainment, thereby leading to a decline in the importance of legacy traditional media entities such as television, radio and newspapers;

H2: The online media environment dominates the digital space and limits the opportunities for PSM, and the popularisation and spread of digital media services also has the effect of limiting or even marginalising them;

H3: The wide range of digital media services contributes to undermining the fundamental premises in favour of PSM, such as general accessibility, diversity, universality, etc. and consequently public funding for their activities;

H4: Changes in the regulatory regime of the UK public service media are dictated by, among other things, the development of digital technologies, thereby changing the attitude of those in power towards the social role and function of PSM;

H5: Changes in the organisational structure as well as in the management system of the BBC are justified by the development of digital technologies, but political and financial factors are equally influential;

H6: Under the influence of the digitisation process, and the regulatory, structural and managerial changes to the BBC that it has brought about, among other things, a gradual marginalisation of the public broadcaster is taking place.

In order to test the validity of the thesis, an analysis will be carried out of the regulatory, structural, organisational and managerial solutions introduced, in recent decades, in the UK public media system, which entail changes in the services offered. It will also be necessary to look at the circumstances, i.e. not only the changing technological environment, but also the social, economic and, above all, political transformations, in order to examine the causes of these changes, to identify their origins. The point of reference will also be the public values expressed in the form of the public service remit, the tasks performed and attributed to the BBC as a public service broadcaster.

### *The three waves of digitisation of the BBC: The technological context of the changes in the services offered*

The structural changes to the BBC's system of organisation and management can be traced back to a number of factors, and their origins can be traced back in principle to the broadcaster's early years. The first instance was when it was established by Royal Charter in 1927 as a public corporation, and then when successively

appointed special government committees and commissions resolved in the 1950s and 1960s, in the face of improvements in the technical aspects of the transmission and reception of radio and television signals, the questions of the legitimacy of maintaining the institution's monopoly. This was followed by the terms of organisation and control and the principles of funding the activity or, finally, when the very idea of public service and the appropriateness of treating the BBC as a paternalistic tool of the elite, shaping the attitudes and behaviour of the British public, were debated (Booth 2020, pp. 324–327). However, there has been an intensification of activity in this area with the development of digital technologies and the necessity, triggered by them, to introduce new legal frameworks to regulate the functioning of all media market players.

In this context, during the first period, which dates back to the late 1980s and the 1990s, the BBC was assigned a leading role in the digital conversion process (Klontzas 2006). The broadcaster launched some of the first digital television and radio (DAB) programmes in the UK, including the free-to-air terrestrial platform *Freeview* (Sarikakis 2004, pp. 40–41), which government and parliamentary bodies tended to view positively, although it was seen as a complementary task for the broadcaster, as a supporting offering to the main terrestrial services (McKinsey & Company 1999, pp. 5, 36–37). The idea of extending the broadcaster's services to include an online offering was approached more cautiously by those in power. John Birt, Director-General of the BBC (1992–2000), in order to be able to develop an online offer had to reform internally the production funding system, allowing significant resources to be set aside for these services (Bazalgette 2002). It was not until 1999 that a ministerial report, chaired by Gavyn Davies, on the future funding of the BBC, reaffirmed the rationale for developing online services and expressed the need for further convergence of broadcasting, television and internet services (DCMS 1999, pp. 41, 65). Thanks to Birt's forward thinking, the 1997 launch of the website [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) is now the most visited online news service in the world.<sup>1</sup>

The BBC's second wave of digitisation was linked to the development of fibre optic technology, the spread of mobile telephony and the widespread process of digital convergence. During this time, the future of the broadcaster was outlined in the Royal Charter granted in 2006 and the vision set out by the BBC's next Director, Mark Thompson, for an institution that was no longer to be associated as a broadcasting service, but as a public service medium operating in a multi-channel environment. The BBC's activities were to be reconceptualised so that the services provided were dynamic, personalised and open to audiences (Thompson 2006). Initially, the new public service concept had a primarily technical dimension. Over the following years, new online services were launched, including the *BBC iPlayer*,

<sup>1</sup> In September 2023, the BBC website ([bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) & [bbc.com](http://bbc.com)) was visited more than 1.1 billion times. See: A. Majid. Top 50 biggest news websites in the world: September slump for ten biggest names. *Press Gazette*, 13.10.2023 [[https://pressgazette.co.uk/media-audience-and-business-data/media\\_metrics/most-popular-websites-news-world-monthly-2/](https://pressgazette.co.uk/media-audience-and-business-data/media_metrics/most-popular-websites-news-world-monthly-2/); 30.10.2023].

a platform for providing video on demand (VoD), and the *Embedded Media Player* (EMP), a programme for better and faster reception of audio and video files. The solutions being introduced were seen as a real response to the individual needs of audiences, thus better fulfilling the broader public service remit. Thanks to the new services, subscribers were to have better access to offerings, including niche offerings (Thorsen 2012, p. 29). By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, multichannel, wide availability of the offer, interactivity and personalisation of the message – and thus, mainly technical aspects of the public service mission – had become the norm (Klontzas 2013). There was a need to *re-root the* public service media in the life of society, in addition to fulfilling core tasks such as educating, informing and entertaining, also *supporting civil society* by fostering democratic attitudes among the British people (BBC 2008). Acting for citizens and democracy was to become the overarching aim and objective of the BBC for the years to come. As a result, on 2 November 2009, the BBC launched the *Democracy Live* service on its portal, a platform dedicated to the institutions of public and political life, followed by the *Election 2010 service*, providing information and knowledge about parliamentary elections and, finally, the *Live Page service*, providing a common platform for the broadcaster's various channels, including the BBC's social media. These moves were also in response to growing allegations from competitors, and their political advocates, that *BBC Online's* offerings and services were distorting natural competition in the market. Indeed, the broadcaster was alleged to be exploiting its historically privileged position and wealth of production resources, thereby preventing others from being able to expand (Cave et al. 2004, p. 263). In the end, the view prevailed that internet broadcasting and digital technology were merely new ways of transmitting content, which the BBC could use just like other players in the market (DCMS 2006, p. 22; Booth 2020).

The next phase of the digitalisation of the BBC's services comes in the second decade of the 21st century and is linked to the increasing importance, and therefore intensifying competition in media markets, of new global players, online platforms and VoD services such as *Netflix*, *Amazon Prime Video*, *Disney+*, *SkyShowtime*, etc. While the Royal Charter, adopted in 2016, noted that the BBC's mission is "to act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain" (DCMS 2016), the specific objectives for the broadcaster have clearly changed in its accompanying documents. What has been particularly pointed out is that the provisions on the necessity of distinctiveness of the broadcaster from other providers in any possible service run the risk of this argument being used as a kind of weapon against the broadcaster, when assessing its performance (Goddard 2017, p. 1089). Chivers and Allan (2022, p. 7) assess that the notion of public value has been cloaked in the category of minimising the BBC's impact on the market, and this, despite the lack of evidence that the public broadcaster is realistically 'crowding out' competitors.

During this period, the broadcaster's programming activity was no longer assessed on the basis of qualitative criteria alone, but also on quantitative criteria, which were

intended to demonstrate the maintenance of an appropriate relationship between the value of the services realised and the costs incurred, the reach achieved and the market share. In addition, the public value tests were complemented by an assessment of the impact of the BBC's offer on other market players, which was carried out by the external regulator Office of Communication (Ofcom), whose main objective is to maintain the competitive capacity of the UK media sector. In this way, the BBC and its services, hitherto defined primarily by normative considerations, became part of a complex market practice, guided primarily by economic logic (Freedman 2008, p. 157). As a result, not all of the broadcaster's proposed new services were likely to see the light of day. In 2009, for example, the BBC Trust (BBC Trust 2009, p. 8) rejected plans to create a *Local Video* service providing local news, believing that such a service would negatively impact the market for regional news publishers. Chivers and Allan (p. 5) argue that the BBC Trust was even sensitive to potential criticism, so that proposed new services and programme offerings were primarily considered from the perspective of impact on the commercial media sector, or individual audience benefits. For this reason, among others, it was decided at the time to close the *BBC Three* youth television programme and 'reinvent' it exclusively in the online space, saving nearly £30 million a year in the process (PS 2015).

### *The digital Trojan horse – changes in the functioning of the BBC*

The anxiety about the future of the British broadcaster, in an increasingly pluralistic digital environment, is exacerbated not so much by the technological changes themselves, but by the accompanying public debate and the increasing number of voices predicting, if not the end of the public service media, then its marginalisation. In the last decade, radical positions, no longer represented only by conservative politicians, but also by representatives of other parties, as well as representatives of the ruling elite, have strengthened their position in this discussion, resulting in changes in the organisational and supervisory and control spheres of the BBC, as well as in issues of financing its activities (Konarska 2022).

In response to this new, increasingly unfavourable approach to the broadcaster, in 2015 the BBC prepared a document entitled "British Bold Creative" (BBC 2015), which argued the need for the institution's presence in a multichannel media environment on economic factors (D'Arma 2018, p. 217), which in turn were the main counter-argument put forward by the BBC's political opponents, including the then UK Prime Minister James Cameron (Barr 2016, p. 54). The BBC Charter Review, a periodic review of the broadcaster's activities published in the same year, encouraged a wide-ranging discussion of the future of the public broadcaster, which some took as an incentive to articulate arguments for the gradual marginalisation or even abolition of the institution, by convincing the public that public funding for the BBC should only cover areas where the market was failing (Starks 2015; Lewis 2015).

"British Bold Creative" appeared as a kind of response to the changing climate on the British political scene, partly a result of the still global financial crisis of 2008, which



enabled the Conservative Party to return to power. One of the first announcements of the changing attitude of the political elite towards the public service role of broadcasting, while at the same time calling into question the current funding system, was the report of the UK House of Lords Select Committee on Communications published in 2009.<sup>2</sup> According to Philip Booth (2020, p. 329), the ideas contained in the document not only heralded the strengthening of a market-oriented media policy, but partly agreed with the provisions of the 1986 Peacock Committee, which advocated a gradual evolution of the BBC's funding system towards a subscription model. The report's proposals were not introduced into current policy, but issues of public funding of the broadcaster's services returned to public debate and became a regular feature of it. Soon after the report was published, too, the licence fee was severely cut, forcing the BBC to make savings and seek compensation in commercial revenues (D'Arma 2018, p. 209). Also, within the first weeks of winning the general election in May 2015, the new Conservative government subjected the BBC to a rather harsh assessment from the licence fee settlement, resulting in BBC losing a tenth of its budget. Financial pressures became the primary determinant of the content of "British Bold Creative", and the category of 'distinctiveness' the basis of the government's BBC Charter Review published in July 2015, which launched the BBC Royal Charter review process (Goddard 2017, p. 1089 et seq.).

As a result of the changing overall climate around the broadcaster, a number of fundamental changes were introduced in 2017 with the renewal of the Royal Charter for the BBC, covering organisational, structural, and financial issues. For the first time in the public broadcaster's history, the dual supervisory and governance structure was abolished, abolishing the BBC Trust, which had been in place for the past decade (which in turn took over from the Board of Governors) and transferring its powers to the media regulator. Ofcom (2017, p. 8) which was originally intended to be responsible only for the commercial sector, was given new powers to oversee the BBC, including: dealing with complaints about content standards; assessing the broadcaster's performance against its assigned mission and public purposes; and evaluating the impact of the BBC's position and activities on other media players.

The changes caused quite a public uproar. First and foremost because the system adopted for evaluating the BBC's programme offerings was based on the 'principle of distinctiveness', i.e. differentiation from those of its competitors, which meant a *de facto* end to the corporation's programme self-regulation. In addition, questions

<sup>2</sup> Earlier, in 2001, Gordon Brown's (Labour) government adopted an exemption from the licence fee for those households in which at least one person was over 75 years of age, causing huge financial hardship for the broadcaster, especially as the changes did not provide for compensation for losses incurred. However, the changes were seen as not so much targeting the broadcaster itself, but rather as fulfilling social obligations to society. More widely: P. Barwise. Why a smaller BBC will be bad for almost everyone. *LSE Media Policy Project*, 30.09.2015 [<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/medialse/2015/09/30/why-a-smaller-bbc-will-be-bad-for-almost-everyone/>; 1.08.2022].



were raised about the way and criteria for assessing the effectiveness of programme activity, which the regulator was to take over.

Another significant change was the transfer of permanent control of the BBC's finances to the National Audit Office (NAO), which in turn raised concerns about possible correlations between the broadcaster's financial efficiency and the assessment of its programming performance. According to the National Union of Journalists (2017), this arrangement could even have disastrous consequences for programme and content plurality in the future, especially as the economic health of the broadcaster requires long-term savings and a restructuring programme. The NUJ's concerns were borne out in the published, first NAO documents, which not only referred to the need for financial cuts and the search for savings, but more importantly, the data was benchmarked against the BBC's commercial competitors. In this way, the public service activities of the broadcaster were indeed embedded in the market reality (Sherwin 2018; Tobitt 2018).

Finally, doubts have been raised in the public debate about the BBC's political independence itself. Experts from the Media Pluralism Monitor team, although generally assessing the degree of independence of the broadcaster as satisfactory (low risk), at the same time draw attention to issues of possible threats to the independence of the governing bodies (Craufurd Smith, Cavaliere 2018, p. 9; Picard, Dzakula 2018). Indeed, the new regulations allow the Secretary of State to nominate the chairman of the institution's board (BBC Board). As Jelena Dzakula (2017) points out, these concerns were not unfounded, for with the implementation of the Royal Charter, Theresa May, the then UK Prime Minister, immediately announced the nomination of her own candidate as chair of the BBC Board. Des Freedman (2019, p. 209) additionally points out that Sir David Clementi was given the job after the government invited him to contribute to the development of a new regulatory framework changing the rules of the BBC. Clementi thus wrote the rule-book of which he was the first beneficiary. In addition, one also recognises the long-standing practice of 'staffing' editorial posts at the BBC by political sleight of hand or political suggestion, and there is talk of a 'staff revolving door' within the business world. A recent infamous example is the appointment in February 2021 of Richard Sharp, a former banker and advisor to Boris Johnson, the former UK prime minister, as chairman of the BBC, and Rishi Sunak, the current prime minister, who was previously Sharp's subordinate at Goldman Sachs bank (PS 2021). Sharp resigned in April 2023 after the *Sunday Times* revealed that he had helped secure an €800,000 loan to Johnson (MAC 2023).

However, the authors of the Media Pluralism Monitor report emphasise that it is not possible to speak of the politicisation of institutions, as there are a number of provisions limiting or even excluding such situations (Craufurd Smith, Cavaliere). Psychogiopoulou et al. (2017, p. 1946) are of a similar opinion, pointing out that the Council and its members are explicitly obliged to ensure the independence of the BBC and cannot accept or follow any instructions from government ministers or others. Meanwhile, the changes that can be observed in the last few years, taking place both within the BBC itself (in its organisational structure and in the services

it offers) and at the political level (mainly concerning the decisions taken by the government on issues of funding the institution's activities), lead one to assume that the power of influence of the political elite is increasing and that the broadcaster is increasingly subject to these pressures.

In January 2022, the UK government (Gov.uk 2022) announced a freeze on the BBC licence fee for two years due to rising inflation. After this period, the £159 figure is to be indexed accordingly. It is estimated that the BBC will lose around £481 million a year in real terms as a result of this decision, which according to Enders Analysis, will have a direct impact on the reduction of the BBC's offer, will also affect the creative sector as well as the audience itself, who will be deprived of local content in the first place (Watson, Harrington 2021). However, it is not so much the freezing of the levy itself that is of greatest concern, but rather the accompanying statements by the ruling elite. Nadine Dorries, the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport announcing the decision, wrote on her Twitter account, among other things, that it was time to start discussing new ways of funding the BBC's operations (MAC, HAD 2022). Although the statement was quite quickly disassociated from the government majority, according to Patrick Barwise (2015), the minister actually said what the Conservative government is pushing for, i.e. a move from licence fee to a subscription model.

The government's decisions have translated directly into the public broadcaster's operations. In mid-2022, Tim Davie, Director-General of the BBC, announced an austerity programme for the coming years involving the closure or relocation of some television channels and radio programmes. For example, children's channel *CBBC* and culture and documentary channel *BBC Four* are to disappear from the airwaves. *BBC Radio 4 Extra* will also cease broadcasting. As part of the savings, television news programmes broadcast to the UK audience *BBC News* and to the international community *BBC World News* will be merged. Radical changes to the broadcaster's offering are also linked to organisational and structural changes. More than 1,000 people are to lose their jobs in the near future, and there are also plans to decentralise the production system and relocate or abolish some divisions, which is also expected to lead to considerable savings (AG 2022; MAC 2022; PS 2022). Davie is straightforward in stating that such major decisions are financially motivated and are the result of the constraints imposed on the BBC by the licence fee freeze for the coming years. At the same time, he declares that the changes are also dictated by changing viewing preferences, i.e. an increasing proportion of viewers using VoD streaming platforms and users of online news services, and thus that this is the last moment for the BBC to build a serious digital offering (AG 2022).

## Conclusions

With Tim Davie's announcement of the austerity programme, he announced a plan to transform the BBC into a 'Reithian organisation for a digital age', which must evolve and innovate its services to become more digitally focused. As Davie points out: "Too many of our resources are focused on broadcast and not online. And less than 10% of our usage is signed in, so we can't offer a properly tailored service, unlike all our global competitors. If we do not respond faster to these changes we will cede too much ground to those who are not driven by public service values" (Davie 2022). To achieve this goal, the BBC wants to spend £300 million over the next few years to develop services such as the *OTT BBC iPlayer* platform and *Sounds* audio platform, and finally *BBC News*, personalising broadcasts and using real-time data. However, these activities will require serious costs for the BBC and therefore the corporation has been forced to cut its budget by £200 million, which means the aforementioned staff redundancies of around 6%, the reduction or merger of some linear channels (*CBBC*, *BBC Four*, some language services *BBC World Service*, *BBC News* and *BBC World News*, *Radio 4*). According to the Annual Plan (BBC 2022, pp. 3–4), the proposed changes to the broadcaster's offer and structure are just the start of a reform to make it a "modern, efficient and lean organisation". While the managers assure us that the main aim is to deliver the values assigned, the dimension and reach of these is dependent on economic factors. These, incidentally, have also featured in Ofcom's analysis of the broadcaster's operations, as well as the consultation being carried out on the award of a new BBC licence (Ofcom 2022). In parallel, work is also underway in relation to the mid-term evaluation of the BBC Charter Review, during which financial arguments also seem to be coming to the fore. Not only are recommendations being considered which the institution should take into account when carrying out assigned tasks under the existing Charter, but the possibility of updating the framework agreement before the next review is also being seriously considered. On this occasion, plans to change the BBC's funding regime, which could be introduced as early as 2028 (DDCMS 2022), have once again resounded. According to the Media Reform Coalition: "The Mid-Term Review asks no questions about how to increase civic participation, address demoralisation among staff, or ensure that the BBC's programming remains distinctive amidst the slew of commercial content available on streaming platforms. Its main purpose seems to be to be keeping the BBC on constant high alert and reinforcing the message that it exists primarily to serve the government, rather than the wider public" (Media Reform Coalition 2022).

In this public discussion, which has been going on in the UK for more than a decade and which has been particularly emotive recently, there are no statements or arguments that could threaten the existence of the broadcaster. Nevertheless, the future of the BBC is not at all bright and luminous. The public service mission to which the corporation was set up seems to have lost its importance, giving way to market considerations. Nor is it at all a foregone conclusion that the announced change in the funding system will not involve a change in the status of the institution.

The public character was to be guaranteed, as John Reith demanded in 1925, by political and economic autonomy. Step by step, the BBC seems to be losing its independence and the Conservative ruling elite may not be sentimental, as in the case of the privatised public broadcaster Channel 4.

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## STRESZCZENIE

**Cyfryzacja oznacza marginalizację mediów publicznych? Zmiany w funkcjonowaniu BBC**

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza zmian formalno-prawnych oraz strukturalno-organizacyjnych dotyczących brytyjskiego nadawcy publicznego, wprowadzanych w obliczu rozwoju technologicznego związanego przede wszystkim z procesem cyfryzacji, którego konsekwencją jest upowszechnienie mediów internetowych, co przekłada się na stopniową marginalizację tzw. mediów tradycyjnych, w tym tak ważnych z punktu widzenia społecznego mediów publicznych. Główna teza opiera się na stwierdzeniu, że media publiczne, na przykładzie omawianej BBC, są poddawane coraz większym naciskom ze strony rządzących, upatrujących w procesie cyfryzacji przesłanek do ograniczania działalności mediów publicznych, finansowanych ze środków publicznych. Wybór brytyjskiego nadawcy jako przedmiotu badań podyktowany jest przesłankami, że przez lata BBC oraz brytyjskie regulacje dotyczące mediów publicznych były uważane za wzorcowe, stanowiły niejednokrotnie punkt odniesienia dla działań podejmowanych przez nadawców i rządzących w innych krajach. Aby sprawdzić zasadność stawianych tez, przeprowadzona została analiza wprowadzanych w ostatnich dekadach w brytyjskim systemie mediów publicznych rozwiązań regulacyjno-strukturalnych, organizacyjnych i zarządczych, które pociągają za sobą zmiany w oferowanych usługach, uwzględniając przy tym ich okoliczności. Artykuł pozwala zrozumieć, w oparciu o analizowany przykład, jakiej presji poddawane są obecnie media publiczne, jakie działania muszą one podejmować, aby przekonać publiczność, a przede wszystkim polityków i rządzących do zasadności ich funkcjonowania. Tekst dostarcza przede wszystkim wiedzy na temat zależności, jakie występują pomiędzy działalnością i ofertą mediów publicznych a stanowiskiem elit politycznych, które często dla własnych interesów wpływają na kształt i ofertę mediów, wykorzystując argumenty technologiczne czy finansowe.

**Słowa kluczowe:** cyfryzacja, media publiczne, BBC, zarządzanie, struktura organizacyjna, oferta, misja publiczna



