

## **Eva, London - Keynote**

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### **'Findability': a central issue for quality medias in a networked world**

This paper examines the implications for the production, mediation, and delivery of Public Service Media through the rising popularity of search engines and aggregator sites such as Netflix, YouTube, and Amazon Prime. According to Pew Internet “On any given day in early 2012, more than half of [American] adults using the internet use a search engine (59%). That is double the 30% of internet users who were using search engines on a typical day in 2004.” (Pew Internet, 2012). Evidence for the use of search as a means to access general media content is clear, but how does this affect, for example, high quality producers, such as public service media?

‘House of Cards’ , originally a BBC mini-series, was re-made exclusively for Netflix, resulting in critical acclaim and awards; reframing the company as a production house, not merely a distributor. Search engines and aggregator sites alter the way we consume media, the taxonomy, ranking, and mediation. Market-driven companies are therefore changing the economic, industrial and cultural landscape of television and film.

At the November 2013 Salford Media Festival in Manchester, UK, Victoria Jaye, Head of TV Content for the BBC iPlayer, noted the biggest challenge facing the BBC in the future is ‘findability’ . If the overall control of what we find (and therefore are more likely to consume) is increasingly becoming predicated on market-led factors, where does that leave independent media? Barnett argues the continuing importance of Public Service media in order “to protect the public interest and help to defend against a retreat to the shallow, the sensational, the contrived, or the PR subsidized confection” (Barnett, 2011:216).

Google claims it exists to “organise the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful” (Google.co.uk, 2014). Their Hummingbird technology tracks previous user requests and patterns in order to predict (and then offer) content which is likely to interest consumers. Further, the information gathered may be sold or used by a third party. The ethics of such modus operandi have recently been called into question, and the growing size and dominance of Google is causing concern. Vaidhyanathan terms this *infrastructural imperialism* (Vaidhyanathan, 2012:2), and “the globalization of a strange kind of surveillance”.

One of the key and founding principles of Public Service Media is impartiality and independence. Public Service Media channels achieve balance through the offering of a sufficiently broad range of views, measured by presenters, producers and editors *over time*. The balance of news is discussed at weekly and monthly editorial meetings. Can sophisticated taxonomies and algorithms such as Hummingbird compete? Are ethical structures in place to ensure balance, impartiality, and breadth?

Helen Goodman, the UK's Shadow culture minister said recently in British newspaper *The Independent On Sunday* (5<sup>th</sup> January, 2014), access to high quality news and educative services is particularly critical for “people where this is not otherwise available”. Events in the Ukraine and Egypt, illustrate the continuing need for access to balanced and independent media sources; improving the ‘findability’ of Public Service media, is therefore both a live and critical issue at UK, European and global levels.

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