

Questioning Public Service Media in Egypt and Spain

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This article examines the legitimacy of public service broadcasting (PSB) in Spain and Egypt, considering recent developments. Despite differing political and social contexts, both are considered to be politically transitional countries. The theoretical framework of this study is based on UNESCO's principles of universalism, diversity, independence, and distinctiveness. Data were gathered from internal and external media industry reports. The findings reveal that the expansion of PSB's public role is being challenged in political discourse and public policy, while public funding aims to promote universality, innovation, and diversity. However, political interference in the appointment of board members hampers independence in both cases. The article recommends the establishment of impartial commissions to safeguard media independence and adequate budgetary support to enable these organizations to compete in terms of technology and meet user demands. Research limitations include a lack of audience data in Egypt, which hinders direct comparisons. Nevertheless, the framework and indicators proposed can inform future studies on the legitimization of public service media.

Keywords: public service broadcasting, public service media remit, UNESCO, performance indicators, Egypt, Spain

The legitimacy of publicly funded television, as well as their foundational principles, are being questioned in many countries (Azurmendi, 2018; Campos-Freire, 2013; Goodwin, 2020; Połowska & Beckett, 2019; Van den Bulck & Moe, 2012). Public service broadcasting (PSB) was defined by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2005) as "broadcasting made, financed, and controlled by the public, for the public" (p. 14). It is neither commercial nor state-owned, free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces. Public media were created to represent the voice of all

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sectors of society and to provide content to inform, educate, and entertain the public while steering away from commercial interests and political inclinations.

The user confidence has been eroded and the current market scenario would appear to be a challenging space in which to argue for publicly funded media whose mission is to offer a cultural vision to fragmented societies. However, we should question if it is possible to propose publicly funded television media in political systems that fail to respect political freedom, diversity, independence, and universality, or even in democratic countries where public service media (PSM) have drifted from these fundamental principles when the industry context is favorable.

UNESCO has endeavored to promote public broadcasting not only in democratic countries but also in third-world democracies and undeveloped nations, as guarantors of independence and civic engagement in political debate (Ayish, 2010). The literature reveals that studies aiming to resolve this apparent paradox tend to develop a comparative analysis of public television models in different national contexts (Campos-Freire, Soengas-Pérez, & Rodríguez-Castro, 2018; Khamis, 2011; Lis, Nienstedt, & Günster, 2018). However, the study of PSM remains underdeveloped in most non-Western countries (Lestón-Huerta, Goyanes, & Mazza, 2021).

The originality of this article is to compare public television in a European country (Spain) and in an Arab country (Egypt), where the public model was established in 1953. Both models have been subject to reform, shifting from a state television service to a PSM organization. This comparative study of public television services in Egypt and Spain aims to contribute to an enlightening debate on the role and legitimization of such a model in a democratic European Union (EU) country and in a transitional, developing country in the Middle East. Spanish Radio and Television (RTVE)'s successful transformation from a company set up under a dictatorship to its later functioning in a modern democracy may yield practical implications for countries in a transitional phase.

RTVE was established in 1956 during Franco's regime as a government-owned national state television organization. Its primary objective was to promote the unity of Spain and Spanish culture. In contrast to other European public television corporations, RTVE received dual funding through state subsidies and advertising, making it financially independent (Bustamante, 2007). For several years, it held a dominant position in terms of viewership until private television channels gained an advantage in 2004. Since 2010, however, the only funding is public funding via the general tax regime. This was a political decision to avoid RTVE's abuse of its dominant position against the private companies and also to consolidate a new model where independence was guaranteed because the RTVE board was selected according to professional criteria rather than political affinities. Contemporary Spain is a politically stable, democratic country where press freedom and freedom of information are safeguarded.

Egypt is a republic with a semi-presidential system established after the 2011 revolution. Its public television institution has existed since 1956. The Egyptian National Media Authority (NMA), is the body responsible for the public broadcasting sector, and was formerly named as The Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU). After the 2011 revolution, a new law was issued and the name was changed into the NMA. The NMA with its new mandate aims towards transforming the state-owned media into a public service one,

especially after a biased coverage of the state during the revolution. Since then, public television has witnessed many reformation initiatives, yet it has not been able to regain its audience back as expected (Allam, 2021; European Journalism Centre [EJC], 2018).

The philosophy of PSB developed when spectrum scarcity justified limiting and regulating radio and television airwaves. Nowadays, regulations are based on the necessity of public service itself. It must adapt to multiple platforms like online texts, podcasts, videos, and user-generated content. Technological advancements enable public broadcasters to offer digital channels and Internet services. Thus, PSM encompasses various content-delivery platforms. This study focuses on PSB.

This article provides a comparison between two case studies concerning the implementation of the four principles outlined by UNESCO in the PSM in Spain and Egypt through public information by reviewing different performances and strategies in the two countries.

After the literature review, the theoretical framework and methodology used in studying the two cases will be briefly outlined. The following section will describe the main features of both countries to contextualize them politically, followed by the results of the two cases and comparisons between them. The final section concludes with a discussion of the results and their implications as well as the limitations of the research.

Literature Review

The literature review focuses on comparative analysis as a valid method for doing research on previous studies where the approach has been used to compare PSM in different countries and on studies carried out in Spain and Egypt before the present research.

According to Esser and Vliegenthart (2017), comparison offers alternative options that can reveal solutions to similar dilemmas elsewhere. The comparative method is often used to outline the achievements and limitations of public service television in different countries (Castro-Herrero, Nir, & Skovsgaard, 2018).

Most of the publications criticize publicly funded broadcasters because they have failed to fulfill the mission for which they were set up (Lowe & Jauert, 2005; Lowe & Steemers, 2012). Various reasons are adduced in this regard: Lack of transparency in management and/or funding (Spasovska & Imre, 2015), lack of political independence (Iosifidis & Papathanassopoulos, 2019), a distant mismatch between institutional objectives and audience interests and needs (Sehl, 2020; Tanaka & Sato, 2014), failure to reflect cultural diversity (Lowe & Martin, 2014) and promote cultural identities (Costa & Díaz, 2021; García-Prieto, Aguaded, & García-Rojas, 2022).

On the contrary, other authors point to the role played by public television media as high-quality content providers (Ojer, 2011), their role in the coverage of minorities (Moring & Godenhjelm, 2011), and their adaptation to emerging public consumption demands (Franquet & Villa, 2014). As well as the BBC as the standard of reference for independent and high-quality content (Freedman, 2019; Ojer, 2012), a number of other European media institutions, such as the PSM in Germany and Portugal, are sometimes presented as legitimate models of public television (Lis, Nienstedt, & Günster, 2018).

The Spanish public broadcasting service (RTVE) has been researched from a range of perspectives, coming in for criticism on the grounds of political bias and lack of independence (Almirón, Capurro, & Ortega, 2010; León, 2010; Medina & Ojer, 2015), as an inefficient financial model (Jivkova-Semova, 2011), and for its failure to adapt to emerging social trends and younger audiences (Azurmendi, Ortega, & Muñoz, 2019). However, other researchers have pointed to RTVE's capacity for technological innovation and attention to minorities (Zaragoza & García-Avilés, 2018).

Scholars have found a gap between the universally accepted definition of PSB and how it is understood and applied in the Arab world and argue that PSB should be established along the lines of universal principles to guarantee diversity and independence (Allam, 2021; Sakr, 2012). Ayish (2010) refers to a number of countries in the Middle East, including Egypt, where there are signs of a move toward administrative and financial independence for broadcasting from the government. Nevertheless, he concludes that public television remains an integral part of the state machinery. Richter, Dupuis, and Badr (2021) offer a comparative analysis of the television sector in Egypt and Poland and conclude that many adjustments are required to enable the NMA's transformation into a public service broadcaster.

The purpose of this article is to explore to what extent the existence of state-supported television organizations may be justified in terms of UNESCO's principles by comparing the case of a democratic country in Europe with a transitional Arab country in the Middle East.

Methodology

To define PSM, we analyzed different assessment criteria from international bodies such as the Council of Europe (2007), European Broadcasting Union (2013), the European Union (2010), the Public Media Alliance, and some others (e.g., Fernández & Roel, 2014) and decided to choose UNESCO's principles because they were sufficiently universal and valid for both democratic and developing countries (Bucci, Chiaretti, & Fiorini et al., 2012; Stiles & Weeks, 2006; UNESCO, 2013). They are considered as the ideal framework for PSM because they were drafted in light of best practices in countries on various continents and in different political situations and economic development contexts (Hendrickx, Raats, Ranaivoson, & Opgenhaffen, 2019). On the other hand, they include the same principles as other organisms.

Public service broadcasting was created to represent the voice of all sectors of society and to provide content to inform, educate, and entertain the public while steering away from commercial and political interests (Freedman, 2019; UNESCO, 2005). To fulfill these functions, public television companies should facilitate program accessibility to all audiences, establishing ways of guaranteeing diversity, public participation, and political independence.

The UNESCO (2005) public television principles—universality, diversity, independence, and distinctiveness—comprise a well-grounded, practical, and applicable model for public television services in both developing and developed countries (Ayish, 2010; Stiles & Weeks, 2006).

Universal service means that the majority of the population should have guaranteed, free access to PSB programming regardless of geographical and financial constraints (Born & Prosser, 2001; Lowe & Savage, 2020). Universality refers not only to physical availability but also to issues of diversity of languages and interests (Sakr, 2012). Universal access to public service programming also includes a variety of delivery platforms, not only on-air television but also live, online broadcasting and access to a range of applications (Trappel, 2008) and public accounts on social media (Andrejevic, 2013; Hutchinson, 2015; Van Dijck & Poell, 2015). In addition, audience ratings and satisfaction should likewise be high (Tsuji & Miyahara, 2007) though it is uncertain how high it might be. Finally, outreach to minority groups such as immigrants, religious or ethnic minorities, or disabled people, enacts decisions and initiatives that reflect the principle of universality (Medina, Herrero, & Frago, 2011; Naerland & Dahl, 2022).

To be universal nowadays means to deliver content using multiple platforms to reach audiences, such as the television set, the computer, the tablet, and the mobile phone (Telkmann, 2021) and through apps and social media to allow the audience to participate by commenting on, sharing, and liking posts (Vaz-Álvarez, Fieiras-Ceide, & Túdez-López, 2021). As a tool to allow dialogue with society, UNESCO recommends nominating an ombudsman or somebody who defends the audience. The existence of an ombudsman allows the audience to participate in the content (Bucci et al., 2012). Public broadcasters must strive to reach the majority of viewers in today's fragmented market, ideally achieving a penetration rate exceeding 90%. On the other hand, to justify their existence, public companies should conduct audience satisfaction surveys. In addition, public companies are especially obliged to include different strategies to facilitate access to audiences with disabilities (Rovira-Esteva & Torr-Carro, 2019).

Consequently, PSM must be *diverse*, that is inclusive of varied content topics and genres, to address different target audiences and to represent diverse voices and viewpoints (Jakubowicz, 2007; Mangani & Tarrini, 2018; McQuail, 1992).

Independence is usually measured in financial, political, editorial, and governance terms. Financial and editorial independence means to deliver content and messages free from the control of the state and commercial influence (Azurmendi, Muñoz, & Ortega, 2018; Bennett, 1997). Independence at a governance level means ensuring that public broadcasting has enough autonomy. Its administrative structure must be accountable, representative of all sectors of civil society, efficient in its administrative structure, and free from intervention by the government of the country (Spasovska & Imre, 2015; Van den Bulck & Moe, 2012). To fulfill these principles, the public broadcaster should have a stable board and a sustainable financial system (Price & Raboy, 2011). Neff and Pickard (2021) stress that secured funding should be accompanied by a regulatory framework that ensures independence with accountable supervisory and executive functions and pluralistic methods of selecting the members of the board. The existence of independent commissions to serve as a buffer between the public broadcasters and the incumbent government can guarantee the fulfillment of the PSM remit (Campos-Freire et al., 2018).

The distinction between public media and state media lies in the former's independence, especially in political terms. The difference depends on the level of political and individual freedom in a country and

how the government uses the public media. The defining characteristic of public media is their separation from government influence.

Considering that the PSM are owned by the state, the next indicators selected to measure independence are a diverse range of board members, a president elected by an authority other than the state government, no state influence on information content, an efficient administrative structure, and external accountability (Cabrera, Talavera, & Valais, 2022; Costa & Díaz, 2021).

Finally, *distinctiveness* is related to offering inclusive programming in an innovative way with high quality and ethical principles (Donders, Raats, & Tintel, 2020; Price, 2002). Some indicators to appraise these criteria are the level of technical innovative resources such as augmented reality, use of graphics, artificial intelligence, recommendation tools, and ethical standards such as the guarantee of freedom of expression, truth and independence, procedures to protect sensitive audiences, and mechanisms to verify information and sources. National or international awards are a tangible indicator of distinctiveness (Bucci et al., 2012).

The purpose of this article is to analyze the functionality of PSB in Spain and Egypt, following the UNESCO principles that legitimize public media as such. The case studies have been analyzed to compare how UNESCO's PSM principles—universality, diversity, independence, and distinctiveness—have been fulfilled. The data were collected from internal reports. The fulfillment of the principles was evaluated by following the methodology applied by Campos-Freire and colleagues (2018). Table 1 shows the proposed checklist for each one of the principles.

Table 1. UNESCO's Principles Indicators.

Universality	○
Variety of delivery platforms:	
• on air	○
• online	○
• app	○
Social media accounts:	
• Facebook	○
• Instagram	○
• Twitter	○
• LinkedIn	○
• YouTube	○
• TikTok	○
Audience satisfaction survey	○
Ombudsman	○
Use of signs for audiences with disabilities	○
Diversity	○
Different types of programs:	
• newscasts & public affairs programs,	○
• educational programs	○

• documentaries	○
• cultural programs	○
• films	○
• local fiction	○
• variety of shows	○
Programs for audiences of different ages:	
• 4-12	○
• 13-24	○
• 25-44	○
• 45-64	○
• 65+	○
Independence	○
Diverse board members	○
President elected by an authority other than the prime minister or the state government	○
No state influence on news or current affairs	○
Independent commission	○
Efficient administrative structure	○
Accountability	○
Distinctiveness	○
Innovation implementation	
• Virtual reality	○
• Augmented reality	○
• Recommendation tools	○
• Artificial intelligence	○
Ethical codes	
• Internal fact-checker	○
Awards received	○

Political Framework of Spain and Egypt

Though Spain has been an EU country since 1986 and Egypt is an Arab country, they have had diplomatic and cooperation relations since 1967, when the first Cultural Cooperation Agreement was established. Since then, their cooperation has extended into educational, cultural, technical, and scientific sectors. The global strategic objective of Spanish cooperation in Egypt ranges from contributing to increasing the economic capacity of Egypt to strengthening its institutions and civil society (Spanish Foreign Office, 2009). The purpose of the Masar Program, the Spanish cooperation endeavor in Egypt, is to collaborate with democratic transition in the Arab world.

The year 2011 saw protests among outraged young people in both countries. In Spain, they originated around March 15, 2011, and were called the 15-M movement. Their objective was to protest

against the Spanish government. Over time, their protests took on a more violent tone. Years later, they became part of the populist party Podemos (We can), whose founder became vice president of the Spanish government in 2019. The process of political and social change that took place in Egypt as a result of the so-called Arab Spring led to a reformulation of the development and cooperation policy across the region, focusing on the process of transition to democracy.

Despite this common historical moment, the political systems of both countries are different. Spanish democracy has been in operation for more than 40 years and enjoys almost full freedoms, while Egypt has just begun to take its first steps toward guaranteeing basic freedoms (cf. The Freedom House, 2022).

The Spanish PSM, RTVE, was set up in 1956 during Franco's regime as a national state television organization owned and managed by the government and was created to boost the unity of Spain and Spanish culture. Its management depends on the Spanish government and is conditioned by the political party in power at any given time (Almirón et al., 2010). Unlike other European public television companies, however, the Spanish public broadcaster benefited from dual funding, financed by both state subsidies and advertising until 2010; the only funding allowed from then on was public aid via the general tax regime (Bustamante, 2007).

The introduction of private channels in 1989 caused a decline in audience ratings and an increase in costs for the public broadcaster. Its financial situation was untenable, and its public service identity and legitimacy were questioned.

After a lengthy consultation process with experts, influenced by British and French models, the government undertook a new reform of RTVE in the 2000s. The Law of State Radio and Television 17/2006 set out to establish political independence and efficient economic management. The most significant change was the removal of advertising as a source of revenue. The law set out the principles for the selection of RTVE executives and ways of ensuring an ideologically independent corporation. Mechanisms were also put in place for greater supervision of the financial management of the public radio and television services.

Egypt's national broadcasting media body, the NMA, regulates 23 television stations and 17 radio stations. Since President Nasser's time in the 1950s, Egypt's rulers have recognized that the media are powerful tools, and the NMA has long been known as the best advocate for the government's activities. In 2014, a change took place when the Ministry of Information was abolished—a key demand of the 2011 revolution where the appeal for an independent regulatory body was high, thus paving the way toward the transformation of the NMA from state broadcaster into public broadcaster in 2016.

In 2018, Law 178, which governs the NMA, was approved, defining its scope, responsibilities, new governance structure, and funding mechanisms (Allam, 2019). The law encompasses crucial aspects that had never been addressed before, such as the importance of a digital presence, the independence of the governance structure, as well as the duties and responsibilities of the authority.

Comparison Results

The analysis is based on data relating to the four criteria: Universal access, independence, diversity, and distinctiveness.

Universal Access

Not only does RTVE deliver content via on-air broadcast it also allows access to all its content and live channels online. Among the options, in addition to viewing programs, it is possible to share content via e-mail, Twitter or Meneáme accounts, and through the apps of their programs. Through its website it is possible to access all its current programs and archives and track the popularity of downloaded videos. To achieve a better relationship with the audience, RTVE set up a Facebook account in 2009 through which it aims to meet users' recommendations. Nowadays, it has accounts on YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, LinkedIn, and the app rtveplay for direct access to its content. Since 2007, RTVE has had an ombudsman, responsible for receiving complaints from viewers and bringing them to the attention of the board of directors, thereby performing a mediating role between the public and the PSB.

The satisfaction of the public may be a significant indicator of the universal reception of RTVE. In a survey carried out by the audience research company IMOP in 2018, 50% recognized that PSM was necessary, and 5% rejected its existence. A survey of audience perception shows the weaknesses of RTVE. The most significant limitations were low use especially among the young, weak links with audiences, alignment with the aging Spanish population, and poor innovation (Gómez, 2018).

In Egypt, the NMA provides broadcasting access to all parts of Egypt via terrestrial transmission, where television penetration reaches 94% of the population and is available via satellite. The NMA has a website as well, where the content of all programs and newscasts is available, yet it does not livestream content. Its presence on digital platforms is mainly through YouTube, with 21 channels, but its presence is weak with a total number of 1 million registered users, of a population of 109 million (ICT, 2022; Nagy, 2018). There is a clear absence of a digital strategy because most of the YouTube channels lack regular uploading patterns. The NMA website includes the option of sending complaints, yet there is almost no transparency in the number of complaints received or those that were resolved.

Both NMA and RTVE have taken similar steps in trying to reach audiences with disabilities. To eliminate barriers, in 2014, an RTVE subtitling plan was developed to facilitate access for people with hearing disability. As for the NMA, a sign-language interpreter is always at the right bottom corner of the screen as a service for people with hearing disability.

According to audience share, the RTVE channels went from 23% audience share in 2007 to 14% in 2022. Since 2011, it has no longer been the leader in audience share as it used to be.

Unfortunately, the Egyptian market lacks an audience research company and, as a result, it is difficult to get data about viewership numbers or the share of each channel. According to some analysts, since the introduction of private broadcasters in 2001, and the Egyptian revolution in 2011, viewership of public media has dramatically decreased (Mideastmedia, 2017).

Diversity

To guarantee pluralism and its function as a public service, RTVE has regulated the right of access to its contents for different social, political, and union groups. However, Callejo (2008), who

studied the presence of different social groups in news programming on RTVE, concluded that this presence is weak.

The Information Statute and the Style Rules of RTVE are available on the company's website since, as a public service, it must ensure social, ideological, political, and cultural pluralism and access to minorities. It also emphasizes the journalistic independence of professionals and specifies that professionals should guide their work toward service, and managers should be open to dialogue.

The corporation has tried to reach different audiences by launching children's channels and news and sports channels, but they have not been able to reach large audience shares. In 2017, RTVE launched PlayZ, a new digital channel aimed at the under 35s, but young viewers are still the missing audience for RTVE since its core audience is mostly adults.

The NMA television channels range from general-interest to specialized ones. However, not all the 23 channels are directly reflected in viewership figures. The newly developed 2018 NMA Law 178 states the importance of meeting different social needs and interests. Yet according to different studies (Sakr, 2012; UNESCO, 2013), the results with respect to public service themes, such as "children and youth," "education," "science and technology," and "environment," were almost nonexistent. This explains the gap between public interest, where young people constitute more than half of the population, and programming strategies, which focus primarily on and give priority to government activities.

Independence

To transform RTVE into a corporation that is independent of political power, and with greater autonomy, the 2010 PSM Reform modified the selection process for members of its governing body. Before that time, the general director was appointed directly by the government and served a four-year term, which is simultaneous with the term of office of the Spanish government. Law 5/2017 set the number of the RTVE board members as 10, to be elected by the parliament, with all having sufficient professional qualifications and experience. They are to serve for a period of six years, which is nonrenewable. The president of the corporation has to appear once a month to answer questions from the parliament's Control Committee of RTVE. These appearances are published in full on the RTVE website.

However, according to Media Pluralism Monitor, "The reports about pro-governmental manipulation and influences on PSM governing bodies have multiplied in the latest years" (cited in Masip, Ruiz, & Suau, 2018, p. 9). According to Azurmendi and colleagues' (2018) survey of the public perception of RTVE, slightly more than half the respondents said they thought that public television was not independent of political power, whereas one quarter said they thought it was.

Despite these legal measures, the political parties control the appointment of the president of RTVE (Ortega, 2017). There is no independent commission to regulate communication matters in Spain. Instead, the Competition and Market Regulatory Body monitors specific issues relating to the audiovisual market, which is a multisectoral regulator appointed by the Spanish government (Fernández, 2023).

In Egypt, the NMA oversees and monitors the national media outlets. It is also responsible for approving administrative and financial regulations, planning the annual budget and the general scheme of programming, and expressing opinions on broadcasting legislation. Before the cancellation of the Ministry of Information in 2014, the NMA annual board meetings were described as useless, given that all plans had to be approved by the ministry (Abd el-aal, 2018).

The new law in 2018 set new criteria for choosing NMA board member. The board consists of nine members, where three members (the head and two others) are chosen by the president, and four other members represent the governmental entities. In addition, the board lacks the representation of civil society groups and non-governmental organizations (Allam, 2021). In addition, the structure of the NMA still suffers from a centralized system, which enforces a top-down communication system. News selection goes through a strict review process to make sure that it adheres to government policies.

The other key aspect of independence is public funding. Before 2005, RTVE had accumulated a \$8.80 million deficits due to inefficient economic and financial management. This situation required restructuring, and 4,100 workers were laid off.

However, the most dramatic change was affected by the financing of RTVE. The 8/2009 Act provided for the abolition of advertising revenue in Spanish public television with effect from 2010. In just four months, RTVE had to meet the same objectives on a much smaller budget. Subsequent financial years saw an ongoing deficit (\$56 million in 2020), but this was not as large as before. Cutbacks in production budgets impacted the number and quality of RTVE productions in subsequent years (Franquet & Villa, 2014; Medina & Ojer, 2010).

As for Egypt, every household is charged a small fee of 0.2 piasters (0.025 cents) per kilowatt on the electricity bill, which does not generate enough revenue to cover the expenses or to enable the production of high-quality programs. Currently, the NMA depends mainly on advertising and government subsidy for funding and had a deficit amounting to \$327 million in 2017.

As with RTVE, a significant proportion of the NMA budget is spent on salaries. NMA is significantly overstaffed, with a workforce hired after the 2011 uprising as a political solution to the ongoing demands of protesters. Most of them lack the required skills to produce high-quality content. Based on a new presidential decree, no more employment in governmental bodies is allowed, which has helped reduce the number of employees from 42,000 in 2011 to 36,000 in 2018.

Financial results and personnel recruitment are very similar in both companies. Though the number of employees is much larger in Egypt, the budgets are significantly different too. In 2020, expenditure at RTVE ran to \$1.28 million, whereas NMA had an expenditure of \$445 million in 2016.

Distinctiveness

The distinctiveness criterion is defined in terms of innovative actions and programming for different age-segmented publics.

RTVE has been a pioneer in the development of new technologies to distribute its contents. It created a *red button* to access its contents and interactive services from smart-TV sets. In 2011, the RTVE Lab, as a unit of the corporation's Department of Strategy and Business Development for Interactive Media, was created to trial trans-media products linked to its contents (Zaragoza & García-Avilés, 2018). In 2015, it launched *Impulsa Visión Startups* to foster start-ups. In 2018, the HbbTV platform, *LovesTV*, was launched to access all television channels. It is quite common for RTVE to use virtual and augmented reality and artificial intelligence in news programs (Aramburu, López, & Hidalgo, 2023). In 2022, a quiz program called *Mapi* was launched with an augmented reality 3D character that interacted with other people and real objects (Urbina, 2022). The awards for RTVE have been abundant. For example, in 2022, RTVE won the European Broadcasting Union Technology & Innovation Award for their 5G and beyond project, which allowed live television broadcasting from technologically deprived rural areas (European Broadcasting Union, 2022).

As well as the Self-regulatory Code to protect children's exposure to the content and, the RTVE has an Information Statute, which includes the rights and duties of the professionals in obtaining, preparing, and broadcasting news, with the goal of ensuring their independence, objectivity, and truthfulness. It created the News Councils as participatory bodies aimed at guaranteeing the internal control and the protection of the journalists.

On the technological innovation side, the NMA website lacks the live streaming option, and there has not been an actual plan yet regarding the digital switchover from terrestrial transmission. As mentioned before, there are individual initiatives for separate programs. Yet, recently the NMA developed a website that brings the latest news, but there is no live streaming; however there is an experimental broadcasting for the Nile News TV channel (a specialized news channel). Moreover, it is worth mentioning that there is a general media code of ethics, in addition to a Children Code was issued by the Supreme Council for Media Regulations (SCMR), the Egyptian media regulator, setting the codes for children representation in different media platforms. As for its social media presence, the NMA has a page on Facebook that posts latest news, yet there is also no live streaming. It also has an account on Twitter, yet no presence on Instagram or LinkedIn.

Table 2 shows the existence or not of the different selected indicators related to the four criteria of PSM.

Table 2. Results.

	RTVE	NMA
Universality		
Variety of delivery platforms:		
• on air	•	•
• online	•	
• apps	•	
Social media accounts:		
• Facebook	•	•
• Instagram	•	

• Twitter	•	•
• LinkedIn	•	
• YouTube	•	
• TikTok	•	
Audience coverage +90%	•	•
Audience satisfaction survey	•	
Ombudsman	•	
Use of signs for audiences with hearing disabilities	•	•
Diversity		
Different types of programs:		
• newscasts & public affairs programs	•	•
• educational programs	•	•
• documentaries	•	•
• cultural programs	•	•
• films	•	•
• local fiction	•	•
• variety of shows	•	•
Programs for audiences of different ages:		
• 4–12	•	•
• 13–24	•	•
• 25–44	•	•
• 45–64	•	•
• 65+	•	•
Independence		
Diverse board members	•	
President elected by an authority other than the prime minister or the state government	•	
No state influence on news or current affairs	•	
Independent commission	•	
Efficient administrative structure	•	
Accountability	•	
Distinctiveness		
Innovation implementation		
• Virtual reality	•	
• Augmented reality	•	
• Recommendation tools	•	
• Artificial intelligence	•	
Ethical codes	•	•
• Internal fact-checker	•	
Awards received	•	

Discussion

The RTVE-NMA comparison clearly reveals that Egypt lies behind Spain as regards most aspects of PSB remit. Only in terms of content diversity does the NMA stand out. In all other areas, the NMA must improve to meet a minimum standard that might justify its existence. Yet, despite the advancement of the Spanish public media, the data show that RTVE suffers from the same problems, especially from the ones that deal with the younger generations. This makes the question of public media efficiency more pressing than ever, especially amid technological advancements and the increase of news and entertainment sources.

A critical assessment of RTVE discloses a number of serious deficiencies as regards its status as a public television organization. Its dependence on political power makes it a state television service as is clear from the way in which the corporation's president is appointed and news is biased in favor of the government. Moreover, falling audience figures may put its future viability at risk. At the same time, RTVE has a number of strengths, such as its initiatives aiming to reach younger audiences via specific channels, commitment to innovation, openness to audience feedback and comments, presence on social media, outreach to the disabled, and the diverse range of content-types produced for different audiences. As compared with RTVE, the NMA must improve in a range of areas if it is to become an actual television organization capable of meeting contemporary challenges, in addition to political independence from the government, the appointment of an ombudsman, the digital switchover, and the production of content for younger viewers.

As regards the financial standing to guarantee independence, 45% of RTVE's budget comes from the state. Its other funding streams are lower; and while its budget has fallen overall since the last legal reform, it remains economically dependent on the state. The NMA is likewise running a significant budget deficit with a funding mechanism that mainly comes from the state.

The first aim of this article was to examine if the public television systems in Spain and Egypt have met UNESCO's principles of PSM. Through the application of the UNESCO (2005) PSB principles, it may be concluded that the public television services in Egypt and Spain comprise a state-controlled model rather than a genuine PSB. Although they are subject to different political systems, the public television operators in both countries share a common challenge: High dependence on the government. This dependence affects the stability of strategic plans, budget limitations, continuity of managers, and the criteria of independence for news. The situation of Egyptian television is even more complicated due to its centralized governance structure and the problem of overstaffing.

Having analyzed RTVE's performance following the UNESCO principles, we can conclude that it is an open organization in terms of innovation, at least, endeavoring to adapt itself to technological and cultural changes across the market. Among the changes introduced to achieve a PSM remit, the most effective were changes in the designation of the board of the public corporation and the removal of advertising as a source of revenue from 2010 onward. In doing so, RTVE was no longer subject to unfair competition from commercial television companies. At the same time, as Gómez-Montano (2013) and León (2010) outlined, there are other aspects that should be improved to become an authentic PSB, such as reaching younger audiences, appointing a stable management board, and ensuring independence from the government.

In the case of Egypt, the NMA continues to fall considerably short of public media status according to UNESCO principles. Though its penetration is high, its presence on digital platforms and other social media is limited to YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. There is no clear digital strategy or assigned budget. The program websites are not particularly engaging for the audiences. The lack of an external audience research company makes it difficult to gauge viewership figures and assess whether or not its contents are popular. While the range of channels on offer is broad, they appear to target the interests of the Egyptian cabinet rather than the public. Furthermore, the board members' selection is influenced by the government, limiting the NMA's independence to evaluate issues based on professional criteria or to question government policy. Accountability is a pending task, and there is an urgent need to develop agencies to research and publish audience data. Finally, the digital switchover has not yet been set as a key objective by the government; thus, the NMA does not stand out in terms of technological innovation.

The findings in relation to Egypt should come as no surprise, given that it is a country still in transition toward full democracy. However, the findings for Spain are surprising because 40 years of democracy might have been sufficient for exorcizing the ghosts of authoritarian governments keen to exercise control over the media.

Conclusions

The results presented in this article lead us to finish with some policy recommendations to legitimize the public media. As Azurmendi and colleagues (2018) recognize, there are structural threats that call into question the public mission of PSBs in terms of independence from political power and their management efficiency.

RTVE has excellent professionals who believe in the PSM mission and understand the new market challenges. However, it is not easy for them to develop their projects because RTVE has historically been too dependent on the Spanish government. This affects the stability of strategic plans, budget limitations, continuity of managers, and the criteria of independent news. Different policies were implemented to solve these problems but without success so far. The Spanish government, no matter which party leads it, fears losing such a powerful media influence on society.

The Egyptian NMA faces challenges due to government control, which impacts news selection and production. A centralized structure promotes a top-down communication system, hindering innovation. The large number of employees burdens the budget and obstructs restructuring efforts. Additionally, reducing the number of channels is necessary for improved functionality and greater audience impact.

Solutions should come from bodies independent of the government, whose responsibility must come from the parliament or an independent commission. Important points that need to be taken into consideration besides the search for new funding sources are the program formats that should meet audience needs and a strong presence on digital platforms to attract younger audiences. The exercise of governmental power over the public media, mainly through funding, likewise limits their news agenda, which focuses on official activities rather than public interests.

Limitations and Further Research

The comparative case-study approach may yield practical findings that can be further developed and applied in ways that legitimize and safeguard the future of public television. This is a comparative research project that drew only on primary and secondary documents as a first step toward further research about the future of PSB, especially in politically transitional countries, in light of the very recent changes that have taken place. The lack of audience data in Egypt was a limitation as it made it difficult to draw clear comparisons and know the actual audience share of the Egyptian channels. Last but not least, further research should use in-depth interviews with employees and managers in both institutions as well as thorough content analysis to assess the diversity of interests and the presence of bias in news programming and to develop audience satisfaction surveys to know whether people consider the public broadcaster necessary and to what extent they are satisfied with it.

Despite these limitations, this research displays common problems that still exist in countries that operate under different political systems yet share common features in both the European continent and the Middle East.

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