

Clinging to the Euro-Bar for Cultural Integrity:

Activism and CSR in an Economic Downturn

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When U.K. NGO activists look at recent developments in broadcasting and online communication in their country, they may well wonder how the values and the quality programming, for which their country is renowned, will survive the current economic realities. They may also wonder how the discourse, consultations, and lobbying at British and European levels on behalf of such programming and its promotion of cultural diversity will be affected; this is inasmuch as their ability to engage in public relations on behalf of viewing and listening audiences, un-and-underrepresented cultural entities, the devolving U.K. nations and, bottom line, civil society, depends on resources. Given this reality, there may well be a significant impact.

This working paper will explore issues in British broadcasting (which is influenced by European policy), the extent to which the bar for corporate social responsibility (CSR)--here, the framework of public service obligations, by which terrestrial broadcasting services are meant to operate--has been altered by the economic downturn, and efforts underway to preserve those obligations. NGO activists seeking broadcasting CSR may wonder whether policies and legislation based on EU directives will be implemented because of fiscal realities.

The study will also focus on the extent to which public discourse about these economic challenges to broadcasting has been spearheaded, or, at least, initiated by activists and has become legislative parlance and/or matters for consultation by the ministries and regulators. Finally, it will examine the impact that the economic downturn has had on the activist groups themselves. Will fiscal realities force the “lobby groups” or “pressure groups,” as these activist NGOs are alternately known in the U.K, to adjust both their CSR agendas and/or strategies? Will activists’ targets of necessity modify their positions on policy issues and commitments to the NGOs? What, if any, NGO strategies implemented in Europe are useful to U.K. activists? Are the EU’s public service/cultural goals as per 2008 Audiovisual Media Services (AVMS [formerly *Television without Frontiers* directive]), potentially compromised?

## *Problem*

The bar for U.K. cultural integrity, has, for over 20 years, been carefully cross-woven within the fabric of public service broadcasting and cultural institutions. Norms for broadcasting performance have been outlined in Parliamentary commissions (e.g. Crawford Commission, 1926) and by scholars (Curran, 1992; Garnham, 1994; McQuail, 1992) and broadcasting institutions themselves (e.g., BBC, 1992). Broadcasting organizations, like other public-sector institutions, have further incorporated these norms as part of their ethos and explicated them in public documents (e.g., BBC. 1996). Nevertheless, changes in broadcasting policy and regulation, represent, at least in part, corporate social responsibility (CSR) catalyzed by NGOs through interaction and consultation with legislators, civil servants, and Ofcom, the regulator.

*Public service obligations as mandated by government: Will broadcasters pull back from them?*

As a result of recent industry developments, many of them ostensibly driven by reductions in revenue, some broadcasters (e.g., Grade [2009] of ITV and others) have indicated a likely withdrawal from public service obligations. Thus, the issue of public service obligations has been debated in Parliament, the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) and Ofcom. Burnham (2008), who, at the time, was Secretary of State for Culture, Media, and Sport, described to MP Holloway his regular meetings with Ofcom to discuss public service obligations, to which Mr. Holloway asked, “But apart from that, is there anything that the Minister can actually do to stop the slide into tabloid television at the BBC?” This indicates that even the BBC is vulnerable to allegations of declining standards, which have plagued commercial ITV.

*Cutbacks across genres.* When the reasons for cutting back on production and broadcast of indigenous programming are exclusively or even primarily cost-related, there is strong cause for concern among public service broadcasting advocates. The genres most readily affected by cost-driven cutbacks are those that are most capital intensive: drama, current affairs, documentaries, and children’s programs. Nevertheless, declining ad revenues at ITV are seen by some activists and observers not as the root

cause of, but rather as rationalization for, a reduction in its public service obligations, which was already in the planning stage.

In the U.K., children's television has faced a major funding crisis that threatens the future of indigenous programming for kids and consequently for future generations of U.K. citizens (Kovacs & Tongue, 2008). NGO broadcasting activists and their target publics--the broadcasters, regulators, policymakers, politicians, civil servants, and other stakeholders, are strained to find ways to make less equal more. This is complicated by U.K. commercial broadcasters' claims that a European-based ban on junk-food advertising to children has reduced ad revenues such that they must sharply curtail investment in and broadcasts of kids' TV programs. There is skepticism that the junk food ad ban is what is curtailing children's programming; rather, said Tongue (2009), the problem can be traced to lack of investment in British content across all channels. Regardless of the cause, severe financial difficulties facing U.K. media industries (the worst "by a long way" according to ITV's Grade [2009]) constrain the health of the public service broadcasting sector.

Gans (1980), who studied news organization and processes, stressed the importance of pluralistic voices in the news. Tongue (2009) extended the need for pluralistic content to other genres. Unfortunately, there is currently a lack of political will to push Ofcom to impose taxes on broadcasters to subsidize pluralistic content.

Although there is strong evidence that media institutions and organizations across all sectors suffer from the negative effects of recession, those effects are far from uniform. For instance, Luft (2008, November 27) discussed layoffs in newspapers outlets but the long-term CSR impact of downsizing on public service broadcasting programs is yet unclear. One would assume that the talent pool and diversity of indigenous, quality audiovisual content would shrink. This would be a cause of considerable NGO concern and activity, as such content represents U.K. diversity.

*Audiovisual media and its window on humanity.* Here one must underscore the distinct nature and contribution of audiovisual media. In the current multichannel electronic environment, all manner of

audiovisual content are available, on demand, in niche and broader genres. Even discerning audiences today are drawn to the “infotainment” format that saturates much of today’s media output and the celebrity-driven nature of mainstream contemporary film. Therefore, one may lose sight of the unique window into discrete cultures, as well as much that is universal in the human mind and soul, which quality, indigenous film and documentary can provide. Most of all, film has the power to engender empathy, which is a mega-tool for tolerance, reconciliation, and unity. In that sense, it is indispensable to both nation building and cross-national understanding. In terms of children’s television, film is a cross-cultural modeling vehicle for society’s next generations.

Therefore, when considering potential changes to public service broadcasting obligations, PSB’s core audiovisual ethos and *raison d’être* must weigh in on any economically-driven arguments in the U.K./EU. (See Discussion re: further implications of public service cutbacks for diverse views of society). In addition, inasmuch as audiovisual media fit into the category of public goods, multiple publics can simultaneously benefit from creative works without any one individual “losing out.” Berry (1977), Fulk, Flanagan, Kalman, Monge, & Ryan (1996), and Barry & Hardin (1982) discussed the concepts of public/collective good, connectivity/communality, and the free-rider. Audiovisual content is a shared resource that builds community and bridges cultures. Therefore, while diversity needs to be accepted and represented, the concept of a U.K. “national interest” also illustrates communality and a unitary, shared body of information or work by members. An audiovisual work’s value is enhanced by the diversity of those who create it and the common threads among those who view and hear it.

*Research.* The possible impact of this economic downturn on research is an important area of concern for U.K. public relations professionals and other NGO activists. Historically, credible independent and government research has bolstered activist arguments and has been the grounds to launch consultations and other policy papers and initiatives. Sometimes that call has come from activists or the research has even been undertaken by them. In the former case, Voice of the Listener and Viewer (VLV), among other groups, catalyzed the Ofcom (2007) review of children’s TV. In the latter, VLV sponsored a

conference on the future of public service broadcasting (Groombridge & Hay, 1995). Credible research, whether conducted in the private or public sector, is capital-intensive, but critical to understanding the “bigger pictures” of the electronic communication landscape, as well as perspectives of viewers/listeners/citizens and other parties and institutions. Yet some policy-making bodies may be reluctant to act on the research and policy recommendations of activists and coalitions because they do not view every stakeholder and option as deserving of careful consideration (Olson, 1971). This was underscored by the Federation of Entertainment Unions in its PSB consultation submission to Ofcom (FEU, 2008).

Currently, the barrage of government consultations about broadcasting and cultural matters makes it very difficult for all stakeholders to keep up with the various arguments. Moreover, it is very costly and labor-intensive for broadcasters and other stakeholders to prepare consultation papers and other written evidence, and to provide witnesses to testify at hearings of Parliament’s Communication Committees. Nevertheless, a number of stakeholders do testify (e.g., Grade, 2009; Tongue, 2009).

*Reduction in unpaid manpower.* Volunteerism is another potential area of pullback from involvement in activism and public discourse. If volunteers, through whose labor and goodwill at least several broadcasting NGOs operate, are strained by greater workplace demands or job losses, who will network, produce position statements or consultative papers, organize events, and otherwise keep campaigns going? Who will solicit funds for overhead expenses, equipment, and distribution of press kits or other documents? Who will ask MPs to raise questions?

Will declining financial resources adversely affect legislative hearings and other consultative processes in which NGOs actively participate? Will discourse critical to effective public relations about policy be hampered? Will NGOs have recourse to engage fully with CSR/civil society issues? The answers to these questions have significant impact, yet it is clear that a protracted recession is not the only variable with repercussions for activist CSR goals.

There are certainly other variables, including the changing nature of activist organizations the media, and other public sector institutions, which may themselves affect those goals. For example, Jocelyn Hay's recent retirement as VLV Chair might presage a change in the NGOs financial viability, strategies, and impact. Yet the pervasive, lingering financial crisis will most likely eclipse other variables in its potential to alter U.K. broadcasting and cultural activism and the ability of targets to meet their CSR goals. As such, public service goals are vital to representation of diversity and to civil society at large. Thus, activists' public relations must include a carefully monitoring of financial, legislative, regulatory developments of compelling interest.

*Integrating CSR into the equation.*

The concerns of the NGOs studied here are considered CSR issues. Although they are not violations of human rights, fair labor standards, environmental regulations, or similar norms, British broadcasters have a public service mandate. Cultural representation clearly falls within their remit and activists expect them to fulfill it. Devolution has underscored this obligation.

It is important to consider how CSR in broadcasting is seen with respect to the larger context of CSR norms in the U.K. and other European states with strong public service values. Moon (2005) related CSR to "societal governance" and that it is "performed by government, social regulation, and markets." (p. 51). He discusses the transition from an implicit CSR (that grew out of business philanthropy) to the explicit CSR operating in the U.K. today, which he sees as a crisis in social governance. Moon relates this current, explicit CSR, to new government regulation, social regulation, and market drivers. This is consistent with expectations for and monitoring of accountability in public sector institutions such as public broadcasters.

Robertson and Nicholson (1996) took a different approach and explored the CSR rhetoric that firms use in their publications. They studies whether the rhetoric was consistent with the firms' actions (whether they "walked the talk") or if it was a substitute for action. Henderson (2001), an economist, takes a third approach, which is to evaluate a corporation's contribution to sustainable development

and to engage in “triple bottom line reporting” (p. 9), which focuses equally on financial, social, and environmental aspects of a corporation’s performance. These approaches, whose origins stem from other disciplines, might provide innovative ways to evaluate broadcasters’ CSR, although the purpose of this particular study is not such a point-by-point CSR analysis. What follows is an account of how data were gathered.

### *Methods*

This study employed a variety of methods. In-person interviews were conducted with representatives of activist groups, broadcasters, lobbyists, journalists, and other relevant parties in metropolitan London and Cardiff in the spring of 2008 and via transatlantic phone calls throughout 2008 and early 2009. In addition, numerous primary documents, such as reviews by Ofcom, correspondence and notes from activist group members, Parliamentary records (Hansard and House of Commons) and activists’ Web sites provided further resources. The authors attended the International Broadcasting Trust’s (IBT) *Screening the World Launch* (2008) and the *One World Awards* (2008). In addition, Kovacs (2008) visited the Institute for Welsh Affairs and the Cardiff offices of BECTU, the U.K. entertainment industry union. Correspondence between Kovacs and Tongue (2009) yielded new additional notes on SKTV activities, evidence to the Lords Communication Committee, and supplementary documentation on audiovisual media. In 2009, Kovacs monitored the Parliamentary Web site and Hansard for documents and videotaped hearings and corresponded with various activists in London and Edinburgh. Additional interviews, archival research, and attendance at activist and other broadcasting-related venues in the U.K. are being arranged for May/June 2009.

### *Results*

The current study groups its findings into four areas: issues, recurrent and emergent; strategies, constraints on both activists and targets that relate to the current economic climate, and activist impact, including those “intangible” effects of activist efforts, such as calls for further debate or consultation or “tangible” effects (e.g., as allocation of resources for production, regulatory change or legislation,

archiving of programming or any other evidence of support for public service, and in particular, indigenous programming. As this is a work-in-progress, a full report will only be possible after the completion of Kovacs' U.K. 2009 research trip.

*Recurrent Issues.* The current paper is an outgrowth of a longitudinal study, begun by Kovacs in 1998. From 1998-2008, Kovacs identified significant, ongoing issues of governance/regulation, content, access, regional and national identity, and other matters (see, e.g., Kovacs, 2005). Some of these are listed below. A more comprehensive of compelling issues will appear in the revised version of this paper.

*Future of Public Service Broadcasting (PSB).* Broadly included within this rubric are several issues, below. PSB has been an ongoing topic of investigation by Ofcom, which just completed a second review after a round of consultations (Ofcom, 2009). This second review detailed plans for children's programming, news, and provided specifics of public service obligations for commercial broadcasters. VLV, at the forefront of PSB lobbying, has allied on an issue-by-issue basis with other groups regarding the future of the BBC, children's TV, and other PSB matters.

*Impartial representation of the nations and regions in the news.* The ongoing concerns about accurate, impartial, and sufficient coverage of life in the nations of Scotland, N. Ireland, and Wales were in part addressed by The King Report (2008), commissioned by the BBC Trust but independently investigated by Professor A. King. It explored public perceptions of the BBC's impartiality in news coverage of the four Nations. The report concluded that although BBC coverage was generally regarded as impartial, there was room for specific improvements. It noted that greater attention to coverage of the English North, while not the principal focus of the Report, was also warranted.

*Children's Television.* There have been ongoing meetings, discussions, and forums to address concerns. Save Kids' TV (SKTV, 2009) took a leadership position in advocating for an online children's content repository. In addition, it argued for funding for original, indigenous productions.

Ofcom's (2009) report made some provisions for the future of U.K. children's TV but SKTV and other NGOs have asked for additional, alternative assurances that kids' needs will be met.

*License Fee and Top-Slicing.* There is an ongoing debate as to the level of license fee funding for the BBC. Some commercial voices say that the BBC should only offer viewer and listeners program content that is not commercially available to them—in other words, what is “market failure.” This is not a majority view. In addition, public service broadcasting is underpinned by the UNESCO Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expression and in Europe (UNESCO, 2005) and as per the EU Treaties public service protocol (see, EC, 2007—the Audiovisual Media Services Directive ([AVMSD])). These documents underscore the value of public service broadcasting as core infrastructure for citizenship and civil society.

More recently, suggestions to top-slice the license fee have been made. If implemented, a portion of the funds would be gathered from each license-fee paying, television-owning household in the U.K. for commercial television services, rather than for subsidizing the BBC to the exclusion of other broadcasters. This has been considered as means to offer public-service pluralism in broadcasting. Opponents argue that this would undermine the relationship between the public and the BBC, unfairly subsidize commercial operations with shareholders, and raise serious issues of accountability. It thus faces strong opposition from some commentators, parliamentarians, and NGOs, and lacks the majority support necessary for Parliament to legislate such a change.

*Devolution of Broadcasting Powers to Scotland.* The Scottish Nationalist Party's (SNP) longtime push for control of Scottish broadcasting to be transferred from Westminster to Edinburgh was rejected by the Scottish Broadcasting Commission (SBC, 2008). In its submission to the Scottish Broadcasting Commission, Peter Wishart, MP, Spokesperson for the SNP, questioned whether newscasts reflect the Scottish nation as accurately as they might and concluded that they did not. He referred to “limitations “ of said broadcasts and pointed to the imbalance in revenues taken from license-fee payers in Scotland (9% of U.K.) and funds available to Scotland (3%) for production and broadcasting. The alleged

inability of London-centric broadcasts to reflect the realities of Scottish life and culture had been a longstanding issue, but is, according to Beveridge (2009), a backburner concern compared to other public service issues. Lord Macdonald (2009) said:

Sadly...understandably, ITV plc wants to shed... key public service obligations by reducing quotas for regional programming and independent production... ITV plc's terms could impoverish STV and undermine its ambition to restore... specifically Scottish programming lost in recent times.

The launch of BBC Alba, the Gaelic channel, has boosted Gaelic speakers in the Hebrides and the Western Isles, but does not satisfy Scots' expectations for substantive cultural representation (see also MacWhirter's [2008] comments on BBC Scotland) .

*Emergent Issues or Those of Enhanced Emphasis at Various Stages of Resolution.* The recession has sobered the broadcasting and online industries, legislators, and concerned observers. Scandals in the corporate world and most recently, in the Labour government itself, have catalyzed calls for full financial disclosure. This is particularly the case with public sector institutions, as seen below.

*Transparency of Executive Salaries.* According to the Minister for Culture Burnham (2008):

I do not consider it right for me, or any other Minister, to provide a running commentary on the levels of individual salaries in the BBC, just as it is not right for me to provide a running commentary on the salaries of footballers, ...there is significant public interest in these issues, and they do affect public confidence in the BBC. It is therefore important for the BBC management and trust to show sensitivity to them, particularly when market conditions are changing and the rest of the country is facing real pressure in an economic downturn.

As with other industries, particularly those using public funds, public sentiment decries inflated corporate salaries and bonuses and thus, full disclosure is expected.

*Investment by audiovisual players in original, indigenous content.* Above, Tongue (2009)

recommended tax credits for those commercial entities that invest in original, indigenous content,

including documentaries. In addition to reaching out to established companies for such investment, there has been a more recent call for online content providers such as Google to do the same. Note an early day motion (EDM) introduced by MP Mitchell (2009) to this end:

That this House, noting that Google now has more advertising revenue in the UK than ITV, is concerned to find that in 2008 it generated 1.25 billion in revenue in the UK but paid only 600,000 in UK corporation tax... ..suggests that...it would be appropriate for Google to... make the same contribution to production and employment in the UK as the companies from which it is taking so much advertising revenue do.

Parliament itself has not moved to impose a tax on new audiovisual players, including Internet-centered companies or video-on-demand providers. Yet such a levy has been proposed:

Where audiovisual players who benefit from video on demand revenues but do not wish to invest directly in UK film and become rights holders, then Ofcom should model and then make proposals for a proportionate industrial levy on their turnover or advertising revenue to be invested in a fund which then other UK film investors can draw on to make British film.

(Tongue, 2009).

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) (2009) report commissioned by the National Union of Journalists and BECTU (the entertainment industry union) concluded that “At first glance, levies may not appear to be politically popular, but there is a strong rationale for considering them as a serious option” (p. 38).

At the same time, the Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU, 2008), commended Ofcom’s willingness to consider new funding models for public service broadcasting. Yet it expressed concern that Ofcom may ultimately ignore options that reflect the public interest by failing to fully research all options, particularly when even a few stakeholders may strongly object to one.

*NGO Strategies as regards respective genres*

*Children's Television Tactics.* The economic downturn has been a factor, but not the major factor, in decisions to cut back on children's television. The U.K. creative pool and Save Kids' TV, which remains the most active group in terms of children's television issues, also employed the most varied set of strategies. Kovacs and Tongue (2008) described some of the tactics used by this group, which included but were not limited to initiating petitions to Parliament and pushing for consultations (e.g., Ofcom [review of children's television]) 2007, and submissions for said consultations. Save Kids TV is itself a coalition of unions, creative talent, writers, and artists who lobby together for policy change.

*News in the Nations and Regions -Parliamentary Questions and Debates.* The Parliamentary process provides several vehicles for raising and discussing an issue. Debates in both Houses, submissions to the Scottish Broadcasting Commission (SBC) and EDMs (Early Day Motions) put the compelling issues of distinctiveness in regional and local news coverage on the broadcasting agenda. Noteworthy is MP Mundell's (2009) EDM regarding the impact on local news of Tyne Tees' (Newcastle area) merger with Border Television:

That this House notes that 24 February 2009 will see the end of Border Television's news broadcasts... believes that Border Television and its Carlisle news studio provided its viewers with well-informed, local and entertaining news coverage ...and did much to protect the strength of local identity and cross-border links in the essentially rural communities it served in the South of Scotland, Cumbria, North Northumberland and the Isle of Man; ... regrets that these qualities... and the strength of public opinion in the ...region were insufficient to persuade Ofcom not to allow the merger with ITV Tyne Tees; and hopes that... strong local stories in news gathering, can be carried forward...

*Rhetorically Setting the Parliamentary Agenda: MPs Discuss the Impact of the Recession*

The remarks by Mr. Holloway, MP, above, are indicative of the rhetorical strategies used to frame issues on the policy agenda. Similar remarks about public service obligations were made by other MPs, such as Mr. Gerrard (2008): (Addressed to Andy Burnham, Secretary for Culture Media, and Sport)

“Will he please bear in mind that we do not want a watering down of broadcasters’ obligations, or a restriction of provision to just one or two public service broadcasters?”

Duncan (2009) requested that the following matter be debated in the House of Commons:

May we also have a debate on the question of how the traditional media will survive the recession? Yesterday's job cuts at ITV are a raw indication of the huge problems that the drop in advertising revenue will cause for both broadcasters and the press, and particularly for local newspapers, which are of great value to all of us in the House... a healthy democracy is only sustainable with a healthy media, may we be told what Government policy is on saving our local radio stations and our local newspapers?

His request was seconded by Heath (2009), who put the matters at stake in even stronger terms.

I agree with the Hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Alan Duncan) that we need a debate on public service broadcasting in the widest sense, particularly in the context of ITV and also because we are losing some very important elements of public service broadcasting, not least children's television, which has almost completely gone down the drain. We need to make sure that the creative industries...are properly supported.

*Lobbying MPs* to raise issues for debate or questions in Parliament has been one effective means for activists to put compelling issues on the agenda for discourse and debate. Finally, Winterton (2009) referred to a town in the U.K. North, which has long complained about poor media coverage:

My Hon. Friend... raised the matter of the news journalists being made redundant by local newspapers and local radio stations. Silk FM, which is part of The Local Radio Company plc- in turn, a subsidiary of the Guardian Media Group-has recently got rid of both its news journalists in Macclesfield. One of them has been made redundant and the other has been transferred to a new centre-which will cover at least three local radio stations-in Burnley, 40 miles from Macclesfield. Will she find time for a debate, either on the Floor of the House or in Westminster Hall, on the problems facing local newspapers and local radio stations, and on

their failure now to provide proper news coverage, which is affecting the information that is available to people in my constituency, among other?

Information is vital in a democracy. The layoffs or transfers of journalists who provide news to underrepresented constituencies may be a reality of a recessions but nonetheless reprehensible.

*Applying Global/Regional Guidelines to Film and TV Industries Across Genres*

Tongue (2009) presented evidence before the House of Lords Communications Committee on the importance of compliance with the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (UNESCO, 2005), which “underpins nation states’ rights to take measures aimed at enhancing the diversity of cultural means of expression, including through measures to support the indigenous film industry and public service broadcasting” (Tongue, 2009, p. 1).

Tongue’s other frame of reference for the Committee was the EU Audiovisual Media Services (AMS) directive (2007), which calls for a 51% public service broadcasting (including feature and documentary) audiovisual output. Tongue suggested tax incentives for U.K. companies to produce quality drama and documentaries and that video-on-demand companies who decline to invest in such programming be taxed. This revenue would subsidize indigenous film content. Tongue also recommended that Ofcom assess the economic impact of U.K. adherence to the EU AMS recommendation, which would boost U.K. content.

*Posting documents and updates on the Web.* Activist NGOs use Web-based technology to post consultations and update their actual and target constituencies on efforts in multiple venues.

*Media Coverage.* This includes not only cultivation of newspaper journalists, but discourse about PSB dilemmas in trade periodicals such as *Television* (2008), which devoted a special issue to these matters.

*External Monitors and Consultants.* Grant (2008), a Canadian, compared economics and challenges to indigenous drama production in four Commonwealth nations and the U.K. He said that fragmentation of viewing audiences in a multichannel environment is a barrier to indigenous drama, given the decline in ad revenues that the fragmentation has wreaked on the commercial broadcasters. He also cited

subscription services' lack of regulation, which unlike other Commonwealth countries, does not support film or drama production. Grant noted multichannel saturation as slowing commercials PSB's audience losses but, "unless the U.K. government takes... steps with respect to funding and regulation, ...high-cost U.K. drama will inevitably decline (p. 29)."

*Discussion: CPR for CSR*

As this is a working paper and additional data needs to be gathered in the coming weeks, it difficult to say conclusively how much of a long-term impact the efforts of U.K. broadcasting activists will have under the current circumstances. Past studies, beginning with Kovacs (1998, 2005) have suggested that broadcasting activists have a strong impact on policy outcomes, both tangible and intangible. In the new communications climate, where there are great opportunities for reaching target publics, there is also great uncertainty, and economic downturn has constrained both spending and available manpower. Nevertheless, the strength of the U.K. public service ethos should not be underestimated.

There is no question but that the challenges that face British public service broadcasters and NGO activists seeking CSR are far more complex than in previous times. As the technologies continue to move towards online and digital platforms and money for original broadcasting tightens, all parties vested in public service values and indigenous content will need to reevaluate if and how those values and content goals can best be preserved. Most of the issues raised above, whether kids' TV or regional/national representation, can be loosely situated within the rubric of future of public broadcasting, and there is fairly solid support for PSB.

Nevertheless, given financial constraints, competing media systems, shifting niche audience genre preferences, and political will (or lack of it), NGO activist strategies must be carefully chosen and thoughtfully implemented. Therefore, the rhetoric, public discourse, research, legislative lobbying, submission of evidence, sharing of consultation papers on the Web, and other tactics used by activists must be evaluated for their relative effectiveness in drawing attention to issues that have strong repercussions for the U.K. communications landscape but more so for its citizens.

If we consider corporate social responsibility and not merely economics as the “driver” of choice as regards broadcasting, then U.K. activists may maximize all means at their disposal, including the print media, to call attention to what is currently an endangered cultural asset. They must pull together the resources to work cooperatively with public service broadcasters, MPs, Government/civil service, journalists, and energetic others to sustain cultural integrity and pluralistic content. As the FEU (2008) suggests, PSB’s stakeholders need to carefully weigh and choose from all options for its survival. Should they rally and succeed, U.K. activists will have pursued and achieved CSR.

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