

Detriment, Empowerment & Protection: The Role of Public Service Broadcasting

Professor Sylvia Harvey
University of Lincoln

Detriment, Empowerment and Protection: The Role of PSB

What are the areas of greatest detriment for low income consumers and to what extent should regulation focus on empowerment and/or protection?

Aims of Consumer Panel, 2005-6

- ‘We focus on access to communications regardless of whether this affects people as citizens or consumers’
- ‘Our goal is to see a communications market place where all consumers can choose and use products and services that suit their needs’ (‘Toolkit’, 2006)

Aims of Consumer Panel 2004-5

- Identifying the need to focus on ‘a small number of substantive issues’
- In 2004-5 these include: ‘access issues arising from consideration of public service broadcasting’ (Annual Report, p.9)

Panel Response to PSB Review, 2004 (1)

- ‘Television viewers are best served by a well-functioning competitive market which delivers a wide range of output, including high quality and informative programming’.

Panel Response to PSB Review, 2004 (2)

- ‘The Panel anticipated continued financial or regulatory encouragement to ensure a base line of high quality public service output’ (Annual Report, 04-5, p.18).

Detriment: Policy Hypothesis

That the three areas of greatest risk for low income consumer benefit are:

Detriment: Policy Hypothesis

- (1) Complacency about potential for a continuing 'base line' provision of high quality PSB.
- (2) Too great a policy emphasis on technology/infrastructure and too little an emphasis on social purpose and function.

Detriment: Policy Hypothesis

- (3) Failure to recognise that the market alone cannot provide a full range of high quality and affordable PSB programmes.

Benefit: Policy Hypothesis

That the three areas of potentially greatest benefit for low income consumers are:

- (1) Policy recognition of the social & cultural role of broadcasting.

Benefit: Policy Hypothesis

- (2) Analysis of factors affecting cost and quality.
- (3) Recognition of the need for regulatory and financial intervention to ensure PSB provision.

Panel Recognition of Risk/benefit Issue

- ‘The Panel anticipated continued financial or regulatory encouragement to ensure provision of a base line of high quality public service output’ (Annual Report, p.18).
- If ‘financial encouragement’ includes the Licence Fee, then the BBC/C4 are key elements in the future ‘mix’.

Detriment, Empowerment and 'Encouragement': Role of PSB.

What is broadcasting for?

- Punch cartoon, 1936.
- American journalist, 1958 (Edward Murrow).
- American thinker and lobbyist (Martin Luther King).

Detriment, Empowerment and 'Encouragement'.

'This instrument can teach, it can illuminate; yes, and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise it is merely wires and lights in a box'.

Edward Murrow, 1958.

Detriment, Empowerment and 'Encouragement'.

- 'Having been denied access to radio and television, we have had to write our most persuasive essays with the blunt pen of marching ranks'. Martin Luther King.

Johnson, *InterMedia*, July, 1987.

Detriment, Empowerment, Cost & Quality

Looking back and looking forward.

- Peacock Report (1986-2006).
- Cost, quality and choice in a multi-channel environment.

Peacock (1) The 'Mixed Diet'.

Alan Peacock's culinary metaphors (1)
Variety and Cost.

- 'the practice of providing a mixed diet at low cost is one that we wish to see continued'.

Peacock Report on Financing the BBC, 1986.

Peacock (2) The Cost of À La Carte.

Alan Peacock's culinary metaphors (2)
Risk and Cost.

'Table d'hôte' ('dish of the day', many diners).

'À la carte' (few diners, high costs).

Detriment, Empowerment, Cost & Quality.

- ‘It is.. possible that the cost of establishing pay-per-programme or pay-per-channel would be so great as to outweigh the benefits to choice and efficiency. For instance some restaurants charge much less for a table d’hôte meal than the same items ordered à la carte’. Peacock, 1986.

The Television World in 1995

ITV: 37%

BBC1: 32%

BBC2: 11%

C4: 11%

Others: 9%

Barb, 2006.

The Television World in 2005

BBC1: 23.3%

ITV: 21.5%

C4: 9.7%

BBC2: 9.4%

C5: 6.4%

Others: 29.6%

Barb, 2006

The Television World in 2004

- Who are the 'Others'?
- Ofcom notes 124 channels with above a 0.01% share of audience

Ofcom, Communications Market Report, 2005,
p.258

The Top Six 'Others', 2004

Sky Sports Total:	3.19%
Sky Movies Total:	2.84%
Sky One:	2.42%
ITV2:	1.98%
UKTV Gold:	1.88%
CBeebies:	1.44%

'Table d'hôte' or 'à la carte'?

The top five in multi-channel homes, 2003

- Eastenders
- Coronation Street
- Emmerdale
- Match of the Day Live
- Holby City

'Table D'hôte': Popular & Cost Effective?

- The top eight programmes in multi-channel homes: all from terrestrial channels and all UK drama, sport or 'docusoap'.
- Eastenders, Coronation Street, Emmerdale, Match of the Day, Holby City, Big Brother, The Full Monty, Heartbeat. (Ofcom 2003 study).

Popularity of Terrestrial & non-Terrestrial, Compared

- The most popular non-terrestrial channel: Sky Sports Total (3.19% share in multi-channel homes).
- Compares with least popular terrestrial channel, Channel 5 (6.4% in all homes)
- Compares with most popular terrestrial, BBC1 (23.3%)

The High Cost of Choice: 'Table D'hôte' and 'À La Carte'

Sources of UK TV revenue in 2002:

- Net Advertising Revenue: 3.1b
- Subscriptions: 2.0b
- Licence Fee: 1.8b

Ofcom, PST Review, Phase 1, p.63.

User Preferences: Viewing Time and Cost (2002)

- 77% of viewing time attracts 57% of cost
- 23% of viewing time attracts 43% of costs.
- Choice is expensive, the 'table d'hôte' of PSB is good value for money.

Harvey, *Screen*, Spring 2006.

Detriment, Empowerment, Cost and Quality

Broadcasting is radio as well as television.

- Might the Consumer Panel remit include issues of quality, value and purpose as well as those of cost and value for money?

Past Accounts of Broadcasting (1)

- ‘You are aware that a private industry which utilizes public airwaves and TV channels – and which is necessarily regulated by public agencies – has a tremendous responsibility for public service.’

Past Accounts: the Power of Numbers (2)

- ‘The public broadcaster and the public servant - we have a great deal more in common than we might at first realize...we are both dependent in large measure on... public approval’.
- ‘the question facing us both is: will that desire for public approbation become dominant?’

Past Accounts: the Power of Numbers (3)

- ‘Will the politician’s desire for re-election - and the broadcasters desire for ratings – cause both to flatter every whim and prejudice – ...to put public opinion at all times ahead of the public interest?’
- ‘For myself I reject that view of politics and I urge you to reject that view of broadcasting’. John F. Kennedy.

The 'Temper of the Times'

- Kennedy's comments are from another era and reflect a different technological and political environment.
- But they remind us of some of the dangers of playing the 'numbers game'.

The 'Temper of the Times'

- The ratings game is important as an indicator of consumer preferences.
- But the multi-channel world is an expensive world; it assumes continuing rises in leisure spending.
- This is not possible for low-income consumers.

Moving Forward

- It would be helpful if the Consumer Panel could develop a methodology for analysing the relationship between cost, quality and affordability.

Moving Forward

- Low income consumers may have a special need for low cost, high quality broadcasting.
- That which is affordable and accessible to all also plays a part in building an inclusive society and culture.