

The re-emergence of local television in the UK: will the pursuit of profit lessen commitments to social impact?

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Abstract

Using a critical political economy of the media approach (Murdock and Golding, 1991) and building on Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital (Bourdieu, 1986), the paper will consider the ways in which current political, economic and cultural regimes shape local media service provision, and the ways in which social impacts on local audiences can be assessed. Presented as early findings from my PhD research, the study focuses on an urban conurbation in the North of England which has high levels of social exclusion, poverty and unemployment, and low levels of democratic engagement, and explores the extent to which increasing deregulation and liberalisation of the cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2013) affects corporate governance and ownership structures within the media industries.

Through an analysis of 57 applications for new local television licences submitted to the UK regulator in August 2012, including the social, economic and democratic conditions within the first 'pioneer' local TV service areas, ownership and governance structures, and proposed social and economic outcomes and contributions to civic debate, the study concludes that corporate governance structures play a key role in determining the impact of local television services, including the creation of social capital with community-owned, non-profit-seeking services predicted to create greater social value than privately-owned, profit-seeking services.

Introduction

Murdock and Golding (2005: 80) argue that television and other cultural forms not only shape our understanding of the world, providing us with the images, symbols and vocabulary with which we interpret and respond to our environment, but are shaped by, wider social, cultural, political and economic forces. They describe such a perspective as critical political economy of the media, wherein the aim is to understand the ways in which the political and economic dynamics of production structure public discourse. What distinguishes critical political economy approaches from others is the ways in which the approach sets out to show 'how different ways of financing and organizing cultural production have traceable consequences for the range of discourses, representations and communicative resources in the public domain and for the organization of audience access and use' (Murdock and Golding, 2005: 60-80). In 2011 the UK government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport proposed that local television would bring numerous economic, social, cultural and democratic benefits and would be 'important in the wider localism agenda, holding institutions to account and increasing civic engagement at a local level' (DCMS, 2011). As the first of a new wave of local television services in the UK begin broadcasting, amid vociferous criticism from elsewhere in the British media (see for example, Greenslade, 2008-2014; Turvill, 2014), the numerous benefits promised by government commissioners as the policy launched are yet to emerge.

During the past three decades, neoliberal shifts towards laissez faire market policies and commodification of cultural goods have played an important part in creating significant change in the cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2013: 9). In the late 1990s, the spread of neoliberal economic policies of deregulation and liberalisation across many advanced capitalist economies created massive

investment in new media technologies which led to an oversupply of infrastructure, stimulating an enormous demand for new content to fill the airwaves. Critics argue that these laissez faire market policies have created a global media industry that is dominated by a small number of powerful media conglomerates and that the commoditisation of media products increasingly works *for* global capitalism by providing both a network infrastructure for non-media firms' business operations and an informational environment that lays the ideological groundwork for the acceptance of a consumption-oriented and profit-driven social order (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 10). That is, it is not in the interests of most commercial television services, which are tightly interwoven with major national and multi-national corporations through advertising, sponsorship, product placement, supply chains, cross-promotion of other cultural products such as films and music and other commercial dealings, to challenge the hegemony of consumer sovereignty (McLaughlin, 2004) by developing television as a Habermasian public sphere where citizens can debate issues of public interest. Indeed, the very act of consuming television and other mass media has been blamed for the collapse of community (Putnam, 1995; Putnam, 2000), through its creation of isolated, passive individuals fearful of the 'mean and scary world' outside their door. One might therefore expect commercial local television services to demonstrate a significant focus on the creation of *economic value* in the shape of profits, dividends for shareholders and added value benefits for a narrow range of selected commercial partners and elite groups.

However, media scholars have since argued that it is the *nature* of television production and content, rather than the *extent* of consumption that matters most (Shah, 1998; Shah et al, 2001; Norris, 1996). Firstly, the organisational structure of a station or channel appears to inform the relationship between television consumption and levels of civic engagement, with public service broadcasters focusing primarily on content that informs, educates and encourages engagement, and commercial providers focusing on content that entertains and distracts viewers from the tedium of real-world issues (Hooghe, 2002; Holtz-Bacha & Norris, 2001: 124). Secondly, it appears that the nature of the content consumed matters. News programming is capable of spurring civically-minded viewers into positive action, creating a virtuous circle (Norris, 2000). Also, some argue that it is the act of engaging in television production, rather than simply consuming content, that creates the most significant social change (Potts, 2012). The community media sector champions the benefits of open access, participative media and co-production. Community media is 'a range of community-based activities intended to supplement, challenge, or change the operating principles, structures, financing, and cultural forms and practices associated with dominant media' (Howley, 2005). Such initiatives are becoming increasingly important as a way of democratising broadcasting since they involve community members in 'playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information' (Bowman & Willis, 2003). Furthermore, community media often engage some of the most marginalised and excluded members of society, giving voice to the voiceless, empowering community residents through media production, 'demystifying' the media production process and fostering digital literacy skills (Ali, 2013). One might therefore expect local television services that sit within the non-profit sectors, such as either public service broadcasters or community media services, to achieve greater *social value* than commercial services.

Reflecting on these dichotomous approaches to the organizing and financing of local television production, the study proposes that profit-seeking services aim to produce fundamentally different outcomes or values than non-profit services, with profit-seeking services aiming to create economic value, and non-profit services aiming to create social value. The next section proposes the use of capital as a framework for the assessment of value creation.

Forms of Capital

While much attention has been focused on the role of economic and human capital in generating growth at both the individual and the aggregate level, researchers have begun only recently to pay attention to other forms of nonphysical capital, and analysed their interplay (Liu, 2003: 823). In *Forms of Capital* (1986), Pierre Bourdieu suggests that in order to account for the structure and functioning of the social world, one must consider capital 'in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory'. While seven distinct types of capital have been identified, including cultural, human, social, political and economic, as well as natural and built or physical capital (Emery, Fey & Flora, 2006), for the purposes of this paper, I will focus primarily on social, political and economic capital.

Although there are conflicting definitions, social capital is 'typically conceptualized as embodied in the social ties among persons and positions' (Coleman, 1990). This study uses Putnam's (1993: 36) definition of social capital as 'features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit', focusing on three key types of social capital. Bonding capital strengthens social ties between individuals of similar backgrounds, useful for 'undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilising solidarity' (Putnam, 2000: 22); bridging capital strengthens social ties between individuals of dissimilar backgrounds, and is 'better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion' Putnam, 2000: 23); and linking social capital encompasses 'norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalised power or authority gradients in society' (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004: 655).

While the concept of political capital is considered by some to have 'sunk into oblivion' (Kjaer, 2013: 253), there have been attempts to resuscitate the concept. Economist Zhiqiang Liu defines political capital as 'productive investment embodied in people, including political skills and such characteristics as having belief in and being trusted by a certain political party' (Liu, 2003: 823-4). Corporate political capital constitutes a close relation between an organisation and the government or politicians (Nee and Opper, 2010 in Lin et al, 2014: 64), potentially bringing benefits such as preferential treatments, lighter taxation, stiffer regulatory enforcements over rivals and other useful resources (Fisman, 2001; Faccio, 2006, 2010 in Lin et al, 2014: 64).

Finally, although opinions also differ regarding the definition of economic capital, it is generally defined as either a stock of physical goods destined for future production or a monetary fund available to investors with the purpose of generating profit (Patruti, 2013: 90). More widely, economic capital of a locality or region can be considered as its Gross Value Added or productivity per capita ratios.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methods explanatory approach, whereby a quantitative analysis was undertaken to identify broad trends and patterns, the results of which informed a further qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2009). A matrix was developed to identify a range of sub-types of social, political and economic capital. Based on the narrative responses provided within the licence applications, each service was scored on a range of 1 to 5, with a score of 1 representing a very low focus on that sub-type, and 5 representing a very strong focus. All licence applications within the first wave of 'pioneer' service applications were analysed. Using SPSS, a series of statistical tests were then conducted. The initial findings suggested by the quantitative analyses were then explored more fully through a qualitative textual analysis and a case study.

Results

All applications submitted in August 2012, the first wave of licensing by the regulator, were assessed, giving a population and sample size of $n=57$ for all tests except for one variable, *Jobs Created*, where data was not available for some applications, so $n=50$. All licence applications are available on the Ofcom website (Ofcom, Local TV Licensing, 2014). The first section of the results illustrates general trends and patterns across the 57 licence applications. The second section presents a case study of Sheffield, an urban conurbation in the North of England.

Local Television Production

Corporate governance structures

Corporate governance structures was recorded as a key independent variable. Services identifying their company status as private limited companies, companies limited by share capital and limited liability partnerships were classified as profit-based services. Those identifying their company status as a company limited by guarantee or a community interest company were classified as non-profit services. The self-declared status of all companies was confirmed with the UK Registrar of Companies.

Awareness of local social, economic and political issues, needs and assets

Non-profit services consistently demonstrated a greater awareness of pre-existing local social issues, needs and assets. For example, the successful Belfast applicant, NvTv, demonstrates a sensitive understanding of the historical socio-political instability of Northern Ireland, and demonstrates a significant track record in developing community cohesion by bringing together individuals and communities from Protestant and Catholic as well as Islam and other minority faiths. This contrasts with the application for a competing, profit-based service for the Belfast licence, which fleetingly refers to 'the troubles' but omits any further discussion of the issue and instead focuses on positive aspirations for the future which could be generic to any city. In other applications, applicants cited socio-demographic statistics without any further discussion of the underlying reasons for the current context or of the various movements to address or improve such issues.

In general, non-profits are more likely to display a greater level of added value economic outcomes than profits, such as developing skills, attracting inward investment and helping to promote the city as a cultural and/or tourism destination. Services scoring strongly in this category frequently proposed to contribute to economic growth through programming, for example, by developing programmes showcasing local businesses, making links between local businesses and potential investors, highlighting local innovation, advertising local jobs vacancies or raising the profile of significant individuals in the business community, such as a local entrepreneur or the new boss of a local firm.

There was very little relationship between a service's awareness of local political capital, such as a strong understanding of local political structures, institutions and issues, and its profit status. For example, the profit-making London 8 application demonstrates a thorough understanding of local political issues, describing the four tiers of government present in London, levels of voter engagement and issues regarding election turnout, and several Your TV applications refer to the coalition government's Big Society policy, cuts in public funding and the potential community ownership of public assets, highlighting the need for local television services to stimulate public debate around these types of issues. The non-profit Manchester City Region application cites a number of relevant policies and strategies, such as the Labour government's Digital Britain Report, Ofcom's audience research and the city's strategic plan.

However, when considering the ways in which local political issues could be addressed through local television services, non-profit services demonstrated a greater sensitivity to the role of the media in facilitating political understanding. Non-profit services more often described the ways in which they would use the service to raise awareness of local issues, increase the visibility and accountability of policymakers, MPs, councillors and other people in positions of authority; and stimulate debate amongst the public. One notable exception is profit-making service That's Solent, whose application highlights their ambitions to reignite interest in politics, open a dialogue, make politics relevant for local people and provide a platform for local people to both question and challenge local politicians. That's Solent is also one of the very few services to propose undertaking investigative journalism, using Freedom of Information powers to hold public sector accountable, which most applications argued would be beyond their capacity.

Financing

Profit-based services tended to demonstrate a slightly stronger focus on the opportunities and benefits to be gained through advertising than non-profits. Services scoring strongly in this category tended to set out a detailed plan for attracting advertisers, such as developing a range of packages for different sized businesses; and for producing advertising content, such as engaging with local independent production companies that could produce television adverts. They also outlined the ways in which these activities could benefit the local economy, such as increasing communications between businesses and customers to increase local sales, and between businesses and other businesses to increase business-to-business (B2B) trade; and helping to grow the advertising, creative and digital sectors. Some services scoring strongly in this category also proposed a variety of additional commercial opportunities such as sponsorship and product placement. Non-profit services tended to emphasise their capacity to attract additional revenues from public and charitable sources, for example, towards the costs of training volunteers or producing programming with social goals.

Staffing

Services scoring strongly in this category tended to propose the creation of high numbers of jobs, in some cases up to 100, and in many cases more than 50 jobs. All services scoring very strongly in this category are profit-based services, which tend to retain both the control and operations of production in-house and so require a larger staff team. This 'closed' approach necessarily requires larger numbers of production staff to create content as well as non-production staff to manage and support production, as well as generate sales and other income to sustain the large staff teams. No non-profit service proposes to create more than 21 jobs, with most non-profits proposing to create between 5 and 15 jobs. Profit services were found to demonstrate a slightly stronger focus than non-profits on staff professional development, although most applications demonstrated a very low focus on this, probably because applicants sought to present their staff team as an asset or key strength of the application, rather than an area for development.

Approaches to Co-Production - Interactivity, Engagement and Partnership

Greater levels of interactivity with audiences were proposed by profit-based services than non-profits, where strong interactivity indicates a wide range of opportunities for audiences to interact with services, for example through participating in live audience shows, phone-ins, email and Skype, or through commenting via social media including Twitter and Facebook. Non-profit services also proposed similar features, although on a less consistent basis, probably reflecting smaller staff teams and resources to provide live programming which would be necessary for some aspects of live interactivity. Non-profits also proposed to use social media to build longer-term relationships with audiences,

although this tended to focus on a longer term relationship which transformed interactivity into engagement, such as using social media to create dialogue about future programming development.

By contrast, non-profit applications tended to have a much stronger focus on, and more effective and embedded systems for, engaging local people and organisations on a meaningful long term basis. The services scoring most strongly in this category tended to demonstrate very strong track records in engaging individuals and communities in development and production of programming; or to demonstrate significant commitment to providing open access to the service. Non-profit applications demonstrate a much stronger focus on developing volunteers, including structured training programmes and in some cases, formal accreditations and payment of expenses. Non-profit services also tended to provide detailed descriptions of the training and development programme to be provided to volunteers and partner organisations; and to demonstrate a diverse range of engagement opportunities and training programmes such as citizen journalism, media business and administration, broadcast engineering, journalism and media production. Whereas services scoring weakly in this category, more commonly profit-seeking services, tended to omit references to engagement strategies, to refer to a small number of engagement activities which could be seen as tokenistic, or to refer to engagement as a future goal, in some cases, an aspiration to be explored beyond the first three years of operations.

Following on from this, non-profit services also proposed stronger partnership arrangements, tending to have already established agreements in place with a wide range of strategic and operational bodies, such as local authorities, councillors and MPs, health services, education providers (including schools, colleges, universities, adult education services), emergency services, business networks and support agencies (including Chambers of Commerce, Regional Development Agencies or Local Enterprise Partnerships), plus a wide range of cultural and voluntary and community networks and organisations.

Local Television Programming

Social capital

Common types of programming that could be considered likely to create strong bonding or bridging social capital is programming that focuses in depth on one or more communities or groups, such as sports programmes, community news and events, programming focusing on specific faith or ethnic groups, programming focusing on special interests such as music, dance, rambling, gardening or crafts. These types of programming could create bonding capital through strengthening intra-group bonds, such as members of a group watching a programme about themselves or people with similar interests. On the other hand, the same content could create bridging capital if it was watched by people who were not already members of that group but who became more aware of the featured group and perhaps became more tolerant of or sympathetic to them, perhaps even becoming interested in becoming a member of that group by, for example, taking up an activity or moving to a new community. For example, the successful Belfast application proposes to establish six ultra-local broadband channels as 'social economy projects', and a range of programming focusing on specific communities, local heritage, local events and music, plus archive material from their local programme bank, suggesting that programming that creates bonding and bridging social capital is likely. However there is also the potential for such content to work the other way, generating negative perceptions of a community and therefore potentially reducing community cohesion and depleting social capital.

Linking social capital could be created through programming that brings together people from different communities or groups. Many services proposed a range of content that would likely create linking

capital, such as coverage of city-wide events, festivals and sporting events that hold broad appeal and enable a multitude of groups and communities across the locality to participate, building links across and between communities. A common example in the licence applications was quiz shows (eg. Notts TV, 2012, Your TV, 2012), where teams from different parts of a city come together to compete in local heats. Some group approaches, notably Your TV, suggested that such local heats could progress to inter-city competitions and national championships. TV Solent describes a focus on coverage of live events such as sports, culture and politics; several services describe local history and heritage programming (That's Solent, 2012; London TV, 2012; Lincolnshire Living, 2012). The strongest linking capital would be likely achieved through programming that both brought together disparate groups from across a city while simultaneously presenting or exploring aspects of culture which are shared between them, such as local history or heritage programmes, programmes exploring the local area or events and festivals with mass appeal, such as the Sea Odyssey events in Liverpool (Bay TV, 2012) or the Olympic Torch Relay (That's Solent, 2012). Perhaps the most powerful form of linking social capital is that which demonstrates leadership in social activism, for example, through showcasing innovative content such as science and business programming and TED-style lectures (Notts TV, 2012). Lincolnshire Living, the only and successful applicant for the Grimsby licence, proposes a 'call to action' at the end of many programmes, encouraging viewers not simply to consume or consider the content but to *take action* (Lincolnshire Living, 2012). Some services describe the ways in which they will challenge current journalistic or television industry practice, such as taking a positive decision not to allow crime to dominate news agenda, to be proactive in challenging rather than adding to perceptions of fear (London 8, 2012: NEON TV, 2012) or challenging negative perceptions of the locality in the regional, national and international media (Manchester City Region, 2012). The application for Our TV in Liverpool described how its partnerships with local public services would reduce public service costs in marketing and communications and would achieve significant cost-savings through informational and educational programming. The application cites the example of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service reducing its overall costs by 45% through focusing resources on fire prevention through public education, suggesting that similar cost-savings could be achieved through local television acting as a local communications portal for public services including health and education.

Political capital

Non-profit services were more likely to propose a wide range of current affairs programming, proposing both a depth and breadth of news and current affairs programming including regular original news, produced in-house rather than out-sourced; regular current affairs programming including a live audience panel show, based on the Question Time format, produced at least once a week; interviews with local politicians and decision-makers; analysis rather than simply coverage; and long-running stories rather than simply 'breaking' news. For example, the That's Solent application proposed a *daily* current affairs programme called 'Have Your Say' covering long-running community issues, as well as a programme called 'The Solent Audit' which would enable local people to review the service received from local councils, health providers and police services. The application also describes a weekly programme called 'That's Solent on Sunday' presented by Esther Rantzen, one of the service's directors and shareholders, which would provide analysis and debate on local issues. The Manchester City Region application proposed a weekly 30 minute slot for each of the ten local authorities to communicate with their constituents on local current issues, providing the service with significant levels of current affairs programming. The City TV Birmingham application also proposed a daily Question Time-style show as well as regular debates, programming focused on the city council and election specials. Likewise, Bay TV in Liverpool propose a morning show including Q&A/interviews with MPs, councillors and business leaders, as well as a daily 30 minutes show called 'Talking Point', coverage of Mayoral Questions and

debate, a weekly programme called 'Pavement Politics' showing local politicians as they go about their ward business and particularly their interactions with constituents, daily reports from the council chambers, and a Friday night live audience debate show 'In the Mix'. By contrast, services scoring weakly in this category tended to focus on news rather than current affairs, and on 'breaking' news rather than analysis or long-running stories.

A Case Study: Sheffield

Sheffield is a city and metropolitan borough in South Yorkshire, England. It was selected as a case study because the successful applicant bid, the non-profit service Sheffield Live TV, clearly illustrates a range of the key features of non-profit services described above, as identified through analysis of the 57 licence applications.

Firstly, a brief background of the city: The city's name derives from the River Sheaf which runs through the city. The population of the city has grown over the last 10 years and is now approximately 550,000 (ONS, 2011). In particular there have been increases in younger and older people, and it is more diverse in its ethnic groups and communities. This is due to a combination of the impact of the universities in the city and inward migration of households with young families. The ethnic minority population of the city is now 19%, more than double that in 2001 (Sheffield First, State of Sheffield Report, 2014). Sheffield is one of the eight largest regional English cities that make up the Core Cities Group. During the 19th century, Sheffield developed an international reputation for steel production. Many innovations were developed locally, such as crucible and stainless steel, fuelling an almost tenfold population increase during the Industrial Revolution. However, international competition in iron and steel caused a decline in traditional local industries during the 1970s and 1980s, coinciding with the collapse of coal mining in the area. The 21st century has seen extensive redevelopment in Sheffield along with other British cities, although economic performance remains a mixed story. The city does not appear to have experienced more problems than comparable cities and the unemployment rate has recently declined in line with national trends. Sheffield remains 'in the pack', rather than lagging behind like some northern cities. However, levels of youth unemployment, particularly long term youth unemployment, remain high (Sheffield First, State of Sheffield Report, 2014). People are living longer in Sheffield and the overall health of the city's population is improving. However inequalities remain: areas of concern include infant mortality rates, unhealthy lifestyles, dementia and poor mental health (particularly amongst the city's children and young people), in addition to persistent geographical inequality. Health represents a complex set of conditions that are inherently linked to social and economic conditions, with different parts of the city and different communities experiencing a variety of root causes. Many of those already in difficulty will potentially face even more extreme hardship and additional groups currently on the margins of poverty and new groups of households who may have been financially secure previously could have new challenges to face (Sheffield First, State of Sheffield Report, 2014). Politically, the city is controlled by a strong majority of Labour Party councillors, and the majority of the city's Members of Parliament are also Labour. Election turnout is consistently lower than the national average.

Sheffield has a long tradition of community media production. The Community Media Association (Comedia), the UK representative body for the community broadcasting sector founded in 1983, is based in Sheffield, as well as a wide range of creative, media and digital enterprises and freelancers. Three applications were made for the Sheffield local television licence. Firstly, the Your TV group developed a Your TV Hallamshire bid, alongside seven others across the UK. Secondly, the Canadian group Metro 8 submitted a bid, also alongside seven others, for primarily northern British cities.

Sheffield Live TV was therefore the only stand-alone, independent bid which was not linked to a wider group or consortium approach. The service proposes an entirely non-profit corporate governance structure:

'The company will be wholly owned by Sheffield Community Media Ltd (SCM), a Society for the Benefit of the Community... In a General Meeting each member will have one vote regardless of share regardless of shareholding.' (Sheffield Live licence application, 2012: 21)

The proposed structure, operations and outcomes of Sheffield Live TV clearly map to the key features of non-profit services as identified through a broad analysis of the 57 licence applications. Firstly, the bid provides a detailed description of the city which demonstrates a high level of awareness of local structures, features and community assets, as illustrated by the following excerpt:

'Sheffield is a cosmopolitan city, the fourth largest in England, with 128 languages spoken in our schools and two major universities, with over 58,000 students. It is known as a place where things are made, a reputation invigorated by the growth sectors of advanced manufacturing and engineering, digital and new media, and the knowledge industries. It has a vibrant music scene from which have emerged internationally successful acts such as Pulp and the Arctic Monkeys. It is England's greenest city with the Peak National Park District and open countryside just a few minutes away – an international centre of attraction for walkers, climbers and cyclists.' (Sheffield Live licence application, 2012: 8)

Later, the licence application clearly links local issues and needs with its strategy, for example, highlighting the need to address 'brain drain', the fight to retain graduates and other talent within a region rather than losing them to London or other major conurbations:

'... the absence of any major television broadcaster in the city means much of the best broadcasting talent moves elsewhere for work. SLTV will provide a platform to showcase local creative and media production, enabling established and emergent media producers to test their ideas, build audience and gain recognition.' (Sheffield Live licence application, 2012: 11)

The leader of Sheffield Live TV, Steve Buckley, has a long history of community media production and has also worked as consultant to community media initiatives for the UK Department for International Development, UNESCO, the Association for Progressive Communications and others. He is also author of several publications such as a *Good Practice Handbook* in community media published by UNESCO; the *African Charter on Broadcasting: a review of its impact in West Africa*; and *Broadcasting, Voice, and Accountability* which provides development practitioners with an overview of the key policy and regulatory issues involved in supporting freedom of information and expression and enabling development of a pluralistic, independent, and robust broadcasting sector.

As one would therefore expect, the licence application demonstrates a significant commitment to co-production, with external freelancers and third party producers central to the business model:

'Our assessment is of a high level of interest in programme making for a local television channel, with content producers prepared to contribute at no or low cost, provided the channel itself is locally-owned and managed, and not run for profit.' (Sheffield Live licence application, 2012: 10)

'We will work with and provide journalism training for local bloggers and community website editors to broaden the range of source material beyond diary events and official communications, and to encourage hyper-local news provision as a complement to broadcast

news reporting. We have identified 50 local bloggers and community news websites and have consulted with over 20 representatives as part of a wider community networking partnership to explore strategies for content sharing and content aggregation.’ (Sheffield Live licence application, 2012: 13)

Sheffield Live TV also demonstrates a strong commitment to engagement of local people:

‘SLTV will draw particularly on the experience of local community radio station, Sheffield Live! 93.2fm, which involves around 120 volunteer producers on a weekly basis producing up to 18 hours per day of locally made and locally relevant radio content.’ (Sheffield Live licence application, 2012: 10)

And to partnership, a commitment to which is apparent throughout the bid, and which is recognized by Sheffield City Council:

‘At the SLTV public meeting in August 2012 Simon Green, executive director for place at Sheffield City Council, applauded SLTV’s consortia approach, calling this crucial so that local television, with demand-led programming, would effectively collaborate with activity across Sheffield... [The SLTV] business model builds on existing resources of organizations like Commedia Sheffield, Kinematic Media Ltd, South Yorkshire Filmmakers Network and the Sheffield College, to assure a sustainable model of local production...’ (Sheffield City Council, in Sheffield Live licence application, 2012: 11)

Regarding programming, Sheffield Live TV aims to develop peak-time programming that has broad appeal, with the aim of increasing community cohesion, while focusing on strengthening individuals communities during off-peak broadcasting:

‘It will carry an eclectic range of community-based content engaging volunteer producers and contributors and including programming for minority communities and special interests... targeting niche audiences including in languages other than English.’ (Sheffield Live licence application, 2012: 11)

Sheffield Live TV explicitly aims to stimulate social change through leadership programming:

‘SLTV will also carry social action campaigns... for example, to promote safer neighbourhoods, environmental responsibility, health and wellbeing.’ (Sheffield Live licence application, 2012: 11)

Finally, Sheffield Live TV demonstrates strong political capital which would increase access to local politicians and increase both the visibility of local politicians and the service’s commitment to stimulating interest in political engagement amongst the wider community:

‘SLTV has received all party support from Sheffield’s Councillors... on weekdays it will carry at least one hour of live current affairs programming going ‘behind the news’ to air local opinion... SLTV will aim to provide a trusted source of local news... we will work with Sheffield City Council to develop programme ideas that can increase people’s understanding of local authority decision making, promote local participation in policy making, and improve access to information from local public bodies’ (Sheffield Live licence application, 2012: 13)

Conclusions

This paper began by considering some of the global social, political, cultural and economic forces which shape the field of local television in the UK, concluding that globalization and neoliberal laissez faire policies increase pressures on cultural producers towards marketization, and that such forces are likely to push local television services in the UK towards market-led approaches that prioritise commercial success, that is, the accumulation of economic capital, over social goals, that is, the creation of social capital. Analysis of 57 licence applications submitted during the first wave of commissioning of local television services in the UK support this hypothesis. The majority of applications were for services adopting a primarily profit-seeking corporate governance structure such as a private limited company or a limited liability partnership, indicating that the majority of applicants see local television primarily as a commercial opportunity towards the accumulation of economic capital, and appear relatively unconcerned with social outcomes. A small minority of applications were for services adopting a primarily non-profit-seeking corporate governance structure, such as a company limited by guarantee or a community interest company, indicating that the minority of applicants see local television as a public service geared towards the development of social capital.

The analysis found that non-profit services consistently demonstrate greater breadth, depth and detail of proposed programming aimed at developing social capital, including bonding, bridging and linking social capital, largely through a range of features, lifestyle and entertainment programming; and political capital, largely through current affairs and news programming. Non-profit services are characterised by relatively small staff teams who act as cultural brokers and executive producers, supplemented by a wide range of freelancer networks, partner organisations and individual volunteers. Non-profit services tend to display a strong commitment to partnership development, community engagement and co-production. The analysis suggests that non-profit services are much more strongly embedded within the local community, consistently demonstrating greater levels of awareness of pre-existing stocks of local social capital, probably because they are more firmly embedded within their localities through strong partnership, engagement and co-production strategies. If this is the case, one might expect to see significant variations in social outcomes between profit and non-profit services, once services become established. However, it may be the case that applicants from the non-profit sector are more adept at identifying, describing and developing proposals to address, key social issues, than applicants from commercial services. If this is the case, one might expect to see lesser variations in social outcomes once services become established.

Interestingly, a focus on the creation of political capital appears unrelated to the corporate governance structure or business model adopted, with services irrespective of profit status tending to propose significant outcomes regarding the creation of political capital. In particular, profit status appears to have little impact on the likelihood of a local television service to improve civic or political engagement or participation. It may well be that this rare consistency between profit and non-profit services is driven by the desires of applicants to satisfy the demands of commissioners, as political actors themselves, to place a higher priority on increasing political engagement than on wider social change.

The Two Types of Local Television Service

Analysis of the bid documents then clearly points to two emergent types of local television service. The first is a community service with primarily social goals; the second is a commercial service, with primarily economic goals.

Community type

The community type of local television service acts like a community media service. Such services are defined by a non-profit business model and often maintain a small staff team supplemented by strong partnerships with local freelancer networks, independent production companies, universities and colleges and a wide range of local service providers including strategic partnership bodies from the public, private and third sector. There is a strong emphasis on engagement and co-production. Community services are likely to create strong local social capital and a significant level of local political capital.

Commercial type

The commercial type of local television service acts like a national broadcast service. Such services are defined by a profit-seeking business model and often employ large staff teams, undertaking the majority of production in-house and offering limited opportunities for community involvement. Commercial services are likely to create strong local economic capital and a significant level of local political capital.

This paper therefore concludes that corporate governance structures play a key role in determining the impact of local television services, including the creation of social capital with community-owned, non-profit-seeking services aiming to create significantly greater social value than privately-owned, profit-seeking services.

Limitations and the need for further study

This study represents a broad brush analysis of the total population of local television licence applications in the UK during the first wave of licensing in 2012. While it has considered the breadth of understanding and proposed goals demonstrated within licence applications, proposals are by their very nature, future aspirations for services, rather than real-life cases.

Most importantly then, as the first local television services begin broadcasting in the UK, further research should explore how the proposals for local television services considered within this paper are enacted within the 'real' world, as opposed to the imagined world of proposals and applications. How have the goals set out in licence applications evolved during the early stages of start-up and launch? Will services achieve the outcomes set out in their applications? How will content impact upon local audiences and economies? What factors will help or hinder them in achieving their goals?

Further, why do leaders in the field of local television decide upon one approach or another? What factors motivate local television leaders and what factors influence their decisions, from intrinsic beliefs in the nature of their chosen approach, to extrinsic factors such as the availability of funding? How do these factors affect the ongoing evolution of service development? How does the nature and ethos of a service evolve over time? Within local television programming, what values are communicated, and how is such content being received, interpreted and acted upon by audiences? The London service in particular has experienced significant criticism within the national media during its first few months on air, with claims that audiences for some programmes are near-zero, but in other areas such as Grimsby and Norwich, there are signs that local television has been more warmly received. With the launch of a further 16 local television services expected by the end of 2014, and more beyond, there will be plenty of opportunities to explore these questions.

About the Author

Kerry Traynor is a Community Consultant specialising in the creative industries and social enterprise. Kerry has previously founded a number of not-for-profit organisations including an educational partnership and a community media enterprise. She has helped to secure more than £16 million to support a range of social causes on Merseyside and has been an independent grants assessor for a national charity since 2003. She holds an MSc in Corporate Governance and is currently reading for a PhD in the social impacts of local television at the Institute of Cultural Capital, a strategic collaboration between Liverpool John Moores University and the University of Liverpool. She can be contacted at Kerry.Traynor@LJMU.ac.uk.

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