

The “Cooling” Audiences for a Cool BBC; Creating Services for Audience-Centered Programming

Journalism Studies

Submitted by:

Florin Vladica*

Doctoral Program in Communication and Culture and Rogers Communication Centre
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street,
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M5B 2K3
florin.vladica@ryerson.ca

Philip Savage, PhD

Department of Communication Studies and Multimedia
McMaster University
1280 Main Street West
Hamilton, Ontario
L8S 4L9
savagep@mcmaster.ca

*corresponding author

For European Communications and Education Association
2nd European Communication Conference
Barcelona, November 25-28, 2008

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Abstract

Based on the authors' extensive mix of academic and professional experience in North American and continental European audience and consumer research,¹ we examine primary broadcasting audience and regulatory documents, as well as key insertions from academics, in a case study to illustrate how the change in understanding audience at the BBC, at the tail end of its 2006 Charter Renewal, led to a radical transformation in the way the world's leading public broadcaster hopes to fulfill its public service mandate.

The BBC management as a world leader and model for non-state, public broadcasting is confronting the new media landscape by implementing an extensive plan in which BBC will "ride the revolution" of media programming into the XXIst century. This change has been described in a BBC project called "Creative Future", formalized in the BBC Charter renewal presented to the British Parliament in October 2006. At the core is a stated goal to acknowledge, accept, and capitalize on the impact of new interactive technologies, of pervasive communication devices, of ubiquitous networked interactions, of the "creative destruction" power of the Internet. One may label this as the new "cool BBC." We look at what is the "audience fit" between the new "cool BBC" and the British public interest? To what degree are the decisions to serve the public in this new media environment – migratory and mobile multi-platform content consumption, in territory with consumer satisfaction models yet to be proven, with delivery methods yet to be established, and with content packages and formats yet to be tested – in tune with actual audience needs and desires? What role will be played as well by the broadcaster's effort to change perceptions about the BBC: from "traditional" to "modern", from "old" to "new", from "simple" to "sophisticated", from "conservative" to "trendy".

¹ Florin Vladica, as Manager Trade Development for over five years in consumer goods, coordinated product launches and branding projects that involved rock concerts, movie show, and direct consumer interactions. Philip Savage was from 1989 to 2005 Head of Research for CBC Radio as well as Senior Manager of Planning and Regulatory Affairs, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

We answer two sets of questions. The first one is about what is BBC's solution to change, to adapt to a competitive marketplace? Specifically, what is the new portfolio of services available on demand, offered across a portfolio of digital platforms, that will suit different generational needs and that will draw audiences across the BBC's (public) services? The second set of questions refers to how BBC planned such changes, and we investigate how audiences are represented and used to justify or to plan new services, or to build policies and legislation around the British public broadcaster. We apply the "audience massage" model as a framework for organizing, on three levels, an enquiry into the role of the audiences in building and implementing the "Creative Future" programme strategy and project, and in shaping the new Royal Charter. The three levels of analysis are: 1) rhetorical – with attention on the content of audience research; 2) framing – with attention to the "media" of research generation, in particular the dominance of certain research methodologies; and, 3) structural – with attention to the discourse as it is supported by certain dominant research systems and institutions that are integrated into larger broadcasting systems (Savage, 2006).

Key Words

Public broadcasting, interactive media, audience research, journalism

Introduction

The BBC management, as a world leader and model for non-state, public broadcasting, is confronting the new media landscape by implementing an extensive plan in which BBC will “ride the revolution” of media programming into the XXIst century. The plan has been formalized in the “Creative Future” programme strategy (BBC, 2006_c; BBC, 2006_e) and the new BBC Royal Charter presented to the British Parliament in 2006 (HRH, 2006). At the core is the effort to recognize, understand, and capitalize on the impact of new interactive technologies, of pervasive communication devices, of ubiquitous networked interactions, of the “creative destruction” power of the Internet. It is an acknowledgment that the way journalism is done and delivered goes through a fast paced, radical, and irreversible adaptation to a world that is transforming.

Padovani and Tracey (2003) studied the trend toward digitization and funding for four major broadcasters: BBC, the Italian RAI, ABC (Australia), and CBC (Canada), and noted “the disturbing contradiction between the necessity for PSBs to be aggressive in the marketplace (and be even more “cost-effective than [their] commercial rivals”) and their public service obligations”:

(...) public broadcasters are caught between Scylla and Charybdis; that is, they have to reinforce their “core services,” while at the same time they are expected to accelerate the take-up of integrated digital TV sets—and, of course, be competitive (Padovani & Tracey, 2003: 136).

Caught in the middle, public broadcasters attempt a compromise, and BBC’s response was clear: survival by adapting to the changes in the media, expansion by adopting the digital, interactive media, and the multiplatform and on-demand communications technologies, and capitalizing on the impact on creativity.

This paper is about the role of the audiences in building and implementing the “Creative Future” programme strategy, and in shaping the new Royal Charter. We suggest how media and audience research performed by the BBC and the public broadcasting

stakeholders has been used to define and represent the audiences, to design and justify new services, as well as to influence the policy making process and the legislation that regulates these services. Ultimately, it was an effort for survival (of the public service) that dictated how to use the audiences (or to be more precise, audience research as a proxy of audience intentions) for the purpose of justification. Our investigation also exposes discrepancies between the arguments in the public discourse and how services, policies, and legislation are actually built at the British public broadcaster. We used exclusively primary broadcasting audience and regulatory papers, and examined BBC's relationship with the government, that is with Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Office of Communications (OfCom). Any of these institutions would select either focus groups, or surveys, or ratings, or else to produce the specific kind of data and the information, the research content that best fits their representation models and that best support their rhetoric, the arguments to be made.

In the introductory part we map managerial choices at BBC, taken to respond to the new realities of the UK and international media. The "Creative Future" is an innovative solution to re-define the BBC for tomorrow, with a portfolio of digital, interactive, multiplatform, and on-demand communications services. It is also the solution to project BBC, to its "cooling" audiences, as a cool brand, organization, partner, and entertainer. Next, we discuss the data and information produced about the audiences, the methods deployed, and the public consultation process. Altogether, it constitutes a comprehensive media and audience research system functioning for some time now at BBC and in the British Government, and that provides a framework for legislation and/or policy making.

BBC goes digital, interactive, multiplatform, and on-demand

The new Royal Charter defined a sixth "public purpose", marking the establishment of the digital and Internet era for broadcasting at BBC². It was the recognition of "the enormous contribution that the BBC has made to British life and culture, both at home and

² (f) in promoting its other purposes, helping to deliver to the public the benefit of emerging communications technologies and services and, in addition, taking leading role in the switchover to digital television (HRH, 2006: 1)

abroad” (DCMS, 2005_a; 2), a contribution where it played a leading role in several ways: 1) for the consuming public, it raised the awareness, triggered interest in digital television, and addressed confusion or ‘fear’ over this, drove the take-up of digital TV, especially through its “Freeview” OTA service (Iosifidis, 2005), attracted millions to the Internet with its high-quality content and learning programs, delivered news and information around the clock in an interactive way, including through mobile; 2) for the government and industry, BBC helped make the target date of analogue switch-off more achievable, and informed, promoted, and supported the adoption of digital broadcasting for both TV and radio; and 3) for national talent, it used its digital portfolio to develop and promote original UK content in comedy, music, and drama (BBC, 2005_a). It was also a victory at BBC over its critics and over coordinated efforts of the cable, satellite, and other digital broadcasters. Those opposed this transformation of what they perceived to be a contradictory public broadcaster, and a contradiction in the approach to delivery the public service with a competitor for the private media (Padovani & Tracey, 2003).

Changes at BBC were triggered to an extent by changes in audiences. Ten teams at BBC, during 2005 and 2006, explored what the world may be like in 2012, looking at the use of emerging communication and information technologies, at the changes in the expectations, behaviour and lifestyle of audiences, at how journalism and broadcasting are being produced and what could be done for an increasingly digital public. It was “one of the largest audience research and insight initiatives the BBC has ever undertaken” (Mark Thompson, BBC’s Director-General), with input from hundreds of people across the BBC, from audiences across Britain, from the independent production sector, talent, and other industry partners. The result was a creative blueprint for content output for the next 5-7 years (BBC, 2006_c; BBC, 2006_e). The “Creative Future” programme envisioned strategies in six genres: journalism, drama, knowledge-building, comedy, music, and children and teens, and included a comprehensive list of recommendations for all structures and operations (BBC, 2006_c).

For example, research showed that children and teens know only Internet, mobile, interactive media, participate, connect, and share. To gain them, people at BBC are

committed to change and make BBC accepted as an alternative for entertainment and education: “I think there’s no other broadcast in the world that is going to take this group as serious as we do, to invest as much as we do” (Richard Deverell, BBC Children’s). Same research showed what is attractive, cool, for teens, 12 to 16 years: a service delivered via digital platforms, TV, radio, and broadband, service that would offer high volume drama, comedy, music and factual content (BBC₅, 2006). To appeal to this segment of a cooling audience, “Creative Future” platform proposed a new brand and portal that would fully exploit the benefits of the digital. Media training resources would support teen’s creativity, letting them do what they are used to: post content online, share movies and music with their friends.

For another segment, the adult consumers, the “Creative Future” should turn BBC into a destination for entertainment and information. Comedy would follow the trendy tastes of the “traditionalists”, “new mainstream”, “progressives” and “jokers”, should suit different generational needs, and draw audiences for the public services (Born, 2003). A new, interactive sports portal would offer live action, breaking stories, highlights, and up to date content pushed on mobile. The BBC’s rich archives would open and be accessed through portals for knowledge building, health & sciences, learning, music, or sport. The already successful bbc.co.uk would have a new look and feel to facilitate easier and interactive navigation and search. There would be also features for creation and sharing of user generated content, to encourage audiences to interact and collaborate with the BBC journalism:

“The content would be fully digital, available on all devices, all the time, searchable, movable and shareable...we’re less than five years from fully individualised, drag-and-drop TV and radio stations”, and one can “pull down anything from any of tonight’s schedules, select anything from our archive, let us propose a channel based on your previous choices, or make your own channel and share it with your friends. Then hit play. That’s it!” (Mark Thompson in BBC, 2006_d: 4).

With its expansion through the launch of new digital channels and alliances with private American and European broadcasters, BBC transformed itself into a globally-oriented media group, being now “the second biggest public broadcaster in the world after

Japan's NHK" (Fraser, 2000). However, it is and will remain a public service delivered in a duopoly created in Britain in the mid-1950, and is keeping its vision to be "the most creative organisation in the world" and to "enrich people's life with programmes and services that inform, educate and entertain" (BBC, 2006_b).

Research focus, questions, framework, and methodology

We offered brief answers to the first set of questions, about what BBC does to change, to adapt to a new and more competitive marketplace, in light of conceptions of audience as citizens and consumers. Specifically, what is the new portfolio of services offered across a portfolio of digital platforms, that will suit different generational needs and that will draw audiences across the BBC's (public) services? In particular we are concerned with the "cool" approach to audience (seemingly counter-intuitive to the stodgy old "Auntie" that is BBC, and other public broadcasters); i.e. what are the broadcaster's actions to change perceptions about BBC among the members of its changing public: from "traditional" to "modern", from "old" to "new", from "simple" to "sophisticated", from "conservative" to "cool" BBC? In this context, the main set of questions refers to how audiences are represented and used to justify or to plan new services, or to build policies and legislation around the British broadcaster. To what degree are the decisions to serve the public in this new media environment – migratory and mobile multi-platform content consumption, in territory with consumer satisfaction models yet to be proven, with delivery methods yet to be established, and with content packages and formats yet to be tested – in tune with actual audience needs and desires?

We captured different perspectives on how audiences are represented and referred to in twenty-one documents directly related to the BBC Royal Charter review process, dated from 2004 to 2007: agreement protocols, programme remits, service licences, statements of programme policy, public value tests, public complaints, market assessments, white and green papers, or policy response papers. The following are key documents that incorporate significant audience research, and that reflect the diversity of arguments, of research data and information, and the range of research methodologies deployed to obtain such data and

information, as well as the comprehensive system and infrastructure that the BBC, DCMS and OfCom have in place to perform media and audience research³:

1. The market impact of the BBC's digital radio services
2. A Report on Deliberative Research to support the DCMS Review of the BBC's Royal Charter
3. Qualitative Research to Inform the Preparation of the BBC Review 2004
4. Quantitative Research to Inform the Preparation of the BBC Charter Review 2004;
5. Independent Review of BBC Online
6. Review of the BBC's Royal Charter: A strong BBC, independent of government
7. BBC Charter Review Qualitative Research
8. The Consumer Experience: Research Report 2006
9. Our Promise To You: How the Trust will engage with audiences

We apply an “audience massage” model for examining, on three levels, the role of audiences in the preparation of the new Royal Charter and, related to that, in the creation and implementation of the “Creative Future” programme strategy: 1) rhetorical – with attention on the content of audience research; 2) framing – with attention to the “media” of research generation, in particular the dominance of certain research methodologies; and 3) structural – with attention to the discourse as it is supported by certain dominant research institutions and systems adopted to perform media and audience research, and that are integrated into larger broadcasting systems (Savage, 2006). The framework provides an accurate and meaningful reading of the type of data and information presented into a research-based report, and of the arguments that these should support. With a link being established between the argument and the content (i.e. research data, form of presentation), we can explain why certain research methodologies were adopted. The assumption is that the sponsors of the investigation select methods that provide a specific set of data to support only, or especially, the argument and/or the preferred conception about audiences. Finally, the structural level, the deepest level of “audience massage” model, can explain the context of the media/audiences research.

³ The authors can provide the list with the sample of twenty one selected documents. For a more in-depth study, a comprehensive list has been compiled from the BBC Charter Review website (DCMS Publications: <http://www.bbccharterreview.org.uk>), with most relevant documents that have to do with the Royal Charter review process (2003-2007), and that involved an unprecedented degree of public and industry engagement, including a range of events, consultation, research and focused analysis.

Audience research and representation

The investigation starts with the content (“rhetorical” level in the “audience massage” model) and methodologies that dominate the audience research (“framing” level), with the answer to who is the public and how is it represented. The range of research methods used, the diversity of perspectives offered by the BBC, DCMS, OfCom, and their contracted consultants, altogether produce significant research output and in-depth understanding of the “BBC owners”.

The British public is the (civil) “society”, “the nation” or, as Queen put it, “Our people” (HRH, 2006). In formal language regarding institutional processes and interactions, issues of governance, functioning, and accountability, often used are “licence fee payer” and “public”, as in the public value/interest/purpose. The public has a granular structure, consisting of different “groups” or “communities”: geographical, like Wales, or East London; demographical; ethnic, like Asians; or occupational, such as educators, innovators. Reports produced by BBC and government, that present results of market and especially audience research, interchangeably use “audience(s)”, “consumer(s)”, “respondents”, “viewers”, and “users”. They refer to the individuals monitored, interviewed, or who attended focus groups. Such research and subsequent reports were usually contracted out to consulting firms; they are inflected with MBA and market-oriented jargon.

The richness of the content originates in the diversity of sources and the deployment of all research methods available. Sources for data, information, or knowledge about the British consumer of public programming are numerous and diverse: industry and market reports, or media and audience research projects conducted by BBC, government, and especially commissioned to external consultants:

- Audience usage: both industry-standard surveys, such as BARB and RAJAR, Nielson Netratings and BBC commissioned surveys, such as BMRB surveys of online usage;
- Audience perceptions: BBC-commissioned tracking surveys, including a new daily survey of around 5,000 people, measuring different aspects of service and programme quality and impact; regular surveys of impartiality; also bespoke adhoc surveys and research, linked to particular services or programmes;
- Content analysis: types of content, range and scheduling. Based on internal BBC audit of actual output and/or research commissioned from independent sources, such as radio output analysis;
- Financial analysis: based on internal BBC financial data, and on publicly available benchmark data from other broadcasters and media companies;
- Expert opinion: including peer review and industry awards won (BBC, 2005_a: 28-29).

Research methods such as surveys, ratings, weblogs, subscriptions, or focus groups usually offer quantitative data presented in tables or charts, and interpreted to illustrate trends, present a point of view, or justify introduction of new services. For example, during the Charter renewal process BBC issued the “Building public value; Renewing the BBC for a digital world” to justify the transition to digital; not only for new digital services such as free satellite or digital radio and HDTV, but also for building of a new technological infrastructure and implementation of organisational changes required for the digital environment. The argument is supported by almost ten pages of quantitative measurements to illustrate online behaviour, consumption of media, broadband adoption, and so on.

As in the work pioneered with the CBC’s audience massage rhetoric⁴, we suggest that the place to look for audience representations is the performance measurement system, where quantitative data measure the accomplishment (or not) of BBC objectives (many of a more qualitative essence). The tracking of institutional objectives seemingly provide a ready stream of concrete and measureable data; empirical output useful for a quantitative representation of the consuming public (even though there is little evidence that any specific audience member or group ever asked for these specifically). This is audience

⁴ Savage, Philip D. (2006). “The Audience Massage: Audience Research And Canadian Broadcasting Policy”, Doctor Of Philosophy Dissertation, *Joint Graduate Programme In Communication And Culture, York University And Ryerson University*, Toronto, October.

measurement where BBC's audiences are represented through collections of pie or bar charts, and numbers in tables and columns, easily and conveniently manipulated to support the overall argument and the discourse of the authors or sponsors of the research commissioned.

This institutionalized system that engages with the public through all three organizations we investigated, goes beyond audience measurement and includes also qualitative work. Qualitative research is being used for assessment purposes, such as in the independent reviews of regular BBC services. But most of the time is being used to justify policy initiatives, such as the new governance model of the BBC suggested in the Green Paper, during the renewal of the Royal Charter (DCMS, 2005_a).

Quantitative data and empirical information, put in a certain context and enriched with qualitative findings and author's interpretations, would produce the depth in the knowledge needed to support an argument in the discourse. For example, to support the review process at the launch of the Charter review, DCMS commissioned not only the quantitative research, but also a thorough qualitative and deliberative research. Focused on the key themes of the BBC Charter review (attitudes, funding, commercial services, organization, infrastructure, governance, and accountability), these research projects were also great opportunities for learning about audiences. Notably, the needs and wants of the public about the transition to digital were not included! One more example refers to audience's typologies, where qualitative interpretations together with empirical quantitative data offer an enhanced, more accurate representation of those who consumer BBC's services (COI/MORI/DCMS, 2004).

Finally, disclosure of details about research methodologies used varies. Policy documents or the "green" and "white" papers are usually based on previous audience research, so there are no such details about the research used to base arguments or policy recommendations. However, when BBC, or DCMS and OfCom present reports about research they performed, or when consultants deliver their findings, usually there are sufficient details available. Overall, this practice of transparency offers a good level of disclosure about the content produced and the research methods adopted. An educated

reader is able to see beyond numbers and text, so to identify underlying assumptions and arguments. One can also assess any possible bias in the research methodology or presentation of the findings, and acquire an accurate understanding of the audiences and of the context in which information is produced and presented.

System of public consultations in British context

In this section we look at the “structural” level in the “audience massage” model. The audience research performed by the BBC, and for BBC related issues by the government, consultants, advocacy groups, or other parties is significant. Every year there are numerous reports produced; some are ad-hoc, issue-specific, whilst most are regular research projects, usually of large scale, comprehensive, asking a wide range of questions and adopting a range of research methods. It has become already a tradition to perform formal audience research and to involve the public in the debate about its broadcaster(s). It is today an entrenched system that has its components fine-tuned and running smoothly, but only after decades of evolution, practice, and organic growth.

For example, for its White Paper about BBC in the digital age, “A public service for all: the BBC in the digital age”, DCMS has received in total over 10,000 responses during the two phases of a public consultation, from “a vast range of people – from the BBC to small independent TV and radio companies, from large charities and trade bodies to individuals members of the public” (DCMS, 2006_b: 69). And the BBC’s “Public service in an online world” shows how the public consultation, and media and audience research work: this document is a full performance review produced by the BBC, with the support of KPMG (research), at the request of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media, and Sports, to be presented in the Parliament for a review of BBC services.

In British context, the licence fee gives the public “the right and route to hold the BBC to account”; and today there is a mechanism with a range of alternatives to engage the BBC public, to be consulted, listened and responded to, to convey opinions and needs (BBC, 2005_a). The fundamental document, that is the Royal Charter, demands explicitly that the BBC should engage with the licence fee payers. Comprehensive public

consultations should bring their perspectives into the functioning of the public broadcaster and into the regulatory framework produced by government agencies, for example through newly formed Audience Councils (DCMS, 2006a: 14). Media and audience research are explicitly requested for the process of policy-making, regulating, and managing the BBC. The new BBC Trust must “carefully and appropriately assess the views of licence fee payers” (DCMS, 2006a: 8), and “must apply the test of public value to everything it does – its services, its commercial activities, its scope and scale. The public have a right to expect a very wide breadth of services and content in return for the licence fee, but the BBC’s depth of vertical integration and in-house activity should be based on public rather than its own institutional priorities” (BBC, 2004c: 5). The methods to engage with audiences include: 1) consultations that will involve quantitative and qualitative research; 2) discussion with the BBC Audience Councils; 3) research projects that will include among other opinion surveys, discussion groups, and workshops; 4) public meetings and online consultations and discussions; 5) interaction with interest groups; and 6) complaints and comments (BBC, 2007g: 4-8).

To conclude, BBC, DCMS, and OfCom have in place a system that creates opportunities for public consultations and audience research, practically about all dimensions of the BBC operations: for new services, for purpose remits, for periodical service reviews, for complaints handling, for Royal Charter review, for market and industry analysis, and so on. This institutionalized public consultation system can produce an accurate representation of those who are measured, observed, questioned, and consulted. Truly, the output of research performed is being used afterward conveniently, for justification of new services, or to influence policy making and legislation around these services. Nevertheless, the way audience research and public consultations are performed within the framework of the BBC operations has merits, and one may conclude that is the best example in the industry.

Discrepancies and the research system

The institutionalized research system investigated herein can produce an accurate representation of audiences. Interestingly enough, one consequence of having rich,

audience related content, obtained through public consultations, is that when the presentation is objective and unbiased, it can expose the discrepancies that exist between the real BBC's audience and its representation in discourse. Discrepancies exist because of tensions between BBC and its stakeholders, including the British public. The BBC, or the British government and Parliament use media and audience research to justify their interests and arguments around the transformations and changes in the BBC's governance and accountability. With the help of the "audience massage" framework, discrepancies become obvious for a conscientious reader of the text. At times, these find their way into final version of some reports and documents, and when that happens, such inconsistencies are barely mentioned, usually ignored, not to alter the discourse, or impact the regulatory and policy making.

One example regards BBC's leading role in Britain's transition to digital, a role assigned formally including in the new Royal Charter. The "Creative Future" project and the full commitment for digital, interactive, multiplatform, and on-demand happens because, is being argued, people showed interest in adopting such technologies and services for own information, education, or entertainment, and because can benefit from the "emerging communications technologies and services" (HRH, 2006). BBC justifies the changes in two ways: 1) the British public, who owns the BBC, is changing, so BBC has to follow audiences in the digital world in order to remain relevant; and 2) same British public expects and demands, in return for the licence fee they pay, to see changes at BBC. Accordingly, related programs are among broadcaster's institutional priorities to build public value (BBC, 2004_e).

Both DCMS and the OfCom, as representatives of an elected government, present themselves as guardians of the public interest. From this position, in the public discourse declare their support for the changes at BBC, but only after changes have been confirmed during public consultations. In other words, their role would be to ensure that British people/voters, who have invested through the licence fee in what has become their trusted and admired BBC, continue to own the BBC. According to the discourse, the role of the entire consultations infrastructure is to ask, listen, and to point BBC, DCMS, OfCom in the

right direction, that is to follow the public and ensure it gets what asked for; the PR buzz about the “Creative Future” and the “cool” BBC should emphasize the argument.

However, there is a discrepancy between the formal discourse about BBC’s audience, its role and importance, and how decisions are ultimately taken, how BBC is governed. As a matter of fact, it was the switchover to digital, a government initiative, the decisive argument to keep the current funding model as is, and to finance BBC operations having a focus on its transition to digital and multiplatform. More precisely, a government priority set the agenda, not the outcome of public consultations, nor the public argument; these are only used afterwards, selectively, for the purpose of justification.

There is no doubt that, through the institutionalized research system, the public has been asked to provide an opinion, or to approve/disapprove the governance model introduced by the new Royal Charter, other “institutional objectives”, and the commitment for digital, interactive, multiplatform, and on-demand. But same public noticed that this is not enough, and is sanctioning the consulting mechanism and its sponsors. For example, questions are worded in such a manner that public needs and wants mentioned and used afterwards for policy making, would support arguments made by the sponsors of the research report:

A small but vocal minority of respondents charged that it had been designed in a ‘biased’ way that sought agreement with the Green Paper proposals. Some felt ‘manipulated by ambiguously worded questions’. A few also noted that whereas a negative response to most of the questions allowed the respondent to expand on or qualify that answer, a positive response did not. In order to add detail, some respondents answered No when otherwise they would have answered Yes (DCMS, 2004_b: 3).

To accept official discourse about the public needs and wants, about the importance of public consultations would mean also to accept that the public is in a solid position to offer informed and educated answers, or suggestions. This may not be the case, there is enough confusion regarding the governance model for BBC, lack of knowledge of who is responsible for the day-to-day management of the BBC, or in regards to explaining the licence fee:

Just over half associate the money raised by the television licence fee with paying for BBC television programmes. Twenty-two per cent think it is used to fund BBC radio programmes and 28% think it is used to fund BBC staff costs. A further 16% think the money is used to fund “the BBC in general”. (COI/MORI/DCMS, 2004: 49).

Ultimately, BBC needs to fulfill its mandate for a public service, has a vision to be “the most creative organisation in the world”, and decided to remain relevant in the contemporary, national and international media. To accomplish these, it needs to secure a steady cash flow to finance current operations, new projects, and more growth. It makes sense then for the BBC to work first with the British Parliament and government, and support their agenda and priorities. Consequently, the broadcaster “has changed tack with a campaign to define its role as the promoter of “public value” (Armstrong & Weeds, 2005), for example assuming a leading role in building digital Britain, in providing multiplatform services, in digitization of content and the easing access to knowledge in digital format, and investing into educational services that address all types of audiences. With such pragmatic approach, BBC is proving to be the right partner and so securing the needed cash. With the cash in hand, there is a better chance to implement the “Creative Future” professionally, and becoming “cool” for its cooling and paying public!

Concluding remarks

The “Creative Future” and the new Royal Charter are about efforts to cope with the change, to capitalize on opportunities, to maintain or gain control, and to adapt in a media context dominated by digital, interactive, on-demand and multiplatform, of media convergence (Jenkins, 2001; 2006). This is happening within a context of emerging trends in the behaviour of media consumers, of modified perceptions and paradigms of the public broadcaster and government agencies about their public and constituents. The consequence is that cultural and communication institutions are forced “to rethink the interface with the consuming public” (Jenkins, 2006; 20). The question about the role and impact of the audiences remains open after this analysis using an “audience massage” model. On one hand, the discourse projected an audience that is close to Jenkins refreshing and encouraging view: an active, involved, mature, but also migratory, more socially connected

public (Jenkins, 2006). On the other hand, we pointed that discrepancies exist between this discourse and the reality, a reality that actually is in line with the traditional perspective: a captured, passive, and commodified audience (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972; Golding & Murdock, 1996; Strinati, 1995; Thomson, 1990). We suggest that the research system that engages BBC and other institutions around the public broadcaster reinforce this paradigm about “passiveness”, and the representation of an audience that is consulted, observed, asked, measured, researched, but has little to say, or many times has no understanding about the set of practices and methods that are in place, designed, picked and deployed by the establishment.

BBC needed to respond to the pressure coming from its stakeholders, and suggested changes that may project a “cool” BBC in the marketplace and among its fans. Change was required to serve the audience needs and desires in this new media environment –of migratory and mobile multi-platform content consumption, with delivery methods yet to be established, and with content packages and formats yet to be tested. Change was also required for the governance and the accountability models in place until 2006. The new Royal Charter formalized the reform in the governance and accountability, and endorsed with the sixth public purpose, the “Creative Future” programming vision. Introduction of the Public Value Test was a major milestone in the transformation of the accountability model, and marks a start in the change of the “passiveness” paradigm. Ultimately, a well established, comprehensive, and yet not perfect consulting and research system that involved in a way or another all stakeholders, contributed greatly to the transformation of the BBC.

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