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Received: 11-08-2010 / Revised: 27-10-2010
Accepted: 12-11-2010 / Published: 01-03-2011

DOI:10.3916/C36-2011-02-09

The Transformation of Public TV Companies into Digital Services at the BBC and RTVE

La transformación de las televisiones públicas en servicios digitales
en la BBC y RTVE

ABSTRACT

Some authors question the existence of public television companies in the new environment of digitalization, Internet proliferation, growing competition and audience segmentation. However, others believe they should act as a driving force in the process of convergence and even that the new media present an opportunity to redefine the public broadcasting service (PBS) remit. The current challenge for the public media companies is to deliver their content through the maximum number of devices, not only via television sets but also broadband and mobile devices. Over the years, the BBC has adapted to new market situations and has implemented solutions that have been adopted by other public and private broadcasters around the world. The objective of this article is to show how the BBC has taken up the leadership of transforming public TV companies into online services in order to maintain market share; and how it has influenced Spain's public TV broadcaster, RTVE. The methodology is based on internal and external documents of both corporations, and the findings are complemented by interviews with online service managers at RTVE. We conclude that these public companies have adapted their activities to the new technologies and have developed interactive services to reinforce their public service mission.

RESUMEN

Algunas voces cuestionan la permanencia de las televisiones públicas en el nuevo entorno digital, caracterizado por una mayor presencia de Internet, más competidores y la fragmentación de la audiencia. Sin embargo, hay otros que creen que deberían actuar como una fuerza motriz en el proceso de convergencia e incluso que los nuevos medios representan una posibilidad de redefinir la misión de las televisiones públicas. El reto actual de las corporaciones públicas es proporcionar los contenidos a través del mayor número de soportes posibles, no solo a través de la televisión, sino también a través de Internet y dispositivos móviles. Un rasgo de la BBC es haberse adaptado siempre a los cambios del mercado y muchas de sus soluciones han sido transferidas a otras empresas de comunicación tanto públicas como privadas de todo el mundo. El objetivo de este artículo es mostrar cómo la BBC es uno de los modelos en los que las empresas televisivas se han fijado para transformar sus servicios digitales a fin de mantener su existencia en el mercado, y conocer cuál ha sido su influencia en la televisión pública española RTVE. La metodología empleada radica en el análisis de los documentos internos y externos de las compañías y entrevistas realizadas a los responsables de los servicios digitales de RTVE. Las conclusiones apuntan a destacar que estas compañías han adaptado sus actividades a las nuevas tecnologías y han desarrollado servicios interactivos como refuerzo de su misión de servicio público.

KEYWORDS / PALABRAS CLAVE

Online services, digital services, innovation, public television.
Servicios online, servicios digitales, innovación, transformación, televisión pública.

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1. Introduction

While some authors (Tracey, 1998; Syvertsen, 2003; Medina, 2007) question the survival of public TV broadcasters in the new environment of digitalization, Internet proliferation, de-regulation, growing competition and audience segmentation, others (Blake, 1999; Meier, 2003; Steemers, 2003; Storsul & Syvertsen, 2007: 285; Moe, 2008) think they should act «as a driving force in the process of convergence between the communication sector and other social sectors» (Prado & Fernández, 2006: 5), and that the new media present an opportunity to redefine the PBS remit (Enli, 2008), with public service broadcasting moving into online media (Trappel, 2008). According to Goodwin (1997: 72), «recent UK debate provides a number of powerful and widely accepted arguments for the continued and extensive role of public provision in broadcasting. All these arguments are independent of spectrum scarcity», as has happened historically.

Of all public TV broadcasters, Azurmendi (2007: 322-5) emphasises the key role of the BBC in DTT-related technological development, digitalization and convergence of TV and Internet. BBC has managed to maintain its prestige over the years by adapting to new market situations, and many of the solutions it has implemented have been adopted by other public and private TV corporations across the world (Walzer & Retis 2008; Ojer, 2009).

The current challenge for the BBC, as with all media companies, is to deliver content via the maximum number of devices, not only via TV but also the Web and mobile devices (Wildman, 2008: 100; Jacubowicz, 2007: 41). The momentum of the information society led the BBC to develop a webpage that is now one of the most visited worldwide, and remarkably, UK citizens have had free access to the BBC's audiovisual archives through iPlayer since 2007. In March 2008, it registered 42 million downloads, and the site has an average 1.1 million weekly users (BBC, 2008: 31). As well as being an innovation, this service is a new source of revenue as users outside the UK have to pay for it.

The RTVE model developed more slowly than the BBC's. Its webpage opened in 2000 but not until 2008 did it have an interactive platform. The objective of this article is to show how the BBC has taken a leading role in incorporating online services and how the Internet enables the BBC to carry out its public service mission. The influence of the BBC on RTVE is analyzed and a comparison is made. The methodology comprises analyses of the process, corporate

structure and products of the online services of the BBC and RTVE, evaluating the key points according to the methodology used by Küng (2008), Paulussen and Coppens (2004: 491-492), and Hills and Michalis (2000). The findings are complemented by interviews with online service managers at RTVE, and the study of the BBC was made enabled by consulting internal and external documents (Ojer, 2009; García, 2009; Moe, 2008; Monroe & al., 2008; Hills & Michalis, 2000).

First, the design of the BBC's Internet strategy is outlined, and then the RTVE approach is described. A comparison of the two yields conclusions and some ideas for further research. We study their strategy, with the public service mission firmly in mind, with regard to: (a) the product, (b) number of users and public involvement, (c) organizational aspects, and (d) economic and financial data.

2. BBC online development

The main objective of the BBC has remained unchanged since its birth: to meet the information and entertainment needs of British citizens. This principle of public service is founded on the production of content for all audiences that reflects the reality of the country. These programs may also contribute to social cohesion by disseminating accurate information that promotes the democratic nature of its society.

In the beginning, the BBC contributed to its public service remit through radio and TV programs. Nowadays, the great challenge for the BBC is to ensure that its audience receives public service content across as many platforms as possible; for example, the Internet and mobile devices.

The BBC has been always aware of the importance of technological developments for its audience. For instance, its research and development department pioneered many initiatives that would later be imitated by other media companies around the world. The BBC introduced the Ceefax system in 1974, a precursor of what was later called teletext, and provided the first subtitles, a vital innovation for the hard of hearing.

Digital TV, which markedly increases the scope for new viewers, is an area in which each public broadcaster must define its position. Once again, the BBC faces a new, exciting challenge for the future, one which it has already begun to address. In a recent document to regulate the British media market, the government's White Paper on Digital Britain sanctions the BBC's move into «the online, on-demand and search word. But its scale and impact on the market

and the ability of others to commercialize services in the digital environment require careful vigilance by the BBC Trust, particularly in relation to proposals for news services, or new devices such as the broadcast-broadband hybrid Project Canvas¹ (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2009: 18-19). The BBC's initiative to provide public content on all platforms had already been articulated in the document Building Public Value. Renewing the BBC for a Digital World (BBC, 2004: 5).

The BBC's brief consisted of creating public value: 1) democratic value; 2) cultural and creative value; 3) educational value; 4) social and community value; 5) global value (BBC, 2004: 8). The BBC's intent was to make «its programs and content as widely available and accessible as possible, using news platforms and technologies, and in partnership wherever it can, to tailor that content to the needs of groups, families and individuals». For that reason, they deployed *bbc.co.uk* and interactive TV to develop new personalized formal and informal learning opportunities for different audience groups (BBC, 2004: 11-3).

The BBC's Internet activities began in September 1996. It initially envisaged BBC Online as a commercial service funded by advertising, subscription, and e-commerce revenues. However, in June 2006, they decided to limit the advertising to the webpage viewed by overseas users (Milmo, 2006). BBC Online was made up of four major independent public service sites: BBC Online, BBC Education, BBC World Service and BBC News Online.

In 1998, the Secretary of the State backed the BBC's licence fee-funded online service as a core public service. This service was conceived as an essential resource offering unique, wide-ranging content, as a tool to reinforce the relationship with

1XtraBBC, BBC 6 Music, BBC7, and BBC Asian Network). The BBC website provides an international news service –BBC World– with the introduction translated into 32 languages, and distance-language courses.

Nowadays, the BBC has one of the most influential and widely visited websites in the world. According to Küng (2003: 2), BBC News Online is «one of the most successful content-only Internet sites in Europe and has a global following». By June 2002, it was one of the most popular content-only websites in the UK and one of the most visited non-portal websites outside the US. Pete Clifton, head of editorial development for multimedia journalism at the BBC, pointed out at the Online Publishers Association Conference 2008 that 47 per cent of the 17 million weekly unique users to the BBC News website are from outside the UK, with around half these users from the US (Oliver, 2008). As the following table shows, the BBC has been remarkably successful on the Internet, especially in 2004.

In 2008, the visits numbered around 16.5 million. Two events in particular succeeded in drawing in users that year: the Beijing Olympics, with 8.5 million weekly unique users, and the US Presidential Election, which broke audience records with 9.2 million individual users (BBC, 2009: 65, 68). Despite this success, BBC executives continue to work to meet user expectations by improving interactivity and enabling users to shape their experience of the BBC (BBC, 2009: 68).

The BBC management team states that it is important to interact with the website viewers, listeners and users. They maintain regular contact with the audience to find out what they like, why and what they expect from the BBC, via the BBC Information website. There are also webpages, such as BBC message boards or Points of View, where the public can post its comments and complaints. In 2007, it handled 1.1 million contacts (BBC, 2008: 55).

The BBC has also promoted audience participation online. The BBC World Service developed a program and website called Have Your Say, connecting audiences across the globe and stimulating debate. In 2002, it launched the Test the Nation website that quizzes the public on its general knowledge of current affairs, famous personalities, sports and entertainment; it includes tests, results, fact files, questions, and answers.

| Weekly visits (in millions) | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| http://www.bbc.co.uk | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
| United Kingdom | n.a. | 22,8 | 12,3 | 14,8 | n.a. |
| United Kingdom and rest of the world | 33.8 | 48.1 | 24.3 | 28.3 | 33.0 |

BBC Annual Reports and Accounts.

licence fee payers and as a trusted guide to the new media environment (DCMS, 2004).

The BBC website provides information about the company and information on all the corporation's services. It is possible to access digital and terrestrial TV channels. It also offers users radio broadcasts (BBC Radio 1, BBC Radio 2, Radio 3 BBC, BBC Radio 4, BBC Radio Five Live BBC Five Live Sports Extra,

BBC has also made alliances with different online social communities such as YouTube, Facebook and MySpace, with the latter offering BBC classics like Doctor Who, The Mighty Boosh, Attenborough, Robin Hood, and others.

The website is very much oriented towards not only providing information but also a useful service for its users. For example, the «Get Involved» section of Sports contains information on the nearest tennis courts for users in England, Wales, and Scotland. The BBC's online shop sells DVDs, audio, books, magazines and children's products. The user can also sign up to the charity Children in Need, whose mission is to bring a positive change to the lives of disadvantaged children and young people across the UK.

All these services enable the BBC to keep in contact with the British taxpayers who finance the public corporation and who, thanks to the iPlayer, can also download audiovisual content free while the international audience still has to pay for it. This archive system has had a great impact on other public broadcasting bodies such as RTVE, as it allows access to content of historical value and generates a new source of revenue, to be reinvested in quality public service content.

iPlayer began in December 2007, and in March 2008 it recorded 42 million downloads of BBC programs. From December 2007 to March 2009, it had over 360 million visits with an average of 1.1 million users per week in 2008 (BBC, 2009: 31), winning it the Prix Italia for Best Cross-Media Public Service. As Tapscott and Williams (2008: 192) outline, the BBC expects its web services to develop innovative content and new revenue streams especially with its archive sales to international audiences. iPlayer allows children to access content for youngsters, but also contains a parental control system. The CBeebies iPlayer puts parents in control of their children's viewing by enabling them to choose what they watch and when. It is designed to provide a safe, dedicated area for children where they can view appropriate content and which restricts inadvertent access to non-children's programming. This section for children has numerous entertaining, educational games and quizzes.

The online services team comprises a Technical Director, Editorial Head, Head of Design and Head of Operations, and the project

was endorsed by the CEO and the Director of BBC News. Küng (2008) regards the process as semi-structured in the terms defined by Eisenhardt and Brown (1999). According to this author, «semi-structures allow organizations to 'patch' – a corporate-level process that allows incumbents to 'remap dramatically' resources in response to changing market opportunities, by 'adding, splitting, transferring, exiting or combining chunks of businesses'» (Küng, 2008: 142).

The BBC online service's organizational structure was not established through the acquisition of a new organization that developed new tasks, nor through spinning out an independent company, but through the creation of a new division within corporate boundaries, staffed by personnel working together yet individually charged with responsibility for the success of the project (Christensen & Overdorf, 2000). The project team was multidisciplinary with a variety of expertise and backgrounds. In the words of Erik Huggers, the BBC Director of Future Media and Technology, «it's about creating an environment where ideas can flourish, and then taking the best of them and making them work for audiences» (BBC, 2009: 65).

BBC News Online is an experienced operation with over 210 staff. According to Küng (2003: 9), «the venture has enjoyed a level of independence unusual in the BBC, an organization known for its tight management style». The Director of BBC Online enabled the successful development of a culture very different from the mainstream BBC way of doing things. He had a very clear sense of what he wanted the organization to do. «The speed, flexibility and creativity which characterised this new unit's work style might 'infect' the rest of the news division. It would also provide a logical foundation for a major current strategic initiative, the development of interactive TV». The result was that News Online was free to design a service which reflected the strengths of the new medium and responded to the needs of Internet users.

At the same time, this approach involved a degree of risk: an intrinsic tension between the speed of the

| Number of plays of some RTVE videos on YouTube/rteve up to 01/30/2008 | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| Videos | Genre | Plays |
| Muchachada Nui | Children's series | 3,000,573 |
| Pre-elections | Political campaigning | 23,929 |
| Tengo una pregunta para usted | Citizen participation | 379,315 |
| Fútbol Club | Sports program | 54,853 |

Source: Ramírez & Sanchis (2008).

Internet and BBC's reputation for careful, responsible reporting. This new way of doing things also had a bearing on how other departments operated.

A growing understanding of the importance of the Internet throughout the BBC, the need to manage all online content centrally to avoid duplication and contain costs, plus a desire to ensure that the «organisational learning» this unit had acquired should permeate the rest of the BBC, meant that there was increasing pressure to integrate News Online with the rest of the organisation. The Director of BBC Online was convinced that integration and success depended on News Online's market and all that was special in terms of culture, creativity and work processes.

The BBC spent £83.2m (€91.02m) on content for bbc.co.uk, excluding BBC Jam2, £24m (€26.25m) on infrastructure and £8.8m (€9.6m) on distribution in 2005-2006 (Kiss, 2007). The annual budget for BBC websites in 2009 rose to £145m (€157m) (The Economist, 2009: 75). The next challenge for the BBC is to move several key departments, including Future Media and Technology, to a center in Salford, in Greater Manchester, by 2011, to be equipped with state-of-the-art technology.

3. RTVE online development

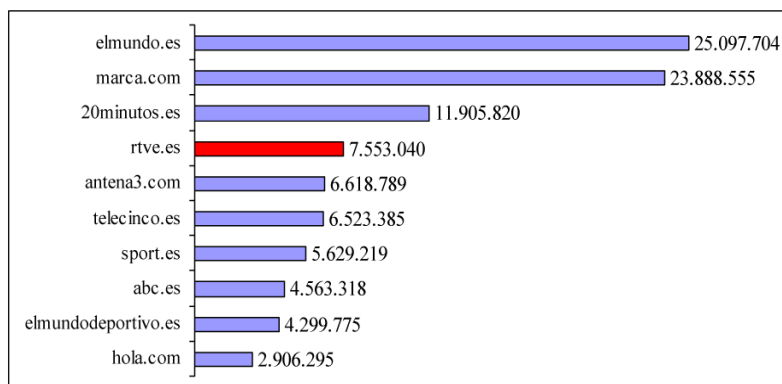
Compared to the BBC, RTVE model has differed in relation to political independence and financing over the last 50 years. However, the recent legislative reform of the Spanish broadcaster seems to move the corporation in the direction of the British model and to correct certain past mistakes. Despite the report on public media reform (2005), which emphasised the lack of a clear, efficient strategy on digitalization online and TV (Comité de Sabios, 2005: 28), the new managers are convinced of the importance of new technologies, especially Internet, as an instrument for the institution's survival. Furthermore, Article 3.3 of Law 17/2006 on Public Radio and TV states that «it is part of the mission of public radio and TV to contribute to the development of the Information Society, to participate in this technological progress using various technologies and means of distribution, and developing new related and interactive services to

ensure and enrich their supply (...)». Since 2006, the new RTVE board's key strategy has been interactive media. In 2007, General Manager Luis Fernández appointed Internet expert Rosalía Lloret as new director of the division. She had previously worked with Terra.es, the website and online TV division of Telefónica, and had also participated in the launch of the Ya.com website.

Although RTVE opened a website in 2000, it was not until a revamp in May 2008 that the website began including video, audio and photos, TV and radio on demand, blogs, some archive material and news. Through the website, it is possible to watch the programs you want, access the 24 Hours TV channel with live reporting of the Council of Ministers, football matches, the program «Tengo una pregunta para usted» [I have a question for you], and others. TV news programs can be viewed once they have been broadcast on TV, as can a derived news product – «Telediario en 4 minutos»–, a four-minute summary of the main news of the day tailored for its web and mobile phone consumers. Internet users can now watch, but not download, episodes from series such as «Los gozos y las sombras», «Verano azul», «La bola de cristal», «Anillos de oro», «Historias para no dormir», «Turno de oficio». The new website is to allow access to TVE's historical archives once the images are digitized by RTVE.

In March 2006, RTVE created its own channel on YouTube: <http://youtube.com/rteve>. For the 2008 Spanish General Elections, it created the Elecciones '08 channel on YouTube and invited citizens to submit video questions to candidates for a talk show

UNIQUE USERS OF SPANISH MEDIA WEBSITES, MARCH 2010



Source: OJD Interactiva.

broadcast live on the TV channel. The RTVE website also offered live and recorded coverage of the Beijing

Olympics that year, providing a platform for citizen participation called «La Villa», through which fans could contact athletes participating in the Games. By January 2008, it had registered 1,358 videos rising to 13,784 subscribers in October 2009. RTVE uses YouTube to show previews of its most popular series, some formatted for a duration of 90 minutes. Table 2 shows examples of RTVE videos on YouTube and the number of plays.

The website has proven to be a useful means for establishing contact with the audience, especially with live-chats with public figures, and famous actors and actresses. The blogs are a good example of the closeness between RTVE professionals and the corporation's users. In October 2009, there were 17 blogs related to cinema and TV, 22 to music, 15 to radio, 21 to sports, 33 on current affairs, and 22 from the international correspondents. Viewer responses reveal their tastes, although this has yet to be systematized. In 2006, the Ombudsperson's online program was created to attend to users' complaints and suggestions on radio, TV and the website. Once a month, the corporation presents the Ombudsperson's TV program, «RTVE responde», in which Elena Sánchez airs the public's complaints and recommendations. In 2008, the program received 4,954 inputs. RTVE also signed agreements with Facebook and MySpace, although the latter was terminated at the beginning of 2009. With Facebook, RTVE implemented forms of audience participation never before seen in public broadcasting, by creating real interactivity between web users/TV audience

and program hosts. RTVE worked with MySpace for two years in the presentation and pre-selection of candidates for the Eurovision Song Contest. TVE a la Carta enables viewers to watch streamed content available for up to seven days after broadcasting. The programs most viewed on the RTVE website are series such as «Muchachada Nui», pre-recorded and live sports events and coverage of specific topics, as well as the radio sites and blogs. RTVE's website had 6 million visits in May 2008, reaching some 9 million a year later. In May 2008, the mean connection time was about 6:40 minutes, rising a year later to 13:35 minutes; by September 2009 it stood at more than 25 minutes (Pinheiro, 2009). The following table lists the Top 10 Spanish media in terms of visits; RTVE ranks above Antena 3 and Telecinco, its direct TV competitors.

Data provided by Pinheiro, Deputy Director of New Projects, indicate that about 75% of users reside in Spain with the rest spread among the U.S., Latin

COMPARISON OF BBC AND RTVE WEBSITES

| | BBC | RTVE |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Beginning | 1991: bbc.co.uk domain is registered 1996 | 2000 2008 (new) |
| Budget | 162 m. € | n.a. |
| Number of employees | 210 (London BBC News Online) | 130 |
| Number of visits | 22 million weekly visitors (2008) | Approximately 10 million monthly visitors (September 2009) |
| Unique users | 16 million unique users (2007) | 4,5 million monthly unique users (September 2009) |
| Pages visited | n.a. | +69 million page views (September 2009) |
| Live content (examples) | Beijing Olympics (2008) US Presidential Election (2008) BBC News | Beijing Olympics (2008) Sports, 24h news |
| Original online content | News | News, Clan TV |
| Blogs | 111 | 130 |
| Pod/audiocasts | Yes | Yes |
| Social networks alliances | YouTube BBC World Wide, Facebook America, MySpace | YouTube, Facebook, MySpace |
| TV contents | Watch and download with iPlayer | Watch, no download. Streaming |
| Sections | News, iPlayer, Radio, Learning English, Sport, Business & Money, Weather, Entertainment, Music, Arts & Culture, Religion, Gardening, Food, International | News, TV, Radio, Sports, Children, TVE Catalunya, TVE Internacional, TV series, Culture |
| Languages | 32 languages (BBC News) | Spanish, Catalan |
| Children parental control | No | In Clan TV (children's site) |
| Citizen participation | BBC complaints BBC message boards Points Of View Have Your Say | Ombudsperson's program Live chats with politicians, actors, sportspeople, etc. Participation through Facebook comments on news, sports and entertainment programs |
| Archives | Through iPlayer | Work in progress |
| Search facility (out/in) | In BBC and news | In RTVE as a whole and by media type (video, audio, news, etc.) as well as by section |
| Games/clubs | For children | In the children's site |
| E-commerce | BBC Shop | RTVE Shop |
| External links and comments | No | No |
| Mobile services | News, Sport, Weather, Entertainment, TV, Radio and Music, Featured Sites | News, weather, games, live content: Champions League, 24h TVE channel |

America, other European countries, Asia, and Africa (Pinheiro, 2009).

Following the BBC, RTVE is working on user access to its TV and radio archives dating back to the last 50 years. RTVE's aim is to make its entire audiovisual treasure trove available to users as soon as possible, but there is concern that it may take several years to digitize all the material, evaluate, classify and document it and establish licence ownership. There is also a plan to prioritize the most popular shows as a means of knowing what users want to watch.

The RTVE website has special divisions for sports, children and merchandising. The radio stations offer podcasts from Radio Nacional, Radio Clásica, Radio 3, Radio 4, Radio 5, and Radio Exterior. Another innovation has been Mobile Match Tracker, an application that enables users to download video-clips of goals and match highlights from the UEFA Champions League directly to their mobile phones. It also enables mobile phone access to the latest news, sports results and events as they occur. Furthermore, RTVE uses iPhone to broadcast its 24-hour news channel as well as those Champions League matches whose rights it has acquired. In June 2009, the new children's site, Clan TV, was launched, where children of all ages can watch programs, play games and participate in activities. There is also a section that informs parents on content, and parental control is enabled for those who register and log in. The corporation also provides some live events online.

Diversity characterizes RTVE, with its 15 regional centers, but the site uses only one other language other than Spanish, Catalan. To promote innovation, these centers launched the International Award «INVI» for Online Audiovisual Innovation in June 2009 to search for and encourage new talent on the Web.

The number of employees in RTVE's Interactive section is 130. There are three main divisions: Content and Design, Development, and IT Systems. Budget figures are not available. Like the rest of the corporation's services, it used to be funded by advertising (almost 50%) and public funding (35%) (Lloret, 2008a). However, since 2010, neither advertising nor sponsorship space is sold on its TV channels or sites. The RTVE website never abounded in advertising, although commercials were more evident on the children's site. In the other site sections, they only allowed two-page banners and video ads prior to content reproduction.

According to Pinheiro, the greatest pressure was not money, but time. They needed to develop the new website as soon as possible. In accordance with

the General Manager, «the RTVE has now caught up after a ten-year delay» (Fernández, 2008). The objective was clear: to offer all radio and TV content to users wherever and whenever they wanted it; to set the standards for multimedia, which is independent and objective information. The goal was for users to have access to all the news and news headlines 24 hours a day, and for them to be able to select how they want to be informed (Lloret, 2008b). The focus was also clear: to continue with the public service mission (Fernández, 2008). However, so as to fulfil this commitment to public service, the corporation wanted to become an online leader (Lloret, 2008a). Integration with the other departments was relatively easy: in most cases, the different teams update their own sites.

4. Comparison of BBC and RTVE websites

The competitive advantage of new media is demonstrated by the investment that both corporations make in their online services and the number of professionals employed in these new areas. A comparison can be made after analysing both sites from the key aspects of corporate culture, interactivity, customization, personalization, contents and services. The table shows the main aspects that differentiate the BBC from RTVE.

BBC Online was created with internal staff and its flexible culture quickly influenced other departments, though most had been operating for more than 50 years with their own particular style. The second launch of RTVE online was created with new managers and staff. But their spirit soon caught on with the rest of the corporation, in part, thanks to the new General Manager.

Most BBC services were later adopted by the RTVE site. However, the commitment of the BBC to the development of this new medium was stronger in terms of the number of employees and budget, and success was more or less immediate, thanks to the prestige and reputation of the Corporation.

BBC Online has been longer on the Web than the RTVE site and its employee numbers are higher. However, the numbers of those involved in online services is almost equivalent, taking into account the overall number of employees at both companies. Although the RTVE website is ranked among the top media company websites and may avail itself of important opportunities to engage Spanish-speaking audiences in Latin America, the success of the BBC's site is incomparable.

Many of the two corporations' services and

alliances forged with other companies are similar: live content, blogs, social networks, TV and radio content, search engines, online shops and contents for mobile telephony. Both are multimedia, especially due to contributions from other media in the group; they provide top-quality content for children, and have developed efficient interactive tools to establish and maintain contact with the public.

However, the BBC has greater experience in relation to audience participation, creation of contents, English language learning, has more archive material available online, and its content comes in many languages. All these services and content are on its webpage.

On the other hand, both corporations, as happens in many media company websites, have to develop different or re-versioned content for the Web, adapted to the new medium.

5. Conclusions and further research

Both companies have seen their online divisions advance considerably especially in their home countries; they are leaders in innovative development. However, the BBC has international prestige and has invested heavily in its online services, which RTVE has yet to do. Clearly RTVE has tried to follow the trail blazed by the BBC; RTVE's Director was asked how *rtve.es* might look like BBC Online and her response was clear.

They (BBC) have several thousand people working in the Internet area. We have fewer for now, but let's not forget that they are the model to follow. They have been on the Internet for 10 years, had considerable success and are the major reference-point for information on the Web (Lloret, 2008b).

According to Klontzas (2006: 610), BBC Online is «centred on a combination of interactivity, branding and content, BBC Online is ambitious to become a global brand». Hills and Michalis (2000: 491) characterized the BBC Online strategy as a defensive means of expanding audience reach and they conclude that this is mainly due to it being a trusted brand.

RTVE online is very well-positioned in relation to Latin America and in comparison to its competitors in Spain. Its site is the most visited, it is better organized and more innovative, and contains less controversial content. The websites of other national TV channels offer fewer services and sections, but have a sexier orientation. The RTVE's children's site was especially significant, being the only free website with parental control in Spain until 2010. That is why so many

advertisers were interested in it. The limitations of this study should be acknowledged. A complete comparison between the BBC and RTVE requires a full range of data, such as budgets, income, and audience reach. Some data still lack scientific rigor and others, relating to financing and economics, should be made available to the public. An in-depth account of the quality of content and corporate responsibility could be a subject for further research, with a particular focus on these corporations' public service mission.

Finally, the current study may prompt a renewed and more scholarly evaluation of different types of websites around the world. A systematic analysis of existing websites from public and private companies, as well as comparative studies, may benefit managers, leading to the development of more efficient ways of developing online services.

Notas

¹ Project Canvas is a proposal to develop a joint venture partnership to help enable the delivery of Internet protocol TV (IPTV). The project would allow viewers to watch on-demand services, such as the BBC iPlayer and other Internet content, via TV sets.

² An online educational service for children under 16 launched by the BBC in January 2006 but removed in March 2007 due to complaints from e-learning firms about unfair competition.

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