

# THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE WITHIN MEDIA GOVERNANCE: THE NEGLECTED DIMENSION OF MEDIA LITERACY

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**ABSTRACT** *Conceptualisations of media literacy often include the dimension of the media users' participation in media regulation or, more general, media governance. In doing so the expectation is stressed, that beyond the ability to participate in media-related communicative practices, literacy would also mean that media users engage in forming the technical, political, and economic conditions for communication processes. However, this aspect seems to be widely neglected when it comes to empirical research on patterns and levels of media literacy. As a consequence, talking about media users as actors of media governance sounds unfamiliar and somehow strange: Media politics and media regulation are rather done for media users and their interests – or sometimes rather against their interests – but almost never by media users. This article proposes a conceptual clarification of the potential roles of the audience and discusses them with regard to concrete instruments that could help to strengthen this aspect of media literacy and thus the role of audiences in media governance.*

## KEY WORDS

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION, MEDIA GOVERNANCE, MEDIA LITERACY, CITIZENSHIP

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## INTRODUCTION

Audiences as actors within media governance? One might be tempted to keep an article on this question very short by referring to the fact that politicians and media companies often claim to act in the interest of the audience, and that audiences are not actors and therefore cannot play an independent role within media governance (e.g. Jarren, 2002: 178). However, current discussions on new forms of media governance which meet the challenges of today's converging media environment, characterised by the blurring boundaries between different types of media, stress the need to consider the perspective of audiences as relevant stakeholders (e.g. Bardoel and d'Haenens, 2004; Livingstone and Lunt, 2011; Lunt and Livingstone, 2012). As several authors (e.g. Mitchell and Blumler, 1994; Baldi and Hasebrink, 2006) have pointed out, media political objectives cannot be conceived as a list of formal or content-related characteristics that concrete media offers have to provide. Since media governance can be regarded as the process to develop a communication order that serves the particular society and culture (Scholten-Reichlin and Jarren, 2001: 233), audiences have to be involved in this process: Media services and regulators should ensure their accountability towards the public and provide procedures that allow for users' participation; they should invite (and listen to) the expressions of interests and needs of different parts of the public, transparently define their objectives, engage in evaluations of their political decisions, concrete media products and production procedures, and seriously consider the public's feedback and critique (see Collins, 2008a; Lunt and Livingstone, 2012).

While there is much consensus that media users should have a voice in media and information politics and that media users' ability to participate in media politics should be an integral part of the broader concept of media literacy, the exact way users can involve themselves in media governance and the specific aspects of media literacy that are needed is controversial. Starting point of the following considerations is a broad understanding of media governance that includes all processes aiming at a) defining social, cultural, and democratic objectives for media services, b) setting the legal and political framework for media related activities and c) evaluating the actual performance of single media services and the media system as a whole. In connection with these processes media users may get involved with different kinds of actors, particularly with media industry, media politics, and different parts of civil society. Thus a comprehensive concept of media literacy has to consider the different ways how users could take part in processes of media governance.

One important part of the procedures, which media themselves and other public bodies apply in order to consider the user perspective, is empirical research on users' interests, patterns of use, and appreciation. However, in connection with debates on political objectives regarding media empirical research on audiences plays an ambivalent role, since it is often unclear which particular aspect of the users' interests and needs they represent, for instance whether they indicate the *public interest* or the *interest of the public* (Mitchell and Blumler, 1994; see also Lunt and Livingstone, 2012).

Against this background, the core objective of this paper is to discuss different conceptions of audiences with regard to their implications for the audiences' role in media governance<sup>1</sup>. In doing so, it sets out to contribute to more reflective and fruitful empirical research on the inclusion of users in media governance processes as one aspect of media literacy. It will develop two arguments: Firstly, a conceptual clarification will be proposed with regard to different user roles, which shape users' opinion and appreciation of media services. Based on this clarification empirical research on audiences should provide a more appropriate reconstruction of what audiences expect from the media (see section *Enhancing the concept of media users*). Secondly, different options will be discussed as to how media users can participate in regulatory processes. In thoroughly investigating these different options, research can contribute to identifying the most effective and efficient ways of involving audiences in media governance processes (see section *Investigating options to involve users in regulatory processes*). The concluding part links the two arguments and pleads for strengthening the aspect of audience involvement in media governance as key element of media literacy (see *Conclusion*).

## ENHANCING THE CONCEPT OF MEDIA USERS

In scholarly discussions today it seems to be common sense to understand the audience as "active" (for the following see Hasebrink, 2010). This conceptualisation focuses on the processes of selection, interpretation and understanding in contrast to the concept of the "passive" user being simply exposed to media messages – a concept that is attributed to former eras of media effects research. The change of paradigms in research – the shift from perceiving the user as easy to manipulate towards an interpreting media user – has been an important step towards a more appropriate understanding of the user. However, within the frameworks of public debates on media politics as well as from the perspective of media industry and media politics the concept of the active media user is interpreted in a quite selective way: Users are exclusively regarded as individuals using the media for their individual needs, as consumers who select the media offers they like and who avoid the media offers they dislike. In consequence, the specific kind of audience research which measures the figures of different kinds of media outlets is regarded as an appropriate indicator of what users want, so that in debates on media politics these figures serve as "the voice of the audience".

Effects of this implicit conceptualisation of the audience can be observed in debates on media quality or, in connection with recent debates on the remit of public service media (e.g. Collins, 2008b), on the 'public value' where ambivalent roles are attributed to media users. One position, starting from the observation that media offers, which attract the masses are presumed to be of low quality, argues that users should not be involved in quality discourses, because they do not seem to look for quality. The opposing view states that extensive audience research is able to reveal the interests of the users, who in this way are taken into account by the media companies. In this perspective high audience shares are regarded as the best indicators for high quality. Neither position refers to the user

<sup>1</sup> This paper builds on an earlier publication of the author in the *Journal of Information Politics* (see Hasebrink, 2011) and relates it to the concept of media literacy.

as participating in decision processes about which kind of media could serve the public, and both promote a rather limited perspective of users as consumers expressing interests solely via their actual choices of available concrete media offers.

The corresponding theoretical basis of this selective understanding of the active audience is the uses and gratification approach, which postulates that media use can be seen as the maximisation of individual gratifications. Approaches that attempt to understand what quality means for recipients (e.g. Greenberg and Busselle, 1992; Gunter, 1997), are theoretically as well as methodologically very much connected with this theory. The central objective is to identify dimensions of gratifications for different media offers. Even in more comprehensive approaches towards models of quality and accountability in the media (e.g. McQuail, 1992, 1997; Schatz and Schulz, 1992), users are only taken into account regarding the satisfaction of their individual needs. These needs are usually contrasted with normative criteria extracted from theories on democracy and then taken as contradictory poles of these normative quality criteria. Accordingly, some studies showed that media offers which from a normative perspective are classified as "high quality" usually do not get high audience rates (e.g. Hasebrink, 1997).

However, this perception of the audience does not provide a complete picture of the users. Transferred into the sphere of political participation this would mean to merely take voting in elections as an expression of the interests of citizens, while crucial criteria for democratic participation like participation in public debate or sensitivity for the interests of citizens or, in this case, users in their everyday culture, are ignored.

James Webster and Patricia Phalen (1994) proposed a distinction between three concepts of the audience: users as *victims*, as *consumers*, and as *commodities*. The concept of users as victims is based on the assumption that the media strongly influence their users. The users therefore have to be protected against media influences. The concept of users as consumers regards users as rationally selecting the media offers which are expected to serve their individual needs. And the concept of users as a commodity refers to the concrete value which the advertising industry is ready to pay for a specific audience. For the considerations on how media users can be involved in media governance, the distinction between the concepts of consumers and commodity seems to be less relevant. More fruitful is another concept: the concept of users as *citizens*. In the context of a study on instruments for the protection of viewers' interests Uwe Hasebrink (1994, see also Hasebrink, Herzog, and Eilders, 2006) pointed to at least three dimensions of users' interests:

- a) The users as *consumers* have an interest in media offers that serve their individual needs and preferences. According to the corresponding concept as described by Webster and Phalen (1994) users act as customers of media companies. The plainest forms of this case are pay-per-view-offers, but usually audience research measures customer interests by means of the number of contacts of specific offers.
- b) A second dimension of users' interests refers to the users as *owners of rights*, or as individuals who need protection and the possibility to defend their rights. This

dimension corresponds with the above mentioned concept of “victims” according to Webster and Phalen (1994). For example, users can become objects of media reporting. As such they need protection against false or offensive statements. In addition they have religious and moral feelings and values and therefore need protection against programmes that violate or exploit these feelings or restrict individual development. The latter point is particularly important for young people and children.

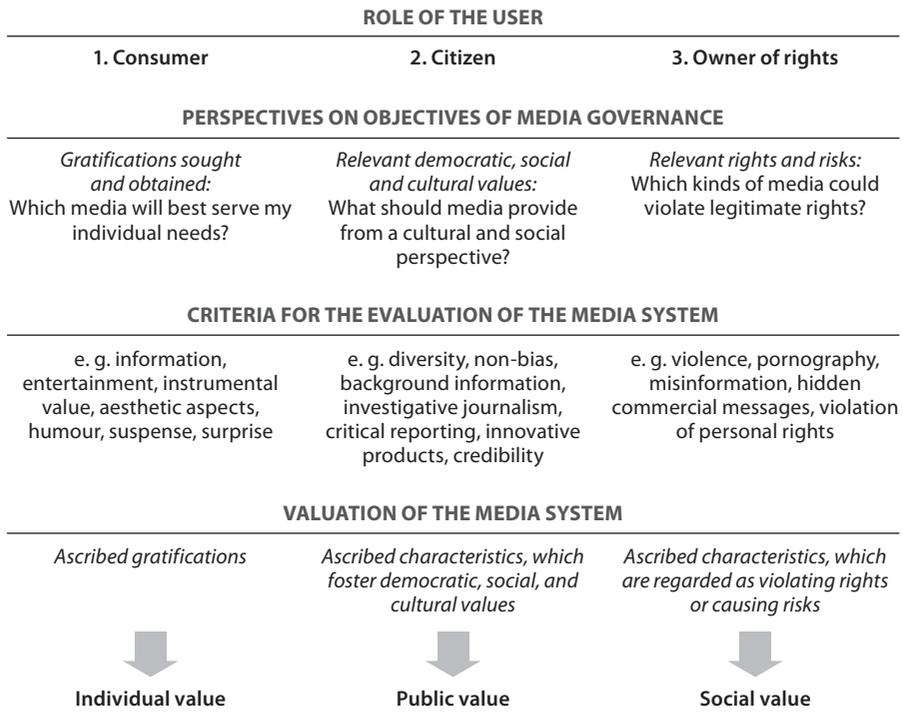
c) The users as *citizens* are seen as members of a democratic society who have an interest to have the media contribute to the general aims of society, e.g. the prevention of monopolistic power in the media market and of biased news coverage, guaranteeing the interests of minorities and the promotion of a greater understanding of the issues and problems facing society.

The two latter dimensions stand in contradistinction to the consumers’ dimension. The argument here is that despite the tensions between them, the three dimensions actually go along with each other, i.e. each user has specific interests on all three dimensions. It is also assumed that users are aware of the contradiction that might exist between their consumer interests and the normative perspective and that they know from experience that they have to create a personal balance between them.

With regard to investigations into the question of what the users themselves regard as relevant objectives for media governance, such considerations lead to the conclusion that users’ judgements will vary depending on their user role. Figure 1 provides a systematic overview of this idea: the three roles are linked to specific perspectives, which emphasise specific criteria for assessments of media systems and media offers, which, as a result, lead to specific valuations of the media system.

From the viewpoint of a *consumer*, the user’s perspective is defined by gratifications sought and obtained, i.e. the core question is how well media services serve the users’ individual needs. The relevant criteria for this perspective correspond with the catalogues of needs and motives, which have been elaborated by research within the uses-and-gratifications paradigm; e.g., users look for information, and/or for entertainment, and/or for some instrumental values. As a consequence, valuations are based on the gratifications ascribed to the media system. Thus these valuations indicate the *individual value* of the media system as an outcome of media governance.

For *users as citizens* it is crucial whether the media system fulfils certain democratic, social, and/or cultural values. The relevant criteria reflect traditional – but not necessarily undisputable – values and normative standards, e.g. the diversity of topics and opinions, the contribution to cultural innovation, or the investigative and critical potential of the media being available. The valuations of the users reflect their perceptions of the media’s functions for society and culture. Thus they indicate the *public value* of media services and the media system in general.



Source: Hasebrink, 2011, adapted version.

▲ *Figure 1.*  
User roles and objectives for media governance

For the role of users as *owners of rights* or *potential victims*, the perspective is shaped by the question as to which aspects of media might violate relevant rights. The criteria for judgements partly correspond with legal norms regarding the protection of minors, the separation of edited content and commercial messages, or the protection of personal rights and consumer rights. The valuations from this perspective indicate to what extent media might cause any harm; they refer to the *social costs* of media.

To summarise, it can be concluded that the conceptual distinction between different user roles is an important step. The paradigm of audience research that dominates the public discourse on media politics constructs audiences exclusively as consumers. This kind of research only listens to the voice, which is reflected by actual media-related behaviours; in contrast it lends no ear to audiences expressing their interests as citizens or as owners of rights. The challenge for audience research is to develop methodological approaches, which are able to grasp indicators for all three user roles. This would allow for investigating combinations of user roles and the relative weight of the three roles in

different user groups. While the argument here is that these roles are analytically different from each other, it is likely that there will be specific combinations of concrete user roles. It is this interplay between the three roles, which is particularly relevant for regulatory issues.

The conceptual distinction of three user roles can also stimulate the discourse on media literacy. It makes sense to distinguish three corresponding aspects of media literacy: a) the ability to be aware of one's individual needs and to realise if the media system actually serves these needs; b) the ability to reflect on the media's role for society and culture and to participate in political initiatives in this area; c) the ability to realise potential social costs or benefits of media and to know about options that can help to avoid these costs or to foster these benefits. This conceptual clarification should help to construct measures of media literacy that systematically cover all three user roles in order to assess the prerequisites of the users as actors in media governance.

## **INVESTIGATING OPTIONS TO INVOLVE USERS IN REGULATORY PROCESSES**

Beyond conceptual considerations regarding different user roles in different types of media governance activities and their implications for the concept of media literacy, we can refer to research projects, which investigate the opportunities, conditions, and limits of different forms of audience participation in media governance and can thus contribute to the development of efficient forms of taking the audiences into account. In this section we will summarise the results of a European study on mechanisms to secure the interests and rights of TV viewers in 29 countries (see Baldi and Hasebrink, 2006). As a first step, a conceptual clarification is presented, which discusses the respects in which media users may be regarded as civil society actors (Hasebrink, Herzog, and Eilders, 2006). As a second step, different methods of involving media users in media governance processes are discussed with regard to the question of whether they meet different civil society criteria and what their implications regarding media literacy are.

### **Media users as civil society actors**

Political theories of democratic participation processes link legitimacy of democratic societies with broad *inclusion* of citizens in political processes, even under circumstances where large parts of society are scarcely organised and have only poor resources (Dahlgren, 2002). As a continuous, active participation of all citizens in current mass societies seems to be illusory, *deliberation* turns out to be an important mode for participation, i.e. public debate on political decisions. Inclusion in this perspective is realised by open access to public debate for all society members (Neidhardt, 1994). According to this model, public spheres are the space for aggregation and articulation of competing interests and as such serve as a means of controlling governance. Decisions of authorities are confronted with the interests of citizens and become an issue of public criticism, meaning that authorities are made accountable for their politics. This mechanism gets all the more reliable as more actors participate in public debate.

Following participatory liberal theory, the role of civil society is to identify upcoming problems (Barber, 1984; Dahlgren, 2002) and to introduce them into the political system. Beyond the important aspect of inclusion, the deliberative model of democracy emphasises further central criteria, such as proximity to the so-called 'life-world', and ideal requirements for public debate such as respect, fairness and rationality (Habermas, 1992; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996). Jürgen Habermas introduced the important element of communication into deliberative theories. He states that the logic of the functioning and reproduction of modern societies will be understood correctly only through the consideration of communication processes. With the concept of the 'public sphere', Habermas directed attention to the mutual exchange of authority and citizens. Without a public sphere, the interests of civil society actors cannot be accomplished. While the public sphere can be characterised as the link between authority and citizens, civil society is the link between individuals and public sphere (see Lunt and Livingstone, 2012)

The implementation of media users' interests needs presence in the public sphere. Regarding the question of how this presence and noticeable articulation of users' interests can be fostered, communitarian approaches assume that users' interests can be articulated and represented best by more or less formal associations (Newton, 2001). All forms of organisations starting with sporadic collective activities, informal networks and citizen initiatives on specific issues up to powerful NGOs can help to raise public attention for civil society interests, in this case for media users. Civil society actors are able to articulate latent or new risks, to place them on the public agenda and thus to make them an urgent issue that has to be dealt with by politics, regulators and media companies (Heming, 2000). Thus, despite being scarcely organised and lacking resources, users' interests can become powerful forces when users and their organisations succeed in raising public attention and support for their objectives.

In summary, civil society in the media sphere can be characterised as an audience constellation, which is discursive, independent, pluralistic, bound to life-worlds and oriented towards the common welfare. With these characteristics, civil society has a special sensitivity for problems and concerns of media users and can articulate them in the public sphere and introduce them into the political process (Dahlgren, 1995). In this respect, users' organisations can be of special importance as they cover the different characteristics of civil society actors. With this theoretical framework in mind, the following section summarizes the result of a European study on the situation of television viewers' role as a civil society actor (see Baldi and Hasebrink, 2006); although this study focused on television related issues, the lessons to be learnt from this research should be relevant also for other media sectors like radio, newspapers, or online services.

### **Options for media users' participation in media governance**

The range of options for users' participation starts with models that are not self-initiated by the users but made available through politics, regulators or media companies themselves. Secondly, we will deal with the viewer organisations that represent the core types of civil society actors. In each case we will shortly refer to the strengths and weaknesses and to the particular implications with regard to media literacy.

**Representation in controlling bodies** In some countries different societal groups are represented in controlling bodies of public service broadcasters and regulatory authorities. This is the case, for example, in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland. By participating in the bodies of these institutions, the representatives of different groups communicate their perspectives particularly in relation to viewers' protection and citizens' interests, and exert influence on the realisation of their interests in the programmes of the relevant broadcasters or the decisions of the regulatory authority.

A problem of this model turns out to be the double role of the members and their representatives in that they act as stakeholders towards the company and at the same time as representatives of the company towards the public. Another problem of this model seems to be that the broadcasters or authorities are more likely to reject complaints or other initiatives by single viewers as illegitimate on the basis that the public is sufficiently represented through these bodies. In general, there is a trend towards decreasing viewers' influence and that of their representatives in this model, as with growing competition on the market the management gains autonomy.

With regards to civil society criteria, closeness to everyday life and the interests of viewers depend on the structure of the different groups of citizens represented in the organisations. Nowadays, the representatives in many cases are multi-operatives of the groups and have lost their grass-root connections. It is also worth noting, here, that presence in the public sphere is also restricted. By way of illustration, some of the bodies do not hold their meetings publicly. While this model of user representation might be regarded as a governance tool that is organised for the users and is quite distant from their everyday lives, it can nevertheless have implications for certain aspects of media literacy. As the research in the above-mentioned project has shown the representation model often suffers from the fact that the users are not even aware that they are represented in these bodies. While this is partly due to the dynamics of these bodies and the representatives who are not able or willing to keep contact with those whom they are supposed to represent, this fact might also indicate a general lack of media literacy in terms of: a) awareness that these bodies shall represent different societal groups, b) knowledge about the objectives and procedures of these bodies, and c) interest and engagement in the issues that are discussed on these platforms. Thus it could be argued that this model of involving users or at least different civil society groups could be strengthened if the users were more literate in respect to the above mentioned aspects.

**Communication platforms** In some European countries communication platforms – offline as well as online – for discussions on different issues of media policies have been established. In some cases broadcasters provide such offers for discussion on programmes, whereas in others the regulatory authorities take the initiative to discuss current questions of media development with media users. The latter initiatives refer to both consumers' and citizens' interests and to questions of media users' protection.

This type of user participation tends to encourage the articulation of user concerns in a direct way and as such might fulfil a central function of civil society control. A disadvantage might be that the initiators of these platforms only allow a rather low level of commitment on the side of the users. In terms of media literacy this could turn into an advantage, since the participation in these platforms does not require sophisticated knowledge or longer preparation.

**Complaints procedures** A widespread measure for protecting the media users' interests in Europe are the different kinds of complaints procedures existing in almost every European country. Among the institutions that provide the possibility to complain, are the media companies themselves, regulatory authorities, self-regulatory organs like e.g. press councils, and other professional associations overseeing the observance of ethical standards. A specific model is the Ombudsman system that is in place in Sweden. Here the Ombudsman is an independent advocate or moderator, who tries to achieve a clarification for the issue in question. In Sweden, most people know this venue for complaining quite well and it is well accepted.

From the civil society perspective this option of media users' participation reflects a high degree of sensitivity for the users' concerns. However, the cases often do not become public and thus remain on the level of individual interests. This circumstance might also explain why media companies often regard people that do complain as grouchers who do not take into account that they are dealing with mass media, which cannot fulfil all individual needs. Nevertheless, as a basic right for media users, an institutionalised complaints procedure seems to be indispensable. And insofar as they are accomplished by rules, which secure that the cases become public and transparent, they can contribute to civil society discourse and control in media politics.

Another advantage might be that highly visible complaint buttons or advertising for hotlines can contribute to strengthen one relevant aspect of media literacy, i.e. the awareness of the fact that media users may expect that media companies as well as media politics have to be responsible and accountable to the public and that users have an option to express their complaint once they feel that there is a lack of responsibility.

**Audience research** As outlined in the previous section, from the perspective of the media companies, users' interests are taken into account by their market research. This means consumer interests are in the focus of research; individual programme preferences in a generalised form become guidelines for programming and advertising presentation. This kind of observation of users' interests can be found in every European country, but societal interests of citizens or the need for viewer protection are widely disregarded in this perspective. In exceptional cases the audience research of broadcasters include all three levels of users' interests outlined above – consumer and citizen interests as well as protection needs. For instance, the Finnish public service broadcaster YLE has conducted surveys, which include extensive parts on the viewers' attitudes towards public service functions, towards different programme offers like children's television, educational and minority programmes or questions on their perception of diversity issues

in the programme offer of YLE. The participants were asked explicitly to refer not just to their individual consumer interests but to take into account their interests as citizens. Furthermore, these surveys fulfil a civil society function as they are published and may enter public discourse on public service performance. With regard to sensitivity for concerns of viewers, however, these surveys have just a limited effect, since standardised questionnaires do not provide enough space for individual perspectives.

**Media users' associations** Typical cases for civil society participation in the media sphere are media users' organisations, consumer organisations or citizens' initiatives dealing with media related issues. The general characteristics for civil society actors as outlined in this paper fully apply to them: They are *associations* which promote *non-profit aims* related to media development; they are open for citizens from a broad range of societal groups and build on a strong *sensitivity for the concerns* of the users; finally they use different means of *public communication* in order to articulate and promote their position in the public discourse.

According to a broad understanding of the term users' organisation, this includes any organisation, which pursues one of the following aims:

- >representing users' interests and needs;
- >supporting certain media qualities, e.g. diversity or educational content;
- >fighting against problematic content (e.g. violence, advertising).

Furthermore, these organisations are independent from regulatory bodies and broadcasters themselves.

Across Europe several kinds of users' organisations could be found, although in a number of European countries there were no such organisations at all. Two remarks should be made on this phenomenon: First, the absence of users' organisations does not mean that users' participation is generally low in these countries; other features of the media system may ensure participation. Second, although users' organisations were found in the remaining countries investigated, in some cases their relevance with regard to their actual presence and efficacy in political debates was very low.

Some users' organisations, particularly in Northern Europe, built up substantial memberships and reach huge audiences with their publications, which provide tests on a wide range of consumer goods and services (see also Mitchell and Blumler, 1994: 233). In some cases these tests include media or television, e.g. with regard to consumer electronics or new technical systems like set-top boxes for digital television. Occasionally, these organisations also comment on actual issues in media politics.

In our research we identified the following aims and motives of users' organisations in Europe (Hasebrink, Herzog and Eilders, 2006):

- >general representation of viewers' interests;
- >protecting family/children/youth interests;
- >defending pluralism and diversity;
- >ensuring gender interests;
- >safeguarding religious values.

The media users' organisations identified in Europe show plenty of activities targeted at various groups of society. A general function that several organisations fulfil is critical *media monitoring*, to act as a television watchdog in general or with regard to specific issues like gender equality. In several organisations the monitoring is complemented by *research*. This includes either conducting various individual studies or providing a study service.

With regard to the aim of giving users a voice in media politics, several organisations do a lot of *lobbying* as well, as they represent the users in media councils and communicate their perspectives to the public via press releases and publications. Probably the most successful organisation in the field of political lobbying is the British Voice of the Listeners and Viewers Association (VLV)<sup>2</sup>, as it maintains a high reputation and effective links with both government and broadcasters.

Several organisations are more oriented towards the media users as the target group of their activities; they provide, for example, *complaints services* by collecting complaints and forwarding them to the broadcasters. Different ways of communicating this service can be observed. Some offer hotlines with toll-free numbers and/or e-mail-addresses or the classical way via mail, where individuals who would like to complain can get (legal and practical) advice and help in formulating their complaints.

Hotlines, chat rooms and other means of communication are used as well for a general service to provide *information* to the users and a *discussion forum*. Most of the organisations run websites with information on complaints procedures, regulatory questions etc. and provide feedback options.

Another kind of service several organisations provide are *radio and television guides* online as well as offline. Some of these magazines give orientation concerning the quality of programmes. Some specifically focus on programmes for children and young people and rate/certify them. An interesting instrument to try to encourage quality programming is used by several organisations in Europe through *awards or prizes* for 'best' or 'worst' programmes.

An important aspect of the organisations' activities is *networking* between different kinds of organisations as well as on the local, regional and national level. Some national viewers' organisations have a regional or even local basis as they are organised in local clubs. Through networking at least two advantages are gained, namely a very close connection to the citizens and a simple way of getting publicity. As European integration and globalisation proceed, international connections become important for viewers' organisations as well. That is also why the VLV initiated the European Alliance of Listener and Viewer Associations (EURALVA)<sup>3</sup>, with ten members from ten European countries until now, which comments on European media policy and encourages public service broadcasting. As one outcome of the project presented here the European Association

<sup>2</sup> See [www.vlv.org.uk/](http://www.vlv.org.uk/) (07.12.2012).

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.euralva.org> (07.12.2012).

for Viewers Interests (EAVI)<sup>4</sup> in Brussels has been founded. Its mission is “to work with European and other international institutions to contribute to the empowerment of citizens, so that they may fully participate in public life. More in general, its mission is to serve public interest in the fields of media with the aim to represent and advance the interests of European media users and citizens in general.”<sup>5</sup> A core objective of EAVI as well as of many other users’ associations is to enhance *media education and media literacy* and organise seminars or projects on this behalf. According to EAVI’s definition “media literacy is the ability to access the media, to understand and to critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contents and to create communications in a variety of contexts.”<sup>6</sup> Based on the argument in this paper this definition should be enhanced by the ability to involve oneself in processes of media government.

## CONCLUSION

This paper set out to discuss the role of audiences within media governance. As a first step a conceptual distinction between different user roles has been proposed. The argument is that it is not sufficient to refer to media users as consumers only as it is often pursued in political debates. Instead, media governance has to take into account that users also act as citizens who have certain normative and value-based expectations concerning media performance within society; at the same time they claim not to be personally offended by the media and might ask for concrete protective measure. How these roles are interrelated, to what extent they might contradict or complement each other, is widely unknown and needs innovative research instruments, which grasp all three aspects synchronously.

The second step referred to a systematic investigation of different forms of involvement of media users in processes of media governance. Starting from the concept of media users as civil society actors, the overview of different kinds of involvement of media users gives an indication of the existing number of ways that exist to support the users’ interests linked with the three roles. Some approaches support complaints, reflecting that users might feel offended by certain kinds of media supply. Others provide information on high quality programmes and in this way deal with media consumers’ interests. Citizens’ interests are represented by users’ organisations in boards and councils or via lobbying (the government). Many associations have a special focus on the protection of minors and organise monitoring as well as research services. Thus, in interpreting users’ participation as civil society activity they build on a broader understanding of ‘audience’ and ‘media users’ than is prevalent in common audience research. The criteria for civil society activities are met by many of the initiatives. They serve as means to achieve a broad sensitivity for the concerns of the users – complaints services, seminars, workshops or online forums as well as other feedback options for viewers. They aim at the inclusion of all parts of society in the process of media governance. Furthermore, they promote deliberation, i.e. the public and transparent discourse on all issues of media development. To what

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.eavi.eu> (07.12.2012).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.eavi.eu/joomla/about-us/mission> (07.12.2012).

<sup>6</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/media/media-literacy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/media/media-literacy/index_en.htm) (07.12.2012).

extent these different procedural and structural means to strengthen the media users' involvement in media governance can become actually effective and which concrete organisational aspects contribute to their success is one important research field, which is getting increasing attention (e.g. Eberwein et al., 2011).

One prerequisite for a stronger user involvement in media governance is a bundle of abilities and competences that should be considered as relevant aspects of media literacy. Awareness of one's individual communicative needs, as well as of societal requirements regarding the communication system, and of the potential risks linked with certain media and communication services builds the basis for any kind of involvement in media governance. Other aspects are the knowledge of basic structures and rules of the media system, and abilities to participate in different forms of political engagement. Research on media literacy should include these aspects in order to provide a comprehensive conceptualisation of media literacy that helps to strengthen the users' role in media governance.

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## ULOGA PUBLIKE U UPRAVLJANJU MEDIJIMA: ZAPOSTAVLJENA DIMENZIJA MEDIJSKE PISMENOSTI

Uwe Hasebrink

**SAŽETAK** Poimanje medijske pismenosti često uključuje i dimenziju participacije medijskih korisnika u regulaciji medija ili, šire, u upravljanju medijima. Pritom pismenost ne znači samo to da medijski korisnici imaju mogućnost sudjelovanja u komunikaciji koja je povezana s medijima nego i da su uključeni u oblikovanje tehničkih, političkih i ekonomskih preduvjeta za komunikacijske procese. Ipak, čini se da je taj aspekt prilično zapostavljen kada je riječ o empirijskim istraživanjima o uzorcima i razinama medijske pismenosti. Stoga kada se govori o medijskim korisnicima kao dionicima u upravljanju medijima, to zvuči nepoznato i nekako čudno: medijske politike i medijska regulacija uglavnom su kreirane za medijske korisnike i njihove interese – ili ponekad čak i protiv njihovih interesa – ali gotovo ih nikada ne kreiraju korisnici sami. Ovaj članak predlaže konceptualno pojašnjenje potencijalnih uloga publike te ih tumači u odnosu na konkretne instrumente koji bi mogli pomoći ojačati taj aspekt medijske pismenosti, a time i ulogu publika u upravljanju medijima.

### KLJUČNE RIJEČI

UKLJUČENOST PUBLIKE, UPRAVLJANJE MEDIJIMA, MEDIJSKA PISMENOST, GRAĐANSTVO

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