The legitimacy of public service media

A suggestion for a change of perspective

FIONA FEHLMANN
DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED MEDIA STUDIES,
ZURICH UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES, SWITZERLAND

ABSTRACT

Although the legitimacy of public service media (PSM) is often mentioned in the context of frameworks, such as the European Broadcasting Union's contribution to society initiative, the emphasis is rarely on the concept of legitimacy and its meanings. This chapter provides different theoretical perspectives on the concept of legitimacy and argues that to conceptualise legitimacy as *perception* can be particularly helpful in research investigating PSM's potential contribution to society. To illustrate this argument, past debates in the context of public value are analysed to show how the legitimacy of PSM has been primarily understood as the result of strategic communication processes. In addition, several research questions, methodological approaches, and challenges that can be considered for research on PSM by understanding legitimacy as perception are outlined.

KEYWORDS: legitimacy, public service media, institutionalism, public value, social theory

Introduction

Are public service broadcasting organisations still legitimate? This question is often at the core of current debates on public broadcasters in Europe (EBU, 2015; Larsen, 2010; Lowe, 2016). These discussions focus on the extent to which such organisations are still considered legitimate within a system of changing rules, norms, values, and definitions; with the emerging media structure of the digital era, in which societies are increasingly interwoven with a wide variety of information and communication infrastructures (Lowe et al., 2018; Suchman, 1995). However, legitimacy as a concept is only rarely brought into strong focus in the theoretical debate with regard to public broadcasting organisations and the changing media landscape in which they operate. Instead, research, as well as management reports, on public broadcasting organisations describe a variety of concepts that may be related to the concept of legitimacy, but rarely place the concept and its meaning at the centre of the analysis. Based on this circumstance, I set out to address the following research questions:

RQ1.   What are possible theoretical perspectives on the concept of legitimacy?

RQ2.   To what extent can the concept of legitimacy be a starting point to understand what the contribution to society of public broadcasting organisations might be?

The aim of the chapter is to provide three different theoretical perspectives on the legitimacy of public service media (PSM) organisations, and to discuss potential advantages of the "legitimacy-as-perception" (Suddaby et al., 2017: 463) perspective for research in this area. Therefore, the intention here is to provide insights on possible theoretical perspectives rather than providing a fully elaborated framework.

Today, there is a long list of concepts, each with a slightly different focus, that attempt to outline a new or changed identity for PSM organisations in the digital era. This is done by adapting the classic core values of these organisations, such as cohesion, universality, independence, diversity, quality, or openness. Typical examples of this kind are "Public Service Media" (e.g., Martin & Lowe, 2014); "Public Value" (e.g., Alford & O'Flynn, 2009; Gonser & Gundlach, 2015); "Public Open Spaces" (e.g., Dobusch, 2019); "Public Service Navigator" (e.g., Burri, 2015); "Commons" (e.g., Murdock, 2005; Schweizer, 2016); or with regard to the RIPE 2021 conference, "Contribution to Society" (EBU, 2015). The latter framework can also be added to this list, which is still far from complete.

As Karen Donders (2021) pointed out in her book, most of these concepts or frameworks – there are certainly exceptions – have not necessarily helped to better understand what PSM constitutes and how, from a normative point of view, their mission could be described:

> My main argument is that these mushrooming concepts give the impression that Public Service Media is everything and nothing at the same time. The question is whether one, from a theoretical perspective, can move beyond public service "anything" and come to a shared story and set of values and rules for Public Service Media in the digital age. (Donders, 2021: 40)

So, how can we try to describe a "shared story and set of values and rules for public service media in the digital age" (Donders, 2021: 40) in order to understand what potential contribution to society these organisations can and cannot deliver? In this chapter, I put forward the argument that such a question can only be fully answered by focusing research also on how citizens relate to PSM: Which norms, values, opinions, definitions, and attitudes do citizens have regarding PSM independent of an already given leitmotif or concept such as, for example, contribution to society? What services of PSM do citizens use and recognise as contributions to their lives? Only through a perspective that understands legitimacy also as the *perception*, or attribution of individuals ("legitimacy-as-perception"; Suddaby et al., 2017), can one identify which contributions create tangible value for citizens.

I further argue that attempts to develop theoretical concepts or frameworks for PSM have so far relied primarily on either the legitimacy-as-process or legitimation perspective, or they have attempted to describe legitimacy as a property that an organisation does or does not possess.

In order to clarify these arguments and the different perspectives on the concept of legitimacy and possible meanings, in the first section I explore the origins of the legitimacy concept and how it can be theorised in different ways. This is inspired by the work of Roy Suddaby and colleagues (2017) on the concept of legitimacy. In the second section, I illustrate, using the public value concept as an example, how the legitimacy-as-process perspective dominates debates on the legitimacy of PSM organisations. Among other things, this specific understanding of legitimacy resulted for a long time in research focusing primarily on the role of PSM organisations as active change agents in the negotiation of their legitimacy. Attention to members of the public as evaluators of the legitimacy of PSM organisations has become more relevant again in PSM research in recent years, with great interest in young target groups, for example. In the third part of this chapter, I discuss exemplary research questions and methodological approaches that could be brought into focus by adapting a theoretical perspective that understands legitimacy as perception in research on PSM.

Legitimacy as a property, a process, or a perception? The characteristics of different perspectives

Academic writings on the concept of legitimacy have a long tradition in the analyses of institutions and organisations, dating as far back as the nineteenth

century (Tost, 2011). Following Max Weber, numerous variations of the concept have been discussed and applied in a wide range of disciplines such as law, political science, sociology, economics, philosophy, and psychology (Krücken, 2020; Suddaby et al., 2017). The concept of legitimacy is particularly present in the broad field of discussion of the so-called new institutionalism (also referred to as neo-institutionalism). In the context of this broad research field, legitimacy is mostly defined as "a generalized perception or assumption that an entity's actions are desirable, correct or appropriate within socially constructed system of norm, values, beliefs and definitions" (Suchman, 1995: 574). Although some authors have pointed out that the word "desirable" misleadingly suggests that the concept of legitimacy is close to concepts such as reputation or status, it is this definition by Suchman (1995) that is used in most publications on the concept. Furthermore, studies focusing on the concept of legitimacy cover a broad range of topics. For example, the legitimacy of certain practices, management teams, company founders, governance mechanisms, or organisations as a whole have been examined (Deephouse, et al., 2017; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). Such research projects differ greatly in their focus and levels of analysis (micro, meso, macro) (Walgenbach & Meyer, 2008). However, what these studies with reference to new institutionalism generally have in common is the assumption that the survival, or raison d'être, of entities such as organisations depends primarily on their legitimacy – and not necessarily on the efficiency of their work and exchange processes (Hasse, 2013; Walgenbach & Meyer, 2008).

What is understood in detail by legitimacy, and how it is established, depends on the underlying epistemological approach chosen. Ideal-typically, three different perspectives on the concept of legitimacy can be described: 1) a property, 2) a process, or 3) a form of perception (Suddaby et al., 2017). In the following section, I first discuss these three streams of legitimacy research in more detail and then explain why the legitimacy-as-perception perspective is considered valuable for many types of inquiry in researching PSM.

Legitimacy-as-property perspective

Research that understands legitimacy as a property usually assumes that legitimacy is something that an organisation possesses in a measurable quantity, and then again can be exchanged between organisations (Suddaby et al., 2017). For example, some researchers speak of legitimacy as an "operational resource" (Suchman, 1995: 576) that organisations can acquire or lose. In order to gain this resource legitimacy, the assumption in this perspective is that there must be a certain fit, or congruence between, for example, structures, products, or routines of an organisation and the normative expectations of its external environment (Suddaby et al., 2017). Legitimacy is thus created between the object of legitimacy, for example, an organisation, and its exter-

nal environment, in that the organisation attempts to maintain congruence between internal and external norms, values, and characteristics through ongoing adjustments (Suddaby et al., 2017; Webb et al., 2009). In research on public service broadcasters, there are some publications that try to systematise this adaptation process. Although the connection between these adaptations and the concept of legitimacy is not the focus, Karen Donders, for example, described a very insightful systematisation of the phases in the context of the transition from public service broadcasting to PSM and adjustments in the distribution strategies. She suggested describing five phases: the experimental phase, the panic phase, the expansionist phase, the consolidation phase, and the maturity phase (for more details, see Donders, 2019, 2021). For example, while in the experimental phase, public broadcasting organisations are just beginning to discover the potential of Internet distribution, while in the maturity phase, these organisations have an elaborated online strategy and a concept to better connect with their differing audiences (Donders, 2021).

Legitimacy-as-process perspective

Another possible perspective on the concept of legitimacy is provided by researchers who emphasise that legitimacy is the result of a communicative process between various social actors rather than the fit of an organisation with expectations from its environment. In legitimacy-as-process views, actors can, for example, explain the existence of an organisation and strategically influence the ways of communication. In this communicative process, Suddaby and colleagues (2017) identified – along with strategies such as persuasion, translation, narration, or categorisation – theorisation as a key communication strategy. Through this strategy of theorisation, existing norms and practices of, for example, public broadcasting organisations are abstracted into generalised specifications or categories. Hence, legitimacy in the legitimacy-as-process perspective occurs between different social actors, especially when actors try to seek or oppose change (Suddaby et al., 2017).

Studies that focus on the legitimacy-as-process perspective typically attempt to identify through qualitative analyses certain environmental factors, as well as forms of narratives, that can influence these various communicative processes (Suddaby et al., 2017). For example, in her research on public broadcasting organisations in the US and Europe, Ellen P. Goodman (2013) identified three legitimising narratives for public broadcasting (democratic discourse, universal service, and educational excellence), which, on the one hand, are associated with functions for society, and on the other, from her point of view, are each inspired by the idea of market failure. She further noted that "market failure narratives" (Goodman, 2013: 205) endure the twenty-first century, but that new narratives' legitimisation for PSM are needed in the digital age – for example, related to innovation.

Legitimacy-as-perception perspective

The legitimacy-as-process view is in some instances criticised for overemphasising the relationship between actors with agency and passive audiences, thus neglecting the critical, nuanced role of individuals' perceptions and their judgments of legitimacy (Deephouse et al., 2017; Suddaby et al., 2017; Tost, 2011). Hence, some researchers studying the concept of legitimacy advocate for understanding the assessments and perceptions of individuals as the basis of legitimacy (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Tost, 2011). In this legitimacy-as-perception perspective, individual judgments and perceptions constitute a sort of "micro-motor" of legitimacy (Tost, 2011). They influence the behaviour of individuals and ultimately ensure that an entity, organisation, or institution is considered appropriate or legitimate within a larger collective (Deephouse et al., 2017; Tost, 2011). Research on legitimacy-as-perception therefore usually adopts a multilevel approach but focuses on the perceptions of individuals. This means that in this perspective, it is assumed that individuals make legitimacy judgments, for example, towards an organisation, based on their perceptions, and subsequently act upon this judgment and thus possibly cause changes on a collective (meso or macro) level (Bitektine, 2011; Suddaby et al., 2017). In other words, legitimacy is attributed to an entity by a larger collective, but it is based on the perceptions and judgments of individuals (Hangartner & Fehlmann, 2019).

While legitimation, or the legitimacy-as-process view, focuses more on the active, goal-oriented role of actors as "change agents", the legitimacy-as-perception perspective describes individual perception as the fundamental mechanism through which legitimacy is constructed. Actors in this case are rather seen as evaluators – that is, those who make legitimacy judgments about an entity (Suddaby et al., 2017).

Empirical studies that have attempted to examine legitimacy as perception have partly relied on media coverage and compared it, for example, with corporate media releases. This is done to compare public perceptions in the media with public portrayals by the corporations themselves (e.g., Lamin & Zaheer, 2012). There are other studies that have attempted to investigate perceptions of legitimacy using a mixed-method approach with qualitative interviews (e.g., protocol analysis) as well as survey instruments (e.g., conjoint analysis). These studies have analysed, for example, which aspects of a company's "novelty" lead individuals to perceive it as legitimate and worth supporting (e.g., Choi & Shepherd, 2005). Research of this kind, similar to those focusing on legitimacy-as-process, have their roots in the work of Max Weber, on the one hand, and in *The Social Construction of Reality* by Berger, Luckmann, and Plessner (2018), on the other (see also Suddaby et al., 2017). Research in this phenomenological tradition highlights that reality, or in this case legitimacy, is socially constructed and inherent in the consciousness of individuals – and thus not a feature of an external force of any kind (Künzler, 2009; Meyer, 2019).

Thus, as with many concepts in the social sciences, the possible configurations of legitimacy elaborated here – as a property, a process, or a perception – show that the differing perspectives are based on various conceptions of the nature and constitution of social reality (Scott, 2014). Accordingly, we find ourselves in a similar situation when considering what the contribution to society framework might mean. PSM organisations want to be perceived as a contribution to society; however, it often remains vague what this terminology refers to. Depending on how one believes that social reality is created – whether one rather emphasises that individuals with their cognition should be in focus, or political structures and institutions or other entities – the answer to the question of what PSM's contribution to society is will probably be rather different.

In this chapter, I argue that PSM's contribution to society can be grasped to a greater extent if research on PSM in general focuses more on the concept of legitimacy, specifically on the legitimacy-as-perception perspective. Despite the interest in individuals and their beliefs, judgements, and cognitions that this calls for, this perspective should, at the same time, always be concerned with the "pitfalls of extreme individualism or a reduction of social processes to 'what occurs by individuals'" (Daft & Weick, as cited in Suddaby et al., 2017: 463). The objective here is therefore not to pit the individual against society, but rather to focus on their interplay (Hepp, 2020). The legitimacy-as-perception perspective is not limited to individual-level processes, as it remains committed to the co-constitutive relationship of meaning structures or sense-making in a collective and individual cognition and behaviour (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Meyer et al., 2021; Meyer & Vaara, 2020). By applying the proposed perspective on legitimacy, the interplay between individual perceptions and "*Deutungsangebote* [interpretive options]" (Meyer et al., 2021: 162) of norms, values, definitions, or practices can be examined, for example, regarding the use and relevance of PSM services within a specific social context or audience.

To further illustrate this argument, in the next section I try to show how previous debates around new frameworks for PSM organisations – for example, in the case of the public value framework – typically rely on the legitimacy-as-process perspective. I subsequently look more closely at pertinent research questions as well as possible methodological approaches that could receive increased attention, assuming that legitimacy of PSM can be understood as a form of perception.

Legitimacy-as-process: From public value to contribution to society

To date, I argue, the guiding principles for PSM organisations have been developed with recourse to the legitimacy-as-process perspective (also referred to as legitimation). In this legitimation process, the "active" public broad-

casters (or other actors) – to exaggerate – turn to their "passive" audience to explain and justify themselves. Here, legitimacy is created via a strategic communication process by active change agents. This led to the situation in which abstract, complex categories and values (e.g., democracy, education, or universal service) were operationalised through top-down theorisation. As explained in the previous section, theorisation is a key strategy in the conception of legitimacy-as-process in which preexisting norms, values, and practices are abstracted into generalised categories or specifications (Suddaby et al., 2017). Public broadcasters communicate such values and at the same time are supposed to deliver those values a priori. Citizens can then provide their judgements on this in surveys afterwards.

For instance, if we look at the debates and controversies regarding the public value of PSM, the focus in these debates on the legitimacy-as-process perspective is quite noticeable. For example, Moe and Van den Buck (2014: 73) noted: "For some, it is a new regulatory concept meant to discipline public service broadcasters, while others see it as a way to 'defend' and promote what public service institutions do". This quotation indicates that the focus in discussions on the public value of public broadcasters is on the legitimacy-as-process view and not, as once intended with this concept, on outputs as well as on "*outcomes*, that is, impacts upon those who enjoy the value/good in question [emphasis original]" (Alford & O'Flynn, 2009: 175). Michael Moore (2000: 52), who is widely referenced in this context, wrote in the book, *Creating Public Value*, that "value is rooted in the desires and perceptions of individuals – [...] and not in abstractions called societies". Nevertheless, or precisely because of such polarising remarks, the emphasis on "intrinsic values" (Lowe, 2016: 7), as well as the theorising of top-down defined evaluation categories for public broadcasting organisations, remains strong in research, within PSM organisations as well as with policy-makers. Again, as mentioned in the previous section, the intention here is not to promote reducing processes from social to individual, as Moore's quote may imply. Rather, I strive to illustrate the benefits of the legitimacy-as-perception perspective that adopts a multilevel approach that considers the interplay between individual perception and (social) meanings of PSM.

Returning to the concept of public value, it is evident from numerous publications that analysing the public value of PSM and their impact on individuals and other parts of society is a complex undertaking. Such publications usually attempt to describe the public value of PSM by dividing the concept into dimensions such as "individual value", "social value", or "citizen value" (e.g., Gonser & Gundlach, 2015; Mazzucato et al., 2020; Süssenbacher, 2011). It becomes apparent when looking at these dimensions that, according to many observers, the values of PSM organisations lie somewhere between individual needs and public interests, although it is not always clear which aspects these two poles encompass. Despite such ambiguities, literature repeatedly empha-

sises the importance of values for the legitimacy of public broadcasters: "these organizations must bear in mind the values that they traditionally stood for, as well those that are arising [...]. Only through reinforcement of its values will PSM be able to navigate the storm" (Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2021: 8). How PSM may illustrate and measure its values has been outlined, for example, by Mazzucato and colleagues (2020). Their intriguing framework on the BBC's "dynamic public value" provides a very comprehensible account on how and with which values the BBC could portray itself as a "dynamic value creator" (Mazzucato et al., 2020: 29) for the individual, society, as well as the local economy. Nevertheless, the theoretical angle of the legitimacy-as-process perspective is again strongly articulated in this report by suggesting that the BBC can "demonstrate" (Mazzucato et al., 2020: 29) its values as an active, goal-oriented change agent.

While such a perspective is certainly relevant, it is among those – as mentioned before – that have been extensively discussed in debates on public value. Questions often remain unanswered in such debates regarding what happens when PSM organisations demonstrate their different value dimensions, but these are not understood or acknowledged by the general public. Additionally, several other questions often remain unanswered in this context: Who defines these sets of values for public broadcasting organisations? Is it bodies of national media regulation in exchange with other stakeholders in politics and the local media industry that define these values? What role do modes of operation and practices of globally active platforms and streaming services, such as YouTube and Netflix, play in the definition of the values of public broadcasting organisations? What role do media audiences or citizens play in determining these values? If these values are defined in an exchange between different interest groups, how exactly does this work, and who is allowed to have a say in these debates? The same questions may be equally applied to the concept of contribution to society. Who ultimately determines which contribution to which society is the valuable one? There is a possibility that debates on this presumably new framework will remain similar to past debates on public value.

Legitimacy-as-perception: Potential for public service media research

The introduction of the leitmotif public value has led to a theoretical refocusing of debates about the mission of PSM organisations – from the interests of political decision-makers towards what individual citizens and media users might consider valuable to them in PSM services. Nevertheless, the detailed, empirical examination of perceptions, views, and needs of users and non-users of PSM services (at least in academic studies) remains a rather rare endeavour (Just et al., 2017; Reiter et al., 2018). When evaluations and assessments

of media users are considered in empirical studies, concepts such as trust, credibility, or quality are often at the centre of the analysis (Jarren, 2019; Sehl, 2020). There tends to be more research related to PSM organisations that deals with how the public value, the mission, or the role of PSM can be described from the normative perspective of regulators and scholars (Goyanes, 2021; Sehl, 2020). Otfried Jarren (2019: 67, 83) accurately stated that this "normative foundation [...] is integral part of journalistic mass media's DNA" and that "public media can no longer be only the formative result of the so-called socially relevant groups, as they must have a minimum level of acceptance and social approval [translated]".

In order to be able to explore this "minimum level of acceptance" or recognition of the DNA of public broadcasters in a differentiated, fragmented social system, it is necessary, or at least desirable, to consider the legitimacy-as-perception perspective which I emphasise in this chapter. Accordingly, I argue that in order to explain and explore the contribution to society concept, the legitimacy-as-process research perspective should not again be the main focus, as in the case of public value. Rodríguez-Castro and Campos-Freire (see Chapter 11 in this volume), for example, show how ex ante public value tests do not result in citizen participation and can thus be seen as a "missed opportunity for PSM organisations to open up their decision-making structures" to participation outside "industry-related agents". This missed opportunity is again – among other factors – caused by the fact that legitimacy is rather understood as a result of a strategic communication process by active change agents rather than a form of perception.

When legitimacy is understood as a form of perception – as something co-constitutive by individual perception and meaning structures – questions about PSM come into focus that would remain rather hidden with regard to the other perspectives on legitimacy (as a property or a process). Again, as a reminder, legitimacy in this understanding can be defined as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995: 574). With such an understanding of legitimacy, it would become possible to compare the normative foundations of public broadcasting organisations and their interpretive options (Meyer et al., 2021) with individual everyday understandings of corresponding norms, values, definitions, and beliefs. Such a research perspective would make it possible to study the extent to which the *Leitidee* – or main idea – of PSM, as well as PSM organisations, are perceived differently by various social groups and audiences.

To mention just a few, the following questions could be addressed: How do individuals as a "micro-motor" of legitimacy perceive public broadcasting as legitimate? What norms, values, beliefs, and definitions do individuals judge public broadcasting organisations on? What role do normative core values

of PSM, such as diversity, cohesion, or independence, play in individual assessments of legitimacy? In the context of changing communication needs in the digital era, are there any new definitions, values, norms, and beliefs among media users that they would consider important in relation to public broadcasting organisations? Furthermore, on the basis of such a perspective on legitimacy-as-perception, it would be possible to ask, for example, with a focus on journalists and other employees of public broadcasting organisations: Which norms, values, and definitions do they perceive as desirable and appropriate for their (journalistic) work in these organisations? In this context, what role do the underlying values of PSM organisations, which are also laid down in the mission statements, for instance, play in everyday journalistic work? Are there certain norms, values, or beliefs that media professionals today consider more important than others when it comes to the legitimacy of public broadcasting organisations in the digital age? What overlaps and differences are there between the perceptions of norms, values, definitions, and beliefs between employees of public broadcasting organisations and the media users they want or need to reach? With questions of this kind (there would be many more), the understanding of the interaction between individuals and public broadcasting organisations would be enhanced and put into focus. In addition, such a perspective would make it possible to describe a *Leitidee* of PSM bottom-up and in an open, participatory dialogue with citizens.

Such a bottom-up perspective is similarly called for by researchers in journalism studies who argue for a radical "audience turn" (e.g., Costera Meijer, 2020; Swart et al., 2022). Swart and colleagues (2022) have provided a comprehensive description of opportunities, challenges, and dilemmas of such a perspective. Some of these are also transferable to the perspective proposed here of conceptualising the legitimacy of PSM organisations primarily as perception. Thus, also here, researchers are faced with the challenge of reconsidering which forms of legitimacy judgements, practices, participation, or engagement in relation to public issues or debates on PSM count as agency. Furthermore, it is essential to be aware of the designations of the objects of study, such as the public, citizens, or media users, as these have an influence on the research design (Swart et al., 2022).

In order to adapt the legitimacy-as-perception perspective on the above-mentioned research questions, a wide variety of methodological procedures and combinations would be conceivable. Perhaps qualitative methods or a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods could be considered first. Suddaby and colleagues (2017) proposed various methodological approaches to investigate (individual) legitimacy judgements. In particular, I consider the proposed method of "multisided ethnography" (Suddaby et al., 2017: 470) promising for an investigation of legitimacy as perception in the area of PSM. Such a method could attempt to analyse how different individuals

and actors – for example, in different PSM organisations in Europe or within specific PSM audiences – understand the legitimacy of PSM in idiosyncratic ways. Thus, individuals making judgements to groups of like-minded actors, to prevailing opinions in the media, and so on, could be considered (Suddaby et al., 2017).

In particular, the increasing differentiation of communicative intermediaries – ranging from streaming services to Tik Tok channels and other social media offerings – requires the diverse exploration of different perspectives on the legitimacy of PSM. This form of differentiation has led to an enormous pluralisation of norms, values, and definitions in the media and social sphere, with an increasing number of different social groups with different communication and information needs, as Jarren (2019: 72) has explained:

> Those who always offer the same thing, i.e., those who can't or don't want to create much variance (i.e., the mass media), are losing importance. This also affects public broadcasting, which is supposed to be broadcasting for all, and has an integration mandate and operates accordingly [translated].

By describing the legitimacy of public broadcasting organisations as perception, there is the possibility of identifying the societal variance described by Jarren (2019) and, if necessary, integrating parts of this variance into the institutional framework of PSM. If PSM organisations focus less on permanently and actively legitimising the status quo vis-à-vis "socially relevant" groups, and more on what role they fulfil in the context of citizens' everyday lives and their understandings of norms and values, they will be able to secure their legitimacy – and thus their future.

Conclusion

The digital age and the profound processes of social change that come with it impose numerous challenges on PSM organisations. In this chapter, I have attempted to illustrate the extent to which an analysis of the concept of legitimacy, and in particular the legitimacy-as-perception perspective, can provide a way of addressing these challenges and exploring them in depth. In numerous past and current debates on these challenges and possible new leitmotifs for public broadcasting organisations, their legitimacy is only marginally addressed and rarely brought into focus. It is rarely analysed in detail who ascribes legitimacy to public broadcasting organisations and for what reasons, and how these assessments are made. If legitimacy as a theoretical concept receives more attention in the context of PSM, it may be possible in the future to better understand the contribution to society of PSM from a citizen's perspective.

In this chapter, numerous questions remain unanswered, for example, the extent to which the norms and values of media users or citizens have changed

and to what extent potential changes in norms and values are compatible with the new frameworks for public broadcasting organisations. Another aspect not addressed here is the extent to which there may be (individual) preferences and values in society that conflict with the public mission of these organisations. The analysis of such issues needs an empirical investigation, in addition to the theoretical perspective presented in this chapter. My goal has been to demonstrate and provide a rationale for why the concept of legitimacy can be useful as a theoretical lens through which public broadcasting organisations may be analysed.

The first section of this chapter shows that research exploring the concept of legitimacy conceptualises legitimacy either as a property, process, or perception, depending on epistemological considerations (Suddaby et al., 2017). In the second part of the chapter, I have illustrated two points in particular by referring to the debates on public value: first, how the legitimacy-as-process perspective has very often led to PSM organisations being studied as active change agents that are able to theorise and thus legitimise their existing organisational norms and core values; and second, that this very perspective leaves many questions about the legitimacy of public broadcasting organisations unanswered. For example, the co-constitutive relationship between individual perceptions and behaviours of media users and meaning structures (e.g., public value or contribution to society) is often overlooked in debates on the legitimacy of public broadcasting organisations. In the third section, I have outlined why particularly the perspective that understands legitimacy as a form of perception can be fruitful when analysing public broadcasting organisations. By adopting such a perspective, it is possible to address certain questions, for example, to what extent do the perceptions of norms of media organisations match with the perceptions of norms by the media users or by the employees in these organisations?

On the one hand, it is not my intention to refer to such questions as a vote in favour of questioning the core values (e.g., diversity, cohesion, universality, etc.) of public broadcasting organisations, nor, on the other hand, to try to overemphasise the micro-level of institutions with the explanations given here. Rather, this chapter is an attempt to raise awareness of legitimacy-as-perception perspective and thus the values and norms of public broadcasting organisations and their possible meaning in the everyday lives of media users and media producers. Only with an understanding of how individual legitimacy judgments about public broadcasting organisations are formed can there be a new kind of mediation between the different interests of the diverse participants in the debate. In this respect, exploring the concept of legitimacy as a form of perception leads directly to the questions that have always been of particular interest to the social sciences in general and to communication studies in particular: namely, the questions of how society and the individual, the media system and actor, and the big picture and the

small particle relate to each other. The analysis of the concept of legitimacy as perception illustrates that even such traditional arrangements as those of public broadcasting organisations cannot survive if they are not perceived as worth supporting or as legitimate by a multitude of presumably small – but in fact crucial – individuals.

References

Alford, J., & O'Flynn, J. (2009). Making sense of public value: Concepts, critiques and emergent meanings. *International Journal of Public Administration*, *32*(3-4), 171–191. https://doi.org/10.1080/01900690902732731

Berger, P. L., Luckmann, T., & Plessner, H. (2018). *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit: Eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie* [*The social construction of reality: A Treatise in the sociology of knowledge*] (27th ed.). Fischer Taschenbuch.

Bitektine, A. (2011). Toward a theory of social judgments of organizations: The case of legitimacy, reputation, and status. *Academy of Management Review*, *36*(1), 151–179. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.0382

Bitektine, A., & Haack, P. (2015). The 'macro' and the 'micro' of legitimacy: Toward a multilevel theory of the legitimacy process. *Academy of Management Review*, *40*(1), 49–75. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2013.0318

Burri, M. (2015). Contemplating a 'public service navigator': In search of new (and better) functioning public service media. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 1341–1359. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2364951

Choi, Y. R., & Shepherd, D. A. (2005). Stakeholder perceptions of age and other dimensions of newness. *Journal of Management*, *31*(4), 573–596. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206304272294

Costera Meijer, I. (2020). Understanding the audience turn in journalism: From quality discourse to innovation discourse as anchoring practices 1995–2020. *Journalism Studies*, *21*(16), 2326–2342. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1847681

Deephouse, D. L., Bundy, J., Tost, L. P., & Suchman, M. C. (2017). Organizational legitimacy: Six key questions. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, T. Lawrence, & R. Meyer (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism* (pp. 27–52). Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446280669.n2

Deephouse, D. L., & Suchman, M. (2008). Legitimacy in organizational institutionalism. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, R. Suddaby, & K. Sahlin, *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism* (pp. 49–77). Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849200387.n2

Dobusch, L. (2019). Public open spaces: Von Sendern zu öffentlich-rechtlichen Plattformen [From broadcaster to public service platforms]. In J. Krone, & A. Gebesmair (Eds.), *Zur Ökonomie gemeinwohlorientierter Medien: Massenkommunikation in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz* [*On the economy of media oriented towards the common good: Mass communication in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland*] (pp. 25–38). Nomos.

Donders, K. (2019). Public service media beyond the digital hype: Distribution strategies in a platform era. *Media, Culture & Society*, *41*(7), 1011–1028. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443719857616

Donders, K. (2021). *Public service media in Europe: Law, theory and practice*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351105569

EBU (European Broadcasting Union). (2015). *Public service media: Contribution to society*.

Gonser, N., & Gundlach, H. (2015). Public value. In J. Krone, & T. Pellegrini (Eds.), *Handbuch Medienökonomie* [*Media economics handbook*] (pp. 563–583). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-09632-8_48-1

Goodman, E. P. (2013). Public service media narratives. In M. E. Price, S. G. Verhulst, & L. Morgan (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of media law* (pp. 193–317). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203074572

Goyanes, M. (2021). Public service broadcasting and democracy: Main research topics and suggestions for the future. In M. Túñez-López, F. Campos-Freire, & M. Rodríguez-Castro

(Eds.), *The values of public service media in the internet society* (pp. 3–20). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56466-7

Hangartner, S., & Fehlmann, F. (2019). Sprachliches Legitimationsmanagement als Ausweg aus der Krise? Die Wirkung von Legitimationskommunikation auf individuelle Legitimitätsurteile [Language-based legitimacy management as a way out of the crisis? The effect of legitimacy communication on individual legitimacy judgements]. In J. Krone, & A. Gebesmair (Eds.), *Zur Ökonomie gemeinwohlorientierter Medien* [*On the economy of media oriented towards the common good*] (pp. 275–289). Nomos.

Hasse, R. (2013). Soziologische Institutionenanalyse: Grundlagen, Schwerpunkte, Perspektiven [Sociological institutional analysis: Foundations, focal points, perspectives]. In M. Künzler, F. Oehmer, M. Puppis, & C. Wassmer (Eds.), *Medien als Institutionen und Organisationen: Institutionalistische Ansätze in der Publizistik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft* [*Media as institutions and organisations: Institutional approaches in journalism and communication science*] (pp. 67–86). Nomos.

Hepp, A. (2020). *Deep mediatization*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351064903

Jarren, O. (2019). Öffentliche Medien als neue Intermediäre der Gesellschaft: Von der Notwendigkeit der Neuinstitutionlisierung öffentlicher Medien [Public media as new intermediaries of society: On the necessity of re-institutionalising public media]. *Jahrbuch für christliche Sozialwissenschaften*, (60), 63–85.

Just, N., Büchi, M., & Latzer, M. (2017). A blind spot in public broadcasters' discovery of the public: How the public values public service. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 992–1011. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/6591

Krücken, G. (2020). Neo-Institutionalismus: Empirische, theoretische und methodische Perspektiven [Neo-institutionalism: empirical, theoretical and methodological perspectives]. In R. Hasse, & A. K. Krüger (Eds.), *Neo-Institutionalismus: Kritik und Weiterentwicklung eines sozialwissenschaftlichen Forschungsprograms* [*Neo-institutionalism: Critique and further development of social science research programmes*] (pp. 251–270). Transcript.

Künzler, M. (2009). *Die Liberalisierung von Radio und Fernsehen: Leitbilder der Rundfunkregulierung im Ländervergleich* [*The liberalisation of radio and television: Guiding principles of broadcasting regulation in a cross-country comparison*]. UVK.

Lamin, A., & Zaheer, S. (2012). Wall street vs. main street: Firm strategies for defending legitimacy and their impact on different stakeholders. *Organization Science*, 23(1), 47–66. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1100.0631

Larsen, H. (2010). Legitimation strategies of public service broadcasters: The divergent rhetoric in Norway and Sweden. *Media, Culture & Society*, 32(2), 267–283. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443709355610

Lowe, G. F. (2016). *PSM in the 21ˢᵗ century: What value and which values?* European Broadcasting Union.

Lowe, G. F., Van den Bulck, H., & Donders, K. (2018). Public service media in the networked society: What society? What network? What role? In G. F. Lowe, H. Van den Bulck, & K. Donders (Eds.), *Public service media in the networked society: RIPE@2017* (pp. 11–26). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-5291

Martin, F., & Lowe, G. F. (2014). The value and values of public service media. In G. F. Lowe, & F. Martin (Eds.), *The value of public service media: RIPE@2013* (pp. 19–40). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-10000

Mazzucato, M., Conway, R., Mazzoli, E. M., Knoll, E., & Albala, S. (2020). *Creating and measuring dynamic public value at the BBC* [Policy Report]. UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/public-purpose/publications/2020/dec/creating-and-measuring-dynamic-public-value-bbc

Meyer, R. E. (2019). A processual view on institutions: A note from a phenomenological institutional perspective. In T. Reay, T. B. Zilber, A. Langley, & H. Tsoukas (Eds.), *Institutions and organizations: A process view* (pp. 33–41). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198843818.001.0001

Meyer, R. E., Jancsary, D., & Höllerer, M. A. (2021). Zones of meaning, leitideen, institutional logics – and practices: A phenomenological institutional perspective on shared meaning structures. In M. Lounsbury, D. A. Anderson, & P. Spee (Eds.), *On practice and institution: Theorizing the interface* (pp. 161–186). Emerald Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0733-558X20200000070005

Meyer, R. E., & Vaara, E. (2020). Institutions and actorhood as co-constitutive and co-constructed: The argument and areas for future research. *Journal of Management Studies*, *57*(4), 898–910. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12561

Moe, H., & Van den Bulck, H. (2014). Comparing "public value" as a media policy term in Europe. In G. F. Lowe, & F. Martin (Eds.), *The value of public service media: RIPE@2013* (pp. 57–76). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:orden:org:diva-10000

Moore, M. H. (2000). *Creating public value: Strategic management in government* (5th ed.). Harvard University Press.

Murdock, G. (2005). Building the digital commons: Public broadcasting in the age of the internet. In G. F. Lowe, & P. Jauert (Eds.), *Cultural dilemmas in public service broadcasting: RIPE@2005* (pp. 213–230). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-10004

Reiter, G., Gonser, N., Grammel, M., & Gründl, J. (2018). Young audiences and their valuation of public service media. In G. F. Lowe, K. Donders, & H. Van den Bulck (Eds.), *Public service media in the networked society*. *RIPE@2017* (pp. 211–226). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-5291

Rodríguez-Castro, M., Campos-Freire, F., & Túñez-López, M. (2021). Introduction: The values of public service media in the internet society. In M. Túñez-López, F. Campos-Freire, & M. Rodríguez-Castro (Eds.), *The values of public service media in the internet society* (pp. 3–20). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56466-7

Schweizer, C. (2016). Public service media and the commons: Crossing conceptual and institutional boundaries. In G. F. Lowe, & N. Yamamoto (Eds.), *Crossing borders and boundaries of in public service media: RIPE@2015* (pp. 171–184). Nordicom University of Gothenburg. http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-4419

Scott, W. R. (2014). *Institutions and organizations: Ideas, interests, and identities* (4th ed.). Sage.

Sehl, A. (2020). Public service media in a digital media environment: Performance from an Audience Perspective. *Media and Communication*, *8*(3), 359–372. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v8i3.3141

Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, *20*(3), 571–610. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9508080331

Suddaby, R., Bitektine, A., & Haack, P. (2017). Legitimacy. *Academy of Management Annals*, *11*(1), 451–478. https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2015.0101

Süssenbacher, D. (2011). Public Value als Selbstdarstellung und Inszenierung [Public value as self-promotion and enactment]. In M. Karmasin, D. Süssenbacher, & N. Gonser (Eds.), *Public Value: Theorie und Praxis im internationalen Vergleich* [Public value: Theory and practice in international comparison] (pp. 155–169). VS Verlag.

Swart, J., Groot Kormelink, T., Costera Meijer, I., & Broersma, M. (2022). Advancing a radical audience turn in journalism: Fundamental dilemmas for journalism studies. *Digital Journalism*, *10*(1), 8–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.2024764

Tost, L. P. (2011). An integrative model of legitimacy judgments. *Academy of Management Review*, *36*(4), 686–710. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2010.0227

Walgenbach, P., & Meyer, R. E. (2008). *Neoinstitutionalistische Organisationstheorie* [*Neoinstitutionalist organisational theory*]. Kohlhammer.

Webb, J. W., Tihanyi, L., Ireland, R. D., & Sirmon, D. G. (2009). You say illegal, i say legitimate: Entrepreneurship in the informal economy. *Academy of Management Review*, *34*(3), 492–510. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.40632826