
Miscellaneous

Ángela Alonso-Jurnet

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8402-6712>

angela.alonso@ehu.eus

Universidad del País Vasco (UPV/EHU)

Ainara Larrondo-Ureta

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3303-4330>

ainara.larrondo@ehu.eus

Universidad del País Vasco (UPV/EHU)

Submitted

September 26th, 2023

Approved

July 4th, 2024

© 2024

Communication & Society

ISSN 0214-0039

E ISSN 2386-7876

www.communication-society.com

2024 – Vol. 37(4)

pp. 21-37

How to cite this article:

Alonso-Jurnet, Á. & Larrondo-Ureta, A. (2024).

Hashtivism as media discourse: analysing

pioneer environmental action in Public

Service Media through transmedia formula,

Communication & Society, 37(4), 21-37.

<https://doi.org/10.15581/003.37.4.21-37>

Hashtivism as media discourse: analysing pioneer environmental action in Public Service Media through transmedia formula

Abstract

Various studies have analysed the news media's participation in debates generated in the public digital sphere represented by social media, particularly X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram. Some of these debates have gained strength and become authentic movements linked to certain social struggles, such as feminism. Similarly, the so-called 'environmental hashtivism' or 'eco-hashtivism' is acquiring increasing importance in the context of this digital sphere. In view of this, the focus of this article is the distinctive area of public radio and television channels in Europe to examine the transmedia action #EKIN_klima, developed by the Basque public audiovisual corporation Euskal Irrati Telebista (EITB). The study of this pioneering initiative allows us to understand just how the eco-activism actions of the public news media can help to reposition it within the hybrid media system and contribute to the modernisation of its social function, along the lines of other actions, such as those carried out by the BBC against disinformation. In this way, it has been noted that the environmental issue is not only something to be included in the news media agenda, but also an opportunity for the public news media to legitimise its social and innovative character through transmedia branding actions.

Keywords

Public Service Media (PSM), transmedia, hashtivism, social media, environment, EITB.

1. Introduction

The news media develops its activity within a context marked by the communication of solutions to climate change. The Public Service Media (PSM) plays a key role in mitigating climate change but faces critical challenges regarding its viability and *raison d'être*.

In 2018 and 2019, the scientific view of climate change risks shifted, emphasizing the news media's role in raising environmental awareness [Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 °C (IPCC, 2018); Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015); Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change (UNESCO, 2017)]. Similarly, it was also expounded some years ago by the Media and Climate Change Observatory (2019a; 2019b) in its report on world coverage of climate change (Alonso-Jurnet, 2020).

More recently, the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022) presented one of the most comprehensive scientific descriptions to date concerning the impact of climate change, reiterating the urgent need for immediate action to tackle global risks, and once again challenging positions of denial regarding this issue. Similarly, in October of 2018 Extinction Rebellion was born in London; an international social movement which, through non-violent resistance, demonstrated against a possible extinction of humanity because of the climate crisis. The movement managed to attract public attention after spreading to forty-five countries and involving scientists in its protests, something which also speaks to the increase in the perception of risk concerning climate change.

There are very few studies about the coverage of climate change in the PSM, and existing studies, such as that carried out on the BBC, do not suggest a very positive professional treatment of the subject: "The coverage of a controversial issue such as global warming is not always properly accomplished by just complying strictly with the fundamental principles of good journalism." In fact, the example of the BBC shows us that the news monitoring of climate change does not necessarily contribute to a deeper analysis of its problems and challenges (Parratt, 2014).

What is true is that, under the framework of the UN's 2030 Agenda, different social agents throughout the world, among which the news media plays a crucial part, are being asked to develop actions and to influence opinion, in their role as a public service. This appeal is aimed even more so at the Public Service Media (PSM).

The *infocination* that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic helped the public audiovisual news media come to the fore as an information reference for a hyper-connected audience (Reuters Institute, 2021). However, this public service is still affected by a crisis of values, credibility, and trust, which is heightened in an increasingly hybrid and heterogeneous news media ecosystem characterized by a diversity of formats, content and brands.

Public broadcasting services –established since the beginning of the century as the Public Service Media (PSM)– have been searching for effective formula through which to reinvent themselves and transfer their mission in this context (van Dijck & Poell, 2015; Donders, 2021; Chivers & Allan, 2022).

Considering this situation, this research looks to go one step further regarding the knowledge acquired so far in relation to the adaptation of European public broadcasting services to the continuous challenges of the digital strategy. To do this, it inter-relates fundamental concepts linked to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and communicative tendencies specific to digital communication, characterised by its participative and democratic nature, such as hashtivism and transmedia events or transmedia branding.

With this aim, the study examines and reveals a specific case focussed on the hashtivist action #Ekin_Klima, developed by the Basque corporation Euskal Irrati Telebista (EITB) on the Climate Summit in Glasgow, 2021 (COP26).

Hashtivism is defined as a method of communication in social media that uses the 'hashtag' tagging technique, represented by the symbol #. This technique allows users to connect and has

shown itself to be useful in expressing solidarity and personal standpoints regarding an issue, or with the aim of advocating for a cause or movement (Mihăeș, Andreescu & Dimitriu, 2021).

This study is based on the premise that hashtivism, developed from a strategy of transmedia content, is useful for operationalizing CSR actions in public news media. These actions enable corporations to contribute practically and effectively to social, economic, and environmental improvements, as exemplified by the case of #EKIN_Klima.

The study thus attempts to empirically show how the PSM can contribute to raising social awareness about climate change mitigation through hashtivism actions on social media. In this sense, the study also highlights the usefulness of hashtivism in enabling a public audiovisual brand to align with modern values, reinforcing the renewal of its identity. This alignment provides the brand with relevance and meaning within a society that embraces environmentalism and seeks solutions to climate change.

This possibility for improving the reputational capital and competitiveness of the PSM (Agostino, Saliterer & Steccolini, 2022) can, in a way, be considered an action of transmedia branding that allows the public broadcasting channel to interact with its objective audience and create a positive emotional engagement between it and the brand (Granitz & Forman, 2015). Regarding this, it is worth remembering that participation is a key element in tackling issues connected to legitimacy and the competitive advantage of the public news media. In this sense, our research considers that the transmedia formula based on social media such as X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram is useful when it comes to combining the search for economic and social viability with the innovation of offering a digitalised content in the PSM context; specifically in relation to the regional public radio and television companies in Spain (Azurmendi, 2014; Marzal, 2015) and the rest of Europe (McElroy & Noonan, 2018). It is thus a formula aligned with the stance of the citizen on a global and local level (glocal), especially that of young, digital natives.

Given these premises, the study seeks to answer the following specific questions:

RQ1. How can a PSM exploit hashtivism (#EKIN_Klima) through the transmedia narrative?

RQ2. What is the response of hyper-connected audiences to this media activism?

RQ3. How, therefore, can this hashtivism help the Public Media Service's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and transmedia branding as strategies to increase audience engagement with the audiovisual brand?

2. Study Context

Most public broadcasting companies in Europe over the last decade have made a considerable effort to survive, based on progressive adaptations that are regulatory, technological and in search of quality content, capable of reconnecting with and creating a loyal audience (Johnson, 2013; Debrett, 2014; Flynn, 2015; Puijk, 2015; Larrondo *et al.*, 2016; Evans, 2018; Sjøvaag, Pedersen & Owren, 2019). Among their governing actions, they have sought to improve their CSR by taking the general public into consideration, as their main stakeholder, and improving their instruments and policies of external communication. Nevertheless, these radio and television companies still face the challenge of balancing economic viability with the development of content strategies guided by the distinctive educational, social and cultural logic of the public service mission (Donders, 2021). So much so that in some cases there is a clear prioritising of competitive logic to the detriment of the social and cultural mandate (Lowe & Bardoel, 2007; Arriaza, Novak & Kuhn, 2015).

In this respect, this article poses a reflection about the value of CSR in the current media and social context, starting from an adaptation of the content issues and formats covered around the PSM, in line with tendencies such as narration and transmedia branding.

Transmedia narratives are characterised by the coordinated creation of different content for different mediums, social media among them, which tends to accommodate spontaneous or amateur contributions from the general public. The use of social media in transmedia events promotes audience participation and involves an evolution of the most recent paradigms of participation in public media. As early as the 1990s, when the internet was still in its infancy,

Dayan and Katz (1994) were already talking about media events being experienced by members of a society as a whole, organised on the fringes of programmed routines, which meant a rupture with the habitual flow of live broadcasting.

Unlike the now common practice of news media companies participating in social media through pre-created hashtags linked to specific events, this work focuses on a hashtivism action initiated by a public audiovisual news media company, EITB. This initiative responds to the interests and opinions of the audience with the aim of training, educating, and raising awareness, clearly aligning with the public service mission (EBU, 2015).

EITB came into being at the beginning of the 1980s as one of the first autonomous regional, or local, public broadcasting companies in Spain, where there are currently twelve corporations of this type, in addition to the national or State broadcasting company (RTVE). Although this ecosystem of a regional, public, audiovisual news media is a specific model in Europe –financed by a public budget and, to a lesser extent, through advertising income– it has similarities with historical broadcasting companies such as BBC Scotland.

In the same way as that corporation, EITB, over a decade ago, was looking to reduce and optimise production and distribution costs, in accordance with the reform of the General Law of Audiovisual Communication (Law 7/2010 of 31st March) passed in Spain. This adaptation to digital technology encouraged the corporation to create a new multiplatform culture of communication and work, producing content for active audiences. It applied more synergistic, innovative, and creative production standards, resulting in greater convergence between traditional audiovisual news media and the internet. More recently, these synergic processes have taken a step forward, because of the societal unification (EITB Media) in 2020 of the different divisions of radio, television and internet that made up the corporation. The EITB corporation currently broadcasts in Spanish and Basque via six television channels, five radio stations and the website EITB.eus.

In EITB, the development of an environmental hashtivism, or eco-hashtivism, comes from this regional corporation's previous experience of journalistic transmedia on the one hand, and from the fight against climate change on the other. EITB has, precisely, shown an interest in offering coverage about climate change and mitigation strategies, conscious that the “news media portrayals of climate change have strongly influenced personal and global efforts to mitigate it through news production, individual media consumption, and personal engagement” (Swain, 2012, p. 162).

As EITB points out on its website, the group has a “strong environmental commitment” that is present in its strategy documents. This corporation has developed a system made up of various actions set out in its *Environmental Improvement Plan 2019–2021*. These actions are aimed towards the adoption of responsible positions, the improvement of energy efficiency and the reduction of carbon emissions. To be more exact, EITB specifies that, in its capacity as a public news media the corporation has decided to adopt the “editorial commitment of placing the climate emergency on the news agenda and carrying out publicity campaigns to raise social awareness” (EITB, 20th May 2020).

This aligns with its CSR goals, reflected in its participation in drafting the Decalogue of Recommendations for Reporting on Climate Change (ECODES, 2019). A previous study on EITB.eus's climate change coverage also shows these efforts (Alonso-Jurnet & Larrondo, 2022). In this respect, we have found no previous studies of cases or initiatives by national or regional public broadcasting companies in Europe that are like those examined in this work.

3. Method

The research adopts the qualitative case study approach because of its value for answering “how” and “why” questions (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006; Yin, 2003). Although centred on a concrete regional PSM, this method is of interest since it goes deeper into elements common to many European PSM, particularly those with a trajectory of convergent innovation at a managerial and newsroom level (Larrondo *et al.*, 2016).

In order to respond to the proposed research questions, this study examines a transmedia storytelling event that shaped a media campaign (hashtivism) to raise climate change awareness and help mitigate its effects. This campaign was called #EKIN_klima, which means ‘climate action’ in the Basque language.

Firstly, a Content Analysis was carried out to describe the discursive characteristics of the transmedia event or campaign covered in this study. This analysis was conducted by studying the components of the solidarity campaign both online and on traditional channels, along with examining the contribution of each component to the overall macrostructure (RQ1). The characteristics of the campaign are described via a transmedia map (Figure 1), based on the model proposed by García and Heredero (2015), that also draws on interesting proposals for the analysis of transmedia products (Belsunces, 2011; Hernández & Grandío, 2011; Piñeiro & Costa, 2013; Pratten, 2011; Scolari, 2009).

From this starting point, diverse empirical actions were carried out, focused on the hashtag #EKIN_klima. Through Social Media Analysis (SMA) tools, firstly an exploratory analysis was done of the main tweets derived from this hashtag via an analysis sheet that included different items. The analysis sheet is included in Supplementary Material. First, the analysed tweet was indicated (user, date, text and main topic of the tweet). Similarly, we observed whether the tweet contained any links, and if so, whether they were internal –i.e., directed at EITB content itself– or aimed at external content. We also observed the engagement level obtained by the tweet, measured via re-tweets, replies, likes and cited tweets, with the aim of examining the response of the social audience to the content circulated by EITB via the hashtag (RQ2). Finally, we examined the *ingagement* level of the tweet, indicating whether the issuer of the tweet belonged in some way to EITB (in-house user) or whether the tweet was published by someone outside the company (external user). The concept of *ingagement*, understood as the affinity between an organisation and its internal audience, enables the organic dissemination of corporate values and messages. As Carlos Molina explains:

over and beyond the leaders, all employees have the capacity to drive the organisation's messages in social media. They behave as micro-influencers, i.e., niche influencers who help to disseminate narratives and lines of argument among more specific groups. In some cases, companies take advantage of this potential to suggest content for sharing through their profiles; in such a way they shape a more powerful personal brand and, furthermore, they publicly express their attachment to the company (Molina, 2017).

For the analysis sample, we selected all the tweets containing the hashtag #EKIN_klima. These search criteria were applied via the Twitter Advanced Search tool (now X). Thus, the analysis sample was made up of 176 tweets.

The same analysis sheet was applied to Instagram posts that included the hashtag #EKIN_klima, also included in Supplementary Material; in this case the analysed post was indicated (format and content, user, date, and main topic of the post). Similarly, we observed whether the tweet included any external or internal links. We also looked at the engagement level obtained by the post, measured via comments and likes and, finally, we examined the *ingagement* level of the tweet, indicating whether the issuer of the post was an in-house user or an external user. For the analysis sample, we selected all the posts containing the hashtag #EKIN_klima. Thus, the analysis sample was made up of 82 posts.

Lastly, a semi-structured in-depth interview was carried out face-to-face with the person in charge of social responsibility at EITB, Marta Álvarez. The aim was to discover the interrelationship between the different pieces of the project, through crossover promotion actions and other possibilities intrinsic to the promotional nature of the news media, such as websites and social media –these being both channel and message. The questionnaire developed to carry out the interview included questions focused on how to develop an internal transmedia strategy (coordination actions, task distribution, use of tools, available economic and professional resources, and distribution strategies) (RQ3).

The combination of these different methods, in their quantitative and qualitative facets, has allowed a deeper analysis and understanding of the actions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), in combination with the transmedia branding strategies, in the case of a Public Service Media (PSM) such as EITB.

4. Results

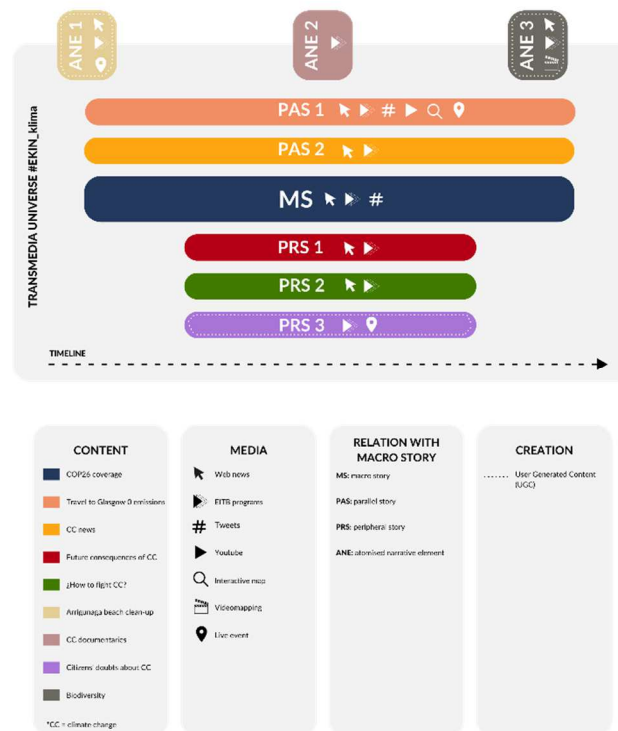
4.1. Content analysis

#EKIN has become EITB's main awareness information transmedia campaign to date; after its annual experience with #EITBMaratoia, the solidarity marathon that this broadcasting company has dedicated to a social cause on a yearly basis since the year 2000. This initiative is not exclusive to EITB, as other reference broadcasting companies in Europe do similar things –such as the BBC or the Norwegian company NRK, as mentioned on their respective websites. #EKIN does, however, represent a specific initiative worthy of being a case study for its value and relevance in the current academic debate, along with its interest as an example for other broadcasting companies due to its nature as a transmedia strategy of social value and device of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

EITB announced on its website that it “would highlight different causes that concern and affect Basque society” (EITB n.d.) through major communication campaigns and actions on all their media. #EKIN would be the common concept in all these campaigns, with the first one focusing on climate change under the slogan #EKIN_klima.

The #EKIN_klima campaign has therefore included a great variety of actions, among which different functions, channels and a target audience have been detected (Figure 1). It is worth highlighting the creation of a specific web portal for the campaign that acts as a container for the different transmedia actions, besides offering additional content in the form of news and other content related to climate change.

Figure 1. Transmedia map of #EKIN_klima.



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 1 shows how coverage of the COP26 forms a central nucleus or macro story (MS) of the transmedia universe of the #EKIN_klima campaign. Similarly, two stories parallel to the macro story were observed; whilst they may be about other environmental narratives, they were developed at the same time as the COP26 coverage: journalist Hodei Arrausi travelling to Glasgow by bike to cover the COP26 with 0 emissions (PAS1), and different topical news stories about climate change (PAS2). On the other hand, the campaign developed three peripheral stories with a lesser relationship to the macro story and developed over a shorter period: information about future consequences of climate change (PRS1), along with possible solutions (PRS2), and citizen's doubts regarding climate change, collected by the programme *Eguraldia* in the street and responded to in different programmes on the channel in collaboration with experts (PRS3). On the other hand, three atomised narrative elements were observed that have no relationship with COP26 coverage, but that do go deeper into environmental subject matter: cleaning up Arrigunaga's beach with the help of the channel's viewers (ANE1), the emission of climate change documentaries (ANE2) and a video mapping involving the projection of images about biodiversity sent in by viewers (ANE3).

The #EKIN_klima campaign demonstrates the essential characteristics of a transmedia project. Its main story expands across multiple platforms and media (Scolari, 2013), viewing the audience as active participants in the story's expansion. This participation occurs either through direct involvement in the story or through the creation of macro story content (Molpeceres & Rodríguez, 2014).

4.2. Social Media Analysis (SMA)

The EITB campaign used the hashtag #EKIN_klima as a tool for the dissemination of its content and the enhancement of audience participation.

Table 1. Topics of the social media publications from the #EKIN_klima campaign.

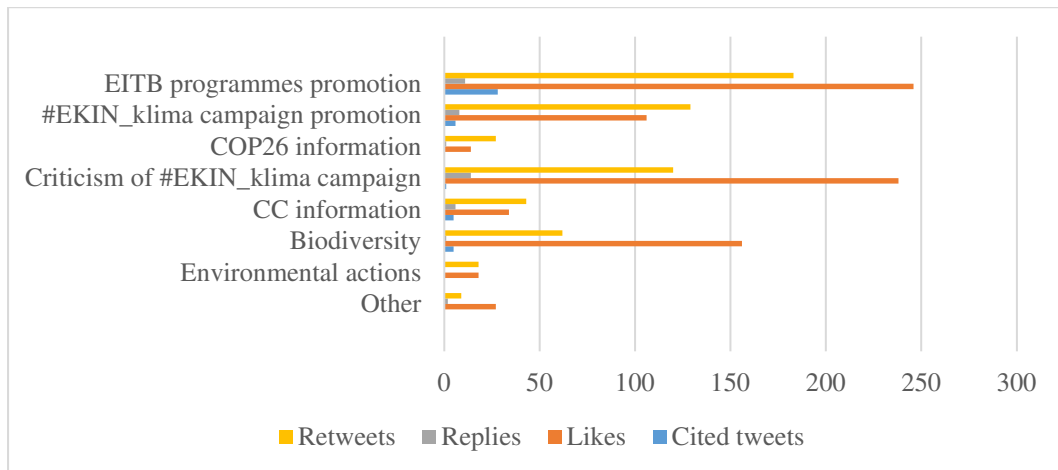
	X		INSTAGRAM	
	N	%	N	%
EITB programmes promotion	52	29.6%	26	31.7%
#EKIN_klima campaign promotion	42	23.9%	35	42.7%
COP26 information	12	6.8%	2	2.4%
Self-promotion	0	-	7	8.5%
Criticism of #EKIN_klima campaign	12	6.8%	0	-
Climate change information	18	10.2%	4	4.9%
Biodiversity	22	12.5%	4	4.9%
Environmental actions	9	5.1%	4	4.9%
Other	9	5.1%	0	-
Total:	176	100%	82	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 1 shows how the main topic of the #EKIN_klima hashtag on social media mainly focused on the promotion of the transmedia campaign itself (23.9% of the tweets and 42.7% of the Instagram's posts), together with the promotion of programmes broadcast by EITB (29.6% of the tweets and 31.7% of the Instagram's posts), which in turn also had a relationship with the transmedia campaign. Although part of the campaign was dedicated to the promotion of the COP26, the percentage of tweets and posts dedicated to sharing information about COP26 itself has not been very high (6.8% and 2.4% respectively). The #EKIN_klima campaign also included tweets about climate change as well as examples of concrete environmental actions, accounting for 10.2% and 5.1% of all tweets, and 4.9% of all the posts respectively. The tweets about biodiversity, primarily posted by the profile @naturabiziaEITB, are also noteworthy (12.5%) on X, with a lower percentage on Instagram (4.9%). Although these tweets contain specific information on these issues, it should be noted that they additionally serve to advertise EITB

and its programmes, recurrently accompanied by links to the channel's website. More specifically, the analysis shows the considerable space that the channel dedicated on its social media to the 0 emissions trip to Glasgow, which generated a large quantity of content. Finally, there were tweets critical of the campaign published by external users (6.8%) and posts promoting personal projects through the hashtag #EKIN_klima (8.5%).

Figure 2. Engagement and topics of the tweets from the #EKIN_klima campaign.

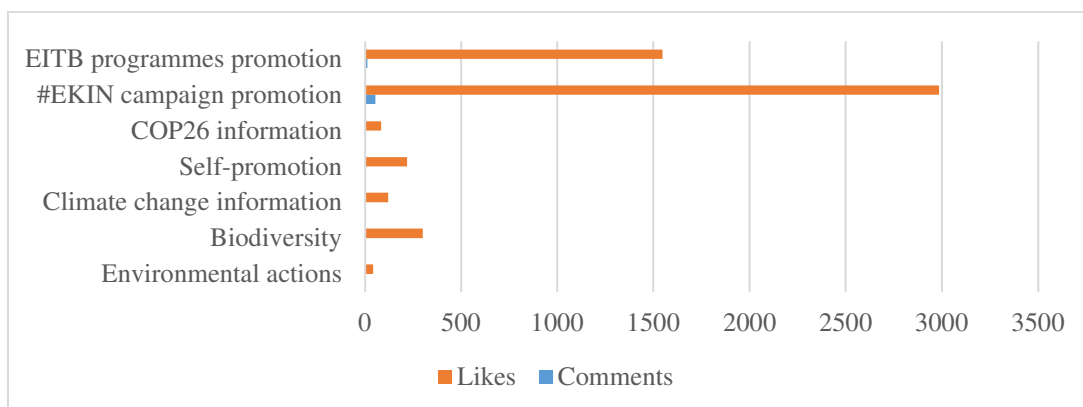


Source: Own elaboration.

As regards the engagement produced by the publications on X (Figure 2), it stands out in terms of the repercussion generated by the criticism to the campaign. It is significant that tweets with a critical tone, which represent only 6.8% of all tweets, have generated a significant impact: they account for 16.6% of the #EKIN_klima campaign's retweets, 32.6% of replies, 28.4% of likes and 2.2% of cited tweets.

The engagement received by EITB's self-promotional content has been lower. Tweets about EITB programmes promotion received 25.2% of retweets, 25.5% of replies, 29.3% of likes and 62.2% of cited tweets. On the other hand, tweets about #EKIN campaign promotion received 17.8% of retweets, 18.6% of replies, 12.6% of likes and 13.3% of cited tweets. Given that self-promotional content makes up 53.4% of the campaign, it can be observed that its engagement has lagged behind that of the critical publications. This interaction also shows the endogamic nature of the content generated by the corporation on social media surrounding an issue that aims to go beyond the company's own productive benefits and focus on society.

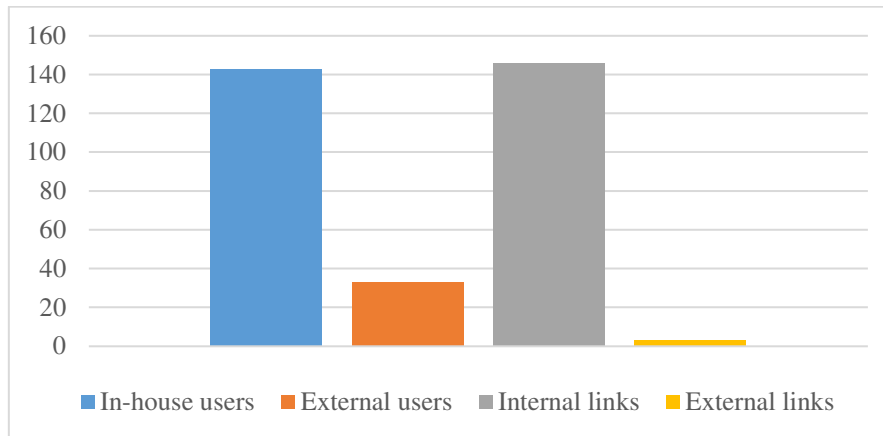
Figure 3. Engagement and topics of Instagram posts from the #EKIN_klima campaign.



Source: Own elaboration.

In the case of engagement produced by publications on Instagram (Figure 3), EITB's promotional content on the #EKIN_klima campaign has had a greater impact than on X, receiving 53.3% of the likes and 69.6% of the comments. This data contrasts with the low engagement received by the posts with information about COP26, receiving 1.6% of the likes and 2.5% of the comments, in line with the low coverage that the COP26 has received on Instagram (2.4% of the total number of posts).

Figure 4. Ingagement of the #EKIN_klima campaign social media publications.



Source: Own elaboration.

With respect to ingagement, we observed that the majority of the users who generated content under the #EKIN_klima hashtag belonged to the EITB group itself. They were mainly publications made from the company's official profiles, although there were also some posts from the personal profiles of journalists from the company (2.8%). In any case, the users who used the hashtag but were external to EITB did so with a critical tone, or with a view to promoting their own projects (Figure 4).

Similarly, it can be seen in the analysis how almost all the links used in the campaign on social media directed the user to internal content of EITB itself, in most cases to content on the website EITB.eus. In this sense, the company used social media as a multiplatform channel to redirect the audience to its own content.

4.3. In-depth interview

4.3.1. Corporate Social Responsibility and transmedia branding actions

Via the #EKIN_klima project we have observed an interest in advancing the channel's corporate social responsibility through transmedia strategies that require the participation of a large part of the team. Marta Álvarez, in charge of social responsibility at EITB, pointed out in the in-depth interview that different departments, and a total of over 50 professionals, took part in the planning prior to the launch of the project, in line with the path to convergence started by the company in the year 2000.

Actions linked to CSR, such as #EKIN_klima, become transversal in taking the form of a transmedia project. These kinds of projects start from a strategic vision in the group, whilst also conferring an important role to the area of promotion. In such a way, it was recognised in the interview how the #EKIN project arose within the area of strategy and communication, even though practically all areas of the group were involved in its initial phases. The company was thus looking to overcome the dynamic in which the different departments functioned as islands, by integrating their knowledge and resources via transversal initiatives.

Therefore, the role of EITB as a public service media, and the notion of social responsibility that this position entails, play a central role within the planning of transmedia branding actions. Marta Álvarez points out that EITB finds itself at a point of strategic reflection, in line with its 2030 actions. Up to now, the company has focused its efforts on working its CSR on an internal level, an aspect that can be seen in its CSR cache. Within the new 2030 strategy the company seeks to give its CSR efforts a central role. For this, they decided to create the umbrella brand #EKIN, which encompasses their four blocks of social commitment: 'climate,' 'diversity,' 'science and research' and 'democracy and human rights.'

The implementation of transmedia projects, along with crossover promotional actions, aligned with subjects of social interest such as the environment, are for the company tools that grant it added value and help to legitimise its position as a PSM. The audiovisual group, conscious of this legitimisation opportunity, has looked to create its own content that sets the agenda. One example of this is the space dedicated to the 0 emissions journey to Glasgow which, together with the reports narrated within the journey itself, constitute its own, unique content relating to the COP26.

4.3.2. Context and informative treatment of climate change in the transmedia campaign

We have observed how EITB carried out an informative planning that has been applied transversally to all the pieces of the transmedia project, through different meetings and a document about context and informative treatment. Within this editorial line, the aim set by the group was to inform from a positive perspective and not one of catastrophe. Therefore, the priority was to show the environmental problem from a perspective that would appear close to the audience in space and time.

This approach aligns with the broader strategy of EITB to leverage its transmedia campaigns to foster a sense of immediate and local relevance of global issues like climate change. By presenting the environmental crisis in a way that resonates with the daily lives of their audience, EITB aims to enhance both awareness and engagement, positioning itself as a proactive agent in the public discourse on sustainability.

5. Conclusions and discussion

The qualitative analysis that was carried out correlates fundamental aspects of the adaptation of public broadcasting companies in the current media context, such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), transmedia or hashtivism.

Firstly, the case of #EKIN_klima provides an interesting formula for combining the search for profitability and competition with the service to the society on which the public media depends, through the promotion of content that helps the development and advance of societies in the context of the Agenda 2030 (UN, 2015). The case in question demonstrates the interest these public news media entities have in improving their communication and brand image by offering content that seeks to engage the public but is clearly linked to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In other words, transmedia communication campaigns directed at raising awareness about specific causes –through which the media company becomes an activist that interacts and makes the audience a participant in different causes– are useful as a communication strategy for public audiovisual brands (RQ1).

However, it is important to recognize that a significant portion of the messages analyzed in this campaign focused on self-promotion. While self-promotion can be an effective tool to increase the campaign's visibility and reach, the prevalence of such messages can distract from the main objective of the campaign, which is to raise awareness about climate change and encourage mitigating actions. Viewers may perceive an excess of self-promotion as a lack of genuine commitment to the cause, potentially diminishing their trust in the campaign and in the PSM as a whole. Therefore, PSM should strive to balance promotional messages with informative and educational content that invites reflection and concrete action.

The overabundance of the multiscreen offer makes it difficult to reach audiences, and media organisations now understand that to reach their interest groups they have to promote content that generates emotion and transmits the corporation's values. We have observed how EITB implemented an informational planning that was applied transversally to all pieces of the transmedia project, through various meetings and a document on context and informational treatment. Within this editorial line, the group's objective was to inform from a positive perspective rather than a catastrophic one. This approach underscores the importance that a Public Service Media (PSM) places on not just raising awareness about climate change but doing so in a way that empowers and motivates its audience. By framing the issue positively, EITB aims to inspire proactive engagement and hope, rather than fear and resignation. This method helps to foster a sense of agency among viewers, encouraging them to see themselves as capable of contributing to climate solutions. Moreover, presenting climate change from a constructive viewpoint aligns with the PSM's broader mission to educate and inform the public in a balanced and supportive manner, ultimately striving to build a more resilient and informed society. By choosing to highlight solutions and positive actions, EITB is positioning itself as a forward-thinking and responsible entity in the fight against climate change.

PSM are seeking communication solutions through multichannel narratives that promote audience-brand interaction. Transmedia storytelling has proven effective for content and corporate promotion. Furthermore, transmedia suits the multiscreen habits of younger audiences, a key target group today. It shows public broadcasters' focus on the internet over television, or on integrated, convergent multiplatform actions that meet current social communication needs.

As indicated by some experts, current climate reporting in the news media is inseparable from the consideration of media communication as one based on the relationship between the news media and their audiences and sources. In this respect, the role of social media is especially highlighted in the news media's current co-productive process. Likewise, the news media is backing a position that is favourable to fighting climate change, which does not necessarily imply challenging the regime of objectivity but exploiting their potential to enhance public participation (Holmes & Richardson, 2020, p. 175).

In this vein, this case study places the spotlight on the power and positive influence shown today by the PSM through actions of raising awareness and understanding of the mitigation of climate change, in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of 2015. To be precise, it has been understood that the fight against climate change, together with other challenges, could drive the PSM to revitalise its role in society: "[...] the endemic threat of recurring coronavirus pandemics and the intensifying climate and environmental crises. Addressing these challenges requires us to reimagine the pivotal role of public service in supporting the cultural resources, social relations and personal capacities that sustain a social order" (Murdock, 2021).

Given the analysis carried out, it is possible to affirm that green campaigns are an interesting indicator for measuring the value and impact of the public service media. It is worth remembering here that this type of indicator has become one of the current challenges of management agendas (EBU, 2015; Donders, 2021).

In these times when there is much talk about the revitalisation of the democratic values of journalism or post-journalism, public broadcasting companies are making an effort to carry out actions that respond to the detection of new practices; and this campaign of hashtivist activism could be one of them, along the lines of the BBC's actions against disinformation, to name just one representative example. The aim is to reconnect the audience with the news media by bringing public news media closer to society's main concerns, both locally and globally.

#EKIN_klima is useful for allowing the audience that participates via the hashtag to identify themselves as active citizens, whilst at the same time, as an EITB audience, connecting this vision to a news company with democratic values that is close to society.

Thus, as far as the transmedia formula is concerned, it is possible to show the usefulness of this for the PSM when it comes to combining the search for economic viability with social viability; although it is true that there are still challenges to be faced as regards achieving higher engagement, such as the generation of content that is less endogamic towards the project itself, and which offers a wider and more diverse experience for the user (RQ2).

This study shows, for the first time, how Public Service Media (PSM) uses transmedia branding to raise social awareness about climate change, aligning with their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). These also serve as strategies to increase audience engagement with the audiovisual brand, endorse its position and positive influence as a public service, and drive its social role (RQ3).

The case of EITB can be considered as paradigmatic in terms of the pioneering innovations that European broadcasting companies are striving to put into practice, in accordance with the sector's visions of the future, contained in the work entitled Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto (Fuchs & Unterberger, 2021): "In 2040, PSM invests in quality journalism, including investigative journalism and innovative formats for different groups in society. Young people see public service journalism as an attractive and viable environment of information, communication, collaboration and participation." In this line, and according to the same work, by that year it is expected that PSM will have adapted and transformed its public service mission to inform, educate and entertain, renewing its contract with the society.

In view of the study carried out, it has also been shown that the climate change issue is characterised by its transversality, both in terms of subject matter and formats: on the one hand the content is no longer almost exclusive to television news programmes, and, on the other hand, its interrelation with other subjects of an economic, cultural and social nature etc. is increasing. Traditionally, television spaces aimed at informing and raising awareness about climate change had expanded into and received feedback from social media (MacDonald, 2020). However, the analysed case is one of the first testaments as to how interest and prominence come from social media, and it is the coverage given by these that leaps onto the company's news programmes in an action of cross-media promotion.

The adoption of a transmedia, positive and proactive approach by EITB not only represents an effective communication strategy but also reveals a transformation in the role of PSM in the digital age. This approach reflects an adaptation to contemporary audience expectations, which demand content that is not only informative but also inspiring and mobilizing. Furthermore, the integration of hashtivism actions within a transmedia strategy demonstrates how PSM can leverage digital platforms to reinforce their relevance and connection with the public. This suggests that, beyond the mere dissemination of information, PSM have the potential to become catalysts for social change, using their reach and credibility to foster more active and conscious participation in issues of global importance such as climate change. From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study indicate that PSM are evolving from mere content broadcasters to facilitators of a dynamic and participatory public discourse.

Additionally, this study provides empirical evidence that transmedia campaigns can serve as an effective tool for CSR, extending the reach of sustainable initiatives beyond traditional channels and fostering greater awareness and collective action. By integrating transmedia branding strategies, PSM not only strengthen their public service mission but also enhance their competitiveness and relevance in an increasingly fragmented media environment.

The COP26 coverage demonstrated how journalism and communication professionals shared the spotlight with environmental organizations and activists, highlighting the company's commitment to fighting climate change. Thus, the environmental issue is not just something to be included in the news media agenda, but also an opportunity for the public news media to legitimise its social and innovative character through transmedia branding actions.

It is essential to recognize certain limitations in this study, particularly regarding the analysis of engagement and the measurement of the evolution of social awareness during the

selected period. Although the study focused on analyzing how public service media (PSM) hashtivism actions can contribute to increasing social awareness about climate change mitigation, the metrics used (such as likes, shares, and comments on X and Instagram) offer a limited view of the depth and significance of audience engagement.

These metrics, automatically provided by digital platforms, are useful indicators of content visibility and initial resonance, but they do not necessarily reflect active and meaningful participation. Active participation in the digital realm should go beyond these superficial reactions and include more substantial forms of engagement, such as the creation of related content, participation in in-depth discussions, and mobilization for offline actions.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a valuable initial analysis of the role of PSM in promoting social awareness about climate change through hashtivism. It demonstrates the potential of transmedia campaigns to generate engagement and highlights the need for greater integration of strategies that foster deeper participation. Future studies could focus on mixed methodologies that combine qualitative and quantitative analyses to better measure the actual impact on social awareness and behaviour.

The authors are grateful to the professionals of the Basque Radio and Television (EITB) for their insightful comments. The study is part of the academic production of 'Gureiker' Research Group, Basque University System (IT1496-22).

References

- Agostino, D., Saliterer, I. & Steccolini, I. (2022). Digitalization, accounting and accountability. A literature review and reflections on future research in public services. *Financial Accountability and Management*, 38(2), 152-176. <https://doi.org/10.1111/faam.12301>
- Alonso-Jurnet, Á. (2020). *Periodismo ambiental en el paradigma de la mitigación del cambio climático: análisis de la cobertura de Euskal Irrati Telebista (EITB) desde la perspectiva de la Responsabilidad Social Corporativa (RSC) [Environmental journalism in the paradigm of climate change mitigation: Analysis of Euskal Irrati Telebista's (EITB) coverage from the perspective of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)]*. Master's Thesis, University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU).
- Alonso-Jurnet, Á. & Larrondo, A. (2022). Ingurumeneko informazio-tratamendua Gizarte Erantzukizun Korporatiboaren (GEKaren) ikuspegitik: EITB. eus-en kasuaren azterketa [The environmental news coverage from the perspective of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): analysis of the case of Eitb.eus]. *Zer: Revista de Estudios de Comunicación*, 27(52). <https://doi.org/10.1387/zer.23012>
- Arriaza, K., Nowak, E. & Kuhn, R. (Eds.) (2015). *Public Service Media in Europe: A Comparative Approach*. London: Routledge.
- Azurmendi, A. (2014). Reforms to the European regional minority-language television corporations in the current context of crisis. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 68(3), 355-382. <https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2013-981>
- Belsunces, A. (2011). *Producción, consumo y prácticas culturales en torno a los nuevos media en la cultura de la convergencia: el caso de Fringe como narración transmedia y lúdica [Production, consumption and cultural practices around new media in the culture of convergence: the case of Fringe as a transmedia and ludic narrative]*. Master's Thesis, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. Retrieved from <https://openaccess.uoc.edu/bitstream/10609/8581/1/abelsuncesTFMo611.PDF>
- Chivers, T. & Allan, S. (2022). What is the Public Value of Public Service Broadcasting?: Exploring challenges and opportunities in evolving media contexts. [Discussion Paper 2022/01. Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre. Cardiff University]. Retrieved from <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/146569/>

- Dayan, D. & Katz, E. (1994). *Media events: The live broadcasting of history*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Debrett, M. (2014). *Reinventing public service television for the digital future*. Bristol: Intellect Books.
- Donders, K. (2021). *Public Service Media in Europe. Law, Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.
- EBU (2015). *PSM contribution to society*. Geneva: EBU.
- ECODES. (2019). Decálogo de Recomendaciones para Informar del Cambio Climático [Decalogue of Recommendations for Reporting on Climate Change]. *Ecodes.org*. Retrieved from <https://ecodes.org/hacemos/cambio-climatico/movilizacion/medios-de-comunicacion-y-cambio-climatico>
- EITB (2020). EITB da cuenta de su desempeño social, ambiental y económico en la Memoria Integrada [EITB gives an account of its social, environmental and economic performance in the Integrated Annual Report]. *eitb.eus*, 20th May. Retrieved from <https://www.eitb.eus/es/grupo-eitb/detalle/7246080/el-desempeno-social-ambiental-economico-eitb-memoria-integrada-2019/>
- EITB (n.d.). Durante los próximos meses EITB pondrá el foco en distintas causas que preocupan y afectan a la sociedad vasca [Over the next few months, EITB will focus on different causes that concern and affect Basque society]. *eitb.eus*. Retrieved from <https://www.eitb.eus/es/grupo-eitb/EKIN/>
- Evans, S. K. (2018). Making Sense of Innovation: Process, Product, and Storytelling Innovation in Public Service Broadcasting Organizations. *Journalism Studies*, 19(1), 4-24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1154446>
- Flynn, R. (2015). Public service broadcasting beyond public service broadcasters. *International Journal of Digital Television*, 6(2), 125-144. https://doi.org/10.1386/jdtv.6.2.125_1
- Fuchs, C. & Unterberger, K. (Eds.) (2021). *The Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto*. London: University of Westminster Press. <https://doi.org/10.16997/book60>
- García, J. & Heredero, O. (2015). Propuesta de un modelo genérico de análisis de la estructura de las narrativas transmedia [Proposal for a generic model of analysis of the structure of transmedia narratives]. *Revista ICONO 14. Revista científica de Comunicación y Tecnologías emergentes*, 13(2), 260-285. <https://doi.org/10.7195/ri14.v13i2.745>
- Granitz, N. & Forman, H. (2015). Building self-brand connections: Exploring brand stories through a transmedia perspective. *Journal of Brand Management*, 22(1), 38-59. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/bm.2015.1>
- Hernández, M. & Grandío, M. M. (2011). Narrativa *crossmedia* en el discurso televisivo de Ciencia Ficción. Estudio de Battlestar Galactica (2003-2010) [Crossmedia Narrative in Science Fiction Television Discourse. A Study of Battlestar Galactica (2003-2010)]. *Área abierta*, 28, 1-20. Retrieved from <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A297555054/IFME?u=anon~bf86e89d&sid=googleScholar&xid=94d4c994>
- Holmes, D. C. & Richardson, L. M. (Eds.) (2020). *Research Handbook on Communicating Climate Change*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- IPCC (2018). Global Warming of 1.5 °C. IPCC special report on the impacts of global Warming of 1.5°C. *IPCC Reports*. Retrieved from http://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_spm_final.pdf
- IPCC (2022). Sixth Assessment Report. Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. *IPCC Reports*. Retrieved from <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>
- Johnson, C. (2013). From brand congruence to the 'virtuous circle': branding and the commercialization of public service broadcasting. *Media, Culture & Society*, 35(3), 314-331. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443712472088>
- Larrondo, A., Domingo, D., Erdal, I. J., Masip, P. & van den Bulck, H. (2016). Opportunities and Limitations of Newsroom Convergence. A comparative study on European public service

- broadcasting organisations. *Journalism Studies*, 17(3), 277-300.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2014.977611>
- Lowe, G. F. & Bardoel, J. (Eds.) (2007). *From Public Service Broadcasting to Public Service Media*. Göteborg: Nordicom.
- MacDonald, T. (2020). How broadcast TV networks covered climate change in 2019. *Mediamatters.org*, 27th February. Retrieved from <https://www.mediamatters.org/broadcast-networks/how-broadcast-tv-networks-covered-climate-change-2019>
- Marzal, J. (Ed.) (2015). *Las televisiones públicas autonómicas del siglo XXI [Regional public television in the 21st century]*. València: Universitat de València.
- McElroy, R. & Noonan, C. (2018). Public Service Media and Digital Innovation. The Small Nation Experience. In G. F. Lowe, H. van den Bulck & K. Donders (Eds.), *Public Service Media in the Networked Society* (pp. 159-174). Göteborg: Nordicom.
- Media and Climate Change Observatory. (2019a). A Review of Media Coverage of Climate Change and Global Warming in 2019. *Special Issue 2019*. Retrieved from https://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/icecaps/research/media_coverage/summaries/special_issue_2019.html
- Media and Climate Change Observatory (2019b). Our racial inequality crisis is intertwined with our climate crisis. If we don't work on both, we will succeed at neither. *Issue 42*. Retrieved from https://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/icecaps/research/media_coverage/summaries/issue42.html
- Mihăeș, L. C., Andreescu, R. & Dimitriu, A. (2021). *Handbook of Research on Contemporary Methods across New Media and Disciplines*. Hershey: ISI Global.
- Molina, C. (2017). Hacia una comunicación corporativa transmedia [Towards transmedia corporate communication]. *AdComunica*, 14, 259-265. <https://doi.org/10.6035/2174-0992.2017.14.15>
- Molpeceres, S. & Rodríguez, M. I. (2014). La inserción del discurso del receptor en la narrativa transmedia: el ejemplo de las series de televisión de ficción [The insertion of the receiver's discourse in transmedia storytelling: the example of fictional television series]. *Historia y comunicación social*, 19, 31-42. https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_HICS.2014.v19.45008
- Murdock, G. (2021). Public Service Media for Critical Times: Connectivity, Climate, and Corona. In C. Fuchs & K. Unterberg (Eds.), *The Public Service Media and Public Service Internet Manifesto* (pp. 69-111). London: University of Westminster Press.
<https://doi.org/10.16997/book60.d>
- Parrat, S. (2014). Public media and climate change: Ethical standards and codes in the BBC treatment of environmental information. *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture*, 5(1), 127-140. https://doi.org/10.1386/iscc.5.1.127_1
- Piñeiro, T. & Costa, C. (2013). De series españolas de éxito a producciones audiovisuales transmediáticas. Análisis de *Águila Roja*, *El Barco* y *Amar en tiempos revueltos* [From successful Spanish series to transmedia audiovisual productions. Analysis of *Águila Roja*, *El Barco* and *Amar en tiempos revueltos*]. *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*, 19 (April special issue), 925-934. https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_ESMP.2013.v19.42175
- Pratten, R. (2011). *Getting Started in Transmedia Storytelling. A practical guide for beginners*. London: CreateSpace.
- Puijk, R. (2015). Slow Television. A Successful Innovation in Public Service Broadcasting. *Nordicom Review*, 36(1), 95-108. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2015-0008>
- Reuters Institute. (2021). Digital News Report 10th edition. *Reuters Institute*. Retrieved from <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>
- Scolari, C. A. (2009). Transmedia Storytelling: Implicit Consumers, Narrative Worlds, and Branding in Contemporary Media Production. *International Journal of Communication*, 3, 586-606. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10854/2867>

- Scolari, C. A. (2013). *Narrativas transmedia: cuando todos los medios cuentan [Transmedia narratives: when all media count]*. Barcelona: Deusto.
- Sjøvaag, H., Pedersen, T. A. & Owren, T. (2019). Is Public Service Broadcasting A Threat to Commercial Media? *Media, Culture & Society*, 41(6), 808–827.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443718818354>
- Swain, K. A. (2012). Mass Media Roles in Climate Change Mitigation. In W. Y. Chen, J. Seiner, T. Suzuki & M. Lackner (Eds.), *Handbook of Climate Change Mitigation* (pp. 161–195). New York: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-7991-9>
- UN (2015). Sustainable Development Goals. *un.org*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/objetivos-de-desarrollo-sostenible/>
- UNESCO (2017). Declaración de Principios Éticos en relación con el Cambio Climático [Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change]. *Article 12, unesco.org*. Retrieved from http://portal.unesco.org/es/ev.php-URL_ID=49457&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
- Van Dijck, J. & Poell, T. (2015). Making Public Television Social? Public Service Broadcasting and the Challenges of Social Media. *Television and New Media*, 16(2), 148–164.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476414527136>
- Wimmer, R. D. & Dominick, J. R. (2006). *Mass media research: An introduction*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Annex

Electronic supplementary material is available in the Figshare data repository with the following doi: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.26121553.v2>