

New challenges for public service media in the age of platformisation

A case study of Taiwan PTS+

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how public service media (PSM) operates in the age of platformisation, especially in terms of distributing strategy. With the advent of platformisation, maintaining the public value of PSM has been quite challenging. This chapter takes Taiwan PTS+, a streaming service launched by Taiwan Public Television Service (Taiwan PTS), as its main case study. We suggest that PTS+ adopts online human-edited curating to maintain the diversity and universality of PSM. Through this type of curation, the audience can experience broadened archival programmes while being imbued with a universal value. Additionally, through one type of new collaboration with commercial subscription video-on-demand (SVoD), the maximum audience can be reached to attain universality. In other words, by combining new media distribution temporally, rather than relying on data-driven technology, PSM can properly adjust its current strategies to meet the problem of maintaining universality in an era of platformisation.

KEYWORDS: public service media, platformisation, SVoD, Taiwan PTS+, distribution strategy

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Introduction

The global media ecology has undergone dramatic changes in recent years, with the rise of subscription video-on-demand (SVoD) services. US-based SVoD services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ have steadily gained in market power around the globe and have a huge impact on national and domestic media industries (Lobato, 2018, 2019; Lotz, 2017, 2018), challenging not only national media policies, but also influencing business models and the distribution of legacy media. Academic discussions have recently focused on these changes (Afilipoaie et al., 2021; Raats & Evens, 2021; Jenner, 2018; Wayne & Castro, 2021). For instance, some studies have investigated the interface and hardware of streaming services (Johnson, 2017; Hesmondhalgh & Lobato, 2019) and how the audience's viewing habits (e.g., binge-watching) have changed (Jenner, 2017; Pillpets, 2019; Steiner & Xu, 2020). Other studies have examined how domestic SVoD services and government regulations respond to global players (Lobato & Scarlata, 2022; Lotz, 2021; Raats & Evens, 2021; see also Lassen & Sørensen, Chapter 5; Raats, Chapter 6; Lindeberg & Ala-Fossi, Chapter 8 in this volume). To some extent, this rise of global streaming services means that the production, distribution, and consumption of television, as well as audience watching habits, have dramatically changed across the world (Johnson, 2019; Lotz, 2018).

Public service media (PSM) is undoubtedly influenced by this development (Raats & Jensen, 2021). Various studies have focused on the BBC and how it adjusts its strategy to compete in the new streaming market (Donders, 2019; Ramsey, 2018). In particular, the BBC has attempted to open up its transnational service through the Brit Box – a joint project with ITV – which is now available in the US and Canada. Furthermore, the BBC constantly rethinks its digital direction. Until this year, the BBC has been planning to concentrate mostly on its online streaming services in the future (Waterson, 2022).¹ In addition, scholars have discussed the strategies of other European PSM organisations as they face the SVoD trend (D'Arma et al., 2021; Donders, 2019; Michalis, 2018; Raats & Evens, 2021; van Es & Poell, 2020).

There is an essential challenge for PSM when responding to the rise of SVoD: maintaining PSM's public value and its contribution to society. Commercial streaming services usually apply algorithms and data-driven technologies as their main distribution strategies, meaning that they provide personalised services based on user data. However, for PSM, personalisation holds particular challenges: On the one hand, it may cause privacy issues, and on the other, it could lead to the exclusion of minority programmes or audiences due to the goal of satisfying personal taste, which actually leans towards a “mainstream inclination”. As such, there is a potential clash between universality and personalisation, which has become a central issue for PSM (Aslama Horowitz & Lowe, 2019; Michalis, 2017; Sørensen, 2020; Sørensen & Hutchinson, 2018).

Meanwhile, in the Taiwanese context, the Taiwan Public Television Service (PTS) faces the same challenges. Taiwan PTS started in 1997 and was originally conceived as a niche service to complement the rapidly commercialising media market. Therefore, from the start, Taiwan PTS lacked sufficient funding and was marginalised in the government's cultural and communications policies. Unlike the BBC or NHK, which are funded by a licence fee and have a substantial budget at their disposal, Taiwan PTS has an annual budget of merely NTD 900 million (approximately USD 30 million). Given this severe restriction, Taiwan PTS has a marginal status in the Taiwanese television market. As such, its digital transformation has been slow because of its limited resources (Tsai, 2016).

In 2016, Taiwan PTS launched the streaming service PTS+7, which offers a seven-day viewing window for certain programmes in conjunction with same-day PTS scheduling and next-day broadcasting. It has attempted to respond to the new (online) viewing habits of young audiences. In 2017, PTS+7 was transformed and upgraded into PTS+, which offers an unlimited viewing option and the addition of past programmes. Additionally, PTS+ provides standard-definition (SD) and high-definition (HD) programmes, as well as ultra-high-definition (4K) broadcasting (Lee, 2018).

Strictly speaking, PTS+ is a relatively new streaming service. Therefore, this chapter considers the case study of PTS+ in Taiwan and mainly focuses on its distribution strategy. PTS+ was chosen for two reasons: First, the abovementioned scholarly works have rarely discussed non-Western countries, and this chapter can therefore offer a start in filling this gap; and second, due to its “special situation” in terms of its limited resources, PTS+ and its distribution strategy are worthy of further study.

The objectives of this chapter are 1) to identify the distribution strategies of PTS+ and 2) to determine how PTS+ implements its distribution strategies within Taiwan's SVoD ecology. In doing so, we aim to examine the impact of the strategy of PTS+ on the principle of universality, which is a core value of PSM. Two research questions are proposed:

- RQ1. How can universality be maintained while promoting PSM content?
- RQ2. How can universality be achieved in the strongly competitive SVoD environment?

These two questions can help us examine Taiwan's PSM situation in the age of platformisation.

In the next section, we discuss the state of research with respect to platformisation, universality, and PSM, highlighting the issue of the potential conflict between personalisation and universality as the main analytical framework. In the subsequent section, we focus on the case study of Taiwan PTS+ and its distribution strategy, looking both into curation and collaboration.

Platformisation, universality, and public service media

According to Nieborg and Poell (2018: 4276), “platformisation can be defined as the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries”. Platformisation has influenced almost every aspect of media production, distribution, and use. The GAFAM (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft) tech giants dominate this development, constantly expanding their impact on global media. Platforms play a digital intermediary role between users and content. On platforms like Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok, users can choose their favourite content outside of traditional media. This also means that data-driven technology is being widely applied: Through collecting user data, these platforms can target a user’s personal taste. While algorithms may have benefits for users, there are also controversial issues, such as privacy infringement.

Similar to these tech giants, global SVoD services have become powerful players, with implications for legacy media. These global SVoD services rely on the control of infrastructure power, and they have a worldwide market advantage owing to content, consumer, connectivity, and capital (Raats & Evens, 2021). For example, in Asia, Netflix has notoriously made huge investments in the Korean audiovisual market, as evidenced by its most successful production to date, *Squid Game*, which resulted in a global craze and generated USD 900 million in profit for Netflix (Li, 2021; Shaw, 2021). This success has also accelerated the operation of other global streaming services, such as Amazon Prime Video and Disney+. Such rapid expansions and constant investments into local content can appeal to new subscribers and maintain the old customer base on a certain streaming service (Evens & Donders, 2018).

However, such rapid expansion can also be considered a new challenge and a threat to national and local media markets, including PSM organisations. Raats and Jensen (2021) identified three challenges faced by PSM: 1) whether to collaborate with these new streaming services; 2) whether to coproduce high-end drama with commercial SVoD services; and 3) whether public service broadcasters can still maintain their distinctiveness once they “go international”. On the one hand, the problem of “collaboration” (i.e., content production) entails accommodating the requests of third-party platforms (Stollfuß, 2021). On the other hand, the distribution strategy adopted by PSM must seek balance amongst commercial, public, and even international interests and dimensions. This chapter specifically deals with new distribution strategies and the repercussions involved for the core values of PSM.

These core values of PSM include universality, equality, diversity, and quality (Nikunen & Hokka, 2020; Van den Bulck & Moe, 2018). In this chapter, we focus on the effects of SVoD on universality, a value with a multi-layered meaning. Paddy Scannell noted that universality has four dimensions:

1) access and reach, 2) genre, 3) relevance and impact, and 4) finance obligations (as cited in Lowe & Savage, 2020). According to Van den Bulck and Moe (2018), “universality” refers to “universal access” and “universal appeal”, the former representing the notion that the public must have access to public broadcasting content without discrimination due to sociodemographic characteristics, and the latter suggesting that public broadcasters must cater to a wide range of tastes and diverse interests. This definition is clearly focused on the level of content and access (EBU, 2012; Aslama Horowitz & Lowe, 2020; Jackson, 2020; Sørensen, 2020). Taiwan PTS chairman Hu Yuan-Hui (2018: 39) has also ever indicated that “the principle of universality emphasises the need to be accessible to all citizens and to the largest possible number of citizens”.² With this chapter, we aim to examine Taiwan PTS+ from these two perspectives – universal access and universal appeal – within the context of platformisation.

The principle of universality faces a huge challenge in this age of platformisation. Streaming services make use of data-driven technology and algorithms for the production and distribution of media content in order to provide personalised services that satisfy viewers’ personal tastes. Profit-oriented SVoD services, such as Netflix, fully utilise certain parameters, including demography, watching history, and content tagging (Álvarez et al., 2020). Such recommender systems help these companies to successfully promote and market their content.

PSM’s SVoD offers may also rely on personalisation; however, personalisation can come into direct conflict with the principle of universality (Sørensen & Hutchinson, 2018), that is, the spirit of universality may be damaged by automated recommendations. For example, a recommender system may cause biased content distribution, indirectly excluding some audience or content based only on usage data. Additionally, algorithms lack transparency, making it difficult to achieve the universality of PSM on their own digital services. As Sørensen (2020: 193) mentioned, “the utility of universalism has been weakened in parallel with the growth of digital platforms and channels”. Nikunen and Hokka (2020) also indicated that if PSM depends on user data and audience metrics, it will move away from its core principle of universality.

This issue has led to discussions among scholars, especially in relation to European PSM, some of which are already using algorithms for personalisation. According to Álvarez and colleagues (2020), one-third of PSM’s VoD offers in Europe make use of a recommender system or at least feature some recommendation elements. The authors distinguished three different types of recommendation elements: While “direct appeal to the spectator” takes a user’s profile into consideration and “content oriented” makes use of Big Data to organise content by format or popularity, “on behalf of PSM” does not involve any particular personalisation but relies on curation rather than algorithms to recommend certain content (Álvarez et al., 2020: 729). Van

den Bulck and Moe (2018) have discussed how personalisation based on algorithms affects universality by examining Norwegian NRK and Flemish VRT.³ Their results show that the two PSM organisations have different attitudes towards the use of algorithms: While NRK is inclined to approve its use with a view to facilitate more effective personalisation, VTR holds a more conservative attitude, expressing concerns about the use of this technology. Martin (2021) investigated two PSM organisations in the US – the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR) – and highlighted the importance of considering the meaning of personalisation in public media and how public media should create public enthusiasm and interest in ways that differ from commercial SVoD services. Furthermore, he also recommended the integration of public television and radio offers into a single registration system, from which the generated data can be transformed into a basis for understanding public interest in public media, finding ways to improve it, and providing personalised experiences for users. Nikunen and Hokka (2020) also noted that the use of data should be more cautious and must not violate public values to avoid a loss of trust among the audience. Furthermore, they found that the BBC and Finnish YLE carefully followed the guidelines of ethical and fair data practice regarding, for example, transparency and piracy.

Making use of personalisation technology while preserving the value of universality is a challenge for PSM. According to Van den Bulck and Moe (2018: 890), the idea of a “public service algorithm” – a new approach to interpreting the principle of universality in the face of emerging personalisation strategies – can safeguard “alternatives and interests” based on transcending personal tastes. In this way, PSM can gradually integrate personalised services into new organisational policies. The authors further argued that PSM must use a public service algorithm that is more compatible with their universality and public service responsibilities. Martin (2021) has also reported that the algorithms adopted by the BBC are still primarily public service algorithms, and even if they are used, this should not necessarily mean abandoning the manual editing process. Instead, media organisations should adopt a hybrid strategy that pursues a balance between algorithmic and manual curation.

Such a hybrid strategy could be connected to “curating”, which has recently been used as the main strategy of PSM (Grainge & Johnson, 2018). The term curation originated from the field of museum work, but in recent years, due to the huge amount of digital content generated, the process of classifying, selecting, and organising digital content for presentation has been labelled “digital content curation”, in which the judgment of the final presentation relies on human judgment rather than artificial intelligence, algorithms, Big Data, or other tools (Rosenbaum, 2011). Based on Bennet’s (2018) study of the curative development of BBC iPlayer, curation based on public service algorithms can make four new connections with the audience in terms of 1)

new content, 2) linking diverse audiences to shared content, 3) new experiences and forms, and 4) external services and content. Especially for the fourth point, content from PSM should go beyond “its own borders”; in other words, this content should be distributed to reach as much “external distribution” as possible, such as libraries and museums. Bennet further emphasised that public service algorithms can help strengthen the BBC’s iPlayer service; moreover, Bennet argued that these four approaches can turn iPlayer into a new “guide” that broadens the prospects of potential audiences.

Although public service algorithms are potentially helpful in solving the conflict between personalisation and universality, they may be difficult to implement in practice. Thus, curation is one way to maintain the public values of PSM by adding a human editor to supplement the possible shortcomings of non-transparent algorithms. Taiwan PTS+, the case study in this chapter, also makes use of human curators, although its implementation has a nuanced difference, because it lacks the key technology used by other SVoD services: the use of algorithms.

Apart from the issues arising from the use of algorithms and data-driven technologies on their own services, another discussion-worthy topic is the potential collaboration of PSM with commercial streaming services. It is possible to distinguish two types of collaboration between PSM and its rivals (D’Arma et al., 2021): 1) distribution, which involves selling rights to commercial SVoD services, and 2) production, which involves PSM co-producing or co-financing projects with commercial SVoD services. Collaboration can help PSM organisations to increase their production budgets (D’Arma et al., 2021) and to create revenues through selling distribution rights for programmes (Steemers, 2016). For instance, co-production or co-finance agreements between Netflix and PSM comprise 80 per cent of existing European partnerships of this kind, due to the streaming giant’s strong credibility (Afilipoaie et al., 2021). In their study, D’Arma and colleagues (2021) discussed how PSM use collaboration to rapidly expand SVoD by cooperating with their competitors to enlarge their production budget. In their work, the authors elaborated on the responses of PSM in the era of streaming using a framework proposed by Philip Napoli (1998) that distinguishes between 1) complacency, 2) resistance, 3) differentiation (i.e., transformation into a distinctly unique competitive position), and 4) diversification and mimicry (i.e., expanding activities to multiple platforms and beginning to adopt the core features of new, threatening technologies). Using the BBC, Flemish VRT, and Italian RAI as their cases, D’Arma and colleagues (2021) examined these four stages of evolutionary media response to new technologies. In addition to these four stages, they proposed the possibility of a collaborative stage, either through sale of programme copyrights directly to streaming services (e.g., Netflix and Amazon Prime Video) or of a co-production model. Their analysis shows that although PSM have gone through these four stages, the

process is not linear, and it basically depends on government policies (level of support and regulation), cultural factors, and the positioning and size of PSM in each country. For example, the UK has the advantage of international co-production due to its language advantage (English), whereas Flemish VRT may not be favoured for Netflix co-productions due to language and market size constraints, although Netflix will buy its high-quality drama content. As such, the complexity of the competitive environment, budgetary pressures, and organisational structures will influence distribution strategies. Collaboration with commercial streaming services like Netflix may also affect the principle of universality, for instance, by marginalising lesser-viewed content.

In this chapter, we examine the strategic response of a the PSM organisation in Taiwan to the development of SVoD services. Since 2016, when SVoD services entered the market, the media environment in Taiwan has been fiercely competitive. By 2020, there were at least twenty-five domestic and global SVoD services active in the country. Among these, Netflix, unsurprisingly, reached a market share of 61.9 per cent, which is significantly higher than any domestic SVoD players (Liu & Lin, 2022). The next two sections offer an analysis of Taiwan PTS's own VoD offer, PTS+, which represents an adjustment of its distribution strategy under the principle of universality amidst the rapidly changing media environment.

Our study is based on a document analysis (Bowen, 2009). Analysing existing material produced by news media or industry organisations is helpful in gaining insights into the operation of media organisations. According to Broughton Micova (2018: 79), “document analysis is a flexible method that can be adapted to the type of documents relevant to a particular case”. In this research, because the launch of PTS+ is an important element of Taiwan PTS's digital development, document analysis allows us to better understand the operation of PTS+ (including its subscription model) and the development of Taiwan PTS's VoD strategy. Our analysis included annual reports, the official PTS magazine *Action Quarterly*, and relevant media coverage about PTS+ from its launch in 2017 through 2021. Additionally, the arrangement of the PTS+ website was reviewed from 2019 through July 2022 to explore its recommendation system. This two-fold analysis should allow for a comprehensive analysis of the distribution strategy of PTS+.

The distribution strategy of Taiwan PTS

Facing the challenge of platformisation, Taiwan PTS has adopted two strategies: human curation of online content and collaboration with other streaming services. Taiwan PTS chose human curation because of inadequate resources for developing a recommender system based on algorithmic personalisation. Moreover, the strong commercial media environment in the country makes it difficult for Taiwan PTS to survive. Thus, in order to widen access to its

content, PTS+ seeks collaboration with commercial streaming services. In the following, both elements of this distribution strategy are discussed in detail.

Human curation recommender system

PTS+ was first launched in 2017 and reached 260,000 registrations after a year of operation. Whenever some flagship or quality programmes (mostly dramas) were launched, PTS+ gained 10,000 more subscriptions in one month (Taiwan PTS, 2018). In 2019, registrations reached 500,000, thus representing a steady growth (Anon, 2019). Indeed, the establishment of PTS+ symbolised a new media experiment of Taiwan PTS, which still provides diverse services and innovative ventures despite the fact that it does not receive as much resources as its counterparts in other countries. Thus, PTS has been constantly rethinking its position in the Taiwanese media market.

Taiwan PTS+ adopted human-edited curation for its recommender system at this initial stage and does not make use of algorithms or data-driven technologies because of its limited budget. This system fully utilises archival programming curation to reinforce diversity and universality in culture. In Johnson's (2018: 226) study, she mentioned that for the BBC, "curation can also be used to offer increased access to the rich history of PSB and British culture". Similarly, PTS+ uses curation as a distribution strategy under the public service value of universality.

Before viewers can use PTS+, they must log in to its website. This means that they must register and provide personal information. To investigate how PTS+ curates its content, we began by examining its interface on the PTS+ website. On the landing page, as with other commercial SVoD services, the audience can watch banners of "Distinguished and now-playing programmes" on the topmost block. The middle block contains the "Popular recommendations" divided into two zones: time-limited watching and binge-watching, referring to programmes with limited time of availability (one week or one month) and those that are produced by Taiwan PTS itself, respectively. The lowest block is reserved for a section on "Wonderful moments", which mainly arranges series programmes under three categories: children, short dramas, and art and documentaries.

In the top-right menu, viewers can choose "Channel", which has twelve categories: live, documentary, drama, art, life, descriptive video service, Taiwanese-language channel, time-limited watching, best children programmes, Taiwan International Children's Film Festival, PTS Kids (for Covid-19), and the PTS Live Performance Hall. The layout of the web page of each channel differs from the layout of the front page and displays curated content. This type of programming curation is theme-centred and mainly promotes current programmes plus archival programmes. From its interface, the current programmes occupy the visual centre, whilst the spaces below this are reserved for related archival programmes.

PTS+ makes use of four forms of content curation. First, when promoting the latest seasons of a drama, variety, or reality-TV programme, the audience is pointed to “Previous seasons” placed below the current one. This allows new viewers to easily discover older seasons of these shows and existing viewers to re-visit them. This curation is simple, but it allows audiences to binge-watch shows.

The second form of curation depends on the theme of the current programme and recommends past programmes. For example, in the Drama category, one theme is “Migrant”, in which the main television drama being promoted is *Merah [Red]* – a drama about family and love between an Indonesian migrant worker and her employer in Taiwan. There are five other television series that match this category, thus making up a small sample of online curation. A similar curation style is also seen in the “Documentary” category. For example, a featured documentary of the week in 2021 was *Fly So Far*, about 17 El Salvadoran women who struggled for freedom because their miscarriages were regarded as a “crime” in El Salvador. Five archival documentaries match this documentary and were thus recommended to the audience: *Amazonia Undercover* (about the local government and efforts to protect and save Amazonia), *We Were Smart* (about the Chinese subculture of young workers in the cities), *RCA Behind the Miracle* (about pollution of RCA and workers in Taiwan in the 1970s), and *Formosa Homicide Chronicle III* and *Formosa Homicide Chronicle I* (a series discussing the issue and problem of death penalty in Taiwan). From this curation, the audience can watch related documentaries that tackle various social issues ranging from world consumerism and youth culture to human rights. Thus, through the main documentary’s theme, this kind of curation is expected to connect relevant programmes to the audience.

The third form of curation uses current events to attract viewers. The most common strategy is to launch a retrospective series about an actor or a drama director who has recently received an award to make the audience understand these people’s growth trajectories and how Taiwan PTS cultivates them through retrospective curation. Moreover, PTS+ also responds to important events or days. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, Tawian PTS planned a series of programmes for children who were unable to attend school, with PTS+ focusing on different categories of school-aged children and youth. These programmes featured different subjects, including technology, health and physical education, general topics, language, and art, so that homebound children and youth could continue to learn without interruption. These programmes were similarly curated to provide immediate and functional public broadcasting services in response to the current societal context of the pandemic. Moreover, if an important person passes away, PTS+ also immediately arranges documentaries or interviews featuring this important person from the Taiwan PTS archive. For example, when former

president Lee Teng-Hui passed away in 2020, PTS+ soon launched from its archive a three-part documentary series about the former president, which was produced in 2006.

The fourth form of curation compensates for “physical distance” due to the Covid-19 pandemic and includes live performances. PTS+ established a specialised channel called the PTS Live Performance Hall, featuring over 40 performing arts groups, organisations, and individual performers from home and abroad. Additionally, the annual Taiwan International Children’s Film Festival hosted by Taiwan PTS has been held by PTS+ since 2020, bringing overall positive feedback from viewers. For example, its 2020 opening film, *Fritzi – A Revolutionary Tale*, drew up to 7,683 online viewers (Taiwan PTS, 2020). By the end of 2021, the Taiwan International Children’s Film Festival channel garnered 13,000 viewers (Taiwan PTS, 2021).

The curation strategy adopted by PTS+ requires human judgment to position various features and themes. As Robinson (2017: 22) noted, “the key difference is aggregation, and curation is human agency and evaluation”. Human editors select valuable archival programmes to strengthen each theme that PTS+ wants to feature. In terms of universality, the design of PTS+ breaks the scheduled-time model, thereby changing the linear watching habits of audiences. Furthermore, the curated programmes properly extend content to facilitate the “discovery” of new (or archival) content, and such a tactic leads to “serendipitous discovery”, as Grainge and Johnson (2018) noted. This discovery indicates a two-way relationship between the audience and content providers. In this way, viewers can broaden their tastes and familiarise themselves with various genre programmes from content providers to avoid watching just “more of the same”. Hence, through this type of human-edited recommender system, the universality of PSM can be achieved without neglecting marginal or non-mainstream content.

Although this online curation seems to emphasise human-edited rather than user data due to limited technology, the log-in system offers the potential for a personalised service and helps PTS+ to better understand audience preferences. Since using PTS+ requires registration, audience profiles and viewing behaviours can be recorded more clearly. This, in turn, allows the VoD service to gather information about the types of programmes a viewer watches frequently, whether they stop watching halfway through, and how often they stop watching, for example. The analysis of such usage data can also facilitate a better understanding of how viewers divide their attention amongst multiple screens (e.g., mobile phones, tablets, and computers). This information can be of great help to the future development of PTS+ and to programme content marketing.

Therefore, although the mechanism of the registration system may seem to restrict the public’s cultural access, it does not. Instead, the information obtained is based on the principles and values of PSM and, more precisely,

on the aim of understanding public needs and interests. PSM can thus adjust to public demands for diversified content in the era of streaming services.

Collaboration with commercial streaming services

In addition to the strategy of human curation to maintain the diversity and universality of its content, Taiwan PTS also adopts a collaboration strategy for external distribution (D'Arma et al., 2021). This means that Taiwan PTS co-produces content with domestic streaming services or sells distribution rights of its own programmes to commercial streaming services like Netflix. This model is based on collaboration between PSM and commercial streaming services, and it has been the main strategy employed by Taiwan PTS as it has positioned itself as the main content provider of high-quality drama in the market.

Given that PTS+ has a limited budget and a low penetration rate in the Taiwanese OTT market, collaboration is not only pursued due to economic considerations but also in order to create public value. Distributing content produced mainly by Taiwan PTS not only on PTS+ can help maximise audience reach and thus achieve universality.

Drama series are the pride of Taiwan PTS and enjoy a great reputation in the Taiwanese market. Since 1998, the year Taiwan PTS was established, the PSM organisation has always been a major winner of the Best Television Series Award in the Golden Bell Awards, the annual awarding ceremony for Taiwanese television productions. From 1999 to 2021, Taiwan PTS won this award nine times – more often than any other broadcaster. Therefore, PTS+ is focused on the distribution of these popular drama series.

A distinctive feature of the distribution strategy is the paywall system of PTS+. While a paywall seems to conflict with the core value of universality, the Taiwanese PSM has a limited budget and depends on other revenue streams, including its commercial profits from DVDs and books. However, this system faces legal issues because there is no definite law that allows PSM to implement a paywall system. Thus, Taiwan PTS sought the advice of the Ministry of Culture, pointing out that Article 28 of the Public Television Law states that Taiwan PTS can obtain revenue from commercial activities or other sources related to the Public Television Cultural Foundation. The Ministry agreed to this new model (Lee, 2018). Hence, Taiwan PTS collaborates with commercial SVoD services while PTS+ is gradually transforming into a paid VoD offer. This collaborative model attempts to maximise universality as it grants the analogue Taiwan PTS channel first broadcasting rights for drama programming co-produced, co-financed, and co-distributed with commercial streaming services.

According to our preliminary investigation, the new solution seems to work well. It is difficult to obtain the numbers of subscriptions or revenues of all

drama series because of confidentiality in business information. However, the phenomenon can still be observed through documents and news. For example, *On Children*, the ten-part television series about parents and children facing social pressure, which was released in 2018, ranked amongst the top three drama programmes in terms of traffic on the VoD service since its inception in September 2018 on LINE TV, with a single episode surpassing 1.3 million views (Tang, 2018). In 2019, the most high-profile programme for that year was *The World Between Us*, which was produced jointly by the Public Television Service, HBO Asia, and CATCHPLAY+ (domestic OTT player). The series, which premiered in Taiwan on 24 March 2019, consisted of ten episodes and dealt with the issues of the death penalty and mental illness. The series was also available in its entirety on PTS+ for a fee of USD 130 for three months. As a result, Taiwan PTS generated over USD 4 million in revenue, and the member numbers of CATCHPLAY+ increased by 220,000 in one month, easily doubling the number of paid members (Tang, 2019).

Another example is *Tears on Fire*, a 2021 drama series co-produced by MyVideo (domestic OTT service) and Taiwan PTS. This drama, which is about the life stories of firefighters, has attracted a significant number of new users to the MyVideo service, garnering the highest view rate in Taiwan in the first half of the year of 2021. In just one week, the number of viewers soared to more than 30 per cent compared with the previous week, with almost over 260,000 views (CNA, 2021).

Apart from domestic streaming services, Taiwan PTS also has a strong partnership with Netflix. However, unlike the investment modes adopted by domestic SVoD offers, Netflix did not invest or co-produce with Taiwan PTS, choosing to serve as a distributor instead. Sometimes, these quality dramas produced by Taiwan PTS premiered on Netflix, depending on the contract. Through the market advantage dominated by Netflix in Taiwan, this strategy can attract more audiences. One example is the 2022 flagship historical drama series, *Sequalu: Formosa 1867*, which tells the story of the conflict between American sailors and Indigenous people through the “Rover Incident” that broke out on 12 March 1867. This drama cost Taiwan PTS around NTD 200 million (approximately USD 6.5 million). When this flagship drama was launched, it immediately broke records, with its first two episodes reaching 1.19 million viewers on television and claiming the top spot on various online streaming services, including Line TV, MyVideo, and MOD. As for Netflix, the first two episodes took the top spot in the programme rankings (Chung, 2021).

We listed all dramas under this competition mode since 2018 to the middle of 2022 (see Table 7.1). This new strategy is implemented in two ways. First, it begins with the co-production and co-financing with domestic streaming services that then distribute the programmes on their own VoD offer, whereas PTS+ can release them at a later time. The second strategy is to be dependent

on a commercial streaming service's distribution, especially Netflix. What both strategies have in common is the paywall system adopted by PTS+ for these quality dramas. The Taiwan PTS television channel, PTS+, and other commercial streaming services have, together, produced content to maximise audience reach.

However, this payment system poses a great challenge to PSM in Taiwan. PSM is rarely connected to a payment system for its audience. Taiwan PTS has attempted to launch this system to supplement its originally inadequate budget and to test whether it could serve as a new business mode.

PTS+ also has better information about its paying members that enables accurate forecasting of viewing data. This new mode can further connect to the log-in system, and such a combination can overcome audience fragmentation and personalisation issues based on public value. By adopting this combination system, Taiwan PTS can know their audience's needs and preferences and adjust its programming accordingly. In addition, PSM must master its competitive relationship with global SVoD services and expand its digital public service advantage to achieve its true potential.

Overall, to actually achieve universality, collaboration with commercial streaming services is a necessary strategy for Taiwan PTS due to its weak status in the Taiwan television and SVoD markets. Indeed, the estimated sum of the viewing population of different commercial streaming services (domestic or international) can augment the distribution of content produced by Taiwan PTS. As D'Arma and colleagues (2021) have pointed out, a successful collaboration strategy can increase the PSM organisation's budget and the visibility of its content. However, there is also the possibility of losing one's brand. This is an issue that must be addressed as the Netflix Original brand grows stronger, thus overshadowing the real production unit: in this case, Taiwan PTS.

In other words, this collaboration runs the risk of marginalisation and of even eroding a PSM organisation's own brand (Raats & Jensen, 2021). Audiences watching various drama series on commercial SVoD services are not aware that these high-quality dramas are produced by, for example, Taiwan PTS, thus leading to the failure to cultivate brand loyalty. This is not a welcome development for Taiwan PTS in the future, even if the current distribution strategy is helping to grow audience numbers. As such, PTS+ must carefully consider this collaboration mode.

Table 7.1 TV series with paywall since the launch of PTS+

Title	Premiere date & time	Streaming with simultaneous broadcasting	Streaming with later broadcasting	
<i>On Children</i> [你的孩子不是你的孩子]	7 July 2017 Every Saturday, 21:00	Netflix	PTS+ Line TV	Every Saturday, 22:00
			My Video	Since 5 August 2018
<i>The Teenage Psychic</i> [通靈少女2]	6 October 2019 Every Saturday, 21:00	HBO HBO GO HBO on Demand	PTS+	Every Monday, 22:00
<i>Green Door</i> [魂囚西門]	16 February 2019 Every Saturday, 21:00	–	Netflix PTS+ HamiVideo	Every Saturday, 22:00
<i>The World Between Us</i> [我們與惡的距離]	24 March 2019 Every Sunday, 21:00	CATCHPLAY+ HBO Asia	–	–
<i>Hate the Sin, Love the Sinner</i> [噬罪者]	8 June 2019 Every Saturday, 21:00	PTS+ NETFLIX iQIYI TW FriDay LINE TV	KKTV MyVideo	Every other Friday, 12:00
<i>Candy Online</i> [糖糖 Online]	16 November 2019 Every Saturday, 21:00	Netflix PTS+	–	–
<i>Ru: Taiwan Express</i> [路~台灣 Express~]	16 May 2020 Every Saturday, 21:00	PTS+	CATCHPLAY+ LINE TV FriDay	Every Saturday, 22:00
			MOD (including HamiVideo) MyVideo	After this TV series was finished
<i>Detention</i> [返校]	5 December 2020 Every Saturday, 21:00	Netflix	PTS+	Every Sunday
<i>Who Killed the Good Man</i> [大債時代]	2 January 2021 Every Saturday, 21:00	Netflix	PTS+ MOD CATCHPLAY+ LINE TV	Every Saturday, 23:00
			MyVideo	Every Sunday, 20:00
<i>The Magician on the Skywalk</i> [天橋上的魔術師]	20 February 2021 Every Saturday, 21:00	MyVideo	PTS+ Netflix	Every Saturday, 22:00
<i>Tears on Fire</i> [火神的眼淚]	1 May 2021 Every Saturday, 21:00	MyVideo	PTS+ Netflix	Every Saturday, 22:00
<i>Sequalu: Formosa 1867</i> [斯卡羅]	14 August 2021 Every Saturday, 21:00	–	PTS+ LINE TV	Every Saturday, 22:00
			Netflix MyVideo	Since 15 August, every Sunday, 18:00
			MOD HamiVideo	Since 22 August, every Sunday, 18:00

Conclusion

PTS+, the streaming service of Taiwan PTS, uses two distribution strategies to reposition itself in the strongly competitive SVoD environment in Taiwan. First, through human curating, both Taiwan PTS and the audience can benefit from archive programmes. To some extent, PTS+ temporarily circumvents the dilemma between personalisation and universality generated by the use of algorithms. The second strategy is collaboration based on a new, experimental business model: the paywall system. In terms of achieving universality, the collaboration strategy maximizes viewership of content produced by Taiwan PTS. Moreover, the paywall system supplements an inadequate annual budget.

Overall, this new two-fold distribution strategy can be expected to contribute to society. On the one hand, the curation mechanisms implemented solve the dilemma between personalisation and universality. On the other hand, this innovative strategy also benefits users in an algorithmically driven SVoD market. Even with its limited resources, Taiwan PTS tries to redefine public values that are conducive to society by offering an innovative curated VoD offer and by attempting to break through the boundaries of commercially dominated information and cultural entertainment markets to provide diversified content services in the spirit of the public good. The digital distribution strategy of Taiwan PTS is therefore based on maintaining the ethos of PSM in society and contributing to a diverse media landscape in a diverse society. At the same time, this strategy can help to reduce the problems of access to content caused by technology gaps in the digital age.

However, these strategies also need to be cautiously examined in the future. The potential future use of algorithms must be balanced with the goal of maintaining public value. How could this mechanism maintain flexibility and the publicity of human-edited curation? Or, how should this normal operation under limited resources be maintained (Tsai & Lin, 2019)? Is it possible to balance curation and personalisation, or does it deepen the contradictory concept of universality in an era of platformisation? Through proper disclosure of transparency of PSM, it is possible to balance curation and personalisation under the scheme of algorithm- and data-driven technology in a way that is also beneficial to society and enables citizen to obtain information from PSM (see Speck, Chapter 14 in this volume).

Furthermore, whether accurate viewership data can provide high-quality programme design that meets diversified public values must also be further investigated. As for external strategies, it is expected that the collaboration mode will continue to operate; however, we must simultaneously consider whether branding or the universality of public service would be diminished by commercial SVoD operation or promotion. Finally, the paywall system may be a cause of concern in terms of balancing the concepts of paid and public services because of the inherent dysfunction of the system. For example, how can one serve the needs of unpaid online viewers in the digital era?

What are the criteria for choosing a pay-per-view mechanism for dramas? Such intricate complexity can be addressed, and PSM should still be further studied to deepen its value in the future.

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Endnotes

¹ BBC has announced that it is moving BBC 4, CBBC, and Radio 4 Extra online, and will downsize by 1,000 people to become a digital-first PSM in the next few years.

² It should be noted that at the time of Hu's speech, Hu was not yet the chairman of Taiwan PTS.

³ Although the latest developments have changed slightly, the development strategies of these two public media at the time are still worth discussing.