

# The Rising Tide of Social Media

[blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2015/04/02/the-rising-tide-of-social-media-reflections-from-ebu-polis-social-media-trend-summit-at-lse/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2015/04/02/the-rising-tide-of-social-media-reflections-from-ebu-polis-social-media-trend-summit-at-lse/)

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*With the European Broadcasting Union Polis hosted 100 social media managers from public service media organisations across Europe for a day's workshop to talk about the challenges they face and the opportunities they have created. Polis intern Alessandro Volonté @alexvolonte reports.*



Social media are fundamentally reshaping what it means to do good journalism in the public interest. After years of conservatism in the face of new technology, that was the progressive consensus amongst public service media at this workshop. Probably a little more unexpected was the fact that such an agreement was almost unanimously shared by all stakeholders practicing in the realm of public service broadcasting.

Probably the most interesting point coming out of the event was, in my opinion, the inherent juxtaposition between repetitive claims that “there is no such thing as ‘best practice’ in the use of social media” – even comparing it to the art of painting by Mike Mullane, Head of Media Online at EBU – on the one side, and the deep readiness to “philosophically reinvent” the notion of public service on the other side, with the latter process especially emphasized by [NRK](#)’s Head of Social Media Ingeborg Volan.

In a way, it is as if everyone agrees that for healthy media outlets there is no way of bypassing social media use in the current landscape, but at the same time there are very little existing points of reference that could act as initial guidelines in implementing social media strategies onto traditional editorial processes. This increases both the excitement and the risk perception on the part of media practitioners willing to invest in social media presences.

## Conceptual Pillars

A number of speakers, led by Director General of [Swedish Radio](#) Cilla Benkö as well as [BBC News](#)’ Jeremy Skeet, tried to outline some conceptual pillars concerning the initial embracement of social media, addressing particularly the most skeptical ones in the field. They said that “you really have to be on social media simply because your

audience is on social media” or again “social media journalism can and should be fun”. Whether these and similar statements really help in formulating concrete strategies for the use of social media on the part of public service broadcasters is probably to difficult to tell. Rather, it is the enthusiasm and believable conviction manifested by the majority of the speakers when talking about their (current or future) use of social media that should, as it appeared to me, be the best and most honest promotional tool for investing in it.

I really like the idea that something practically uncontrollable like social media and their impact on content strategies and management are meant to fundamentally reshape a cornerstone of modern secular societies such as public service broadcasting. Some hesitation on the part of the players necessarily affected is partially understandable. Probably to overcome such initial indecisions if not fears of journalists about to embark in the social media adventure, Swedish Radio has produced the very useful and accessible [Social Media Handbook](#).



Now that even public service broadcasters have come to the agreement that social media is an inescapable, powerful reality that cannot be ignored, it is really time to preach their actual establishment in journalistic practices almost globally (or at least on an European level, judging the countries of origin of the speakers present at the summit). While it is no secret that commercial and private media have already fully invested in social media resources a while ago, at least with regards to the intensity of the investment, there are no excuses left for their colleagues operating in the public service sector to follow the trend and start surfing along on the multiform wave of social media channels. After all, did we not already hear at some point in history that, in the end, a rising tide lifts all the boats?

**This report by *Polis intern Alessandro Volonté***

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