

## How Well is Today's Media Serving Your Community?

Today's media is far from properly serving our community. Currently, the main issue with media in New Zealand is that we lack something that almost every other developed country has: a public service broadcaster on television. This can be seen as an ethical issue, since it's mainly a question of what is more important, popular programmes that generate greater revenue or programmes that truly serve the people of New Zealand?

A Public Service Broadcaster is, as the name suggests, a public service offered to us, the people of New Zealand. It's different from a commercial broadcaster because while a commercial broadcaster is purely worried about making money by producing something that will appeal to the masses and get the biggest audience possible, a PSB is worried about producing *quality* content for *all*. A PSB is owned by the state and operates under a charter, a list of obligations, to ensure that all New Zealanders are being well served by it. Its obligations can be summarized as informing people, giving opportunities for Kiwi artists to flourish, presenting and reinforcing New Zealand culture, serving minorities and niche interests, fulfilling the Treaty of Waitangi obligations and, overall, to providing Kiwis with quality programming.

From 2002 to 2011, TVNZ was our main public service broadcaster. In 2002, the then Minister of Broadcasting, Marian Hobbs (Labour), understood the need for a PSB in NZ and introduced a charter to TVNZ. The charter ensured that TVNZ would prioritize people over money and introduced TVNZ 6, which aired kid's shows only, and TVNZ 7, a news channel. Unfortunately, in 2011, the charter was scrapped by the National Government because they deemed it impossible to sustain TVNZ operating under the charter since by serving minorities they didn't have a big enough audience to receive enough funding from advertising. Now, TVNZ is a State Broadcaster, meaning it is still owned by the people of NZ, however, it now operates purely as a commercial broadcaster, with no public service requirements. The only non-commercial broadcasting service we have now is Radio NZ. Sadly, although RNZ has won numerous awards -- nationally and internationally -- and is the most listened to radio station in the country, it has suffered under a frozen budget for over ten years.

The reason why the charter was taken down in 2011 is because if TVNZ continued to operate under the charter the way it did back in 2010, it soon wouldn't have the funding to continue to operate at all. Even though TVNZ was a PSB, it was 90% funded through advertising. The way a commercial broadcaster works is by producing programs that have a mass audience appeal, because the larger the audience they have, the more revenue the broadcaster will make out of each individual advertisement shown. The problem with these mass appeal programs is that, as the name suggests, they are made to appeal to the majority, and therefore wind up neglecting the minorities. So, by attempting to produce programs for minorities, TVNZ wasn't generating enough revenue. Then why don't we create a tax-funded PSB like the BBC in the UK? The answer is simple, we don't have enough people here. The population of the UK is of 66 million people, while here in NZ we have less than 5 million people. Therefore, in the UK, with every person paying a small amount of tax that is directed to broadcasting services, they have enough funding to produce high quality original content for all, including the minorities, because since their funding comes from taxes, they don't have to worry about audience sizes and ads. TVNZ's current advertising revenue is of \$173.5 million, so here in NZ, with very few tax-payers, we would all have to pay an astronomical amount of taxes to be able to fund it solely by taxes. Although it is a challenge to bring back TVNZ as a PSB, it is not impossible, and it is of great importance that we are provided with this kind of service.

There are significant ethical issues that arise from commercially-only funded broadcasters. An example would be regarding our Treaty Of Waitangi obligations. The Treaty Of Waitangi guarantees that Maori have their culture preserved; this is constitutional, it's not optional. Every state institution such as hospitals, schools and the police have to operate following the NZ constitution, so I believe that TVNZ -- as a state broadcaster, a state institution -- should also operate according to the constitution, that is, honouring the Treaty of Waitangi. New Zealand is a bi-cultural country, yet Maori are not treated the same as Pakeha. Take our educational system, for example: It has a huge fault relating to the way Maori students' education is treated. Maori students as a group spend less time in the system and do less well on it, than non-Maori students as a group. According to the Ministry of Education, in 2017, the percentage of school leavers with NCEA level 2 or above was of 83.8% for Pakeha students, yet only 67.9% for Maori students. One of the main reasons for this is that when Maori students are in a classroom with many non-Maori students, they might feel disenfranchised. Schools all over NZ are working on ways to make Maori students feel more included inside the classroom, and the

media should also be promoting Maori inclusion. The media, the shows and films we watch are what feed us our ideas of normativity -- what is normal and what is different from us -- and if a certain group of people doesn't receive the representation they should be getting -- like the Maori aren't getting -- it leads to them being othered by a white-normative society. A way towards solving this issue is giving them proper representation in the media. This is why we need a PSB operating under a charter and ensuring that Maori are being well represented.

Commercial Broadcasters will always do anything in their power to draw in the largest audience possible to their programs, and it is no different when it comes to news and current affairs programs -- they are, after all, a media product made to generate income to its producer. Consequently, these news programs will sensationalise every story and debate they present, instead of using intelligent arguments and presenting the audience with both sides of the discussion. Take for example Mike Hosking, from ZB radio station. In June, during a debate with Green MP Chlöe Swarbrick about the legalization of Marijuana (which Swarbrick is in favour), Hosking called her "naive" and told her to "wait until you have kids". Instead of responding Swarbrick with educated and insightful arguments, which would've shown the audience the reasoning of both sides of the debate, Hosking opted instead, to attack the person, not the point. He does this because people with loud voices and angry comments bring in bigger audiences than a respectful and informative debate. This is one of the many issues with commercial media, it deprives people of their right to receive information from a trustworthy unbiased source. The reason why a public service broadcaster wouldn't have a news and current affairs show like this is because PSB's shows don't need to appeal to mass audiences and don't need to produce content based on audience values, rather they can present the story with a minimal possible bias and present people with complete information that takes into account more than one side of an issue or event.

Take New Zealand youth and their parents as another example. Due to sensationalist news reporting, teenagers have suffered from a weight of representation that pictures them as being out of control, irresponsible and criminally inclined. Representation is the way the media portrays a specific group of people or person/character by using stereotypes and codes. The use of representation is a normal and necessary practice in the media; the issue arises when one specific representation of a certain group becomes far more common than any other representation of said group, which creates a weight

of representation on them. By representing teenagers as a threat to society and even to themselves, the report is increasing its news value by creating conflict and proximity to its target audience, therefore gaining larger viewership and increasing their advertising profit. This practice not only creates a stereotype and a pressure on teenagers to “live up to the standard” and be like the teens sold by the media, it also creates a prejudice on teenagers, because people will be accustomed to think of teenagers in the way the media presents them, even though, in reality, many teenagers are not in anyway similar to that representation. Parents of teenagers also fall victims of this wild misinformation, as they are being led to feel even more worried about their children’s well-being. With a PSB, this would no longer be an issue because it would give teens, Maori and everyone else, a fair and unbiased representation.

Yet another problem with broadcasters approaching their programming with a commercial mindset is that they don’t value Kiwi culture, minorities and niche interests. They only spend money on content that will appeal to mass audiences and give them a good monetary return. As a result of this, niche interests -- such LGBTQ+, religious and scientific content -- wind up being neglected because they don’t bring in a large enough viewership. Another victim of this are New Zealand’s artists, who don’t get enough opportunities nor recognition. Currently, most of the shows on during prime time in TVNZ channels aren’t made in NZ, they are American or Australian. Why are we importing content and presenting it in prime time, when we could be showing so much more of our own national talents on screen? New Zealand doesn’t have a good platform for people with talent to flourish neither do we have enough exposure to all the talented people in our country. Media products are a way that we Kiwis express ourselves, our views on the world and our rich culture. To have more NZ-made media content is to praise NZ’s culture and people.

Overall, as this essay demonstrates, NZ’s state broadcaster is not properly serving our community. We need a Public Service Charter for TVNZ so we can receive proper media representation, be informed by a trustworthy source and have our rich culture celebrated. There are many challenges to the installation of a PSB, such as the funding issue; however, the biggest challenge today is apathy to the problem. So many Kiwis have grown up without the privileges of a PSB, so now the majority of them fails to see the benefits of having a broadcaster that serves the community rather than the majority. Because of this, the best action we can take right now is to raise awareness, be

it through social media, organizations such as BPM, media studies in schools or simply talking to our peers about this invisible ethical issue present in our media.

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