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From brand congruence to the 'virtuous circle': branding and the commercialization of public service broadcasting

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Branding has been widely recognized as a key strategy for broadcasters within the digital era (Todreas 1999; Arvidsson 2006; Author Removed 2012). While commonly understood as a commercial strategy designed to increase competitive advantage, branding has also been used by public service broadcasters to support their public service activities and reputations.¹ In a period in which public service broadcasters across the globe have been expanding their commercial activities, branding, therefore, sits at the intersection of their public service and commercial operations. On the one hand, a strong brand identity is a key commercial asset when developing new products and services. Branding is not just a means of marketing the attributes of a particular product or service. Lowe and Palokangas (2010: 131) argue that 'the reputation of a media company is crucial to competitive success' and branding is a key strategy in constructing, communicating and maintaining this reputation with consumers. On the other hand, branding is invaluable in developing and maintaining public support and loyalty for public service broadcasting. Across the West the rise of neo-liberalism has led to policy claims that free markets are best placed to deliver competition, quality and choice in broadcasting (Freedman 2003; Hesmondhalgh 2005), resulting in attacks on federal subsidies for public service broadcasting in the US (McChesney 2008: 233) and the emergence of an EU policy context in which public service broadcasters are seen as unfair competition that threaten free markets (Collins 1998: 55). Within this climate branding functions as a way of encouraging public loyalty towards public service broadcasters, which has become increasingly necessary for their continued survival.

In this article I want to ask how public service broadcasters are using branding to manage the relationship between their public service and commercial activities, focusing on the example of the BBC. As the rise of satellite in the mid-1980s shifted broadcasting from national markets dominated by public service broadcasters to a pluralised transnational system, television was increasingly conceived of as a service to be traded (Collins 1998: 51), with public service broadcasters such as ABC in Australia and RAI in Italy entering into the global marketplace as commercial operators (Padovani and Tracey 2003: 148). In the UK the BBC has been expanding its domestic and international commercial activities since the early 1990s, in part because of pressure from successive governments to increase commercial revenue to keep down the cost of the licence fee and to exploit the global market for television and radio services (Freedman 2003; Hesmondhalgh 2005). The BBC is a useful case study within this context. On the one hand it has been successful in expanding its commercial activities and developing as a global commercial broadcaster. In 2012 BBC Worldwide (the BBC's commercial arm) reported revenue beyond £1billion for the fourth year in succession, of which £216million was directly returned to support the BBC's public service activities (BBC Worldwide 2012a: 1). On the other hand, the BBC retains wide support within the UK populace as a publicly-funded public service broadcaster (Ofcom 2011) and continues to depend on the licence fee which generated around 60 per cent of the corporation's income in the 2011/12 financial year (BBC

2012a: F6). The BBC faces significant financial pressures over the coming years as it is required additionally to fund the BBC World Service (the BBC's overseas services previously funded by a Parliamentary grant in aid from the British government) and the Welsh language service S4C. This equates to a 16 per cent reduction in its ongoing licence fee funding (BBC 2012a: F4) and will increase pressure to generate more income from commercial activities. Analysis of the ways in which the BBC negotiates this position provides a useful starting point for comparative work on the commercial activities of other public service broadcasters operating within an increasingly commercial and globalized marketplace.

In debates about the commercialization of public service broadcasting little attention has been paid to the impact of commercial activities on the reputations of public service broadcasters. Rather the debate has tended to focus on the broader arguments about policy and regulation, with both sides of the political and ideological spectrum criticizing the commercial activities of public service broadcasters. Free market critics argue that the only appropriate role for public service broadcasters is to address market failure by providing those programmes seen as valuable for citizenship and culture that are not provided by the market. Within this model any successful commercial activity by public service broadcasters could be seen as distorting the market and creating the market failure that it attempts to rectify by providing unfair competition in niche markets (Collins 2004; Sawers 1996). The free market approach to broadcasting policy has been widely criticized as an ineffective means of providing broadcasting that serves the needs of the public as citizens, resulting in highly concentrated, uncompetitive markets that discriminate against the poorest in society (Keane 1991; Curran 2001; Barnett 2004; Barwise 2004; McChesney 2008; Jacubowicz 2010). There is significant evidence to demonstrate that a broadcasting service defined by the attributes of diversity, universality and impartiality (that Collins (1998) argues characterize a wide range of definitions of public service broadcasting) is not possible without positive regulation. Yet this does not mean that there is an inherent contradiction between public service and commercial imperatives as many supporters of public service broadcasting claim (Padovani and Tracey 2003: 140). Broadcasters such as ITV and Channel 4 have demonstrated that it is possible to produce high quality public service broadcasting funded through commercial activity, albeit in a different media landscape to the one in which they are operating today (Allen 2005; Harrison 2005). While commercial public service broadcasters such as ITV have argued that they can no longer deliver against their public service obligations for regional, children's and cultural programming (Iosifidis 2010: 25), this is largely because of increased competition from non-public service commercial companies, rather than because of any inherent contradiction between public service and commercial broadcasting.

Rather than rejecting the commercial activity of public service broadcasters altogether as inevitably polluting their ability to provide public service broadcasting or inevitably distorting a free market in broadcasting, we need to ask how public service broadcasters are managing the relationship between their public service and commercial activities. Although there has been some work on this from an operational and policy perspective, whether in recommendations to prohibit the BBC from cross-subsidizing commercial activities (Collins 2004: 146) or in the claims that commercial imperatives may drive (and limit) the production of public service programmes (D'Arma and Steemers 2010: 123), what is absent from this debate is a consideration of the ways in which the public might experience the commercial and public service activities of public service broadcasters and the impact that this may have on the reputations of public service broadcasters. It is within the area of user experience that brand strategies are particularly focused. Celia Lury (2004: 7-8) defines

branding as a site of interactivity concerned with constructing and managing the relationship over time between consumers, products/services and producers. Branding recognises the role of the attitudes and activities of the consumer in constructing the meanings of the brand, and strategic brand management attempts to manage the consumer's experience of the brand. Proponents of strategic brand management argue that the consumption of signs is as important to the cultural landscape as the consumption of products and that media companies need to recognise and strategically manage the consumer's experience of their signs and symbols as well as their products and services (Lowe and Palokangas 2010: 131).

This use of strategic brand management is apparent in the guidelines produced by the BBC to manage its commercial activities, particularly its Fair Trading Guidelines (BBC 2012c) and its Global Strategy (BBC 2011). The BBC's Fair Trading Guidelines require that all commercial activities must comply with its '4 Commercial Criteria' (4CC), namely that they must:

fit with the BBC's Public Purposes;

not jeopardise the good reputation of the BBC or the value of the BBC Brand;

exhibit commercial efficiency; and

comply with the Trust Fair Trading Policy, the BBC's Fair Trading Guidelines and, in particular, avoid distorting the market (BBC 2012c: 19)

The final two criteria here address the market concerns of the corporation's commercial activities in requiring that they are commercially efficient and do not distort the market. The first two criteria address the concerns that commercial activity may undermine public service broadcasting, ensuring that all commercial activity is "appropriate" and "connected" to the BBC's Public Purposes' (BBC 2012c: 23) and does not jeopardize the corporation's brand reputation, for example, by associating BBC brands 'with organisations that might affect the BBC's editorial integrity or potentially bring it into disrepute' (BBC 2012c: 33). The BBC brand here is defined as 'anything which could suggest that a good or service has a strong association with, or has originated from, the BBC', including the BBC name and logo and the names and logos of channels, services and programmes (2012c: 32). Similarly, the BBC's Global Strategy states that the corporation's 'Commercial activities must not incur reputational damage to the BBC's UK brand and funding model' and that all 'content within its portfolio should be "Brand Congruent"' (2011: 7). Indeed, it goes on to argue for the need to coordinate the BBC's overall global portfolio in order to 'ensure that all activities which use the BBC brand reflect common values and standards' (2011: 8).

At the same time, however, the BBC's Fair Trading Guidelines emphasise the importance of separation between the BBC's commercial and public service activities, claiming that 'Clear boundaries should be drawn between the BBC's Public Service Activities and its Commercial Activities in order to ensure that there is clarity in their respective objectives, strategies and decision-making' (2012c: 25). Primarily separation refers to the operational management of commercial activities, namely that the BBC's commercial services must not receive an unfair advantage from its public service groups and must not use or risk public funds (ibid.). However, the need for separation also emerges in the guidelines for the use of BBC brands:

There should be an appropriate degree of separation between the use of brands by the BBC's Public Service Groups and by its Commercial Subsidiaries to make it clear to consumers when they are in a commercial environment and when they are in a publicly-funded environment. (2012c: 33)

These documents demonstrate the ways in which the BBC is using strategic brand management in negotiating the boundaries between its public service and commercial activities. The BBC here recognizes the importance of its brand reputation and has put in place strategies to ensure that its commercial activities are congruent with the values of its brand. These strategies are both operational (concerned with the internal structures and processes within the BBC, its commercial subsidiaries and its dealings with third parties) and symbolic (concerned with the public experiences of the BBC, its programmes and its services). Yet there is also a tension here between separation on the one hand and brand congruence on the other, particularly in relation to the symbolic management of the commercial exploitation of BBC brands. On the one hand these documents recognize that any product or service associated with the BBC might impact on its brand reputation and that, as a consequence, it needs to ensure that all activities that use the BBC brand are congruent with its core public purposes. On the other hand these documents recognise a potential conflict between the commercial exploitation of BBC brands and the BBC's reputation as a publicly-funded corporation protected from commercial interests, particularly in terms of the consumers' experiences of those brands. This is reiterated in the definition of the BBC brand provided in the Fair Trading Guidelines:

The BBC is a unique organisation: a content and service provider funded and owned by the British public, free from commercial and political interests. It exists to enrich people's lives through high-quality and distinctive content for everyone – to inform, educate and entertain. This is the essence of the BBC brand. (2012c: 32)

Here the BBC's public funding is articulated as central to its brand identity and tied to its delivery of high quality content. Indeed, the BBC Trust's recent review of the BBC's activities, 'Putting Quality First', emphasized the BBC's freedom from commercial interests as its primary value in the minds of the public:

The public place great value on the non-commercial environment provided by the BBC, which they see as politically and ideologically independent. The BBC offers a cultural and public space in society which isn't trying to sell anything and can be trusted. (2010: v)

This is an important argument in the BBC's continued campaign to maintain its licence fee funding. As such, what is at stake for the corporation is the extent to which its commercial activities might undermine its public reputation as a broadcaster free from commercial pressures and interests.

To examine how this conflict works in practice I want to focus on some specific examples of the BBC's commercial activities. I am less interested here in the operational management of commercial activities at the point of production/sale than with the ways in which the BBC's commercial activities emerge within public spaces in ways that might affect the BBC's corporate brand reputation as a publicly-funded public service broadcaster. As such, I am particularly interested in the use of the BBC name and logo, identified within the BBC's Fair Trading Guidelines as core to the experience of the BBC brand. Celia Lury argues that logos can be understood as the public face of the brand, that

which makes the brand visible to the consumer (2004: 74). The logo functions in relation to the consumer's existing knowledge of and attitude to the brand to create a set of associations and abstract identities within the minds of the consumer (2004: 79). As symbolic shorthand for the values and meanings of the brand, the logo has emerged as a valuable product in its own right that is protected by trademark law (Lury 2004: 96). The BBC owns and manages a number of logos, from its corporate logo (Fig.1), to its channel logos (Fig.2) and their associated idents (Fig.3), to logos for its key programme brands such as Doctor Who and Top Gear. The use of these logos is central to the consumer's experience of a wide range of content and services created by the corporation. The BBC's use of its logos and idents to manage the user's experience of its brands reveals the difficulties for the corporation in negotiating the need for brand congruence on the one hand and separation of commercial and public service activities on the other.

Expanding the BBC's Commercial Activities in the Digital Era

From the mid-1990s UK broadcasting policy has actively encouraged the BBC to expand its commercial activities, with the 1996 Royal Charter for the BBC specifically endorsing commercial activities and the development of digital services as core objectives for the corporation (Steemers 1999: 49). Part of the intention of this Conservative government policy was to allow the BBC to respond to the developments in digital technology without drawing licence fee income away from its core terrestrial service. Although in 2000 the Labour government agreed to an increase in the BBC's licence fee until its Charter renewal in 2006, it retained the requirements upon the corporation to generate income out of its commercial activities (Hesmondhalgh 2005: 102-3). In part this endorsement of commercial activity was to continue the BBC's leading role in the switchover to digital television.ⁱⁱ However, it also stemmed from the Labour government's desire to increase the global export of television as part of a broader attempt to place the creative industries at the centre of the UK's 'new economy' (Freedman 2003).

The BBC's commercial activities over this period have been focused on exploiting the new domestic and global markets that have emerged with the growth of satellite, cable and digital technologies. In 1997 BBC Worldwide entered into a joint venture with Flextech, called UKTV, to develop a range of UK commercial advertiser-funded satellite and cable channels that were later rolled out on digital (UKTV is now co-owned by BBC Worldwide and Scripps Networks International). The aim of the UKTV channels was to provide a site through which to exploit financially the BBC's extensive back catalogue of programmes (Born 2004: 485), with UKTV having a first look deal on all programmes distributed by BBC Worldwide. The UKTV channels avoided using the BBC name and logo, demonstrating the separation of commercial and public service activities outlined in the BBC Fair Trading Guidelines. However, the names of the UKTV channels did draw on associations with key BBC programmes. The first two channels to be launched, UK Arena and UK Horizons, made reference to long-running BBC programming strands in their titles (the arts strand Arena and the science programme Horizon respectively) (Light 2004: 98). As such, UKTV was drawing on associations with the BBC, while simultaneously distinguishing these commercial channels from the BBC's publicly-funded services. This was important because at the same time the BBC was beginning to launch a range of public service BBC-branded UK digital television channels and radio stations.ⁱⁱⁱ

Within the global marketplace, however, the BBC's logo and name has been a key asset when developing new channels and services. On 19 March 1998 the BBC signed a US\$0.5billion deal with

Discovery to develop global channel brands. The deal led to the development of a number of international commercial television channels (including BBC America), funded by a combination of subscription and advertising. As with the UKTV channels, these overseas channels were developed in part to provide distribution sites for BBC (and other UK) content. More recently, the BBC's review of its commercial activities in 2009 concluded that BBC Worldwide 'should become a more internationally facing business, focused on improving appreciation of the BBC and UK creative industries abroad.' (BBC 2009: 2). The mention of the broader 'UK creative industries' here suggests an attempt to assuage the concerns of the corporation's commercial competitors in the UK market by emphasising the broader benefits that can accrue for the UK creative industries from increased BBC global commercial activity. Furthermore, focusing commercial activity on the global market aims to 'reduce the risk of any friction or overlap with the BBC's public service activity in the UK' (BBC 2009: 7) and justifies the BBC's commercial activities in terms of the BBC's public purpose of 'bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK' (BBC 2009: 6-7).

While the BBC's UK commercial channels avoid using the BBC name, these overseas commercial ventures explicitly exploit the BBC's brand identity. As Chris Becker (2007) has argued in relation to BBC America, this was not simply a matter of drawing on existing qualities associated with the BBC's corporate brand identity. Indeed, Becker argues that in the US the BBC tended to be associated with the rather staid, genteel and upper-middle class values of PBS. BBC America explicitly attempted to alter the US perceptions of the BBC brand by drawing on qualities associated with US premium channels such as HBO (Becker 2007: 276). Over and above this, Becker argues that BBC America affected the broader image of the BBC in the USA, becoming a beacon for programming trends as US producers increasingly looked towards UK formats and programmes for localized adaptation. In providing sites for the sale of BBC programmes and in generating income from subscription/advertising (the two largest profit centres for BBC Worldwide), these international commercial channels are central to the BBC's strategy of generating revenue in order to offset cuts to the licence fee. Furthermore, these channels provide sites for the international distribution of UK programming from other British television companies, helping to enhance the global reputation of UK television and, in doing so, helping to generate work and profit for the British television industry more broadly.

In addition to the development of new domestic and international channels, the rise of digital has also extended the sites for engaging with broadcasting content beyond the television channel or radio station onto the computer and personal media devices. The BBC has responded to this by developing new public service and commercial services. These include an on-demand catch-up service the BBC iPlayer (available in the UK online and through some subscription cable and satellite services) with a global version available by subscription to be launched as a pilot (initially as an iPad app) in 2012, the internet services BBC Online (a UK site including pages for all of its programmes, many of which contain audio-visual content) and BBC.com (an international online service for users outside the UK that carries advertising), as well as BBC Mobile services geared around key content, such as sport, Doctor Who, news and radio.

Each of these new public and commercial services could be understood as a brand extension, building on and extending the BBC's established reputation (brand image) in radio and television broadcasting. Celia Lury argues that when an existing brand is used as the basis for the development of a new product range, the brand manages the development of the product so that new

innovations function in relation to the brand (and must be brand-like) (2004: 27). Although the BBC here is developing new services, rather than new products, each new service functions in relation to the BBC's broader corporate brand identity, whether in attempting to improve the brand image of the BBC in the USA (BBC America), drawing on the positive values associated with BBC programming in the launch of new commercial channels (UKTV) or reiterating the corporation's public service commitment to children's programming (with its public service digital channels CBBC and CBeebies). The brand extension not only draws on the BBC's corporate brand identity, but also contributes to it, illustrating Lury's argument that branding is essentially a two-way form of communication. As such, each of these activities (whether commercial or public service) contributes to the BBC's broader corporate brand identity. While brand management is concerned with developing strategies to control the values associated with the brand, this is difficult to achieve, precisely because brands are dynamic, rather than static, objects (Lury 2004: 96-7).

The difficulties involved in strategic brand management are particularly acute when one considers the relationship between channel brands and programme brands. At the same time that the BBC has been expanding its range of channel and service brands it has also developed a core number of global content brands, including Top Gear, Doctor Who and BBC Earth (natural history programming), on which BBC Worldwide has focused its commercial exploitation. The development of content brands threatens to sever the relationship between the programme and the broadcaster. What is branded is the programme itself and not the corporation that broadcast it; Top Gear rather than the BBC. For a commercial broadcaster this separation of product and corporation is not necessarily a problem as long as it generates profits for the company. However, this is not the case for the BBC. The BBC is required to fulfil a public service remit in exchange for the licence fee. It is, therefore, essential that the BBC's programmes and services are attributed back to the corporation. Indeed, Julie Light (2004: 139) argues that the adoption of marketing at the BBC was explicitly tied to the need for the corporation 'to gain credit for its activities amongst opinion formers (especially those in government) as well as with the general public', quoting a BBC speech from 1999 which made explicit the role of marketing as, 'Completing that virtuous circle, linking consumption [of BBC programmes] with credit back to the BBC and ultimately with approval of the licence fee' (ibid.). As such, the attribution of its programming back to its corporate brand is essential for the BBC to demonstrate that it is fulfilling its public service remit.

The BBC manages this by constructing a temporal framework for exploitation. As Victoria Jaye (Head of IPTV and TV Online Content for BBC Vision) describes, using the example of the UKTV channel Dave:

We currently hold back titles so they don't transmit on Dave immediately, that is, they don't go into commercial release until a certain number of days have passed since they first aired on the BBC's public service channels. This is about ensuring BBC public service gets full credit for originating that content. If it moves too quickly to Dave (or other commercial channels), people start thinking what a brilliant Dave commission that is and the connection with what their licence fee pays for is weakened. This is very dangerous, because if public understanding of what their licence fee pays for is lost, people won't think it's valuable, and this threatens the entire content ecosystem. (interview with the author, 1 June 2010)

BBC programmes produced with public money are first transmitted on the corporation's free-to-air public service channels and made available for seven-day catch-up through the UK BBC iPlayer service before they can be commercially exploited in the UK. This upholds the public service value of universal access and ensures that content funded through public money benefits the public. However, as Jaye indicates, it also aims to ensure that BBC programmes are associated with the BBC's channel and corporate brands. For example, when new Top Gear episodes are first broadcast on BBC Two they are framed by the BBC Two idents that situate the programme within the channel (see Grainge 2009 and Author Removed 2012 for a more detailed discussion of the role of channel idents). On the UK iPlayer the association with BBC Two remains. Although the programme can be accessed through programme title, genre or channel, once located a still image of the programme displays the BBC Two logo in the top left-hand corner and each episode begins with a BBC Two ident identical to those used on the broadcast channel (Fig.4). Here the use of idents and logos helps to reinforce brand associations between specific programmes, the channel that initially broadcast them and the BBC's corporate brand, ensuring that the virtuous circle is completed.

However, emerging viewing practices and commercial imperatives potentially undermine the frameworks through which the BBC attempts to manage the movement and exploitation of its programming across different sites. While the most up-to-date programmes, clips and information are available on the BBC's branded public service sites, viewers are increasingly able to access and engage with BBC programmes on a wide range of different sites that frame the programme in different ways, particularly online. As we shall go on to see, there are broadly three different sites within which BBC programmes appear online: BBC public service websites and services (such as BBC Online and the BBC iPlayer), BBC Worldwide websites, and third party websites and services such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Programme pages on BBC Online always include the BBC corporate logo and often additionally include BBC channel branding, particularly where a programme is clearly associated with a particular channel, such as Sherlock and BBC One or Top Gear and BBC Two (Fig.5). However, certain content brands identified for development by BBC Worldwide also have separate commercial websites. For example, the BBC has a commercial BBC Worldwide website for Top Gear (www.TopGear.com) that carries up-to-date information about the programme as well as clips, games and a shop with branded merchandise. The site does carry the BBC Worldwide logo, but does not include any mention of BBC Two. It also carries advertising (Fig.6).^{iv} While all of these different sites retain BBC corporate branding, they frame the encounter with BBC programming in different ways, with advertising taking particular prominence on the BBC Worldwide site for Top Gear.

As the majority of BBC Worldwide's commercial advertiser-funded websites are aimed at an overseas audience, it is relatively atypical for the BBC to have a commercial and non-commercial UK site for the same programme (as they do for Top Gear). However, BBC Worldwide does operate UK-targeted websites that do carry advertising, such as www.bbcgoodfood.com, and it is not unusual for the BBC's internationally-focused websites to be accessible to UK audiences. For example, although BBC Worldwide's Top Gear site appears in three different versions (for the UK, American and Australian markets), all of these versions are accessible in the UK, while websites for international channels such as BBC America and BBC Entertainment can also be viewed in the UK. The sale of advertising on these sites is part of the broader aim of the 'Brands, Consumer and New Ventures' division of BBC Worldwide that functions to 'acquire the commercial rights to great programmes such as Planet Earth, Doctor Who and Top Gear and find ways of earning money from these across different media and markets.' (BBC Worldwide 2012b). And although not all of these international

websites carry advertising, the relative fluidity of national boundaries on the internet makes it difficult for the BBC to maintain an advertising free space online for a UK audience, complicating its ability to construct a brand image for the corporation in the UK (and particularly overseas) as a 'public space in society which isn't trying to sell anything' (BBC 2010: v).

In addition to developing its own websites, the BBC is increasingly looking to third party websites in order to engage more directly with viewers and to respond to demand for content to be more easily available on multiple platforms. This is particularly important for BBC Worldwide which has as one of its strategic priorities the need to 'develop more direct connections with consumers' (BBC Worldwide 2011: 11, 22-3). Social media have been identified by BBC Worldwide as particularly valuable in achieving this aim:

Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, are particularly key. With Top Gear, for example, we had our first hugely successful experience in building a fanbase online via Facebook [...]. Based on this learning, we then launched a Facebook page for Doctor Who in December 2010, and in just a few months it had 800,000 fans. Via this, we engage daily with fans, give them the most up-to-date news, and provide a single destination for all things Doctor Who. The page has also proved a valuable marketing tool, delivering 12.6% of traffic to the BBC's Doctor Who website to date. (BBC Worldwide 2011: 23)

By August 2012, the BBC's Doctor Who site on Facebook had generated over 2.5 million 'likes'. In addition to fulfilling BBC Worldwide's aim of connecting more directly with its consumers in order to increase loyalty, the site also provides Worldwide with a greater sense of 'what consumers want to build better products for them' (BBC Worldwide 2011: 23). However, BBC Worldwide's use of Facebook and Twitter could also be seen as supporting the corporation's sixth public purpose, 'delivering to the public the benefit of emerging communications technologies and services', specifically the priority to 'Work in partnership with other organisations to help all audiences understand and adopt emerging communications technologies and services' (BBC 2012b). Creating Facebook pages for high profile and popular programmes such as Doctor Who, as well as using Twitter to provide viewers with insight into and often access to creative processes and personnel, could encourage viewers to encounter these communications services for the first time.

As with BBC Worldwide's commercial websites, these Facebook sites include the BBC Worldwide logo but they also carry advertising. Advertising also appears on some of the BBC's YouTube channels, which provide viewers with clips of current and classic programmes. For example, where the BBC iPlayer's episodes of Top Gear begin with the BBC Two logo, clips of the programme on BBC Worldwide's YouTube site begin instead with an advert. BBC programmes can also appear on third party sites as a consequence of their sale to other broadcasters. For example, Dave has a Top Gear site (<http://uktv.co.uk/dave/series/tvseries/1834/>) offering quotes, information, games and a forum for comment, in which the programme is framed within the visual iconography of Dave's distinctive channel brand identity, with no reference to the programme's origination on the BBC. Similarly, episodes of Doctor Who and Top Gear available for purchase through the iTunes store always feature the programmes' logos and visual iconography, but do not always carry the BBC's corporate logo.

These new sites of distribution offer multiple opportunities for the development of programmes such as Top Gear and Doctor Who as content brands that can be expanded across a range of platforms and media in diverse ways.^v In doing so, however, they multiply the encounters that viewers can have with BBC content. While the BBC attempts to use its corporate and channel logos to ensure that its programmes are attributed back to the corporation, these examples demonstrate that online the virtuous circle is not always completed as programmes emerge in non-BBC branded sites. Over and above this, however, these examples also reveal a broader tension between the BBC's public service values and its commercial activities. This is particularly apparent when BBC programming and BBC corporate brand logos emerge within sites, such as YouTube and Facebook, that carry advertising. If the development of programme brands raises the significance of the 'virtuous circle' in ensuring the attribution of programming produced by the BBC back to the corporation, the increasing emergence of the BBC brand within advertiser-funded spaces reveals the difficulties of ensuring 'brand congruence' across all of the BBC's activities, particularly when the BBC brand is defined in part as being free from commercial interests.

Conclusions

While the debates about the commercialization of public service broadcasting raise concerns about the boundaries between public service and commercial aims, in today's digital media environment it has become increasingly difficult for corporations such as the BBC to distinguish between their commercial and their public service activities. Much as the BBC's public service activities have come to depend on financial income from its commercial work, the BBC's commercial activities depend on both the products produced as part of its public service remit (such as its programmes) and the broader reputation of the corporation within the global market. Indeed, this article has argued that the programmes, channels and services developed by the BBC exist in a two-way relationship, drawing on the values associated with the corporation while simultaneously contributing to those values. As such, the BBC's public service reputation and identity is as important to its commercial activities as it is to its public services. This is recognised in the BBC's Global Strategy and Fair Trading Guidelines which state that all of the BBC's activities (whether public service or commercial) must reflect the core values of the BBC brand and its public purposes. These documents attempt to ensure that the BBC's commercial activities do not contravene or undermine the corporation's public service remit. At the same time, however, the BBC's policy documents argue for the separation of public service and commercial activities. From an operational perspective this ensures that the BBC has mechanisms in place to prevent commercial imperatives from threatening editorial and creative decision-making. However, it also aims to protect the corporation's reputation as a public service broadcaster defined through reference to its unique position in the UK as a publicly-funded public service broadcaster free from commercial and state interests.

It is from the perspective of the public's experience of the BBC's products, channels and services that the separation of commercial and public service activities becomes most difficult to manage and this stems from two competing pressures on the BBC that arise from the need for the corporation to justify its public service funding. On the one hand, it is important for the BBC to complete the 'virtuous circle' and ensure that the corporation is recognized as the originator of work paid for by public money. As a publicly-funded broadcaster accountable to the public and the government for the service it provides, the BBC needs to demonstrate how it is spending public money. Ensuring that the BBC's corporate brand logo imbues its channel, service and programme brands is an important

way of completing this 'virtuous circle'. On the other hand, it is important for the BBC to demonstrate that it is free from commercial interests, as this is a key distinction for the corporation as a broadcaster and an important argument for the need for public funding. However, just as completing the 'virtuous circle' is important in bringing credit back to the BBC it also makes it harder for the corporation to distinguish between its commercial and public service work. As we have seen, it is not uncommon (particularly online) for BBC brands to appear within commercial sites funded by advertising. In completing the virtuous circle the BBC may be in danger of undermining its reputation and value as a non-commercial broadcaster. This may leave the BBC more vulnerable to privatization as the continuation of the BBC as a publicly-funded organisation depends significantly on public support for the corporation and the licence fee.

So where does this leave the BBC and other public service broadcasters engaging in commercial activities? Clearly research suggests that viewers value the provision of sites free from advertising and this is one of the key values of public service broadcasting in a highly commodified society. Yet to bar the BBC from placing its content on third party advertiser funded sites would limit its ability to engage with key audiences (such as the youth audience traditionally less engaged with public service broadcasting), while limiting its ability to sell advertising on its commercial sites would restrict an important avenue of revenue. In a highly commercial media environment we can no longer expect the BBC to exist solely as a 'public space in society which isn't trying to sell anything' (BBC 2010: v). Yet this is not to argue that the BBC should be privatized. The licence fee remains an important way of providing the BBC with a base line of funding that is not determined by commercial aims, allowing it to fulfil its public purposes outside of the demands of the market. There is significant evidence that public funding enables broadcasters to operate within the public interest, in part because it ensures that public service broadcasters serve all of the public and not just those of value within a commercial marketplace or with the ability to pay (Curran 2001; Barnett 2004). Just as funding through the licence fee minimizes (while not completely removing) the influence of government on the BBC, maintaining the majority of its funding through the licence fee minimizes (while not completely removing) the influence of the market on the BBC.

The BBC has put in place strategies to manage the relationship between its public service and commercial activities, particular in terms of its institutional and organizational practices. However, more attention could be paid to the potential impact of its commercial activities on the public's experience of the BBC. There are a number of potential avenues here. Further research could usefully examine the extent to which the BBC's public service reputation is undermined when its brand appears within commercial, advertiser-funded spaces. Meanwhile, the BBC could look at the ways in which it communicates the relationship between its commercial and public service activities. A good example of this is in the recent redesign of the BBC UK website which now includes information about the commercial availability of BBC television and radio programmes on all of its programme pages. This information is accompanied by an explanation of why the BBC is providing links to commercial pages (including the BBC's own online shop (www.bbcshop.com)) as well as information about how the suppliers were selected. The BBC also includes a disclaimer at the bottom of its UK commercial websites that explains that 'BBC Worldwide is a commercial company that is owned by the BBC (and just the BBC). No money from the licence fee was used to create this website. The profits we make from it go back to BBC programme-makers to help fund great new BBC programmes.' This could be made more prominent and included in other BBC Worldwide sites that carry advertising, such as the BBC Worldwide YouTube site. The BBC could also look at developing a

more distinctive brand identity for BBC Worldwide that could be used to distinguish more clearly between the BBC's commercial and public service sites. While there is no political will to explore other avenues of funding (such as a levy on commercial broadcasters or an increase to the licence fee) commercial activity has become a practical necessity if we are to have well-funded public service broadcasters that can survive in the digital era. Rather than seeing commercial and public service aims as inherently contradictory, we should be looking at the ways in which broadcasters such as the BBC can better communicate the relationship between their commercial and public service activities while continuing to argue for the social and cultural value of publicly-funded broadcasting.

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Footnotes:

ⁱ For example, the BBC created a number of high profile branding campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s, such as its 'Perfect Day' film produced in 1997, that attributed the diversity and quality of the

corporation's output specifically to the licence fee (see Born 2004; Grainge 2010; Author Removed 2012).

ⁱⁱ In September 2003 the Labour government committed to a policy of digital switchover which would result in analogue television being replaced with digital transmission by 2012 (Starks 2004: 2).

ⁱⁱⁱ As of February 2012 the BBC's slate of domestic television channels had expanded from BBC One and BBC Two to include BBC News 24, BBC Parliament, BBC Three, BBC Four, CBBC, CBeebies and BBC HD. Meanwhile, its domestic radio stations had expanded from Radio 1, 2, 3 and 4 to include Radio 5 Live, Radio 5 Live Sports Extra, Radio 4 Extra, Radio 6 Music, Radio 1 Xtra and the BBC Asian Network. The BBC also provides radio services for the nations and regions.

^{iv} It is worth noting that the BBC's commercial sites, such as www.topgear.com and www.bbcgoodfood.com carry the BBC Worldwide version of the BBC's corporate logo in which the BBC letters in white blocks are framed by a pink and purple box. It is arguable whether there is sufficient brand awareness of the difference between this and the BBC's corporate brand logo.

^v Top Gear has also been extended as a transmedia text, including extensive merchandising, overseas sales and spin-offs (such as a live show). Evans (2011) offers similar examples in relation to Doctor Who.