

# MAPPING DIGITAL MEDIA: GATEKEEPING IN DIGITAL MEDIA

By Peter Olaf Looms



# Gatekeeping in Digital Media

WRITTEN BY

Peter Olaf Looms<sup>1</sup>

Who decides what is going to be covered on the TV news each evening? Why do pay-TV and mobile phone operators ask consumers to sign up for at least six months or even longer?

For anyone interested in the workings of media, “gatekeeping” is a central concept. It provides a way of understanding *organizational processes*: how journalists and managers source, filter and edit content on its way to the end user.

Gatekeeping helps us understand the ecology of the media market, in particular *competition and cost*, by explaining how incumbents defend their market positions—and why keeping customers is so important.

Gatekeeping also involves checks and balances including regulation of media. Here the emphasis is on how gatekeeping affects the workings of the economy, and how governments strike a balance between top-down regulation and free-for-all competition.

Gatekeeping need not be insidious if the control mechanisms are transparent and the implications are clear. In conclusion, the paper proposes three actions that can strengthen the transparency of, and in, gatekeeping.

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# Mapping Digital Media

The values that underpin good journalism, the need of citizens for reliable and abundant information, and the importance of such information for a healthy society and a robust democracy: these are perennial, and provide compass-bearings for anyone trying to make sense of current changes across the media landscape.

The standards in the profession are in the process of being set. Most of the effects on journalism imposed by new technology are shaped in the most developed societies, but these changes are equally influencing the media in less developed societies.

The Media Program of the Open Society Foundations has seen how changes and continuity affect the media in different places, redefining the way they can operate sustainably while staying true to values of pluralism and diversity, transparency and accountability, editorial independence, freedom of expression and information, public service, and high professional standards.

The **Mapping Digital Media** project, which examines these changes in-depth, aims to build bridges between researchers and policy-makers, activists, academics and standard-setters across the world.

The project assesses, in the light of these values, the global opportunities and risks that are created for media by the following developments:

- the switchover from analog broadcasting to digital broadcasting
- growth of new media platforms as sources of news
- convergence of traditional broadcasting with telecommunications.

As part of this endeavour, Open Society Media Program has commissioned introductory papers on a range of issues, topics, policies and technologies that are important for understanding these processes. Each paper in the **Reference Series** is authored by a recognised expert, academic or experienced activist, and is written with as little jargon as the subject permits.

The reference series accompanies reports into the impact of digitization in 60 countries across the world. Produced by local researchers and partner organizations in each country, these reports examine how these changes affect the core democratic service that any media system should provide—news about political, economic and social affairs. Cumulatively, these reports will provide a much-needed resource on the democratic role of digital media.

The **Mapping Digital Media** project builds policy capacity in countries where this is less developed, encouraging stakeholders to participate and influence change. At the same time, this research creates a knowledge base, laying foundations for advocacy work, building capacity and enhancing debate.

The **Mapping Digital Media** is a project of the Open Society Media Program, in collaboration with the Open Society Information Program.

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# Introduction

The metaphor of gatekeeping conjures up images of old walled cities. Common to all such cities was the presence of a gate—sometimes more than one—built into the wall so that access to and from the city could be controlled.

Gatekeeping had implications for the movement of people as well as vehicles, goods and livestock. Gatekeeping was intimately connected to security and defence, trade, taxation and public health. Gatekeepers themselves were often soldiers or employed by the city. In addition, some cities had internal gates to control access to and from the keep and other buildings of strategic importance. It so happens that the area around the gate was often used for disseminating information. Announcements and proclamations, details of tolls and taxes, weights and measures were displayed here to inform passers-by.

# I. What Is Gatekeeping in the Media?

The term “gatekeeping” is current today not only in media policy and information science but also in sociology, management and the law. Yet there is little consensus from one field to the next about the meaning of the term and the theoretical frameworks that underpin its use. Some frameworks are value or process-oriented while others look at gatekeeping and media stakeholders.

There are gates at different locations within organizations and between them. Gatekeeping is a process that influences the passage of information and media, but equally can be conceived as a mechanism by which various media stakeholders compete for power and for which governments create a framework in which competition takes place.

Some authors use the metaphor when talking about *editorial processes* having a bearing on what content reaches the viewer. The focus is on how journalists and managers source, filter and edit content on its way to the end user. Here the gate is found within the organization itself.

Others focus on the ecology of the media market. Gatekeeping in this context is a question of *competition and cost*. The focus is on incumbents defending their market positions, or new players wishing to enter the media market. The gate in this case is usually the point at which the organization controls access to media and uses the gate to gain a competitive advantage.

Still others look at gatekeeping in connection with *government regulation*. Here the emphasis is on how gatekeeping affects the workings of the economy and how governments use competition law, media regulation and licensing to create a framework for the media market.

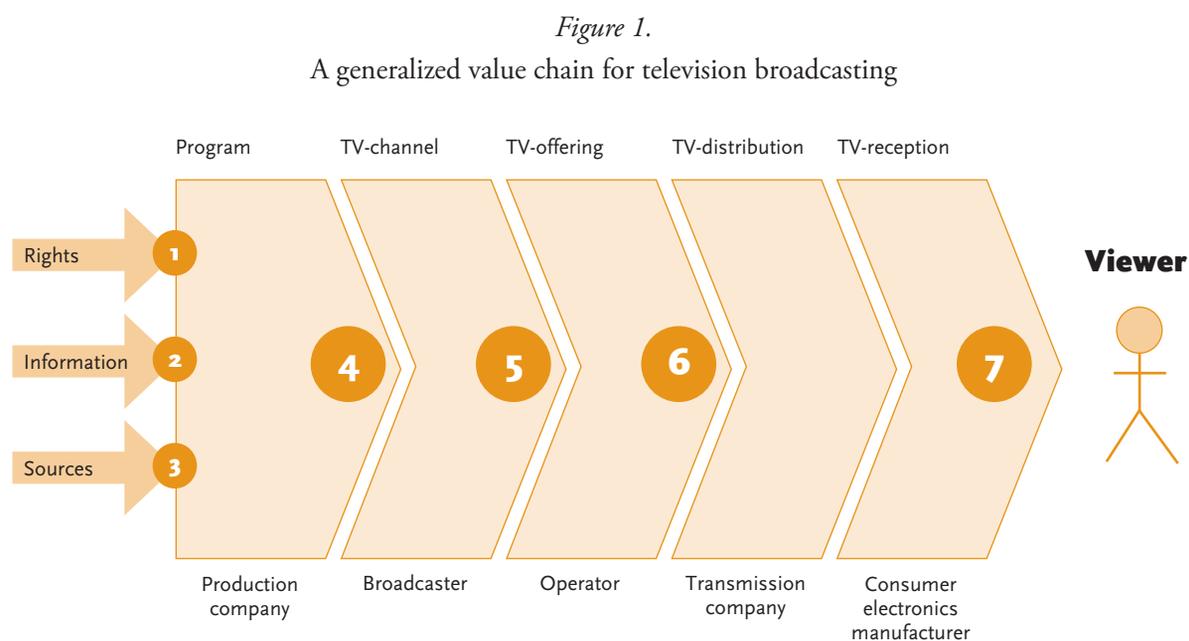
In the broadest sense, the study of gatekeeping is part and parcel of *ideologies and politics*, as it involves analysis of the media industries and how these affect the rights and well-being of citizens both nationally and globally.

It is notable that gatekeeping research and analysis has rather neglected the relationship between the gatekeeper and the gated, and also the impact of gatekeeping on the gated and other stakeholders, from individual journalists to organizations and national authorities.

## II. How Is Gatekeeping Carried Out?

Gatekeeping is best explained by examining its application to a range of cases, highlighting in each case where the gate is, who the gatekeepers and gated are, what the gatekeeping mechanism is, and what the implications of gatekeeping are for the various stakeholders.

*Value chains* can be useful for explaining where the gate is. Figure 1 shows a generalised value chain for television broadcasting which should be read from left to right:



On the left are various inputs for television (e.g. information and media resources—circle 2, sources for news items—circle 3, and holders of rights and permissions such as FIFA and the International Olympic Committee in connection with sporting events—circle 1).

These provide the starting point for workflows in the first box: production. This encompasses television programs, services to make programs accessible to those with handicaps (e.g. subtitling and audio description), and information about the programs themselves (e.g. Electronic Programming Guides or EPGs, spots, trailers and advertising in other media, all of which are needed so that viewers can find programs). There is a gate—circle 4—between production and the channel controller at the broadcaster.

In the second box, programs are scheduled to create a TV channel ready for playout (i.e., transmission to the network). There is a gate—circle 5—controlled by the broadcaster at the point at which the signal is handed over to the platform operator. In the third box, an operator aggregates channels into a television service. And there is a gate—circle 6—controlled by the platform operator, where the channels are provided to the transmission company (satellite, cable, terrestrial or IP) for delivery to viewers.

The fourth and fifth boxes involve networks for getting the service from the operator to the viewer. There is no gate at the transmission company. The sixth box covers the reception and display of the television service on a screen and the remote control device for discovering and viewing individual programs (the outputs). The television receiver and conditional access unit can be regarded as a separate gate—circle 7.

On the far right is the viewer. Above and below—exerting direct or indirect influence on the value chain—are media regulators and competition (both competitors and competition law).

# III. Gatekeeping on Free-to-air and Pay-TV

## Being Able to Watch TV Programs

In the case of a free-to-air digital terrestrial TV platform such as Freeview in the UK, as the name “free-to-air” suggests, there appears to be no “main gate.” A consumer can go into a retailer and buy just about any brand of terrestrial receiver. It can be an integrated digital TV receiver or just a set-top box that can be hooked up to the existing TV receiver. Once there is a signal from an aerial or dish and the receiver has been tuned, the consumer can watch any of the free-to-air channels available in the area.

In the case of pay-TV, the main gate is usually the television receiver itself (circle 7 in Figure 1). The gatekeeper is the pay-TV operator who charges for access to various program bundles, some of which will contain a mix of general channels and “premium” content such as channels, sporting events and films not available from other operators.

The gatekeeping mechanism is usually technical. The operator requires the subscriber (the “gated”) to obtain and use specific hardware and software to receive the service. This is a conditional-access unit requiring a smart card provided by the operator to be able to see encrypted programs, or a set-top box with a specific application programming interface (API) and technical features meeting the requirements of the operator, or both of the above.

Because a pay-TV subscriber has joining costs—“investing” in both proprietary equipment and paying a subscription—potential customers should weigh up the perceived value of the pay-TV television service against the exit costs should they choose to leave the service. If they are not aware of the gatekeeping mechanism implicit in pay-TV, this lack of awareness will have an impact on their freedom of choice at a later point. The joining costs can create an economic barrier that prevents *churn*—viewers switching to a competing pay-TV service. In the UK, a subscriber would find it costly to switch from BSkyB to Virgin Media, as this would require getting a new set-top box and perhaps even a new personal video recorder (PVR) as the old satellite box and PVR are incompatible with Virgin’s requirements.

Churn causes significant expense for operators. Anything that reduces annual churn rates also keeps costs down (both the investment in equipment and services for the departed customer, but also the additional cost of “recruiting” a replacement customer).

This kind of gatekeeping mechanism that ties the gated to the gatekeeper makes it attractive for operators to invest in new services. For example, after BSkyB launched its Sky+ PVR package in 2001, churn among existing customers reportedly dropped by half. The package was an inducement to keep subscribers loyal to the operator. The perceived value of the service far outweighed the additional future exit costs for the subscriber.

## The Electronic Program Guide (EPG)

The gatekeeping mechanism on pay-TV may also involve dissemination in the same way as the traditional city gate. While the city gate posted announcements, taxes, weights and measures, the operator often has its own information portal and electronic programming guide (EPG) for subscribers (circle 6 in Figure 1). The fact that the operator has control over the EPG reflects the fact that pay-TV operators get income from a number of sources:

- Subscription fees from viewers
- Advertising on the digital TV portal
- Carriage fees from channels wishing to make use of the pay-TV platform

The owners of pay-TV operators may also own some of the channels on the platform (e.g. News Corporation owns a controlling share of BSkyB including Sky News; MTG owns Viasat and TV3 in Scandinavia).

For this reason, the operator may have a stronger commercial interest in some channels than in others, and act as a gatekeeper when choosing what to market. Apart from promoting such offerings in an information channel with promos and trailers for forthcoming attractions, the operator can make use of the EPG, where channels on the top page are at an advantage compared to those that require scrolling down to a subsequent screen.

In some countries, there is no regulation of the operator and the default ranking of TV channels in the EPG. In such cases, the visibility of a given channel will depend on its agreement with the operator (gatekeeper) to get a good position at the top of the EPG.

In other countries, the regulator has rules governing channel ranking even on Pay TV, in some cases including stipulations that major public service channels be located at the top, or that the channel ranking reflects the market share of the channels in question.

A free-to-air operator, by contrast, has no commercial imperative to favour specific channels. The main source of income is carriage fees from the various TV channels. The provision of an EPG by the operator is merely

a matter of aggregating program schedule metadata in a coherent and meaningful way, and distributing the metadata with the television programs, allowing individual television manufacturers to display the EPG as they see fit, within the framework of national or regional regulation.

However, having said this, concern about the potential impact of the EPG as a gatekeeping mechanism appears to have been overstated and may now be on the decline. After all, many or most viewers habitually watch a limited number of channels, even if they subscribe to scores or even hundreds of channels. For these viewers, the EPG is only used when they want to see something specific and need to find out when the program starts, or use the “bookmark” feature to make sure that the set turns on and is tuned to the program when it starts.

Over time, the operator’s influence is likely to fall as consumer electronics manufacturers allow viewers to customise their TV EPG, as has long been the case for TV EPGs on the internet. Another source of competition is subscription-based third-party EPGs that are delivered by other means to the television receiver that the viewer pays for separately. An example of this is IceTV that won a landmark intellectual property case against the Nine television network in Australia in 2009.

## **E-inclusion and Access Services**

Finally, the lack of ‘e-inclusion’ may be a gatekeeping issue. About 15 per cent of adult Europeans have physical, sensory or cognitive impairments that affect their ability to benefit fully from television viewing. Impairment levels around the world are quite similar. To benefit from watching television, this group needs various access services (primarily subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing, audio description and visual signing).

Pay-TV operators have the wherewithal to retransmit television TV access services originally produced for digital terrestrial television so that those with impairments (such as hearing loss or poor sight) can watch television.

However, the differently-abled audience may not be a high priority for the operators. Withholding the access service (whether by accident or intention) can be regarded as a gatekeeping mechanism: subscribers receive television but cannot benefit from it. This is particularly the case for IPTV operators that have not designed their platforms to handle the access services such as subtitles and audio description associated with the TV programming. Here the gate can be at circle 5, 6 or 7 in Figure 1.

Their dilemma is whether to change their network architecture and receivers to accommodate the needs of small, commercially insignificant audience segments. The imperative for action, as Figure 1 suggests, is the influence of competition from other players and regulatory requirements for the provision of television access services.

## Hybrid Broadcast and Broadband Television

It was mentioned above that free-to-air digital terrestrial operators do not have a gatekeeper mechanism in the receiver. This situation may be changing with the introduction of hybrid television receivers that have both digital broadcast and broadband connections.

At the end of 2008, Samsung announced a new range of hybrid television receivers for the European market that allowed the viewer to view widgets<sup>2</sup> with various internet services overlaying the television signal. Samsung had made an agreement with Yahoo! to provide news widgets on such screens. Unlike widgets on computers, these television widgets are hard-wired by the television receiver manufacturer, so the user cannot use the television screen freely to surf the internet. This kind of arrangement where the viewer does not have freedom of choice is called a “walled garden,” and the gate is at circle 6 in Figure 1.

Imagine a scenario in which you are tuned to the BBC to catch up with the news. Instead of seeing the BBC’s digital text news overlay, you are offered Yahoo! news widgets. You switch to Sky News and again are offered Yahoo! widgets rather than Sky’s digital text service. It is not surprising that this incident caused considerable concern among broadcasters, as did the hybrid broadcast/broadband initiatives of other consumer electronics manufacturers, such as Philips. Consumers, too, were dismayed when they discovered that the “walled garden” prevented them from freely accessing websites of their choice on their hybrid TV sets.

In the Samsung case, the gatekeeper was the manufacturer of the television receiver. The gate was the television receiver with a broadband connection, but the gate itself was concealed from the consumer (the gated), who was probably informed about this feature at the time of purchase—though not necessarily, or with a clear explanation. Gatekeeping in this case involves the pre-selection of news widgets that the viewer cannot change and that are in potential conflict with comparable services from the broadcaster to whom the viewer is tuned. If the widget feature does not contain localization (i.e. allowing for the translation into languages other than English and cultural adaptation of the content to meet the requirements of users in a given territory), the same TV set in, say, Denmark would just be a source of irritation to its owner.

The widget agreement between Samsung and Yahoo!—the concealed gate—may have been drawn up with the best of intentions, but the lack of transparency and the implications of “hard-wired” news services using widgets were, and are, a source of concern.

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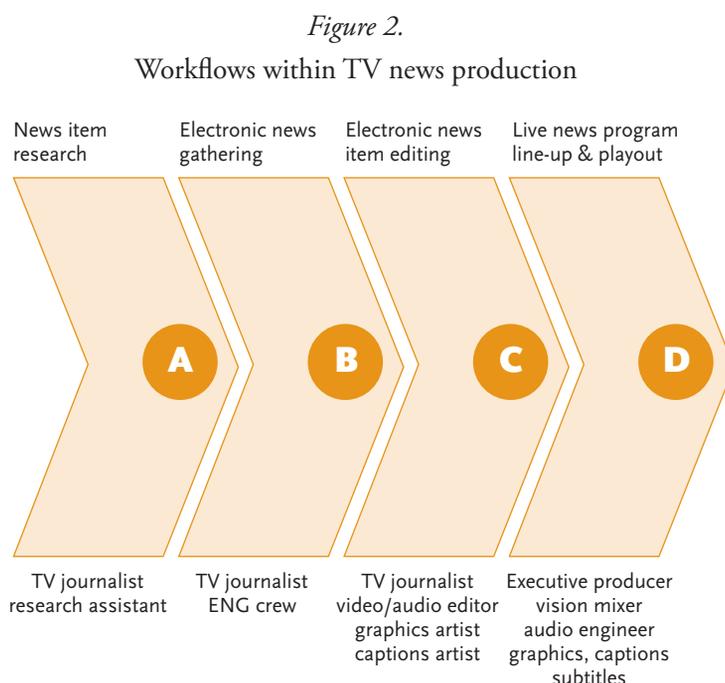
2. A widget is a small window of variable size that can be positioned at will in a layer in front of the television (or computer) picture. It allows the viewer to do specific things like check the news or see a weather forecast. The word probably derives from “window gadget.”

## IV. Gatekeeping in Television News

Research into gatekeeping and news has identified the points and ways in which news is shaped in news production.<sup>3</sup> Figure 2 is essentially the production box from Figure 1. It shows the workflows and the main internal stakeholders involved in television news. Recalling the “walled city” metaphor, this process can be regarded as going on within the city and involving a number of internal gates.

As this figure shows, the idea for a traditional TV news story can crop up anywhere. Individual journalists work on stories or news items assigned at or after the first editorial meeting of the day. The news is shaped as it passes through various gates (shown as circles A to D in Figure 2).

Numerous logistical and editorial decisions affect the content and form of the story during research, news-gathering, editing and processing. A particular news item may be finished and ready for airing only to be postponed or dropped as the result of decisions by the executive producer.



3. See Pamela J. Shoemaker and Tim P. Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory*, New York, 2009.

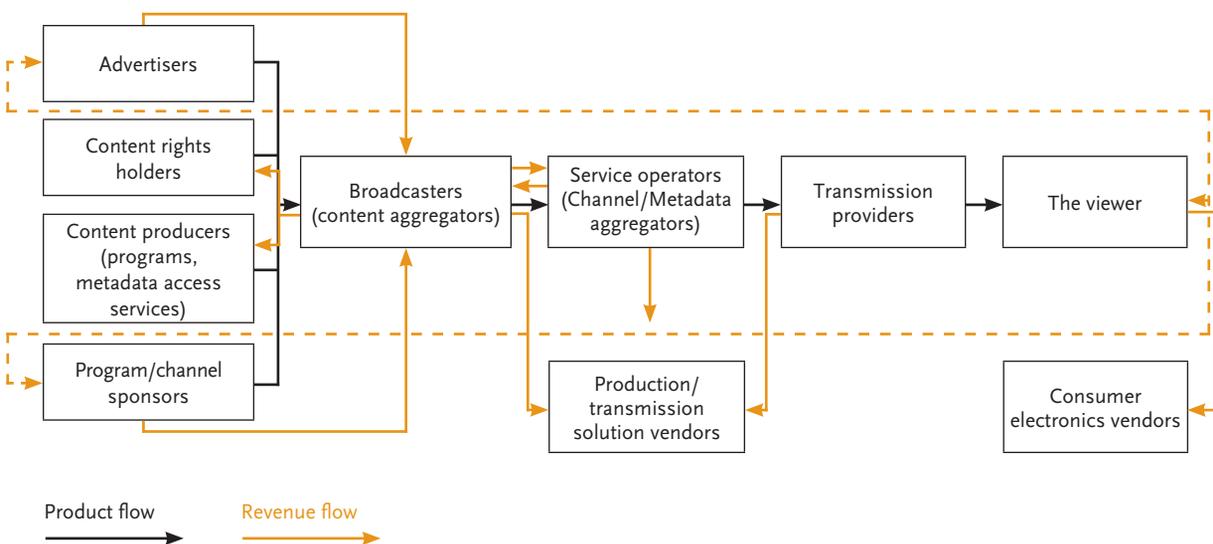
Internally, gatekeeping in news may take place at several levels:

- At the level of the individual journalist or employee, acting as a gatekeeper in terms of the production and selection of news items from external sources (circles A , B and C).
- Collective gatekeeping in the form of explicit or implicit communication routines (“news-worthiness”, policies about the use of official or formal sources and the backwash effect of deadlines and the logistics of having to go on air with the news)—circle D.
- Organizational gatekeeping (e.g. organizational socialization which leads staff to adopt the value system of the news organization that employs them, and the groupthink phenomenon in which the pressure to reach consensus may override the contributions of individual members of staff).

We saw in the case of the news widget that there could be gates between the organization and external stakeholders other than the viewer, and that these gates could be difficult to identify.

Figure 3 shows the value chain overlaid with revenue streams for commercial, free-to-air broadcasters. At this level—that of “television ecology”—the broadcaster interacts with a host of stakeholders including advertisers, sponsors, content rights holders and independent television production companies as well as service operators for pay-TV services carrying the channel. It interacts both directly and indirectly with viewers who are both its audience and its product in relation to advertisers.

Figure 3.  
Commercial broadcasters—value chain and revenue streams



The dotted lines indicate the indirect revenue flows from the viewer back to the advertiser (advertising is an investment to increase product sales) and the sponsor (TV sponsorship increases the brand awareness of the sponsor’s product or service and has indirect financial implications). All of these product and revenue flows lead to a complex set of relationships where the broadcaster can be the gatekeeper or the gated, depending on the nature of the relationship.

## V. What Is the Impact of Gatekeeping?

The examples of free-to-air and subscription television given above illustrate the impact of gatekeeping in the media market.

- *Within an organization*, gatekeeping covers the explicit and implicit processes that cover the sourcing, production and editing of media from start to finish. This is of particular importance for news media as viewers need to be aware of gatekeeping processes in order to reach their own conclusions about the news they have seen. Henry Jenkins (2006) and his colleagues discuss such challenges as part of media literacy. One of their concerns is transparency. Talking about the parallel challenges of online media, Jenkins notes:

Increasingly, content comes to us already branded, already shaped through an economics of sponsorship, if not overt advertising. We do not know how much these commercial interests influence what we see and what we don't see.

He mentions a study by Fischman et al (2004), which established that high school journalists felt constrained by the strong social ties in their school, unwilling to publish articles they believed would be received negatively by their peers or that might disrupt the social dynamics. Jenkins concludes that:

One important goal of media education should be to encourage young people to become more reflective about the ethical choices they make as participants and communicators and the impact they have on others.

- *At the organizational level*, gatekeeping covers the explicit and implicit processes that allow incumbents to maintain or defend their competitiveness in the media market. For new entrants in a relatively mature market (e.g., a company offering some kind of pay-TV), the use of proprietary technologies and solutions by those already in the market constitutes an entry barrier. In many nation-states the media industry is subject to media regulation and competition legislation. In others, there is self-regulation and little or no competition legislation. Taken together, the totality of these forces has an impact on the television programming available to the viewer. The implication of this kind of gatekeeping for consumers and viewers is that transparency is also an issue here. Media education needs to cover not only reflection on

the ethics of editorial processes but also the dynamics of the media market and how it affects them as consumers and citizens.

- The highest level—involving *politics and ideology*—ultimately determines the rules of play for media in a given territory. Broadcasting in China, for example, is regarded as a natural means for the state to communicate with its citizens, and for this reason all media are controlled by the State Information Office. This even leads to censorship of public statements by top public figures reported in the media. In other parts of the world, such as Western Europe, “he who pays the piper” does not necessarily “call the tune.” Public service broadcasters are regulated at arm’s length, offering considerable editorial independence from the government. The balance between state-operated, public service and commercial television in a given territory will reflect the prevailing political and ideological climate and thus determine what media are available to citizens in that country. Ideally, media education should provide citizens with an understanding of the interplay between politics, ideology and the media, but this is usually a decision made by those in power.

## VI. What Does Gatekeeping Mean for Media Policy?

As the previous sections have shown, there are gates both within a television organization and elsewhere within the television value chain. In some cases the gates, the gatekeepers, the gated and the gatekeeping mechanisms are clearly visible and their impact on digital television is clear to see.

What characterises digital media in the current decade compared with those of the last century is the fulfilment of the “anything, anytime, anywhere and on any device” paradigm. Customization is not enough. In order to succeed, digital media need to offer personalization—even when we talk about social media.

What the examples quoted earlier about gatekeeping and digital television demonstrate is that control mechanisms are in place at numerous points and levels. Gatekeeping is not a one-way process, in that gatekeepers and the gated influence each other; for example, executive TV producers decide which news stories are covered, and their decisions are influenced in turn—whether directly by their managements, or indirectly by other stakeholders.

A second issue that emerges as the result of technological convergence is that legislation and regulation risk losing touch with current realities. When media such as television can be delivered on a number of different distribution platforms, regulating broadcast technologies but leaving the internet free creates distortions in the media market.

A lack of transparency about gates, gatekeeping mechanisms and their impact seems to be the main challenge, and one which will become ever greater as new media devices and networks emerge. Two recent examples are as follows:

- *The Apple corporation* and its approval system for apps on the iPhone and iPad that are sold through its App Store. Apple has a legitimate concern to ensure that third-party apps work. However, the approval process is not transparent and has led to discussions with competitors who submit apps for approval. The comparable app store for Android apps run by Google may not suffer from exactly the same weakness,

but by the same token Google has a dominant position in the market for advertising in relation to searches, the workings of which are far from transparent.

- *Internet service providers (ISPs) and network neutrality.* Many ISPs are pushing to have different online “qualities”—being able to offer a premium service and a second-tier, “best-effort” service where the content has no guarantee of being treated on a par with content willing to pay for delivery. Regulators around the globe including the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the European Commission have expressed concerns about the implications of dropping the current network neutrality without clear rules governing the workings of such a two-tier approach.

## VII. What Actions Are Needed to Keep Gatekeeping under Control?

Clearly, gatekeeping in digital media other than television is widespread and its nature is neither well-documented nor understood by the population at large. Gatekeeping need not be insidious if the control mechanisms are transparent and the implications are clear. Here are three actions that can strengthen the transparency of, and in, gatekeeping.

### **a) Make full use of the legal and regulatory mechanisms that are already in place**

In democratic states, competition legislation and media regulation often contribute to promoting pluralism and diversity in digital media provision. Free-to-air broadcasting funded from license or advertising revenues offer opportunities to lay down clear rules to ensure universal access and some degree of transparency.

As broadcast signals and the internet do not always follow national borders, international or global provisions can ensure that television operators do not exploit national differences to operate in one country and upload television signals from another where media legislation is less demanding. An example of gatekeeping that does exploit such differences is access services for digital satellite television, where channels uplinked to satellites from the UK for Scandinavian audiences do not meet the UK's stringent requirements set by the media regulator Ofcom. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities came into force in 2008, shortly after the European Commission's directive on audiovisual services. Article 3c of the Audiovisual Media Services (AVMS) Directive contains rules that aim to make audiovisual content on television and the web increasingly accessible for those with functional impairments. Four European consumer electronics manufacturers have signed a voluntary agreement to incorporate technology for the reception of access services in their products. National markets such as the UK have made impressive strides towards 100 percent subtitling and 10 percent audio description on all major channels. Elsewhere in Europe, compliance with the UN Convention and the AVMS Directive is incomplete and patchy, only in part because of the impact of the economic downturn on digital media.

If compliance is to be forthcoming, specific production targets are needed, such as those in place in the UK or the Nordic countries stipulating the proportion of television programming for which subtitling and audio description must be provided. There also needs to be a consultation mechanism so that legitimate practical and commercial concerns can be voiced by those affected. The roadmap for increasing access services needs to be explicit and realistic in terms of the ability of central stakeholders to pay for such services.

Competition legislation and the threat of possible intervention by a regulator may be enough in, say, the case of Apple's approval mechanism for apps produced by competitors. In the related case of a smart phone platform such as Android (developed by Google) it may be difficult to document whether Google's dominant position in the sale of targeted internet advertising also spills over onto the playing field of Android smart phones.

If we look at competition in a broader sense, there is often legislation governing *fair trading* that involves the ethics of product and service descriptions in advertising and marketing and terms and conditions of sale. Ultimately, those doing business in the media market have a corporate moral responsibility or even a corporate social responsibility to third parties including consumers. Consumers and special interest groups can make use of such legal mechanisms and the relevant regulators to rectify, say, cases of misrepresentation or unethical behaviour when dealing with vulnerable groups (for example children or the elderly).

In some countries there are professional bodies such as advertising councils or trade associations which handle complaints about members with the ultimate sanction of exclusion. When it comes to news and the press, many countries have a Press Council that acts as a regulator to enforce high standards of professional conduct. They have the power to force members to publish its rulings in specific cases.

## **b) Make full use of investigative journalism and academic research to understand the workings and implications of gatekeeping**

Many aspects of gatekeeping have been probed by investigative journalism and academic research since the term was coined more than 50 years ago. The dynamics of gatekeeping in traditional media are quite well covered and understood. What is needed now is broader coverage and analysis of digital media, not only digital broadcasting but also the working of social media on the internet and on handheld devices in the Web 2.0 era. Schools of journalism, business, economics, and media can all make invaluable contributions.

## **c) Create a greater awareness of media production and distribution in education**

When it comes to language and media, school curricula have changed significantly in much of the industrialized world over the last four decades. Since the 1970s, the focus of mother tongue language programs has been expanded to include not only literature but also a wide range of audiovisual media including advertising. As the technologies to produce such media became widespread and relatively cheap, schoolchildren gained hands-on experience in producing and distributing media (first with radio, then with television, websites and mobile apps). Getting children to reflect on the ethical aspects of media production is one of the most

powerful ways of empowering them to become active and informed citizens. By making use of the results of gatekeeper research, media literacy initiatives at school and university can lay the foundation for a great awareness about how media are produced and funded, and can highlight how business models based on license funding, advertising or subscriptions influence the resulting media.

Education need not confine itself to schools and universities, however. NGOs and special interest groups can help their members by arranging workshops on media production and distribution to highlight the workings and implications of gatekeeping.

## Further Reading

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**Mapping Digital Media** is a project of the **Open Society Media Program** and the **Open Society Information Program**.

## Open Society Media Program

The Media Program works globally to support independent and professional media as crucial players for informing citizens and allowing for their democratic participation in debate. The program provides operational and developmental support to independent media outlets and networks around the world, proposes engaging media policies, and engages in efforts towards improving media laws and creating an enabling legal environment for good, brave and enterprising journalism to flourish. In order to promote transparency and accountability, and tackle issues of organized crime and corruption the Program also fosters quality investigative journalism.

## Open Society Information Program

The Open Society Information Program works to increase public access to knowledge, facilitate civil society communication, and protect civil liberties and the freedom to communicate in the digital environment. The Program pays particular attention to the information needs of disadvantaged groups and people in less developed parts of the world. The Program also uses new tools and techniques to empower civil society groups in their various international, national, and local efforts to promote open society.

## Open Society Foundations

The Open Society Foundations work to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. Working with local communities in more than 70 countries, the Open Society Foundations support justice and human rights, freedom of expression, and access to public health and education.

For more information:

Open Society Media Program  
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