

NEWS

FROM AROUND THE GLOBE



Back in time: 50 years ago at the Eurovision Song Contest – one of the most popular public service broadcast TV programmes. In 1969, there were, unusually, 4 winners – France, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK, pictured above and flanking the previous year's winner. The contest, held at the Teatro Real in Madrid, luckily had four medals available as some were intended for the song writers

BROADCASTING

PUBLIC SERVICE LINK TO DEMOCRACY

A healthy democracy is closely linked to strong public service media (PSM), according to the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) in a report, "Democracy & PSM". The EBU says it demonstrates how countries with robust public service broadcasting tend to rank higher in a democracy index while countries with weak provision of PSM have a lower level of democracy, although the EBU does say that the correlations do not imply direct causation. The report finds that in countries where PSM are well-funded and enjoy a high market share:

- People are more active in politics
 - There is more political stability and an absence of violence
 - Corruption is under control
 - If citizens also believe their public service broadcaster is politically independent, they tend to be more satisfied with their democracy.
- "Healthy PSM are thus closely linked to citizens' state of wellbeing."

David Fernandez-Quijada, head of the EBU's media intelligence service, said the report also shows that strong PSM are well correlated with high levels of press freedom in a country. "As free and independent media are key for a healthy democracy, well-funded PSM that are valued by citizens make a hugely positive contribution to society," he said.

He added that in a world where people's trust in media and institutions is at an all-time low and people are barraged by fake news and disinformation online, PSM are where people turn for trusted news and information; their news brands are among the most trusted in more than 80% of European markets. "To protect European democracy, we must ensure PSM are well-funded and secure and easily accessible by all citizens across all platforms," Fernandez-Quijada said.

The EBU has also joined a group led by the BBC that aims to tackle disinformation following a "trusted news summit" held in the summer. *The public version of the PCM report can be downloaded at bit.ly/2lp7di5*

■ Former BBC director-general Mark Thompson, and now CEO of the New York Times, has warned in a lecture in the UK that British "cultural sovereignty" is under threat from global digital players. He said: "British creators make first-class programmes for Netflix, Amazon and the other American streamers, but there's a crucial difference between producing great content to fit someone else's creative agenda, and commissioning and controlling it yourself." Meanwhile, Sharon White, head of Ofcom, has suggested a levy on media platforms to fund public service broadcasting.

DIGITAL DIVIDE

CONNECTIVITY STALLS

Traditional approaches to driving internet network rollout and uptake are failing to reach the remaining half of the global population still lacking online access, according to a report by the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development. To counter slowing global growth, the report advocates new collaborative strategies to drive the concept of "meaningful universal connectivity" through greater emphasis on resource sharing and a more holistic approach that treats broadband as a basic public utility and vital enabler of global development.

The report, titled "The state of broadband 2019: Broadband as foundation for sustainable development", notes that global growth in households connected to the internet is slowing, rising only slightly to 54.8% from 53.1% last year. In low-income countries, household internet adoption improved by only 0.8% on average. See bit.ly/2myelsy

PRIVACY

FACEBOOK CONSULTS

Facebook has called on regulators and other experts to answer questions that could help it with a strategy to protect user privacy while meeting demand for increased data portability. In a white paper, Facebook has noted that laws such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the US state of California's Consumer Privacy Act require it to offer tools making it easier for users to transfer their data from one service to another. But it said complex questions about what and whose data should be transferable, how to share it in a manner which fully protects user privacy, and who is liable for misuse after a transfer remain unanswered and clear rules are needed. See Facebook's white paper at bit.ly/2kwX5mP

RIGHT TO BE FORGOTTEN

CJEU RULES ON GOOGLE

Google has won a case at the EU Court of Justice (CJEU) against French regulator, Commission nationale de L'informatique et des libertés (CNIL), over the "right to be forgotten" rules. The CJEU has ruled: "The operator of a search engine is not required to carry out a de-referencing on all versions of its search engine. It is, however, required to carry out that de-referencing on the versions corresponding to all the member states and to put in place measures discouraging internet users from gaining access, from one of the member states, to the links in question which appear on versions of that search engine outside the EU."

SPECTRUM

GSMA CLAIMS HARMS FROM HIGH PRICES

The GSMA, the mobile operators body, has issued a report with the main finding that the negative impacts of high spectrum prices on consumers “can no longer be disputed”. The report, titled “The impact of spectrum prices on consumers”, says that countries with poor spectrum policies – which either inflate spectrum or delay spectrum assignments – “are leading to millions of people being left unable to access mobile broadband services or experiencing reduced network quality”.

“Spectrum auctions can’t be viewed as cash cows anymore,” said Brett Tarnutzer, the GSMA’s head of spectrum. “Any government that prices spectrum to maximise revenue now does so with full knowledge that its actions will have negative repercussions on citizens and the development of mobile services.”

The GSMA study is claimed to be the first to provide strong evidence to directly link high spectrum prices, and

other spectrum management practices, to negative consumer outcomes, such as slow network rollout, reduced quality of service and poor mobile coverage.

The key findings for the period 2010 to 2017 are:

- In developed countries, costs played a significant role in slowing the rollout of 4G networks and drove a long-term reduction in 4G network quality

- In developing countries, spectrum prices were, on average, almost three times more expensive than in developed countries in relation to expected revenues, and slowed down rollout of both 3G and 4G networks and drove long-term reductions in overall network quality

- In the countries studied with the highest spectrum prices, the average mobile operator’s 4G network would cover 7.5% more of the population if it had acquired spectrum at the median spectrum price.

The report is at bit.ly/2mcMwWv

DIGITAL ECONOMY

GERMANY PROPOSES COMPETITION GOALS

A commission of experts on competition law set up by Germany’s minister for economic affairs and energy has made recommendations for a new competition framework for the digital economy. The commission believes that the practical power of consumers to dispose of their own data must be improved, that clear rules of conduct for dominant platforms must be introduced, legal certainty for cooperation in the digital sector must be enhanced, and the institutional linkage between competition law and other digital regulation must be strengthened. With a view to attaining these goals, it has drawn up 22 recommendations relating to platforms, data access and digital ecosystems. The government says it will study the recommendations and look at their application to competition law at European level. See bit.ly/2k7zaKo for a summary in English.

DEVICES

MANY SMART IOT GADGETS ARE UNSAFE

The digital security of many consumer devices connected to the internet is poor, according to tests carried out by Agentschap Telecom, the Netherlands communications regulator. Smart toys (“connected toys”) and baby monitors in particular scored poorly in the study on 22 commonly used devices that also included broadband routers, IP cameras, smart locks and smart thermostats.

A total of 17 devices scored poor to very poor in basic security and privacy issues. Many devices use default settings that are not secure, and performing an update is often cumbersome. This can allow personal data or passwords to be disclosed. The study is a follow-up to a roadmap on safe digital hardware and software published last year by the Dutch government.

IIC EVENTS

4-9 November 2019

Bangkok and Jakarta

Artificial intelligence for economic growth and social good

10-11 December 2019

Washington DC

Telecommunications and Media Forum (TMF)

IN BRIEF

EU PROMOTION

Margrethe Vestager, the EU’s competition commissioner, has been promoted to VP in charge of EU digital policy as well as competition in the next European Commission, which starts on 1 November. The incoming commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, has highlighted artificial intelligence, big data and cybersecurity as priorities.

CANADA’S COUNCIL

The organisations responsible for enforcing the Accessible Canada Act have announced the Council of Federal Accessibility Agencies, which is made up of chairs of bodies including communications, transport and human rights.

EFFECTIVE REGS

A fall in complaints to Australia’s Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) highlights the power of effective industry regulation, according to the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN). The TIO reports that complaints about phone and internet services fell 21% in the last financial year.

IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh has proposed a single spectrum licence for mobile operators to replace separate permits for each mobile technology. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has also proposed calculating spectrum charges based on an operator’s subscriber base.

MEDIA SETBACK

A court in the US has rejected proposals by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to relax media consolidation limits “because of the agency’s failure to analyse the impact of these rule changes on broadcast ownership by women and people of colour”.