

Study on the ‘public interest’ of French broadcast content*

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to study the concept of public interest in broadcasting, which has been approached only from a policy or legislative perspective in Korea, through analysis of the program content itself. To this end, this study focuses on French broadcasting, which has a long history of public service, has learned the concept of ‘public interest’ during its long growth process, and has specifically put this concept into practice through program production. Analysis of French TV programs that have been broadcast over the past 10 years categorizes the concept of public interest that French broadcasting has embodied into the following three categories. The first is the characteristic of ‘freedom of speech: ‘participation’ and ‘generality’ in the public sphere’ shown by discussion programs or talk shows. The second is the characteristic of ‘transmission of cultural identity’, which is shown even in entertainment programs. The third is the characteristic of ‘social capital: spreading the value of social solidarity’ shown in documentary or discussion programs. In addition, we examine how French broadcasting is implementing public interest at a time when digital media such as YouTube or Instagram are becoming the center of the media environment, and a digital public social media called ‘Culture Prime’ created by public institutions.

Keywords

French broadcasting, Public interest, Public sphere, Cultural identity transmission, Social solidarity, Culture Prime

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I . Introduction

The term “television” has faded out from people’s mind. The word 'broadcasting', which has replaced 'television', has long since moved beyond the medium of television to refer to the fragmented media activities of individuals. Even though television is still recognized as an influential medium in Korean society, its future is becoming increasingly unclear amidst the powerful OTT and various digital services. In such a context of uncertainty, what is the point of examining television as an object of serious inquiry? Especially in the face of the ever-obligatory notion of ‘public interest,’ a term that has become outdated and ambiguous in its meaning.

In Korea, the concept of public interest in broadcasting has been shaped under the direct influence of political power, unlike in the West, where public interest philosophy has evolved in various forms along with political systems and social structures and has been reflected in the media system over the course of history. In the West, liberal political philosophy, which values individual choice and market principles, and communitarian political philosophy, which emphasizes collective values and egalitarian ideals, have formed the two main perspectives on public interest. These two opposing viewpoints have directly influenced the formation and development of the concept of public interest in media(Kim & Ma, 2015). In other words, the approach that public interest is realized through the two positions of marketism and public forum has been maintained, and this has influenced the development of media. In South Korea, on the other hand, the concept of public interest in media was created by the regime in the 1970s and 1980s during the process of introducing the public broadcasting system in the country. In other words, the discussion of public interest in broadcasting in South Korea is inseparable from the historical and political background of contemporary South Korea (Jung, 2009). Under this

background, public interest in broadcasting has been understood and applied in normative terms in the realm of broadcasting policy and media legislation rather than for any other purpose in Korean society. It can be seen that “public interest” has firmly established itself as the guiding principle and regulatory philosophy of media regulation policies, including terrestrial television broadcasting (Yoon, 2011; Yoon, 2013).

In this way, ‘public interest’ in Korea has always been ‘used’ as a tool of policy or legislative norms, regardless of whether its meaning leans towards marketism or communitarianism. It has been used as a conceptual tool for framing, modifying, and rationalizing the modern broadcasting system. As a result, the public interest in broadcasting is currently understood as a goal to be achieved and met through institutional aspects such as the establishment of viewer committees and their opinions, the broadcast rating system, the station relicensing system, or the programming regulations related to broadcasting programs. Furthermore, of this relative emphasis on the ‘form’ or ‘quantitative aspect’ of public interest, the ‘content’ or ‘qualitative aspect’ of public interest has been overshadowed by the form, missing the opportunity to become a subject of political and social debate in Korean society.

In Korean society, which is accustomed to such institutionalized public interest, there is a lack of understanding regarding the “public interest characteristics” that broadcasting can possess. In Europe, where broadcasting developed early in the form of public service, public interest became an attribute of broadcasting, and their programs reproduced the multifaceted meanings of public interest that had been formed in the historical development of Europe in various forms in their content. Public interest has been seamlessly integrated into their programs, allowing the diverse social values it encompasses to be conveyed naturally to society through television. Broadcasting itself has continuously and naturally exposed citizens to public interest values and meanings.

The public interest characteristics of European broadcasting is not limited to old-fashioned broadcasting. From the new media era of the 2000s, to the digital broadcasting era of 2010 and beyond, to the current era of digital multimedia, their public interest attributes have been manifested in the form and content of broadcasting. Thus, this study aims to examine what public interest and public interest practices are, not as institutional constructs but as expressed and embodied in programs themselves, using France as a representative example that faithfully embodies public interest characteristics. Through this, we aim to explore and understand what the “public interest characteristics” of broadcasting are and what kind of public interest is generated by program content. This will help us consider how to define these concepts effectively.

When studying European broadcasting, the focus is always on the UK’s BBC, leaving in-depth research on other European countries’ broadcasting systems less explored. In Korea, academic approaches to broadcasting systems have also leaned towards policy and legislative aspects. This study on French broadcasting is significant as it examines the meaning of public interest from a different perspective than the BBC-centric approach, providing a new viewpoint beyond the institutional perspective of public broadcasting. This study will take this a step further and examine how French broadcasting is implementing public interest at a time when digital media, such as YouTube and Instagram, is becoming central to the media landscape. The study of broadcast public interest in this digital environment will eventually provide a justification for why we should study still television and why we should study still public interest in this era.

II. The public interest nature in the development of French broadcasting

Before analyzing the content of French broadcasting, we would like to take a brief look at the context in which these programs have developed. Rather than detailing the history of French broadcasting in chronological order, we will attempt to summarize its development by identifying the public service characteristics that are evident throughout its long history, i.e., the elements or characteristics that have made it possible to characterize French broadcasting as qualitatively public service.

In analyzing the causes of the public nature of French television, the first point to be mentioned is the fact that the French government chose public service as a model for its development. It is undeniable that the policy decisions made during the creation of the television broadcasting system, along with the characteristics and nature of the early broadcasting environment, played a significant role in shaping the current state of French broadcasting. The historical background preceding this decision played a significant role in France's choice of public broadcasting as the fundamental framework for television. During the heyday of radio in Europe, in the 1920s and 30s, the French government not only opened numerous public radio stations, but also granted broadcasting licenses to many private radio stations. During the subsequent occupation of France by the German Nazis from 1940 to 1944, many French private radios became pro-Nazi, and after the liberation of France in 1945, the French government, in establishing a new television broadcasting system, emphasized the dark past of radio during the Nazi occupation, when the airwaves were in the hands of private operators, and pushed television, which had far greater influence than radio, into the national system. Having witnessed the “great” propaganda of the Nazis in Germany unfold so effectively through

the visual mass media of film and radio, and the power of television, which combined the features and strengths of both, was self-evident, the French government did not want to lose this powerful mass media from their hands (Missika & Wolton, 1983).

However, these historical mistakes of private radio were not the most important reasons for France's choice of a public television system. Envy of the solid public service model created by the BBC in the United Kingdom, and the need for media for effective social cohesion during a period of national reconstruction after the war, were also key reasons for the nationalization of television. An interesting fact at the time of its inception was that the people hired to produce television programs were journalists from newspapers and radio, playwrights and directors from the theater, screenwriters and directors or actors from the film industry - in other words, people from the cultural and elite circles of France's left-leaning establishment, but they did not mind working for a television station that was heavily interfered with and controlled by the conservative right-wing regime of the time. Rather, it was the elite staff of these stations who shaped the public interest of broadcasting through their programs, thinking about what broadcast content should look like and coloring it (Bourdon, 2011; Missika & Wolton, 1983). The main concern of the French left at the time was the transformation of France into a capitalistic society like the United States. They held a strong antipathy towards the American commercial broadcasting model, which was maintained by leaning on such a consumer society. Thus, to the extent that the right-wing conservative government was able to protect television broadcasting from the evils of "crass American" capitalism by adopting a broadcasting model that justified state interference in public broadcasting, albeit with different political goals and colors than their own, left-wing broadcasters were quite content to create programs in this environment.

The early French broadcasters, like their model, the BBC, emphasized the

production of cultural, artistic, and educational programs. In France, they adopted the BBC's formula of "information, culture, and enjoyment," replacing "education" with "culture" in the second part of the formula, "information, education, and enjoyment." From the beginning, French broadcasters were obsessed with raising the cultural level of their audiences and making them "rational human beings" or "awakened publics." The ideals of the French Enlightenment have influenced television. The following quotes from television directors of the 1950s and 1960s reflect their ideas about program production (Missika & Wolton, 1983).

"It's not enough to 'watch' (television). You have to engage. We need to actively create audiences. I like the fierceness of serious issues over stories of bourgeois mediocrity.... I worry that "making everyone happy" will diminish television's ability to do what it does best. A true TV director shouldn't be afraid to make a drama of what he wants to make, even if it's only relevant to a very small part of the public. I think so." (Jean-Paul Carrière, 1960)

"To awaken the viewer, to make them aware of themselves, of their own solitude, of their own inner richness, not to make them lose themselves in the midst of laughter and talk, but to awaken them...this is what we can do." (Rose Iglesias, 1959)

In France, the public broadcasting monopoly lasted until the early 1980s. The 1980s then set the stage for broadcasting reform. This was the time when television in France and other European countries began to embrace the trends of deregulation and globalization, and began to create a new concept of television. In other words, this is when private television emerged. In fact, until the early 1980s, there was only one private channel in the whole of (Western) Europe. It was ITV, the UK's private channel, which was so public service that it was actually considered a "public service commercial broadcaster."

In 1987, France privatizes TF1, its public broadcasting channel, and launches a second commercial channel, M6, which targets younger audiences with music videos and American dramas. In the 1990s, ‘Americanized’ entertainment programs or fictions were produced and broadcast by importing American program formats, and from the 2000s onwards, commercial programs (such as reality shows) that are sensational and are sensitive to increasing ratings, have been newly developed undergoing genre convergence amid the globalization of formats. However, since the 1990s, the era of “copycat television,” or television that imitates other countries’ programs in order to conform to norms in a globalized environment (Moran, 1998), has not erased the production traditions that are deeply rooted in the French broadcasting landscape, such as the motivation to create, to give social meaning, to enlighten, and to awaken critical consciousness. To this day, French broadcasting, whether it is private or public, even in its entertainment programs, follows this tradition of production, the public service character of French broadcasting, which has become unconscious over time.

III. Analyzing the public interest nature of French broadcast content

In this chapter, we will summarize the unique characteristics of French broadcast content and analyze how these characteristics are public interest based on French broadcast programs. As this study aims to understand the public interest characteristics currently embodied in French broadcasting content, the analysis will focus on programs that are currently broadcasting or have recently been broadcasting, but have been broadcasting for more than 10 years, so that the programs that are recognized as public interest content with social impact

can be studied.

1. Freedom of speech: 'participation' and 'generality' of the public sphere

One of the characteristics of French TV is the high number of debate or discussion programs. Just as daily dramas are broadcast every day in Korea to give daily routine to the lives of Koreans, French debate programs are also organized in the form of daily programs to integrate into the daily lives of French people. There are daily discussion programs that seriously address current affairs such as social, political, and economic issues with the help of experts. Additionally, there are “magazine” style daily programs that tackle significant social issues by incorporating cultural and entertainment elements and engaging with people from various social strata in a conversational format. Together, this brings the number of discussion programs broadcast on the six general programming channel¹⁾ during weekdays to a total of seven(as of December 2023). Add to that the number of debate and discussion-style programs that air once a week, and you have 14 debate programs per week. This includes not only social issues, but also thematic programs in the form of debates on parenting, family issues, health, books (reading), movies, and media (see <Table 1>).

1) TF1, France 2, France 3, France 5, ARTE, and M6 are the six general programming channels.

〈Table 1〉 Debate or discussion–style programs broadcast on major French general channels

Program Form	Channels	Program name
Daily discussion form program	France 2	Télématin
		La maison des maternelles
	Canalplus	Clique
	France 5	C dans l'air
		C à vous
		C ce soir
		Le magazine de la Santé
Weekly discussion form programs	France 2	Beau Geste
	France 3	Un dimanche en politique
	France 5	C politique
		C l'hebdo
		C médiatique
		En société
		La Grande Librairie

The most distinctive feature of French debate programs is that they serve as a social “public sphere.” The act of bringing together people from different social backgrounds (mainly educated and sophisticated intellectuals) to exchange words, sometimes serious and profound, sometimes heated and sharp, to refute or persuade, makes French television a place of productive exchange. Through these “public agents” (Habermas, 2001), the viewer is not only informed about social issues, but also acquires a sense of the current of public opinion, which is shaped by the diversity of opinions.

In fact, the historical origins of the “public sphere” that characterizes these French debate programs can be traced back to the 17th and 18th century French salons and English coffeehouses. These were the places where what Habermas called the “discussing public” gathered to create a genuine “public sphere,”

where sustained debate among private individuals was first organized. These spaces of the public sphere had a set of common institutional standards, the first of which was “equality” that opposed hierarchical consciousness and challenged the authority of social hierarchies. This didn’t mean equality of social status, but a social communion that disregarded status itself, implying an equal qualification of “simply being human.” The second was the “secularization of topics of discussion,” as areas and subjects that had until then been the exclusive domain of interpretation of church and state authority, especially philosophy, literature, and art, and culture in general, began to enter the realm of public discussion. With the growth of the market, philosophical books, literary works, and artworks have become commodities, making culture and art accessible to the general public. The third is the non-closure of the public. The publics that belong to each of our respective spheres as readers, listeners, and viewers are not locked into cliques, but exist within a larger conceptual public of private individuals who, through the marketplace, have a wider sphere of discussion. When topics of discussion, once monopolized by those in power, become socially debatable, they become “common,” open to all, and available to all. The public can thus be said to be a “public body” (Habermas, 2001).

These institutional characteristics of the historical European public sphere continue to function as institutional standards for contemporary French discussion programs. The first criterion, equality, and the third, non-closure, are explained by the diversity and pluralism of the participants in the debate programs. To approach a given topic as comprehensively and fairly as possible, discussion programs select and feature panelists according to the principles of diversity and plurality. This includes journalists and researchers of different political persuasions, to expert panelists from different areas of expertise or professions, to social activists or representatives of social organizations representing different social classes and groups. In less specialized and more inclusive programs, cultural and artistic figures, or actors, singers, or other public figures who are making waves in their own right, serve as panelists to

express their opinions on socio-political or cultural issues. These visible acts of speech by a diverse public have transformed French television into a space where everyone can participate equally, not just a medium serving specific classes or individuals from particular fields. In other words, it has enabled French television to acquire the symbolism and legitimacy of a “public sphere.” In the process of reproducing the diversity and pluralism of the “discussing public,” the topics of debate become “general” issues that can be discussed by everyone. The public sphere characteristics of equal participation and the generality of discussion topics are elements that have been historically and socio-culturally internalized by French broadcasting. These are the foremost aspects to consider when discussing the public interest of French television.

2. Transmission of the cultural identity

French broadcasting is very self-conscious about its history and culture. In the early days of television, French broadcasters became preoccupied with the production of fiction because television producers, eager to raise the intellectual level of their audiences, sought to inform them about French history and literary history through fiction based on historical novels and adaptations of theater works (Bourdon, 2014). Unable to play an adequate “enlightening” role in news and current affairs programs due to state control of television, TV producers saw fiction as a genre suitable for fulfilling the primary mission of public broadcasting: to educate and cultivate, and thus to express “national identity” or “cultural identity.” As television was perceived by its producers as the inheritor of a long and shared history of France, the modern fiction produced within it (Moretti, 1999) was bound to be fictionalized stories broadcast to the French public in their own language, stories that were given special value within French culture and thus contributed to the formation of an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991; Bourdon, 2014).

Since the 1960s, as television fiction naturally began to pursue popularity, the

fiction genre gradually distanced itself from this educational role. However, the broadcasting community's awareness of television as the "successor of history" and its public mission to transmit France's cultural values has remained unchanged, becoming internalized as a fundamental philosophy of broadcasting companies. In the 1980s, with the arrival of commercial channels and the importation of American entertainment formats, French television has exhibited a highly popularized programming system, but despite these external changes, this mission of transmitting cultural identity has been strongly rooted in the French TV landscape. The mission of education and culture has been perceived as a fundamental role that broadcasting is supposed to fulfill and has been since its inception. Even the entertainment programs produced by commercial broadcasters are infused with this educational and cultural mission.

Reality shows, which have become more commercially successful than any other genre due to the global circulation of the format, are an entertainment genre that is far from having an educational or cultural function for citizens. The UK's 'Pop Idol', which became a global music competition program format in the 2000s and served as a model for many subsequent music competitions, can also be considered a branch of reality shows (Bourdon, 2014). It was adapted and broadcast in France as *A la recherche de la Nouvelle Star* after its success as *American Idol* (below *Nouvelle Star*) in the United States, where the format was imported. Launched in 2003 and broadcast in France until 2017, *Nouvelle Star* was one of the most popular shows of its time, filling up two hours of prime time on Friday evenings from 8:30 to 10:30 p.m. for three months each year. However, that reality show focused a great deal, so something other than the usual singing competition between contestants. If you look at the list of songs that the contestants sang, you'll see that they weren't chosen by the contestants or by the producers, but rather by the show's production, who went through the popular music of France by era: French chansons from the 1940s and 50s, French rock music from the 1960s and 70s, and French avant-garde pop from the 1980s. In addition, American and

European pop music that has influenced the French musical landscape throughout the ages were also featured. Given that the target audience of the program is mostly teenagers, what *Nouvelle Star* (consciously or subconsciously) communicates to them is not just the musical pleasure or the thrill of the competition, but also the history of French popular music, its value as a part of French history, and the power of popular culture as a spiritual and cultural heritage. In addition, the four judges were careful to convey the values of French history and culture in the process of evaluating the contestants' musical interpretation abilities and logically expressing their appreciation with poetic expressions, pointing out the value of (French) popular music in the times.

Ensuring that the public remains continuously aware of France's unique cultural and historical identity, and thereby facilitating the natural transmission of France's cultural values from one generation to the next, is another reason why French television can be considered "in the public interest."

3. Social capital: spread the value of social solidarity

Nus et Culottés is a travel documentary that airs annually on the public service channel France 5. The program began in 2012 with season 1, and after a hiatus in 2014, it has been broadcast annually until its current season 11 in 2023. It is part of the summer season and airs in July and August during the vacation season. In the show, two male performers create a travel itinerary with a clear starting and ending point, reveal their mission to "fulfill any dream at the destination," and set off on the journey naked, with nothing on their person except for three cameras filming them. In the process of obtaining everything they need, the two performers reveal their "dreams" and ask for help, which they receive in return with handmade crafts, songs or poems of their own creation, or labor. And some of those who lend a helping hand are even invited to experience the "dream" at the end of the journey, sharing it with the two travelers.

The “dreams” include, for example, traveling to a town famous for its hot air balloon rides and performing their own songs and dances to impress the balloonist and get a free ride in return, or traveling to a village in western France on “Grandma’s Day” and organizing a small festival to celebrate “Grandma’s Day” with the villagers and their homemade bread. And these two travelers continue their journey by forming connections with the people they meet along the way. Sometimes stumbling upon a broken-down truck and fixing it so they can continue on their journey, or recruiting a hip-hop boy to perform for the balloonist. For the “Grandmother’s Day” festival, they learn how to bake bread from the owner of a car who gave them a ride.

The program is a hybrid of two genres: documentaries, which document the real and present, and reality programs, which show realistic reactions to the real world. Of the two, *Nus et Culottés* is a program that falls squarely in the documentary tradition. As France is the country where cinema first began, the documentary genre has had a profound impact on its development. It was in the 1960s that the documentary as a theatrical film found its place on television in France, where it took the form of the docudrama or reportage. As state control of television weakened in the 1970s, fiction and variety shows began to push documentary programs out of prime time, a phenomenon that would continue until the 1980s and 1990s, when deregulation took its toll. Despite this neglect by the broadcasting industry, documentary filmmakers continued to work tirelessly to establish the identity of the genre by touting the artistic and social functions of their work, and soon a collective movement led to the popularization of documentary films by organizing documentary film festivals in 1989 and 1990 (Barreau-Brouste, 2011). Soon after, ARTE, a joint French-German public channel, was created (1992) with documentary as the main genre of its programming, and a law was passed (1995) to reduce the burden of public subsidies on independent producers (1995), and documentary gradually expanded its territory in the television broadcasting environment from

the mid-to-late 1990s onwards. Especially since the 2000s, as public channels such as ARTE and the educational channel La Cinquième have increased the amount of time devoted to documentaries, the genre has gained popularity and has begun to be shown in prime time.

French television documentaries, which have walked a challenging path of growth, have experienced changes in content and form since the 2000s. This was due to the emergence of reality shows - a popular genre that also focuses on real-life subjects - and the advancement of digital technology that enables one-person filming and editing. But they have remained convinced of their 'raison d'être,' the essential function of exploring and reflecting on society. Traditionally, documentaries have focused on real-world issues and social concerns, aiming to encourage the public to view society with a critical perspective. They also wanted to be a socially and culturally useful "media" by conveying contemporary thoughts and opinions, allowing members of society to communicate with each other's thoughts and feelings, and in doing so, strengthening the relationships between members of society (Barreau-Brouste, 2011). It was a genre that was deeply involved in public life and the lives of citizens, opening their eyes to the real world and making them feel more connected to each other, in other words, giving them an understanding and inspiration of social solidarity.

French broadcasting approaches the concept of social solidarity not merely as interest, compassion, sympathy, or a sense of kinship towards others in contemporary society, but from a universal and humanitarian perspective. This requires a broad accessibility, considering it an obligation of members within a society. Therefore, reality-based documentary programs, TV documentaries addressing social realities, and various programs discussing social issues - including magazine programs, reportage, discussion programs, and talk shows - depict social solidarity as a fundamental aspect and an ideal value that French society should uphold. In this way, French broadcasting emphasizes that French

society is a society that has accumulated enough “social capital,” and that it is an important value to protect. According to Putnam, social capital is the “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam, 1994). Although Putnam's definition has been criticized for its ambiguous linkage between the dual values of profit-utility and morality, the elements he emphasized as important values of social capital are the voluntary cooperation, reciprocity, trust, and social solidarity of a community. For Newton, who emphasizes a more moral value-oriented view of social capital, social capital does not contribute to the production of profit-seeking individuals, but rather serves to transform them into members of a civic community oriented toward the common good of society (Lee, 2018). In other words, it “acts as the glue that holds society together by transforming selfish and self-centered individuals who pursue self-interest and territory without a sense of social obligation or social consciousness into members of a civic community oriented toward the common good and the public good” (Newton, 1999). This role of social capital is precisely what French society, the public, and its citizens demand of their broadcasters, but it is also what French broadcasters themselves impose on themselves, an obligation that has become ingrained in them.

4. Public service in the digital age: Culture Prime

Can we discuss the public interest of broadcasting in the current digital era, where the clear distinction between terrestrial broadcasting and pay channels has been broken down and the hierarchy between channels has collapsed? In a reality where OTT platforms like Netflix and digital content media like YouTube are redefining the rules of television viewing and changing the very definition of broadcasting, can we still discuss the public interest of broadcasting? In particular, France, where the philosophy of public broadcasting and the production culture based on it are relatively well-established, has

historically developed a robust public broadcasting system and is addressing these questions in a unique way.

(1) *Culture Prime*, the social media of France's public service organizations

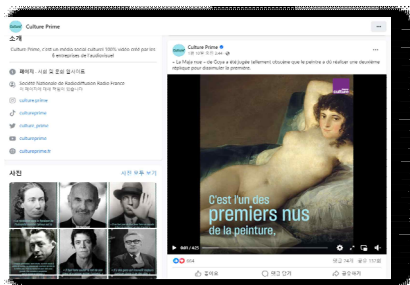
In November 2018, six public institutions related to French broadcasting formed a collaborative partnership and decided to create a joint social media platform. On November 23, they posted their first video. *Culture Prime* is the name of this social media. It is the result of a collaborative effort between French public televisions and public institutions, who realized that young people no longer consume legacy media with a wide range of information and in-depth analysis on culture, the arts, and society in general. Six public media organizations - France Télévisions, the French public television company; Radio France, the public radio station; ARTE, the German-French joint public television; France Médias Monde, the French international news channel; INA, the French national broadcasting archive; and TV5Monde, the French-speaking international channel - have joined forces to create video content and distribute it through digital outlets such as Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram under the umbrella of *Culture Prime*.

These six institutions select topics together, each producing and posting videos. On average, a total of 4-5 videos are updated daily through these six institutions. Each of the six organizations creates videos based on their knowledge of culture and the arts, historical information about current events or people, or (like INA) on their own archival footage. In terms of the topics they cover, there is no single editorial office that oversees the six organizations; rather, the heads of the six organizations meet regularly to decide on topics. The journalists and producers of each organization then produce and distribute videos based on these topics or themes. In the case of *Culture Prime's* content, there is no one journalist assigned to each organization, but rather a rotation of journalists from different fields. There is a kind of governance between the six

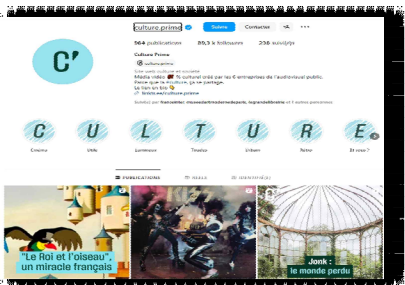
organizations, and *Culture Prime* relies on it. Each video is the responsibility of the journalists and producers who created it, and the higher-ups do not interfere with the production and content of the videos at all (Lerond-Dupu, 2021).

Targeting younger generations, these videos are in short-form format, typically ranging from 3 to 5 minutes in length. The videos are not available on the *Culture Prime* website or app, but on social media and digital platforms, mainly Facebook (as already mentioned), but also Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc. The length and content of the videos are edited according to the specifics of each social media: on Facebook, the videos are 3-5 minutes long, while on Instagram and TikTok, the videos are re-edited to be less than a minute long, even if the content is the same as that posted on Facebook.

These videos do not merely provide snippets of knowledge related to various themes in culture and the arts (such as music, dance, theater, painting, literature, film, photography, cultural heritage, games, and comics), historical events or figures, or current social phenomena and issues. They analyze these topics from multiple perspectives and offer various interpretations on matters and situations that the public might find intriguing. Particularly, videos covering topics such as music, history, historical discoveries, forgotten female heroes, or the lives and works of popular artists like Picasso and Frida Kahlo have garnered high viewership and popularity.



〈Figure 1〉 Facebook account



〈Figure 2〉 Instagram account

(2) The public interest of *Culture Prime*

On November 23, 2023, representatives of the six partner organizations gathered to celebrate the fifth anniversary of *Culture Prime*, which was broadcast live on the public TV channel Culturebox. The representatives of these organizations took the opportunity to announce that they had successfully achieved two of the goals they set out in 2018: “to make culture and knowledge accessible to as many people as possible” and “to develop new formats of content that adapt to new digital media usage habits and make them accessible to youth and young adults” (Alexis, 2020). According to the official report on their achievements over the five-year period, the six organizations have produced more than 5,000 videos, and the total number of views has reached nearly 2 billion across all social media platforms where *Culture Prime*'s videos are posted, averaging nearly 30 million views per month. The official announcement also cited the high number of views on Instagram and TikTok, emphasizing that *Culture Prime* has captured the attention of the digital new generation with a video language and editing techniques that appeal to their sensibilities.

Starting as an experimental model in 2018, *Culture Prime* has seen its subscriber count grow each year and has been socially recognized for its quality. It is now considered a successful digital social media model for public broadcasting. Many factors can be attributed to the success of *Culture Prime*, including the close cooperation between public organizations, the development of creative formats and editing techniques based on the long tradition of broadcast production, and the understanding and research of media use by the digital generation. But perhaps the most important aspect of the project is the willingness of public institutions rooted in the public interest to preserve their identity. Sibyle Veil, president of Radio France, one of the six partner organizations, commented on the success of *Culture Prime*.

"The success of *Culture Prime* shows that, contrary to our preconceptions, young people want content with strong cultural values. By effectively combining our forces, our public broadcasting organizations have discovered new codes and new ways of writing for young people, and when we put them in front of them, we realize that they are demanding something of high quality. Shining the torch of culture, contributing to the creation of a socially connected society and a free and autonomous citizenry - that's what public broadcasting is for, and that's the most important duty it has to fulfill."

The French public broadcaster's commitment to spreading knowledge and ideas, opening eyes to culture, art, and society, and helping the public develop into conscious citizens, is what ultimately made the *Culture Prime* digital video system a success. The underlying intent of the entire *Culture Prime* system is, ultimately, the commitment to education and culture, and the desire to foster social solidarity by emphasizing the cultural identity of the community. This reflects the long-standing commitment to public interest that French public broadcasting has internalized over the years. We have already seen in the previous chapter that the public service characteristic of French public broadcasting, the transmission of cultural identity and the value of social solidarity, is incorporated into *Culture Prime*.

This recognition as a public media has not always been received favorably. Contrary to an analysis that suggests that public participation has become more active as broadcasting has moved from the terrestrial to the digital system (Ferrandery & Louessard, 2019), some French researchers have argued that the public digital media of *Culture Prime* has not expanded the opportunities for the public to express their opinions. They argue that the choice of topics, the way the videos are edited, and the way they are narrated do not encourage viewers to express their opinions freely, but rather to learn about and recognize the common culture and heritage that the videos describe. In other words, the format emphasizes a one-way transmission of knowledge. As a result, it has

been criticized that *Culture Prime* does not serve as a public sphere where opinions and questions have to be actively exchanged, but only as a media of institutionalized culture (Alexis, 2020). Conscious of this criticism, the producers of *Culture Prime* are attempting to ask more questions in their videos through narration or by creating “stories” such as “Et vous?(And you)” on Instagram to raise topics for, but these attempts are still not enough to make *Culture Prime* a place for discussion.

Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to analyze this as a failure of the “participation” aspect of the public sphere, which is one of the public interest characteristics of French broadcasting, in the digital system. The public sphere characteristic of French broadcasting mentioned above is the result of French broadcasters' efforts to create as much space for debate as possible within a broadcasting system that is limited by its one-way nature. The interactivity inherent in the digital space differs fundamentally from the participation seen in traditional, one-way broadcasting. While more theoretical discussions are needed on the topic of ‘public sphere’ in digital media, it is clear that the *Culture Prime* has a public service role as a place of education and is recognized as a tool for democratizing knowledge due to its enlightening role, but it is true that its role as a public sphere for the democratic exchange of opinions is minimal.

IV. Conclusion

Explaining the public interest of broadcasting based on program content rather than institutional aspects is not easy. It is even more challenging to explain the content of foreign broadcasts and articulate why they are in the public interest, and what “public interest” ultimately means, in non-academic terms. In a context where broadcast programs are predominantly popular and emotional in nature, explaining them with academic and rational language may fail to convey the

elements of public interest inherent in these programs. Moreover, in Korea, the term “public interest” feels overly clichéd and heavy-handed, making it difficult to convincingly argue that entertainment programs possess public interest elements. These challenges are why the researcher has spent a considerable amount of time academically and logically articulating the personal belief that French broadcasting indeed embodies “public” characteristics. Nevertheless, the study has persevered through this lengthy process because the researcher believes that questions and discussions about the “public interest” in broadcasting are critically needed in Korean society and its broadcasting environment. Within French society, French broadcasting has been the subject of many accusations and criticisms, and its role and function is still a topic of social debate. Programs, regardless of genre, is scrutinized in debate programs meticulously studied by academic researchers. Critically-minded discussion programs, talk shows, cultural and artistic programs that introduce French and world cultural heritage and history from various perspectives, and documentaries that movingly portray how a society should be and how social solidarity is formed continue to be quietly broadcast without wavering. In Korean society, the abstract concept of “public interest” contrasts sharply with the French approach, where this concept has been concretely internalized through thorough reflection and practical consideration. It's a rough and riddled research paper, but if it can make the concept of public interest in broadcasting more clear and more accessible, it will have earned its keep.

This study is significant in that, unlike previous research that analyzed the public interest in broadcasting from normative or institutional perspectives, it focuses on the public interest embodied in the content itself. And it aims to extract and clarify the concept of public interest inherent in the content. Additionally, exploring how the current French public broadcasting system implements public interest in the digital space is expected to help Korean broadcasters, who are anxious about an uncertain future, to newly recognize the “meaning of broadcasting.” Every time a new medium emerges, the fate of the

purchasing entity is discussed as a candle in the wind. However, as the history of media has already shown, existing media have not disappeared, but has gradually evolved into a new form. Radio did, and so did movies. Television has not died, nor will it; its system will continue to evolve. Similarly, the concept of public interest in broadcasting will undergo many changes and will be practiced in new forms and ways. This will happen as long as continuous reflection and effort, as seen in France, are maintained.

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