



# THE ON DEMAND NEWS STREAMING PROJECT

How to promote democratic conversation through  
better video stories

Pia Thordsen  
Constructive Institute Fellow

## Table of contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	2
Why it matters.....	3
Can mis- and disinformation be corrected?.....	4
Research question: .....	5
Method: .....	6
A user-centric approach: .....	7
A constructive path to credibility .....	7
<b>THE NEWS STREAMING PROJECT</b> .....	8
<b>Track 1 USERS</b> .....	10
The user-centric approach .....	10
Users are bypassing the gatekeeper .....	12
What user's want and don't want - the case of TV SYD.....	13
User Needs in practise - the case of Politiken.....	16
The Case for Community-Powered Journalism .....	19
Do we have the energy and should we? .....	20
The Case for Constructive Journalism .....	21
<b>Track 2 RETHINKING NEWS FORMATS FOR ON-DEMAND</b> .....	24
Why on demand?.....	25
What is streaming? .....	25
Formats .....	26
The case for long news formats .....	27
SVT, NRK and the search for short video formats .....	29
<b>Track 3 STORYTELLING IN A STREAMING FORMAT</b> .....	31
The dragon - a storytelling model for news? .....	31
The need for context, explanation and perspective .....	34
Explainers - one way forward?.....	34
The case for animation .....	35
<b>Track 4: REACHING AUDIENCES</b> .....	36
Distribution.....	36
Trapped on third-party platforms? .....	37
Personalisation and viewers on their own platforms .....	39
Artificial intelligence .....	41
<b>Conclusion and take-aways:</b> .....	41
References:.....	43



# INTRODUCTION

**”Nowadays you can shop around between programmes and you have to be very lucky to get to work and talk to a colleague about something you saw the night before”**

*Woman in TVSYD's user survey 2024*

Users experience it. Established TV-media is experiencing it: The increasingly fragmented news stream that has become a result of digitalisation.

Netflix, Disney, Viaplay, YouTube, FaceBook. TikTok, Instagram, Telegram, X, Snap, newsletters, WhatsApp, algorithms.

News fatigue. News avoidance. News and information overload.

The list of offers and challenges seems endless.

We live in a time of accelerated development in artificial intelligence, which not only challenges and transforms the established media's ability to reach users online, it also challenges media users' ability to distinguish between truth and lies.

AI-powered technologies that can be used to create deep fakes and the amplified ability to rapidly spread dis- and misinformation via social media to millions of users is a gift to those who want to manipulate facts and a challenge to a shared understanding of reality and thus also to the shared democratic dialogue.

It's a huge challenge we face as a society - and a unique opportunity for established media: now is the time for the old mainstream media to bring their credibility, experience and expertise into play to win back market share. But it may soon be too late:

According to Reuters Digital News Report 2023, the credibility of the established media in the eyes of users is steadily declining, while more and more users are turning to celebrities and influencers on social platforms - including TikTok. A platform that knows its users inside out<sup>1</sup>.

This context is crucial when it comes to answering how traditional TV media can succeed in getting users to consume video content on demand on streaming platforms. Packaging is not enough. There has to be something credible and worthwhile inside, and when it comes to public service, entertainment is ok - but it's not enough.

It's already established that we live in an attention economy.<sup>2</sup> However, it can be argued that the growing uncertainty surrounding the veracity of information in the context of AI development, among other factors, is leading us towards a 'credibility economy'. In this new economic landscape, credibility is emerging as a pivotal resource in the media's pursuit of user attention.

**Because in a world where we can't trust anything, we need to be able to trust someone.**

It's not a given that established media conquers that position.

---

<sup>1</sup> So do other social media platforms. TikTok is highlighted here because its algorithm is particularly well known for retaining users on the platform.

<sup>2</sup> Goldhaber, M. H. (1997). The attention economy and the Net. *First Monday*, 2(4). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v2i4.519>

At least for young users, this "someone to trust" is apparently not the established news media. According to the Reuters Digital News Report 2023<sup>3</sup>, young people are more likely to get their news from celebrities, influencers and news creators on social media than from established news media. This is especially true for news in video formats<sup>4</sup> (see figure 1)

If the established news media are to bring themselves into play as "the trusted someone", the opportunity lies in the intersection between the trustworthiness and editorial muscular power of legacy media and users' need for verified knowledge they can trust.

This is the golden opportunity for established media to regain a unique position as a provider of credible, verified and curated content.

But while verified content and high standards of press ethics are important tools, they are not enough. Trust and credibility are built in reciprocal relationships, and it requires putting users at the centre of the news media mindset, otherwise the battle is lost.

### Why it matters

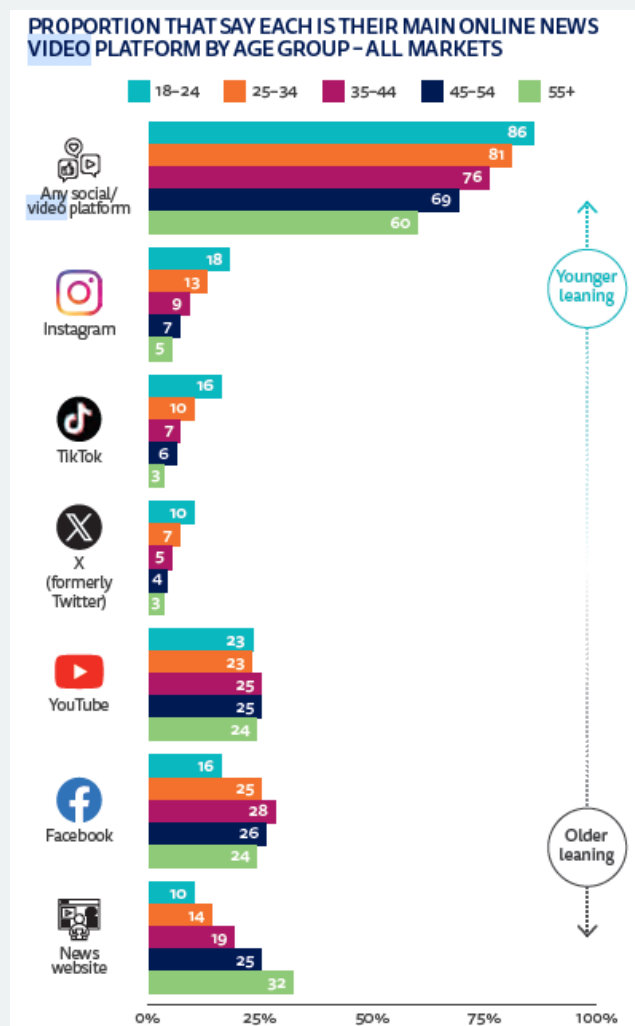
*"Do you really think democracy is under threat?"*

The question came from a young former news avoider with whom I had had an enlightening conversation over dinner for a couple of hours.

My surprise at the question was no less than her surprise at the concern I had just shared with her.

I have had the privilege of living my life in a democracy. As a young person, I could not imagine it being jeopardised. Because who would want to get rid of "the worst form of Government except for all those other forms

Figure 1



Source: Reuters Digital News Report 2024

<sup>3</sup>Reuters Digital News Report 2023 p. 10: "Perhaps the most striking findings in this year's report relate to the changing nature of social media, partly characterised by declining engagement with traditional networks such as Facebook and the rise of TikTok and a range of other video-led networks. Yet despite this growing fragmentation of channels, and despite evidence that public disquiet about misinformation and algorithms is at near record highs, our dependence on these intermediaries continues to grow. Our data show, more clearly than ever, how this shift is strongly influenced by habits of the youngest generations, who have grown up with social media and nowadays often pay more attention to influencers or celebrities than they do to journalists, even when it comes to news"

<sup>4</sup> Reuters Digital News Report 2024 p. 14: One of the big challenges of the shift to video networks with a younger age profile is that journalists and news organisations are often eclipsed by news creators and other influencers, even when it comes to news.

*that have been tried from time to time* ", as Winston Churchill put it? In my eyes, liberal democracy was, in Fukuyama's words, "the end of history".

But in recent years, concern for democracy has crept up on me as polarisation and distrust have spread like malicious ripples. As words like deepfakes, internet trolls and rabbit holes have become part of my vocabulary. As lies, dis- and misinformation have become easy to spread and almost impossible to refute before they have taken root as facts in the minds of users. As democratic principles are overridden by elected officials in the name of security.

Yes, there is reason to worry about cohesion in a post-factual world order: about democratic backsliding and the progress and tailwind of authoritarian regimes. For a common public space in disintegration. For echo chambers, tribalism and polarisation between identity groups. I was - and am - forced to recognise this.

But there is no reason for hopelessness, I hastened to reassure my dinner companion. As long as we – and not least her generation – do not choose to turn our backs on reality.

And - I might add, addressing myself and the established media of which I am a part: As long as we as media reflect on a nuanced description of the world. As long as we don't blow "doom and gloom" out of proportion and forget to convey hope and solutions. As long as we remember to tell that the majority of the world's population wants peace - not war and polarisation.

It is a call for action. A burning platform underneath us all - not least the young generations and those who care for their children and grandchildren - and not least underneath the established media.

## Can mis- and disinformation be corrected?

Democracy, cohesion and shared dialogue are the big WHY for public service media. Their fundamental *raison d'être*.

Therefore, it is also important to understand the ideas behind the least bad form of government and the internal and external challenges facing democracy, cohesion and shared dialogue.

Media and democracy have been the common thread through the four university courses I have followed at the Political Science and master's programme in Journalism at Aarhus University/DJMX during my fellowship.

The courses focused on topics such as democratic legitimacy, the defence of democracy, the impact of (mis)information on citizens' political perceptions and attitudes, and the opportunities and challenges of journalism due to political, technological and market developments.

It would be going too far to go through the many important considerations that the curriculum and teaching has given rise to in all four subjects.

But there is reason to emphasise some of the insights from the course "Fact or Fiction? The Impact of (Mis)Information on Citizens' Political Perceptions and Attitudes" since we can already see how problematic misinformation can be for the common dialogue and for the formation and maintenance of political opinions based on misinformation - whether it is spread with or without the intention to misinform.

In an interview with the Constructive Institute in 2022, Nobel Laureate Maria Ressa said that without agreement on facts, we do not have a shared reality.

This is the fragmented (media) reality that we are in the midst of, and which risks fragmenting even more with the technological development that is in full swing.

Fortunately, the results of research into the meaning of (mis)information are not entirely clear-cut, and some of the study designs used can also be criticised, as well as the fact that the research was primarily conducted in the (highly polarised) USA.

The level of political polarisation has an impact on the importance of dis- and misinformation in shaping opinion. The greater the polarisation, the harder it is to correct misconceptions. Even if the subjects recognised that the information they had originally received was false, it was almost impossible to achieve a lasting change in their perception of true and false and a consequent correction of their political views.

Confirmation biases mean that people who already have strong opinions are very willing to accept misinformation that confirms their political views as fact. Here, motivated reasoning kicks in too: Strong “believers” tend to reinterpret corrections or facts to fit their pre-existing beliefs.

There is a tendency for misinformation to become established as fact. Even if it is corrected by the source that originally provided the misinformation, or even if it is a trusted source that corrects the misinformation.

It's a phenomenon that plays out in the US right now, and it's a phenomenon that can be observed globally.

That's one of the reasons why it's so despairing that misinformation travels freely and unhindered around the globe. First impressions last.

Fortunately, not everyone is completely fact resistant. There are "swing voters" - people who are centrist or moderate, who correct their opinions based on facts and corrections.

So here too, there is reason for hope. But there is cause for concern and reason to take the issue seriously. That's also why I argue that credibility is a value that will be even more central to the importance of media in the future than it already is, and that a close connection to media users is essential for media to gain that trust.

This is also why it's important to find a good answer to my research question.

### Research question:

The goal of the project I have worked on during my TrygFonden-supported fellowship at the Constructive Institute has been to:

*"Explore the potential of constructive journalism in engaging users with our news content and attracting them to seek it out on our online streaming platform. The goal is to address the problem that users who are leaving traditional TV often choose not to stream news online. The hypothesis is that a constructive and solutions-oriented framing of important challenges in society, instead of a problem-oriented approach, can help attract and engage users to and in well-researched, critical and balanced journalism content. The goal is - if possible - to test the findings in real life after the fellowship year."*

"Relevant question" and "If you can answer that, you'll be rich" are typical comments I encountered when presenting my research question to news industry sources during the research for this report.

How to make news "streamable" is a topic most broadcasters struggle with - and so far, there is no clear and conclusive answer.

While traditional TV media has long since gone digital with written news on the web (sometimes - and increasingly - spiced up with video content tailored for digital platforms - often social media), most news stories from TV are relegated to the archive section of the website immediately after the TV news has run on screen.

The challenge exists for all news providers. Not least for the regional TV stations in Denmark, which have traditionally been known for their news broadcast at 19.30. A product that has lost viewers on cable TV over the years but has yet to attract an audience of similar size to stream the content.

## Method:

While there has been a great deal of scientific research on the digital transformation of print media, it has been difficult to identify significant research on the digital transformation of short-form TV news formats such as those broadcast on analogue cable TV.

When it comes to streaming video content, researchers have primarily focused on live streaming and platforms that stream long-form formats such as films, TV series, TV shows and documentaries:

Platforms like Netflix, HBO, Viaplay, Disney Plus and the big national players in the field - like DR/DRTV and TV2 Play.

This report is therefore based on interviews with a number of public service players in the industry: Representatives from the regional TV2 stations in Denmark, TV2 Denmark, DR, BBC, NRK in Norway, and SVT in Sweden.

Most of the interviewees are content managers with overall responsibility for streaming.

The focus of the interviews was to uncover what strategies broadcasters have in place to promote on-demand streaming of news content and to create and curate content aimed at digital streaming.

I also interviewed Hanne Bruun, Professor at the Department of Communication and Culture - Media Studies at Aarhus University, Lene Heiselberg, Associate Professor at the Centre for Journalism, SDU, and found relevant scientific research articles about on-demand streaming in general to try to understand what can be learned from them.

This report also draws heavily on input from a wide range of experts we have met in the Constructive Institute lounge over the past ten months, plus those we have met on field trips to Denmark (including the WAN-IFRA 2024 conference in Copenhagen), California and Kenya - not to mention the many valuable discussions with my fellow fellows, whose project themes have proved to coincide in many ways with my own: Reforming news criteria, reasons for news avoidance, democratic dialogue and trust in the media are all topics that play - and should play - a central role when discussing how and why we want users to consume our content in any format.

Not all of these experts will be quoted by name due to the "Chatham House rules" that apply to CI meetings with experts. However, their input contributes to and informs the report.

The insights in the report are also based on the previously mentioned bachelor's and master's level courses at Aarhus University, from which I have also drawn inspiration and documentation.

The courses focused on topics such as democratic legitimacy, the defence of democracy, the impact of (mis)information on citizens' political perceptions and attitudes, and the impact of political, technological and market developments on the opportunities and challenges of journalism.

## A user-centric approach:

At the beginning of my fellowship, I thought my project would be about platforms and storytelling. But through the many sessions and conversations we had in the Constructive Institute lounge, as well as through my research and conversations with sources in the media industry, it became clear to me that my project - and that of the entire industry - will fail if we don't start somewhere else - with users:

Is it only because they are impatient and pleasure-seeking that they seek out more entertaining video content than what we provide? Or is it more about the fact that they don't feel we deliver enough value in return for their attention? That what we do is not about *their* lives? And that it's often too negative and gives a distorted view of reality?

[2024 ICIJ Knight Fellow, Mattia Peretti](#) puts it this way:

*What we are failing to understand is that the crisis of journalism is as much a business model problem as it is a product problem: "Mainstream media might be the only industry in the world that continues to supply endless product with no real information on the demand for it. It is stuck where it started decades ago, with no clue about user needs, habits, or expectations, no new distribution strategies, and no new ways to make money."*

*We are in trouble because we are not meeting our users' needs. Instead, we obsess about [efficiency and productivity through technology](#) to improve what we do, but essentially continue doing what we've always done, just in a slightly cheaper and marginally more effective way.*

The issue of user needs is not new. The BBC launched its User Needs model in 2017, and an increasing number of media outlets have started to study their users' behaviour and needs.

This report is concerned with users because it is a prerequisite for solving the question of how we 'sell' our news content to them, and because it is a futile waste of resources to package a product that is deemed 'irrelevant' by users nicely. It may be packaged up, but if the content is deselected after a few seconds, it's nothing more than a worthless 'click'.

## A constructive path to credibility

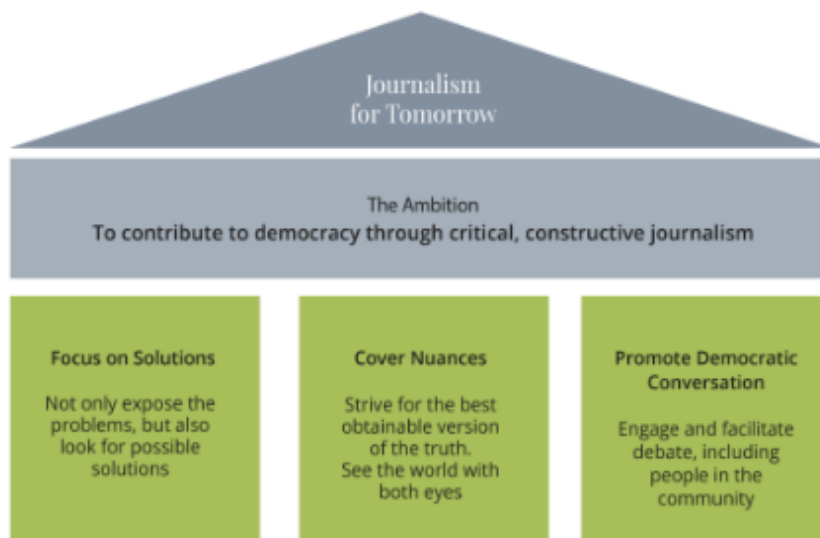
However, a better understanding of users' content needs is not enough. We - the media - also need to understand the impact of our own editorial choices and the way we communicate stories.

Not only because these choices often contribute to news avoidance - especially among younger audiences - but also because of the way our own - unrecognised - tone or biases can inadvertently influence our users.

The way we describe the world also helps shape reality, which means we need to be acutely aware that we - with our individual personality, values and level of knowledge - are a filter through which 'reality' and facts are inevitably interpreted and passed on to our audience - who in turn perceive news through their own filters of values, perceptions, beliefs etc. How do we ensure democratic discourse if we transmit and receive on completely different frequencies? We need to get in sync.



Figure 2



Source: *Constructive Institute*

(see Figure 2) - points to a model for rebuilding the credibility that many users say the media has lost<sup>5</sup>. A model rooted in critical journalism. As Christina Johannesson, project manager Future Competencies at SVT News and Sports and Current Affairs, says: "constructive stories do not mean that we have abdicated as journalists."

## THE NEWS STREAMING PROJECT

This report focuses on four tracks, all of which are important to answer the overarching question - how to get people to stream regional news content on demand:

- ❖ **Track 1: User-centric - why we need to understand them even better**
- ❖ **Track 2: Rethinking news formats to fit on demand**
- ❖ **Track 3: Telling news stories in a streaming format**
- ❖ **Track 4: Reaching the audience**

For two decades, the consumption of news on linear TV - often referred to as "flow TV" in Denmark - has been steadily declining.



<sup>5</sup> In its "[Digital News Report 2017](#)" Reuters Institute found that 37 per cent cited the media's lack of credibility as a reason for avoiding news.

In Denmark, Danmarks Radio (DR), TV 2 Danmark and the TV2 regions have been the dominant players in the TV market. What they have in common is that they all have a public service obligation (TV 2 only on the main channel) and that they - except TV 2 - are publicly funded.

In the 1990s, the TV2 regions had a combined audience of around 1.5 million viewers when they went on air with their news programme at 19:30.

By 2024, daily viewership are between 500,000 and 400,000.

Overall, the regions are still a significant factor in Danes' news consumption. But against a sad backdrop: a corresponding general decline in consumption of commercial legacy media, which either voluntarily or due to a self-imposed "public service" duty have bound themselves to press ethics rules and the associated ethics and editorial/journalistic processes.

Over the years, the TV2 regions have picked up some of the lost viewers in other ways: on their own websites, their own and TV 2's play apps, social media, and an almost unmeasurable share of viewership on the regions' 24-hour TV channels.

The migration has meant that fewer people are getting their regional news in video format than in the heyday of the regions. This is partly due to the prioritisation of resources away from video and towards text on the regional websites, and partly because the consumption of video news on demand on the regions' platforms is limited.

Why is this trend happening?

There is no single explanation for the escape of viewers from flow TV. But it does have an obvious one:

Older generations are literally dying out and new generations are used to getting news and entertainment online. It simply doesn't occur to most of them to switch on a TV news programme and it doesn't occur to them either to seek out news content online. "What I need to know will come to me" is a common strategy for staying up to date.

And while influencers, youtubers and others have grabbed the camera and created video content that is far more appealing and entertaining than traditionally formatted news on TV, the original TV-producing publishers have gone digital, focusing on written web articles instead of well-produced video content.

What's the reason?

One explanation is that analogue TV news has until recently been seen - and still *is to some extent* - as the "flagship product" for many "TV native" media houses (partly because they still are), while web articles (perhaps with the story from TV or with other video pieces embedded) have been the main digital focus, along with a growing focus on producing content tailored for social media - third-party platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube.

Regions that have attempted to embed TV features in web articles have seen very limited usage.

But there are many good reasons to focus on an improved offering of on-demand - and live - streaming news content:

One of them is that young(er) people are far more likely to consume video than text online.

Although young people are not specifically the focus of this report, they are still an important focal point.

Partly because they are the consumers of the future, and partly because it is a democratically relevant task and obligation to get in touch with them.

Firstly, the consumption patterns they represent are increasingly reflected in older target groups.

Furthermore, the news streaming project this report focuses on is particularly relevant to younger audiences, as they are more likely to consume video content online<sup>6</sup>, while older generations are more likely to consume text content - although this is also changing. One should also keep in mind, that the existing news video content is just not appealing enough to older generations either, so falling in between “boring and too young” it could also be a supply-issue.

## Track 1 USERS

### The user-centric approach

There are good reasons why media should listen to its users and put them and their needs at the centre of everything from story selection to presentation and distribution.

Editor-in-Chief and co-founder of the online media Zealand, Lea Korsgaard's put it this way when she spoke at the Constructive Copenhagen Summit in May 2024:

*"Journalism has NO value in and of itself. Absolutely no value. The value comes when someone - hopefully many - find it valuable and hopefully use that journalism.*

*That's why I find that a user-centric model - a user-centric mindset - is key if you want to do constructive journalism. Start with their needs!"*

At the same time, she emphasised that *"constructive journalism is basically just good journalism."*

If you want to start from the needs of your users and create value for them, you need to know and understand them - both the users and the needs.

It's also necessary if you want to be the 'someone' users can trust when they find it hard to trust 'anything' in a world of alternative facts, dis- and misinformation, deep fakes and fake news.

The problem is that many media outlets have lost the connection with users to the extent that they ever really had it.

Essentially, mutual knowledge is the prerequisite for creating a relationship where information about needs and their fulfilment can flow back and forth between user and medium.

Establishing such knowledge and such a channel is an important step towards building trust and establishing the loyalty that media is increasingly desperate to achieve as social media changes algorithms to deselect news, or to steer users away from news and offer them entertainment<sup>7</sup> that is more engaging and keeps users on the platform.

If there's any truth to the claim that we're moving into a credibility economy, where we as media need to realise that credibility is the currency we can offer as payment for users' attention, then we must not only be able to offer well-documented, fact-based and fact-checked journalism. It must also be relevant

---

<sup>6</sup> Reuters Digital News Report 2024 p 10 "Short videos are accessed by 66 per cent of our sample each week with longer formats attracting around half) The main locus of news video consumption is online platforms (72 pct) rather than publisher websites (22 pct)"

<sup>7</sup> Huang, S., & Yang, T. (2024). Auditing Entertainment Traps on YouTube: How Do Recommendation Algorithms Pull Users Away from News. *Political Communication*, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2024.2343769>  
Overall, YouTube recommendation algorithms have a higher probability of recommending entertainment videos than news. The findings imply essential biases in algorithmic recommendations on digital platforms beyond amplifying users' preferences.

to our users, and they must feel that they can recognise the reality they live in. They need to feel that "their media" is committed to uncovering and finding solutions to the things that matter in their lives.

Does this mean that media should incessantly fulfil their users' preferences and stop offering content that is essential from a journalistic point of view?

Far from it. But perhaps it's a false dichotomy to contrast the wants and needs of users with "socially relevant and independent journalism."

At the BBC, there is a need to make sure the content produced feels relevant to all audiences, and not just certain groups or parts of the country, Chris Achilleos, Executive News Editor, Streaming at the BBC, explains.

*"Although there is a wide range of local and regional news offered across platforms by public service broadcasters like the BBC, we know that some audiences feel like they don't see themselves well represented in news content. Perhaps they see lots of big cities, but not where they live, or people they can relate to. Where this perception exists, it's important to address it, to make sure we are engaging as many audiences as possible with news content they find relevant and useful" he says.*

Achilleos gives the coverage of living expenses as an example.

*"Money is tight for a lot of people in this country. That has been a big issue for that group. But have we done enough content that helps them? Or have we just done lots of content, that's gone: "oh, it's terrible, it's terrible, it's terrible? Which speaks to another thing around Constructive journalism, solutions journalism: giving people solutions to stuff, rather than just saying how terrible everything is, which is something that all age groups are telling us."*

So maybe the two are not mutually incompatible. Maybe it's a question of finding the most relevant stories to people's lives and better, more useful ways to cover the stories that are complex and controversial, or those that seem boring but are socially important, such as agricultural subsidies, regulation of banks and financial institutions, climate change, environmental protection, school policy, elderly care and so on.

In any case, it is unrealistic to imagine a situation where publishers will spend resources on creating content that is not consumed, and for this reason, among others, the task is to figure out how media bridges the gap between journalistic independence and the world of users.

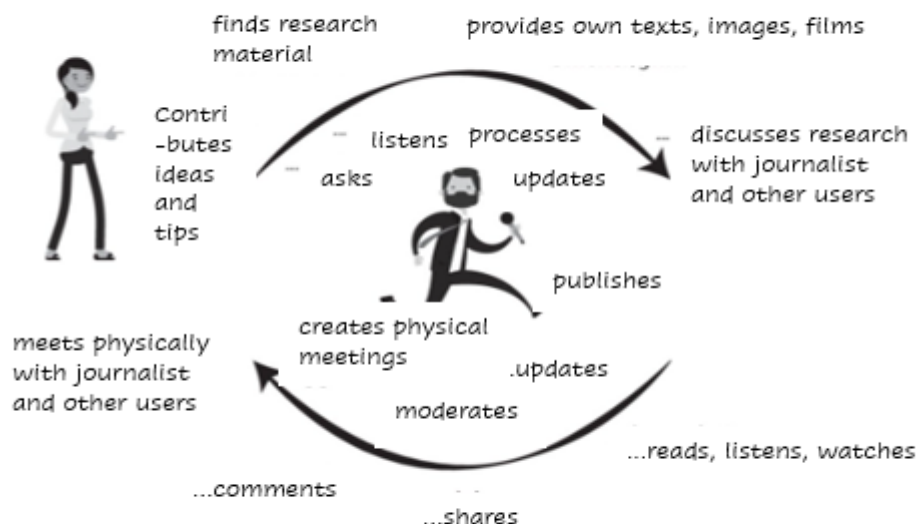
Journalism that reflects and puts into perspective the world and the challenges and opportunities users experience in a relatable way can be the path to increased trust between media and users

In *"The journalistic connection. How the news media reinvents its relationship with citizens - and its relevance to democracy"*, Søren Schultz-Jørgensen and Per Westergård argue for the need for journalists to realise that journalism cannot remain a one-way communication from journalist/media to reader/listener/viewer but must be an involving process where users are involved in the entire journalistic process from idea to evaluation.



Figure 3

### The participatory circuit



Søren Schultz-Jørgensen and Per Westergård's proposal for a participatory cycle where citizens are involved in several parts of the journalistic process.

Source: "The journalistic connection" (translated into English)

## Users are bypassing the gatekeeper

The time is definitely coming to an end when newsrooms chose which stories were relevant to their users.

Users decide what's relevant and algorithms make sure to bring it to them.

For years, TV SYD - like virtually all other TV2 regions and legacy media in many parts of the world - has found that much of the traditional public service news content that editors prioritise and find socially relevant and important can be difficult to engage users with.

This can be for many reasons: for example, users find the story itself uninteresting or irrelevant, it's not being sold well, or they can't find the story at all (or vice versa - a problem that is increasing due to third-party platform algorithms).

Whatever the reason, it's a partial waste of resources if the content produced is not sufficiently consumed.<sup>8</sup>

According to Hanne Bruun, professor at the Department of Communication and Culture - Media Studies at Aarhus University, this is a reality that challenges the legitimacy of public service media:

*"Relevance and reach are crucial - otherwise legitimacy disappears,"* she points out, and continues:

*"Those big words like legitimacy and that the population actually has an interest in using public service media content are becoming more and more crucial in this day and age. 10-15 years ago, diversity was*

<sup>8</sup> It is important to add that reach is not the only measure of the impact of journalistic content. Content can have a high impact even if the number of users is low if the story manages to create debate or change. But reach is not insignificant, as it is important for informing citizens in a democratic society.

*the big issue, but now we have enough diversity to serve the population's many different subgroups and specialised taste communities. Today, perhaps it's more the challenge of bringing the population together at all - attracting them in the cacophony of other offers that are out there that is the challenge. Offers that are super attractive with high production standards," she says.*

Since public service media cannot necessarily match the production quality found on many digital streaming platforms, Hanne Bruun believes there are other things than quality to focus on today.

*"In the old days you could say: you should watch DR and TV2, because that's where the good content is. But that argument has completely fallen apart. So, what you need to emphasise today is a form of proximity - it's proximity - national, cultural, linguistic proximity that is the focal point today," she says.*

## What user's want and don't want - the case of TV SYD

What is it that users want?

TV SYD - the regional TV2 station the southern part of Jutland - set out to answer this question in spring 2024.

Over the years, TV SYD - like all other media organisations - has tried different strategies to increase users' attention on digital platforms.

Overall, the total spend has remained fairly stable, but individual, well-crafted and well-told stories can get good user numbers.

According to TV SYD's CEO, Betina Bendix, part of the explanation may be that TV SYD has moved further away from users as more and more journalists work behind a screen and via telephone.

This is a development that has followed the reprioritisation of resources from TV to digital platforms.

*"I think we're not in touch enough with our users because we no longer have time to talk to them much when we're out and about, and we're becoming more and more similar, those of us working in the journalism industry in general, while the world is becoming more and more fragmented," says Betina Bendix.*

To answer the question of who the users are and what their needs and wishes are, TV SYD teamed up with Lene Heiselberg, an associate professor at the Centre for Journalism at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU) and specialised in journalism/media effects and audience research.

Lene Heiselberg points out that journalists often do stories in the "update me" category - the concise here-and-now registration of a news story:

*"This is the type of content you publish the most, so it's really good to get other perspectives to diversify the content you publish," says Lene Heiselberg.*

Lene Heiselberg points to the "I-centred" mindset that characterises editorial practices around story selection and idea development:

According to Heiselberg, the mindset is based on the idea that journalists can get others to take an interest in what they are passionate about. That the users' needs are understood as long as you have a sufficiently diverse editorial team, that the habits, routines and attitudes of the journalist/editorial team are the best working tool, and that the good story is selected based on intuition, experience and gut feelings.

According to Heiselberg, it can be argued that the starting point in their own reality gives the journalist blinders on, that media need to get to know users and meet them on their home turf, that their own habits, routines and attitudes are a source of biases in the journalist, and that the good story actually arises in dialogue with users in all phases from idea to research to evaluation - and not in the journalist's stomach.

These are points that call for a cultural change in editorial offices - a fundamentally different way of working and a different way of prioritising resources if they are to be put into practice. Because it's obvious that knowledge of users doesn't just happen by itself.

This requires investment on several levels - both in analytical tools and in concrete and continuous contact with users, as user needs can hardly be considered static.

It is the users themselves - TV SYD's support organisation Club Syd - who have donated funds to conduct the study, which in addition to in-depth interviews with 50 loyal and loyal/peripheral users, also includes a quantitative awareness analysis conducted by Kantar-Gallup.

I asked earlier if we deliver enough value to our users.

Time and attention are a scarce resource for all of us. So, from a user perspective it makes sense to de-prioritise anything you don't feel is essential - or relaxing and entertaining, if that's what you need.

The answers users give TV SYD provide insight into what they want from the content the station delivers in order for it to be of value to them.

In addition to geographical proximity and stories they don't find in other media, they want TV SYD to get better at explaining the meaning of the events it covers. They want to be updated ("what"), but not only that: they want help understanding the world around them ("so what").

They also want hope, and they want us to tell them about solutions.

Finally, they want a more modern form of storytelling, and younger respondents want regional content to be more relevant to young people.

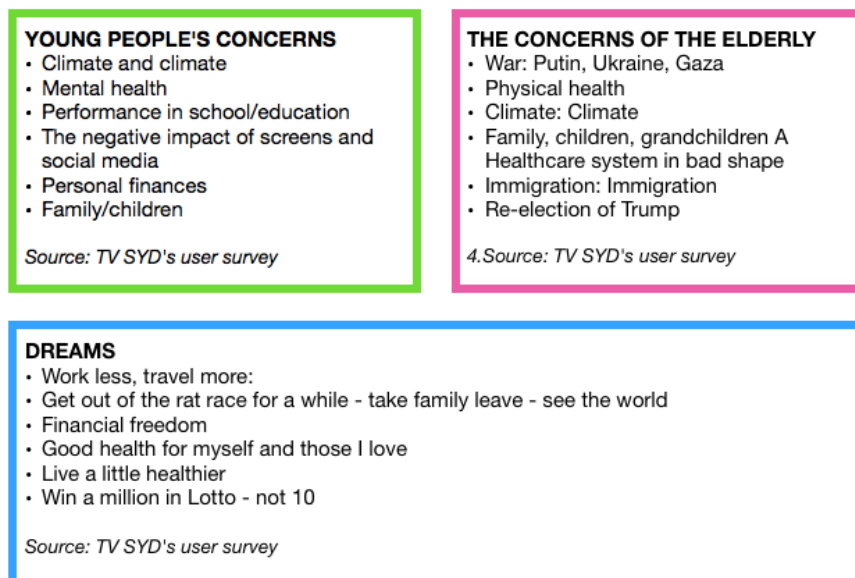
And what is it that is relevant to young, middle-aged and older people? Is everything interesting and relevant because it is geographically close or solution-orientated?

Or do we need to get even closer to users to create the value they actually demand and consume when they don't answer surveys, but actually press "play"?

TV SYD's survey asks about respondents' dreams and concerns, and this is where the first concrete suggestions on what gives users value will probably be found.

Not surprisingly, users' concerns largely reflect where they are in life, as seen in Figure 4

Figure 4



But the study also reveals the need of users in southern and southern Jutland to avoid much of the content that the media prioritises today: content that has contributed to news avoidance and news fatigue in large parts of the democratic world.

In Denmark, one in five Danes say they "often or sometimes" avoid news. This is fewer than in most other countries in Western Europe, but a trend that has increased by six percentage points from 2017-22.<sup>9</sup> It has since dropped one percentage point.

When TV SYD's users are asked how they view news in general, they respond:

- There is too much death, destruction and accidents
- Miss having news and consequences explained
- Tired of repetition in the news
- Tired of sensationalism and news media blowing things out of proportion
- Tired of politics and political mudslinging
- Tired of clickbait headlines
- Tired of news media that mainly covers Copenhagen
- Younger: enjoy personalisation - that algorithms on SOME find the news for those they are typically interested in

One of the users in the survey expresses his experience of news like this:

*"I prefer news that are somewhat positive. It doesn't all have to be death and destruction. I can see why climate change is important, but I want to know what we can do about it. There must be light in the darkness" (woman, 36)*

The user responses in TV SYD's survey are largely consistent with previous research conducted by Reuters Digital News Report on causes and solutions:

*"There are no simple solutions to what is a multifaceted story of disconnection and low engagement in a high-choice digital environment, but our data suggest that less sensationalist, less negative, and more*

<sup>9</sup> [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/Digital\\_News-Report\\_2022.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/Digital_News-Report_2022.pdf)

*explanatory approaches might help, especially with those who have low interest in news. Of course, what people say doesn't always match what they do, and other research reminds us that in practice we are often drawn towards more negative and emotionally triggering news (Robertson et al. 2023). This may be true in the moment, but over time it seems to be leaving many people empty and less satisfied, which may be undermining our connection with and trust in the news." (Reuters Digital News Report 2023)*

Trust in public service news media in Denmark is still high<sup>10</sup>. This gives hope that the media can still capitalise on this high credibility and position itself as "the trusted someone".

A recent trend in legacy media's conversion rate from analogue to digital platforms (i.e. the number of analogue users moving to the legacy media's digital platform) has made Betina Bendix optimistic.

For many years, the conversion rate has been 11 per cent.

A mysterious - previously impenetrable - global barrier that Danish public service media has now broken, bringing their conversion rate up to 13 per cent.

*"I don't think it's because we've gotten really good, but also because people need to find out if what they read on Reddit is true. And I strongly believe that the uncertainty and the big changes that are happening in the world right now are making people look back towards the local and the regional - mostly the local,"* says Betina Bendix.

That kind of victories also have merit. But if Reuters' analysis that "emotionally triggering news" - all the death and destruction and clickbait that people in the southern part of Jutland resent - in the long run leaves users "empty and less satisfied", and that this undermines trust in news, then it emphasises the need for an increased focus on user needs and a change in the journalistic mindset towards the model that the Constructive Institute stands for.

An argument I will return to later in this report.

## User Needs in practise - the case of Politiken

In the Politiken newsroom, a new screen hangs alongside other content monitoring platforms such as Chartbeat.

"POLITKEN's USER NEEDS", it says at the top of the screen. Underneath you can see how many articles have been published under each of the newspaper's seven user needs.

"Show me the attitudes" leads over "Update me". In third place is "Explain me", closely followed by "Show me the people". "Fascinate me", "Entertain me" and "Guide me" follow in the last three places. 77 percent of all articles are tagged with a user need.

"It shows that it takes time to implement new ways of working," says Andreas Kønig, editor for content development and newsletters at Politiken. He has led the work of adapting the User Needs 2.0 model to the needs of Politiken's users and has been responsible for its implementation in the editorial office.

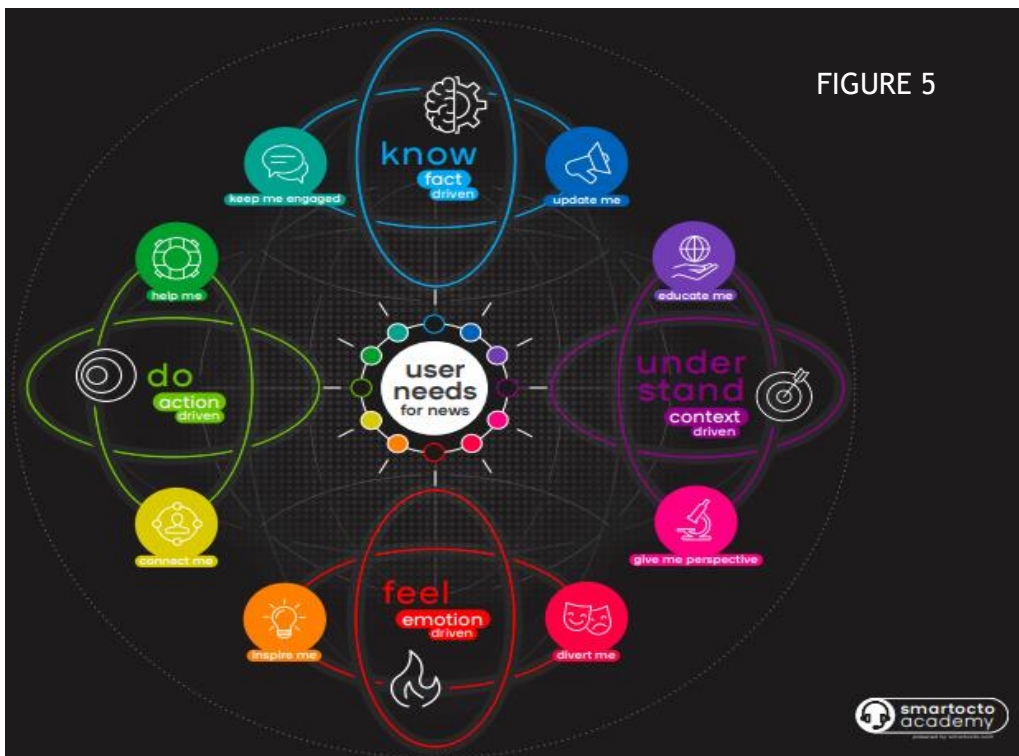
---

<sup>10</sup> Schröder, K., Blach-Ørsten, M., & Eberholst, M. K. (2023). Avoidance of news, podcasts and Danes' views on public service. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7965043> "Once again this year, the analysis of Denmark shows that trust in public service news media is the highest among all Danish news media (Newman et al., 2023:70-71). Thus, 83 per cent of Danes trust DR, while 79 per cent trust TV2. Børsen comes in third place with 72 per cent."

The user needs screen has been hanging in the newsroom since Politiken started working with their own version of the BBC's User Needs 2.0 model at the turn of the year - a model that the BBC implemented in 2017 after several years of user research and constant iteration.

The BBC version of the user needs included six categories: "Update me", "Keep me on trend", "Give me perspective", "Educate me", "Inspire me" and "Divert me".

The model has since been developed by [Smartocto for the 2.0](#) version in collaboration with Dmitry Shiskin, who originally developed the model with the BBC World Service, and the "Help me" and "Connect me" needs have been added (aimed respectively at providing useful information that can solve personal problems and improve users' lives, and at creating a sense of community and enabling people to engage with wider societal issues).



Politiken's analysis of why established media is losing ground in a digital world is in line with Lene Heiselberg's:

*"Like so many other legacy media, we are characterised by the fact that we have been an "inside-out media". We're the ones who decide what's important to users, and we hope they think so too,"* explains Andreas Kønig.

With the decision to put user needs at the centre of the newsroom, Politiken follows in the wake of a growing number of international, national, regional and local media around the world that have done the same:

New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Atlantic, Bonnier, Berlingske and Jysk Fynske Medier, JFM. But also digital native media like BuzzFeed and Vox - to name a few.

At Politiken, the goal is to get more users, but also to service and retain existing subscribers.

Initially, Politiken drew on the large amounts of data and user surveys that already existed in-house. The daily newspaper conducted focus group surveys and then began to develop its own user needs based on a thorough analysis of all the data.

According to Andreas Kønig, it's too early to say whether user needs generate more traffic, but an engagement barometer that collates different information about the consumption of each article serves as a tool that has helped the editorial team to test and identify new ways of covering climate, for example:

*"Climate is something we here at Politiken believe is important. But the users have - at least not all the time - agreed with us that it was important. Instead of dropping it and doing something completely different, we had to find out what it was that made climate work - and that's where we used user needs,"* says Andreas Kønig.

The editors have found that "fascinate me" and "explain me" are the two user needs that make climate coverage the most successful.

A story about an innovator-type who finds a way to create energy using a giant magnifying glass and can heat a small town that way is one example of a "fascinate me story" that works:

*"It's a story that you can explain in many ways. You can make it really dry, but you can also focus on him and his invention of something new and something that is pretty wild, that has the potential to change the way we approach climate change,"* explains Andres Kønig.

Personal stories are something that works really well - also at Politiken - both when it comes to doom-and-gloom, but also when it comes to the more uplifting stories:

According to Andreas Kønig, it's easier to relate to the fact that it affects specific people or that a person has made a wild invention than it is to relate to numbers or statistics.

*"Part of the fascination with our users also lies in new frontiers. Our users are very interested in new science and new ways of doing things, and that translates very much into climate coverage,"* says Andreas Kønig

*"Through user needs, we've been able to increase our reader engagement in climate coverage, and we've done it in a way that didn't dumb down the content. In this way, we've kept our publishing standards high while engaging our users more,"* says Andreas Kønig.

According to Kønig, success in the "fascinate me" category doesn't mean the editors stop covering climate in other categories:

*"For example, we still think it's important to do climate news, even if it's not the stories that reach the most people. But then we can use the user needs model to work on how to make good climate news, and you can also start thinking about the amount of different stories in the category."*

Andreas Kønig points out that user needs are used to develop ideas and plan the coverage of major events to ensure that you fulfil the needs of users when covering major breaking events.

*"It could be the stock exchange that's on fire. With user needs, we're a little better at finding out if we're getting round all the corners. Whereas before we were perhaps too limited and only ran news stories all the time, this gives us a fairly easy overview of whether we've also explained why it burned, whether we've also shown the great pictures. Whether we've got an opinion piece in and so on."*

## The Case for Community-Powered Journalism

The question is whether the User Needs model itself gives media organisations enough knowledge to understand their users well enough to deliver content to them that they find valuable.

The model provides tools for a clear editorial focus on the purpose of each story. Is it to entertain, give perspective or explain something? But what does a user need, that says “update me” mean? Engage me? Inspire me?

About what? In what and for what, you might ask.

User research and analysing user data goes a long way. But it can be argued that it is necessary for the media to seek a deeper understanding of what knowledge creates value for users and empowers them to take action in their own lives.

Later in the report, I will discuss storytelling, referring to research that shows that the brain's RAS system acts as a kind of gatekeeper, separating relevant from irrelevant knowledge and throwing the latter out so that the brain doesn't burn out when bombarded with information.

A bombardment that is absolutely enormous in the digital age.

It's worth mentioning when talking about creating value, because value equals relevance, which allows content to be stored in users' memories.

Media products can create value for users in a myriad of ways if they are perceived as relevant enough to get past the gatekeeper: Media content can challenge or confirm perceptions, enable users to talk to over lunch at work or at the sports club, provide information that enables citizens to act on issues in their own lives and in the communities they participate in, entertain, provide new knowledge and so on.

But how do media organisations gain this knowledge about users?

By being present as an observer on social media? By participating in the debate and showing that you are a person you can trust?

The very idea of closer involvement that could compromise independence sends shivers down the spines of many journalists - and media executives - who consider journalistic neutrality a badge of honour - an imperative for journalistic credibility.

Because where do we draw the line when we can no longer claim to be "striving for objectivity"?

According to researchers, community-based journalism is an alternative way to engage with users.<sup>11</sup>

Because of the way, journalism sees itself: as a watchdog and a contributor to democratic dialogue there is on the one hand, a role for media in supporting human communities and conversations, and on the other hand, it may also make sense from a more commercial point of view:

If media plays a role in people's communities (which can be location-based, interest-based or identity-based<sup>12</sup>), and is considered valuable by these communities, it can reinforce the group's recognition of the importance of the media and increase support for it in a wider circle, which will also strengthen individual loyalty.

---

<sup>11</sup> [Davis and Hunter, 2020](#) "The Internet giants defined engagement as the time spent interacting with particular content, whether user-generated or created by a provider. That measure matters for us, too. But engagement has other, multiple meanings for a contemporary news outlet. It is the cornerstone of trust, because people place greater trust in others whom they can contact, see, and exchange with.<sup>11</sup> It is the gateway to data, because through those interactions, we learn more about our users."

<sup>12</sup> Kevin Davis and Mark Lee Hunter, Community-Powered Journalism - a Manual for Sustainability and Growth in Independent News, 2020 <https://communitypoweredjournalism.com>

In the Community-Powered Journalism manual, Kevin Davis and Mark Lee Hunter explain how media can engage with users and their communities - or as the title suggests, how interaction with communities can re-fuel journalism:

*"Your community's needs are the roadmap. Take the time to investigate them and keep asking what they will need next. Every time you solve their problems, you earn their trust. Every time you address another of their problems, you keep them with you. Just make sure that you concentrate on the problems that matter to them and that fit your mission, now and in the future."<sup>13</sup>*

In the book "The Journalistic Connection", Søren Schultz-Jørgensen and Per Westergård highlight the editor-in-chief of New Brunswick Today, Charlie Kratovil, who takes the plunge and calls himself a community organiser. They quote him as follows:

*"We can't just deliver stories and journalism. We need to help communities organise themselves, meet, debate, exchange ideas and knowledge so they can better solve their problems."*

Schultz-Jørgensen and Westergård outline a new journalistic ambition to replace the traditional journalistic ideology that "journalists were created to neutrally, independently and objectively convey the truth to citizens":

*"This notion should be replaced by three new ambitions for journalism: (1) to provide a service to citizens, (2) on an open basis (transparency about own working methods ed.) and (3) using methods that create dialogue and close contact between journalists and citizens,"* they write.

According to them, the way to increase credibility is for journalists to come out of the ivory tower, and they argue that the job of media is to create communities:

*"Unlike in the past, where the media was or represented communities to a large extent, the task today is that the media must actively and continuously seek out and make itself relevant in the communities and social contexts that citizens are already involved in. And the media must - actively and continuously - invite its users to help create new ones."*

## Do we have the energy and should we?

Direct engagement with users and communities is an overwhelming task for media outlets that have either experienced round after round of layoffs - or for public service media outlets that are generally not staffed to maintain such close contact with users in a relatively large geographical area.

Some media solve this by inviting users to interact with the media.

For example, some media outlets use systems like Hearken - an audience and community engagement system based on a philosophy of listening to users and communities.

In Denmark, both TV2 Fyn and TV2 Kosmopol have made use of the system.

TV2 Kosmopol uses the system for weekly user polls, where users can submit questions about things they wonder about via an online form, and each week users vote on which question should be investigated and made into a story on the station.

Online media company Zetland does it differently. They see subscribers not as customers, but as members who contribute ideas in a contribution track under every article and through member events.

There is definitely a need to develop even more models for user involvement.

---

<sup>13</sup> Davis and Hunter, 2020

But it's a balancing act between engagement with users and journalistic insistence that the connection is fact-driven: that journalists are not part of the "story" - but can help uncover solutions and options for action.

Or - to quote Schultz-Jørgensen and Westergård again:

*"This way of understanding journalism is not a rejection of the classic content, the news, the feature, the good story. But it is an expansion of both the territory of journalism and its obligation. The work is not finished when an article or news item is produced. It is only complete when you have provided citizens with the knowledge, tools, contacts, relationships or answers they need to move forward in a given situation."*

## The Case for Constructive Journalism

**"So how do we develop journalism and what constructive journalism is - what journalism always should have been? It should never have been separated, but I think we are forced to think this way, to define the problems very clearly, so we can help our societies find the right solutions."**

*Nobel Laureate and CEO of Rappler, Maria Ressa, in an interview with Constructive Institute, 2022*

Looking at the responses in TV SYD's user survey, there is no doubt that the wishes users have for TV SYD are far more in line with the Constructive Institute's model of constructive journalism than with the media's traditional focus on news criteria such as sensation, conflict and, for that matter, materiality.

A 72-year-old woman **doesn't like sad news with problems she can't do anything about.**

A 30-year-old man says **"there is enough negative news, so I like the positive ones better. The ones that show what we can do in our area. We have a lot to be proud of and we need to showcase that more. My advice would be to create local content and then make sure that the positive news is more prominent - also in the future."**

Another man wants **"more positive and constructive news - especially about health and social issues"**, while a woman is **"tired of news that gets blown out of proportion."**

TV SYD's users are not alone according to research into news avoidance. Reuters Digital News Report has focused on the phenomenon for several years, and their interviews show similar results:

**" Generally, I want a lighter tone. It's good for my soul and makes me less anxious".** (Male, 55)

In the Reuters Digital News Report 2022, the Reuters Institute examines the reasons people avoid news:<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> The report looks at selective news avoidance - that is, users who avoid news most of the time.

**"A significant proportion say they avoid news because they think it can't be trusted (29%). Around a third (36%), particularly those who are under 35, say that the news brings down their mood. Others say the news leads to arguments they would rather avoid (17%) or leads to feelings of powerlessness (16%). A small proportion say they don't have enough time for news (14%) or that it is too hard to understand (8%)".**

**REUTERS INSTITUTE: OVERVIEW AND KEY FINDINGS OF THE 2022 DIGITAL NEWS REPORT**

In other words, users themselves are pretty sure why they avoid news and what they want more of. But in the editorial offices, there is a sense that people say one thing and do another: they say they want fewer negative stories - yet that's exactly the type of stories they click on.

Research supports that humans have an innate "negativity bias". We are more aware of events that could threaten our existence and therefore pay more attention to negative events than positive ones, which are perceived by the brain as the "normal state" (we rarely notice when we feel good. Conversely, we always notice if something hurts).<sup>15</sup>

It is therefore tempting to give readers what they want: what we know they click on: the sensational - and often negative.

However, as previously stated, the flip side of the coin is that it is ultimately the many clicks on negative news that leads more and more people to deliberately avoid news - and this behaviour is largely seen in young users.

Just because users click the most on negative news doesn't mean they click the least on constructive ones.

Since the Constructive Institute launched its Constructive News Mirror - an algorithm trained to distinguish constructive news from other news - the Institute has seen evidence that constructive news - like conflict stories - attracts more clicks than average news:

Preliminary results of analyses of articles published by public service media in the Nordics, local/regional media in Denmark, and private media in Germany show that constructive stories provide:

- 15 per cent more readers
- 16 per cent longer reading time
- 20 per cent higher reader satisfaction

---

<sup>15</sup> Rozin, P., & Royzman, E. B. (2001). "Negativity bias, negativity dominance, and contagion." \*Personality and Social Psychology Review, 5\*(4), 296-320.

For public service media, however, there is a far more important argument for constructive news: the responsibility to provide a nuanced picture of reality and to help create a debate - a shared conversation - that is not polarised.

Despite the fact that we as media are "striving for objectivity", we cannot escape the fact that the stories we choose to focus on, the angles we choose to prioritise and the worldview we impose on them influence reality.

A concrete example is the narrative created in the 1960s of nature as something to be 'tamed' - rivers were straightened because it was economically advantageous for agriculture - helped create public acceptance of actions that later proved to be highly destructive.

Similarly, one could argue that an excessive focus on sensational, negative news helps create the impression of a reality that is more threatening and dark than it really is - with all the consequences for the individual: fear, stress, elevated cortisol levels, health consequences - both mental and physical.<sup>16</sup>

And for society: increasing conflict levels, greater polarization and legitimization of legislation that is meant to protect citizens but at the same time is at odds with democratic principles and creates democratic backsliding.

It's not entirely incomprehensible when it causes an increasing number of people to turn their backs on news in whole or in part, and it calls for reflection by the media on how traditional news criteria<sup>17</sup> affect the worldview they convey and how a more balanced - and accurate - worldview can contribute to a better culture of debate, increased engagement and less hopelessness.

Both SVT in Sweden and NRK in Norway have taken constructive journalism into their daily work.

Both SVT in Sweden and NRK in Norway have incorporated constructive journalism into their daily work.

At SVT, Christina Johannesson is project manager Future Competencies at SVT News and Sports and Current Affairs. Her role is to support the digital transformation of the news organisation and she is the driving force behind the focus on constructive journalism.

As part of SVT's digital transformation, the media organisation has had hundreds of employees visit users over the years to ask them what they wanted.

And while 25-year-olds and 70-year-olds have completely different wishes for content and tone, there is one thing that unites the groups, says Christina Johannesson:

*"If there was something that really united all audience groups - all ages all over Sweden - it was that almost everyone said they also needed another type of news than conflict, crime, accidents. Not that we should stop doing journalism about scary topics, just that the audience needed another type of journalism in addition, they said. Something that is more hopeful. And a lot of them have all over the*

---

<sup>16</sup> McLaughlin, B., Gotlieb, M. R., & Mills, D. J. (2022). Caught in a Dangerous World: Problematic News Consumption and Its Relationship to Mental and Physical Ill-Being. *Health Communication*, 38(12), 2687-2697.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2022.2106086> - "Results also show greater mental and physical ill-being among those with higher levels of problematic news consumption compared to those with lower levels, even after controlling for demographics, personality traits, and overall news use".

<sup>17</sup> Constructive Fellow 2023-24, Kåre Kildall Rysgaard's fellowship report "Newsworthiness" examines why the existing news criteria - VISAK - are problematic and how to reconsider new criteria.

*years more and more told us, that they avoid news actively because they want to protect their psychological well-being."*

Swedish research shows that a third of users actively avoid news. SVT has therefore made constructive news part of its overall strategy. According to Christina Johannesson, this is necessary if SVT is to succeed with the editorial culture change it requires and - not least - if it is to succeed in attracting users aged between 20 and 40.

*"We can see that they are the ones who leave us the fastest, and we believe that if we can retain them, we can also retain the older users who are more loyal."*

She says that faith in the future is one of the things 20–40-year-olds are looking for.

*"This generation is even more gloomy and pessimistic about the future than the older generation, so if we want to make it worthwhile for them to consume news, we need to develop journalism in a way that they can actually stand us,"* says Christina Johannesson.

SVT has chosen to focus on Pillar 1 - solution-orientated journalism - in its strategy.

*"And the solution must be verifiable. You must be able to investigate it journalistically, and we don't abdicate as journalists, even if we use constructive journalism in the news,"* she says.

She points out that there has long been a misconception that constructive news was "positive news". But that perception is on the wane:

*"Now the concept has matured, we can see that constructive stories sometimes attract more users than non-constructive stories do. You can also see that it works because it's the constructive stories that commercial media often choose to put behind paywalls,"* says Christina Johannesson.

## Track 2 RETHINKING NEWS FORMATS FOR ON-DEMAND

What is news? When and where is it news, why is it news and to whom?

The digital transformation of the media market has, as described above, put all power in the hands of users. It no longer makes sense for traditional news media to insist that they are the best judge of what users should know - or when and in what context people should be updated on new information.

In linear TV, digitalisation means that news is live and online all day and is therefore generally no longer news when the traditional news broadcasts - TV Avisen, Nyhederne (now News) or the 7.30pm broadcast on Danish regional TV stations - go on air.

It questions what news actually is and what it should be in traditional TV news programmes - just as it questions what news is and should be if it is to perform in a digital - temporally fluid space - where the consumption of news is not connected to a particular context in either time or space, and therefore must be viable in its own right.

In a digital world, a half-baked story doesn't get a life because it's surrounded by two good ones like it can in a traditional news broadcast. The good ones get picked. The half-baked ones don't.

Some TV 2 regions choose to embed news produced for TV in their web articles. It is consumed very little. *"But then the opportunity is there"*, as several of them put it.

But it remains a stopgap solution for lack of a better one.

Director of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, has repeatedly pointed to the media's lack of product development as a problem for the industry.

But while it may be slow, small steps are being taken, and a number of content and platform managers and editors from Danish, English, Swedish and Norwegian public service media contribute their experiences of this development here.

## Why on demand?

Why is it important to format news content to make it an attractive streaming product?

This is partly because news is increasingly consumed in a video format - not least among young people.

This is documented in Reuters Digital News Report 2024, among others. In Denmark, the consumption of short videos is – so far – lower than it is globally. 44 per cent consume short news videos digitally.

**Video is becoming a more important source of online news, especially with younger groups. Short news videos are accessed by two-thirds (66%) of our sample each week, with longer formats attracting around half (51%). The main locus of news video consumption is online platforms (72%) rather than publisher websites (22%), increasing the challenges around monetisation and connection.**

*Reuters Digital News Report 2024, executive summary*

If you look at where the news consumed on social media comes from, it is largely only on X and Facebook that the established mainstream media can compete with news content (not just video) produced by influencers, celebrities and individual news/content creators, who in many cases are politically polarised - often on the right.<sup>18</sup> Young people in particular are choosing to get their news from online personalities.

At TV 2 Play, around 50 per cent of streaming consumption takes place live - that is, at the same time as the content is broadcast on linear TV. But TV 2 - and not least TV 2 News - is a pay channel, and live content is not available to viewers - typically young people - who can only afford to pay for the cheapest streaming product, which only offers access to on-demand consumption. According to Jonas Fjordside, Head of publishing, TV 2 Play, this is why TV 2 is now focusing on news on demand:

*"The motivation for even talking about on-demand streaming of news is especially the younger demographic, which we can see has a large predominance of on-demand consumption. We really want to reach the youngest target group with our important news content and our content in general," says Jonas Fjordside.*

## What is streaming?

In this report, streaming is defined as the consumption of audio and video on the internet. The content is downloaded while it is being watched, which can be live or delayed - "on demand". Streaming can take

<sup>18</sup> Reuters Digital News Report 2024 does not investigate which online personalities Danes/young Danes get their news from.

place on websites or on a dedicated play platform - an app - or an online universe - such as YouTube. On the TV2 regions' websites, you will often find a play icon that takes you to the region's play universe.



## Formats

Delivering news on streaming requires a completely different format than a traditional two-minute TV news report.

At TV 2, Jonas Fjordside, Head of Publishing at TV 2 Play, doesn't believe that "news like pearls on a string" - as we know it from TV - is the way forward on a streaming platform.

He believes that news content for streaming should be developed into fixed news formats. The daily news and breaking stories (update me stories ed.) should be released as live streaming (on TV 2 News in TV 2's case), and then news content that can do more should be developed, put into perspective and served in a format specifically developed for streaming platforms.

*"We don't want a lot of content, but we want the right content. The stuff that affects, the stuff that connects, and the stuff that starts conversations. The stuff that matters and that we can break through the sound barrier with. We can't do that with a thousand things, but we can maybe do it with a few hundred things during the year. So, it's something about getting more aware of what we believe in. We need to listen to what it is that users really want,"* says Fjordside.

It is longer formats that work on a play platform according to Fjordside:

On TV 2 Play, news content should preferably not be shorter than 15 minutes. But it can be longer. As long as the content can carry - preferably 20-25 minutes - as he puts it.

Fjordside points out that 80 percent of the on-demand content consumed on TV2 Play runs on large screens - that is, on TV screens - and that short stories are more of a mobile behaviour.

The same message comes from Head of Publishing at DR, Peter Rosberg:

*"Short formats just generally work pretty poorly on streaming services. They probably belong more on [dr.dk](https://www.dr.dk) - or other services - like YouTube or similar. You expect longer formats on streaming services,"* says Peter Rosberg.

At DR, TV Avisen is one of the most streamed programmes on DRTV (DR's streaming platform) - about fifty-fifty live and on demand, says Rosberg.

But even at DR, posting individual stories from TV as standalone units is not a success.

DR and TV 2 have had great success with streaming - both live and on demand - on DRTV and TV 2 Play respectively.

In terms of time spent, both TV 2's and DR's BVoD platforms<sup>19</sup> became bigger than SVoD platforms such as Netflix,<sup>20</sup> , which was relegated to a position as the Danes' fourth most favourite streaming platform in 2023 - with YouTube as the most consumed platform.

But when it comes to news, video content for digital media is primarily developed for social media platforms and websites.

Fjordside points out that TV 2 has long been working on developing video formats for their digital "free platform" - tv2.dk.

The content varies from very short video clips that appear either in conjunction with web articles, as standalone interview snippets or stories that make a very brief point that requires no further explanation, to short live reports from TV 2's reporters in the field and complete short stories from Echo.

However, neither TV 2 nor DR have found a solution for a dedicated short streaming format for news yet.

*"How we succeed with this project is a huge issue throughout the Nordic region, but also in all traditional media houses,"* says Jonas Fjordside.

The BBC is also working on the case:

*"The challenge is that at the end of the day you might turn on Netflix or your favourite streamer, and most people are not going to sit down and watch news. They are there to relax, turn off and be entertained. So, we are trying to define ways of making content that is news - undeniably news, but doesn't look or feel like traditional news",* says Chris Achilleos

For most regional TV 2 stations, streaming is a bigger challenge than it is for TV 2 and DR. This is largely due to the fact that the regions are not as big "content generators" as DR and TV 2 are.

The common challenge for regional TV is that the number of daily users on regional streaming platforms is limited. Some programmes can peak at 50-100,000 views. But many programmes only reach a few thousand. So even though the regions are in contact with many users across platforms every day - including on linear TV - they struggle to succeed with video content on their own digital platforms, and when it comes to news, the challenge is particularly big despite news being the regions' main product.

In light of the fact that today's youth and thus future media consumers choose to consume news in video format (and find it from sources other than the traditional media - namely the previously mentioned news creators, who in some cases are skilled and professional in their communication - but in other cases spread decidedly false news), this emphasises the need for development work to be initiated.

## The case for long news formats

According to Jonas Fjordside, TV 2 is experimenting with news formats aimed at on-demand streaming. Longer formats are the focus of the development work.

"The Shadow Side ("Skyggesiden") is an example of a news format developed as an on-demand streaming format," he says.

The programme is a true crime format where two anchors (Jannie Pedersen and Carsten Norton) review and analyse a current crime case in a 25–30-minute format.

---

<sup>19</sup> BVoD: Broadcast Video on Demand. SVoD: Subscription Video on Demand

<sup>20</sup> DR media development 2023

According to Jonas Fjordside, the cases covered by Skyggesiden are good examples of stories that could easily run as traditional TV news stories on the 7pm news, but which could benefit from further development and nuance.

Visually, news streaming formats have special requirements.

According to Fjordside, thumbnails<sup>21</sup> must be eye-catching and attractive because they must compete with the other A-content on the platform. Content that has exactly those qualities.

In addition, the visual expression in the broadcast itself must match the aesthetics of the thumbnail. Otherwise, cognitive dissonance occurs: you think you're buying a colourful and attractive product, but when you click, the look is grey and dull.

*"It makes people leave the programme again," says Jonas Fjordside.*

He believes rethinking what news is is necessary if it is to be consumed in a streaming context. He points out that TV 2 uses the term "news and current affairs" - partly because the very concept of "news" in a traditional evening news programme is challenged by the fact that news from a "breaking" perspective is usually "old" when the traditional main news broadcasts run on TV in the evening. The same issue applies to streaming news on demand:

*"The interesting question is, what does news cover? It's something I think we'll be talking a lot about both here and among the TV2-regions. What belongs in this genre? News is not just "who, what, where and why". It's also for the heart. It has to be something that provides vitamins and a different perspective."*

Jonas Fjordside gives TV MIDTVEST's series "Forladt" (Abandoned) about abandoned buildings as an example of a news/current affairs streaming format that would be difficult to tell in a traditional TV news broadcast, but which has both news and public service relevance.

"They film abandoned buildings. It tells something about the neighbourhood and it tells a story about a building, the people who have lived there, the people who have been there. It can be both touching and fascinating. News can be too."

At TV 2, Skyggesiden won't be the last experiment with news formats that can work in a streaming context.

"Big Moments" (Store Øjeblikke) is another news format developed for streaming. It is used to summarise major events. "Zelenskyj visits Denmark", "The space journey with Andreas Mogensen", "The inauguration of a new sovereign in Denmark" and "When the stock exchange burned" are examples of major news events that are compiled into a streaming product on the day.

*"Five years ago, we might have done eight little snippets throughout the day - now he appears on the balcony, now he drives through the city and so on. Instead, we now work with a fixed, well-produced format of about 15 minutes or more. It works much better than producing those 'bits and pieces', which are super difficult to work with in terms of curation and placement," says Jonas Fjordside.*

At DR, Peter Rosberg agrees that streaming requires other formats than those known from TV news:

*"The news agenda needs to get out in other ways. And that's by creating new habits, new formats - cultivate what's live and keep developing our perspective flagships."*

---

<sup>21</sup> A thumbnail is the small image icon - possibly with a title - that the user clicks on to view a programme.

He mentions the foreign affairs magazine "Horizon" ("Horisont") as a format from TV that is streamed by many users:

*We need longer formats. We've had good success with current affairs formats - "explainers" that are slightly longer than the ones you find elsewhere. It could also be "24 hours of war" (Krigens Døgn), which is another current affairs format. Or "Earth is calling" (Jorden kalder). These are very different offerings from this year and last year, where we are curiously exploring how news with perspective is communicated in a streaming context. If you go a little further, you could say that "Close to the truth" (Tæt på Sandheden – a news comedy show, ed.) is also a fourth bid, which conveys topicality in a completely different way," says Rosberg.*

The BBC's experience largely matches the Danish experience: The BBC - like TV 2 and DR - has the greatest success with medium and long formats for news. Here too, the crime genre works well - especially with women and younger audiences.

*"It's one of the big challenges because you can't build a strategy only around crime and work for a public service broadcaster. One of the big things that I'm thinking about but haven't got the full answer to yet is: What formats can we make which addresses all these sorts of big important stories: Public service stories, politics. But even utility stories around cost of living. All that sort of stuff says Chris Achilleos.*

Several TV 2 regions are also investing in longer streaming formats fitted to work on their own streaming platforms and on TV 2 Play – and sometimes also to be broadcast on linear TV.

As Marc Killigren Akselsen, News and Deputy Director at TV MIDTVEST puts it:

"We don't believe that all news sells if it's not formatted."

To strengthen its streaming efforts, TV MIDTVEST has moved 60 percent of the resources that used to produce content for the 19.30 broadcast during the day to pre-production of news:

*"The news and current affairs content we create - also for 19.30 - must be targeted in a different way on digital platforms in order for it to be something that users will consume as video. You can't just cut a single story made for the 19.30 newscast and then publish it on play or [midtvest.dk](http://midtvest.dk). It has to be a different experience there. But we haven't yet found the recipe for how to get the news content we produce every day chopped up in a way that works on play," says Marc Killigren Akselsen.*

## SVT, NRK and the search for short video formats

So, what is the "recipe" for producing news in short, streaming-friendly formats?

Time and time again the answer is that short format streaming doesn't work on play platforms.

*"Our analysis is that every time something ends, users have to choose whether to continue. In a streaming context - or a big screen setting, which is what the streaming app is primarily used for - you give people an option to opt out or jump off every time a programme ends," says Ida Anna Haugen, Development Director at Norwegian TV, NRK.*

Instead, NRK is experimenting with short video formats for the web, as is SVT in Sweden.

In just a few years, Sveriges Television, SVT, has increased the number of clicks on news videos on [svt.se](http://svt.se) tenfold.

Every day on svt.se there are 1.4 million news video starts with a completion rate of 75 per cent.

The tenfold increase is the preliminary result of a targeted effort that started when the station began posting more videos on its website in the hope of increasing video consumption.

However, several videos did not produce the desired results. That's why SVT set up a group to focus on inventing short digital news video formats, according to Nergiz Nora Westerberg, head of digital news division, SVT.

*"We made a promise to our users that everyone who accesses our news service should be able to be updated on a topic in 60 seconds,"* says Nergiz Nora Westerberg.

SVT has created a series of one-to-three-minute news formats that not only aim to update - but also to educate viewers on current affairs. Some formats are longer - two to three minutes long.

One format is "True or False", which answers specific questions in 60 seconds ([True or False about the cold in the north | SVT Nyheter](#)).



Another format, "Who is", tells you in one to two - maximum three minutes – who, for example, Emmanuel Macron is when elections are called in France.

*"Young people know that if they press this video format about "who is" Macron "or whoever, they will find out in a few minutes' tops, who Macron is",* says Nergiz Nora Westerberg.

The short stories are published in conjunction with web articles but can be viewed without having to read the article, and it is clear from the thumbnail that you are now clicking into a video that lasts one, two or three minutes.

At SVT, content produced for online platforms is sometimes also being broadcast in SVT-regions' late newscasts.

*"The mindset is that content produced for online platforms can also be in tonight's regional news. It doesn't happen a lot, but sometimes they use square video because they don't have the resources and they have to focus on online, so they have had to progress faster because of the resources",*

says Nergiz Nora Westerberg.

*"When we use 60-90 second news stories - produced for a digital platform - it requires the presenter to continue the story through graphics and possibly live guests,"* she says.

At NRK in Norway, more and more video stories are also being produced for web-first:

*"It's a clear strategy that we want to move away from text as the only format for [nrk.no](#). It's a very text-oriented universe today. We see that we have a higher share of young people on our video content when it's narrated well. So, it's a way to reach a target group we want to reach better, and it's also to highlight all the good video content that is actually being produced and choose the format that best suits the story - also digitally,"* says Ida Anna Haugen, Development Director at NRK.

She also explains that NRK has experimented a lot with using features produced for the web in the news broadcast on TV:

*"It works well. The way you tell stories on nrk.no also works on linear TV. It requires a faster style of storytelling than what is traditionally done for linear TV. You're more direct - you use the main point and the best, most sensational images earlier, you don't build the story in the same way, and we use more*

active/visible reporter in mobile videos than in traditional TV features. More participatory reporters," says Development Director Ida Anna Haugen.

## Track 3 STORYTELLING IN A STREAMING FORMAT

As described above, public service media organisations are more experienced in longer news streaming formats, while short online video formats are most often found on social media or websites.

On their own platforms, regional TV 2 stations typically work with two strategies for online video: Either they embed the video-story from the 19.30 broadcast in a web article, or they publish small, selected video sequences in connection with web articles – such as reportage snippets or interview bits as documentation or elaboration of the TV story.

Videos of this type, work in a text universe, but typically not as standalone video narratives.

In addition, entire newscasts are uploaded to an archive function on each station's play platform - often also in a cut-up version, so that individual news stories can be selected individually. Newscasts are consumed on demand to a very limited extent.

In addition, all regions are present on Facebook, Instagram and Youtube, while TV2 Kosmopol, TV2 Østjylland, TV2 Øst and TV MIDTVEST also publish content on TikTok.

The question is how TV native media can make their primary product - TV storytelling - palatable to a discerning and impatient online audience.

What can we learn from the formats that exist on social media and what can we learn from the longer formats that TV 2, the TV 2 regions and DR work with?

The starting point for telling the short stories for on-demand streaming is, as Jonas Fjordside, TV 2 Play, puts it:

"Nobody really has the philosopher's stone and can say, "this is what works." It's a lot of little things. We have to try something and then we have to get better and then we have to refine it."

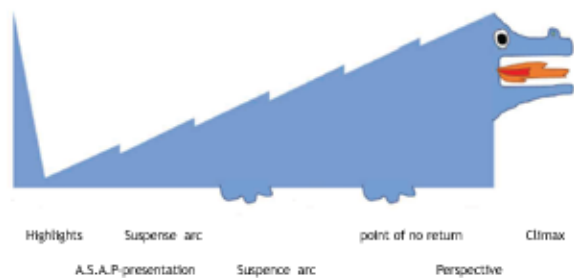
### The dragon - a storytelling model for news?

Probably the most well-known storytelling model for the type of stories that do well in longer formats on play platforms is known as the "dragon".

"The dragon model differs in many ways from the reporting model - also known as *the 'whale'* - that journalists in Denmark have been trained in for many years," says Camilla Villefrance Selch, Programme Manager at TV SYD, where the dragon model is used in longer formats made for streaming, but also broadcast on TV SYD in the 7.30 pm newscast and in the station's weekend formats.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Several years ago, TV SYD moved away from broadcasting news at weekends. News is covered in the regions' short news programmes on TV 2 and on the web, while 19.30 is used for programme formats that entertain and provide insight into life in the region.



### Dragon models

Source: *Dragen: en analysemodel til serielle streaming-formater*, Lene Heiselberg and Christoffer V Ebbesen, chapter 8 in the anthology *"Medievidenskab - metoder og teorier"*

The dragon dramaturgy was invented by Lene Heiselberg and Christoffer V Ebbesen, who describe it in the chapter *"The Dragon - an analysis model for serial streaming formats"* in the anthology *"Media Studies - Methods and Theories"*. Here, the authors commit *"pity killing of the whale"*, which cannot survive in a digital "culture of impatience"<sup>23</sup>, where users react promptly if they are bored or feel they are not getting value for their attention. There is no time for building tension and arousal – it has to be there from the beginning.

The dragon model differs from the narrator model in that it starts at a narrative peak: with the strongest content. Unlike the whale, which only reaches a climax deep into the story, the dragon, according to Heiselberg and Ebbesen, consists of *"highlights followed by an ASAP presentation, a series of suspense arcs, a point of no return, continuous perspective and finally a climax"*<sup>24</sup>

*"Users need to be emotionally aroused and think "here I am being entertained" or "what the f\*\*\*." Curiosity needs to be aroused. Once you have aroused people's emotions, you have bought their patience to learn. You can't expect people to invest time in learning without a promise that 'if I see this through, I'll get this in return,'" says Camilla Villefrance Selch."*

Heiselberg and Ebbesen explain in the anthology that the old whale functions poorly because of the way the human brain is organised.

Humans are equipped with a Reticular Activating System (RAS), a kind of "doorman" that ensures that the brain is not overstimulated. The doorman scans whether information is relevant and if it is not deemed relevant, *the media user's brain simply "ignores it"*<sup>25</sup>

One way to bypass the doorman is by arousing emotions that create *arousal* in the brain, and *"high arousal is a VIP entrance to the brain for content,"* the researchers write.

Once the emotions are set in motion, a promise must be made (advertising the actual purpose of the programme - the climax) - or in longer programmes, the first of several climaxes throughout the programme, ending with the climax and no fade-out: once the promise is fulfilled, the viewer is gone.

The question is whether the model can be used for news storytelling.



### Narrator models ("The Whale")

<sup>23</sup> Hanne Bruun, 2019

<sup>24</sup> Lene Heiselberg and Christoffer V Ebbesen, chapter 8 *"The Dragon - an analysis model for serial streaming formats"* in the anthology *"Media Studies - Methods and Theories"*

<sup>25</sup> Garcia-Rill, 2009

Lene Heiselberg investigated this in an experiment conducted in collaboration with the newscast 21 Søndag (DR), TV 2 Echo and TV 2 Fyn, and she believes the answer is yes - but maybe not for all news stories.

In the experiment, the Centre for Journalism and Digital Democracy Center at SDU tested three DR stories from 21-Søndag, three stories from TV 2 Fyn and one story from TV 2 Echo.

All original flow versions were re-edited according to the dragon dramaturgy, and then both A and B stories were tested in a lab where subjects had EDA analyses (hand sweat analyses), which measure arousal. In addition, the subjects self-reported their own experience of how the two stories affected them.

*"We have received relatively good responses,"* says Lene Heiselberg.

*"We have three stories that work really well and three at the other end that don't work so well. There can be several reasons for this. Among other things, they may not have been precise enough at following the instructions we've given. And then of course there could also be something about the content - that it's less suitable,"* she says.

The study is in peer review and the final results will not be published until autumn 2024 at the earliest. But one of the results that has been shared with the public so far pleases Lene Heiselberg.

In participants self-reporting, the researchers found that participants who don't watch a lot of news, and who public service providers find difficult to lure onto their platforms, say that the dragon model works better.

*"This suggests that there is a better effect among those who have low news consumption and who are not as interested in news. This is something we're really happy to see. That something can actually be done dramaturgically to lure those who are less interested in news onto the platforms,"* says Lene Heiselberg.

At TV 2 Fyn, which contributed stories to the study, video editor Sofie Dambæk Rasmussen has embraced the dragon model.

*"In the editorial department where I work now, we only do stories based on the streaming model, whether it's a short or long video. It's something we're slowly but surely rolling out across the entire organisation, because we can see from our figures on the website that it's currently having a positive impact on how people use our videos - but a lot can happen in a year,"* says Sofie Dambæk Rasmussen.

According to her, the consumption of video stories has grown since the editorial team started using the dragon model. However, the station does not provide exact figures for the growth.

But even though the figures show that users welcome the dragon model in short news formats, she agrees with Lene Heiselberg that the model is not a "one size fits all" solution:

*"Not at all. It's really also about the story. Everything that has always been true for a good story is still super true."*

Sofie Dambæk Rasmussen points out that a strong main character and a focus on users are prerequisites for a good news story:

*"For many years, we've had a strong news in this house, and we still do. But in that news focus, we have perhaps sometimes forgotten the ordinary people of Funen a little bit. It still works when there's a human in the front row. There are a lot of things that are just good old-fashioned journalism that work, but*

*because user behaviour on the phone and social media and the way they watch TV and stream is changing, we've looked at the structure of the stories," she says.*

There are a number of models that are a further development of the dragon model. TV 2, for example, works with the "unicorn model". It has a peak at the beginning, middle and end of a story.

Similar models can also be found in storytelling on YouTube, for example: A promise is made at the beginning and delivered on at the end, and the viewer is constantly reminded of the "contract" in an often fast and intense narrative pace.

## The need for context, explanation and perspective

As Lene Heiselberg points out, there are news stories that the dragon model doesn't work for. An educated guess as to why, might be that communicating complexity, for example, requires more explanatory narrative models - although the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

As a news consumer, it's time-consuming to stay on top of even the most central and important stories in the news stream.

When war broke out in Ukraine and Gaza, most people focused on the first days, maybe weeks, when the coverage was most intense.

But even those who don't quit because of the horrific images and the feeling of powerlessness have to give up at some point, unless they professionally follow through.

And what was the background to the conflicts? Few people have followed a landmark event well enough to understand it, and at some point, the whole story and its background and significance becomes so intangible that many people give up relating to it on anything more than a recording level.

The same goes for local news, which evolves over time. If you don't keep up to date with developments, you lose track of the situation.

It's not just young media users who feel they lack context and therefore give up engaging. It applies to all consumers. And it's especially true in a digital landscape where video news is primarily consumed on social media - without any kind of curated context.

Therefore, there is a need to explain, provide context and perspective, which is where other storytelling tools have proven their value.

## Explainers - one way forward?

Main characters are powerful tools for communicating news stories. But what format works for news stories that don't have an obvious protagonist or where the complexity of the story makes it difficult to visualise? This is a problem the BBC is trying to solve.

*"It might be explanatory - like an explainer format although it's not the newest format in the world", says Chris Achilleos, BBC.*

*"I don't think 'traditional' explainers with someone standing next to a screen pointing work particularly well on a streamer. So, what's the reinvented version of an explanatory format that works well for streaming? That's what we're working on at the moment, and right now we're not doing a lot of topics, because our formats don't currently fit into them,"*

According to Achilleos, short explainers work well on social media - but streaming is a different framework:

"One of my previous jobs was running a social media team for 18-24-year-olds, and it was quite easy there, because you could knock out one minute explains on for example vaping and other stuff that young people really cared about. One of the lessons was just listening to the audience and giving them what they want. You can do that on TikTok in a minute, but what's the longer more in-depth offer? How do we do that? Is it heavily graphic led - probably not. Is it personality led with a couple of people and an expert that's almost advanced towards podcast territory?"

The questions are queuing up, and neither dragon models, explainers, person-centred or host-centred forms of communication are definitive solutions. The question is whether there is such a "hack" at all.

## The case for animation

Since 2019, researchers and animators at Northeastern University in the US have been researching how the use of explanatory animations can help make fact- and data-driven stories more understandable in a TV format.



Source/Illustration: Smartocto

It's an approach to storytelling that speaks into the User Needs driver called "Understand". Understand is context-driven and contains the user needs "educate me" and "give me perspective." Here, analyses, explanations, context and solutions play an essential role in storytelling.

As mentioned earlier, explanation, context and meaning are some of the things users in TV SYD's qualitative user survey clearly stated they want from regional news coverage, and they are also some of the things young news-avoiders - and young people in general - demand from the media.

According to the researchers behind the project, Mike Beudet and John Wihbey, today's users expect "insight, context, influence and an understanding of stories as they unfold".

According to Beudet and Wihbey, animations are an effective way to handle complexity in news stories.

"Graphics and animation assist in the understanding of more complex issues, as they can capture sequences of events, illustrate geography, aid in comparison, and connect the dots. They enable a deeper understanding, and a higher level of retention, of the facts at hand," they write.<sup>26</sup>

The researchers tested animated and conventional versions of the same stories (A and B versions) and tested them on 1,000 users across two TV stations - WLS-TV in Chicago and WCVB-TV in Boston.

Subsequently, users reported that they found the stories easier to understand, visually more interesting, easier to remember, innovative, well-made and less boring. But again – neither the dragon model or animations are solutions in and of themselves, but merely tools in a larger toolbox.

[The videos can be viewed here](#)

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.rtdna.org/news/the-case-for-changing-the-way-you-tell-stories>

In addition to animations, the project has added the use of historical footage in news stories and made the stories longer.

Animations that can explain complex relationships that cannot be filmed are also highlighted by Smartocto as one of the ways "educate me stories" can be communicated.

*"When newsrooms overestimate their audience's knowledge on a subject, they can make their stories too complicated and incomprehensible, making it impossible for readers to really connect with it. They might be intimidated by a story or subject, ignoring it altogether even though it may be important for them" (Smartocto)*

According to Smartocto, research shows that stories in the "educate me" category are the ones people spend most time on and that people who consume these types of stories are the [most loyal](#).

*"This indicates that there's lots of opportunity to build your audience here, if you're willing to invest the time. (Smartocto)*

## Track 4: REACHING AUDIENCES

Once the content is in place, the question becomes how to reach the right users at the right time with that content.

How can media help create the basis for a shared reality in a fragmented media world where people get their news on platforms governed by algorithms that no content-producing media has control over?

The opening quote in this report from a TV SYD user clearly illustrates the loss of value experienced on the user side, when friends, neighbours, colleagues - and maybe even your own children and partner - are floating in their own - often algorithm-driven - knowledge universes: You lose a common basis for conversation.

### Distribution

Just as perfectly functioning distribution is worthless without relevant and value-adding content, it's equally worthless if content doesn't reach users.

The challenge is that media organisations have largely lost control of their distribution channels.

In terms of distribution, media lives in the side streets of the internet, while people shop in the market square. Only a few people stop by to see what's on the shelves at legacy media.

According to the Reuters report "Journalism, media, and technology trends and predictions 2024", 77 percent of media executives said at the start of the year, that by 2024 they will focus more on loyal users and connecting with them directly through their own websites, apps, newsletters and podcasts.

It's an endeavor driven by necessity:

When the researchers behind Reuters Digital News Report - and media executives themselves - look at Chartbeat figures, they see a development that is not to be misunderstood: In 2023, Facebook referred 48 percent fewer users to the news media. The same trend is seen across social platforms: fewer from Instagram and X, while platforms like TikTok don't even offer the option to link to the media's own platforms.

According to the report, one of the answers from the media is bundling: A universe of recipes, games, entertainment and news on the same platform: many products for the same price (like the New York Times does).

Aggregation<sup>27</sup> is another method, that seems to be better suited to public service products. An example of this is the TV2 regions' agreement with TV2 to publish their content on TV2's play app.

It's a way for media to reduce dependence on tech giants. But the dependence on a large platform will still be there. All regions are struggling to get their own play-universes to perform - but many are questioning whether it makes sense to spend resources on their own play apps.

For the TV2 regions, the presence on TV2 Play is by far the most effective usage driver, and it is a collaboration they would like to see intensified.

"It's clear that the likes of DR and TV2 are better positioned to create more complete streaming universes than we can on our own," says Mathias Svane Kraft, Digital Editorial Director at TVs Øst.

All regions report that they get far better viewing figures for their streaming content on TV2 Play than on their own digital platforms. Some regions find that content that attracts 5,000 plays on their own platforms sometimes reaches 100,000 plays on TV2 Play. In particular, programmes prioritised in TV2's hero band (the top carousel on TV2 Play's front page) achieve high viewing figures.

The challenge is that the content must be able to compete with TV2's own A-content. This means that it is often content that has been invested with extra resources that does well. The challenge of creating a daily consumption of regional news is therefore not solved by the distribution partnership with TV2. Especially when it comes to news in short streaming formats, which is still the regions' core product.

TV MidtVest is one of the stations that has had success with intensive public outreach: 120,000 people in Central and Western Jutland have downloaded the station's own app - and the goal is 200,000 by 2026, says News and Deputy Manager, Marc Killigren Akselsen.

But the problem for small players in the digital market is the lack of content.

While the major public service broadcasters - BBC, TV 2, DR, NRK and SVT - can all deliver large amounts of content in different genres, it is more difficult for media organisations the size of the TV2 regions to deliver the volume of content needed to create regular consumption habits among users on digital platforms, as has been possible on linear TV.

The importance of creating habits is something that streaming and content managers mention time and time again as crucial for gaining loyal users who go directly to the media's own platforms where editors have the opportunity to offer curated content.

## Trapped on third-party platforms?

There is a growing - and urgent - realisation among established media outlets that they need to pull users onto their own platforms as social media algorithms increasingly de-prioritise news content and the tone of social media discourages many from participating in the debate.

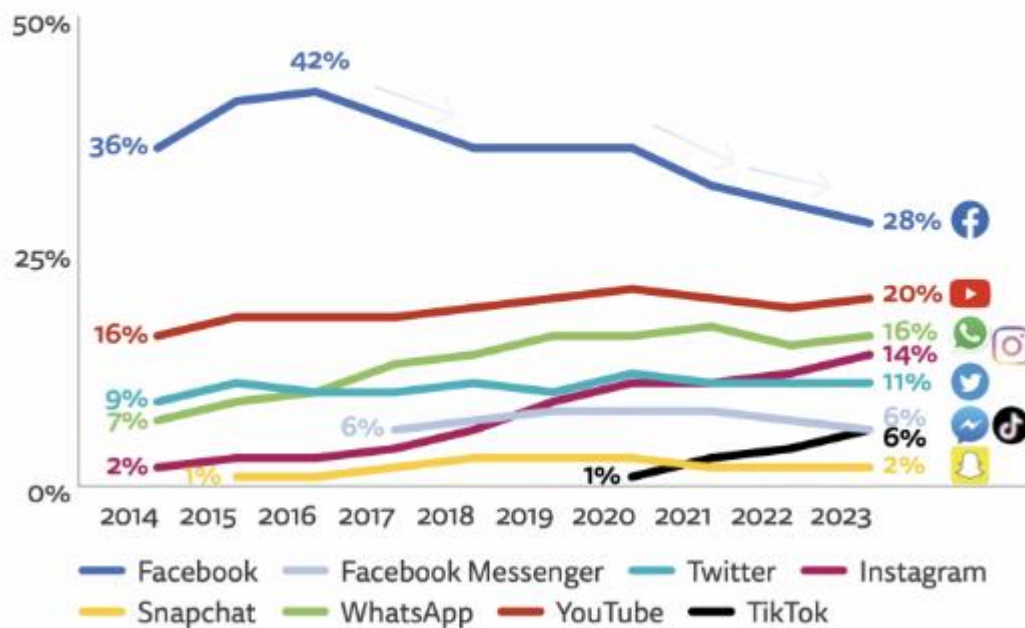
---

<sup>27</sup> Aggregation is in this context understood as platforms hosting multiple publishers' content as opposed to a more traditional concept of aggregation as gathering content from different platforms.

However, traditional media still relies heavily on connecting with users by distributing news via social media.

A lot of effort is put into producing video content, which paradoxically is increasingly keeping users on the third-party platforms that established media wanted to lure them away from. Facebook is still the largest supplier of users to the news media. However, according to Reuters Digital News Report 2023, news consumption on the platform is declining, as is the number of referrals.

### PROPORTION THAT USED EACH SOCIAL NETWORK FOR NEWS IN THE LAST WEEK (2014-2023) - AVERAGE OF SELECTED COUNTRIES



Source: Reuters Digital News Report 2023

On the other hand, consumption on TikTok, YouTube and Instagram is on the rise, both of which (YouTube and Instagram) de-prioritise content from news media and prioritise video content from celebrities, influencers and individual news creators, who in some cases have more users than media like the BBC.

According to the report, only 22 per cent of users prefer to find news content on an app or website. A decrease of 10 percent since 2018. 30 percent prefer to get news via social media.

These are numbers that make it difficult to write off social media as a distribution platform. Furthermore, established media outlets see presence on social media platforms as the only real opportunity to connect with young/younger users.

Third-party platforms are therefore used by DR, TV 2 and the BBC, all of which are otherwise quite successful in getting users directly onto their own platforms - and by the regional public service media organisations.

According to Chris Achilleos, despite a strong iPlayer platform, the BBC is active on social media platforms - including Instagram with approximately 20 million followers and TikTok - recognising that some users cannot necessarily be moved to its own platforms:

*"TikTok is key to reaching young audiences. BBC has been quite aggressive in its expansion on TikTok to reach those audiences because we all know the TikTok audience of today is not necessarily going to migrate to TV or even to iPlayer. So how do you - amongst that audience - get the brand loyalty at a young age about BBC news? They know what the BBC is. But how do you get BBC to be a brand that they like as well as trust?"*

In other words, the BBC uses social platforms to build awareness, but also recognising that chances are small that young users will click through to [bbc.com](http://bbc.com) to find out more.

But especially when it comes to young users, TikTok is also where they get BBC news content. A situation that Chris Achilleos recognises is hardly sustainable in the long run:

*"TikTok is here at the moment. But for how long? You just don't know. It's risky - particularly for commercial companies - to try and build a strategy based on a platform - on an algorithm - that you do not control."*

The same realisation exists at TV 2. Here, too, they continue to spend resources on producing content for social platforms - including TikTok.

*"We're there because it creates awareness, and it can help create conversation. It may not matter that they haven't seen a whole documentary. It may mean more that we've reached them with some of the content we've created, so they have some idea that there is something called TV 2,"* says Jonas Fjordside.

Half of the TV2 regions are also present on TikTok for the same reasons.

TV 2 Østjylland went TikTok in autumn 2023:

*"News is by no means on its way out. People are consuming more news than they ever have. We have an insane amount of news views on TikTok. It's young people as young as their teens who are tuning in to hear about big and small things going on in the region. It's told 1:1 like a news story,"* says Thomas Skov, Content Manager at TV2 Østjylland.

"School evacuated due to bomb threat" is an example of a news item that received 240,000 clicks on TikTok. But TV2 Østjylland doesn't know whether it was young people from the region who watched the videos, or whether they watched one second or the entire video.

The problem for established media is that they don't know the "quality" of the clicks that are recorded. Have people clicked for one second - or have they watched the whole video? Nobody (apart from TikTok, Facebook, Instagram etc.) knows.

## Personalisation and viewers on their own platforms

As described above, the need to understand users, the development of new formats and modern storytelling are all crucial factors in getting viewers to consume video content in a digital universe.

So how do you succeed in getting users onto public service media's own platforms?

The BBC, DR, TV2, NRK and SVT all have success with their streaming platforms, but - so far - limited success when it comes to news, as described above.

What the major national public service media have in common is that they all have large amounts of content to choose from, and the daily production is large, so there is regularly new content to choose from. This means that they can reach many different target groups with large amounts of relevant content, and they are also experts in creating the broad, unifying content that Hanne Bruun, Aarhus University, points out is the justification for public service media.

In comparison, the TV2 regions are each small and therefore cannot produce nearly as much high-quality content as national public service media can.

Some TV2 regional directors conclude that their production is so limited that they need to be able to sell all the content produced to the region's users, and that personalisation is therefore not relevant.

But even with limited production, there may be reason to reconsider the strategy - with due respect for privacy and other ethical challenges associated with personalisation:

- Firstly, personalisation can provide users with the content that is most relevant to them first when they check into a streaming service.
- This can increase the user's feeling that the content is relevant and thus increase loyalty.
- Personalisation can provide insights into user preferences that can contribute to relevant content creation.
- Personalisation can also help limit and target the number of notifications sent out to users, which can prevent some users from blocking notifications altogether - or possibly deleting their app.
- With younger users, there is a pre-existing expectation that they will be seamlessly served the content that is important to them.

Personalisation doesn't have to lead users into echo chambers if media uses it right.

Emily Withrow, VP of Product and Head of Subscriber Experiences at The New York Times, told the WAN-IFRA conference in Copenhagen in May 2024.

According to her, the NY Times algorithms are set up so that the editorial team can always override the personalised algorithms so that essential content reaches everyone.

And the New York Times is far from alone in doing it this way.

One of the arguments against personalisation is the risk of users ending up in filter bubbles.

At the BBC, Chris Achilleos believes that the best cure for echo chambers and filter bubbles is to get users onto the BBC's own platforms:

*"Bringing people to your own platforms counteracts that. We're on social platforms, where you do get echo chambers, but we want to bring people to any of our BBC platforms where we have curated a choice of stories for them and want to build a deeper relationship with them".*

There are several arguments against personalisation. Firstly, collecting user data always involves an invasion of privacy. It also requires a log-in, which excludes users who do not want to give away personal data. Secondly, any log-in is a barrier between the content of the medium and the users.

In any case, personalisation and collection of user data requires a clear contract between user and media, and that the media is transparent about the algorithms used and how data is used and protected.

## Artificial intelligence

There are several relevant topics that I have largely avoided in this report. One of them is artificial intelligence. This is a deliberate choice because it would be far too extensive for the report to deal in any meaningful way with the phenomenon, which is sure to turn many of the issues facing the media upside down.

It's a technology that creates both opportunities and challenges: AI can enhance research, content production, user engagement and distribution - while quality control, credibility, job security, and algorithmic biases are among the challenges it presents. Perhaps it will provide answers to some of the challenges we currently struggle to solve when it comes to producing news content in short video formats.

## Conclusion and take-aways:

Making users stream news stories on demand starts not with platforms or presentation but with understanding people's lives and needs: what is important to them and the communities they are part of? Phenomenon's like news avoidance is on the rise, and users are persistent in requesting more "positive" news. While positive news is not a sound democratic answer, constructive journalism provides an important mindset for critical journalism with a balanced focus on news that give hope and provide viable and verifiable solutions to the challenges of our time.

While most TV-producing media have experimented with long on-demand streaming formats, there is not yet much experience when it comes to short news videos for on-demand streaming on play platforms. Therefore, short news videos are primarily a format used and developed for media organisations' websites and social media, possibly with reuse in linear TV news broadcasts.

Traditional tv-formatted news stories are still consumed live on streaming platforms, but on demand news-content is constantly competing with high quality streaming products on platforms like YouTube and on tv channels own streaming platforms, while search engines and social media platforms are increasingly diverting users away from news content towards entertainment.

### Takeaways:

- **User-centric:** User Needs 2.0 is worth exploring. They guide newsrooms to focus on what users need and look at the story from different perspectives. They help focus on *how* to cover stories - not so much *what* to cover. But don't stop at the user needs - get to know your users - and what they want (= *what* to cover) - at a deeper level: Their values, worldviews, fears and hopes. In short: what keeps them interested? What keeps them connected to the world around them? This is not a call to "feed the beast" - it's a call for relevance.
- **Community-centric:** People live in communities, and what happens in their communities affect their lives and the lives of people they care about. In its participatory form, community centered journalism can increase relevance, nuance and accuracy in reporting. It can also increase coverage of under-reported issues and populations – all of which contribute to strengthen media credibility and user loyalty.
- **Re-formatting news:** Consider what news is and how to format it. Young audiences consume short news videos on mobile platforms, while older audiences prefer longer news formats on streaming-platforms. It's a compelling opportunity to provide nuance and solutions.
- **Rethink storytelling:** The whale is dead, and the dragon is taking its place. Experiments with the narrative "dragon model" indicate that even short news formats have a greater impact when a more straightforward and hard-hitting narrative style is used. Start by evoking emotion. This is

where consumer's patience is bought, to understand the important parts of the story. Keep them on the hook until the end. Consider investing in an animator who can help explain complicated issues to audiences in a simple and compelling way.

- **Go Constructive:** The case for a constructive journalism approach is building up around us as polarisation, conflict and wars have become dominant guests on our news screens. Guests that trigger news avoidance. So yes, gloom and doom and fear trigger clicks. So does constructive journalism. Not as many. But it does something more important: It provides nuance. It promotes engagement and democratic conversation. It's what a growing number of news avoiders and young audiences say, they want. It will be good for business – and it's certainly indispensable for a healthy democratic debate and for de-escalation of conflict and polarisation.
- **Reconsider news criteria:** Galtung warned the industry about relying on traditional news criteria. Nevertheless, the industry kept using them. But do these criteria help us select the stories of real interest and importance to our users? We can definitely do better. Consider reading my co-fellow, Kåre Kildall Rysgaard's report on newsworthiness for a deeper understanding of the psychology and philosophy behind the urgent call for a change of criteria.

## References:

- **Understanding User Engagement Mechanisms on a Live Streaming Platform**
- Xinwei Wang<sup>1</sup> and Dezhi Wu 2 July 2019, in book: HCI in Business, Government and Organisations. Information Systems and Analytics, June 2019 (pp.C2-C2) DOI:[10.1007/978-3-030-22338-0\\_40](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-22338-0_40)
- Huang, S., & Yang, T. (2024). Auditing Entertainment Traps on YouTube: How Do Recommendation Algorithms Pull Users Away from News. *Political Communication*, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2024.2343769>
- Schrøder, K., Blach-Ørsten, M., & Eberholst, M. K. (2023). Avoidance of news, podcasts and Danes' views on public service. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7965043>
- Schrøder, K., Blach-Ørsten, M., & Eberholst, M. K. (2023). *Danskernes brug af nyhedsmedier 2023*. Centre for News Research, Roskilde University. Danes' use of news media <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7956294>
- Public Service Media in Europe: Law, Theory and Practise, Karen Donders, 2021 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351105569>
- **Social Identity, Self-Categorisation, and the Communication of Group Norms**, Michael A. Hogg & Scott A. Reid 1 School of Psychology, University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD 4072, Australia / 2 Department of Communication, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-4020, February 2006 *Communication Theory* 16(1) DOI:[10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00003.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00003.x) [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/43454258\\_Social\\_Identity\\_Self-Categorization\\_and\\_the\\_Communication\\_of\\_Group\\_Norms](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/43454258_Social_Identity_Self-Categorization_and_the_Communication_of_Group_Norms)
- Felix M. Simon (2024) Escape Me If You Can: How AI Reshapes News Organisations' Dependency on Platform Companies, *Digital Journalism*, 12:2, 149-170, DOI: 10.1080/21670811.2023.2287464
- The Effects of Emotional Arousal and Valence on Television Viewers' Cognitive Capacity and Memory, Annie Lang, Kuljinder Dhillon, and Qingwen Dong, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* / Summer 1995, pp 313-326
- Kevin Davis and Mark Lee Hunter, *Community-Powered Journalism - a Manual for Sustainability and Growth in Independent News*, 2020 <https://communitypoweredjournalism.com>
- Rozin, P., & Royzman, E. B. (2001). "Negativity bias, negativity dominance, and contagion." *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 5\*(4), 296-320.
- McLaughlin, B., Gottlieb, M. R., & Mills, D. J. (2022). Caught in a Dangerous World: Problematic News Consumption and Its Relationship to Mental and Physical Ill-Being. *Health Communication*, 38(12), 2687-2697. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2022.2106086>
- Figdor, Carrie (2019). Trust Me: News, Credibility Deficits, and Balance. In Joe Saunders & Carl Fox (eds.), *Media Ethics, Free Speech, and the Requirements of Democracy*. Routledge. pp. 69-86.
- The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation, Roy F. Baumeister & Mark R Leary, *Psychological Bulletin* 1995, Vol. 117, No. 3, 497-529
- Policy Brief January 2024, **Future-proof Public Service Media in Denmark**, Lessons learnt from a comparative analysis of seven media markets, Hanne Bruun, Professor, Media Studies and Journalism, Aarhus University
- New scheduling strategies and production culture in public service television in the digital era: The case of DR and TV 2 in Denmark, [Hanne Bruun](#) and [Julie Münter Lassen](#) **The International Journal of Television Studies, 2023, Volume 19, Issue 2** <https://doi.org/10.1177/17496020231196422>
- **The changing role of a video- on-demand service in the strategies of public service media A production study of Danish TV 2 Play and its impact on the production culture of the schedulers, 2016-2022** HANNE BRUUN department of media and journalism studies, Aarhus University, Denmark, *Nordicom Review* **VOLUME 44 (2023): ISSUE 2 (JUNE 2023)**
- **The reappropriation of time in television** *How traditional qualities of broadcast media are being adopted by their video-on- demand services*, JULIE MÜNTER LASSEN department of media and journalism studies, Aarhus University, Denmark, *Nordicom Review*, **VOLUME 44 (2023): ISSUE 2 (JUNE 2023)**
- The Power of Platforms Shaping Media and Society **Rasmus Kleis Nielsen** and **Sarah Anne Ganter**, *Oxford Studies in Digital Politics*, 2022

- **Different population groups' perception and understanding of what news and current affairs are and their significance in a societal context**, Mediernes Udvikling i Danmark 2019. A research project commissioned by the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces by: Jakob Linaa Jensen (leader of the research project), Roger Buch, Jakob Dybro Johansen, Poul Thøis Madsen (also AAU), Flemming Tait Svith, from the Danish School of Media and Journalism
- Goldhaber, M. H. (1997). The attention economy and the Net. *First Monday*, 2(4). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v2i4.519>
- Lene Heiselberg and Christoffer V Ebbesen, chapter 8 "*The Dragon - an analysis model for serial streaming formats*" in the anthology "*Media Studies - Methods and Theories*"
- Garcia-Rill, 2009, Waking and the Reticular Activating System, DOI: [10.1016/B978-008045046-9.01767-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-008045046-9.01767-8)
- The delay economy of "continuity" and the emerging impatience culture of the digital era, Hanne Bruun, Nordic Journal of Media Studies [VOLUME 1 \(2019\): ISSUE 1 \(JUNE 2019\)](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.njms.2019.06.001)
- Consumer preferences in video streaming, Umeå University, Clara Jacoud & Théo Dolou, Master's Thesis in Business Administration I, 15 Credits, Spring 2022 Supervisor: Henry Lopez Vega URN: [urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-197196](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-197196)
- The journalistic connection. How the news media reinvents its relationship with citizens - and its relevance to democracy", Søren Schultz-Jørgensen and Per Westergård
- Smartocto's webpage: [Smart and actionable editorial analytics \(smartocto.com\)](https://www.smartocto.com)
- **The Case for Changing the Way You Tell Stories, By Mike Beaudet, Anna Campbell, and John Wihbey, 2021** <https://www.rtdna.org/news/the-case-for-changing-the-way-you-tell-stories>
- The Case for Video Animation in Local TV News, Summary Report for Newsrooms, Mike Beaudet & John Wihbey, November 2021
- **Reinventing Local TV News**, Innovative Storytelling Practices to Engage New Audiences, February 2019, Mike Beaudet & John Wihbey
- [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/Digital\\_News-Report\\_2022.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/Digital_News-Report_2022.pdf)
- [Reuters Digital News Report 2023](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Digital_News-Report_2023.pdf)
- [Reuters Digital News Report 2024](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2024-06/Digital_News-Report_2024.pdf)
- [Reuters Digital News Report 2017](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-06/Digital_News-Report_2017.pdf)
- [2022 Digital media trends](https://www.deloitte.com/uk/en/insights/industry/technology/2022/digital-media-trends-16th-edition), 16th edition, Toward the metaverse, Deloitte Insights
- **Seven expert tips for a viral news explainer, Reuters** <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/calendar/art-viral-news-explainer>
- JOURNALISM, MEDIA, AND TECHNOLOGY TRENDS AND PREDICTIONS 2023, Nic Newman, Reuters Digital News Project 2023, DOI: 10.5287/bodleian:NokooZeEP
- [User Needs Whitepaper](https://www.smartocto.com/user-needs-whitepaper), Smartocto
- [DR Media Development 2022](https://www.dr.dk/medieudvikling/2022)
- [DR Media development 2023](https://www.dr.dk/medieudvikling/2023)
- Analysis of user prototypes, Lene Heiselberg, SDU for TV SYD, 2024
- Overall analysis Survey and user postcard, Lene Heiselberg SDU for TV SYD, 2024
- TV SYD User Survey, Kantar Gallup 2024
- Public service contract between TV SYD and the Minister of Culture for the period 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2023
- TV SYD **PUBLIC SERVICE STATEMENT 2023**
- BBC News announces savings and digital reinvestment plans, 29 November 2023 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/2023/bbc-news-announces-savings-and-digital-reinvestment-plans>