

Convergence and Participation in Children's Television

The Case of Flemish Public Service Television

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Abstract

Flemish public television is increasingly conceived as a convergent, cross-media enterprise, as most clearly exemplified by Ketnet – VRT's cross-media brand and platform for children. Drawing on theories about convergence and participation as key characteristics of the networked society, this chapter empirically investigates the production of children's television by analysing Ketnet's online and cross-media presence. First, the chapter draws on qualitative content analysis to chart how Ketnet combines programmes and digital content. Second, in-depth interviews with producers explore the rationale behind this and its participatory potential. Our findings indicate that Ketnet is strongly convergent because television and online content are closely aligned, despite organisational and financial restrictions. Ketnet is also highly participatory, but not in the maximalist sense of sharing editorial power and control with children. There are ample opportunities for interaction and some for co-creation, but professionals keep tight control over the production process, which cautions against celebratory accounts of a radical shift in power in convergent media culture.

Keywords: VRT, Ketnet, cross-media, production studies, qualitative content analysis, editorial power

Introduction

Any study of contemporary television must deal with a discourse that suggests a condition of radical, irrevocable change. The future of media is commonly held to be uncertain due to digitisation and ensuing changes in the production, dissemination and consumption of 'content' beyond traditional broadcast programmes. Convergence is a key term to designate the networked entanglements between television and a range of digital media platforms, especially websites, social media and mobile apps. The lowering of historic barriers between production and consumption is supposed to facilitate easier and greater audience participation. On the basis of empirical research, we explore how issues of convergence and participation, key characteristics of the networked society, play out in the production of public television.

This chapter focuses on mechanisms and contexts that facilitate the convergence of television and digital content production, with specific interest in opportunities for audience engagement and participation that are created in the process. We report findings from a case study in ‘cultural production studies’ that emphasise the importance of context and micro-level analysis to understand production cultures (Havens & Lotz 2012). Three key contexts are reflected upon: first, the national (in our case the Flemish media landscape as an important regional market in Belgium); second, the institutional context of public service broadcasting (PSB); and third, the generic and audience context of children’s television broadly construed.

The case we analyse is Ketnet, a children’s TV channel operated by Flemish public broadcaster VRT. Established in 1997, in the reorganisation of VRT and continually modernised since, Ketnet is today a multiplatform brand with a strong online presence targeted to serve children up to twelve years of age (see www.ketnet.be). Ketnet offers a rich case because the channel is supported by a range of digital media and is particularly interactive compared to the majority of Flemish television channels. Moreover, in the broader literature on digitisation and convergence, children and adolescents are considered a key demographic as an age group oriented towards innovation and as a cohort who grew up with digital media (Livingstone 2008; Mittell 2011; Steemers 2016a). We exercise caution, however, to avoid reproducing an uncritical celebratory popular account of children as digital natives embracing all technological innovations. The focus on children’s TV should be welcome because, as Steemers (2016b) notes, there is a lack of production studies about children’s content outside the US and other English-speaking territories. The research reported here will help to fill this gap.

Our central research question is: In the networked society, how and why does Flemish public television address children on convergent platforms and create opportunities for audience participation? To answer the question, we use two methods: 1) qualitative content analysis to chart how these channels combine programmes and multiplatform digital content and applications, and 2) in-depth interviews with producers to explore why certain choices are made (i.e. the production logic and characteristic practices). Based on insights gained through the analysis of the case, the discussion and conclusions reflect more broadly on the role of public service media in a networked society.

Convergence and participation in networked societies

As influentially discussed by Manuel Castells (1996), transformations in recent decades have produced what he characterises as the ‘network society’ in which social structures are facilitated by new technological affordances. Media occupy a central position in his conception because the network is highly mediated. Also important is the work of Henry Jenkins on media convergence as a key driver, which is enabled by digitalisation and facilitates interactivity. Jenkins (2006: 2) highlighted the need

to understand “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want”. A first consequence is that research on convergence in TV necessitates the inclusion of all platforms where TV(-related) content is made available (Bennett 2011). A second consequence is that convergence not only refers to technological changes but, importantly, to changing cultures of media production and reception (Kackman et al. 2011). In our study, we therefore include all platforms and focus on production culture. Audience research falls beyond the scope of the research reported here.

In Jenkins's treatment (2006), convergence culture is closely tied to commercial companies and goals. It is clear by now that the ramifications are much broader. The current convergent and participatory media culture is equally pertinent to and for PSB, and offers opportunities of particular importance in the development of public service media (PSM) that goes beyond, but does not exclude, radio and television broadcasting. As Iosifidis (2011) argues, PSM is capable of contributing to the creation of a more inclusive public sphere, even more so than the internet in general, because it operates (ideally) outside the context of commercial pressure. Van Dijck and Poell (2015) add the important point that although social media have the potential to engage users, they pose significant challenges due to increasing commercial exploitation as data-driven platforms. They further observe that PSB organisations were quick to embrace the potential of audience engagement offered by Web 2.0 platforms, but increasingly feel the need to develop guidelines to safeguard public service values. By focusing on a pertinent PSM case, we can usefully explore the importance and challenges of convergence and audience participation in the public service context.

From a production perspective, convergence implies transmedia storytelling (Jenkins 2006), stories that unfold across different platforms. This should not be confused with cross-media productions that are developed for one medium and then expanded and cross-promoted in other media (Evans 2011). Transmedia narratives presuppose an active audience chasing down bits of fragmented but connected storyline across media channels (Jenkins 2006). As a consequence, convergence implies a renegotiation of the relationship between producers and consumers as an engaged audience takes up a more central position (Murdock 2010). Networked media are of central importance here.

From an audience perspective, networked culture encourages media to become ‘spreadable’ as audiences actively shape, share, reframe and remix content to satisfy their respective interests (Jenkins, Ford & Green 2013). Social media enable networked links between producers and consumers even for traditional broadcasting, “braiding the conversational and creative strengths of networked platforms with the mass entertainment and audience engagement abilities of broadcast networks” (van Dijck & Poell 2015: 148). Clearly, the convergent production process allows for increased audience interactivity and participation. But clarification of ‘participation’ is especially needed (Hayward 2013). The perspective advocated by Fish (2013: 374) is useful in

defining participation as amateurs engaging with closed sociotechnical systems, “in fields otherwise dominated by gatekeepers or professionals”. Carpentier and De Cleen (2008) further distinguish between minimalist forms of participation, where audiences have limited degrees of control, and maximalist forms of participation where audiences gain increasing control – potentially to the point where they gain equal power with professional television producers.

A broad definition considers low levels of audience engagement as a minimal form of participation, but some scholars prefer to use others terms. Vanhaeght and Donders (2016) distinguish between ‘interaction’, ‘co-creation’ and ‘participation’. They define ‘interaction’ as an active social-communicative relationship between broadcasters and publics, or between members of the public, as evident for instance in processes of selecting and sharing content, online voting and commenting. As observed by Carpentier (2012), while interacting the audience does not necessarily co-decide about content and such participation does not alter power relations. ‘Co-creation’ takes participation one step further because people contribute to the creation of content, for instance by uploading photos or videos. Again, however, this is not ‘participation’ in the maximalist sense, which implies a power shift through the structural involvement of non-professionals in processes of content development, decision making and production.

Early studies on convergent media tended to be optimistic about the potential for audience participation. Authors such as Rosen (2008), Deuze (2009) and Hartley (2009) expected corporate media industries to experience major disruption as audiences gained high degrees of control. Increasingly, however, empirical research underscore the contextual specificity of audience engagement in production. While audiences indeed have gained a more active and visible role, this has not generally been to a degree that has resulted in producers losing control (Domingo 2008; Teurlings 2012; van Es 2016). Our empirical research provides a useful exploration of the actual shift (or not) in power from producers to audiences in Belgium. This provides an interesting window for examining how ‘networked’ contemporary television actually is. To this purpose, we take into account degrees to which audience participation can occur, from minimalist to maximalist forms. In line with Moe, Poell and van Dijck (2016), we stress the importance of contexts, in particular national media culture and public versus commercial television.

The particularity of children as audiences in a convergent media context is the final element for theoretical contextualisation. More than any other group, children are perceived to be a vulnerable audience that must be protected from potential harm. Regulation strongly focuses on protection from the negative effects of commercialisation, sexual and violent content, and technological overload (Steemers 2016a). Against the alleged negative effects of media and presumed passivity induced by television consumption, children’s television has a tradition of seeking to activate its viewers, stimulating them to participate, engage and create (Christensen 2013). From its early years, public television was typically assigned the duty of educating, protecting and nurturing children. Domestic content was understood to play a key role in this en-

deavour by encouraging the development of healthy personal lives as well as national and cultural identities in contradiction to commercial culture (Steemers 2016a). From the 2000s, these preoccupations have been translated in the development to multi-platform digital channels or brands (Rutherford & Brown 2012; Steemers & D'Arma 2012) which, building on the heritage of participation, have taken advantage of the increased possibilities offered by digitisation. Taken together, this means convergence and participation are both of particular importance as a means for activating and involving young audiences, and limiting the potential for media-related harm to them. Therefore, producers negotiate the pressure to innovate with the obligation to protect, particularly in the PSM context.

Methods and context

As indicated, our main research question is: In the networked society, how and why does Flemish public television address children on convergent platforms and create opportunities for audience participation? We began research with qualitative content analysis to chart how Ketnet combines programmes and multiplatform digital content and applications. We wanted to learn how children's TV programmes are supported by cross-media extensions, and the degree to which and how children participate. To accomplish this, we reviewed Ketnet's programme schedule in the Spring season of 2016 and analysed one episode of all content produced by the channel as well as all online content. Using a topic list consisting of open-ended questions, all instances of convergence (e.g. cross-platform references) and participation (e.g. audience interaction, input and feedback) were extensively analysed. Rather than categorising each instance, our aim was to provide a finely grained analysis of each programme and site in all aspects, which led to some fifty pages of notes. In this chapter, we can only provide a synthetic overview.

In the next step, and most importantly, we explored why the choices are made. We wanted to analyse the production logic behind these platforms to gain insight into the motivations and considerations guiding decisions about Ketnet's digital presence, as well as the challenges and limitations that confront producers. We specifically examined why producers adopt certain digital extensions and how they use them, and their ideas about convergence and participation. To answer these questions, we used in-depth interviews, one of the methods frequently used in production studies to understand the motivations of producers (Bruun 2016).

As it is produced in a slightly different context, we will distinguish the news programme 'Karrewiet' (2002-) from the overarching Ketnet offer. We interviewed five key production collaborators: Ketnet channel manager Maarten Janssen, digital content manager Sam Ickx and editor Els van den Abeele; and 'Karrewiet' producer Bob Dierckx, and reporter and digital editor Marjon Willems.¹ In the analysis that follows, we consecutively discuss these cases, first addressing the convergent nature

of content and the participatory potential it creates, and then using the interviews to elucidate production logic and motivations.

Before starting with analysis, and in line with cultural production studies, it is important to briefly sketch the national and broadcasting context of our case. The case is located in Flanders, the northern Dutch-speaking community of Belgium, with a population of about 6.5 million. As a relatively prosperous but small region, the Flemish media landscape is dominated by VRT, the PSM organisation that is market leader in television – with a 39,3 per cent share in 2016 (CIM 2017). VRT is regulated by five-year government contracts that stress PSM's role in the digital cross-media landscape. The 2016–2020 contract (VRT 2015) specifies seven strategic goals, among which being “future oriented, digital and innovative” (p. 2) has a central position. Moreover, the aim is to provide content on a broader range of digital platforms, including social media (p. 27), and to stimulate audience participation and co-creation (p. 29).

VRT has specific responsibilities towards children. First, education is a core task that is oriented in particular to children (VRT 2015). More specifically, under the rubric of ‘media wisdom’, the current contract emphasises VRT's role in helping children deal with digital media, to guide them and interact with them (p. 20). To accomplish this, it must offer at least one brand oriented primary and multimedia service for children (p. 25). That is realised through Ketnet. As part of its duty to inform, VRT must also create information targeted for children, which is realised through the news programme ‘Karrewiet’. Clearly, VRT's duties in relation to children correspond to the historical and international framework sketched above, combining the call to innovate with the responsibility to protect. And as clearly, contract specifications recognise a unique role and range of responsibilities for PSM in the networked society context.

Ketnet

Ketnet is a flagship channel of Flemish PSM targeting young media users in a context of ever increasing commercial and international competition. With a share of 1,53 per cent of the total television market, it is the biggest children's channel and competes with a host of commercial channels: domestic channels including Studio100 TV (0,38 per cent market share), Kadet (0,35 per cent) and vtmKzoom (0,34 per cent), and international players including Nickelodeon (0,81 per cent), Nick Jr (0,63 per cent), Disney Channel (0,4 per cent), Cartoon Network (0,25 per cent) and Disney Junior (0,22 per cent) (CIM 2017).

In this fragmented and mostly commercial market, Ketnet aims to safeguard children from otherwise overwhelming commercial influences and offer them domestic content, which is less prominent on Flemish commercial channels and virtually absent from global channels. Beside a wide audience reach on television (49,6 per cent of all children in 2016), Ketnet has high website traffic (on average over 38,000 daily users)

who mainly watch video clips online – over 45 million in 2016 (VRT 2017). As a large player in the Flemish children's market, and part of a strong PSM presence in television and radio markets, Ketnet is not perceived as the underdog (as public children's channels often are) but closely monitored by commercial players who see the channel as an advantaged competitor with a guaranteed budget provided by the government. Public support for Ketnet is strong and it is perceived to be the safe and trustworthy non-commercial alternative in an increasingly commercialised landscape.

Ketnet is a multiplatform brand, offering users a 360-degree experience. Beside a well-stocked TV schedule containing a wealth of domestic programming, it has an elaborate website and two apps (the Ketnet app for users between 6 and 12, and the Ketnet Junior app for those under 6), as well as accounts on social media including Facebook and Instagram (mostly oriented towards parents, however, as only people over 13 years of age can – officially – register). Our content analysis shows that rather than operating separately, these media platforms continuously refer to each other. For instance, TV programmes are connected by so-called 'wrappers', young and dynamic Flemish presenters who announce programmes and feature in them. They frequently refer viewers to the Ketnet website, while also featuring material gathered through the website on the TV screen (such as pictures and videos that children uploaded). While most (professional) video content is produced for television and subsequently featured online (i.e. cross-media as defined above), the website also contains original content and narratives, such as a web show following the birth and growth of several animals ('Klein Gespuis' 2015-), a rare instance of transmedia storytelling. Beside original content, the website also contains an elaborate database of most programmes as well as games, contests and challenges, very much like the cases studied by Zanker (2011). Clearly, then, Ketnet acts as a convergent multimedia platform.

In the interviews, the producers confirm Ketnet's convergent production culture. Channel manager Janssen explains how the television and online members of the production team work closely together both in processes and in a shared office space: "We are one whole. We also share the same story." Ketnet digital content manager Ickx confirms this view: "We're all together in one bubble, so to say. We continuously work together in one process [...]. If we brainstorm, we do this together. In the daily editorial meeting we sit together." While the content of these platforms is closely coordinated, convergence has its limits because, as TV editor van den Abeele explains, online editors are not yet exchangeable with television editors because these jobs imply different technical skills.

As discussed above, convergence creates the possibility and expectation of audience participation – at least interaction and co-creation. Ketnet fulfils this expectation by allowing children to react online through their 'Ketnet profiles', a kind of social media profile which familiarises children with the principles of 'liking' and commenting, while protecting them by not allowing 'friending' or the exchange of personal information. This is a clear instance of interaction, as are the so-called 'wraps' between the TV programmes. Beside the direct viewer address that is typical of linear television,

these interludes between programmes not only refer to the website but also feature viewer input such as drawings, e-mails and online comments. However, the majority of the other shows tend to be more self-contained. While some do stimulate viewer activity, such as the quiz show ‘KwisKwat’ (2009-) where the presenter continuously encourages the audience to participate at home, or draw on audience input, such as ‘Team Kwistenbiebel’ (2010-) where children’s questions are answered by a team of ‘superspies’, all examples of viewer engagement are limited to interaction.

Beside the Wraps, two shows offer more extensive opportunities for audience engagement. ‘Ketnet Swipe’ (2015-) is the extended Saturday version of the Wraps, spread through the day and including audience input of all kinds – drawings, letters, e-mails shown on television, as well as a screen in the studio displaying messages posted by children on the website. A few children literally participate by phone or in the studio, making it one of the few examples where interaction extends to a modest form of co-creation. ‘Kingsize Live’ (2011-) takes this one step further, both by involving a bigger group of children live in the studio and by inviting them to participate from home. Even more so than in ‘Ketnet Swipe’, children act as co-creators, for instance by posing questions to the special guests, both in the studio and from home. But even here, this does not extend to participation in the strict sense because producers make all key decisions and keep tight control of the production process.

Talking to the producers, the rationale for these participatory practices (broadly defined) becomes clear. As channel manager Janssen stresses, participation has always been part of the DNA of Ketnet and, as such, it is self-evident: “I think we do very few things in which no participation by children is possible.” Asked why participation is so important, he stresses its connection to the core values of the channel: “We want to connect children, stimulate them. We want to engage in society, and that doesn’t work if you only work in one direction. You can only do that if you let children participate.” Clearly, the motivation for participation stems less from the growing technical possibilities and more from an older public service orientation that prioritises activating children and encouraging them to participate in the public sphere, a key characteristic of PSM (Iosifidis 2011).

Focusing in particular on participation through online and social media, Janssen also points out that their target audience forces them to follow new trends. Digital content manager Ickx confirms that their endeavour to create audience engagement is connected to the broader aim of safeguarding audiences in an increasingly competitive and commercial media ecology: “Of course you move towards a context in which children increasingly take control of their media use. The stronger you connect children to your offer, and the more you keep in touch with what they want to see and what triggers them, the stronger you are and the more important you become in their choices.” This is very much in line with Steemers’ observation that all PSB firms need to consider how to meet children’s changing media consumption (2016a).

Reviewing the producers’ responses, the strong focus on participation seems as much connected to pragmatic considerations such as keeping in touch with audiences

and keeping them engaged and viewing as to PSM values. Direct audience participation in programmes is restricted for similarly pragmatic reasons, as it necessitates careful planning. For instance, children participating in 'Kingsize Live' need elaborate instructions and rehearsal, as TV editor van den Abeele stresses: "Because if you suddenly put a micro under children's nose, you usually don't get anything. You have to prepare them well, so that has become a well-oiled machine." While sympathetic to the idea of children producing more content, van den Abeele stresses the importance of professional guidance: "You can never let them make something on their own; that is not going to be very enthralling". In a similar vein, Ickx stresses the importance of participation (broadly defined) while recognising that this does not lead to actual control over content production: "I think there's absolutely moments where we explore formats in which children themselves can creatively participate, but to say that children explicitly co-create content..." The television programme is always controlled by Ketnet professionals, which shows that more maximalist forms of participation, while commendable in theory, are hard to accomplish in practice.

Karrewiet

'Karrewiet' is Ketnet's news show. It is an interesting case because it operates in the same PSM context but is produced by a different editorial office that is situated in the VRT news department, which is known to operate as a separate entity inside VRT overall and has a strong identity. 'Karrewiet' consists of a short daily news show as well as a sub-page on the Ketnet website. Whereas Ketnet as a whole is strongly convergent in terms of the entanglement of TV and online content, our content analysis shows that 'Karrewiet' is first and foremost a TV programme with cross-media extensions on the website. The website primarily features clips from the TV show, while adding short written articles illustrated by pictures. In terms of participation (broadly defined), on the website children can like and comment on each clip and article through their Ketnet profiles and participate in polls. This input is rarely visibly featured in the news show on television, however. Therefore, audience participation in 'Karrewiet' is mostly limited to interaction. Children also frequently appear in the news show as subjects or vox pops in stories, but the news is made by professional producers so this does not constitute participation in the maximalist sense.

Talking to the 'Karrewiet' producers, it becomes clear they do aim to engage children in the news but work with a less convergent and participatory logic compared to the overarching Ketnet editorial team. Producer Dierckx explains how the news reports mostly come first, with a web editor subsequently uploading the stories on the website and adding articles and links, although occasionally they work the other way around: "For some topics, from the start we say: that's fun, we can... We should perhaps start by doing a call on the website, then we know the results on Monday and can use these results to film in a school, for instance, to confront them with the results."

Noting the centrality of the news show, Marjon Willems who works both as a TV reporter and a part time web editor for 'Karrewiet', thinks that 'Karrewiet's' online presence should be strengthened. She says, "I think it goes a bit too slowly. I feel that there should be a 'Karrewiet' app by now." To her, the digital extensions follow the TV news too much, which is mostly due to time and budget constraints: "You're stuck in a routine and if you don't have a lot of time and budget, it's very difficult to get out of it and imagine new things." This is also a matter of personnel: Willems estimates that only one web editor per day works on the 'Karrewiet' site, while six or seven do so for the Ketnet site.

In terms of participation, producers for 'Karrewiet' even more than Ketnet use audience reactions on the website (liking, commenting, voting) as a form of feedback and to keep abreast of children's opinions and interests. Explaining the importance of audience input, Dierckx says: "It is important for us because it gives us an idea of what preoccupies children and in that sense, our website is good. [...] It often happens that we feel that a topic really lives, 'perhaps we should do something with it'. Or 'wow, there's a lot of reactions on that, that's something that interests a lot of children.'" Audience participation, then, acts as a form of audience research because it helps producers keep up with children's interests and select stories. Similarly, they get a lot of e-mail, particularly from schools, suggesting topics to explore in news reports: "Yes, these are all read and considered, and that leads to great reports. I think a lot of news reaches us that way. Because there are no special press agencies with children's news, so collecting them in this way is very important."

So, while the opportunities for audience input mostly qualify as interaction, one could argue they occasionally lead to a modest form of co-creation as children and schools (indirectly) contribute to the choice of news topics. Moreover, the website is also used to identify children who can act as reporters, a form of co-creation that increases viewer engagement but does not necessarily surrender editorial power and control. Editor Willems is sceptical about participation in the maximalist sense because she thinks the potential for audience participation is overestimated: "Children who jump out, for instance with a crazy opinion, are exceptions. The responses we get are often quite childish and super boring and you can't work with that material." Again, this underscores the need for professional guidance of children as participants.

Discussion and conclusion

Over the past several years, Ketnet has become a convergent platform with strongly connected television programmes and digital content that reflect an underlying structure of collaboration and forms a multiplatform brand, which is in line with international tendencies in children's television (Rutherford & Brown 2012; Steemers & D'Arma 2012). As such, Ketnet fulfils its PSM duties by offering content on digital platforms and helping to develop children's media wisdom. At the same time, our in-

interviews clearly show that higher-level policies are not top of mind for the producers, who mostly indicate pragmatic reasons for developing convergence as a way to stay in touch with young, volatile and media-savvy media users. Moreover, producers mention a number of practical obstacles explaining the slightly lower level of convergence for 'Karrewiet', which has a smaller web staff and prioritises television content. For 'Karrewiet', digital content mostly operates as cross-media extensions, while Ketnet TV and online editors work more closely together, occasionally developing the transmedia content which is characteristic of networked convergence culture.

In terms of audience participation, Ketnet is strongly oriented towards its viewers and users, and consistently solicits their active participation and input. This has been part of the channel identity from the start, and builds upon a long tradition of activating and stimulating children in Flemish public broadcasting. In the digital media ecology, new opportunities were created such as interacting through social media and uploading photos and videos. However, while participation broadly defined is key to all of Ketnet's endeavours, it hardly ever qualifies as a shift in producer power. Most often, children's engagement can be qualified as interaction, responding to producers and other users while not participating in the production process. Occasionally, participation verges on co-creation, not in the egalitarian sense of contributing to the production process as equals but in terms of providing content (questions, pictures, etc.) and participating in the television show. None of this is participation in its more maximal form. As professionals explain, they feel a need to keep control over all occasions for audience engagement to guarantee good quality. This is very much in line with other critical and empirical research (Domingo 2008; Teurlings 2012; van Es 2016).

Our research results call into question celebratory accounts of increased audience participation that seem to go hand in hand with convergence in networked societies. The participatory potential of networked culture is not fully realised here, in line with growing insights in academic research including recent work from Jenkins (2014: 272) who has acknowledged "how many people are still excluded from even the most minimal opportunities for participation within networked culture". If decentralised production, outside of classical media companies, is one of the potentials in and for a networked society, this potential is not realised here: professional producers, embedded within the PSM institution, keep control. Compared to other VRT departments, Ketnet operates with a rather networked logic, creating connections between diverse platforms and its audience. But it gets nowhere near to the more radically decentralised logic of networked culture where non-professional consumers become producers.

The question remains, then, whether maximal participation is really the ideal scenario? The tendency in current literature on participation condemns efforts by professional media producers to keep control. Particularly for PSM, the dominant idea is that audiences should be engaged and involved in the public sphere through a significant degree of participation. The Ketnet case shows that more minimal forms of participation such as interaction and co-creation can be successful ways of integrating

audience input, stimulating participation in society but not necessarily in the media production process.

Of course, we must take into account the specificity of children's television: Due to their developmental stage in the lifecycle it makes sense to involve children to a limited extent in media production. In a context of digital and social media giving increasing power to non-professionals, a more classical (if increasingly networked) PSM institution may provide a safe haven, in fact, guaranteeing adherence to professional standards. This is arguably the case not only for children's television, but well beyond, as the initial excitement over the networked society increasingly gives way to concerns about commercial and political recuperations. Ketnet is a successful example and we would argue that although PSM needs to engage with the broader networked society, it can be of greatest service by offering a stable and trustworthy 'node' and maintaining professional standards that are rooted in the public service ethos.

Note

1. All interviews were transcribed verbatim; all quotes are translations from Dutch by the authors. We wish to thank the MA students of the 2015-2016 Audiovisual Media seminar at the University of Antwerp for their help in conducting and transcribing the interviews.

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