

Public service youth content on social media platforms

Reaching youth through YouTube

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyses public service content on third-party platforms and, more specifically, how legacy media organisations adapt to social media logic when creating content for youth. It builds on a production study of *NRK 4ETG* – the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation’s (NRK) YouTube programme – using elite interviews and document analysis as main methods. The chapter answers two research questions: First, what strategic function and rationale inform the programme and how does it fit NRK’s overall ambition to serve youth with public service content? Second, what industry logic guides the programme’s production and how is this logic different from the media logic guiding traditional youth television? The chapter contributes to existing scholarship by providing empirical evidence of producers’ self-perception concerning the creation of YouTube content within a public service context and argues that these programmes – while overtly differentiated from traditional public service offerings – serve important strategic functions by engaging young audiences and new content creators, both of which will be essential to public service media in the future. Challenges remain, however, primarily regarding how to expand public service value in new digital settings.

KEYWORDS: NRK, public service media, social media entertainment, youth content, YouTube

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Introduction

A central task for all public service media is to engage young audiences and ensure the relevance of their content for future generations. Yet, it is a widely held concern that youth tend to migrate from traditional radio and television to social and global media platforms (EBU, 2021; Ofcom, 2021; Strømmen, 2022). This “youth challenge” (Andersen & Sundet, 2019), or “lost generation” issue (Lowe & Maijanen, 2019), has compelled public service media institutions to regularly describe their re-engagement with youth as core to their future legitimacy and existence. More generally, media executives tend to pay close attention to young people’s preferences and behaviours because they indicate future consumption patterns (Sundet & Lüders, 2022). According to Woods (2016), youth programming represents a nexus of the broadcasters’ responses to a changing television landscape.

In this chapter, I explore the attempts by public service media to develop a programme for a young audience from production and media policy perspectives. More specifically, I analyse public service youth content created for third-party platforms, departing from a case study of the Norwegian public service broadcaster, NRK, and its YouTube programme, *NRK 4ETG*. There is a growing corpus of literature on public service drama made for youth, teens, and tweens (see, e.g., Andersen & Sundet, 2019; Krüger & Rustad, 2019; Lindtner & Dahl, 2019; Redvall & Christensen, 2021; Sundet, 2020, 2021b; Woods, 2016), but there are fewer studies addressing public service teen content made for social media (see, however, Boyle, 2018; Enli, 2008; Moe, 2013; van Dijck & Poell, 2015). Such studies are nevertheless essential, as they uncover production models that differ from models commonly used in television drama and also highlight the new skills demanded of the talents and professionals working on social media productions (Boyle, 2018). Moreover, studies of teen content produced for social media are likely to spur media policy debates (Michalis, 2021) about whether public service institutions even *should* be on third-party platforms and, if so, *how* to best be there. As such, they tap into broader debates about the role of public service media in Western society today.

Two research questions guide this chapter: First, what strategic function and rationale underline *4ETG* and how does the programme fit NRK’s overall ambition to serve youth with public service content? Second, what industry logic guides the programme’s production, and how is this logic different from the media logic guiding traditional youth television? The analysis relates to the overall theme of this volume by engaging with youth media produced by a public service institution in terms of how global media platforms form and frame online youth content. In terms of theory, this chapter combines perspectives from production studies and media policy studies, including insights from studies of public service youth content (Andersen, 2019; Lury, 2001; Redvall & Christensen, 2021; Sundet, 2020, 2021b; Woods, 2016) and

platforms and social media logic (Abidin, 2018; Bishop, 2018; Boyle, 2018; Poell et al., 2022; van Dijck & Poell, 2013, 2015). Furthermore, I discuss how legacy media organisations translate and incorporate social media logic when creating youth content and how these actions may impact policy debates about public service media.

NRK reflects the specificity of the Nordic context for public service media, characterised by a broad remit, solid public funding, and an ideal of universality in access and content. These organisations typically occupy central cultural positions and are among the few public service media which continue to avoid advertising (Van den Bulck & Raats, 2018). Many have historically been allowed to expand and explore “new media” services (Donders & Moe, 2011), and some have even been assigned the role of “digital locomotive” by national policymakers (Syvertsen et al., 2014: 77; see also Bruun, 2019). While the analysis of NRK can therefore not be considered representative of public service media in general, it offers vital insights into a youth production created by an institution which is allowed to test new ways of reaching young people, and the debates and dilemmas that have arisen as a result.

Methodologically, this chapter offers a production study of *4ETG*, a programme produced in-house as a YouTube comedy programme following a social media logic and aesthetic, and made available on NRK’s TV Player to allow for more traditional viewing modes. The data stem from elite interviews with *4ETG* team members and document analysis of vital institutional and policy texts expressing NRK’s mission and strategies. Both methods are frequently used and combined in production studies (Paterson et al., 2016a; McDonald, 2021) and media policy studies (Van den Bulck et al., 2019), including production studies of public service media. The chapter contributes to the field by providing empirical evidence of producers’ self-perceptions concerning the creation of YouTube content and their conflicted relationship with the public service remit and broadcast practices. Furthermore, I argue that such productions – despite differentiating from traditional public service offerings – serve strategic functions by engaging young audiences *and* new content creators, both of which are essential to public service media in the future. Challenges remain, however, including how to expand public service value in new digital settings driven by different media logic.

Public service, youth content, and social media logic

Previous studies document well the challenge faced by public service media in attracting, engaging, and serving young audiences (Andersen & Sundet, 2019; Boyle, 2018; Davison et al., 2020; Lowe & Maijanen, 2019; Sundet, 2020; van Dijck & Poell, 2015; Woods, 2016). Relatedly, some television

scholars use the term “youthification” (Hagedoorn et al., 2021) to describe the constant need for television to renew itself toward these ends. The term has a double meaning, referring, on the one hand, to the *strategic* focus which television executives bring to the production of youth content in the interests of answering the “youth challenge”, and on the other, to the *conceptual* focus on making sense of television as a perpetually changing medium which must constantly “youthify” itself to stay relevant (Sundet, 2021b: 146). These aspects interlink, so that youth productions serve to strategically attract young audiences and explore innovative ways of telling stories. For instance, television productions aimed at younger audiences tend to involve new media platforms, publishing models, and storytelling techniques, reflecting the industry perception that digital and social media serve relatively tech-savvy young people. The quest for innovation and “newness”, of course, often coincides with the need for cost efficiency, meaning that youth productions branded as innovative are usually produced on a small budget by small production teams (Sundet, 2021b; see also Woods, 2016). Many of these youth productions further call for a unique professional skill set, meaning they require different types of talent (Boyle, 2018). While talent can be bought, borrowed (through freelancing), or cultivated from within, it is nevertheless often difficult to come by, perhaps especially in the case of television-ready talent *with* social media skills – a career (or single video) on social media may be both easier to achieve and financially more lucrative than traditional television work (Boyle, 2018: 6, 17).

When public service media organisations expand their content into social media, they must incorporate the industry logic of social media platforms, which differs significantly from traditional broadcasting. A useful term in this context is social media logic, put forward by van Dijck and Poell (2013: 3) to describe the strategies, mechanisms, and economics underpinning social media platforms. The term relies on Altheide and Snow’s (1979) concept of media logic, a set of principles informed by common-sense rationality cultivated in and by media institutions which penetrates the public domain and dominates organising structures. Relatedly, social media logic refers to the processes, principles, and practices through which platforms process information, news, and communication, and, in turn, channel social traffic (van Dijck & Poell, 2013: 5). van Dijck and Poell formulated four grounding principles of social media logic – programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datification – as critical to understanding how social interaction is mediated in our networked society. Social media logic, they claimed, has gradually been entangled with mass media logic, for example, in the way in which social media logic complements mass media logic and enhances its norms and tactics. Hence, while mass media logic and social media logic are inherently different, they are often mutually reinforcing (van Dijck & Poell, 2013: 3).

Other social media scholars have identified similar reinforcing effects between legacy media and social media. Discussing the phenomenon of online celebrities, Abidin (2018: 37) observed that an increasing number of Internet celebrity formats “derive from, overlap with, and display spillover effects with other media industries in society”, and that this proves that the attention economy on digital spaces is “simultaneously capitalising on and being cannibalised by legacy media, as both industries compete and cooperate for a digital audience”. A helpful concept in this regard is “lending fame”, which Abidin (2018: 60) used to describe the tendency wherein legacy media invite or cast already-famous Internet celebrities, exploiting their fame to profit from their “Internet-native audience” and appeal to the youth market. Following this line of argument, we can also expect public service media to lend fame by recruiting online personas and content creators to work on youth productions.

While all four of the social media principles defined by van Dijck and Poell (2013) are relevant to content creators, Burgess (2021: 22–23) claimed that datafication – the “extraction and collection of digital traces of cultural practices and social interactions so that they can be sorted, aggregated, analysed, and deployed for strategic purposes” – is the most important of them. Datafication has the power to “make or break” the careers of content creators, as well as shape what counts as value and how value is measured (Burgess, 2021: 23). Relatedly, other scholars have addressed how data and metrics shape the activities of television companies and content creators alike, and how the *perception* of data, platform features, and algorithms shapes actions as well. Drawing on the work of Bucher (2017), Bishop (2018) examined YouTube’s algorithms and their impact upon content creators in terms of both what the algorithms are doing and what content creators *think* the algorithms are doing. In a later study, Bishop (2019) introduced the term “algorithmic gossip” to describe the public discourse about the YouTube algorithm and how such gossip shapes content creator practices. In turn, we also expect online content creators within public service media organisations to be affected by both the perceived and actual impact of algorithms.

Social media logic affects all legacy media organisations that expand onto social media platforms. Still, it has distinct consequences for the public service media in particular because of its remit and obligation to culture, society, and democracy. While some scholars stress the need for public service media to expand and evolve in this way, others are more sceptical, claiming that its presence on third-party platforms raises serious dilemmas regarding ownership, trust, and control (Ihlebak & Sundet, 2021). According to van Dijck and Poell (2015: 157), public service media organisations must transfer and translate their mission, values, and “publicness” beyond traditional broadcasting – that is, *outside* the designated space of public television. Many such institutions, they argued, have historically played a critical societal role in

promoting and facilitating value outside this space and their public service programmes (van Dijck & Poell, 2015: 160; see also Donders & Moe, 2011). van Dijck and Poell (2015: 151) have pointed to the alternative of *not* expanding, which risks not only the engagement of a younger audience but also the interest of younger content creators, “many of whom are attracted by the innovative potential of multiplatform production and distribution”. The trick, they claimed, is to manage expansion without “compromising public value” (van Dijck & Poell, 2015: 148).

Making a similar argument in the context of the British public service media, Boyle (2018) emphasised the importance of developing and nurturing talent in a multiplatform environment. The television industry has always been “talent hungry” (Boyle, 2018: 140), but new formats and social media platforms demand new skills and practices while offering alternative pathways into the industry. New formats might even work as a proving ground for fresh voices and media “personalities” and “profiles”; while some talents settle in for good on YouTube, others see it as a “starting platform that might just lead to television” (Boyle, 2018: 152–153). Engaging young people on YouTube might therefore be beneficial to public service media companies not only for attracting and keeping young *viewers*, but also for attracting young content *creators*.

Case and method

This chapter presents a production study of *4ETG* (started in 2018, ended in 2023), NRK’s profile-based online youth universe. The programme’s central platform is YouTube, where *4ETG* typically posts two weekly videos, often involving other YouTubers, comedians, or humourists as guests. *4ETG* also hosts Instagram and TikTok accounts through which the programme team promotes videos, communicates with followers and fans, and offers peeks behind the scenes. Since 2019, the programme has been available on NRK’s TV Player, where it is described as a “humour collective where everything is allowed”. The *4ETG* team frequently contributes to other NRK productions and has also launched several sub-series, including *4ETG dater* [*4ETG dates*] and *GYM* in 2021, a dating programme and comedy sports competition, respectively, with Norwegian content creators, humourists, and television personalities.

As a format, *4ETG* builds on NRK’s YouTube programme for children, *NRK FlippKlipp*, and many members of the *4ETG* team came over from *FlippKlipp*. Both programmes are profile driven – that is, centred around their hosts and their personas – and they recruit those profiles from among active YouTubers, which demonstrates the way NRK lends fame (Abidin, 2018) while seeking creators with social media experience (Boyle, 2018). Both programmes also frequently change their profiles, and “old” profiles often

go on to host or contribute to other radio or television shows, indicating the ability of both *FlippKlipp* and *4ETG* to contribute talent to the broader field. At the time of this study (2021), Karsten Blomvik and Annika Momrak were hosting *4ETG*.

Administratively, *4ETG* is aligned with NRK's entertainment division, not the youth division (NRK P3), even though its target audience is young people. This in-house positioning likely signals NRK's ambition for the programme to be an entertaining playground for youth and new content creators rather than a source of the "popular enlightenment" traditionally expected from NRK's children and youth divisions (see Sundet, 2020). It also signals a different "production as culture" (Meyer et al., 2009; see also Paterson et al., 2016b).

To analyse *4ETG*, I draw from elite interviews (Bruun, 2016) with industry executives and document analysis (Karppinen & Moe, 2019) of vital institutional texts. Interviewing industry elites is a valuable means of gaining in-depth insights into industry perceptions and strategies (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Elite informants possess expert knowledge (Van Audenhove & Donders, 2019: 170) and function as gatekeepers of information (Bruun, 2016: 132–135). Two *4ETG* team members, programme profile Annika Momrak and producer Zack Jacobsen, were interviewed. At the time of the interview, both had worked for *4ETG* for about two years and were seasoned participants in the team's tasks, practices, and decision-making processes. The interview with Momrak and Jacobsen took place in October 2021 using a semistructured interview guide with questions about the programme, work tasks and routines, production logic, and audience relations. The interview was transcribed and thematically analysed (Herzog et al., 2019), with analytical weight given to the informants' "self-reflexivity" (Caldwell, 2009). The interview was conducted in Norwegian, and all quotes have been translated to English.

I also rely on document analysis, as institutional and policy documents provide vital information on remit, strategies, and actions for publicly funded media organisations. More specifically, the document analysis relies on policy and industry texts articulating NRK's mission and strategy, including most notably NRK's article of association (NRK, 2019), corporate strategy documents (NRK, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2021), annual reports and public service accounts (NRK 2016, 2020a), and (parts of) *4ETG*'s in-house contract (NRK, 2020b). While some of these documents are publicly available and written in a standardised and corporate manner, others are internal working texts intended for the production team in question. The list of documents thus includes both publicly disclosed and fully embedded deep texts, as described by Caldwell (2009: 202). The documents were thematically analysed (Herzog et al., 2019) to identify NRK's youth strategy, contextualise interview statements, and relate the case to overall media policy debates. All quotes have been translated from Norwegian to English.

NRK's social media youth remit

To put the analysis in context, the next section provides a short description of NRK's public service remit regarding youth and third-party platforms. NRK's overall assignment is to provide the entire population access to a broad range of (public service) content, and its public service mission is formally articulated in the NRK placard [NRK plakaten] and incorporated in NRK's (2019) article of association. NRK has several obligations concerning its service to young people and its use of social media platforms. Regarding the former, NRK is obliged to prepare an overall offering relevant to all age groups and social segments, including youth (§21), as well as regular Norwegian-language programmes for young people (§22). NRK's article of association even specifically obliges NRK to develop in-house content for children and young people on the Internet (§50). Regarding the latter, NRK is obliged to strive for high quality, diversity, and innovation (§21) and to be present on (and develop services on) all important media platforms, including the Internet, to share NRK's overall programming slate as broadly as possible (§24). Consequently, both youth content and "new" media platforms are formally defined aspects of NRK's public service remit.

NRK's (2021) corporate strategy – reflecting the formal obligations and adjusting them to current trends and perceived threats to meeting the obligations – is structured around three overall strategies: "strengthening and developing the Norwegian democracy", "uniting and engaging everyone living in Norway", and "being a world-class publisher and content producer". Sub-strategies which are especially relevant here include "providing content people find, choose, and love" and "connecting with the audience, knowing Norway best, and being to everyone's benefit". Moreover, in institutional documents, NRK often stresses the importance of "serving young people", and since 2012, this has been a specific goal of NRK's content and publishing strategies (NRK, 2012, 2014; see also NRK, 2016, 2021). A focus on youth is also commonly articulated in NRK's public communication – when NRK's new director general (Vibeke Fürst Haugen) was interviewed about future challenges, youth engagement featured prominently in her responses (as cited in Mangelrød, 2022).

NRK's corporate strategy also defines strategy focus areas such as being "younger and more accessible", offering "more content for youth and children", and being "best on our own platform" (NRK, 2021). The latter is a new formulation which represents a substantial shift from earlier strategies. Whereas NRK formerly endorsed the extensive expansion onto third-party platforms (Moe, 2013), the company presently stresses that these platforms only be used for the following three purposes: to promote content, communicate with followers and fans, and, importantly, "bring back" audiences to NRK's services and platforms (Lund, 2022). In part, this appears to be because NRK fears the loss of control over content that accompanies activ-

ity on third-party platforms and wonders whether it will strengthen global competitors (moving audiences away from NRK) or reduce the audience's trust (Grut, 2021). Consequently, NRK announced in 2022 a strategy to put their own platforms first for radio and podcasting, and it began to delay publishing content on Spotify to attract audiences back to NRK's platform for audio services. NRK also recently closed its Facebook news and youth sites with the following message:

NRK will publish less on social media in the future, and one of the consequences is that our P3 account will be closed. [...] You can still find us on Instagram (@nrkp3), and, of course, on P3.no and NRK.no. See you! (NRK P3, 2022)

The shift from expansion to caution regarding social media is part of larger media policy debates which characterise the global impact of these platforms as a potential threat to democracy (Ministry of Culture, 2022a, 2022b). In short, NRK appears to be in a period of transition as it explores, develops, tests, and evaluates new social media strategies.

NRK 4ETG: Strategic function and rationale

The first research question concerns the strategic function and rationale of the programme and how it fits within NRK's overall ambition to serve youth with public service content. In publicly available documents, *4ETG* is sparingly described as an example of NRK's "narrow entertainment provision" (NRK, 2018: 129) and a "shared universe providing a break for young people in their everyday life" (NRK, 2020a: 53). Similarly, in the interview, *4ETG* profile Annika Momrak characterised *4ETG* as a "humour collective and universe that exists in various places online". The production team honours an in-house contract to deliver one hundred videos a year (for 2020) on the YouTube channel as well as nrk.no and NRK TV. The contract also states the mission and target audience of *4ETG*:

The production team shall continuously develop video content and series relevant to the target group of 14–20-year-olds (with the 17-year-old as the primary segment) and meet demographics in rural and urban areas. Unique insight into topics that concern young people online and in everyday life should ensure that stories are relevant and humorous. The series will be promoted on social media, on NRK, and through the profiles' network. (NRK 2020b)

Regarding *4ETG*'s strategic value to NRK, the informants first noted that the show is essential for *reaching a target youth audience*, which is otherwise elusive, and hopefully "bringing them back" to the organisation's programming (NRK, 2021). Both informants emphasised the importance of getting to know

the audience and serving their needs and habits, and as Momrak explained, they “spend *a lot* of time thinking about what 17-year-olds are interested in”.

On the one hand, the focus on relevance echoes findings from studies of other NRK teen productions, which have emphasised that insight into young people’s everyday lives is a crucial selling point for small-budget productions in particular (Sundet, 2021a: 57–65). On the other hand, *4ETG* aspires to go even further by inviting youth to participate in an immersive and interactive online experience across social media platforms, according to producer Zack Jacobsen: “We are more deeply engaged with what 17-year-olds think is fun at this point in time and are trying to appeal to the rapidly changing trends in Internet and YouTube culture. I think few others at NRK do that”. For instance, young people are not solely addressed as the audience or social media platform followers, but also as contributors and co-owners; according to Momrak, “they are a big part of the *4ETG* universe – they get involved and feel ownership of our content”. Hence, while *4ETG* ratings are often lower than many traditional television programmes for youth, the production team redefines the measurement of success by stressing how the programme does well in cultivating a deep, engaging, and “intimate relationship” (Abidin, 2018; see also Duffy, 2017) with its core audience: Creating a deep relationship with a few hard-to-get members of the audience was perceived as more valuable than reaching a large number of people.

Both informants also stressed the need to communicate to the target audience that NRK is working for *them*, hoping in turn that this would promote loyalty and investment later in life. Again, we see the strategy of “bringing back” viewers, even if it here refers to actions for future generations, as laid out by Momrak in the interview:

4ETG is important to NRK because the target group we reach is not otherwise using NRK. They generally trust NRK and perceive NRK as a good thing but not as something serving *them*. When we meet them and their needs, they discover that “shit, this is *4ETG* and NRK”. They realise that NRK takes them, their lives, and their interests seriously. It makes them value NRK as necessary for them in later life.

Bringing-back arguments like this are widespread in the industry and are often used to legitimise new media services aimed at younger audiences. These arguments also reflect perceptions of youth as distinctly different from other audience groups, again legitimising why new strategies and services are needed (see also Sunet & Lüders, 2022).

A second strategic function of *4ETG* involves the ways in which the show explores *new ways of making content*. This is useful not only for bringing back audiences but also for testing new production models and attracting new talent. As Jacobsen explained in the interview, creating content for young audiences on YouTube is fundamentally different from producing

television programming, and other (more traditional) divisions within NRK often struggled to understand YouTube's style of production. The rough and speedy editing rhythm of YouTube, for example, fundamentally differs from the editing of traditional television programmes, according to Jacobsen:

We often feel that other people at the NRK don't understand what we are making. They hardly know what they are watching because it goes so fast. For many, watching our videos is like having a fever dream. But that's what 17-year-olds on YouTube want. I want the same myself. I don't expect YouTube to go slow.

According to the informants, *4ETG* is among the few NRK programmes intended for social media from the start (it is a native social media production) rather than initially made for radio or television and subsequently edited into social media content (as a means of promotion). Jacobsen compared *4ETG* with NRK's youth division (NRK P3): "NRK P3 produces mostly NRK-native content and edits it into [social media] content afterwards – short snippets to post online after a radio show or a television series. We create *for* YouTube".

Both informants noted that YouTube allows them to experiment and position their work outside the "safer" and more established public service media organisation. Momrak stated: "We are supposed to be the outcast of NRK, and we are supposed to push boundaries. We might even need to be more ground-breaking and get more complaints than today. I sometimes think we are too nice". As a small-budget production for YouTube, *4ETG* offers its team the space to cultivate a distinct production culture, valued by both audiences and team members precisely because it represents an alternative to the more established public broadcaster. Momrak summarised that "it doesn't look or sound like NRK, and it shouldn't. They [the young audience] are amazed: 'This is also NRK – it's cool!'" In short, for both Momrak and Jacobsen, being "different" was a selling point for the programme.

When asked about the programme's relationship to NRK's public service mission, both informants pivoted to it being the primary function of *4ETG*: engaging youth via humour and minimising the influence of any public service obligations or the need to generate "public value". "We are not expected to focus on that; we are expected to focus on making engaging content", Momrak stated, and Jacobsen agreed: "I don't go around thinking about it [the public service mission]. It's something my boss takes care of". Statements like these reflect a narrow working definition of what public service is – something established, slightly old-fashioned, unengaging, top-down, and impersonal – that is difficult to cultivate for a young digital team, even though many examples of the opposite exist (Sundet, 2020). According to both, followers and fans are sensitive to "inauthentic content" – that is, content not originated by the profiles or the *4ETG* team. Introducing issues or "value" beyond the profiles' areas of interest therefore represents

a challenge because the audience considers it fake. Similar “authenticity claims” feature prominently in studies of content creators and online celebrities, where presenting oneself as “real” is considered a key currency (Duffy, 2017; see also Abidin, 2018). While both informants acknowledged the importance of being relevant to (and engaging) young people’s lives, they mostly wanted to reach and retain this target audience, not edify or educate it. Jacobsen elaborated:

NRK gives us a lot of freedom. Most people in the building don’t understand what we are doing, but that’s only an advantage, since it allows us to keep going without much interruption and critical barriers from the house. They let us [produce our content] because they see that it works and that we reach our target audience, even though they don’t understand what we are doing. We are getting a new audience to NRK and the viewing numbers we need.

Again, the informants operated with a distinction between NRK and *4ETG*, with an us-versus-them rhetoric defined by the target audience and the use of platforms. *4ETG* is presented as a bottom-up initiative, providing an alternative culture of production.

Simply existing as a (public service) YouTube programme is fraught with challenges, the informants observed, and trust, control, and predictability are crucial aspects of success on the platform. Momrak explained: “Of course, it’s challenging being on third-party platforms. We can’t trust them. And they change all the time. A big challenge with TikTok is that we have no control”. When asked about the general criticism of NRK’s use of third-party platforms, Momrak pointed to the bringing-back strategy and the dilemma involved in communicating with an audience you do not already have:

I understand the criticism well. I also understand that NRK wants to bring the audience “home” to compete with companies like Netflix and HBO. NRK must get the audience home to succeed. But we can’t start there. Our target audience is on these platforms, and we need to be present where they are.

Momrak and Jacobsen considered it strategically preferable to use NRK’s platforms for producing and publishing content, but they are less sophisticated than YouTube and lack “critical functionalities”. Jacobsen argued that young people do not “check NRK” on a routine basis:

YouTube is well established. It’s been here so long. There are so many content creators gathered there in one place, and it’s free and easy to use. Young people have their routines for checking YouTube. In comparison, few people have routines for checking nrk.no or NRK TV. It’s very different. Most young people are on YouTube.

To summarise, *4ETG* is perceived as strategically important to NRK for at least two reasons. First, it serves a young audience which can be difficult to reach, and it reassures them that NRK, as a public service media organisation, cares about them, their interests, and their everyday life. Second, and as further discussed below, *4ETG* cultivates an alternative culture related to producing content by exploring the various forms public service media can take on social media to connect with young audiences.

NRK 4ETG: Industry logic

The second research question asks about the industry logic that guides the production of *4ETG* and how it differs from the media logic guiding the production of traditional television programming for youth. Although the informants did not refer to van Dijck and Poell's concept of social media logic as such, they operated with a notion of what makes YouTube productions different from traditional television productions in terms of rhythm, authenticity, and context.

In terms of *rhythm*, YouTube's aesthetic of speedy editing is intended to bombard the audience with new content. Both Momrak and Jacobsen considered the YouTube audience as fundamentally "unfaithful" and "roaming" – the latter term introduced by Hill (2019: 11) to capture the way in which audiences traverse the media landscape, following pathways created by the industry as well as making their own way. To retain a restless audience, the informants argued, one must not waste time: "Something needs to happen all the time; otherwise, they disappear because they have a thousand other things popping up and wanting their attention", as Momrak put it. Jacobsen agreed:

You must think fast, quickly, and efficiently. You must "catch" the viewer fast – within the first five seconds – otherwise, you lose them because it's so easy to click on a new video. We use a lot of "jump cuts", speedy editing, and quick information delivery before jumping right into the action.

Telling stories speedily was also a known strategy for manipulating the YouTube algorithm, as videos must prove that they will not lose viewers after the first sequence to remain visible. This is a clear example of the structural impact of algorithms and their influence upon creators' practices (Bishop, 2018). Jacobsen continued:

We are very keen on attracting viewers and keeping them through the videos, especially at the beginning of each video, because that's important for YouTube's algorithm. If people lose interest and "click out" during the first five seconds, it impacts how the video is "recommended" and pushed on YouTube. We carefully edit videos to suit YouTube's algorithms.

In short, knowledge of how platforms work and the logic guiding them was considered essential to any successful expansion into the social media realm. This principle evokes van Dijck and Poell's (2013) concept of datafication and the related perception that minor adjustments can "make or break" a programme's performance on the platform.

Authenticity relates to the personal approach which YouTube audiences tend to favour and informs the appearance and skill set required of profiles. Jacobsen stressed that successful *4ETG* profiles must be "personal, open and unfiltered", and, Momrak added, "authentic and original". The programme was seen to be largely defined by its profiles, and their authenticity was considered the programme's main currency. Momrak insisted: "It should be real and raw. We are often 'meta' in our videos. It's no big deal if the cameraman appears on tape; in fact, that could be a good thing. [...] It must feel genuine". Momrak added that *4ETG*'s Instagram account is crucial to providing followers and fans with a behind-the-scenes version of the programme's universe and thereby enhancing its authenticity:

Instagram is important for us. [...] On Instagram, we have a relationship with the audience every day, and they get a peek behind the scenes, which is a part of our universe. They follow the stories beyond the videos. Also, what's happening in our office is essential. Instagram makes it easy for us to have two-way communication. We can ask for feedback and responses: We can post things like, "Hey, do you have any questions we can answer in today's video?"

The programme's profiles are vital not only for producing and hosting the show but also for promoting it across social media platforms. As a result, profiles act as intermediaries between the various parts of the *4ETG* universe. The cross-platform universe created by *4ETG* resembles the storyworlds made via reality formats (Ytreberg, 2009) and transmedia storytelling (Evans, 2011); yet, the profiles serve as the critical junction points, again recalling those social media influencers and content creators who often use their online personas to create pathways between social media (see also Abidin, 2018; Cunningham & Craig, 2019). The programme's authenticity is defined not only by its profiles but also by its editors, according to Jacobsen: "Much of *4ETG*'s identity lies in how the videos are edited and who is behind it". Momrak added: "You know when Zack [Jacobsen] or Jonas [Lihaug Fredriksen] edited a video because their editing voice is different and incredibly important. It's very personal". Clearly, for both Momrak and Jacobsen, creating a viable YouTube programme means revealing and using one's personality. In this process, the profiles' brands might become stronger and more valuable than the NRK brand, moving the show even further away from the ideas of public service and public value as the result.

The focus on *context* points to how the programme relates to both the

audience *and* other YouTubers and content creators. For example, the two informants differentiated *4ETG* from traditional television programmes by describing it as a “fresh product” (Jacobsen), in that the production process is short – typically, the team develops ideas, shoots, edits, and publishes within one to two weeks – and that the episodes are part of an extensive web of other YouTube videos. This recalls van Dijck and Poell’s (2013) principle of connectivity – in this case, in terms of the larger YouTube culture. As Momrak explained, making good *4ETG* content means knowing the context very well: “We are talking about an extreme reference culture. [...] It contributes to creating our community: We are together, and we understand this”. A sense of what is trending and how to acknowledge it was considered important to the success of *4ETG*.

Furthermore, the focus on context encompasses the show’s followers and fans and the closeness many feel to the programme and its profiles. Fostering a solid industry–audience relationship brings many benefits to the production team, including the provision of an ongoing focus group: “We always know what they are thinking, and that’s positive. We know when we ‘hit’ and when we ‘miss’”, according to Momrak, who continued, “we have a core group of fans who have created a Discord group where they talk and have become friends for real. It leads to a lot of engagement”. Here, again, the relatively limited number of fans is perceived as less important than the strength of their engagement and loyalty, not only concerning the show but also towards one another.

This vigorous industry–audience relationship has drawbacks as well, noted Momrak: “I check comments on our YouTube channel all the time, and I don’t even notice I’m doing it. You can get tired of getting responses. It can be a real disadvantage at times”. The production team also experiences harsh critique at times, particularly when the programme changes profiles. The personal relationships many fans cultivate with their favourite profiles generate pained, occasionally angry responses to their departures. At such times, the positive “feedback loop” (Busse, 2018) with fans can sour, squandering the goodwill that the programme has worked towards for so long (see also Grey, 2003).

To summarise, *4ETG* follows a social media logic that fundamentally differentiates the programme from traditional teen television programmes with regard to its rhythm, authenticity, and context. This rationale fosters a speedier, tighter, and more personal relationship between the production team (and especially the programme’s profiles) and the (young) audience, although this relationship, in reality, might be stronger between audiences and profiles than between audiences and NRK. In the end, it enables the programme – and NRK – to cultivate and retain a young audience while also encouraging a younger generation of content creators to experiment and thrive in the world of public service media.

Conclusion: Lending fame and skills and the implications of it

4ETG is not a public service programme brought to YouTube, but rather a YouTube programme created by a public service media organisation seeking a presence on social media. *4ETG* originates in NRK's solicitation of well-known YouTubers (lending their fame) to create authentic content online (lending their skills) – content which sits outside a traditional public service perspective. The aim is twofold: to reach a young audience that is difficult to reach through traditional programming and to explore new ways of creating youth content on social media platforms.

The ambition to reach young people on social media platforms and “bring them back” to the public service fold is not new; similar motivations underpin many of NRK's youth initiatives, including NRK's teen drama (Sundet, 2021a). In contrast to teen drama, however, *4ETG* has no explicit intention of providing popular enlightenment. Instead, the programme is motivated by the need to reassure the young audiences who have fled to social media that NRK also cares about them and aims to serve them – if not with popular enlightenment, then at least with popular entertainment, and in a social media form they are familiar with. As such, the new social media talents of *4ETG* are tasked with engaging young people through relevant content otherwise freed from any specific public obligations. This personality-driven, bottom-up approach to content for young followers and fans is made possible by the programme's platform-driven ability to fly under the radar of mainstream audiences and its mission of engaging hard-to-reach youth.

A contribution of media production research is emphasising what is at stake politically and the implications media productions have for media policy debates (Paterson et al., 2016a). Michalis (2021) has argued that media industries and media policy are inextricably interlinked, and one cannot study one without tapping into the other. One of the findings of this study is how NRK's YouTube production succeeds in engaging youth and online content creators but has few ambitions of providing public value. On the one hand, this lack of ambition might reflect *4ETG*'s location in the entertainment division, although entertainment can also have public value, for instance, by unifying the nation, facilitating public connection, or empowering sub-groups (Nærland, 2019; Nærland & Dahl, 2022). On the other hand, it might reflect a more general notion among a new generation of online television producers on the difficulties of transforming public value to social media platforms because of the distinct logic governing the platforms. The latter indicates a more profound shift from within, with fundamental implications for the future of public service media. If a new generation of content providers find it difficult to provide public value on social media platforms, how will it impact public service media's survival in the future? Or put differently: Is it enough for public service media to reach young audiences, or should we also

discuss with “what” do we reach them? It is in this context that this analysis activates “old” media policy questions, namely, how to expand public service value beyond these institutions’ original domain (van Dijck & Poell, 2015).

An alternative approach considers online public service youth content as balancing on a false dichotomy of (stuffy) public service ideals, on the one hand, and authenticity and immediacy, on the other. One could view 4ETG’s self-imposed ideals for production as a bottom-up “youthification” (Hagedoorn et al., 2021) of NRK’s interpretation of its public service remit. If that is the case, we must reconsider the values that productions such as 4ETG give to (young) audiences and (online) content creators. While a single study such as this cannot answer these questions alone, it can invite more studies and debates about how public service media can fulfil (and update) their remit for young audiences, attract online content creators, and increase the public value of online entertainment.

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