

SVT Barn online and *In Love*

Searching for identity in a world of smartphones and digital interaction

ANDREAS MAGNUSSON QASSIM

LUND UNIVERSITY, SWEDEN

ABSTRACT

This chapter uses the short-form tween drama *Kär [In Love]* as a case study to explore SVT Barn's digital transformation. The data stem from interviews with SVT creatives and executives involved in the production – from commissioning to writing and directing the series. Specifically, the chapter analyses how online-first and mobile-first strategies are implemented in the public service media (PSM) attempt to attract young viewers in competition with YouTube, subscription video-on-demand services, gaming, and social media. SVT Barn's search for a new identity in the digital media environment mirrors the identity search of the tween characters and viewers of *In Love* themselves, in a world of smartphones and digitally mediated interaction. The analysis concludes that an increased focus on interaction between producers and young audiences could result in a clearer, up-to-date PSM identity and an improved intergenerational dialogue.

KEYWORDS: public service television, digitalisation, datafication, online youth fiction, smartphone culture, tweens, identity, interaction

Qassim, A. M. (2023). SVT Barn online and *In Love*: Searching for identity in a world of smartphones and digital interaction. In P. M. Jensen, E. N. Redvall, & C. L. Christensen (Eds.), *Audiovisual content for children and adolescents in Scandinavia: Production, distribution, and reception in a multiplatform era* (pp. 119–138). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855817-7>

Introduction

The motto “to inform, educate and entertain” – coined by the BBC’s first Director-General John Reith in the 1920s – comprises three foundational values for public service organisations worldwide (Bolin, 2016: 111). However, fulfilling these goals in the over-saturated media environment of today is a huge challenge for public service organisations, not least regarding young audiences. Swedish children and youth aged 9–19 years old spent less than 10 per cent of their total viewing time in 2018 on Swedish public service television (SVT), including broadcast and the online service SVT Play (Swedish Government, 2019: 15). Reaching the young clearly requires thinking in new directions for producers of public service media (PSM).

In this chapter, I explore one attempt to do so, namely the tween drama production *Kär [In Love]* (Lagerberg & Bylund, 2020). No longer children, and not yet teens, the 9–12-year-old or “tween” segment corresponds to the end of the age range in which SVT Barn still has a steady viewership. Since shifting to an online-first policy – that is, focusing all efforts on its streaming platform rather than traditional broadcasting – SVT Barn has been successful in attracting children up to 11–12 years old. However, after age 12, there is a sharp drop in reach (according to an interview with the commissioner of children’s and youth content at SVT and head of SVT Barn in Stockholm). In addition, *In Love* represents a mobile-first strategy, as the series was crafted specifically for the smallest screen and revolves around mainly smartphone-mediated interaction between the two lead characters.

In this chapter, I aim to explore how SVT Barn strives for relevance online and trace how the producers worked to be “close to the audience”, the official slogan for Swedish public service 2020–2025 (Swedish Government, 2019). *In Love* is investigated here as a potential model for improved intergenerational dialogue, in particular between PSM and young audiences. Before proceeding to the main analysis, I present and contextualise the series, after which I lay out the theoretical approach of analysing the production and media text, followed by a presentation of the production interviewees.

The series: *In Love*

The small-scale, online-only series *In Love* ran on SVT Barn and SVT Play between 19 August and 18 December 2020. With its tiny budget of SEK 2.8 million and experimental format – 122 episodes, usually around 2 minutes each, 5 hours in total, published daily for an entire semester – the series did quite well, despite not receiving the same promotional push as SVT’s regular shows (according to an interview with the project leader for *In Love* and MAXA Barnplay, SVT Malmö). The average online rating per episode was 72,000.¹ For comparison, *Klassen [The Class]*, SVT Barn’s flagship drama for younger teens, has 160,000–170,000 ratings per episode, and *Kokobäng*,

SVT's most popular humour show, has around 600,000 ratings per episode. In February 2021, a repackaged version was published called *Kär: långa avsnitt* [*In Love: Long Episodes*] with the intent of making the series more attractive for catch-up viewing. The original 122 episodes were later removed from the platform.

In Love tells the story of Adam and Bianca, two musically gifted twelve-year-olds who became friends during a summer music camp after sixth grade. They go to different schools and keep in touch mainly via their smartphones. In addition to everyday “Snapchatting” and “FaceTiming”, they record songs that they send to each other. Sometimes they meet in real life, record music together, and publish their music videos online, looking for likes and followers and dreaming of making it big. It is obvious from the start that they like each other. Are they just good friends, or is there something more?

In Love marked the debut for SVT Malmö producers Hanna Lagerberg and Anna Bylund as writers and directors of an original drama series. The series is clearly related to other Nordic “short-form, small-budget online fiction series in which social media function as a central part of the narrative with the aim of accommodating a digital native youth audience that was otherwise turning its back on the institutions” (Andersen & Sundet, 2019: 2). The game changer for this genre, Norwegian teen drama *SKAM* [*Shame*] has been hailed as an example of “the Scandinavian approach to public service”, offering creativity, innovation, and the creation of world-class drama on a modest budget (Sundet, 2020: 71; Duggan, 2020: 1005). *In Love* was created within the same tradition, although for a younger target group.

Theoretical approach

In this chapter, I alternate between a “helicopter view” (Havens et al., 2009) and a ground level view of *In Love*, from early preproduction and onwards. Using this methodological approach commonly used in media industry studies, the chapter offers insights into some of the complexities of PSM production in the digital era, from working in a commercially driven platform society (van Dijck et al., 2018), to making the most out of highly restricted budgets in small language territories (Donders, 2019; McElroy & Noonan, 2018). Media industry studies emphasise the role of context (Freeman, 2016), the main contexts here being the digitalisation and datafication of Nordic public service television (Jackson, 2020), smartphone cultures of the young (Vincent & Haddon, 2018), and the “youth challenge” of contemporary PSM – which is the overarching focus of this volume.

The study is exploratory and uses an abductive, iterative approach (Bazeley, 2013: 336). The interviews were thematically designed and analysed in a recursive process that fed back into the design of further interviews (Seale, 2018). The conceptual underpinning is Hill's (2019: 16) “analytic dialogue”,

originally developed for assessing the dialogue between producers and audiences, in which the researcher takes part in the conversation as a “bridge across the industry-audience divide”. It can also be used to assess dialogues within media companies, for example, the exchange of ideas amongst creatives or discussions between creatives and executives (Hill, 2021: 6–7). An analytic dialogue draws attention to how multidirectional dialogues shape media production, highlighting the relational aspect of production and engagement. Other scholars have similarly emphasised the importance of having a people-focused methodology in production research, as “it is people that remain the unchanging anchor of the media industries” (Ashton, as cited in Freeman, 2016: 118) even in times of fast-paced technological transformation.

Theoretically, I assume a meta perspective on identity, juxtaposing the identity search of the *In Love* tween characters with SVT Barn itself, trying to work out what kind of public service television SVT is aiming to be in the digital age for young viewers. According to Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (1996: 4), identity is a “process of becoming rather than being”. Tweens might be the quintessence of “becoming”, busy as they are in their identity construction process, approaching adolescence. Tweens are also characterised by their state of being in-between age categories (childhood and adolescence): a liminal state of being “betwixt and between” (Turner, 1967). Those existing in liminality tend to “elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space” (Turner, 1969: 95). Like tweens, SVT Barn could be said to lead such a liminal existence, as it is currently in mid-transition between the broadcasting era and a digital future that has not been fully written yet.

According to psychologist Stephen Frosh (1991: 5), the modern state of mind is a condition in which maintaining a self is “nearly impossible”. In a fluid and contradictory reality, the self can never be stable, it will always be in flux. However,

modern individuals are subjects within a culture which is in part constituted by its ability and tendency to produce precisely that experience. It is in the nature of modernity to provoke crises of identity: that is what modernity is about, that is what supplies its immense energy and productiveness. (Frosh, 1991: 191)

Modern identity search, then, can be seen as a struggle without end, as well as a source of energy that offers opportunities for trying new directions.

Methodology: Production interviews

Six semistructured interviews were conducted between 19 January and 18 March 2021, involving five participants, who all gave consent for using their names:

- Efva Henrysson: project leader for *In Love* and MAXA Barnplay, SVT Malmö
- Hanna Lagerberg: writer and director of *In Love*; producer and editor at SVT Malmö
- Anna Bylund: writer and director of *In Love*; producer and editor at SVT Malmö (interviewed on two occasions due to a tight schedule)
- Petter Bragée: head of children’s, comedy, and entertainment programming, SVT Malmö
- Safa Safiyari: commissioner of children’s and youth content, SVT; head of SVT Barn, Stockholm

The following analysis is divided into two parts. The first deals with how and why SVT Barn is striving for relevance online, whereas the second traces how the producers of *In Love* worked to be close to the audience in this case.

Analysis part 1: Striving for relevance online

Using online platforms to pursue relevance

Swedish public service television is currently running two online platforms or apps: SVT Play and SVT Barn. The interviewees sometimes referred to SVT Barn online as “Barnplay”, and the word “Play” was sometimes used to talk about SVT online in general. Since 2019, SVT Barn is the name of both the broadcast channel and the online platform. However, the participants spoke of broadcasting as a bygone era. According to Henrysson, the *In Love* project leader, the broadcast channel today mostly functions as an “ad window for Barnplay”: All new ideas and strategies are focused online, she said. The head of children’s, comedy, and entertainment programming, Bragée, explained that the programmes for children and youth produced in Malmö constitute slightly less than half of SVT Barn’s national in-house production. These are visualised as four worlds, as illustrated in Figure 7.1, assembled by SVT Barn to present their 2020 offering of programmes. The worlds are considered to correspond to four “needs” of an audience (an SVT Barn Malmö approach that is not the same for SVT Barn nationally):

- The SVT Barn world: Suspense and imagination for the 7-year-old (the blue triangle)
- The Arts and Crafts world: Creativity, DIY (do-it-yourself), and participation for the 9-year-old (the green triangle)
- The Alex & Carro world: Fun, pranks, and your friends for the 9-year-old (the yellow triangle)
- The Drama Tweenie world: Relations, identification, and genuineness for the 11-year-old (the purple triangle)

FIGURE 7.1 The four worlds and MAXA © SVT Barn Malmö (2020)



In Love started out as a commission within the framework of MAXA, an ongoing project aiming to “maximise” SVT Barn as an attractive online platform (but it ended up in the Drama Tweenie world). Such an online-first approach can be seen in many other children’s divisions of European PSM, in response to changing consumption patterns (Donders, 2019). MAXA is pictured as a fifth world in the middle, overlapping the other four, a place for experimenting with new ideas and offering audiences added value and online-exclusive material. According to Bragée, MAXA has two main purposes: “one is to be a development hub and come up with the new stuff that can become big formats, and the second is to kind of keep an eye on the audience”.

According to Safiyari, the commissioner of children’s and youth content and head of the channel, SVT Barn online has become a more “YouTube-ish” platform than SVT Play and is therefore the natural home for short-form content like *In Love*. This was echoed by Bragée, who predicted that SVT Barn might evolve into becoming “SVT’s YouTube” (for solo viewing), while SVT Play will be “SVT’s Netflix” (for social viewing), hinting at a major reconstruction being under way. The differentiation of their two online platforms is not only about age groups, then, but also formats and viewing habits.

The interviewees were quick to point out that they, formally speaking, have no competitors, as they are commercially independent. Yet, the frequent comparisons with YouTube and subscription video-on-demand services like Netflix are testament to how positioning oneself in a platform society (van Dijck et al., 2018) ruled by the Big Five – Google, Apple, Facebook (Meta), Amazon, and Microsoft – necessitates playing by those rules to some extent, even for publicly funded, non-commercial PSM. Essentially, they are all competitors in the same market, but on very different terms (see Steemers, 2019; McElroy & Noonan, 2018).

Using format to promote loyalty

The starting point for *In Love* was a commission towards the end of 2019, according to Lagerberg, in which SVT Barn's headquarters in Stockholm asked its Malmö branch to come up with concepts for "lots of TV for little money"; Safiyari called it an "exploratory commission". It did not necessarily have to be short-form, it could just as well be longer than regular formats, for example, live transmissions. Format here was more about certain characteristics that make content better suited for online engagement than broadcast. Genre was less important, and the main "tentpoles" were volume, frequency, durability, and a small budget. In Safiyari's view, one of the easiest ways to build audience loyalty is to make programmes with lots of episodes (see also Redvall, Chapter 4 in this volume).

The perception that children and youth are losing interest in longer storytelling formats – see, for example, the University of Copenhagen research project Reaching Young Audiences (RYA, n.d.) – was dismissed by Bragée, who said that there used to be a belief that children consume "snacking formats" only, for instance, on the bus between home and school, and "entire production companies were started for the sole purpose of providing such content". However, children might as well start watching something long on the bus and continue when they get home. According to him, children will watch 2-hour videos of *Jocke & Jonna* (a popular Swedish YouTube vlog) as well as *Gissa Alex* (an SVT micro-short-form series starring Alexander Hermansson): "Format is quite irrelevant for them. It just needs to be right".

With *In Love*, SVT Barn was looking for a continuous presence in the lives of young viewers. Hill (2019: 121) refers to this as "embedded engagement", which is about "how people form relationships with entertainment over time, in the context of their everyday lives". Indeed, ratings showed that *In Love* was mainly watched in the morning before school, afternoons and evenings after school, and then peaked during weekends, according to Henrysson. With its many episodes and daily publishing model, engaging with *In Love* seems to have developed into something of a ritual, embedded in the everyday lives of viewers.

To remain relevant, PSM must keep an eye on what goes on in other parts of the industry. It has been noted that television is becoming increasingly expensive *and* increasingly cheap, as "budgets are gravitating towards either massively high value and production or YouTube do it yourself (DIY)" (Sørensen, 2018: 509–510). Safiyari compared Swedish influencer Therese Lindgren with the Netflix hit series *The Crown*: the former super cheap to produce, the latter astronomically expensive, both with a huge reach in Sweden. For a publicly funded company in a small country who could never afford to produce *The Crown*, "the cheap production is what we must explore", Safiyari stated. *Malins vlog* and *Alex & Carro* are examples of cheap "public service vlogs" meeting the MAXA criteria described above. As we have seen, *In Love* ended

up outside the MAXA world but was characterised by the same “YouTube-ish” thinking, in terms of volume, frequency, cost, and (online-only) format.

Reaching the target groups

According to Safiyari, SVT Barn’s online transition has improved their reach compared with broadcast-only times, and digitalisation has led to “an increased niche focus on specific target groups, in more genres, and in more contexts”. During this transition, SVT chose to focus on the youngest and the oldest children. For the latter group, they have produced drama series such as *The Class*, *Jobbigt* [*Awkward*], *Vi 4ever* [*We 4ever*], *Snart 13* [*Soon 13*], *In Love*, and more recently, *Strula* [*Make Out*]. At the older end of this age segment, however, there is a sharp drop in engagement: Among 9–11-year-olds, SVT has a reach of around 70–80 per cent, while for 12–14-year-olds, it is 40 per cent, according to Safiyari.

SVT Barn must also keep in mind that they often hit below target with their programmes. Many viewers are considerably younger than the intended target group, whereas the actual target audience will watch “much, much more advanced stuff, like *Riverdale* or *Stranger Things*... content about adults or college or high school students... and so they reject us”, Bylund, one of the writers and directors of *In Love*, explained. Henrysson said that the childish-looking SVT Barn website does not help: “There’s a dilemma of identification there... if you’re on your way to becoming a teenager, would you admit that you’re watching something that includes the word child?”

Bragée expressed frustration with the lack of interest in funding content for teens, that is, the target group next up from that of *In Love*. Other Nordic public service television channels have specialised youth departments, often with roots in youth radio channel P3, “with expertise on how the target group works”, whereas SVT does not (see Andersen & Sundet, 2019). “SVT basically has problems reaching people from 12 to 50”, Bragée stated. SVT’s current policy is to focus on “the upper half of that problem”, hoping engagement will spill down onto younger audiences, whereas in Bragée’s view, it should be the other way around: “There’s an attitude that ‘they’ll come back after they’ve been out playing’. I don’t understand that thinking. If I’d been CEO, I’d have prioritised differently” (see also Sundet, Chapter 5 in this volume).

Henrysson suggested a lack of confidence within SVT – that youth have simply been deemed too difficult to reach and keep as audiences. Indeed, youth television has a history of being regarded as a “market failure” sector, considered too small to be interesting to investors (Steemers, 2017). For Safiyari, it is not a question of “yes or no” anymore, as *Shame* and other series have shown that the young *can* be reached by PSM. The question is instead how to achieve the same thing in other genres: “Outside drama, few things work”, he said, pointing to how variation and genre breadth are also part of the public service remit: “We can’t spend all our money on drama”.

The interviewees generally downplayed the importance of age when discussing the loss of viewers, or the claim that tweens and teens would be harder to reach than other groups, as discussed by Bylund:

I would love to see more youth content... but honestly, I think that some of them, we lose much earlier... like those watching nothing but Netflix from an early age or so... it probably goes for the whole age span... How do we attract people for whom SVT isn't a natural place to search for "What should I watch today?" ...it's a job that needs to be done for everyone.

Nonetheless, there seems to be a blind spot in SVT policy for late tweens and teens. At the time of interviewing, new programmes were in the pipeline. For example, Hanna Lagerberg's *Bror* [*Brother*] was under preproduction, a drama series aimed at teenage boys that was not to be "held back by the restrictions of the SVT Barn platform", according to Henrysson. However, there is still no specialised youth television department in sight, as there is in Danish and Norwegian public service television.

Using data to produce popular content

Television is traditionally a "gut feeling business", according to Bragée, meaning that producers and commissioners will base ideas and decisions on what they like themselves, or used to like as children; he started out that way himself three decades ago, but now he finds such an approach completely irrelevant. Bragée considers that public service is not primarily about *making* programmes, it is something that happens when people *watch* programmes: "If nobody watches, there is no public service", he said, and that is why he is "so obsessed with online statistics". Safiyari had a similar outlook: "Consumption equals relevance... if we disregard all other values". Aside from the market language, indicated here is that SVT Barn has chosen a trends-led or audience-led approach. "Viewers simply do not choose content they do not want to watch", as Safiyari put it. Children and youth themselves define what is relevant for them.

Bragée praised the *In Love* creative team for being "data-driven", that is, that they base ideas and creative decisions on audience data instead of intuition only. He particularly commended Lagerberg, one of the writers and directors, who came to SVT from a digital media background, "without the preconceptions of how it should be in TV production", who took a genuine interest in target group behaviour by studying the numbers and graphs:

To be data literate in online statistics, you need to have been doing it for a while, so that it's in your spine how every show looks and how the curves for those shows look. And she understands how to do that... few producers do.

There can be prestige in terms like “data” and “digital”, by which media companies strive to be perceived as innovative players within the media industries. McElroy and Noonan (2018: 159) pointed out a tendency for “futurology and technophilia” in discourses around digitalisation that can obscure the social world, and van Dijck (2014) has warned about “dataism”, an over-reliance on objective quantification that risks leading to alienation. Being “data-driven”, according to Jackson (2020: 210), is partly about basing decisions on data, but also about a fluid, agile way of working, an “approach that is alien to most producers accustomed to working in a linear way within television and radio”. For SVT Barn, “data” seems to be more about being audience oriented, whereas production processes remain quite conventional. Projects follow a preset pattern of preproduction, production, and postproduction. The blueprint of a project might be adjusted along the way, but it will not change dramatically, as it might in the IT and tech world, for example.

The interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the tools available for measuring online engagement. Gender, for example, is largely invisible in the statistics. They *assume* that the majority of *In Love* viewers are girls, but “as long as we don’t make more focused investigations, we don’t know... we only get viewing time, and devices used”, Henrysson explained. In “broadcast times”, SVT had access to more nuanced data through traditional audience investigations. Online statistics lack the demography: “Now we only see ‘OK, *Klassen* is being watched. But how old are they?’ We don’t know”, Bragée stated.

Analysis part 2: Close to the audience

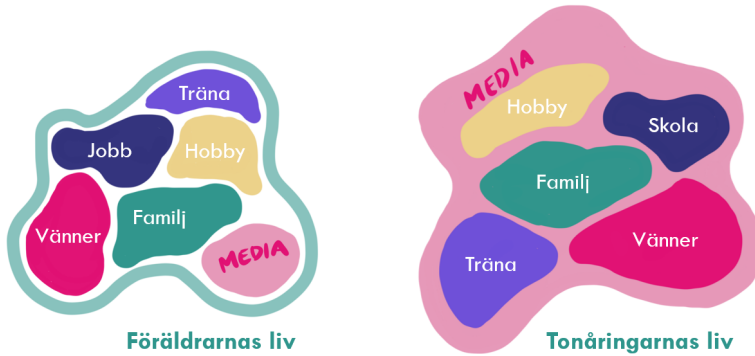
Bridging the generational gap

[The young] are difficult to reach *if* we assume that they are like we were when we were kids. [...] That’s the simple trick we came up with at SVT Barn, to not think that they are like us. Because they’re not. (Bragée)

According to Bragée, “the gap between children and adults today is bigger than it has been since the 1950s, a time when adults wore hats and spoke in a nasal way and did not understand what the youngsters were up to”. An investigation into media habits commissioned by SVT showed two kinds of viewer profiles, as represented in graphics in Figure 7.2: For the parental generation, “media” floats in a bubble next to family, friends, job, hobbies, and exercise; and for the 12–15-year-olds, media *is* the bubble in which all other areas (family, friends, school, hobbies, and exercise) are embedded. “They swim in it, you see, it’s like their bloodstream”, Bragée said, echoing Deuze’s (2012) “media life” of people living in, rather than with media, or perhaps the “deep mediatisation” of Couldry and Hepp (2017), in which

social life and mediated social life are so intertwined that it does not make sense to treat them as separate. Bragé’s reasoning is also in line with the idea that personalised mobile technologies amplify generational segregation (Chambers, 2013: 101), that is, that the young have their world and the old have theirs, and that these rarely overlap – that there is a basic lack of understanding between the two.

FIGURE 7.2 “Media is the glue”



Source: By Augur: The Human Experience Agency © SVT Barn Malmö

SVT Barn tried to bridge this perceived gap during the production of *In Love*. Step one was audience research conducted by the writer–director duo, starting with casual chats with children in schools and libraries, and by “hanging out where kids hang out” in social media, Henrysson explained. Bylund and Lagerberg found that love and mobile phones were engaging themes: “There was this twelve-year-old boy asking ‘What if we could peek inside a girl’s Snapchat?’, and then the idea grew from there”, Bylund recounted.

Chats were followed by in-depth interviews with fifteen 12–14-year-olds. The youngsters were asked the same questions that the writer–director duo later asked their fictional characters, Adam and Bianca, when crafting them. The questions were inspired by Laurie Hutzler’s (n.d.) *Character Map*, a character-driven dramaturgical model used by Julie Andem for the production of *Shame*, and by Maria Karlsson Thörnqvist for the SVT teen drama *Festen* [*The Party*]. Bylund explained:

I asked them questions about who they are, what they are afraid of, what they hope for in their lives, this thing about being in a relationship. I asked them to describe it... how it ended... how much you share with your parents, and how much you share with friends.

A central concept in this model is that we all wear masks, that we try to hide

our fears and insecurities. One of the interview questions was: “What would you say is the greatest misconception about you?” Lagerberg explained that “the answer is that character’s mask, which might not be the true you, but the first thing that meets the outside world, and how other people see you”. As an example, the main character Bianca’s mask is “Little Ms. Perfect”. She is pretty, smart, properly behaved, gets top grades in school, and so on. That is what her friends and family seem to associate her with – and perhaps someone she pretends to be at times – but we as viewers learn that there is more to her than that. Underneath the spotless surface there is a real person, struggling with emotions, stress, and identity.

This is classic Erving Goffman (1959) territory: juggling front stage and backstage selves. Goffman used the metaphor of theatre to explain human social interaction, comparing it with putting on various masks for various social situations. The theory is about performance, impression management, and life as social drama, also referred to as dramaturgical sociology or dramaturgical analysis. The Hutzler *Character Map* approach was used again when child stars Eva Jumatate and Oscar Stenbridge had been cast, asking them the same questions about fears, desires, and misconceptions. The fictional characters were then crafted not too differently from the actors: “When you’re that young and inexperienced, it’s easier to play a character who is close to oneself”, asserted Lagerberg.

From the audience interviews, the writer-director duo picked three outgoing girls and formed a reference group that they would consult throughout the production. They enjoyed being “nerdy with details”, asking them about everything from abbreviations used in chats to names of contacts in their phonebooks, which were often not proper names, Bylund shared. “Such things are fun and contribute to the feeling of authenticity”, added Lagerberg. In a RYA blog post (Christensen & Redvall, 2019), such an approach is referred to as working with junior editors: “a way to give the audience agency and get important input on the current lives of children”. The junior editor label could also be applied to the actual editor of *In Love* – a young person “not too far away from that reality”, Henrysson said. The editor insisted on keeping misspellings and such things in the “Snapchat graphics” to make it look more authentic. In the repackaged version *In Love: Long Episodes*, Lagerberg and the editor took it one step further, giving the digital communication a more coherent, and often rougher look. Throughout the production process, then, the writer-director duo approached the younger generation through dialogue and interaction, setting the stage for relevance.

A mirror or an ideal?

In Love is an interesting mix of everyday life and “larger than life”, a bit like how a musical switches between spoken parts and musical performance, or backstage and onstage. According to Henrysson, tweens are highly efficient

on their smartphones but inexperienced emotionally. For this reason, “the music layer” was given a prominent position. Twelve-year-old expressions of love might not be so advanced; therefore, music was used to “maximise the drama”. Adam and Bianca could be angrier, happier, more in love, and more hurt through music, Bylund said. The writer–director duo also spoke about wanting to make their series “goalsy”, something to strive for and dream about. Their two lead characters are not the average tweens, according to Bylund:

Well, they’re kind of “A Kids”, aren’t they? Super talented singers, really cute, they’re like... in that way, maybe we are showing an ideal... It’s a balancing act, to strengthen kids in various ways without becoming moralistic, or giving them too unattainable ideals... How many twelve-year-old boys would make an “I’m your biggest fan” [music] video for their girlfriends? In a way, that is raising the bar a lot...

Bragée defended the somewhat glossy world of *In Love*, referring to their repertoire as a whole, saying that it is not the same in all their programmes. Then, he countered by asking why this would be an issue in children’s content: “It’s a dream world. It’s an elevated reality, and that’s what we want. You know, that’s what we get all the time, us adults”. Regarding glossiness and music, Lagerberg compared it with *The O.C.*, a drama series she grew up watching about affluent Californian youth. However, “*In Love* is much closer to reality”, she asserted. Ratings showed that episodes featuring full music videos had more uncompleted views than other episodes, according to Henrysson. In the end, music, stardom, and glossiness did not seem to constitute the main appeal of *In Love*.

Adam and Bianca are noticeably well-behaved (most of the time) and their social world is a pretty gentle one. Their digital communication contains hardly any swear words, no “inappropriate” pictures, and they do not talk behind people’s backs. Bragée explained:

There is so much talk about children’s roughness and bullying... but the majority of what goes on online isn’t like that. And that’s important. If we were to portray everything that goes on online as we usually do in the adult world... that it’s hard and raw and problematic, they wouldn’t recognise themselves.

There were discussions regarding “bad behaviour” during the production of *In Love*. For example, Adam and Bianca try smoking, they break into a restricted area, Bianca tries wine, and Adam sometimes shoplifts. As the editor-in-chief [ansvarig utgivare], Bragée must weigh every such inclusion against the risk of being reported by the Swedish Broadcasting Commission [Granskningsnämnden]. The paragraph called “the special impact of the medium” in their licence agreement states that they cannot encourage or

inspire dangerous or criminal activities (MPRT, 2020: 7). Wine drinking, for example, can be included, “but we’re not allowed to portray it as all pleasant”, Bragé explained. While the creatives would have preferred “less disclaimers”, they expressed an appreciation of these discussions, as they “keep them on their toes”, as described by Bylund:

It’s an interesting balancing act. If we get too scared, we’ll lose relevance. But if we’re too... if we don’t take our public service role seriously, at the other end of the spectrum, then maybe we’ll lose trust, so in a way, that’s where we work all the time.

The above is an example of how dialogues become sites for articulating, performing, and negotiating values of credibility, relevance, and trust (Hill, 2021). Values are not just words in a policy document, they must be constantly re-articulated and re-invented in living, breathing production cultures.

Adapting to a smartphone culture

Marshall McLuhan claimed already in the 1960s that “all technologies are extensions of our physical and nervous systems” (McLuhan, 1964/1994). In *In Love*, we see Adam and Bianca constantly texting, Snapchatting, Facetimeing, “lurking” (checking each other out on social media), updating, filming, publishing, and commenting. Their digital communication is certainly “anytime, anywhere, always on” (Vincent & Haddon, 2018: 5). By showing mobile screen action on top of live action, we are invited as spectators of the “performance of self” (Goffman, 1959) as the characters perform their selves in multiple social worlds, often simultaneously. One such example is when Bianca watches television with her mother in an early episode, while at the same time texting with Adam. By comparing the mobile phone dialogue with the verbal dialogue, we can clearly see the performance in both. It is striking how unextraordinary such a complex social situation has become, in life as in mediated representations of it. Bragé commended his creative team for how they handled the digital layer – for example, when all we see is Bianca scrolling on her phone, how we read drama into the pace of scrolling, what images she stops at, the way she scrolls back up, and so on: “It’s like being inside her brain”, Bragé said.

The smartphone culture of *In Love* can be situated within a celebratory or idealised representation of digital communication among young people. Such a positive picture is not entirely uncontroversial in a country where discourses around children using screens can be negative. There is no trace of the “child at risk” here: phenomena like addiction, bullying, or antisocial behaviour (Mascheroni, 2018). Adam and Bianca are more social through their smartphones, not less. Safiyari said that it partly has to do with

relevance, but also with an “anti-authoritarian model of thinking” and a “core democratic idea”:

A large part of Scandinavian TV culture for kids... is built on a philosophy of not pointing the finger [...]. One should not patronise kids, not be on a mission to raise kids... what is bad for them and what is... you know, but instead having a more affirmative attitude towards life.

It would be something of a paradox for SVT Barn to prescribe less screen time for children: “How could we ever join an anti-screen movement? Because we work with screens ourselves”, Safiyari stated. In the world of *In Love*, smartphones are unproblematic devices, even when Adam and Bianca lie sleepless in bed because the other did not reply. Difficulty sleeping is otherwise one of the risks that has been outlined, as are expectations of constant availability and reciprocity (Mascheroni, 2018). Instead, this was put forth by Lagerberg as one of the main elements of *appeal*:

I think that one of them is recognition... and intimacy... That you're allowed into someone's bedroom when that person can't sleep, because he or she didn't get a reply on a “snap”. I don't think we've seen that being portrayed a lot for this target group in Sweden.

Not too long ago, it might have appeared strange to see twelve-year-olds “glued” to their mobile screens in a public service drama. However, surveys showed already in 2017 that more than one-third of Swedish 7–8-year-olds, and 98 per cent of 11-year-olds had their own smartphones (Davidsson & Thoresson, 2017: 24). Danish public service television (DR) even changed how they divide the target groups for their two online platforms for children and youth, Ramasjang (4–8-year-olds) and Ultra (9–14-year-olds), based on when Danish children receive their first smartphone, which is around eight or nine (Christensen & Redvall, 2019). Being able to reach children through personal media devices, then, changes the way content is planned, produced, and provided for this group.

Steeemers (2019) has pointed out that even in highly digitalised parts of the world, the level of digital literacy varies. We cannot assume, for example, that all children are equally at home with social media apps, or that they can or want to (or are allowed to) run their own YouTube channel. It seems that *In Love* targets a particular kind of child: the mediated digital literate with a strong online presence. The “digital layer”, however, does not appear to be the main thing that drew audiences to the series. SVT's ratings showed that episodes featuring live interaction were more popular than “Snapchat episodes”, according to Henrysson. In the end, the core appeal of a series with so much digital communication turned out to be old-fashioned human contact and intimacy.

Looking for the “i” in interaction

Digital media technologies have been said to speed up children’s emancipation from the family sphere and provide them with an autonomous “private sphere” with continuous access to the peer group (Chambers, 2013; Mascheroni, 2018). In such a secluded space, identities and social worlds can be constructed and experimented with beyond the scrutiny of authority figures like parents and teachers. However, identity search remains emotionally stressful. Bylund explains:

Bianca has got one foot in family life and one foot in a world of friends that is starting to exert more pressure, and all the time... even in the relationship with Adam, all the time she gets exposed to having to make choices about who she is. Trying to find that voice, what you want yourself and who you are.

In Goffman’s (1959) interactionism, the self is not fixed but fluctuates according to whom one is interacting with. Likewise, Hall and du Gay (1996: 4) emphasised that identities can only be maintained in relation to the Other. Bianca puts on different masks for different Others. Who does she want to be? The mask she wears when she is with Adam (the outsider), or the one she wears for Oliver (the popular guy) to impress her friends? Or the mask she wears at home for her mother?

Seen through Frosh’s (1991) “crisis model”, Bianca’s identity search would potentially go on forever. However, she is a character in a television drama with a beginning, middle, and end. There is closure to her struggle. In the final episode of *In Love*, Bianca confronts her mother, portrayed as a strict and demanding parent throughout the series. Forced to give up her love for being “a good girl”, Bianca now follows her heart and chooses Adam, the only person who has ever asked her what *she* wants. As it turns out, they both want to be the selves they are in their co-constructed world: a world that exists only between them, through their interaction and mutual interest.

Likewise, SVT Barn can only be “public service” when audiences choose to be served – and they did: 72,000 online ratings per episode are decent numbers for an online-only small-budget experiment. *In Love* is a small piece in the larger puzzle of SVT Barn’s identity search in the contemporary digital media environment. Unlike the tween characters of *In Love*, however, who complete their transition and leave their liminal existence, SVT Barn must keep searching, stay in transition, and always be “in process” (Hall & du Gay, 1996) to remain relevant.

Conclusion

Informing, educating, and entertaining young people in the 2020s is a complex endeavour. SVT Barn is searching for ways to redefine and strengthen its brand identity, aiming to regain the ground it lost or simply never had in some segments. Public service productions are now influenced by popular online formats from other, essentially different areas of the digital media landscape. SVT's strategy is to try to attract viewers to its own platforms (and not having much of a presence on other platforms), where formats tailored for online and smartphone consumption are tested and evaluated. Although Nordic PSM must compete (for attention) in a commercially driven platform context, how could they ever, with such limited budgets, provide the full range of nuanced, niche content that audiences have come to expect? Glancing too much at Netflix and YouTube might prove to be a dead end. Without losing sight of new, popular formats, maintaining and cultivating its unique position as an alternative is what will continue to make public service stand out from the rest.

“Love and smartphones” were themes that came out of audience investigations and interviews, traditional methods that still constitute an essential part of remaining close to the audience. Music was used to maximise the drama, to paint a picture of a “goalsy” world in which twelve-year-olds have love relationships and can express their emotions like mini-adults. Dreaming about becoming famous through self-promotion online could be assumed to be close to a tween world of YouTubers and influencers. However, ratings showed that audiences were hungrier for “offline intimacy” and “live” social interaction, perhaps a reflection of pandemic times of social restrictions, or an indication of a general longing for the genuine.

The smartphone culture of *In Love* is positive and pro-social, celebrating independence from parental influence, emphasising the opportunities for performing selves, and conducting personal relationships. The “anytime, anywhere, always on” connectivity was put forth as recognisable and appealing, not as something problematic. This rendition could very well represent “an affirmative attitude towards life”, but also a strategic choice, as SVT Barn considered online and smartphone formats as their best shot at reaching young viewers.

“Data” was the prestige word of the day, as the Malmö branch claimed to have abandoned the “gut feeling” of olden days, instead opting for more modern, data-driven forms of production. The datafication of SVT Barn, however, is more about listening to audiences than adopting fluid and agile production methods. SVT Barn is listening through conversation and interaction, and by studying the numbers and graphs of online statistics.

In Love proves once again that young viewers *can* be reached by PSM. However, producers must keep talking to their viewers to continue to evolve within the digital ecology. Online statistics alone are not sufficient for es-

establishing a data-driven PSM 3.0 (Jackson, 2020). More focused audience investigations, not least regarding the reception of programmes, are needed, or PSM will keep chasing shadows when seeking young people's attention. Interaction is clearly valued by SVT themselves, as seen in other areas of their repertoire, for example, in initiatives such as *Fika med SVT* [*Coffee with SVT*], in which audiences are invited to “digital coffee sessions” to discuss how SVT can improve. Regarding young viewers, communicating through the SVT Barn Instagram account is not enough. More “old-school interaction” is needed to provide the data required for a “modern”, up-to-date SVT Barn 3.0. Maybe it is time to update that classic trio of public service values with a fourth one? Inform, *interact*, educate, and entertain.

Acknowledgements

SVT Barn did not commission or finance the study, and they did not interfere in its design.

References

- Andersen, M. M. T., & Sundet, V. S. (2019). Producing online youth fiction in a Nordic public service context. *VIEW: Journal of European Television & Culture*, 8(16), 110–125. <http://doi.org/10.18146/2213-0969.2019.jethc179>
- Bazeley, P. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis: Practical strategies*. Sage.
- Bolin, G. (2016). Värdeskapande och medborgarskap i det digitaliserade samhället [Value creation and citizenship in the digitalised society]. In O. Westlund (Ed.), *Människorna, medierna & marknaden: Medieutredningens forskningsantologi om en demokrati i förändring* [*The people, the media & the market: The media investigation's research anthology on a democracy in transformation*] (pp. 109–130). Wolters Kluwer.
- Chambers, D. (2013). *Social media and personal relationships: Online intimacies and networked friendship*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Christensen, K. B., & Redvall, E. N. (2019). *Producing public service serial drama for children and young audiences: Towards a new future for the Danish broadcasting corporation's tween channel DR Ultra*. CST Online. <https://tinyurl.com/4nnrtu2x>
- Couldry, N., & Hepp, A. (2017). *The mediated construction of reality*. Polity Press.
- Davidsson, P., & Thoresson, A. (2017). *Svenskarna och internet 2017: Undersökning om svenskarnas internetvanor* [*The Swedes and the internet 2017: Survey on internet habits of the Swedes*]. Swedish Internet Foundation. https://www.iis.se/docs/Svenskarna_och_internet_2017.pdf
- Deuze, M. (2012). *Media life*. Polity.
- Donders, K. (2019). Public service media beyond the digital hype: Distribution strategies in a platform era. *Media, Culture & Society*, 41(7), 1011–1028. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443719857616>
- Duggan, J. (2020). Revitalizing seriality: Social media, spreadability, and SKAM's success beyond Scandinavia. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 53(5), 1004–1022.
- Freeman, M. (2016). *Industrial approaches to media: A methodological gateway to industry studies*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55176-4>
- Frosh, S. (1991). *Identity crisis: Modernity, psychoanalysis and the self*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor Books.
- Hall, S., & du Gay, P. (Eds.) (1996). *Questions of cultural identity*. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446221907>

- Havens, T., Lotz, A. D., & Tinic, S. (2009). Critical media industry studies: A research approach. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 2, 234–253. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2009.01037.x>
- Hill, A. (2019). *Media experiences: Engaging with drama and reality television*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203103531>
- Hill, A. (2021). Media industries and audiences: An analytic dialogue. In P. McDonald (Ed.), *The Routledge companion to media industries* (pp. 508–517). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429275340>
- Hutzler, L. H. (n.d.). *The character map: 6 simple steps solve character problems*. <https://www.etbscreenwriting.com/shop/the-character-map/>
- Jackson, L. (2020). Datafication, fluidity, and organisational change: Towards a universal PSM 3.0. In P. Savage, M. Medina, & G. F. Lowe (Eds.), *Universalism in public service media: RIPE@2019* (pp. 207–222). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-9999>
- Lagerberg, H., & Bylund, A. (Directors). (2020–). *Kär [In love]* [TV series]. SVT Barn Malmö.
- Mascheroni, G. (2018). Addiction or emancipation? Children’s attachment to smartphones as a cultural practice. In J. Vincent, & L. Haddon (Eds.), *Smartphone cultures* (pp. 121–134). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315307077>
- McElroy, R., & Noonan, C. (2018). Public service media and digital innovation: The small nation experience. In G. F. Lowe, H. Van den Bulck, & K. Donders (Eds.), *Public service media in the networked society: RIPE@2017* (pp. 159–174). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-5291>
- McLuhan, M. (1994). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. MIT Press. (Original work published 1964)
- MPRT (Myndigheten för press, radio och tv) [The Swedish press and broadcasting authority]. (2020). *Granskningsnämndens praxissamling: Granskat & klart. Tema: Mediets genomslagskraft [The Swedish broadcasting commission’s collection of practices: Reviewed & done. Theme: The impact of the medium]*. <https://www.mprt.se>
- RYA. (n.d.). *Reaching young audiences: Serial fiction and cross-media storyworlds for children and young audiences*. <https://comm.ku.dk/research/film-science-and-creative-media-industries/rya/>
- Seale, C. (Ed.). (2018). *Researching society and culture* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Stemers, J. (2017). International perspectives on the funding of public service media content for children. *Media International Australia*, 163(1), 42–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X17693934>
- Stemers, J. (2019). Invisible children: Inequalities in the provision of screen content for children. In J. Trappel (Ed.), *Digital media inequalities: Policies against divides, distrust and discrimination* (pp. 179–192). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden:org:diva-5550>
- Sundet, V. S. (2020). From “secret” online teen drama to international cult phenomenon: The global expansion of SKAM and its public service mission. *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies*, 15(1), 69–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749602019879856>
- Swedish Government. (2019). *Regeringens proposition 2018/19:136. Ett modernt public service nära publiken: Villkor 2020–2025 [Government proposition 2018/19:136. A modern public service close to the audience: Conditions 2020–2025]*. <https://www.regeringen.se>
- Sørensen, I. E. (2018). Content in context: The impact of mobile media on the British TV industry. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 24(6), 507–522. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856516681703>
- Turner, V. W. (1967). *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*. Cornell University Press.
- Turner, V. W. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Cornell University Press.

- van Dijck, J. (2014) Datafication, dataism and dataveillance: Big data between scientific paradigm and ideology. *Surveillance and Society*, 12(2), 197–208.
<https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v12i2.4776>
- van Dijck, J., Poell, T., & de Waal, M. (2018). *The platform society: Public values in a connective world*. Oxford University Press.
- Vincent, J., & Haddon, L. (Eds.) (2018). *Smartphone cultures*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315307077>

Endnote

1. The way online ratings work for television, according to the SVT personnel, is that one full view of an episode equals one rating. If, for instance, one person watches half an episode, and another person (or the same person) watches half an episode, it counts as one online rating. For more information about online ratings, see the Swedish website MMS (<https://mms.se>) and the tab “Så mäts online-tittandet” [How we measure online viewing]. MMS is a service for measuring the consumption of moving images in Sweden and Scandinavia. It is owned by SVT (24%), NENT Group (24%), TV4 (24%), Discovery Networks Sweden (24%), and others (4%).