

Adapting news video narration to online services

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Abstract

This article examines the motivations, advantages, and challenges of implementing a novel narrative strategy for online news video: the Batman Affective Structure (BAS). The BAS prioritizes emotional engagement as a response to the platformization of news and shifting audience behaviors in digital environments. The model was introduced to three Danish public service organizations – DR, TV 2, and TV 2 Fyn – during a workshop to explore its applicability in newsrooms. Follow-up collaboration with these industry partners examined both its benefits and the tensions it creates within journalistic practice. Findings indicate that public service broadcasters have implemented the BAS to enhance audience engagement and strengthen their presence on streaming platforms. However, the transition also uncovered challenges, such as journalistic resistance to narrative standardization, difficulties in applying the BAS across different news genres, and the evolving role of the studio anchor. The study shows both the strategic potential of the BAS for public service news and the complexities of aligning emotional narrative structures with public service values in a rapidly transforming media environment.

Keywords

News narration, narrative structures, streaming, news content, platformization, on-demand

Introduction

The latest news report by the Reuters Institute focusing on Denmark underscores an urgent and ongoing decline in news consumption across all major media types (i.e., TV, social media, newspaper's online news websites, TV stations' online news websites, radio, and printed newspapers) (Schröder et al., 2023). Public service media (PSM) faces a critical dual challenge: Alongside this diminishing interest in news, audiences are rapidly shifting from traditional linear TV to online platforms. If these broadcasters fail to engage audiences through their broadcaster video-on-demand (BVoD) services, they risk losing significant public funding, which is increasingly tied to their ability to inform the population about current affairs. This issue has profound societal consequences, as reduced public engagement with news threatens informed citizenship and democratic participation, particularly among the least educated (Van Aelst et al., 2017). In a media landscape increasingly dominated by entertainment-driven digital platforms, individuals highly interested in societal issues will continue seeking news, while those with moderate or low interest may encounter significantly less news content. Van Aelst et al. (2017) warn that this shift could exacerbate knowledge and political participation gaps.

While many types of news consumption are in decline, online news video consumption is rising among people under 45. Recent data show that 72% of 18-24-year-olds, 59% of 25-34-year-olds, and 53% of 35-44-year-olds viewed news videos produced by news organizations in the past week (Schröder et al., 2023). These statistics indicate a crucial opportunity to counteract declining news engagement by leveraging younger and middle-aged audiences' interest in online news videos across digital platforms such as online TV, social media, and news websites. Addressing this challenge, this article draws on the concept of news platformization – that is, the process by which news content is shaped by the technological and economic structures of the platforms on which it is published (Hase et al., 2023). A growing body of research on news platformization has examined third-party platform news publishing, driven by concerns that external platforms may exert excessive influence, potentially prioritizing popular or trending topics over those with high societal relevance. This research highlights how algorithmic and economic pressures can favor high-engagement content, sidelining critical public-interest journalism (García-Perdomo, 2021; Hartley et al., 2023; Hase et al., 2023).

While prior studies have primarily focused on news organizations' dependence on external platforms (Hartley et al., 2023), recent research (Cores-Sarría et al., 2024) has expanded this focus to examine news platformization within BVoD services. Building on this emerging perspective, this study investigates how news narration can be adapted to BVoD services and other online platforms, exploring how the affordances of on-demand technology provide an opportunity for PSM news organizations to “platformize” news by developing new modes of news video narration.

We introduce the Batman Affective Structure (BAS), a narrative model grounded in the psychology of emotion and communication science, and demonstrate its practical

application through a case study of academic-to-industry knowledge transfer. In the first part of the article, we introduce the theoretical foundation and structure of the BAS. In the second part, we present how three PSM organizations have begun adopting and adapting this narrative structure to enhance the platformization of news narration in their in-house BVoD services and other online platforms. The article closes with a conclusion and discussion.

Literature review

Online news videos on BVoD services and other online services

Video has become one of the most widely used methods for content delivery. While entertainment video on YouTube or VoD services became popular as audiences began subscribing to broadband services, online news video production lingered (Kalogeropoulos, 2018). However, in 2018, the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* documented that many news organizations were increasing their production of online news videos as social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter pushed native video on their platforms. Since then, online news videos have been integrated into news websites, apps, and BVoD services. This has been evident, for instance, in Danish PSM, such as the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), TV 2 Fyn, and TV 2. Currently, news organizations are experimenting with new ways of producing and publishing online news videos. On their BVoD services, some shuffle news within large libraries as stand-alone messages that can be watched at any time (and often from one day to another) or short hourly news bulletins inspired by their broadcast equivalents (Cores-Sarría et al., 2024). Others provide explainer formats inspired by YouTube explainers (i.e., news messages that boil down complex issues for audiences).

Examining the Danish context

Bruun et al. (2025) demonstrate that news on PSM BVoD services is central to maintaining distinct public service identities amidst increasing competition from global streaming platforms. Recent studies on the role of Danish PSM BVoD services show that they maintain traditional features of broadcast television, such as liveness and immediacy (Bruun & Lassen, 2023). The authors examine how DR and TV 2 integrate linear and non-linear publishing strategies on DRTV and TV 2 Play, prioritizing time-sensitive genres like news and sports. These strategies ensure content discoverability and uphold public service values of universality and diversity, though they risk homogenizing audience conceptualization by sidelining niche content. Lassen (2023) explores how DRTV and TV 2 Play reappropriate temporal structures to sustain a sense of continuity and eventfulness. DRTV emphasizes weekly rhythms through temporal markers like broadcast day badges, fostering habitual viewing. At the same time, TV 2 Play focuses on live events and real-time experiences, such as news, to engage audiences. Both platforms deploy these strategies to preserve

their public service identities while competing with global streaming services. Although media organizations are experimenting with various approaches to narrating online news videos, the platformization of news in BVoD services is still in its infancy (Cores-Sarriá et al., 2024). Instead, it is more common to repost news content on BVoD services directly from linear TV news without adapting it to the new medium (Cores-Sarriá et al., 2024). However, a report based on interviews with a few journalists at three regional TV news stations in Denmark (Pallesen, 2022) describes how social media video narration begins to influence TV news narration and finds that regional TV news broadcasters are reconsidering traditional narrative structures. Pallesen (2022) points out that some TV news stories on regional television start with an appetizer, typically a remarkable image or sound, showing that the influence of social media has increased the importance of getting attention in the news story going from the start. As audiences migrate from broadcast TV to online TV services, the urgency of engaging them with innovative news narration has become more apparent. One way to innovate online news video narration and adapt it to today's on-demand, high-choice media landscape – where entertainment dominates – is by carefully considering the message's affective structure, specifically the placement of its most and least emotional elements. Consequently, to achieve success, narrative structures for online news videos must be strategic about their placement of emotional content.

Denmark as case and presentation of the news organizations in the case study

Danish PSM news organizations present a relevant case for studying the adoption of the proposed streaming-friendly narrative structure, the BAS. Danes are early adopters of digital media technologies and exhibit high levels of engagement with digital platforms, including social media, news websites, and streaming services (DR, 2024). For instance, the number of viewers of online TV already surpassed that of broadcast TV in 2022 (Schrøder et al., 2023). This makes Denmark an inspirational case for studying the adaptation of news video narration to online services.

Three Danish PSM news organizations participated in the study: the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), TV 2, and the regional TV 2 Fyn. DR is the largest national public service broadcaster, founded in 1925, and has received state subsidies ever since. TV 2, which was established in 1988, is a commercial but publicly-owned operator. Both DR and TV 2 are popular among the general population and have a significant reach (DR, 2024), and they have invested heavily in their BVoD services. TV 2 Fyn is a regional public service broadcaster based in Odense, Denmark's third-largest city. The BAS was introduced to the three organizations in this case study, initiating a one-and-a-half-year collaboration between researchers and industry, detailed below. Since TV 2 Fyn engaged in more collaborative efforts than DR and TV 2, we offer additional details about this organization. TV 2 Fyn is one of Denmark's eight TV 2 regional stations, employing 46 journalists. It airs regional news on TV 2 at designated times throughout the week, with

additional simulcasts on its own news channel. Furthermore, news videos and 5-6 minute news features are aired on the website tv2fyn.dk and their mobile app.

Existing research on online news videos in BVoD services focuses on integrating traditional broadcasting features (Bruun & Lassen, 2023) but has not yet studied how narrative structures adapt to on-demand platforms. While an industry report notes the influence of social media storytelling on TV news (Pallesen, 2022), little attention has been given to how affective structuring – particularly the placement of emotional elements – enhances engagement. As audiences shift to digital platforms dominated by entertainment content, understanding how emotion-driven narratives sustain engagement in PSM news videos is crucial. This study addresses this gap by introducing the BAS and examining its application in PSM BVoD services. The research question guiding this study is: How and why do Danish public service broadcasters implement the Batman Affective Structure (BAS) in their digital news videos, and what are the advantages and challenges of aligning this narrative model with public service journalism in a platformized media landscape?

Theory: Using emotion to make online news video narration more streaming-friendly

To guide the development of a streaming-friendly narrative structure, we turn to the dimensional approach to emotion (Barrett & Russell, 1999; Bradley & Lang, 2007), a theoretical framework that conceptualizes emotions along continuous dimensions rather than discrete categories. Two key dimensions are valence, which represents the positivity or negativity of an emotion (e.g., happiness vs. sadness), and arousal, which reflects the intensity or activation level of the emotion (e.g., excitement vs. calmness). As a first step into optimizing narrative structures for online news videos, we propose focusing on arousal because the placement of positive and negative content might be less generalizable and more dependent on the specific topic of the news message. We draw from two media theories that have closely examined the importance of arousal in mediated communication: Lang's Limited Capacity Model of Motivated Message Processing (LC4MP) (Lang, 2017) and Zillmann's Excitation Transfer Theory (ETT) (Zillmann, 1983).

LC4MP (Lang, 2017) is a media theory that examines how content and formal aspects of messages affect the emotional and attentional responses of the viewer. A core assumption of the LC4MP is that to process the information in a message, viewers have a limited pool of cognitive resources they can draw from automatically or in a controlled way (Lang, 2017). LC4MP describes two main ways in which messages can provoke the automatic allocation of cognitive resources: through an increase in motivational activation (i.e., an increase in arousal) and through orienting responses, the latter being an increase in alertness due to the sudden detection of something novel or meaningful in the environment. A media message's formal and content aspects can cause motivational activa-

tion and orienting responses. For example, emotional stimuli such as open wounds or sexually attractive people activate the aversive or appetitive motivational systems and cause greater resource allocation and an increase in attention. Similarly, formal features such as a cut between shots or the onset of a graphic title in a video have been shown to elicit orienting responses which in turn increase arousal and resource allocation. Decades of research inspired by the LC4MP have accumulated a variety of evidence suggesting that formal aspects, such as the speed or pace of editing as well as the angle, distance, and movement of the camera, influence the emotional response of the viewer (Cores-Sarria et al., 2024; Huskey et al., 2020).

ETT (Zillmann, 1983) is a media theory based on the dimensional approach to emotion, which looks at how arousal is transferred from one stimulus to the next. Specifically, it states that the physiological arousal caused by an intense emotional response to a stimulus does not fully fade when the stimulus finishes or disappears but “spills over” to the next stimulus. Physiological arousal leaves a residue that creates a more intense emotional response to the new stimulus than there would have been otherwise. Importantly, the viewer misattributes the intensified emotion to the new stimulus, even if it is affected by the former.

Drawing from ETT and LC4MP, we propose a narrative model for online news videos: the Batman Affective Structure.

A narrative strategy for online news video: The Batman Affective Structure

We propose a three-part model that resembles the shape of the head of the well-known superhero Batman: the Batman Affective Structure (BAS) (see Fig. 1). The BAS is a single-message narrative structure for news videos that optimizes the emotional engagement of viewers and captures attention, posing a potential solution for the intense competition

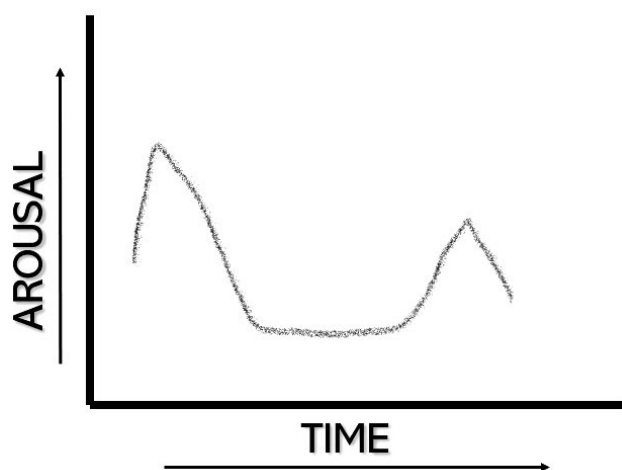


Figure 1: The Batman Affective Structure.

in online environments. The horizontal axis indicates time, and the vertical axis indicates the intensity of the viewer's emotional engagement (i.e., arousal). Arousal is highest at the beginning, then decreases to allow key information to be presented, and gradually rises again towards the end, creating a slight asymmetry between the "ears". The beginning (left ear), the middle (between ears), and the end of the news message (right ear).

1. Left ear: Engage the viewer with emotional intensity

In the digital age, viewers can effortlessly skip online news videos, often abandoning content if it fails to captivate them immediately. While video skipping occurs in flow TV, it is far more frequent online, where there are seemingly infinite content options instead of a limited set of TV channels. As anecdotal evidence, in pitch workshop material from 2021, an executive from Netflix, Chris Mack, states that "the audience subconsciously decides whether they will watch your show in the first 5 seconds". As a result, an industry standard for online videos is the "3-second rule", which highlights the need to prioritize engagement in the first few seconds of a video (Hickman, 2021; Tonal Vision, 2023; Marketing Essentials Lab, 2021).

Thus, the left ear of the BAS addresses this need by opening up with a peak in emotional arousal. Research shows that elements such as close-up camera framing, fast pacing, music, and sudden sound effects can effectively increase arousal and maintain viewer engagement (Detenber et al., 2021; Lang, 2017; Zheng et al., 2021). This can be achieved through content, that is, by opening with a clip or several clips edited together that showcase some of the most emotional events in the story. In terms of form, the chosen content would feature attention-grabbing structural aspects such as fast pacing, loud sounds, music, handheld camera movement, or close framing, all of which can elicit an immediate affective response from the audience and capture their attention within the critical initial moments of the video.

2. Midway interlude: Allow cognitive processing

While an emotional start is essential, sustained high-arousal content risks overwhelming the audience and hindering information processing (Lang et al., 2000). Furthermore, as posited by ETT (Zillmann, 1983), emotional shifts allow for residual arousal from the left ear to positively influence attention and cognitive engagement during the video's middle section. Reducing emotional intensity in the middle of the video enables viewers to process critical information, such as facts and context. This drop in intensity prevents cognitive overload and allows for a gradual build-up of tension toward the climax. Research on affective arcs in advertising and literature highlights that emotional shifts, rather than constant high arousal, are more positively evaluated by audiences (Ghosh & Deb, 2022). Such a "down-and-up" emotional trajectory maintains engagement, avoiding habituation and ensuring the viewer stays invested throughout the story.

3. *Right ear: End with emotional engagement to encourage continuation*

When one video ends, competition for attention resumes, increasing the risk that viewers switch to non-news content or even leave the platform. Drawing inspiration from serial television, where episodes end on climactic notes to retain audience interest, news videos should conclude with moderate emotional engagement to maintain viewer attention beyond the current video. Similar use of form and content, as suggested at the beginning of the news video, can be used or even re-utilized, although the goal is a more subtle effect. This peak in arousal has a double purpose: to wrap the message in a climactic way that should positively impact the overall perception of the news message and, drawing from ETT, to enhance the emotional impact of the subsequent video's opening seconds. This should boost the likelihood of continued viewing during the crucial moments when viewers decide to stay or skip, primarily if the platform's algorithm promotes further news content. The goal of the BAS is to capture and retain viewer attention for online news videos by combining these three principles: activating emotions, facilitating cognitive engagement, and sustaining emotional continuity.

Method and research design

This case study employed a participatory action research approach to foster innovation and change (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). This dual focus supports the development of new theories and produces practical and valuable insights for the industry. The researchers contacted DR, TV 2, and TV 2 Fyn to invite them to participate. Upon accepting the invitation, each organization selected the editors and journalists who would take part. The research's participatory nature extends the entire process by enabling collaboration between researchers and industry partners. Direct engagement with media professionals provided access to industry insights, practices, and decision-making processes, ensuring a more contextually grounded approach. The research project included six phases and numerous sources of empirical data, with different degrees of interaction with the three organizations (see Table 1). In short, the researchers first taught the BAS to the news organizations in structured industry workshops (Redvall & Sørensen, 2021). Second, there was a phase of production and testing focusing on online TV. Last, the researchers followed up on the implementation of the BAS at TV 2 Fyn.

Activity	Description	Empirical data	Time
1 Workshop 1	Researchers teaching the BAS to partners.	Recording and transcription	January 2023
2 Production and lab-testing	Production teams from DR, TV 2, and TV 2 Fyn produced news stories using the BAS for online TV. The model's effectiveness was then tested through lab experiments, and the results were presented at DR, TV 2, and TV 2 Fyn.	Journalists' written descriptions	February-March 2023
3 Workshop 2	Internal upskilling process at TV 2 Fyn using the BAS for local news. The researcher participated in the workshop.	Field notes	January 2024
4 Experimental phase	Experiments applying the BAS to news videos produced for online TV and social media at TV 2 Fyn.	Miro boards Field notes from informal talks	February-May 2024
5 Workshop 3	Feedback on experiments by the researcher.	Field notes	May 2024
6 Interviews	Three expert interviews with a news managing editor and two video journalists from TV 2 Fyn.	Recordings and transcriptions	March-June 2024

Table 1: Overview of phases and data.

In the first phase, we carried out a structured industry workshop (Redvall & Sørensen, 2021) in 2022 to teach the principles of the BAS to the leading editors from the three organizations (DR, TV 2, and TV 2 Fyn). In the second phase, managing editors from the news media companies directed their production teams to adapt three previously produced linear TV news stories following the BAS guidelines. The two narrative strategies were then tested against each other in a lab experiment (Cores-Sarría et al., 2025). In short, the lab experiment compared the two narrative styles using a variety of self-reported measures (e.g., attention, news appreciation) and electrodermal activity, a physiological index of emotional arousal. First, electrodermal activity confirmed the double-peak arousal structure for the BAS. At the same time, the messages in standard linear TV style followed an s-shape pattern, suggesting lower physiological arousal both at the beginning and at the end of the message. The BAS performed best across most self-reported measures among viewers with high media use but low news interest, a demographic with significant potential for increased news consumption. However, it underperformed compared with the standard style among viewers with low media use, a group already challenging to engage. The researchers presented these results to journalists and editors at the three news media companies, and they were received very positively. The collaboration was restricted to TV 2 Fyn for the rest of the phases. In the third phase, the first author participated in an internal upskilling initiative at TV 2 Fyn, focusing on online news video narration. This initiative arose from TV 2 Fyn's growing interest in adapting its news video storytelling to align with the affordances of on-demand

consumption, sparking an interest in implementing the BAS as part of this process. This initiative represents a significant shift in journalistic practices, aligning with the evolving media consumption trends and technological advancements. The first author attended a full-day kickoff workshop in January 2024 with approximately 40 employees from TV 2 Fyn. At this workshop, the author held a keynote speech on how to make online news videos more streaming-friendly, featuring the BAS and the results from the lab experiment. After the presentation, the first author conducted a Q&A session with the workshop participants. In the fourth phase, journalists and editors at TV 2 Fyn experimented with implementing the BAS. They worked in small groups of journalists, photographers, and graphic designers. After creating the first version of the BAS-inspired news story, the team received feedback from colleagues, and in the end, the news stories were published on TV 2 Fyn's online platforms, including their BVoD platform. In the fifth phase, in June 2024, the first author gave feedback to the groups applying the BAS, focusing on how well it had been implemented. In the sixth and final phase, the first author conducted three qualitative expert interviews to understand the industry perspective of applying the BAS with a journalist and a managing video editor, both responsible for the innovation process and internal upskilling at TV 2 Fyn, as well as two video journalists from the organization. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately one hour, and the OVRI method (Heiselberg & Stępińska, 2023) was applied.

The analysis strategy involves triangulating the diverse data sources, including field notes, interview and workshop transcriptions, and personal experiences, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the case study. Each data type was coded and categorized to identify recurring themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

The following analysis examines the reasons for, and advantages and challenges of, implementing the BAS. The analysis highlights the advantages of implementing the BAS, including increased audience engagement, a shared storytelling framework among journalists, and the potential to enhance the competitiveness of PSM in the digital landscape. Concerning the latter, it explores three key tensions: journalists' resistance to narrative standardization and concerns about creative autonomy, the difficulty of applying the BAS model across different news genres, and the evolving role of the studio anchor.

Reasons for implementing the BAS

The wish to implement the BAS in Danish PSM newsrooms reflects a strategic response to the increasing platformization of news and the imperative of maintaining audience engagement in an on-demand, high-choice digital media environment. A key motivation for adopting the BAS among the Danish public service broadcasters participating in this study is enhancing audience retention and engagement in the increasingly competitive

digital ecosystem. Editors from TV 2 Fyn, TV 2, and DR Nyheder emphasized their organizations' strategic shift towards prioritizing BVoD services over linear TV. This reflects an awareness of the changing news consumption habits, where audiences expect news content to be available on-demand and structured in ways that maximize engagement:

We need to strike a balance between on-demand and live news. With live, we can take over if we need to go into breaking. So, we are currently focusing on live news broadcasts. In addition, we also have on-demand news formats, such as *21 Søndag* and explainers (DR Editor).

This shift aligns with broader industry trends, where platformization reshapes news narratives by emphasizing emotional intensity, immediacy, and user retention metrics (Cores-Sarría et al., 2024; Hartley et al., 2023). As one editor noted, news content must now compete directly with entertainment on streaming services: "News is homework and it's not hard to be tempted to watch something else on streaming services or online" (TV 2 Fyn Editor). This observation echoes previous findings that news content on digital platforms often struggles to capture audience attention compared with entertainment (Leiner & Neuendorf, 2022). The introduction of emotion-driven structures like BAS is seen as a strategy to counteract this decline.

The editors also describe the narrative structure that is currently dominating. "In Workshop 1, the editors from the three Danish news organizations stated they were familiar with *Berettermodellen* and *PKP* (typical Danish models for linear TV news narration). However, when asked to define together the most commonly used narrative structure for a linear TV news story, they referred to an adapted version of *Berettermodellen*. They came up with the detailed description below (see Table 2):

As the quote from this TV 2 Editor demonstrates, this broadcast narrative structure slowly builds up and fizzles out in the end:

If we're going to draw it, this model looks like "*Berettermodellen*", which we also call "The whale". There is not much tension at the beginning and the end, and it has a really long and slow start. The host must spend time saying factual things before we can get to the point (TV 2 Editor).

The Editor from TV 2 Fyn echoes this by describing the intro as "long and boring". This suggests a critique of the pacing, where the initial part of the narrative is seen as dragging and potentially disengaging. The editors point out that the host typically presents factual information before reaching the main point, implying a possibly tedious or overly detailed setup: "It is very similar to a *Berettermodel* but flatter... the intro tries to create interest, but with a long and boring lead-in to the intro because of the host" (TV 2 Editor). In the high-choice media landscape, boring news narration is problematic as online news videos

Content	Examples of content	Structural aspects
Introduction by host	Facts rarely present a “why”, but it does occur	Host in studio This section often follows the The Inverted Pyramid
Intro/appetizer	The case story is introduced	Reportage Interview with exemplar
Main part	Elaborated premise: The angle of the story is dealt with in-depth. The exemplar is put into context. This often overlaps with the introduction by the host creating redundancy	
Elaboration or Live interview	Perspective or conflict	E.g., a live interview, a debate, a reportage
Fade out	Exemplar returns Perspective	
Outro by host	Transition to the next news story. Point to additional information on the news website	Host in studio

Table 2: Editor's description of standard broadcast TV news story narration.

compete for viewer attention against other genres, particularly entertainment. Emotional content attracts preferential attention (Calvo & Lang, 2004) and is correlated with heightened engagement in digital contexts (Nelson-Field et al., 2013; Yu, 2014). Therefore, it is important that the narrative structures of online news videos strategically incorporate emotional elements to achieve success.

Advantages of implementing the BAS

When asked about the advantages of implementing the BAS, the interviews with the manager and video journalists at TV 2 Fyn mention several. The managing editor mentions that many of the employees at TV 2 Fyn find this phase of experimentation with new ways of narrating the news exciting. They recognize the potential of using the BAS to make news content more appealing to their younger and middle-aged audience, and they are aware that they “must innovate to stay relevant to audiences” (TV 2 Fyn Managing editor). Another advantage of implementing the BAS, is that it created a shared language between journalists and production teams:

Another thing is that we have developed a common language among journalists. And [Video journalist 2], when he acts as a consultant on something I'm working on, we know exactly what we're talking about ... The other thing is that we have also developed a common language with the photographers when we're out on a shoot (TV 2 Fyn Video journalist 1).

A shared language increases transparency and facilitates the transition to the BAS by ensuring a common understanding among journalists, editors, and production teams. In other words, it streamlines collaboration, reduces misunderstandings, and supports creative experimentation.

A third advantage is that the data analysis shows that the BAS can improve audience engagement. As such, audience engagement emerges as a critical metric in the expert interviews. The managing editor from TV 2 Fyn and the two video journalists assess the effectiveness of the narrative experimentation through digital user behavior, such as longer view times and increased interaction when they use the BAS. The journalists noted higher engagement and completion rates for videos structured with the BAS. As video journalist 2 explains:

When you emphasize a strong start and present the premise of a story within the first few seconds of a news story or a segment for online platforms, I can state that users respond by watching longer and getting more value from the productions we make (TV 2 Fyn Video journalist 2).

Additionally, their intentional use of the BAS in a recent series about a local football club, Odense Boldklub, received positive audience engagement. According to the managing editor at TV 2 Fyn, this series was a success as measured by viewer figures, as it was the fourth most viewed series on their BVoD service in 2023. She explains that she uses these success stories to convince journalists that it is possible to use narrative structure, such as the BAS, strategically to reach the organization's 2025 strategy goal. Thus, employees point to the success of specific news stories shaped by the BAS as a powerful motivator.

Resistance to narrative standardization and the role of journalistic autonomy

When asked about resistance from employees during the upskilling process at TV 2 Fyn, the managing editor notes that some news journalists, particularly those accustomed to producing broadcast TV content, oppose the use of a prescriptive affective narrative structure, viewing it as a limitation on their creative freedom. Furthermore, she mentions that some journalists feel they have been “put in a bind by requiring them to use the BAS” (TV 2 Fyn Managing editor). She explains that for most journalists at TV 2 Fyn, producing news stories in this way represents a shift from their traditional practices and that it is beneficial for them to start thinking in terms of “selling the news story on the streaming service” (TV 2 Fyn Managing editor). Thus, while some journalists see BAS as a tool to enhance storytelling effectiveness, others view it as overly prescriptive. This resistance is one very good reason why the platformization of online news video narration is still waiting to happen (Cores-Sarría et al., 2024). This resistance reflects broader concerns about the platformization of news production, where storytelling frameworks increasingly prioritize engagement-driven metrics over editorial autonomy (Lotz, 2022). The managing editor at TV 2 Fyn emphasized that to implement BAS successfully, journalists required

substantial training and organizational buy-in: “It is essential to have a ‘management focus and a strategy’ for this to happen” (TV 2 Fyn Managing editor). In the process of experimenting with the application of the BAS at TV 2 Fyn, there has also been a discussion around habituation, as the repeated use of any given narrative model, including affective narrative structures such as the BAS, carries a risk of habituation, that is, a decrease in the effectiveness of the narrative structure after repeated presentations. According to the managing editor, it is possible that news organizations, over time, develop a range of affective narrative structures that are targeted to the characteristics of the content (e.g., if it is hard or soft news, longer or shorter format if the content that is inherently positive, negative, overly arousing, etc.) and also to the platform where it is going to be published. This would help avoid habituation and lack of novelty and creativity while also optimizing the structure to the unique characteristics of the message and platform.

Excitingly, a follow-up meeting with TV 2’s management revealed that they had further refined the BAS by introducing an additional emotional peak between the two “Batman ears”, which they referred to as an “alicorn” (see Figure 2). This innovative adjustment highlights the BAS’s adaptability and opens up promising avenues for future research into optimizing emotional engagement in news narration.



Figure 2: TV 2’s adaptation of the BAS: *The Alicorn*.

The challenge of applying BAS to different news genres

According to the managing editor, journalists find it hard to apply the BAS to “the big regional political agendas” (TV 2 Fyn Managing editor). Appropriateness was also discussed when the BAS was presented at the kickoff event at TV 2 Fyn. Specifically, employees questioned whether highly arousing and negative topics, such as a recent terrorist attack, might require a dampened use of formal aspects and an overall flatter affective narrative structure to elude cognitive and emotional overload. Some research has found that extremely arousing content (i.e., disturbing events) in news messages can harm subsequent recall (Mundorf et al., 1991). Thus, if the topic is excessively negative, a highly emotional and intense narrative structure like the BAS could amplify the negative impact of the information on people’s moods. The journalists share similar sentiments, acknowledging that not all content fits neatly into the BAS model and that there is a need for flexibility: “That’s one of the difficult things, in my opinion, when working with real people and a reality that has to fit into this form of dramaturgy” (TV 2 Fyn Video journalist 1). This resistance highlights the tension between innovative approaches and established practices within public service news organizations. It also highlights the need to expand the BAS to account for the strategic placement of positive and negative content rather than focusing solely on emotional intensity.

This also relates to reflections from journalists in workshop 3 regarding sensationalism. The BAS promotes the strategic use of narrative structures to increase the emotional impact of online news videos, something that could be seen as contributing to the “sensationalization” or “tabloidization” (Wasserman, 2020) of news. Sensationalism in news reporting is sometimes seen as a way of catering to the lowest common denominator among news audience interests by publishing news messages that are based on fundamental human fears, such as crime, murder, and disease, or fundamental fascination for celebrities, scandals, and disasters, a strategy employed to excite audiences and increase viewership (Sterling, 2009). In that regard, we challenge the assumption that emotions are incompatible with a trustworthy and factual coverage of events. Emotion is an inherent aspect of information processing, and overlooking it in news narration can hinder communicative success. It is important to give online news audiences a real chance to watch news videos by optimizing them to fit the logic of the new services. That said, and as the employees at TV 2 Fyn pointed out, there is not a silver bullet, and the BAS should be followed up by new structures that consider other aspects of the message, such as topic, valence, and length.

Reevaluating the role of the studio anchor in platformized news

One of the most significant structural shifts observed in BAS-based storytelling was rethinking the studio anchor’s role. In traditional TV news, the anchor serves as a trusted authority, framing and contextualizing news stories. However, in BAS versions, the studio

presence is saved for later to prioritize an emotionally driven, in medias res opening. A DR journalist compared the two openings of a news story on organ donation:

In the flow [linear TV] version, the feature starts with a long SPIB [Speak In The Picture] with host Kaare Quist in the studio. Then another introduction from reporter Peter Geisling in sync from a car. So, it's 2 minutes and 30 seconds before we meet the main character and hear her express some emotions (DR Journalist).

In contrast, the BAS version began with emotionally compelling footage before introducing the host:

In the BAS version, we start with a clip of emotional highlights. The very first thing you see and hear is the main character, Berit, telling how she said goodbye to her daughter when it was clear that her daughter was going to die (DR Journalist).

As the quote illustrates, the linear versions began with a host's studio introduction, while BAS versions began in medias res with engaging footage from the story. In contrast, TV 2 Fyn used the studio anchor only at the beginning of the linear version and left the host out of the BAS versions. Regarding the ending of the news story on organ donation, the journalist from DR explains how the broadcast version of the news story concludes with a scene where the organ recipient and the donor's mother converse, followed by an outro from the host in the studio. As described above, this structure is typical of traditional TV broadcasting (inspired by Berettermodellen), where a narrative arc is followed by a studio-based closure, providing a sense of completion and returning viewers to the familiar presence of the host. Furthermore, she explains how the studio segment with the host is left out. By eliminating the traditional studio outro, the segment maintains its emotional intensity until the end, leaving viewers with a lasting impression:

In the broadcast version, the segment ends in the scene where Dorte [organ recipient] and Berit [donor's mother] sit and talk. This is followed by an outro from the studio by the host, Kaare Quist. In the BAS version, I have changed the ending to make it more emotional. Now the main character, Berit in the segment is in sync and tells what her daughter looked like the last time she saw her, when she was dead and had had her organs removed. This sync is also included in the flow version, but in the streaming version it has been moved to the end. The studio segments have been dropped completely so we can end on an emotional highlight (DR Journalist).

This quote also shows how the journalist has relocated the sync (i.e., synchronized audio-visual segment) featuring Berit's recollection to the end of the BAS version, as opposed to its earlier placement in the broadcast version. This exemplifies deliberately restructuring narrative elements to maximize emotional impact following the BAS. Beyond the intro-outro differences, journalists noted other stylistic variations, that is, BAS versions used fast editing at the beginning or end of the stories to increase arousal, a technique not used in

their linear counterparts. In the discussions with journalists at workshop 3, some asked if this structural change should raise questions about the role of authority and verification in public service news, that is, does the BAS enhance audience engagement by minimizing the anchor's presence at the cost of traditional journalistic credibility? This should be paid close attention to and, if possible, be monitored over time.

Conclusion and discussion

As more people shift from broadcast TV to online services, news content is steadily losing prominence (Leiner & Neuendorf, 2022). To ensure the democratic relevance of legacy public service broadcasters and to avoid losing their role as providers of information, they must ensure the appeal of news by tailoring their news-making for online services. We argued that online news videos should pay attention to how the message structures the viewer's emotional response over time, especially in the high-choice environment of online services, where news videos have lost some of the structural advantages they held in the broadcast TV era. In this article, we presented the BAS as an affective narrative structure for online news videos that can help carry out such an optimization effort. The BAS is a three-part narrative structure for online news video narration that facilitates emotional activation both within-message and with subsequent messages. Following the head of the superhero, the left ear of the BAS starts with high emotional content to engage the viewer from the beginning of the news video. It then moves into a low-arousal middle part to facilitate cognitive processing, which is nonetheless benefitted by residual excitation transfer from the left ear. The structure then slowly rises towards a moderately arousing right ear, which should, in turn, positively affect a potential subsequent news video.

The case study we presented here highlights three Danish PSM organizations' increasing concern and awareness about improving and adapting news narration for online platforms. After learning how to use the BAS in the context of a workshop designed to produce stimuli for an experiment run by the authors, some of them moved forward with implementing it into their newsmaking. TV 2 Fyn has implemented the BAS in its online news videos to reach its 2025 strategy of attracting and retaining users. Results show that they have had positive results using the BAS in some of their online stories, as shown by digital behavioral data. The data gathered here, especially that resulting from the implementation process at TV 2 Fyn, shows that a shift in journalistic practices is required for news media to remain relevant in the digital age. Moreover, incorporating emotional engagement and narrative innovation into news video narration presents challenges, opportunities, and promising results. The results underscore a transformative period in news production, driven by the need to adapt to online services, that is, platformization of news videos to online services, and that collaborations between journalism scholars and the news industry can foster such an effort.

However, the challenges of applying a theoretically derived narrative structure to real-world stories and overcoming resistance from those accustomed to traditional practices highlight this transition's complexities and the broader platformization process. In further detail, the results present three key tensions: journalists' resistance to narrative standardization, the difficulty of applying the BAS model across different news genres, and the evolving role of the studio anchor in a platformed news environment.

This study contributes to academic theory by advancing research on news narration, platformization, and audience engagement in digital news environments. It provides empirical insights into how public service media adapt narrative structures to fit the engagement-driven logic of streaming platforms, expanding discussions on the platformization of news. Additionally, it refines narrative theory by demonstrating how affective structuring influences audience engagement, offering new perspectives on the relationship between emotional narration and digital news consumption.

As with any research, this study has limitations. It is restricted to three Danish PSM news organizations, which may limit the generalizability of its findings to other cultural or media contexts. Consequently, variations in journalistic practices or audience responses across different countries or media systems are not accounted for. Future studies should expand this scope by examining public service news media in diverse cultural and institutional contexts to enhance the applicability of the findings.

Furthermore, the participatory action research method influences the analysis by embedding the researchers within professional practices, shaping data collection, analysis, and interpretation. By working closely with journalists and editors, researchers gain insider access, allowing a nuanced understanding of the motivations behind adopting the BAS. The analysis is also shaped by the interactions between the researchers and participants, meaning that the presence of researchers may have influenced how the journalists and editors framed their experiences with BAS in relation to their perceptions of both the challenges and advantages of BAS implementation. The participatory approach further influences how challenges and tensions are framed in the analysis. Rather than imposing an external theoretical framework, the study captures practitioner concerns, embedding the analysis in professional realities. The challenges identified, such as resistance to narrative standardization and difficulties in applying BAS across genres, emerge from these interactions rather than being dictated by academic perspectives alone. That said, a potential limitation of the participatory approach is that some degree of subjectivity is inevitable, as the same researchers who designed the BAS also introduced it to practitioners and are now reporting and evaluating the process. Future studies assessing the implementation and evolution of the BAS would greatly benefit from independent research teams to ensure a more objective perspective.

Despite the limitations, our study demonstrated that collaborations between the news industry and journalism scholars can be highly productive. They should continue to explore and empirically test various theoretically-driven affective narrative structures.

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