

## **The active choice of television**

### **The digital transition of the Danish public service media organisation DR and implications for its production culture**

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#### **Abstract**

*Based on an empirical production study, this article demonstrates the multifaceted implications of the Danish public service media organisation DR's digital transition. Focusing on the role of the publishing editors and their concept of the active choice, the article proves how the perception of the video-on-demand users has repercussions for DR's production culture, as the streaming service is strongly prioritised in the content publishing. The term streamability is coined to illustrate how the content on offer as well as the production-related requirements of the single programme are adjusted accordingly. Broadcasters worldwide experience a cross-pressure from competition with global platforms, political interference, technological development, and changing media usage. The case of DR illustrates how digital transition can entail greater organisational orientation towards the users. However, the article concludes by cautioning against the risk of losing the legitimacy of a public service organisation when introducing AI-supported personalisation.*

#### **Keywords**

*Digital transition, production studies, publishing practices, multi-platform strategies, streamability, on-demand television*

## Introduction

In this article, I present the key findings of a television production study of the Danish public service media (PSM) organisation DR. Many broadcasters, public as well as private, currently find themselves in the process of transition from broadcast to digital television, where the linear service is supplemented with a non-linear offer. Drawing on material from a project studying scheduling practices in public service television, the focus of the article is the production culture of DR's publishing department. The publishing editors have been chosen as the lens through which to study the digital transition, as their work on the content publishing functions as an interface between DR's cultural-political obligations, the organisation's business strategy, and the users. In addition to this, I argue that the publishing department is becoming more influential and visible in the organisation due to a reorganisation process in DR, which decentralises the commissioning responsibility and budget; this emphasises the importance of studying the role and practices of the publishing editors. My understanding of a production culture is based on Caldwell's (2008) interpretation and emphasises practices of media production as well as how the editors reflect on and verbalise their work.

In line with recent studies of PSM organisations' responses to new technologies, competition, the process of platformisation, and cutbacks (Bruun, 2023; D'Arma et al., 2021; Donders, 2019; Lordache & Raats, 2023), I argue that DR's digital transformation is being developed in the complex interplay between several different but interlinked parameters including the regulatory framework, organisational restructuring, and media usage. Following this, the data for the analysis derives from three sources: interviews with publishing editors at DR, a field study in the publishing department, and strategic and regulatory documents. The combination of empirical data and policy documents strengthens the explanation of why and how DR's digital transition develops and offers insights into which challenges and dilemmas arise in the day-to-day practices of DR's publishing editors (see also Drake, 2021).

The article opens with perspectives on how legacy public media organisations react to the appearance of new media technologies and services. After having discussed the methods and material and introduced the organisation DR, the analysis sets out by demonstrating how the formation of DR's digital strategy has happened under political influence while also seeking to respond to general media usage and competition from the global media industry. In the analysis of the changing production culture, the overall argument is that the digital transition has pronounced impact on DR's organisation, distribution, and content. This is illustrated in analyses of the relative strength of the television services, publication practices, and characteristics of the streaming content. I highlight the concept of *the active choice* of the user, an idea which has become determining for the work of the publishing editors, and suggest the term *streamability* to describe the changing demands on the programmes. Finally, I discuss the onward digital development in light of DR's public service obligations. As such, the article contributes to the understanding of the

strategic development of public service television in the digital era and the implications of the transition on the production culture of the PSM organisations.

## Responses of PSM to new technologies and competitors

The role of being a public service broadcaster means that these organisations do not only react to the market but must adapt according to regulation, whether this be restrictions on activities or the driving force of a technological development. A growing body of literature deals with the different strategic responses of PSM organisations to challenges emerging from new digital technologies, platforms, datafication, transnational competition, political interventions, and the use of algorithmic personalisation (Bruun, 2023; D'Arma et al., 2021; Donders, 2019; Doyle, 2023; Lordache & Raats, 2023; Lassen, 2023; Michalis, 2022; Sørensen, 2019). A common conclusion is that there are several factors influencing the current conditions of the PSM organisations, and that the response to the challenges is far more complex and thorough than offering one's content in an on-demand service (Bruun, 2023; Donders, 2019; Lordache & Raats, 2023).

In a comparative study of four European public media organisations in Flanders (VRT), Ireland (RTE), the Netherlands (NPO), and the UK (BBC), Donders (2019) reflects on the theoretical and practical evolution from public service broadcasting (PSB) to PSM. Based on a qualitative document analysis, she scrutinises how the distribution strategies of the broadcasters have changed substantially from linear to multi-platform distribution, where content is produced for and distributed across radio, television, and internet services, either by producing multiple texts or by modifying one text for distribution on additional devices (see also Doyle, 2010). According to Donders, a consequence of the focus on on-demand services is internal restructuring of the PSM organisations, in which the budget is shifted away from the linear to the non-linear services. However, the shifting of budget is not enough, according to Donders: "When a multitude of services are distributed via a multitude of devices and platforms in a linear and non-linear manner, as is the case with PSM, the old silo-based organisation of PSB needs to be adapted" (Donders, 2019, p. 1015). An important point is that whereas some developmental characteristics can be found across all four cases in Donders's study, there are also significant differences dependent on factors such as the size of the organisation, economy and business model, and market.

This conclusion is also reached by D'Arma and colleagues (2021) in their analysis of how the three European PSM organisations VRT (Flanders), RAI (Italy), and BBC (UK) have responded to the growing success of transnational subscriber-funded video-on-demand (SVoD) services such as Netflix. Like Donders's conclusion, D'Arma and colleagues find that whereas some strategic responses are found in all three cases, there are also clear differences between the organisations. Thus, the authors state that, "different strategies are contingent on national contexts and PSM repositioning is shaped as much by policy and regulatory priorities at the time, as by the arrival of Netflix" (D'Arma et al., 2021, p. 695).

Some of the differences are interpreted by the authors as pragmatism (including demands for investment obligations on Netflix and involvement in co-productions), while others are explained by path-dependency rooted in historical traditions, and some in cultural factors, market size, and circumstances related to the organisation's role and position as PSM. A recent contribution by Lordache and Raats (2023) offers similar findings: Based on a combination of document analysis and analyses of five PSM VoD services' catalogues, Lordache and Raats describe a multi-faceted transition process and conclude that the online-first media logic has repercussions for the production, commissioning, distribution, and organisation of PSM. Thus, based on the contributions from Donders, D'Arma and colleagues, and Lordache and Raats, two key issues can be highlighted: First, to be successful, the digital transition must include the entire organisation and all stages of the production and distribution of the content; second, the development and implementation of the digital strategies of PSM organisations takes place in a highly complex interplay between different factors including global changes arising from platformisation processes but which, in many aspects, are dependent on the national context.

For this reason, it is of great relevance to also consider Bruun's (e.g., 2018, 2020, 2023) work on the Danish broadcaster TV 2. Based on data from three production studies at TV 2 in 2016, 2019, and 2022, Bruun (2023) documents how the changing role of the streaming service affects the production culture, scheduling strategies, and content prioritisation of the company. She describes how the streaming service TV 2 Play is being developed from a catch-up service to a means of attracting young audiences to, in 2022, being the "front door" to all of TV 2's content for the mainstream audience. Consequently, the content demand and publishing need of the streaming service grow ever more important, and the schedulers are given greater editorial power in the organisation. The development is, to a large degree, in tandem with general media usage in Denmark, but Bruun emphasises that securing the business model is the main driver behind the strategic steps in the development of the commercial broadcaster. This causes her to raise a critique of TV 2's content strategy and increased focus on the mainstream audience, as the pursuit for financial security risks jeopardising the core public service values of creativity, diversity, and universality (Bruun, pp. 250-251). This challenge, however, is not limited to the transition of TV 2, according to Bruun, but constitutes a potential threat to the legitimacy and support of PSM companies regardless of whether the funding is public or commercial.

This article contributes to the body of scholarly work on PSM organisations' responses to external developments including global competition, political interventions, and technological evolution. Inspired by the work on TV 2 by Bruun, the article offers an empirically based analysis of the connection between DR's digital strategy, organisational changes, and development of the production culture. Besides contributing to the broader research on PSM, television scheduling, and media production studies, the article also closes a gap in the research into Danish PSM: Whereas Bruun has offered several contri-

butions on the development of TV 2, there is no recent in-depth analysis of the digital development of Denmark's largest PSM organisation, DR, from a strategic and organisational perspective (for previous studies, see Andersen, 2019; Lassen, 2018). And while factors such as language, market size, general media usage, and competition are common conditions for DR and TV 2, there are also differences between the two players: DR is 100% publicly owned and financed, while TV 2 is a commercially funded limited company owned by the Danish state. All of DR's activities on radio, television, and other digital services fall within the public service remit, whereas TV 2 only has obligations to its main channel. Thus, the comparison offered here between DR and TV 2 indicates the level of influence from the business model and regulatory framework on the digital transition and changing production culture.

## Methods and material

As a single-case media production study, this article offers an empirically based in-depth analysis that is rich in detail, context, and complexity (Broughton Micova, 2019, p. 73; Norander & Brandhorst, 2017, pp. 117-118). The data that supports the findings derives from three sources: semi-structured interviews, observations from a field study, and regulatory and strategic documents concerning DR.

Five face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees in DR's publishing department in the second half of 2022. Table 1 shows the names, titles, and purviews of the interviewees. The interviewees were not offered, and did not request, anonymity. This is due to a wish to ensure validity, and due to the fact that all the interviewees have individual tasks and are thus easy to identify. All quotes have been approved by the interviewees.

Name	Title	Purview
Henrik Birck	Head of TV portfolio	Head of long-term publishing and international acquisition. Managerial responsibility
Christian Boye-Roed	Publishing editor	Responsible for youth content on DRTV
Sofie Maria Rønnow	Junior publishing editor	Responsible for films and Christmas content on DRTV
Uffe Høj Svenningsen	Strategic publishing editor	Head of short-term publishing and fiction on DRTV. Managerial responsibility
Rune T.K. Sørensen	Publishing editor	Responsible for culture, documentary, and history on DRTV and scheduling of the linear channel DR2

Table 1: Name, title, and purview of the interviewees.

When doing empirical research that includes interviews and/or field studies, obtaining access to the object of study can be challenging. Bruun and Frandsen (2022, p. 90)

describe it as partly a matter of *timing* to emphasise the strategic dimension of choosing the right time for a meaningful interaction with the field of study:

[...] the researcher's temporality should be aligned with the relevant, temporal patterns that characterise the production environments and the embedded routines of the genre. It is a question of performing a behaviour towards the field, which provides answers to the research question while simultaneously convincing the stakeholders in the field that there is value to granting the researcher access (Bruun & Frandsen, 2022, p. 92).

Initially, obtaining access to the DR publishing department and its staff proved challenging. Key employees did not wish to participate in official interviews, and a gatekeeper to the department refused my request due to uncertainties and changes in the production culture caused by both the digital transition and the new restructuring of the organisation. When I did succeed in gaining access to the publishing editors, it can partly be ascribed to prior acquaintance, as I have conducted interviews with some of the informants in a previous project (Lassen, 2018), and partly to what Bruun (2023, pp. 240-241) describes as "a shared notion of uncertainty about the future of television". As such, I experienced confidence in me as a researcher from most of the publishing editors and an interest in the research project and its results, and, consequently, a willingness to participate. Additionally, some of the publishing editors were fascinated by the fact that a researcher was interested in observing and talking to them about their work. This also smoothed the path for me to gain access.

The field study took place over three days in September 2022. Besides being able to observe and having informal conversations with the publishing editors, I was granted access to editorial meetings concerning the three levels in which DR's publishing department works: the day-to-day discussions on the layout of DRTV, the short-term plans (three weeks) of the linear channels and streaming service, and the long-term plans of the scheduling/publishing for the following year. Parts of what is discussed in especially the long-term meetings is confidential for competitive reasons. As stated by Bruun (2023, p. 241), confidentiality is problematic for the validity of an empirical study. However, I believe for two reasons that the confidentiality of what was being said during the strategical meetings does not limit the results of this article: First, I was able to employ the insights from the meetings as background knowledge for the interviews, which are non-confidential; second, participating in the meetings and observing who attended provided me with general knowledge of the structure, culture, and practices of the department.

As the interest of this article lies in the development of the production culture of DR's publishing editors over time, and the intention is to state different influential factors, a range of documents inform the analysis. The documents are partly strategic (DR's digital strategy) and partly policy documents (media political agreements and DR's public service contracts). In this article, the documents are employed as sources, as they have a

descriptive function and document a developmental process (Karppinen & Moe, 2012, p. 185).

## **The organisation DR and its online television activities**

DR is 100% tax funded through the annual budget and has the status of an independent public institution. The organisation is governed through the Danish Radio and Television Act and public service contracts, which typically operate for a period of four years. While the contracts are negotiated between the Director General of DR and the Minister for Culture, they build on so-called media political agreements, which are negotiated between the government and the other parties in the Danish parliament. All issues concerning DR in the media political agreement must be included in the subsequent public service contract. Regarding platforms, DR's remit is rather wide, as the law states that the public service activities must be carried out via television, radio, and the internet *or the like* (The Radio and Television Act, chapter 3 §10, emphasis added).

The first time DR offered live television online was in 2001, when Denmark hosted the Eurovision Song Contest. In the following years, it became possible to watch selected programmes as catch-up, but not until 2006 were the two linear channels DR1 and DR2 available as live-streams. Since then, the linear channel portfolio and the streaming offer have been altered substantially (see also Lassen, 2020). DR's television offer now consists of three linear channels (DR1, DR2, and DR Ramasjang for children aged 4-8) and the streaming service DRTV, which includes three online "universes" with content for young children aged 1-3 (DR Minisjang), children aged 9-14 (DR Ultra), and young people aged 15-31 (DR3), an extensive on-demand catalogue, as well as access to the linear channels and an online-only news channel. Within the last couple of years, DRTV has competed with Netflix and TV 2 Play to be the most used streaming service in Denmark.

In the following sections, I unfold the analysis of how the digital transformation affects the production culture of DR. The analysis is divided according to three main themes: first, how the population's media usage and political interventions influence the digital transition of DR's television activities; second, how DR's published digital strategy has been developed; third, how the digital transition has significant impact on the production culture of DR's publishing editors manifested in the strong prioritisation of the streaming service regarding the publishing, commissioning, and production of content.

## **Two external factors influencing the formation of DR's digital strategy**

Denmark is, in all aspects, a highly digital country. The fully developed digital infrastructure occasions that media consumption is characterised by online services regarding both audiovisual and written media. Looking closer at the television market in Denmark, the consumption of linear television peaked in 2010, with an average of 202 minutes per

day. Since then, a decrease of linear television consumption and a spiralling increase in the usage of streaming services has been witnessed. In 2023, the average daily viewing on streaming services was 98 minutes, while the average daily viewing of broadcast television was 123 minutes.<sup>1</sup> These figures evidence that the television consumption of the Danish population increasingly takes place through an internet connection.

As DRTV was launched in 2010 and global SVoD services were subsequently introduced on the Danish market, young people in particular rapidly developed a preference for on-demand streaming. Consequently, in 2016, DR announced the plan to discontinue the broadcast of the linear channel DR Ultra (aimed at children aged 7-12) in 2020 in favour of launching an online streaming universe dedicated to the target group instead (Lassen, 2018). Also, the public service organisation argued for a relaxation of the politically decided restrictions regarding DR's on-demand content: For example, DR was not allowed to offer popular feature films from abroad on DRTV, and episodes of fiction series from abroad could only be available for eight days. However, in the 2018 media political agreement, the restrictions on DRTV were not lifted, and new limitations were put on DR's activities. The majority in the Danish parliament at that time was in favour of a stronger private sector, which occasioned the decision that DR should discontinue at least two of its six linear television channels and focus its activities on so-called core public service: news, current affairs, art, culture, history, enlightenment, educational programmes, and content for children and young people (Kulturministeriet [Ministry of Culture], 2018, p. 2). In addition to this, a cutback of 20% of DR's income was decided. DR had enacted half of the cutbacks, closed one linear channel, and transformed two other channels to online universes before the majority in the parliament changed in 2019. The new government reversed the cutbacks, and the subsequent media political agreement reduced DR's obligations in general and lifted the restrictions on DRTV.

DR currently has wide rights regarding its online television activities. This regulatory framework mirrors Syvertsen and colleagues' description of the regulatory regimes in the Nordic countries as characterised by flexibility and adaptability (2014, p. 94). From an organisational perspective, however, it is important to note that the transition from broadcast to online television is marked partly by a wish to offer a streaming service and partly by a necessity to speed up the process due to the politically initiated closure of channels. This is reflected in the statement of publishing editor Rune T. K. Sørensen, in his comment on the reorganisation of the linear youth channel DR3 to an online brand in January 2020:

I don't think the house would have closed DR3 as a channel if there hadn't been a need to save at that time. It wasn't that we were ready for it; it was because we had to. We needed to be mature for this, and we hoped that the market was mature enough for it (personal interview, December 19, 2022).

In the following section, I analyse the development of DR's digital corporate strategy with a focus on the reasoning of the digitalisation.

## The development of DR's digital strategy

DR has continuously launched digital services. However, only from September 2018 have the initiatives been communicated publicly as a part of an overall strategy concerning the entire organisation. I briefly characterise the strategic development of DR's digital transition based on the three primary strategy documents since 2018, before turning to the essence of the most recent version of the strategy from 2021. My main argument is that DR's digital strategy has been shaped in a process in which national political pressure on DR has been replaced by a shared understanding between the political players and DR on the need to counter global tech companies and foreign content (DR, 2021; Kulturministeriet [Ministry of Culture], 2023). This shift from a focus on cutbacks and core tasks to an orientation towards competition on a global digital market explains why major changes in the organisation and production culture are not seen until 2021.

DR first launched a publicly available digital strategy in the fall of 2018 as an answer to the politically decided restrictions and cutbacks as described above. The focus of the strategy, titled *A new, smaller, and more digital DR*, is how DR will meet the required cost reductions, and the digital development is related to the closing of three linear channels: "In light of the current economic downturn, DR will close a number of channels on TV and radio in order to be able to develop the digital offers while simultaneously maintaining an attractive high quality flow offer" (DR, 2018b, p. 3, author's translation). It is stated that DRTV will be developed from primarily being a catch-up service to becoming a main entrance for Danes who stream, of whom the majority are young people.

When the newly elected government was set to negotiate a media political agreement in 2019, DR published a strategy as a contribution to the debate. The primary aim of the strategy, titled *Together with an impact: DR's strategy towards 2025 & priorities for a new media agreement*, is to argue against continued savings. Interestingly, the digital development is not very noticeable in this strategy. Out of three objectives, only one concerns the digital development, and investments in digital platforms and technology are mentioned alongside the development of new talent and professional management (DR, 2019, p. 22). Instead, DR's benchmarks for value are described along with three priority areas: news, culture, and content for children and young people (see also Lassen & Sørensen, 2023). Only the latter is linked to a digital development, as children and young people are considered "digital natives" (DR, 2019, p. 20). This indicates that as the political pressure on DR has been lifted, the impetus for a rapid digital transition is less present and the organisation's focus is oriented towards content and its identity in terms of values.

In October 2021, unrelated to any specific media political incidents, DR updated its strategy towards 2025 based on a wish to speed up digital development. The strategy

emphasises that “the digital development is not an end in itself but a prerequisite for DR being able to meet its public service ambitions in a digital reality” (DR, 2021, p. 3, author’s translation). According to the strategy, vital initiatives will be implemented to make sure that the population finds and utilises DR’s offering in an environment dominated by strong international players (DR, 2021, p. 3). Thus, the latest development in DR’s strategy reflects the increased competition across digital platforms and services. The focus on a global digital media industry provides a breeding ground for initiating pervasive changes in distribution and production.

Three key points are substantial in the updated strategy. First, users and media usage are articulated as the core of the digital transformation; the strategy is motivated with statements such as, “it is no longer the case that the Danes are becoming digital – they are digital” (DR, 2021, p. 3, author’s translation). Following this, the second point is the prioritisation of DRTV; already in 2018, it was announced that the main channel and the streaming service were to be “main entrances” to DR’s television offer (DR, 2018a, p. 4). However, in 2021, it was emphasised that DRTV must be the streaming service of all Danes and the digital entrance to DR’s entire television offerings (DR, 2021, p. 26); the main channel is not mentioned in the document. Third and finally, the commissioning model is changed as the powerful department DR Media is closed and the commissioning responsibility and budget are decentralised according to a genre-based model. As argued before, this has resulted in the publishing department becoming more influential in the organisation.

As the brief survey of the formation and development of DR’s digital strategy demonstrates, the digital transition, which has been going on since 2001, was accelerated in 2018 as a reaction to the politically initiated cutbacks. In 2019, the cutbacks were put on hold and DR articulated other strategic priorities. Only with the re-launch of the strategy in October 2021 did DR initiate a fundamental digital transformation, which is why it is at this point in time that radical changes in the organisation as well as the production culture are seen. The following section explores these changes in detail.

## **Changes in the organisation and production culture of DR**

In the following three subsections, I demonstrate how DR’s production culture undergoes a transformation in accordance with the prioritisation of the streaming service. The key interest here is the more powerful role of the publishing editors as well as their concept of the active choice of the user.

### ***A hard focus on streaming***

In accordance with the strategy of 2021, several of my informants describe a “hard focus” on DRTV and streaming-first in the publishing department. This goes for both the marketing campaigns in the interstitials (see also Bruun & Lassen, 2024) and for the evaluation

of how a given programme has performed: “Now you are more oriented towards DRTV in your evaluation of how well a programme has performed. However, most often programmes that perform well on DRTV also perform well on DR1” (Uffe Høy Svenningsen, personal interview, August 12, 2022). Even though Svenningsen highlights this consistency, the relative strength of the streaming service and the main linear channel entails a potential conflict: Who decides whether to continue a series if it has performed well on one service but not on the other? This issue is raised by Sofie Maria Rønnow (personal interview, December 8, 2022). From my interviews, it seems that in most cases the streaming service is in the strongest position of the two. The relative strength must also be seen in the light of the target group of DR1 and DRTV: whereas DR1 is the main channel with “a broad offering”, according to DR’s public service contract (Kulturministeriet [Ministry of Culture], 2022, p. 5), DRTV’s offering includes the DR1 and DR2 programmes as well as content dedicated to children and young people. Thus, to all of DR’s users, DRTV is a relevant distribution channel – for some, it is the only one. Therefore, it is only natural that DRTV is increasingly prioritised over the linear offer. This does, however, require a readjustment of the mindset of the employees. From my interviews, it is evident that the view of those who work with publishing on DRTV is that the transition has been too slow. As stated by Christian Boye-Roed:

I think it has been a very slow transition to DRTV, even for the publishing department. I think it’s because the importance of linear channels has been clear. I agree that they are still very important. But when usage patterns move as much towards streaming as they do, then we need to be able to make an offer on DRTV, which is the primary focus (personal interview, July 7, 2022).

In contrast, Henrik Birck and Rune T. K. Sørensen, who primarily focus on the linear channels, air concerns about a hasty transition in which the importance of the linear channels, including their ability to create a sense of immediacy and liveness (see also Lassen, 2023), is neglected. This is not only relevant to DR1 but perhaps to an even larger degree to the more specialised channel DR2, which is being squeezed between the two main entrances, according to Rune T. K. Sørensen (personal interview, December 19, 2022). The diverging views on the speed of the digital transition can be seen in relation to the areas of responsibility of the informants: Whereas Christian Boye-Roed, Uffe Høy Svenningsen, and Sofie Maria Rønnow primarily are focussing on tasks related to DRTV, Henrik Birck and Rune T. K. Sørensen have purviews that embrace both the linear channels and the streaming service. The way in which the two modes of publishing are being interwoven in the department illustrates two important points: First, the interplay and relative strength between the two services are still work in progress; second, it speaks to the fact that the organisational silos in DR are being disintegrated at several levels, as pointed out by Donders (2019) as a necessity for the successful transformation to PSM. In continuation hereof,

it is worth noting how the digital transformation is supported by the physical settings of the publishing department, as the editors of the linear channels and DRTV are stationed together in an open-plan office. This is not a unique finding, as Bruun (2020, 2023) describes a similar development at TV 2. But during my field study, I witnessed frequent informal subject-related dialogues taking place between the editors. As such, DR's adaptation of the television offer is also taking place at a very tangible level.

### ***Publishing practices in transition***

Most of the publishing editors at DR have a background as experienced schedulers of linear television, while a few have digital backgrounds. The shared professionalism means that both digital publishing editors and linear schedulers (who are now also titled publishing editors) experience how two conflicting publishing strategies are at play in DR's digital transition, as the logics and needs of a streaming service, in some regards, differ from those of a linear channel. Christian Boye-Roed describes it as the discipline of scheduling is expanding with what he terms "co-scheduling", a principle that Bruun (2021) terms transprogramming, which is the merging of linear and non-linear distribution and publishing strategies. From my interviews with employees in the publishing department, it is evident that the digital transition and merging of the two distribution forms occasion two very concrete changes in the publishing practices at DR, which I describe below. First, however, it is relevant to state that, despite different strategies, the two modes of publishing share a common ambition. As Boye-Roed expresses it: "To a publishing editor, there is nothing better than user habits. It is what you try to do on streaming; it is what you have always tried to do on flow" (personal interview, July 7, 2022). On linear television, a way of creating user habits is so-called block publishing: The principle is to schedule several similar programmes on the same evening, repeated weekly (Adams & Eastman, 2013, p. 58). Earlier, this was a popular practise, especially on DR2, which offered evenings with programmes centred around, for example, history, culture and fine art, or current affairs and debate (Lassen, 2018, p. 110). However, this publishing practice has been replaced by a need to distribute the content over the course of the week. Rune T. K. Sørensen links this to the role of the so-called *hero board*, or the top priority content visible in the prime space (Bideau, 2020) of the landing page. On DRTV, the hero board takes the form of a large merry-go-round with up to 12 programmes represented. A position on the hero board is, of course, coveted, and Sørensen explains how the distribution logic of the hero board is decisive for content prioritisation and publishing practices:

There is an attempt to balance the hero board. Having a history evening or culture evening is actually a bad idea because then there is one evening where there are three cultural programmes. And what should people choose? They end up choosing only one thing. It becomes a rather heavy evening on the hero board and then there are other evenings

where there are lifestyle programmes or a lot of current affairs. It's actually better to offer a little bit of everything (personal interview, December 19, 2022).

Importantly, Sørensen emphasises that due to the wish to co-publish on the linear channels and DRTV, the priorities of the hero board become determining for the publishing practices of the linear offer. Bruun reaches a similar conclusion regarding the changing scheduling practices of TV 2 Play and describes this as a content approach instead of a channel approach (2023, p. 246), as she similarly finds that traditional linear scheduling practices are being sacrificed to support the needs of the streaming service (Bruun, 2023, p. 245).

It is not only over the course of a week that the publishing editors at DR seek to distribute the content; the merging of the linear and non-linear distribution forms has also influenced the yearly publishing practices. Henrik Birck compares the current publishing practices with the previous seasonal scheduling:

Put informally, there are no seasons on DRTV. There are differences during the year but not as distinct as on flow [...] It is another ball game in which we must have a continuous offer so that people regularly seek out content to watch and find something. It is much more difficult to attract than to retain (personal interview, July 1, 2022).

On the linear television market, summertime used to mean low season, but, according to Birck, the consumption on streaming services differs so that DRTV and other streaming services, for competitive reasons, must make a continuous offer. Birck links this need for continuous publishing to the more active role of the streaming user compared to the linear viewer. All informants mention the concept of the active choice, which is developed and employed by the publishing editors to capture their perception of how the consumption of on-demand content differs from that of linear television: When using a streaming service, everything is a choice, as you do not just click on the remote control and turn on the television channel. When streaming, you must choose which service to enter and search for and/or select content from. According to the publishing editors at DR, selecting a programme him/herself means that the user is much less patient regarding the experience of watching television. Further, according to Birck, being chosen from a variety of services and apps is more difficult than when DR1 used to be the number one channel on the remote control. It is evident that the production culture of the publishing editors is developing in accordance with, or as a consequence of, their perception of the user and changing usage practices. The perception affects both the short term (daily and weekly) and long term (seasonal and yearly) publication practices as described above, and the active choice has become a principle with which the publishing editors travel the organisation and teach their colleagues in all departments. In the following subsection, I explore how the idea of the active choice also influences the selection and production of content.

***Silver streamers and talking heads: New users and changing content***

As the target groups of DRTV have developed from being primarily young people to all age groups, so have the content and publishing practices been modified. Above, I described how competition, the wish to co-publish, and the perception of the streaming usage influence DR's short- and long-term publishing practices. However, the conceptualisation of the target groups using DRTV also plays a part in the publishing editors' changing approach. Most important in this context is how the popularisation of digital media in Denmark means that older generations have also made their entry on the streaming services. Several of the publishing editors refer to this target group as *silver streamers* (owing to their hair colour) and describe how this group of users has different habits than younger age groups: They are perceived as being more loyal to DR's streaming service, using the integrated linear channels to a larger degree, and being used to the linear publication practices and need for returning every week for the next episode of a series, instead of binge-watching several episodes. The last aspect accords with DR's desire to have a continuous offer, thus retaining the users over a longer period of time. However, as pointed out by Henrik Birck, it also points to a growing challenge of DRTV: The expansion of target groups means that DRTV must meet the, to some degree, diverging demands of more target groups (personal interview, July 1, 2022).

According to the publishing editors, not only their curation of the content but also the content itself is in transition due to the merging of the linear and non-linear television services. Based on my interviews, I highlight three substantial changes that address three levels: a division of labour between the services regarding the distribution of content, which content is being requested, and the production of the individual programme. In continuation hereof, I will argue for the introduction of the term *streamability* to describe how the digital distribution occasions new demands for the content to be chosen and watched.

First, Uffe Høy Svenningsen states that fiction, to some degree, has left DR's linear channels and is now consumed on the streaming service. He argues that the reason for this is the development in the general media usage where the population for a decade has consumed fiction serials and films on SVoD services such as Netflix, HBO, and Disney+. According to Svenningsen, this means that many users now turn to streaming services when seeking fiction content, whereas content that has a focus on topicality performs better on the linear channels (personal interview, August 12, 2022).

Second, the digital transition causes changes in what content is on offer. According to Svenningsen, this development is not related to the most recent changes in DR but dates to 2016-2018, when streaming consumption increased on DRTV. However, the continuous digital transition is reinforcing the demand for an alteration of the content. Earlier, DR offered several studio programmes where a host would discuss, for example, a topical issue or artwork with invited guests. However, according to, among others, Rune T. K. Sørensen, programmes with *talking heads* do not perform well on a streaming service.

Due to financial resources, there is a need for transmitting the same content across the linear and non-linear services; thus, the studio programmes have been curtailed in DR's offer. Instead, the publishing editors describe their experience of how *the personal story* – programmes characterised by, among other factors, no visible journalistic intermediary between the viewer and the main character – works better than host-borne programmes on a streaming service.

Third and finally, there is the conception among DR's publishing editors that the active choice of the user occasions higher demands for the quality of the single programme. Rune T. K. Sørensen, whose areas of responsibility include culture, documentary, and history programmes, explains that an increasing number of programme types require editing, re-enactment, and an aesthetic that catches the viewer's attention from the first moment – otherwise they will switch over to another programme. Sørensen emphasises that such production-related requirements are expensive but regarded as necessary to attract and retain users (personal interview, December 19, 2022).

In her production study of TV 2, Bruun (2021) finds that the company's trans-programming strategy entails what she calls a *broadcastification* of the streaming service: how the publication practices on TV 2's streaming service are influenced by commissioning and scheduling of the linear channels. Based on my study of DR's digital transition, I add to that vocabulary with the term *streamability* to capture the new demands for the content: To enhance the streamability of DR's television offer, the distribution, publishing, and production value of the single programme are adjusted in accordance with the perception of the on-demand usage, as here verbalised by the publishing editors.

Summing up the main findings of the analysis: With the re-launch of DR's strategy in 2021, the PSM organisation's digital transformation is extensive. While not all of the publishing editors fully agree with the organisational *hard focus* on non-linear distribution, it is evident that the production culture has changed significantly, as the streaming service is now strongly prioritised in the publishing practices, the content on offer, and even in the production-related requirements of the single programme.

### **Continuous change: Will DR lose its users or its legitimacy?**

In her conclusion of how the distribution strategies of the public broadcasters have changed with the multi-platform approach, Donders states that there is a lack of focus and insufficient alignment of strategies between brands and departments in her study. However, she admits that "it could be argued that a clear focus will never be possible, given the highly fluid nature of the media sector" (Donders, 2019, p. 1025). With the re-launch of the strategy in 2021, DR seeks to align the digital transition between the departments, and, as I have demonstrated in the analysis, the production culture as well as the distribution and content itself have already responded substantially to the changes. As illustrated above, there are still diverging views on the role of DR's linear channels among

the publishing editors. But whereas the priorities in the portfolio are debated, it does not affect the united approach in the day-to-day practices of the publishing department. However, in line with Donders's point, Rune T. K. Sørensen highlights the complexity of the changeable situation:

Some years ago, streaming was understood as young people and binge publication. Now we talk about silver streamers and [weekly] publication. Remember, television is about change. [...] Nobody has worked it out yet, and, even if we had, the situation would change within a couple of years. But I believe we can get something good out of it (personal interview, December 19, 2022).

The above quote speaks to the rapid development of the television medium as – among several other factors – a consequence of new target groups with other usage patterns making their entry on streaming services, as described above. As also emphasised by Bruun (2023, p. 241), continuous development requires adaptability in production culture and organisational structures. Interestingly, a comparison between the digital transitions of DR and TV 2, and how it has affected the respective production cultures, shows that many of the characteristics described by Bruun (2023) recur in the case of DR: for example, the broadening of the streaming service's target group, the more central role of the streaming service as well as the publishing editors, and the changes in the publishing strategies, including the significance of the hero board. This indicates that factors such as global competition, technological development, cultural conditions, and the media usage of a population leads both players in the same direction, whereas political intervention and regulation have been less significant for DR's current stage of its digital transition. That the business models of the private and public broadcasters differ is, perhaps surprisingly, not striking. The speed and time of implementation of the various steps in the digital transition might differ, but only TV 2 Play's use of premium content stands out from DRTV's publishing practices.

A difference is evident, however, in the opinion about the mainstream focus of the streaming services, which is characteristic for both companies. As described earlier, Bruun cautions against the potential consequences of this strategy, but it is not problematised by TV 2 itself. In contrast, most of my informants consider the mainstream offer the greatest weakness of DRTV currently. However, this is not linked to the risk of harming the public service values but rather to the risk of losing the users with an offer that is too broad and unfocussed. DR's answer to this challenge was to implement a mandatory log-in on DRTV in September 2024, whereas the service until then could be used anonymously. Based on the improved knowledge of the users, DR aims at offering different versions of the DRTV landing page according to (for now) three segments based on frequency in visits to the streaming service as well as a more personalised offer. According to Henrik Birck, the publishing editors will continue to play a key role in the curation of the content (personal interview, July 1, 2022). However, serious consideration must be given

to the risk of sacrificing the core public service values of universality and diversity as well as DR's role as a facilitator of a joint conversation in Danish democracy in the attempt to future-proof the streaming service through segmentation and personalisation. Otherwise, DR risks losing its legitimacy as a PSM organisation in the pursuit of retaining the users.

## **Conclusion: A snapshot of a moving target**

This article has shown how DR's digital transition is extensive, with a priority on the digital services and pervasive organisational changes that support the strategy. From the analysis, it is evident that not one decisive factor explains the process, as the organisational changes have been implemented concurrently with increased global competition, political interventions, a rapid technological development, and changing media usage. It is worth considering if the digitalisation of the Danish population's media usage has been accelerated by DR's (and TV 2's) digital transition. The different components of the changes in DR's production culture must be seen as intertwined and mutually influential, and this article is thus in line with the findings of other studies of PSM companies' digital transition by highlighting the complexity of the process.

A key finding is that the publishing editors have taken a more influential role in the organisation over a timespan of a few years, as also documented by Bruun (2023) in her study of TV 2. This development indicates that the increased competition DR experiences entails a greater orientation towards the users: Digital media usage generates much data on user habits, and as the publishing editors have insights into this data, their knowledge becomes in demand in the more digital, and more decentralised, organisation. This is evident from both the changed commissioning model and the fact that the publishing editors distribute their perception of the active choice across the departments in DR and thereby influence all levels of the production process. In this regard, I have highlighted how the priority of the streaming service affects the short- and long-term publishing practices, as the balance of the hero board triumphs the traditional scheduling techniques, and the need for a continuous streaming offer replaces the seasonal publishing pattern. Further, I have shown how the digital transition affects the content at three levels: a division of where the different types of programmes are distributed, an adjustment of programme types included in the offer, and an attention to the (more expensive) production-related requirements of the single programme to ensure the content's *streamability*. Both the empirical production study and the document analysis have illustrated the speed of the digital transition, as they demonstrate the changes over a period of just three years. This emphasises the changing demands of the many different professional standards in a large media organisation such as DR. At a policy level, the rapid and continuous development accentuates the difficulties of drawing up long-term strategies and policies in the current media environment.

Until now, DRTV has been the only (non-advertising-based) streaming service with free access on the Danish television market. However, with the coming mandatory log-in, DRTV to a larger degree mimics the commercial SVoD services. DR claims that this is to develop DRTV on the digital premises and to meet the needs of the modern, hard-to-please media user. As I have argued, the segmentation and personalisation come with the risk of jeopardising core public service values of universality and diversity. As many public broadcasters, regardless of funding model and scope of regulation, are amid a digital transition, more research is needed into the organisations' balancing of the needs and wants of the single user and of society, including how access to more user data is being managed. Production studies of how corporate strategies are being implemented and potentially influence the power balances inside the organisations will be indicative of which values and priorities are at work and thus how the PSM mandate is currently being interpreted. Such research is beneficial to PSM and television scholars as well as policy-makers and – ideally – the organisations themselves.

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## Notes

- 1 I have abstracted the numbers from the AdvantEdge software analysis tool. The numbers are based on the Kantar-Gallup and Nielsen audience measurement ratings. In the streaming number, the distributors' services are included, and YouTube and social media are excluded.

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