

PRODUCING ONLINE YOUTH FICTION IN A NORDIC PUBLIC SERVICE CONTEXT

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Abstract: This article addresses how digitalisation and media convergence present both challenges and opportunities for public service institutions, using the production of online youth fiction as the basis for discussion. More precisely, we analyse the organisation of online youth fiction in two Nordic public service institutions, the Norwegian NRK and the Danish DR, and how organisational strategies and production cultures come into play in each of these broadcasters' early signature youth series: the widely popular online teen drama *SKAM* (NRK, 2015-2017) and the less known youth series *Anton 90* (DR/New Creations, 2015). A key argument in the article is that digitalisation and media convergence impose pressure on public service institutions when it comes to youth content, but that this pressure can also be used to legitimise new production models and organisational changes. In the article, we elaborate on the two institutions' production patterns for short-form youth fiction, which in both institutions is treated as a distinctly different task than the production of "regular" prime-time fiction.

Keywords: digitalisation, streaming, production studies, online youth fiction, public service broadcasting, NRK, DR, *SKAM*, *Anton 90*

1 Introduction

This article investigates the conditions for making online youth fiction in a public service context at a time when young people increasingly are abandoning both legacy mass media and linear flow television to consume and share content online. It addresses the so-called “youth challenge” from the perspective of public service institutions and aims to discuss how global streaming services and social media providers prompt national broadcasters and producers to rethink their existing models and strategies. Although also older audience groups are heading online, young people are leading the path to such an extent that some analysts talk about a deeply structural generation divide in the consumption of television today.¹ This is not solely a problem for private broadcasters that lose hold of a commercially attractive audience group, but also for public service institutions aiming to serve the *entire* population with relevant content.

This article examines the organisation and production of online youth fiction in two Nordic public service institutions, the Norwegian NRK and the Danish DR, both publicly funded with a broad and popular remit. While the Nordic markets are small and somewhat peripheral, they are also technologically mature and have served as strategic test markets for many new streaming services as well as social media providers.² Hence, trends in these markets and the strategies applied by their core public service media institutions may serve as a forecast for trends and strategies in other markets and by other institutions. As such, the article aims to discuss the more overall question of how digitalisation and media convergence present both challenges and opportunities for legacy institutions such as these, making the competition fiercer, but also allowing for new storytelling techniques, production cultures, and publishing models. We argue that this dual perspective is strongly needed, as many studies seem to narrow their scope to the challenges of digitalisation, thus underestimating the resilience and flexibility of public service institutions as well as the beneficial prospects of digitalisation, streaming and social media as a result.³

Our study focuses on the organisation and production of public service youth fiction. Several studies have addressed the role that public service institutions have played in the international success of Nordic prime-time television fiction⁴, and a growing corpus of literature has recently added insight on the smaller online series, often targeting a younger niche audience.⁵ Yet, few of these studies have focused on the organisational context surrounding online fiction⁶, and studies taking a comparative or cross-cultural perspective are almost non-existing. In our article, we ask: *How do NRK and DR organise the production of online youth fiction, and what distinct strategies and production approaches do they apply in their early attempts to make fiction for an online youth audience?* In order to address these questions, the article starts by analysing the two institutions’ organisational setup for making online youth fiction followed by an analysis of the distinct production approaches used in these broadcasters’ early attempts to make online youth fiction: The widely popular online teen drama *SKAM* (NRK, 2015-2017) and the less known youth fiction series *Anton 90* (DR/New Directions, 2015). The two series share many similarities: They were both commissioned and produced during the second half of the 2010s as short-form, small-budget online fiction series in which social media function as a central part of the narrative with the aim of accommodating a digital native youth audience that was otherwise turning its back on the institutions. However, they also have differences, one of the most obvious being related to impact and success: *SKAM* transformed during its four seasons from an online drama targeting young Norwegians to a global cult phenomenon with viewers and fans in all age groups and on all continents and the format was later sold in several European countries as well as in the US.⁷ *Anton 90*, on the other hand, got positive reviews but gathered only a Danish niche audience as a one-off experiment for a single season.⁸ Our analysis focuses on how the two productions represent two specific organisational approaches in the respective institutions rather than focusing on the series as texts. Hence, the two online youth series are selected to illustrate different approaches within similar organisations at a time that was characterised by uncertainty and change.

In the following, we will first present the article’s theoretical framework about online youth content in the context of public service broadcasting before presenting our methodological approach. Next, we will analyse the two institutions’ organisational setup for making online youth content as well as the two distinct production approaches that the two series represent. In the conclusion, we link these findings to the more overall question of how to navigate successfully within online youth fiction in times of change.

2 Public Service and Online Youth Fiction

In recent years, much research on public service broadcasting has concentrated on these institutions' response to digitalisation and media convergence, including their expansion to new online platforms.⁹ These developments have led to discussions of the new strategies used particularly by public service youth channels in Western Europe and their interest in digital distribution.¹⁰ In *The Media Welfare State: Nordic Media in the Digital Era* (2014), Syvertsen et al. describe how the Nordic public service broadcasters' use of online platforms went through three different phases from the mid-1990's and onwards.¹¹ In the first phase, which lasted until the millennium, the broadcasters did not have a clear strategy for how to use the emerging internet, and discussion was not only related to *how* but also *if* public service institutions were to expand beyond their original domain. In the second phase, after the year 2000, their attitudes changed and they now saw online activities as an important supplement to their regular radio and television broadcasts. In the third phase around 2010, they increasingly tried to integrate their web activities with traditional broadcasting in order to give the institutions a cross-media profile. In addition, they created sub-sites and online platforms with content specifically for children and young people as well as social media profiles on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Based on this development, Syvertsen et al. conclude that in comparison with most other European public service broadcasters, Nordic public service broadcasters have had a "generous leeway for expansion in the digital era".¹² Additionally, McElroy and Noonan have argued that digital platforms can serve as a particularly important tool for public service broadcasters in small nations with small languages – like the Nordic – and aid them in achieving core public service objectives.¹³

For our object of study, this historical framework suggests, first, that NRK's and DR's digital structures surrounding youth content have expanded and moved towards making the streaming and "spreadability"¹⁴ of online youth fiction possible. Secondly, it suggests that NRK's and DR's organisation of the production of online youth fiction in the period 2012-2015 – in which our two series were developed – was still adapting to the digitalisation process. This is in line with other studies of (Nordic) public service broadcasters and their strategies and actions in relation to new media platforms, which have found that public service broadcasters have taken an active role in expanding their services, but have not always been allowed to do so by media policy makers and regulators.¹⁵ Furthermore, we suggest that the digitalisation process is still expanding and that NRK and DR may have entered a fourth phase in which the youth channels are often give higher priority to distribution through online platforms than their linear flow TV channels.

In fact, several studies have shown how the focus on youth content can lead to new ways of operating as these productions aim for a "digital native" audience. For instance, in their study of an interactive blog for children, Sjöberg and Rydin show how the Swedish public service broadcaster SVT moved towards the "blogosphere" by following practices guided both by the logics of broadcast television and of convergence culture.¹⁶ According to Sjöberg and Rydin, the logics of convergence culture – such as supporting user-generated content and collective intelligence – made SVT reflect on their practices and change them, among others by "increasingly relying on ethnographic methods in order to meet young people's needs in daily settings".¹⁷ Clearly, then, digital and social media platforms do not only represent a way of distributing youth content, but also a way of gaining insight into the complexity and shifting user habits of young people. Whether such an *ethnographic shift* is equally visible within NRK and DR is debatable and will be examined in the following analysis of the youth fiction traditions in these two organisations.

3 Methodological Approach

Production studies encompass a broad range of approaches and methods, but are guided by the notion that contextual conditions matter, in the sense that media products are affected by the people creating them, by the

institutions they work in and by the conditions of the industry in which they belong.¹⁸ In this study, we aim to use this approach to analyse the different organisational setups and production cultures of NRK and DR, respectively, through the lenses of the two online youth series *SKAM* and *Anton 90*.

Empirically, the study relies on several different methods and sources. First of all, it draws upon qualitative interviews¹⁹ with key executives and decision makers working at the two institutions, including executives working on *SKAM* and *Anton 90*. These informants should be considered “elites”²⁰ or “exclusive informants”²¹ because they have a particularly relevant perspective on the topic under scrutiny – in this case, the organisation and production of youth fiction – and in-depth knowledge on this topic is hard to attain without gaining access to these particular informants.²² The study incorporates twelve informants in total, six from DR and six from NRK, who were selected to cover similar roles in the two institutions, including both strategic/editorial and creative functions.²³ In the interviews, which followed semi-structured interview guides, we have been interested in both strategic and creative decisions related to the organisation and production of youth fiction, including the informants’ “self-reflexivity”²⁴ and their thoughts on the key production choices that were made. We are well-aware of the risk of being blinded by “trade stories”²⁵ and “industry lore”²⁶ when using industry informants as an empirical source, and we have critically addressed the material and included secondary sources and contextual interview statements to aid our comprehension, when such sources have been accessible.

Secondly, the article relies on document analysis²⁷, first and foremost of institutional documents describing DR’s and NRK’s actions, strategies and obligations, but also news articles and debates that accompanied the making of the two series as covered in national newspapers and trade press. The aim was to paint a richer picture of the issues covered in the interviews, as well as obtaining secondary opinions and additional knowledge on issues not touched upon by the informants.

4 Organising and Producing Youth Fiction at NRK

NRK organises its children’s and youth content into two different divisions – NRK Super and NRK P3. NRK Super targets 2-12-year-olds, while NRK P3 targets 13-29-year-olds, although both divisions generally operate with more exact age groups in specific productions.²⁸ On a strategic level, the goal is for NRK P3 to “take over” when young people “grow out of” NRK Super.

NRK established both divisions in response to structural changes in the media market and increased competition from private, commercial and international players. NRK P3 was launched in 1993, originally as a radio channel, in response to the breakup of the national broadcasting monopoly and the increased competition from new, private and commercial radio (and television) channels.²⁹ P3 soon expanded its services to include an online website (p3.no) and from 2007 a linear television channel (NRK3), although another NRK division commissions and schedules this channel. Today, the P3 brand includes two radio channels (P3 and mP3), an increasing number of podcasts, a website, several events and a small range of television series, of which *SKAM* undoubtedly is the most well-known.

As for NRK Super, it was launched in 2007 – in what Syvertsen and her colleagues label the second phase of the Nordic public service broadcasters’ digital expansion – as a response to the digital transformation of television distribution and the increased competition from new niche channels, including global children’s channels like Disney.³⁰ In contrast to NRK P3, NRK Super was established as a multimedia division from the beginning, producing radio, television, online and social media content, often by the same multifunctional personnel. In many ways, NRK Super serves as a “digital flagship division” within NRK, in the sense that the innovative and “forward-looking” user habits of Norwegian kids have forced the division to constantly try out new production and publishing models. For instance, in 2013, NRK Super was the first division at NRK to have a television series that

gained more viewers online than on the linear channel, which led to a shift in focus towards the value of different media platforms and a more outspoken strategy of using online platforms and digital storytelling techniques to connect with younger audiences on their terms.³¹

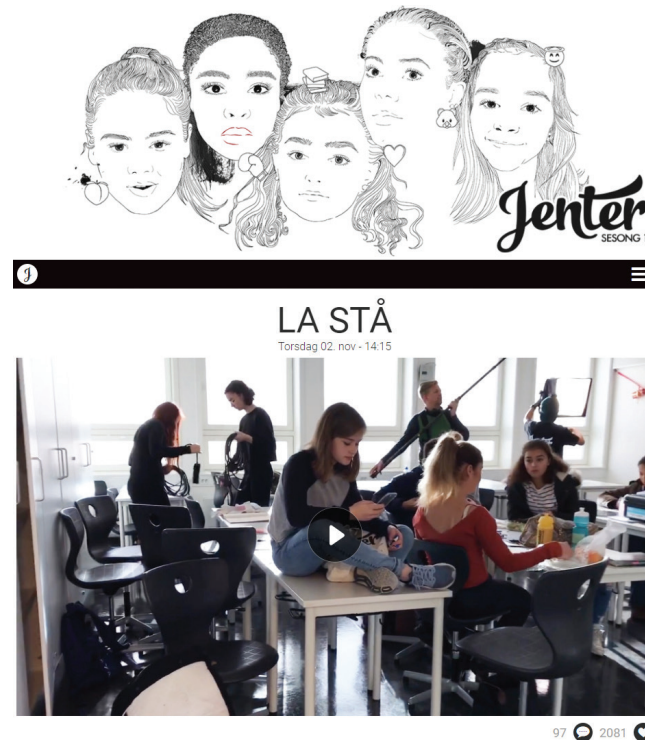
Strategically, both divisions must fulfil NRK's overall public service mandate, which implies an obligation to serve the democratic, social and cultural needs within society.³² Although NRK's mandate does not include any explicit obligations concerning youth content, NRK is still obliged to "serve the entire population" (also young people) and provide them with high-quality content reflecting Norwegian language, identity and culture, and, importantly, it has been given leeway to use any (new) media platforms to fulfil this duty. NRK has however often stressed the importance of "serving young people", and since 2012 this has even been formulated as a key priority in NRK's content and publishing strategies, clearly reflecting the institution's take on a changing media market in which young people are abandoning established mass media to explore social media and watch YouTube and international drama series on Netflix and HBO.³³

Although both NRK P3 and NRK Super must fulfil NRK's overall strategy, they are also allowed to pursue their own visions. NRK P3's vision has been to "reflect and define the reality of young people and leave marks on young people's lives", but changed in 2017, now aiming to "bring young people closer together, entertain and challenge them where they are, and reflect reality".³⁴ NRK Super's vision was previously to "create a world where children grow and are important", but since 2017, it has been to "create the strongest community for all children in Norway".³⁵

In terms of fiction, NRK Super has a long history of producing different types of fictional series, from high-budget, full-scale productions (like the children's Christmas calendars) to low-budget, small-scale productions (like online drama), including several types of productions in between. While the full-scale productions have given NRK Super experience with high-end productions and full production teams, the small-scale productions were introduced as a way of producing more drama content at a lower cost using a smaller multifunctional team, with the same people typically writing, directing and publishing the content.³⁶ In summary, the mixed approach adopted by NRK Super has provided them with a highly experienced staff team with a track record in organising and producing different types of fictional series. NRK P3, on the other hand, has less experience in producing both television and drama series, as the division historically was rooted in radio, and documentaries and humour have been given higher priority in its television productions. Hence, when NRK wanted to produce youth fiction, it had to look beyond NRK P3's borders to find skilled personnel and soon took an interest in the forward-looking production culture within NRK Super.

5 SKAM

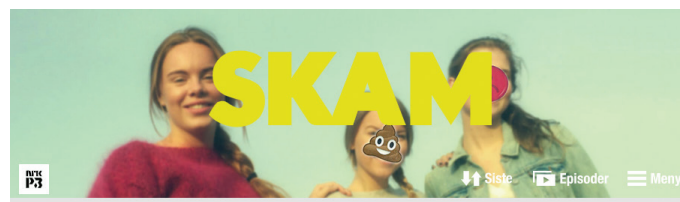
SKAM was not initiated by NRK P3 or NRK Super, but rather by NRK's programming division who wanted the two divisions to join forces. The ambition was two-folded; *SKAM* was to reconnect with the young audiences that NRK otherwise tended not to reach, as well as to give them public service content which they were not likely to get elsewhere.³⁷ While NRK P3 was the division in which youth content "belonged", NRK Super was the division with knowledge and experience of how to produce low-cost online fiction. More precisely, since 2007, NRK Super had developed a new genre of so-called "online drama" that had proven to be extremely popular within its targeted audience segments, that was, young girls aged 10-13 years. Although these series – *Sara* (2008-2009), *MIA* (2010-2012) and *Jenter/Girls* (2013-2017) – had many differences, they all had in common that they were character-driven fictional stories in which the storyline was revealed daily and in "real time" on a blog through a mix of video clips, chat messages and pictures.³⁸ In all of them, the young audience was actively invited to comment and engage, among others through a commentary section that followed every update on the blogs. These series also all build on extensive audience research, in which the aim was to gain in-depth information on how to portray young girls in a relevant and realistic way, but also to uncover how these online series could serve the needs of this particular audience group. As such, these series were motivated by the ambition of addressing also more serious issues, thus fulfilling NRK's public service mission.³⁹



Video 1. *Jenter* – early online drama from NRK Super

Consequently, *SKAM* was initiated as a “joint venture” between NRK Super and NRK P3, in which the *SKAM* team was to build on the experiences of the previous success stories of online drama, but target the specific needs of an older age group, namely 16-year-old Norwegian girls.⁴⁰ The task to create the new series was given to Julie Andem, who had worked on all the previous online drama series of NRK Super and had inherited this particular way of writing, directing and publishing online stories. In order to develop the new series, Andem and her team made use of the so-called NABC-model, which NRK (and especially NRK Super) had used for a numbers of years to gain audience insight and identify audience needs, and furthermore, put these needs at the centre of the programme production.⁴¹ Among others, the *SKAM* team conducted 50 in-depth interviews and 200 speed interviews with Norwegian teens from all over the country, in addition to school visits, social media scanning, and readings of reports and statistics on teen culture.⁴² One key findings from the research was that Norwegian teens experienced a lot of pressure – as Andem said; “pressure to be perfect, pressure to perform”⁴³ – and the main ambition of the new youth series was set to address teen pressure. Andem and her team even formulated a “mission statement”, defining *SKAM*’s vision to “help 16-year-old girls to strengthen their self-esteem by breaking taboos, make them aware of interpersonal mechanisms and demonstrate the rewards of confronting fear”.⁴⁴

The result, then, was an online youth fiction series that centred on a group of high school teenage characters and follows their life at home and in school, each season focusing on a different main character in first person. Like the previous online drama series, the stories dispersed across multiple platforms, in which the *SKAM* website (skam.p3.no) was the most important one. Here, video clips, chat messages and pictures were published daily and in so-called “real time”, making the publishing rhythm irregular and unpredictable, but also generating a sense of “liveness” as the audience watched the characters and their storylines “as they happened” on screen and together with other members of the audience.



Tirsdag 22.09.15 kl 14.32



Vår skyld

33 2599

Video 2. *SKAM* – from online ‘secret’ to global cult phenomenon (geoblocked in some locations)

Although *SKAM* was produced and published to serve the specific needs and user habits of Norwegian teens, the series soon grew beyond its targeted audience segment, and in season 3 and 4 it had become a global cult phenomenon with viewers and fans in all age groups and on all continents. Because the show was not geo blocked (at least not before season 4), it was available to anyone with internet access, and from season 3 with multiple translations provided by fans via social media such as YouTube and Twitter as well as via Google drive links.⁴⁵

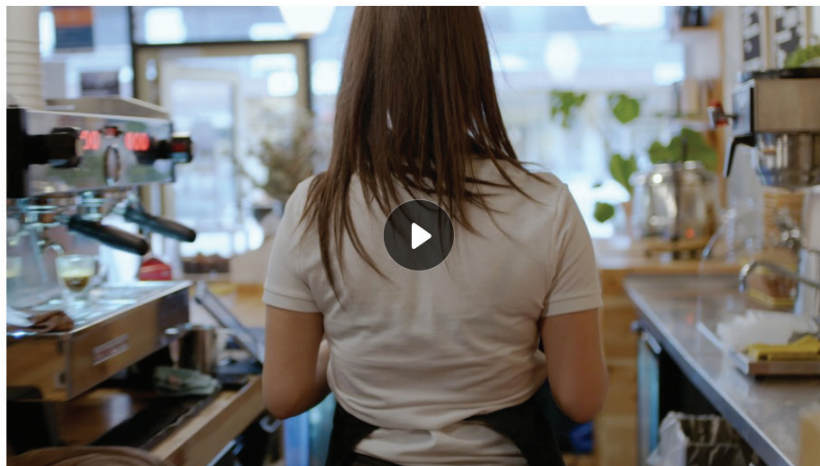
Following the interest of audiences and fans beyond national borders, also international mainstream media soon discovered *SKAM*. For instance, the British national daily newspaper *The Guardian* published a story entitled “Shame: A scandi TV sensation for the social media generation”, while the US cult magazine *The Fader* wrote a story entitled “Why The Whole Planet Is Obsessed With This Norwegian Teen Drama”.⁴⁶ Furthermore, international broadcasters and publishers began to pay attention. In 2017 the *SKAM* format was eventually sold in six European countries as well as in the US, where it was distributed in spring 2018 as the “first Facebook Watch” TV show.⁴⁷

Following its extreme success – in terms of audience ratings, nominations and prizes, buzz and fan activities⁴⁸ – *SKAM* obviously functioned as a game changer for NRK and partly for the television industry in general. For NRK, it was a clear indication of the power of online storytelling, and for NRK leaders, the combination of extreme success and low cost must have been almost unbelievable. *SKAM* also proved to be a strong argument for audience research and the NABC-model, which invited storytellers to create fictional stories based on audience needs.

Although it is too early to make conclusions on the full impact of a successful show like *SKAM* for the NRK, it is worth noting that NRK has initiated several new online drama series following the paths of *SKAM*. The first one, *blank* (NRK, 2018-), was developed, produced and published within the same NRK Super tradition in terms of online storytelling and shares many similarities with *SKAM* and its predecessors (*Jenter*, *MIA* and *SARA*), but centers around new characters and storylines. This production was also developed and produced as a joint venture between different NRK divisions, this time between NRK P3 and NRK Entertainment, and hosted by NRK Drama.⁴⁹



SØNDAG 17.03.19 KL. 12.00



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Video 3. *blank* – NRK’s next online drama after *SKAM* (season 1)

SKAM was also used to legitimate changing strategies and actions within NRK, including NRK P3. For instance, in 2017, *SKAM* was used as a “best practice” when mapping out P3’s new strategy, highlighting the significance of audience insight in combination with important and relevant public service content. As stated by Camilla Bjørn, head of NRK P3, “I think *SKAM* is the ultimate proof that we need to make our content ‘choosable’ and listen to the audience, instead of just broadcasting content”.⁵⁰

On a more critical note, NRK’s production model for online drama, in which the storyline was written, directed and published almost “on the fly” by a small, multifunctional production team in which the same person often both wrote and directed the show, also had some downsides: To start with, it was an ambitious and somewhat vulnerable production model in which a small production team would constantly fight the clock trying to get through the production plan. Secondly, it was a production model that requiring special skills from its production team, especially the writer and director. Naturally, not everyone would fit such a model, in which the storylines were written and directed only weeks before publishing, discussed across various media platforms and in constant dialogue with the audience. Arguable, it was only a limited number of personnel even within the NRK that would be able to pull such a production off, clearly implying an important downside of this particular production model.

6 Organising and Producing Youth Fiction at DR

DR organises its audiovisual youth content into two different departments: *DR3* (the television channel distributing content for ages 15-39) and *DR Ung* (production of youth television and social media content). This section will focus on DR3 in relation to the division of labour between these departments in the strategic organisation of online youth fiction.

DR3 was created in 2013 with a so-called license to experiment⁵¹ and has commissioned programmes from both in-house and independent production units during its short lifespan. With the launch of DR3 in 2013, DR as an institution made a strategic move by aiming at a younger target group, and in DR's public service contract DR3 is described as having "a focus on the younger part of the population".⁵² This contract puts pressure on DR3's management by making their efforts subject to political evaluation, while also highlighting the importance of making "innovative content on the internet". However, the contract does *not* at any time specifically mention fiction for young people, but points out both "Danish drama" and "children's drama" as mandatory content.

While the contract's definition of children's content is divided into two age-defined TV channels and mandatory children's drama, the definition of youth content is much broader in terms of age. As such, the contract perceives children and young people as two separate content areas with very different requirements and political incentives. The contract illustrates how the involved politicians back in 2014/15 did not perceive youth fiction as a strategically important content area for DR at the time. The contract also illustrates an understanding of "Danish drama" (for adults/everyone) and DR3's "content on the internet" as two distinctly separate categories and departments.

This perception is mirrored in DR's complex organisational structure where the production unit "DR Drama" – a flagship department that has made many award-winning Danish TV series – has its own special status. Here DR Drama is separated from both the youth content department "DR Ung"⁵³ and from DR3, which belong to two other organisational branches called DR Culture and DR Media. That "youth content" and "drama" are two separate categories in DR is also evident from DR's programming history: DR has a rich tradition of making satire series aimed at a young audience⁵⁴, but has mainly produced drama series targeting either a broad audience under DR Drama⁵⁵ or tweens and children⁵⁶ – almost never a young target group. This historical track record points to youth fiction series as a relatively unexplored content area for DR.

By solely being a distributor and not a producer of content, DR3 had to get another unit to produce their online youth fiction. A key question remained, however, namely who best to take on the task. In 2014-15, making online youth fiction really seemed to go beyond the organisation's logics and structures and against its track records. DR3's very first fiction production, *Kødataloget* (2013-14, Eng.: "The Meat Catalogue") was another satire series by DR Ung, aimed at a thirtysomething target group.⁵⁷ In accordance with this, DR's youth fiction experience is mainly based on a tradition of producing satire in both DR Ung and its sister department B&U (Children and Youth), where potential talents were given a shot at making short-form satire programmes for radio (P3) and television (DR2). These productions typically had very few resources and short time frames, but despite the humble working conditions this tradition fostered several popular social satire shows.⁵⁸

In 2014, DR3 had already made several factual programmes with explicit efforts to "experiment", but intentionally deprioritised fiction due to their small budget and the direct competitor channel TV 2 ZULU's strong line-up of youth fiction series.⁵⁹ Another reason for not making more online fiction was – according to the DR3 editors – the fact that such productions had to fit into a flow TV programming schedule because of budgetary structures. At this time, DR3 did not have any experience of making online youth fiction, so they needed to decide who they should outsource this strategically important task to. One solution was to make a cooperation between DR production units and/or DR Digital. Instead, and perhaps in accordance with the displayed organisational logics, DR3 as the commissioning channel chose an external production company called New Creations with their own freelance director named Martin Skovbjerg. New Creations had fiction/satire experience and had pitched an idea for a short-form satire series about a

couple in their thirties and presented a short dummy using a point-of-view style and social media (online text messaging) as part of the narrative. The DR3 editors liked the dummy but wanted to make the characters younger, and they gave this production a short-form format with 10 episodes of 8-9 minutes per episode.⁶⁰

In summary, DR and DR3's understanding of short-form fiction production was that this format was a good fit for satire content, and this understanding was their reason for choosing a satire production as their first youth fiction production for both flow TV and DR's online platform. However, that this production called *Anton 90* (DR3/New Creations, 2015) later transformed into a drama/dramedy and was not part of their initial plan.

7 Anton 90

When DR3's head of channel, Irene Strøyer, was asked about the motive for choosing the short-form format, she stressed the channel's economy: "Because it is damn expensive to make fiction".⁶¹ Due to the scarce resources, the scriptwriters involved in *Anton 90* were freelancers who were only on contract for seven weeks while writing the satirical script, and they had no influence on the shooting of the series. The director was also a freelancer, but he had the main responsibility for making the series a coherent audio-visual experience. As they only had 12 days to shoot the series, the director ran into trouble on the set when he discovered that the many punchlines in the satirical script did not land well. Due to the very short time frame, he had to make a quick decision to change the genre of the entire series: In his opinion, *Anton 90* would work better as an improvised drama. The result was very different from what DR3 and New Creations initially had agreed on. Eventually, the editors started losing faith in the project, and the director ended up changing parts of the series based on the editors' wishes while also still insisting on his own dramatic vision for the series.⁶²



Video 4. *Anton 90* – a clip from the first episode (no subtitles)

Anton 90 became DR3's first online youth drama and it aired on 25 December 2015 as a binge-watching marathon with all 10 short episodes being shown sequentially on DR3. The series was also shown on DR's VOD and catch-up service, but this would be the only time that the series was shown on linear flow television. When asked, all of the involved parties agree that this slot was the result of the DR3 editors' lack of belief in the series' potential (and not initially a conscious distribution strategy to reserve the content for online viewing). Needless to say, this linear flow TV marathon on Christmas Day – which is an unusual premiere date in Denmark – did not attract many viewers. But to the editors' surprise, the online viewership numbers turned out to be favourable compared to their initial expectations: The first episode gathered 200,700 viewers, the second episode 96,400 viewers and the remaining eight episodes

75-45,000 viewers.⁶³ The DR3 editors evaluated the series as a surprising online success, however, a second season was not commissioned.

When the DR3 editors were asked why they rejected the possibility of a second season, they pointed to a strategic decision that they have made regarding the channel brand: DR3 should be constantly renewing itself, not repeating itself. This goes also for their so-called successful programmes.⁶⁴ This strategy reflects a general tendency in DR3's approach to original programming and youth fiction in particular: They prefer commissioning one-off series over series with several seasons, because they found that one-off series to have a greater uniqueness and originality to add to their brand value.

This strategy is also apparent when looking at DR3's youth fiction series from 2013 to 2016: Each series was made by a new team of writers and directors. In this regard, DR3 has chosen not to cultivate a recurring group of showrunners, writers and directors in the way that DR Drama has done for years by handpicking and nurturing talents from the Danish Film School and sometimes supporting their screenwriters financially while they search for new ideas.⁶⁵ Unlike this formalised cooperation with the Danish Film School, DR3 cooperates with many different production units, both internal and external, which has resulted in a broad number of connections but also in a lack of continuity. Without continuity and an actual youth fiction production talent scheme, DR3 and other Danish channels have lacked showrunners with experience of making online youth fiction, as one informant highlights.⁶⁶ In her work, Eva Novrup Redvall has also expressed a need for better TV production training in Denmark in relation to working with new platforms and a variety of formats "[...] rather than only learning to develop expensive drama for traditional broadcasters".⁶⁷

As the breakdown of DR3's organisational framework shows, the endeavour of producing online youth fiction back in 2014 was a strategically demanding cross-disciplinary task, which the organisational structure of DR did not seem to support. Youth fiction content had not been prioritised until then and was not even mentioned in the current public service contract, but DR3 still displayed a strategic awareness of the need for online youth fiction. This awareness led to the commissioning of a short-form satire series in accordance with the tendencies in DR's institutional history of making satire when they needed to reach a young audience. In this context, *Anton 90* started out as a somewhat conventional DR satire series, but with a shorter time format than usual.

This one-off approach to youth fiction generated a surprising domestic success with *Anton 90*, but it did not provide DR3 with a long-term fiction scheme, and they waited another two years before commissioning fiction again. In the interviews conducted with employees from DR3 and New Directions in 2016-17, everyone spontaneously mentioned a game-changing series which since the autumn of 2016 had a major influence on their work: *SKAM*. After *SKAM* became popular in Denmark and in the Nordic countries, DR's youth department DR Ung changed their organisation by establishing a team that focuses solely on online fiction and satire⁶⁸, and they quadrupled their production of fiction in 2017 by airing seven new Danish-language fiction series with varying online publishing models.⁶⁹ These initiatives can be interpreted as part of an organisational shift within DR where online content is given a higher priority than before *SKAM*.

8 Comparison

When comparing NRK and DR, they are seemingly similar in terms of their privileged position in their national markets and their evaluation of the "youth challenge". However, our analysis shows that there are many differences in how the two organisations have approached the challenging task of making online youth fiction. In summary, we have named these two approaches: A) *the long-term audience-focused approach*, as used by NRK Super/P3, and B) *the short-term satire-focused approach*, as used by DR3.

While NRK P3 benefited from the cooperation with NRK Super, which had a long tradition of making niche-oriented online drama based on extensive audience insight, DR3 had deprioritised fiction in favour of satire and instead decided to create a single coproduction with an independent production company. This is also evident in the two series starting point: While NRK let the target audience group (16-year-old girls) and their specific needs be basis for storytelling, DR started by listening to ideas from independent production companies in order to let the best idea win. Furthermore, the production of *SKAM* was characterised by an explicit devotion to fulfilling the public service mission of giving the audience what they presumably needed in a cool and entertaining way. In comparison, the production of *Anton 90* was characterised by an abrupt change of genre, which resulted in DR3's first drama/dramedy, but left the department without a long-term strategy for online youth fiction.

Moreover, our analysis shows that online youth fiction in both NRK and DR was organised as a specific content area, produced with no clear ties to the production models of mainstream or prime-time fiction. In both organisations, online youth fiction was defined as productions with smaller budgets and a narrower target audience, which was ultimately *treated as a different type of production than "regular" fiction and prime-time drama series*. Such an organisational divide between mainstream fiction and youth fiction might lead to a situation where useful experience from previous productions is isolated and not shared. The analysis also demonstrates how online youth fiction for these broadcasters back in 2013-2015 was an area for innovation and experiments rather than a major priority. However, according to our informants, the success of *SKAM* and the competition in relation to youth content has subsequently led to an organisational shift within both institutions' youth departments, where online publishing and streaming is now given higher priority than the linear flow TV channels. Considering this development, and the historical progression described by Syvertsen and her colleagues, these two Nordic broadcasters have now entered a *fourth phase* in which the youth channels often *prioritise distribution through online platforms over linear flow TV channels*.⁷⁰

9 Conclusion

Several studies have addressed the challenges of digitalisation and media convergence for public service institutions, including the challenges presented by new players, new platforms and new user habits.⁷¹ A key argument in this article has been that these trends do not only involve negative effects, but also opportunities, as they open up new ways of producing and publishing content, as the case of *SKAM* demonstrates.

In this article, we have investigated how two Nordic public service institutions, NRK and DR, have treated online youth fiction as a different task than regular fiction, but, furthermore, have responded with distinctly different approaches towards online youth fiction: A) *the long-term audience-focused approach*, as used by NRK Super/P3, and B) *the short-term satire-focused approach*, as used by DR3. We have analysed how NRK and DR, respectively, organise, develop and produce their youth content, and the analysis shows that the two institutions have some key organisational differences: Despite NRK P3's long tradition of experimenting with new media services, it still needed to adopt a production model for youth fiction from another in-house NRK department. Although *SKAM* was produced by NRK P3, it was "born" in NRK Super and followed the legacy of this division when it came to audience research, production, publishing and storytelling. As for DR3, the task of making online youth fiction went beyond the organisation's logics, track records and departmental divisions. This resulted in the commissioning of an externally produced series which did not provide DR3 with a long-term solution for production of youth fiction. The DR experience reminds us that public institutions often need time to adapt to new ways of operating, but also that they will find inspiration from one another and that other public service success stories may serve as a key argument for shifts in organisational structure and strategies.

Sjöberg and Rydin's study demonstrated how SVT increasingly showed an interest in both the audience and the online formats.⁷² Such an interest is mirrored in the approach used by NRK, but DR's interest in online youth fiction was not as strong – until *SKAM* paved the way and DR changed its organisation. As departments, both NRK P3 and

DR3 were not fully equipped to solve the task of making online youth fiction, which called for new production models: At NRK, the model was developed through cross-departmental cooperation, and at DR, the model was developed through external production. However, the model used for *SKAM* eventually inspired DR3 to a much greater extent than their first attempt with *Anton 90*. Whether *SKAM* can be said to have inspired a more ethnographic turn in television production beyond the Nordic region, needs to be investigated further in the future, but several recent Nordic teen productions do at least point to an increased focus on audience insight.⁷³

Despite their differences, however, both *SKAM* and *Anton 90* should be seen in relation to the more overall tendencies of digitalisation and media convergence, which have put pressure on public service institutions to create attractive, relevant and high-quality content across various media platforms and in increasing competition with global players. In discussions of public service broadcasting, these institutions are sometimes accused of not being innovative. Yet, our cases demonstrate how these two public service institutions have made several new initiatives within online youth fiction, which involved both changes within their organisation and production patterns. Such changes naturally involved risk-taking; in the case of *SKAM* the result was a game-changing production, while *Anton 90* had less of an effect but still gave the DR3 valuable insights. The possible “crisis” caused by digitalisation and media convergence was what led these institutions to take new content risks and – ultimately – to prioritise online youth fiction. Our analysis gives valuable examples of how public service institutions “fight back” on these challenges, and how these institutions have various success stories to learn from.

Notes

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2. Trine Syvertsen, Gunn Enli, Ole J. Mjøs, and Hallvard Moe, *The Media Welfare State: Nordic Media in the Digital Era*, University of Michigan Press, 2014.
3. For an insightful discussion, see Tom Evens and Karen Donders, *Platform Power and Policy in Transforming Television Markets*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
4. See, for instance, Eva Novrup Redvall, *Writing and Producing Television Drama in Denmark. From the Kingdom to The Killing*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013; Ib Bondebjerg, Eva Novrup Redvall, and Andrew Higson, eds, *European Cinema and Television. Cultural Policy and Everyday Life*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2015; and Vilde Schanke Sundet, ‘Co-Produced Television Drama and the Cost of Transnational ‘Success’: The Making of *Lilyhammer*’, in Eva Bakøy, Roel Puijk, and Andrew Spicer, eds, *Building Successful & Sustainable Film & Television Business: A Cross-National Perspective*, Intellect, 2017a, pp. 67–87.
5. See for instance Vilde Schanke Sundet, ‘Det er bare du som kan føle det du føler’ - emosjonell investering og engasjement i nettdramaet *SKAM*’ [‘Only you can feel what you feel’ – emotional investment and engagement in the online drama *SKAM*], *Filmtidsskriftet*, 16, 9, 2017b; Mads Møller Andersen, ‘Negotiating Creativity on a Small Budget,’ *Nordicom Review*, 39, 1, 2018a, 19–32; Synnøve Skarsbø Lindtner and John Magnus Dahl, ‘Aligning Adolescent to the Public Sphere: The Teen Serial *Skam* and Democratic Aesthetic,’ *Javnost – the Public*, 26, 1, 2018, 54–69; Emelie Bengtsson, Rebecka Källquist, and Malin Svenningsson, ‘Combining New and Old Viewing Practices. Uses and Experiences of the Transmedia series “Skam”,’ *Nordicom Review*, 39, 2, 2018, 63–77; and Steffen Krügger and Gry Rustad, ‘Coping with Shame in a Media-saturated Society: Norwegian web-series *Skam* as Transitional Object,’ *Television & New Media*, 20, 1, 2019, 72–95.
6. See, however, Vilde Schanke Sundet, ‘From ‘secret’ online teen drama to international cult phenomenon: The global expansion of *SKAM* and its public service mission,’ in *Critical Studies in Television*, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749602019879856>
7. Ibid. See, also, Rachel Donadio, ‘Will ‘Skam’, a Norwegian Hit, Translate?’, *The New York Times*, 9 December 2016; and John Hopwell, ‘Mipcom: ‘Shame’ Gets European Remake Roll-Out from NRK, Beta Film,’ *Variety*, 14 October 2017.
8. Andersen, ‘Negotiating Creativity on a Small Budget,’ 2018a.
9. Gregory Ferrell Lowe, Hilde Van den Bulck, and Karen Donders, eds, *Public Service Media in the Networked Society*, Nordicom, 2018; Hanne Bruun, ‘DR License Fees, Platform Neutrality, and Public Service Obligation,’ in Derek Johnson, ed, *From Networks to Netflix*, Routledge, 2018, pp. 77–84; Paul Grainge and Catherine Johnson, ‘From catch-up TV to online TV: digital broadcasting and the case of BBC iPlayer,’ *Screen*, 59, 1, 2018, 21–40.

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11. Syvertsen et al., *The Media Welfare State*, 2014, p. 86f.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
13. Ruth McElroy and Caitriona Noonan, 'Public Service Media and Digital Innovation. The Small Nation Experience,' in Gregory Ferrell Lowe, Hilde Van den Bulck, and Karen Donders, eds, *Public Service Media in the Networked Society*, Nordicom, 2018, pp. 159–174. See also Ruth McElroy and Caitriona Noonan, *Producing British Television Drama. Local Production in a Global Era*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2019.
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15. Gregory Ferrell Lowe and Jo Bardoel, eds, *From Public Service Broadcasting to Public Service Media*, Nordicom, 2007; and Gregory Ferrell Lowe and Jeanette Steemers, eds, *Regaining the Initiative for Public Service Media*, Nordicom, 2011.
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17. Sjöberg and Rydin, 'Transmedia Storytelling and a Young Audience', 2013, p. 117.
18. Kirsten Frandsen, 'Produktionsanalyse: teoretiske og metodiske problemstillinger' [Production analysis: theoretical and methodical problems], in Kirsten Frandsen and Hanne Bruun, eds, *Tv-produktion – nye vilkår*, Samfundslitteratur, 2007, pp. 23–54. See also John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, Duke University Press, 2008.
19. Steinar Kvale, *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, Sage Publications, 1996.
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21. Hanne Bruun, 'Eksklusive Informanter: Om forskningsinterviewet som redskab i produktionsanalyse' [Exclusive Informants: About the research interview as a tool in production analysis], in *Nordicom Information*, 36, 1, 2014, 29–45.
22. See also, Tom Gitlin, *Inside Primetime*, Pantheon Books, 1983.
23. The informants from NRK/SKAM are: Anne Wisløff, director and scriptwriter on *SARA*, *MIA* and *Jenter* at NRK, interviewed March 2018; Camilla Bjørn, Head of NRK P3, interviewed March 2018; Hildri Gulliksen, Head of NRK Super, interviewed May 2015; Mari Magnus, online producer on *SKAM* at NRK, interviewed January 2017; Marianne Furevold-Boland, project leader on *SKAM* at NRK, interviewed December 2016; and Vibeke Fürst Haugen, Head of NRK Programme, interviewed May 2015 (all done by Vilde Schanke Sundet). The informants from DR/*Anton 90* are: Erik Struve Hansen, managing editor at DR Ung, interviewed January 2017; Irene Strøyer, head of channel at DR3, interviewed July 2016; Jacob Katz Hansen, scriptwriter of *Anton 90*, interviewed January 2017; Kasper Tøstesen, head of digital at DR Ung, interviewed May 2017; Mads Kromann Andersen, editor at DR3, interviewed February 2017; and Martin Skovbjerg, director of *Anton 90*, interviewed January 2017 (all done by Mads Møller T. Andersen). Several attempts were made to include an interview with *SKAM*'s director and scriptwriter Julie Andem, but it could not be arranged, demonstrating the methodological challenge associated with gaining access to media "elites". To incorporate her perspectives, then, the chapter draws upon extant media interviews in the public domain. All quotations have been translated from Norwegian and Danish to English by the authors.
24. See Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 2008.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Timothy Havens and Amanda D. Lotz, *Understanding media industries*, University of Michigan, 2016, p. 137.
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34. Bjørn, interviewed 2018. In Norwegian: “Vi skal spille og definere ung virkelighet og sette spor i unges liv” and “Bringe unge nærmere hverandre, underholde og utfordre der unge er, og være ekte”.
35. Gulliksen, interviewed 2017, and NRK (2016b) “NRK Supers grunnmur”, internal strategy document given by email by Gulliksen June 2017. In Norwegian: “Vi skal skape en verden hvor barn vokser og er viktige” and “NRK Super skal skape det sterkeste felleskapet for alle barn i Norge”.
36. Anne Wisløff, director and scriptwriter of *SARA*, *MIA* and *Jenter*, interviewed 2018.
37. Marianne Furevold-Boland, project leader on *SKAM* at NRK, interviewed 2016. See also Sundet, ‘From ‘secret’ online teen drama to international cult phenomenon,’ 2019.
38. See more, Ingvill Marie Nyborg, ‘MIA – et stort og stille drama på nett’, *NRKBeta*, 3 May 2012. See also, Sundet, ‘From ‘secret’ online teen drama to international cult phenomenon’, 2019.
39. Wisløff, interviewed 2018, see also Øystein Espeseth Andresen, ‘Hva er NRKs ‘Jenter’?’ [What is NRK’s ‘Jenter’], *NRK.no*, 20 June 2014, Anders Lysne, ‘Farvel til nyansert jentemoro’ [Godby nuanced girl fun], *Periskope.no*, 26 January 2018.
40. See also Jon Inge Faldalen, ‘-Nerven i ‘Skam’ skal være sterk og relevant’ [The nerve in *SKAM* should be strong and relevant], *Rushprint.no*, 4 April 2016.
41. Vibeke Først Haugen, Head of NRK Programme, interviewed 2015. See also Ole Hedemann, *Ideutvikling i mediehuset* [Creating ideas in media companies], IJ-Forlaget, 2014.
42. Mari Magnus, online producer on *SKAM* at NRK, interviewed 2017. See also Sundet, ‘From ‘secret’ online teen drama to international cult phenomenon,’ 2019.
43. Andem quoted in Donadio, ‘Will ‘Skam’, a Norwegian Hit, Translate?’, 2016.
44. Furevold-Boland, interviewed 2016.
45. See more, Sundet, ‘From ‘secret’ online teen drama to international cult phenomenon,’ 2019.
46. Sarah Hughes, ‘Shame: A Scandi TV sensation for the social media generation’, *The Guardian*, 4 December 2016, and Patrick M. McDermott, ‘Why The Whole Planet Is Obsessed with This Norwegian Teen Drama’, *The Fader*, 10 April 2017.
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48. In which the latter can be measured in the thousands of comments on the *SKAM* website ([skam.p3.no](http://www.skam.p3.no)) and on fan-provided websites such as the thank-you-skam-websites (<http://www.instagram.com/thankyouskamcom/>) in which fans express their gratitude towards the show.
49. Other *SKAM* successors included the real-time online drama *Lovleg* (Rubicon TV for NRK, 2018-2019) and the online drama *17* (NRK, 2018-).
50. Bjørn, interviewed 2018. In Norwegian: “Jeg tror faktisk *SKAM* er selve beviset på at man må gjøre seg valgbar og lytte, og ikke bare sende ut.”
51. Irene Strøyer, head of channel at DR3, interviewed 2016.
52. Danish Ministry of Culture, DR’s public service contract 2015–18.
53. DR’s organisation (organisational diagram), January 17 2017.
54. Hanne Bruun, *Dansk tv-satire: Underholdning med kant* [Danish TV satire: Entertainment with an edge], Books on Demand, 2011.
55. Gunhild Agger, *Dansk tv-drama: arvesølv og underholdning* [Danish TV drama: family silver and entertainment], Samfundslitteratur, 2005.
56. Nina Sahl, *Fjernsyn for børn: Vores fælles historie* [Television for children: Our common history], Auctories, 2013.
57. Erik Struve, managing editor at DR Ung, interviewed 2017.
58. Bruun, *Dansk tv-satire*, 2011, p. 155f.
59. Irene Strøyer, head of channel at DR3, interviewed 2016.
60. Martin Skovbjerg, director of *Anton 90*, interviewed 2017. Mads Kromann Andersen, editor at DR3, interviewed 2017.
61. Irene Strøyer, head of channel at DR3, interviewed 2016.
62. Martin Skovbjerg, director of *Anton 90*, interviewed 2017.
63. These numbers were provided by DR Media Research and they are rating estimates based on the two whole periods where *Anton 90* was available on their VOD catch-up service DRTV. It should be noted that the first episode had more exposure in terms of promotion and marketing compared to the following episodes.
64. Mads Kromann Andersen, editor at DR3, interviewed 2017.
65. Eva Novrup Redvall, *Writing and Producing Television Drama in Denmark*, 2013.
66. Jacob Katz Hansen, scriptwriter of *Anton 90*, interviewed 2017.
67. Eva Novrup Redvall, ‘Craft, Creativity, Collaboration and Connections: Educating Talent for Danish Television Drama Series,’ in Miranda Banks, Bridget Conon, and Vicky Mayer, eds, *Production Studies, The sequel! Cultural studies of global media industries*, Routledge, 2015, p. 86.
68. Kasper Tøstesen, head of digital at DR Ung, interviewed 2017.
69. Andersen, ‘Negotiating Creativity on a Small Budget,’ 2018a.
70. Syvertsen et al., *The Media Welfare State*, 2014.

71. See, for instance, Lowe and Bardoel, eds, *From Public Service Broadcasting to Public Service Media*, 2007; and Lowe and Steemers, eds, *Regaining the Initiative for Public Service Media*, 2011.
72. Sjöberg and Rydin, 'Transmedia Storytelling and a Young Audience,' 2013.
73. See, for instance, Karoline Fjellborg, 'SVT:s «Skam»-wannabe funkår, men har ingen humor' [SVT's SKAM-wannabe works, but lack humour], *Aftonbladet*, 5 March 2019; Anna Thodenius, 'Stor framgång för ungt drama baserat på målgruppsarbete' [Great progress for young drama based on audience insight], *viptv.svt.se*, 19 June 2019; and Tommy Nordlund, 'Nyheter för unga på publikens och plattformens vilkor' [News for young people on the audience's and platform's terms], *Nordvision.org*, 12 June 2019.

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