Reaching young audiences: Public Service Media on TikTok

Student Name: Iva Konstantinova
Student Number: 603683

Supervisor: Dr. Sergül Nguyen

Master Media Studies - Media & Business
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

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ABSTRACT

This study explores two public service media's TikTok profiles and video content directed at younger audiences – BBC's Newsround and DW's Stories. The contemporary media landscape has undergone numerous transitions and industrial disruptions brought by digitalization. The emergence of social media was no different, with platforms captivating audiences, which in turn have grown distant from legacy media. Facing the growing challenge of capturing and maintaining young audiences, public service media adopt various innovative practices to reinforce their legitimacy and functionality in a fragmented, digital-first environment, expanding their relevance through content distribution on third-party platforms. As external information conduits, platforms have been prioritized by young audiences, with TikTok becoming one of the most popular apps in recent times. Thus, this study explores how two European media organizations – DW and BBC balance between providing quality, informational content and adhering to TikTok logic, utilized for creative and algorithmic enhancement.

Adopting a qualitative comparative research approach, this study relies on content analysis and critical discourse analysis, respectively, applied to BBC and DW's TikToks and interpreting their public mission rhetorics. The findings from short-form video analysis revealed that DW Stories heavily prioritizes hard news reporting, providing extensive storytelling that is dominantly enhanced through various entertainment strategies. Moreover, DW's content is underscored by increased TikTok adoption, utilizing both creative and technological affordances to shape the organization's final product. Comparably, BBC Newsround prioritized soft news coverage, still sticking to extensive information provision. Differently from DW, when reporting on hard news, BBC avoided employing entertainment strategies as opposed to its soft news reports. Contrastingly to DW, Newsround represented limited platform logic, employing only a few content strategies.

Collectively, the two organizations situated impartiality at the basis of their public mission, with the BBC foregrounding its legacy expertise and competitive advantage in the media landscape to legitimize its function. Diversely, DW's unbiased reporting goal is discursively framed through cooperation, justifying its digital practices as a result of audience demands. BBC's acknowledgement of the growth and relevance of social media platforms for digital news reporting was complemented by repeated discursive resistance to platform dominance, revealing the confounding implications from the advent of digitalization and subsequent rise of technological platforms in the media market.

KEYWORDS: *PSM, TikTok, platformization, content strategy, public mission*

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1. Introduction

Digitalization has undeniably reshaped the contemporary media landscape, where public broadcasting serves as an integral sector that strives to put people first. Defined as publicly funded media organizations with editorial independence, their universal objective is to provide knowledge of current affairs while upholding precise social values, namely "universality, independence, excellence, accountability, content diversity access, and innovation" (European Broadcasting Union, 2012 in Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2021, p.9). The rise of digitalization, the subsequent changes in audiences' media consumption from passive to active, and the shifting market dynamics due to increased commercial competition have pushed professionals to re-evaluate the role of public broadcasting (Lowe & Bardoel, 2007, p.17; Milosavljević & Urbániková, 2025, p.26). Resultantly, Public Service Broadcasting's transition (PSB) into Public Service Media (PSM) came as a response from organizations showcasing their efforts to uphold their values and maintain their legitimacy, while extending into the digital world. This meant that organizations must embrace the multimedia context and come up with products that will keep them relevant to shifting consumption practices and private interests (Lowe & Bardoel, 2007, p.21).

One point of innovation for PSM was the adoption of new distribution channels to ensure content diversity and accessibility, inevitably tapping into social media platforms. The emergence of platformization gave access and control to third parties regarding how media content is made and spread (Dragomir, 2025, p.73). Citing Nieborg and Poell (2018), platformization describes how digital platforms and their economic, governmental, and infrastructural functions have influenced cultural practices, making them contingent on third-party commodification (p.4276). Thus, PSM content on such platforms is dependent on external technology that shapes its value (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4277). This bears complications for public media organizations due to their independent status, which has become increasingly challenged due to their clash with commercial competition and private interests in the digital media market (Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2021, p.23).

Platform power's rise has been a widely discussed topic for PSM because of the threats to perceived public value it triggers, but at the same time, the favorable opportunities it provides (Baldini et al., 2021, p.49; Martin, 2021, p. 9 in D'Arma et al., 2024, p.256). Drawing on Olsen et al. (2024), platform dependencies such as algorithms and datafication (p.2), as well as limited journalistic autonomy and business model reconsideration (Poell et al., 2023, p.1392), weaken PSM's legitimacy. Moreover, financial obstacles prevent innovation and competitive advantage in the ever-changing platform landscape (Martin, 2021, p.9 in D'Arma et al., 2024, p.256). At the same time, the proliferation of social media fulfills PSM's objectives to reach more audiences (Olsen et al., 2024, p. 2), which could still be difficult due to the content oversaturation provided by public and private news organizations and viewers' needs which are at the center of social media platforms, thus limiting direct access (Dragomir, 2025, p.75).

Naturally, platformization has not only influenced internal processes for PSM, such as production, but also external activities such as audience consumption (Dragomir, 2025, p. 75). Changing media consumption processes contribute to PSM challenges as academic sources have expressed younger viewers' growing disinterest towards PSM and alternative information sourcing (Dragomir, 2025; Lowe & Bardoel, 2007; Sehl, 2020). According to Sehl (2020), PSM news delivery among audiences in three European countries (Germany, France, UK) is of high quality and trustworthy, even for younger surveyed respondents (p.369). Yet, the research (Sehl, 2020, p.369) revealed that younger viewers are still not committed to using PSM sources, despite considering them as reliable. This tendency has only increased as the most recent report by Reuters (Newman et al., 2024) illuminates the declining relations between news organizations and younger audiences as they shift their attention to non-news content or subjective interpretations by social media content creators (p.10).

In line with this, short-form video content has become the main gateway to news for younger viewers (Newman et al.,2024, p.10). The front-running platform for this type of content is TikTok, which has overturned X (previously Twitter) as a news source (Newman et al.,2024, p.10). Among users, reasons for its continuous use cover the perception that "videos are more difficult to falsify" (Newman et al., 2024, p.16), the convenience of getting information when scrolling on a platform that is aware of the user's interests, and the opportunity to come across multiple viewpoints on the same topic and form your individual opinion (Newman et al., 2024, p.16). However, the emergence of sophisticated technology like artificial intelligence (AI) has accelerated deepfake production and misinformation, which are counterintuitive to the expressed benefits and an increased threat to digital journalism (Milosavljević & Urbániková, 2025, p.37; Newman et al., 2024, p.16). While these concerns have yet to be resolved, Newman and Cherubini (2025) anticipate that media organizations will put more effort and funds into reaching younger audiences on TikTok in 2025 (p.15).

To stay relevant, PSM must explore new options in digital distribution and bring innovation to their news organizations, as this is the only way to get younger viewers' attention (Sehl, 2020, p. 369). In the context of TikTok, PSM ought to navigate between virality and information quality to sustain its public mission. Currently, limited research has investigated PSM on TikTok, outlining a scarcity of information on this topic. With one identified source at the time of writing (Degen et al., 2024), PSM's TikTok activities have been researched from journalists' perspectives and not the organization (p.674). No research has focused exclusively on public media organizations' content strategies and how they participate in the current media landscape on TikTok through short-form videos, identifying a research gap. Following the previously outlined trends, researching PSM's activity on TikTok could provide novel insights into the complexity of upholding public remit whilst catering to younger audiences' changing news consumption practices under platformization. These implications underline this study's objectives, aiming to answer the following questions:

RQ: *How is PSM crafting its content to balance its public objectives and platform-determined engagement demands on TikTok for younger audiences?*

SQ1: *What content strategies are manifested in PSM channels, specifically DW Stories and BBC's Newsround?*

SQ2: *How do DW and BBC state their mission in organizational reports? Are these stated missions aligned with their TikTok content? If so, how?*

To answer these questions, this research will make use of a qualitative methods approach to investigate the TikToks posted on Deutsche Welle's Stories and BBC's Newsround channels through qualitative content analysis (QCA), focusing on whether and how news reporting is shaped by platform dynamics and catering to young audiences' demands. Relying on the theories of platformization (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) and infotainment (Brants & Neijens, 1998; Savolainen, 2022; Thussu, 2007, 2015) to assess content strategies under social media logic, this project will look into recent short-form video news coverage on the selected profiles to interpret how German and British PSM position themselves to uphold integrity in a virality-based digital environment.

As complementary data, the most recent policy reports of Deutsche Welle and BBC will be investigated through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to understand each organization's public objectives, their perception of platform dynamics, and whether these considerations are transferred into their TikTok content. Here, Hallin and Mancini's media systems framework (2004) will provide insight into institutions' organizational characteristics, providing a contextual outline for determining expressed editorial priorities and their relation to platform dynamics (p.87).

As established public media organizations worldwide, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Deutsche Welle (DW) make up this project's sample due to their popularity on the platform, having multiple channels as part of their platform presence. For this project and its interest in content for younger audiences, a specific focus will be placed on BBC's TikTok profile Newsround which is part of their CBBC network directed at young adults and children (Sherwin, 2023, para. 10). Similarly, DW's TikTok profile Stories (The World Unpacked) (Kaminski, 2023, para. 1) addresses younger user segments on the platform, therefore being relevant to this study.

1.1 Academic and Social Relevance

Digital innovations have overturned traditional practices for PSM, pushing them to reconsider content creation and distribution strategies to stay relevant and fulfill their public service remit. This study has significant academic relevance because it focuses on PSM practices in a platform-stratified environment, exploring TikTok as a popular but under-researched social medium in journalistic contexts. Previous studies have largely focused on commercial or digitally native news outlets and their activity on TikTok (see García-Ortega & García-Avilés, 2023; Hase et al., 2022; Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024; Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020; Zhao & Ye, 2025), presenting a research gap

for PSM's role. Building on this, available research rarely addresses media organizations' production processes, prioritizing journalist and executive perspectives but not the actual finished product (Røsok-Dahl & Ihlebæk, 2024, p.1238).

With distinct responsibilities as public organizations, PSM differentiates from private for-profit media organizations; therefore, a special emphasis on them will expand current understandings of platformization and its influence on media. Moreover, by following digital transformation's implications for PSM directed at younger audiences, this research contributes to the academic literature that addresses current challenges and evaluates practices taken by organizations stretched thin between generating viewership and revenue to stay relevant while remaining dedicated to their core democratic values. As Røsok-Dahl and Ihlebæk explain (2024), there are not enough academic insights into media innovation practices directed at the youth, especially when it comes to evaluating how media organizations cater to them (p.1242).

In line with this, this study bears social significance through its evaluation of PSM practices concentrated on younger audience engagement on social media. PSM's role in the current complex media logic, where news quality and trust are declining (Newman et al., 2024, p. 31), deserves critical attention to understand how organizations communicate their public mission in a commercially oriented digital environment so as to balance between maintaining their integrity and echoing social demands.

As attention is shifting to third-party platforms, this project will provide practical insights into the current practices and strategies of BBC and DW as established PSM, addressing how they handle distinct social media logic while actively trying to protect their public remit. Furthermore, this study sheds light on TikTok's influence on two different institutions' content creation and distribution practices, thus informing media professionals by considering the future adoption of short-form video formats in PSM. Correspondingly, this research bears academic contributions by looking at PSM's digital product and contrasting it to their stated public mission, investigating TikTok's under-researched context, and adopting a unique research angle through the comparison of two different data types.

Resultantly, this study builds on a growing body of literature that discusses how public organizations are addressing the challenges and opportunities brought by digitalization with a focus on platformization and its implications for content creation, production, and distribution that aims to inform society.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Public Service Media and Its Contemporary Challenges

Historically, Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) was developed as an initiative within European countries in which broadcasters were dedicated to delivering valuable content, typically categorized as one that informs, educates, and entertains the public in line with democratic principles (Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2021, p.9). These institutions differentiate from their commercial counterparts based on their operational characteristics. Specifically, PSM have a primary priority to "maximize utility for society" (Von Rimscha et al., 2025, p.201), with financial considerations being covered by state funding or through license fees (Napoli, 2025, p.101). On the contrary, private media's main objective is to generate profit, having fewer obligations to society.

PSM's established public service remit continues to be central in its operations today. However, as Rodríguez-Castro et al. (2021) note, the meaning of value has been growingly questioned due to its subjective interpretation and lack of exclusive definition (p. 8). As an essential provision of PSM functioning, the European Broadcasting Union (2012, in Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2021, p.9) has established a framework that takes us a step closer to understanding PSM remit. Specifically, universality, independence, excellence, diversity, accountability, and innovation make up the framework's core six principles and have been largely adopted by European public media organizations. Importantly, as Rodríguez-Castro et al. (2021) suggest, values are subjected to change, connected to and reflected by the media landscape and ongoing organizational shifts (p.12) (more in subsection 2.1.1).

Naturally, as technological capacities progressed, public broadcasting started to lose momentum, entering into a market that was more commercially oriented and with a larger competition brought by for-profit players quickly adopting digital innovations to appeal to societal demands (Lowe & Bardoel, 2007, p. 14). Originally, public service broadcasting encompassed only television and radio, yet challenged by rapid digitalization, PSB slowly started to evolve into the present Public Service Media concept, which adopts novel distribution channels (Donders, 2019, p.1014), with multi-platform participation becoming the norm. This change is what Doyle (2010) describes as media convergence in which broadcasters embrace the multi-platform opportunities brought by digital distribution, ultimately transforming their production practices to suit distinct formats and audiences (pp. 432-433).

The transition from PSB to PSM encapsulated all organizational, operational, and social practices of media institutions, setting the stage for challenges that they face even today – protecting their public legitimacy in a commercialized, ever-changing multi-media environment (Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2021, p.4). Drawing on Lowe and Bardoel (2007), the need for transition from public service broadcasting to an all-encompassing term 'media' comes from the necessity to replicate the

expectations of the current multimedia environment, its services and content must match the viewers' demands rather than be supplemental (p.9). Apart from television and radio, other distribution means gained equal importance due to the audience's increased interest (Donders, 2019, p.1014). This meant that broadcasters must depart from their "supply-driven culture" (Lowe & Bardoel, 2007) and adopt a structure that serves the public accordingly. Moreover, the authors maintain that such changes are triggered by audiences' evolving role, becoming an active partner that shapes PSM's practices (Lowe & Bardoel, 2007, p.17). Even more so, generational shifts in audience attention are also outlined by Bardoel and Lowe (2007), as younger audiences grew apart from traditional PSB offerings, making cross-media adoption practices that much more necessary (p.21). Still, PSB's expansion into PSM came with the tension of keeping up with public obligations and being distinctive from commercial actors to maintain legitimacy (Lowe & Bardoel, 2007, p.22). These challenges led to public media institutions shifting their perceived value, not in terms of the audiences they generate, but based on their capacity to provide social improvement (Baldini et al., 2021, p.47).

Since the publishing of Lowe and Bardoel's work in 2007, PSM have undergone significant changes, which Baldini et al., (2021) refer to as paradigm shifts, first embracing the abovementioned value reorientation towards audience inclusivity and mutuality to combat commercial competitors, and most recently, PSM's entrance into (social) media platform use as another paradigm shift (p. 48). Increasingly, PSM are converging to the multi-platform approach, developing their own on-demand services while also participating in others (Dragomir, 2025, p.85). Furthermore, product innovation in PSM has covered not only distribution strategies shifting their priorities to digital-first but also adopting new media genres that simultaneously incorporate institutions' informational objectives into new engaging formats (Von Rimscha et al., 2025, p.204).

Despite these developments, some of the challenges brought by Lowe and Bardoel (2007) remain relevant today. Even more so, innovation strategies have become both an opportunity and an obstacle for PSM in tackling these challenges. To briefly discuss, social media with its large audiences and particularly strong engagement from younger social groups, resembles a favorable environment for PSM and a potential solution to their declining viewership (Dragomir, 2025, pp.88-89). However, it is also available to for-profit competition and alternative voices, therefore becoming a conflicting resource that can harm institutions' legitimacy.

Still, PSM's responsibility to cater to audiences everywhere and encourage civil participation is essential to avoid public scrutiny. This persistence underlines the complexity of these debates and the necessity of exploring PSM in both academic and practical contexts. This study builds on the discussion of these challenges by following BBC's Newsround and DW Stories' current content strategies and analyzing the organizations' reports with a focus on the connection between digital media practices and their public mission for younger audiences.

2.1.1 Media Systems and the PSM Governance

Hallin and Mancini's (2004) media systems comparison framework is a foundational inquiry into the ways systemic conditions around governance, funding, and regulation can alter the decision-making and execution processes of media organizations (p.21). The typology branches into three distinct models - the Liberal, the Democratic-Corporatist, and the Polarized Pluralist (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p.87), defined by four central dimensions, namely media market structures, political parallelism, journalistic professionalism, and state interference (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p.21). Diving deeper into Hallin and Mancini's models (2004), market structure represents the circulation of the press both for-profit and public (p.25), political parallelism looks after the influence of political parties over editorial practices (p.27), journalistic professionalism exemplifies certain standards that need to be upheld by professionals in the field (p.35), and lastly, state interference evaluates the government's role in regulatory, financial or legislative operations (p.43).

Collectively, the combination of these four dimensions makes up three typologies, with the most relevant for this study being Germany under the Democratic-Corporatist model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p.143) and the UK, which belongs to the Liberal Model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 198). Traditionally, the Democratic-Corporatist model has distinguished political parallelism, together with significant journalistic professionalism established on strong work standards and a shared conception of public interests (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pp.144-145). Moreover, German media organizations resembling this typology have low institutional dependency but prominent state regulation, particularly for public service media (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p.160). Differently, the UK's Liberal model is characterized by strong market logic brought by early-stage commercial development and minimal government intervention (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pp.198-199). It rests on established journalistic professionalism and political objectivity, with less institutional involvement, allowing for blooming market initiatives that bring competitive advantage (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p.232). From this, it is apparent that a central difference between the two typologies lies in the distinct market strategies and variance in the prioritization of social values, where the former is more embraced in the UK context, and the latter is central for German organizations.

Still, the validity of Hallin and Mancini's framework has been questioned in scholarship. Later interpretations by the authors (Hallin & Mancini, 2016, p.164) and individual works (Mancini, 2020, p.5761) that focus on the implications brought by the digital age discuss the adaptation of old dimensions such as state intervention and political parallelism under technological shifts (Mancini, 2020, pp.5766-5767), suggesting that digital media could intensify or weaken their relevance. These insights reflect the general position that "media systems are not static" (Hallin & Mancini, 2016, p.167) and must be continually altered to fit new media ecologies (Mancini, 2020, p.5761 in Labio-Bernal et al., 2024, p.2). Even more so, the framework has been tested in academic analyses (Hallin & Mancini, 2016, p.160) and expanded from three into four typologies, including one for Southern

media organizations. Similarly, later propositions to split the Democratic Corporatist model into two separate models because of country-specific differences (Büchel et al., 2016, in Hallin & Mancini, 2016, p.160) underline the model's fluidity triggered by ever-changing media dynamics.

Despite surrounding debates, Hallin and Mancini's work (2004) remains valuable to this research because its explanatory significance allows for a comprehensive outline of structural media differences in the selected cases and interpretation of findings in this study (Mattoni & Ceccobelli, 2018, p.4). Systemic conditions based on the Democratic-Corporatist and Liberal models contextually sketch out how DW and BBC discursively navigate platform dynamics. Because of the inherent differences in market logic, regulations, and funding models, prioritizations, in terms of editorial choices, may differentiate between the two, thus deepening the results' interpretation.

According to Cornia et al. (2019, p.694) and later Sehl et al. (2021, p.1392), different funding models and organizational legacies influence digital strategies and platform approaches, altering editorial processes. Similarly, Neff and Pickard (2021) indicate that there are five system models for public service media worldwide (p.620) that are largely determined by funding levels, regulation, and established democratic principles. Importantly for this research, the authors (Neff & Pickard, 2021) have found that "well-funded and institutionally secure public media" (p.619) positively influence public interactions regarding politics and strengthen democratic values. In fact, it is suggested that when there are significant funds in PSM, there is a better opportunity to attract audiences (Neff & Pickard, 2021, p.619). The Democratic-Corporatist model in their analysis departs from the original model on the premise of its enhanced regulatory practices that contrast it from "state-administered systems" (Neff & Pickard, 2021, p.621), which are at the basis of its original conceptualization. Therefore, establishing various funding arrangements can weaken political pressures and provide better stability for media organizations (Neff & Pickard, 2021, pp. 620-621). While this study will not investigate funding models or regulatory practices in detail, accounting for the difference in media systems will provide context for the interpretation of the public mission stated in the selected organizational reports. In turn, this will be useful to interpret how content strategies are shaped by organizational principles.

2.2 Platformization and its impact on PSM

2.2.1 Origin and Conceptualization

Platformization is defined as "the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of online platforms into web and application systems" (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p.4276) that foster cultural products, having direct effects on their creation and dissemination. Emerging as a prominent concept in political economy and business studies, platformization discusses how contemporary digital platforms are not simple technological tools but functioning infrastructures holding power over the content that they facilitate (Helmond, 2015, p.1; Van Dijck, 2020, p.2802;

Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4276). This power is manifested in the platforms' role as a mediator between the producer and the consumer of a product in the digital space and the benefits that come from this position (Helmond, 2015, p.8; Poell et al., 2023, p.1392). Namely, technological giants like Google and Meta have developed significant audiences that use their infrastructures, benefiting from tracking user data (Helmond, 2015, p.1) and other "circulation efforts" (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4276) that generate profit from businesses and users wanting to get to these large audiences. In turn, users invest in the platforms either with funds or through data to participate and show their content, becoming dependent on platforms (Van Dijck, 2020, p.2802).

Resultantly, cultural products become contingent on these platforms and reveal the emergence of multi-sided markets, where technological companies display control over the relations between users, profiting from both content distributors and content consumers (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4277). Products become dependent on platforms not just economically but also creatively and infrastructurally (Helmond, 2015, p.8). Engagement metrics and algorithmic insights can influence cultural producers to optimize their content in line with platforms (Van Dijck, 2020, p.2809). Therefore, as data feedback shifts, cultural producers must constantly reinvent their offerings, actively adapting to commodification (Helmond, 2015, p.8). Platformization displays how social media platforms like TikTok hold greater implications for communication practices for both creatives and consumers, beyond surface-level implications like entertainment.

2.2.2 Influence on PSM

Academic research on platformization effects on journalism has extensively explored what the abovementioned processes mean for news creation and distribution. Referencing Poell et al. (2023), there is growing concern over technological companies' power over news publishers' digital access, which scholars have termed as platform dependency (p. 1392). The asymmetrical relations between platforms and editors accelerate this dependency because social media platforms' core purpose is not to be spaces for news organizations' content (Poell et al., 2023, p.1392). However, they are valuable spaces for news outlets due to the massive audiences they facilitate (Olsen et al., 2024, p.3).

Similarly, platforms' algorithmic power is discussed as having the potential to intensify publishers' tendency to alter editorial practices according to data-driven audience demands (Poell et al., 2023, p.1393). These considerations are even more striking today due to reported initiatives by technological companies to decrease news visibility on their platforms (Newman et al., 2024, p.11). Such instances illustrate platform dependency's negative implications for media organizations whose aim is to inform and educate people.

Moreover, infrastructural power over news publishers is also manifested in their monetization, as platforms profit from news outlets' investment in targeted advertising (Poell et al., 2023, p.1394). Since not all media organizations have the financial capacity to compete in digital

markets, these processes can harm not only publishers' operational stability but also users' access to multiple perspectives on current affairs. These complexities could be especially critical to public service media, whose mission is centered around the informational value they provide.

Drawing on Dragomir's (2025) PSM assessment in platform environments, three influential dimensions were identified: structural conditions, internal capacity, and external engagement (p.73). This framework was developed to evaluate the threats and opportunities for public media institutions based on the EBU's six established values. Structural conditions involve how funding and governance intertwine with platformization, internal capacity resembles the opportunities and threats provided by platformization for content distribution and creation, and lastly, external engagement covers how platformization could potentially enhance or weaken this process (see Dragomir & Túñez López, 2024, pp. 611-612).

While the latter two dimensions are the most relevant to this study, it is essential to point out that governance and funding as structural conditions are influential for operational practices such as content development, which could then directly affect audience engagement (Dragomir, 2025, p.75). This is also reflected in Sehl et al.'s (2021) comparative analysis across six European countries (including Germany and the UK), which argues that differences in funding and organizational background influence content distribution types between for-profit and public service media (p.1392). For broadcasters, who typically do not rely on the generated profit from their social media publishing, the necessity for digital exposure is explained as a practice that will ensure their legitimization (Sehl et al., 2021, p.1392), which is secured when certain values are upheld. Despite the pressure for monetization being lower for PSM news outlets online, significant investment is contributed to their platform presence (Sehl et al., 2021, p.1391). These insights are important for PSM's report analysis because they provide context with which to interpret expressed attitudes towards platform participation.

Going back to Dragomir's (2025) identified threats and opportunities, one of the biggest challenges is the increased competition from for-profit players in digital environments and the ethical concern over trend adoption to stay relevant (p.86). Similarly to Nieborg and Poell's research (2018), editorial practices are threatened and could become a subject of increased scrutiny for PSM, expected to provide quality content (Dragomir, 2025, p.87). Similarly, audience asymmetry occupying digital platforms is both a pro and con for external engagement (Dragomir, 2025, p.87), due to the PSM's mission to cater to all audiences (Sehl et al., 2024, p.1391). Digital platforms' worldwide coverage can help organizations get to underserved communities, yet aging audiences could be isolated because of difficulties with navigating technology (Dragomir, 2025, pp.88-89). Regardless, the framework suggests that PSM's participation in platform environments can strengthen the perceived information quality and serve as a public mission enhancer.

These insights suggest that the clash between delivering public value and staying on top of digital developments is not new but ongoing and difficult to resolve at once. Early research on PSM

social media distribution developed by Bonini and Sellas (2014) on two organizations from Italy and Spain and their Twitter adoption for radio and television promotion showed that initial platform use was just complementary to central broadcasting services (p. 142). Years later, similarly, Donders et al.'s (2019) cross-country investigation of four public broadcasters positioned organizations' tapping into social media content dissemination as an "additional channel to reach audiences" (p. 1022) but differently recognized this practice as posing ethical challenges similar to the above-listed.

Most recently, Olsen et al. (2024) have explored the paradoxes of protecting public service media's legitimacy in platform environments through policy analysis and expert interviews across Europe, Canada, and Australia, with a sample that covers 10 years (p.7). The researchers found that PSM organizations' hardship in maintaining audiences on their traditional channels and subsequent social media adoption accelerates platforms' power by converting user insights into commodities. Thus, platforms counteract PSM legitimacy as independent of any external influences (Olsen et al., 2024, p.13). Organizations adopt conflicting discourse regarding their relationship with platforms, altering between defining them "as friends and foes" (Olsen et al., 2024, p.8), either utilizing them as places for innovation and audience reach, or enhancing their public significance as "active counterweights to platforms' negative impact in the media landscape" (Olsen et al., 2024, p.8). While this research does not involve the UK or Germany in the analysis, it provides relevant insights into the disharmony between institutional perceptions and real platformization implications, suggesting that policy reports serve to reinforce public media's value for society but do not necessarily reflect practices beyond the text (Olsen et al., 2024, p.8). Taking into consideration these findings, this study will contribute by potentially building the bridge that is missing between institutional arguments for upholding value in platform environments and their implementation into present content dissemination strategies.

Based on what has been discussed so far, it is not unreasonable to consider that the platform types can also have specific implications for PSM. Namely, in Bonini and Sellas' (2014) case, Twitter's text-based interface accommodated a self-referential strategy, where audiences could be redirected to the original source and thus limit, or at least, equate power between the platform and the creator (p.141). Today, with TikTok and its short-form video affordances, redirection to external channels and traditional PSM resources is difficult and even unrealistic because the platform's core functionality is based on providing information in an audiovisual format that is more flexible than text. In a way, this increases platform dependency because of PSM's limited opportunity to redirect audiences and the increased expectation to conform to TikTok's entertainment purpose. Resultantly, further investigation of TikTok content becomes even more essential in times of increased use and as a direct illuminator of the challenges listed above.

This overview served the task of introducing how scholarship has addressed platformization influence on cultural production with a specific focus on PSM practices shaped by digital platforms and the current challenges and opportunities resulting from the two's symbiosis. While a central focus

was placed on platform power's organizational and social implications for public media institutions (Dragomir, 2025, p.73) as many sources covered the complexity of balancing between public mission protection and digital innovation in competitive markets (Olsen et al. 2024, p.8; Sehl et al., 2021, p.1391), most academic resources adopt a macro-level, institutional lens (Dragomir, 2025, p.73), focalizing executive perspectives or policies (Donders et al., 2019, p.1022; Olsen et al., 2024; Sehl et al., 2021, p.1391), without accounting for the actual product seen on people's screens.

Undoubtedly, the studies provide valuable knowledge on the ways platforms can influence PSM's funding and structure (Sehl et al., 2021, p.1391), together with editorial practice (Donders et al., 2019, p.1012; Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p.4279), yet they have disregarded closer examination into present-day strategies brought by platformization. Furthermore, platformization's impact on demographically based content production has received less interest from PSM-concerned academia, especially when it comes to highly entertainment-driven visual social media platforms like TikTok (Røsok-Dahl & Ihlebæk, 2024, p.1242).

2.3 Young Audience's News Engagement: Trends and Implications for PSM

2.3.1 Attracting the Youth

In this chapter's previous section, technological advancements that have disrupted operational processes for public service media were discussed. However, these changes cannot be solely attributed to platform shifts, as the users inhabiting digital spaces are integral to technological companies' growing power. The urgency for PSM's digital innovation was partially triggered by the audience's shifting media consumption preferences, whose transition to increased technological use influenced information-gathering practices (Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2021, p.6).

For young audiences, news access happens largely online and on social media (Galan et al., 2019, p. 4; Newman et al., 2023, p.10). Citing Røsok-Dahl and Ihlebæk's (2024) systematic review of youth-centered news consumption, young audiences are commonly described as having "disloyal and unpredictable behavior" (Røsok-Dahl & Ihlebæk, 2024, p.1232) towards news content due to the normalized flexibility and abundance of choice brought by technology, making their habits more difficult to organize (p.1239). Resultantly, the authors (Røsok-Dahl & Ihlebæk, 2024) describe a changing dynamic brought about by social media, which delivers news to audiences without them actively seeking out information (p.1239). Identical insights have been brought by another academic article that investigates young people's expectations of news content, suggesting that the accelerated reliance on social media has reversed roles as news content finds its viewers (Frei et al., 2024, p.103). Incidental exposure has been further backed up by Reuters' exclusive report on youth news practices (Galan et al., 2019, p.4), together with their latest report on digital news (Newman et al., 2024), highlighting the social media's ongoing relevance for news consumption (p.4). Collectively,

incidental exposure could have positive attributions for media organizations, whose digital presence may benefit from users not necessarily searching to be informed (Frei et al., 2024, p. 103; Røsok-Dahl & Ihlebæk, 2024, p. 1239).

However, increased social media use for news consumption is also believed to have negative implications for media outlets, related to increased avoidance and disinterest in news (Newman et al., 2024, p. 26). Younger audiences who perceive news as boring, negative, and overwhelming have opted for selective news evasion (Autenrieth et al., 202, p. 1171; Newman et al., 2024, p. 26), pushing media outlets to rethink their practices. While these considerations are valid when accounting for news liberalization through digital distribution, Røsok-Dahl and Ihlebæk (2024) suggest otherwise, that the youth are not ignorant of current affairs because of the opportunity to get information from multiple sources (p. 1239). These conflicting insights reveal that the complex relations between users, media organizations, and digital innovation cannot be isolated from one another.

From this perspective, viewership power also poses challenges to quality, which, when tied to current technological advancements, weakens established media organizations' authority (Røsok-Dahl & Ihlebæk, 2024, p. 1040). Based on this, changing expectations regarding news content creation and dissemination could sway editorial choices. Relying on Frei et al.'s (2024) research into Swiss young news consumption patterns, it is presented that content-specific consumption trends involve preferences towards entertainment and audiovisual properties, as well as heightened acceptance of novel distribution practices (p. 114). Complementary findings by Hendrickx (2024) suggest that young audiences appreciate unique formats such as short stories or video content that explains information in a digestible way (p. 10). With this, Newman et al. (2024) concluded that value in news consumption is not attributed only to the content's informational capacity but also to the inclusion of user-specific needs, one being entertainment (p. 44).

2.3.2 Implications for PSM and prior research insights

Capturing and keeping audiences that are increasingly fragmenting due to the resource abundance in online spaces is no easy task (Newman et al., 2024, p.11; Rodríguez-Castro, 2021,p 8; Sehl, 2020, p.369). As platforms have undertaken new strategies to decrease news exposure to users guided by developments in AI and growing concerns about misinformation (Newman et al., 2024, p.11), news consumption on platforms and changing audience expectations hold various positive and negative implications for public service media.

Since one of public media organizations' main pillars is the capacity to cater to all audiences, also known as universality (Rodríguez-Castro, 2021, p. 6), the necessity to be digitally active increases to reinforce these institutions' legitimacy as socially beneficial. Even more so, scholarship suggests that it is this established integrity that has left a positive impression on younger audiences about legacy media (Sehl, 2020, pp. 368-369), often describing them as credible in comparison to for-profit players. However, young audiences' disloyalty to media outlets resembles a threat since mere

positive impressions may not be good enough to sustain PSM relevance in the current media landscape (Røsok-Dahl & Ihlebæk, 2024, p.1239).

The balance between market-driven and publicly beneficial journalism has been a longstanding dilemma in the industry, with financial and commercial benefits directly contradicting social understanding achievements (McManus, 1992, p. 205). As technological and market developments progressed, the business side of journalism undoubtedly accelerated this duality with research increasingly focusing on journalists' role and editorial decision-making (Nelson, 2021, p. 2353; Degen et al., 2024, p. 690) influenced by social media metrics and the quantification of success which could persuade media organizations to prioritize what audiences want but do not necessarily need. This dichotomy between shareability (Degen et al., 2024, p. 690) and utility in journalism (McManus, 1992, p. 202) undoubtedly affects PSM, especially online, where competition for attention could override traditional media values (Degen et al., 2024, p. 667). Thus, while PSM must consider audience preferences and implement strategies that will alleviate the growing threat of media institutions being discarded (Rodríguez-Castro, 2021, p. 6), the implications of market-driven journalism should be accounted for.

Outlining previous research into youth's news consumption practices, focusing on PSM, Autenrieth et. al's investigation (2021) puts forward the preference for shorter content that has both informational and entertainment properties (p.120). Moreover, content personalization triggered by platforms' algorithmic affordances is favorable to young viewers who prefer to engage with content that resembles their interests (Autenrieth et al., 2021, p. 119). However, young audiences' unique media consumption practices are a threat and an opportunity for public service institutions as users perceive their credibility but do not actively search for it (Autenrieth et al., 2021, p. 121). Sehl's (2020) cross-country survey on audiences' PSM perspectives, similarly, presents that quality and informational properties are central to PSM content's positive perceptions (p. 366), yet, they are considered as less entertaining (p. 366), limiting the youth's interest in their services (p. 369). Based on the two studies (Autenrieth et al., 2021, p. 123; Sehl, 2020, p. 369), to get the youth's attention, PSM should put more effort into being accessible and discoverable on social media platforms where young viewers are, delivering content that matches their preferences for information and entertainment.

The main takeaways from this section portray the importance of audiences' news perceptions and the subsequent influence it has on editorial choices. Understanding how the youth consumes information on current affairs is critical not only to evaluate current practices in news creation but also to project future transitions and potential disruptions of news production (Røsok-Dahl & Ihlebæk, 2024, p. 1129; Sehl, 2020, p. 369). The same challenge seems to be reiterated in scholarship; continuous disengagement with young audiences risks decreasing public media organizations' legitimacy (Rodríguez-Castro, 2021,p. 8; Olsen et al., 2024, p. 13). Tying this to the platform complexities in the previous section, young audiences' evolving consumption practices require further

investigation into how PSM crafts information for digital spaces, increasingly dominated by entertainment-first logic.

2.4 News production for TikTok: digital infotainment's rise

This study investigates the emergence of a new dominant platform among young audiences and public news organizations' publications on it. TikTok is one of the most popular platforms among young generations (Newman, 2022, p. 6). Reuters's Digital News Report outlines that TikTok's relevance for news consumption has been steadily growing in comparison to previous years (Newman et al., 2024, p. 12). This is largely attributed to audiovisual formats' significant traction and short-form video content (Newman et al., 2024, p. 12). Interestingly, videos have become more popular due to beliefs that they are more trustworthy but also based on broader news consumption shifts (Newman et al, 2024, p. 16). Tying this to the previous section's "news find me" phenomenon (Frei et al., 2024, p. 103; Røsok-Dahl & Ihlebæk, 2024, p. 1239), media organizations' TikTok adoption seems even more reasonable.

2.4.1 News on TikTok: Trends, practices, and considerations for PSM

One of the earliest academic insights on TikTok adoption from news publishers discusses how its social media logic extends beyond infrastructure and into media distribution processes (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020, p. 1718). Analyzed content strategies of selected public and for-profit media organizations posting on TikTok, revealed that editorial choices were shaped by "characteristics and aesthetics" (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020, p. 1729) typical for the platform, as well as its technological affordances, such as editing features.

Similarly, García-Ortega & García-Avilés (2023) discuss journalistic practice reshaping under social media-influenced news consumption habits with a special focus on TikTok as a pool for young audiences (p. 185). The authors investigated whether novel storytelling practices, such as the comedy mixture with informational sources, follow traditional journalistic principles or reinvent them. Resultantly, viral journalism underlines news distribution strategies on TikTok, implying that content shareability on the platform is dependent on the visual properties, sounds, and hashtags displayed (García-Ortega & García-Avilés, 2023, p. 189). These specificities reflect the ways information is communicated, with some styles involving greater infotainment use - the symbiosis between information and entertainment. However, the researchers maintain that traditional journalistic standards are not erased.

Another recent analysis suggests that media organizations adapt their content to platform logic (Zhao & Ye, 2025, p. 666). The authors outline current trends in editorial choices that resemble viral journalism, including the use of audio and infotainment-based reporting to keep audiences engaged (p. 682). In line with the previous, old journalistic standards are woven into novel strategies

shaped by platform logic, representing an undeniable shift in news consumption brought by digital innovation and audience demands.

Contrastingly, Hendrickx and Vázquez-Herrero's (2024) most recent TikTok news analysis departs from the premise that the platform is largely used for entertainment purposes, suggesting that a significant amount of sampled news contained informational over solely entertaining properties (p. 1065). Still, the investigation into the balance of content adoption and journalistic norms concluded that the visual and rhetorical strategies in the content were TikTok-specific (Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024, p. 1062), featuring on-screen journalists who delivered current affairs in a digestible way (Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024, p. 1064). Moreover, platform affordances were utilized by publishers using in-app effects, audio, and stickers, signaling the content's nativeness as opposed to it being repurposed from other formats (Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024, p. 1067). Identical findings concluded the research of Wirz and Zai (2025), which underlines that media organizations are influenced by platform logic (p. 17). As a central takeaway, the authors (Wirz & Zai, 2025) maintain that news is not just passively distributed to platforms but actively informed by their specificities, resembling the paradigm shift present in this chapter (pp. 1067-1068).

While research concentrating specifically on public service media is scarce, Degen et al.'s (2024) inquiry into German journalists' perspectives working in public media institutions that post on TikTok, supports the abovementioned content adaption in line with platform specifics, suggesting that journalists utilize strategies that are shaped by current trends and audience demands (p. 688). However, there is an enhanced emphasis on maintaining the established public mandate to protect PSM integrity (Degen et al., 2024, p. 688). Connecting this to the abovementioned discussion on the balance between market dynamics and publicly beneficial journalism, Degen et. al's contributions reveal that German PSM journalists acknowledge the changing values of quality journalism triggered by social media, aiming to balance tradition (e.g. rationality and accuracy) with newly established values like entertainment and shareability (Degen et al., 2024, p. 691).

The abovementioned shifts in editorial choices and news production practices on TikTok illuminate broader changes in journalism discussed by scholars since the globalization of media. Specifically, infotainment's reoccurrence in this overview hints at a favorable theoretical angle from which to explore how public service media are also crafting content on TikTok.

2.4.2 Infotainment

The concept of infotainment represents the convergence between information and entertainment in communication repertoires (Savolainen, 2022, p. 956). Dating back to the 1980s, the term was central to communication and political studies, greatly relevant to journalism and its evolution from traditional news reporting practices (Wirz & Zai, 2025, p. 2). Drawing on Thussu (2007), entertainment's emergence into informational practices has been a long tradition in the media, struggling between upholding moral standards and having prominent positions in increasingly

competitive markets (p. 16). Originating from the US, the first example of the mix between informational and entertaining content was the penny newspaper, which reported human-interest stories, delivered in an easy-to-understand style (Brants & Neijens, 1998, p. 336; Thussu, 2007, p. 2, 2015, p. 17). As this phenomenon progressed, it was imported to European media organizations and grew prominent in newspapers and broadcasting (Brants, 1998, p. 321; Thussu, 2015, p. 26).

The advent of digitalization was no different as infotainment-based communication reached more audiences through online publishing, solidifying its relevance in contemporary editorial practices (Thussu, 2007, p. 3). Social media platforms like TikTok that facilitate digital news dissemination and are known for their entertaining properties exemplify real-life instances of the ongoing hybrid turn in media. Before we get into what this means for PSM, it is valuable to outline the concept's key theoretical dimensions.

Infotainment is broadly identified as the intersection between "entertainment and serious information" (Savolainen, 2022, p. 956) in a media product. The concept departs from traditional binary classifications in news creation, such as soft and hard news, and the idea that factual information cannot be entertaining (Savolainen, 2022, p. 956). Infotainment symbolizes journalism's hybrid turn (Savolainen, 2022, p. 954) by focusing on the transition from strictly factual reporting to practices that include "emotionally charged elements" (Thussu, 2007, p. 6) to resonate closer with audiences. Resultantly, in scholarship, infotainment is an ambiguous concept (*Infotainment*, 2008, p. 336) having no standardized framework and contrasting academic interpretations (Savolainen, 2022, p. 956).

The earliest attempts to conceptualize infotainment focused on disapproving attitudes towards the term as representing news quality's decline, with a concrete divide between rationality and emotionality (Savolainen, 2022, p. 960). Later, more analytical approaches were developed, starting with the infotainment scale by Brants and Neijens (1998, p. 151). This framework evaluates media content "on a continuum with two poles resembling informational and entertaining sources" (Brants & Neijens, 1998, p. 152). The informational side covered hard news and political affairs consistent in media programs, while the entertaining side entailed soft news related to pleasure and lifestyle (Brants & Neijens, 1998, p. 152). Furthermore, this continuum was also applied to the "topic, style and format characteristics" (Brants & Neijens, 1998, p. 153) of programs where differentiation was again based on the dichotomy between informational (e.g., serious reporting style, objective tone, etc.) and entertaining properties (e.g., emotionally-laden communication, etc.). Based on Brants and Neijens's model (1998), infotainment is not static but nuanced depending on the production format (p. 152).

This scale was foundational for other conceptualizations of the term, namely Reinemann et al.'s work (2012, cited in Savolainen, 2022, p. 962), which synthesized the abovementioned criteria by focusing on the hardness and softness of various news features (e.g., topic, theme, style). Differently here, the author also prioritized focus – "aspects or events that are emphasized" (Reinemann et al., 2012 in Savolainen, 2022, p. 962) to signal the topic's multidimensionality.

Another framework by Pelzer and Raemy (2020, cited in Savolainen, 2022, p. 956) also supports infotainment's varying degrees through aesthetic content and news values investigation (p. 962), which together closely resemble the previous two models.

Outlining these conceptualizations helps to understand the concept's flexibility in terms of its application to media content. A very recent conceptualization by Wirz and Zai (2025), which focuses on infotainment's applicability to TikTok news, borrows from the abovementioned models and Graber (1994), evaluating the degree of information provided even when there are entertaining features (pp.5-6). Based on this, the authors (Wirz & Zai, 2025, p. 8) outline a three-part framework that measures infotainment based on the relevance of the topic (hard vs. soft news), information richness, and entertainment degree (see Wirz & Zai, 2025, pp. 8-10). Being TikTok-focused, this framework brings unique value to this study.

The undisputable blurring of boundaries between news' objective informational capacities and humorous, emotional hybrids results in a potential threat to perceived newsmaking seriousness. Drawing on Thussu (2007), news tabloidization triggered by infotainment has been seriously disputed due to concerns over replacing content that enhances social values with sensationalist matter (p. 2). Moreover, infotainment's historical take-off during times of growing competition brought by for-profit media accelerated journalism's commercialization (Thussu, 2015, p. 33), directly opposing public media organizations' social principles (Thussu, 2007, p. 3). Despite apprehensions, adopting infotainment in PSM is inevitable if institutions want to keep up with audiences and stay in competitive positions (Thussu, 2007, p. 6).

3. Method

This study investigates BBC and DW's news reporting for younger audiences on TikTok, focusing on video content strategies and organizational reports. This chapter will outline the selection and analysis of appropriate materials to fulfill this research's objectives.

This project relies on a multi-method qualitative research approach to evaluate two data types, namely short-form audiovisual content on TikTok and textual data from organizational reports, combining content analysis and critical discourse analysis. Respectively, adopting a qualitative research approach is ideal when investigating data involving personal and social meanings (Schreier, 2012, p. 21). Due to its interpretative nature, qualitative research is useful when looking into sources that are informationally rich and contextually embedded (Flick, 2018, p. 6; Schreier, 2012, p. 22). Importantly, qualitative research is "case-oriented" (Schreier, 2012, p. 25) because it approaches data holistically by exploring the phenomena entirely rather than looking into certain variables. Thus, it allows for comprehensive, in-depth inquiries into selected sources.

Firstly, qualitative content analysis will be applied to short-form TikTok videos to investigate utilized content strategies of rich audiovisual formats systematically, but with a specific focus on youth engagement, necessary to answer the research question. Secondly, critical discourse analysis will be performed to interpret each medium's organizational perspectives under a distinct theoretical context, triangulated with TikTok findings. Since this project comparatively investigates BBC and DW and their editorial and organizational principles online, a qualitative route is suitable to provide exhaustive insights under a specific context, accounting for various interpretations of a socially relevant subject.

3.1. Research Design

3.1.1 QCA

Qualitative content analysis (QCA) "is a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material" (Schreier, 2012, p. 1), using a coding framework in which the selected information is categorized. QCA is a method used for data whose meaning is not straightforward but requires interpretation. It is useful when wanting to outline the main takeaways from large amounts of data, still sticking to your research's specific angle (Schreier, 2012, p. 3). Furthermore, QCA could be applied to various data types from textual to visual, and combined (Schreier, 2012, p. 3) Based on this, QCA is a suitable method for analyzing PSM content strategies on TikTok, allowing it to describe the meaning of varying digital editorial choices with a contextual focus on platformization and its tension with public service mission.

The method's systematic approach centralizes the same steps for different selected materials, ensuring consistency (Schreier, 2012, p. 6). After choosing a research question and selecting

appropriate materials, a crucial step in performing QCA is code frame development, consisting of various categories and subcategories that will inform our interpretation. Drawing on Boeije (2010), "a code is a label that depicts the core topic of a segment" (p. 95); it is also a way to find and focus only on aspects within different data sets (Schreier, 2012, p. 59). As the authors suggest (Boeije, 2010, p. 95; Schreier, 2012, p. 7), a codebook can involve both concept-driven and data-driven categories, where the former categorizations are based on theoretical underpinnings and the latter emerge during the research phase.

Subsequently, the research material, also known as a unit of analysis (Schreier, 2012, p. 130), must be allocated to one subcategory but could be coded within multiple categories as long as they interpret different meanings (Schreier, 2012, p. 133). After the pilot testing, the coding book is revised, and the rest of the material is coded.

3.1.2 CDA

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a method useful to evaluate how meaning is produced through language and text (Tonkiss, 1998, p. 245). Having originated from critical linguistics (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 2-3), CDA looks at language as a social construction and a tool that is shaped by and shapes social practices (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011, p. 3). One of its central capacities is to explain how discourse informs power relations, unfolding hidden assumptions and ideas that organize the social world (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 5; Tonkiss, 1998, p. 247).

In comparison to QCA, CDA is less systematic but just as concerned, if not more, with the surrounding social context in which discursive practices are performed. Citing Tonkiss (1998), "discourse analysis aims to analyze language use in its larger social context" (p. 249) because it considers aspects beyond speaking, such as the social setting, power relations among participants, and even gender inequalities. Differently from qualitative content analysis, which perceives reality as inherent in texts and is generally more descriptive (Schreier, 2012, p. 47), this method is found on constructivist principles, suggesting that discursive choices actively develop meaning rather than describing what is already present.

This main difference also defines the utilization of two distinct methods in this study. Analyzing organizational reports with CDA will not only describe PSM's public mission as a quality information provider online but will also outline how their discursive choices inform their role in a complex media environment. Resultantly, this will potentially reveal how certain editorial practices, found from the content analysis, aim to solidify PSM missions for digital audiences. Therefore, CDA is used for complementary purposes and to bridge the gap between organizational references and actual practices, an inquiry that is missing from academic research (Røsok-Dahl & Ihlebæk, 2024).

3.2 Sample

This study's objective is to look into how PSM craft their content strategies on the social media platform TikTok, specifically directed at younger audiences. To successfully fulfill these objectives, this research employs purposive sampling with case selection following specific criteria. Firstly, BBC and DW were chosen as samples because of their global recognition as public service media organizations and leaders in digital innovation practices, posting on multiple social media platforms, including TikTok. In fact, BBC is believed to be one of the first TikTok news distributors (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020, p. 1722), having a multi-profile presence on the app. Similarly, DW holds an extensive portfolio on TikTok with several profiles. Secondly, both PSM have TikTok accounts that distribute news to younger audiences, which is this study's demographic of interest. A representative from DW has positioned DW's Stories as a TikTok account specifically developed to deliver information to people under thirty (Kaminski, 2023, para. 1). BBC's Newsround is a CBBC program extension that delivers news to young viewers (Sherwin, 2023, para. 10), satisfying this research's criteria.

Analyzing two reputable media institutions under different media systems further explains the case selection process by providing insights into diverse approaches to editorial practices under the same European objectives based on democratic principles. Concentrating on two distinct media systems is also favorable when analyzing media reports to interpret stated public missions, as previous scholarship has concluded that organizational legacy and institutional origin shape innovation practices and editorial choices (Donders, 2019, p. 1025; Sehl et al., 2021, p. 1392).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, German media organizations occupy the democratic corporatist model, having stricter state regulations with a focus on public interest, backed up by state funding (Neff & Pickard, 2021, p. 617; Sehl et al., 2021, p. 1386). By contrast, the UK, argued between the liberal model and the democratic one (Neff & Pickard, 2021, p. 614), historically has weaker regulatory influences exemplifying stronger market logic (Sehl et al., 2021, p. 1381). Citing Meier (2022), these diverging priorities have contributed to British media organizations' faster transformation towards more innovative digital strategies in comparison to the German media landscape (p. 700).

Undoubtedly there is a wide range of academic research into BBC and DW as media organizations, yet choosing to adopt a Eurocentric perspective in this study is also beneficial because of the EU's continuous efforts to restrict platform dependencies through regulations such as the Digital Services Market Act, which enforces platforms to be more transparent and responsible toward the services they provide (EBU, 2024, p. 3). In the current post-Brexit scenario, such regulations are not mandatory for British media organizations, representing another contrasting angle that makes choosing these two cases favorable. Per Harcourt's position (2023), differentiation emerging from post-Brexit changes in regulation affects PSM's functioning in the UK, thus providing an opportunity

to investigate both similarities within established European broadcasters and also explain dissimilarities if they emerge (pp. 219-220).

3.2.1 Data Collection

This study's sample consists of TikTok videos, averaging one minute per video, divided between the two organizations and four organizational reports – three from the BBC and one from DW. Video data collection was based on selection criteria in line with research objectives. Only original content from the profiles of DW Stories (The World Unpacked) (n.d.) and BBC's Newsround (n.d.) reporting on news or current affairs was downloaded and included in the sample, using Tokdownload, which is a software that allows you to download TikTok videos in bulk with no watermarks.

This study focused on a three-month selection period, from November 2024 to January 2025, investigating within a recent timeframe that is also free of any major social events. Recency was prioritized because TikTok facilitates virality and rapid content distribution, with content strategies changing constantly, influenced by algorithmic practices, user behavior, and cultural trends. Focusing on this timeframe allows us to closely situate current editorial choices while also covering a long enough period to confirm practices. Because TikTok content is uploaded almost daily, videos were analyzed until a saturation point was reached where no new insights emerged, resulting in 55 videos from the BBC and 45 videos from DW.

The most recent organizational reports make up the complementary analysis sample. In particular, *BBC Annual Plan 2024/25* (BBC, 2024, pp. 1-96) and *A BBC for the Future* (BBC, 2024, pp. 1-28), together with DW's *Strategic Plan 2022-2025* (2023, pp. 1-60) were chosen because they consist of relevant information about public mission, future goals, and commitments regarding (digital) content distribution. BBC's *Delivering our Mission and Public Purposes* (BBC, 2024, pp. 1-166) expands the annual plan by outlining the current practices taken to uphold these commitments. Collectively, the reports will be regarded as PSM's communicated position in the media landscape and provide context for digital actions found in TikTok content.

3.3 Operationalization

Following this study's theoretical framework, a codebook was created to outline the content strategies woven into DW and BBC's TikTok content on the selected profiles. Based on Schreier (2012), a coding framework is utilized to structure qualitative material systematically and reduce its meaning in line with research objectives (p. 58). The codebook consists of main categories and subcategories, derived from theoretical concepts from the literature review but also data-driven codes that have emerged in the pilot testing and analysis (Schreier, 2012, p. 84). The coding template was created in Word to organize the different categories, while providing space for notetaking, which was useful for interpretations in the result section (see Appendix). The table includes eight dimensions and

complementary subcategories. Video analysis took a holistic approach, taking each video as one unit of analysis and coding it within a subcategory.

3.3.1 Infotainment

Three dimensions were adopted from Wirz & Zai's quantitative research (2025) on TikTok journalism, which conceptualizes infotainment for audiovisual digital content. Their dimensions were reinterpreted to match this study's qualitative approach.

Firstly, to investigate the proportion between hard and soft news reported in the digital content, the topic type was coded with two subcategories: hard and soft news. Utilizing Reinemann et al.'s typology (2012 in Wirz & Zai, 2025, p. 7), hard news represents information on politics, religion, crime, etc., while soft news covers lifestyle, sport, and travel.

Secondly, to operationalize infotainment, two dimensions were created to interpret the usage of information and entertainment within the videos. Information richness was developed following Graber's conceptualization of basic information and context information (1994 in Wirz and Zai, 2025, p. 8), where the former is measured through the four W's (who; what; where; when), and the latter is measured through 'why' and 'how'. Similarly, the category of entertainment strategies makes up the other code in the operationalization of infotainment, identifying resources used to engage and entertain audiences (Wirz & Zai, 2025, p. 8).

The following subcategories were coded: emotionalization, expectation, and personalization. Emotionalization is captured when a video contains verbal or visual elements that communicate emotions or explicit references to emotional states. Personalization is coded when a story is personalized through a subject's perspective, for example, the story is organized around an individual's experience. Lastly, expectation is coded as a storytelling strategy where the viewer's attention is triggered through expectation set by the introduction of a question or an open-ended statement that is resolved as the video progresses (Wirz & Zai, 2025, p. 8). Two inductive subcategories (humor and informality) expanded this dimension after the pilot phase.

3.3.2 Platformization

This dimension was adopted from Vázquez-Herrero et al. (2020), Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero (2024), and Wirz and Zai (2025) to investigate how each media organization's content was shaped by TikTok's algorithmic and aesthetic norms. Subcategories include trend usage (e.g., viral sounds, references to other TikTok content, memes), attention-grabbers (audio/visual hooks, sound effects, etc.), interactivity resembling a "call to action" (e.g., "comment what you think"), duets/stitching, and mentions. Such categories were useful in interpreting how TikTok can shape editorial practices and content strategies, in line with platformization theory and its relevance for PSM. Relevant to the abovementioned clarification, all elements coded in this section relate to TikTok

logic, separating entertainment strategies from strategies of virality aimed at triggering algorithmic processes (see Appendix).

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Coding Procedure

All videos were downloaded and organized with links into a table on May 1st (see Appendix). As mentioned, each video was analyzed holistically, treating it as one unit of analysis that was assigned to a dimension within the codebook. Manual coding was performed in Word using a template with space for notetaking and examples for the results section (see Appendix).

To test the codebook, a pilot phase was initiated where 20% of each medium's videos were coded to test their relation to the deductive codes and track for data-driven ones. After this, new and existing codes were redefined where necessary, and subcategories were introduced or merged with available ones. Correspondingly, video duration was categorized, measuring how long each video is in seconds to identify if the duration reflects the incorporation of entertaining or informational sources. Since TikTok videos are typically on the shorter side, it is interesting to interpret how deeply a topic is communicated in thirty seconds vs. in one minute, what is prioritized, etc. Additionally, self-referencing elements emerged as a category, together with visual setting and presenter appearance. Concluding with novel entertainment and platform strategies integrated as subcategories within Platformization (e.g., looping) and Entertainment dimensions (e.g., humor) (see Appendix).

During the analysis period, videos were coded two times with a one-week break in between to ensure the codebook's validity. After the coding phase was finished, the data was imported into Excel for better theme recognition. There, the most used strategies were organized into tables, and occurrences between multiple strategies were interpreted to identify common digital news reporting patterns.

3.4.2 CDA tools

CDA was applied to DW and BBC's organizational reports to identify how the two PSM organizations communicate their public mission in the context of digital transformation.

To fulfill this research's objectives, multiple CDA tools were utilized based on Machin and Mayr (2012) and Jørgensen & Phillips (2011), namely word connotation/denotation, lexical choice, overlexicalization, suppression, structural opposition, modality, and intertextuality. Word connotation/denotation, overlexicalization, and lexical choice capture term repetition to persuade toward a particular idea (Machin and Mayr, 2012, pp. 32, 36, 42). Similarly, suppression and opposition serve to influence a reader's understanding of a certain phenomenon and adopt a particular perspective (Machin and Mayr, 2012, pp. 37-38). Modality captures a speaker's relation to an uttered statement, while intertextuality is a discursive strategy in which one text is referenced in another to

communicate a standpoint (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2011, pp. 15, 26). Collectively, these tools were helpful in examining how BBC and DW position themselves within digital media's challenges, emphasizing their public mission and its shaping triggered by platform dynamics, and intended to cater to young audiences.

3.5 Ethics and Credibility

This project analyses publicly accessible sources from the social media platform TikTok and the two organizations' websites. In line with research ethics, no sensitive information has been collected or interpreted from the cases, limiting ethical concerns. Furthermore, data has been analyzed transparently, upholding ethical integrity by relying on a codebook for QCA and CDA tools for straightforward analysis, both methods carried out in separate files submitted with the thesis.

This research upholds credibility standards by offering a thick description of the phenomenon of interest, addressing current developments in the media industry through crystallization by using two data sources (e.g., reports and TikTok videos), and showing detailed examples when reporting on the findings (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). Moreover, this study relies on multiple methods, triangulating two types of data based on the same research objectives with the aim of coming up with truthful and objective findings (Tracy, 2010, p. 843).

Furthermore, reliability and validity criteria were applied throughout the research process. For QCA, consistency was tracked with definitive criteria used to determine whether a video should be assigned to a specific category and its respective subcategory (Schreier, 2012, p. 168) (see Appendix). Intra-coder reliability was positively assessed when videos coded twice over two weeks by the researcher confirmed the findings' consistency (Schreier, 2012, p.192). Furthermore, to uphold validity standards, codebook development followed closely the research objectives of this study, relying primarily on theoretically driven dimensions, taken from research that investigated similar phenomena. Similarly, only recognized CDA tools were used to interpret organizational perspectives.

4. Results

4.1 TikTok strategies

4.1.1 News type distribution

Since this is an explorative study with no prior data on the specific TikTok profile of DW Stories and BBC Newsround, it was essential to outline what news items are editorially prioritized by the organization for online consumption, therefore the news type code, dividing news items into either hard or soft news was utilized to understand the content mix provided.

For DW, a striking imbalance between hard and soft news has been found across the sample. Specifically, out of 45 news videos analyzed, 43 were coded as hard news and only two as soft. The most common hard news items covered politics, economic issues, and war, followed by environmental and health-related reports. The two soft news items covered cultural events and media-related social affairs, namely, new cultural symbols recognized by UNESCO and the emergence of a TikTok language.

Contrastingly, the BBC covered more soft news (39) but maintained a greater balance by including a substantial amount of hard news (16). Throughout their sample, soft news primarily reported on pop culture, entertainment, sports, and nature, while hard news focused on politics, environmental issues, public affairs, and technological advancements. Despite the strong contrast in hard news reporting between the two samples, BBC and DW strived to engage young audiences in the current global political environment, concentrating on American politics and conflicts in the Middle East. Following Wirz and Zai's findings (2025), legacy media were found to cover more hard news on TikTok in comparison to for-profit organizations (p. 11). This study partially reflects their findings when considering DW's extensive hard news coverage. Still, the BBC is also a legacy media representative but contradicts its findings by prioritizing soft news across the three months.
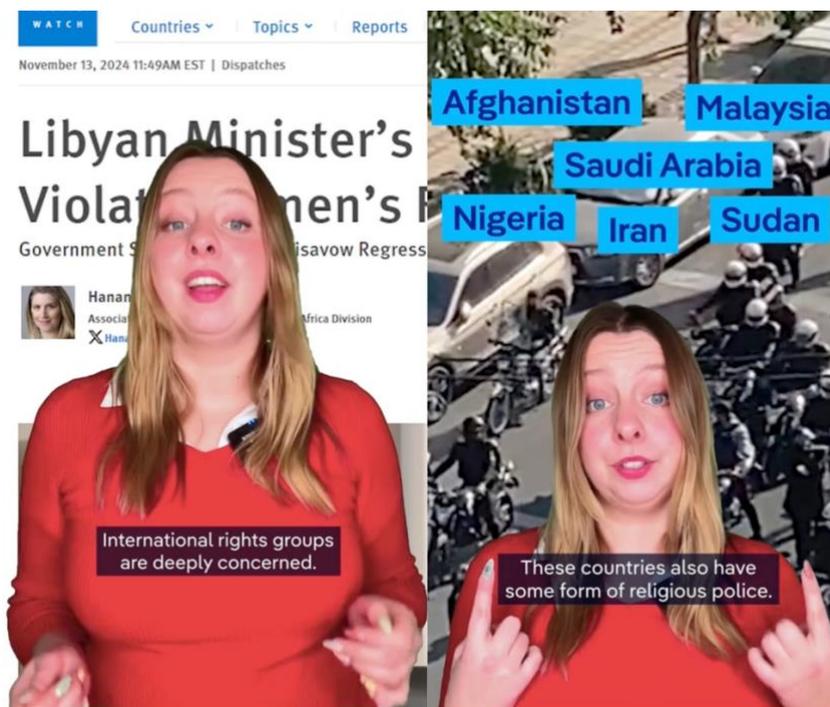
4.1.2 Informational Richness

As a public service media, DW and BBC's primary function is to inform and educate their audiences, providing in-depth, quality information regardless of how news is distributed. Because of this, informational richness within their TikTok content becomes essential to explore. In DW's sample, the majority of videos included all informational features (44 out of 45), regardless of the information type they reported on. In fact, across the sample, a consistent pattern occurred where contextual information actively involved insights that could be considered beyond the 'why and how'. In particular, presenters reported on past events relevant to the story, compared with practices in other countries, referenced older statistics, or future implications, quoted commentary from multiple perspectives, or gave definitions or background on specific terms.

To exemplify, in DW's video reporting on Libya's morality police (DWV_10, 00:30, 2024) other perspectives, historically relevant insights and comparisons with other countries having a similar organizational force are included (Fig.1). The video utilizes its audiovisual properties fully by allowing the presenter to verbally communicate different perspectives but also illustrate them through referential images and texts. Moreover, the majority of videos discussed events' implications, contextualizing them to wider social relevance. To illustrate, a video reporting on the established ceasefire between Hamas and Israel extends into a detailed analysis of the potential future steps taken if the ceasefire holds, anticipating the estimated financial costs and time that it would take for Gaza to fully recover (DWV_39, 00:20). This feature echoes Grusin's (2004) premediation concept as anticipation is communicated through factual statements, implicitly introducing a highly potential future scenario (p. 31).

Figure 1

Screenshot from DWV_10

Note. By Deutsche Welle's TikTok account DW.Stories (The World Unpacked) - visual and verbal elaboration of informational richness.

Similarly, all informational features were predominant across the BBC's sample, with 44 videos out of 55 providing contextual information. Again, information that could be considered beyond contextual relevance was noted, with videos elaborating on potential implications, historical background, similar events, and multiple perspectives. In video VBBC_20 (00:24), the presenter mentions the NGO's dissatisfied perspectives with the provided aid. Among hard news items, all

reports were coded as having full informational properties, exemplified by a video on South Korea's abrupt martial law implementation, providing definitions of terms and perspectives from officials and the public (VBBC_29, 00:68). Diversely, only a small soft news proportion qualified as having only basic information, suggesting that BBC's overall objective is to be as informational as possible.

Collectively, the findings resembled a sustained commitment to informing digital publics by elaborating beyond the basic facts and diving into polar attitudes, reflection on past experiences, and premeditation (Grusin, 2004, pp. 28-29), which undoubtedly increase the videos' informational richness and educational value. These insights match the conclusions made by Wirz and Zai (2025), whose comparison between legacy and commercial media highlights that quality media gives away more information on TikTok (p. 13). This commitment to exhaustive information within DW and BBC's reporting styles could be further attributed to their public service mission (see more in section 4.2).

4.1.3 Entertainment Strategies

Despite hard news items' dominance within DW Stories' TikTok, most content involved one of the entertainment strategies within the codebook (44 out of 45 videos). Specifically, the most used ones were emotionalization and expectation, with equal counts of news items coded (12), followed by humor (7) and informality (7), and ending with personalization (3). For soft news videos, informality, which is an inductive subcategory, was the main entertainment strategy used. Dissimilarly, Newsround's diversification leads to two main findings. Predominantly for hard news, little to no entertainment strategies were coded (5 out of 16 videos), while for soft news, most videos contained one of the entertaining codes (35 out of 39). Specifically, the most common entertainment strategies used were informality (15), expectation (8), and humor (7). For the deviations in hard news, emotionalization (3) and expectations (2) were coded as inclusive within the videos' storytelling.

Videos that refer to or portray emotions were coded as utilizing emotionalization to entertain viewers (Wirz and Zai, 2025). Across the DW sample, notable examples could be found that reveal how emotionalization has been used in hard news reporting. Namely, videos using empathy-triggering storytelling to report on healthcare regulations, introduce the information with "imagine being ill and in unbearable pain" (VDW_32, 00:79) or "imagine being sick and not being able to tell your doctor what is wrong!" (VDW_05, 00:44), shifting the viewer's position from a passive information receiver into this scenario's potential victim. This communicative strategy was similarly integrated into another video (VDW_37, 00:52) related to the recent fires in Los Angeles and insurance companies' wrongful practice of excluding high-risk regions from protection. Here, the presenter utilizes dramatic language to incorporate the viewer into the narrative: "but an even bigger crisis is on the horizon for all of us (…), with climate change (…) the question is no longer if you will be affected, but when." (VDW_37, 00:51). Importantly, these narrative strategies are also aesthetically enhanced

with complimentary images and audio encapsulating the whole emotional experience. In this way, DW Stories' videos weave emotionalization into hard news to attract and retain viewers' attention.

Comparably, a BBC video covering legislative permission on spaceship launching in the UK opens with an ecstatic exclamation from the presenter "Three two one, lift off!" (VBBC_51, 00:03) keeping up this uplifted tone throughout the video and finalizing with "watch this space" (00:28), which is commonly used to communicate exciting upcoming developments. Still, emotionalization was not commonly used across the BBC sample, which could be interpreted as a strategy to avoid tabloidization of hard news. These findings partially illuminate those of Wirz and Zai (2025, p. 14) since emotionalization is frequently utilized by DW in this analysis, but also partially used by BBC.

The second most common strategy – expectation, further reveals narrative techniques' entertaining strength, embedded in TikTok videos. For DW, twelve videos began using this technique to engage the viewer. In a video from November (VDW_03), a DW Stories presenter asks, "Can you cancel out someone's vote?" (00:02) to start a news report on a politically charged TikTok trend triggered by the US elections, where people would go to vote to cancel out their republican family members' votes. The video information is then framed around trend discussion before culminating with the initial question's resolution to the viewer. What's more, a TikTok covering the relations between Israel and Germany sets off with the open-ended statement "This man has put the German government in a tough spot" (00:01), accompanied by visuals of the man who is Israel's PM, Netanyahu. Again, the video continues with a breakdown of the relevance between the statement and the rest of the news item, closing the story with a resolution to the initial remark.

Within Newsround, expectation is the second most used strategy, exemplified by a video report introduced with the question "Are you experiencing brain rot right now?" (VBBC_25, 00:01), which eventually dives into a breakdown of this word, headlining the Oxford Dictionary's word of the year rank. In this way, the reporter triggers the viewer's interest through a narrative arc, which was also a predominant strategy for quality media in Wirz and Zai's study (2025, p. 15).

Humor was the third most common entertainment strategy utilized by both PSMs. Ironic or satirical elements were frequent in politically and economically focused news items on DW Stories. More specifically, in a video (VDW_36, 00:96) covering Donald Trump's interest in Greenland, the reporter makes a comic remark on Trump's benefit-driven attitude towards Greenland's resources, suggesting that Trump's next luxury resort will be there, illustrated by snowy visual and a Christmas song embedded over the Trump tower (Fig. 2). The joke is further intensified through the incorporation of penguins and the rhetorical question "Arctic edition?" (V_36, 00:42).

Figure 2

Screenshot from DWV_36

*Note. A c*ollage of screenshots from Deutsche Welle's TikTok account DW.Stories (The World Unpacked) - humor as an entertainment strategy for hard news reporting.

Similarly, a report on German expenses regarding Christmas decorations was introduced with a viral moment from Melania Trump expressing dissatisfaction with having to organize the Christmas decorations in the White House back in 2020. The news reporter sets off the video by contextually embedding Melania's remark with the statement "Melania might love this decision from Germany's capital (…) Berlin is cutting the budget for Christmas lights" (00:08). Even more so, DW Stories takes comedy one step further by meme-fying Elon Musk's appointment as the head of DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) by including the doge meme GIFs, which is about a popular Shiba Inu dog, which was later turned into a cryptocurrency coin, endorsed by Elon Musk. DW Stories' choice to introduce DOGE in this way resembles their motivation to stay relevant and entertaining among young viewers on the platform, and together with the other provided examples, reveals a strategy of refining hard news with amusing elements.

As for the BBC, humor is frequently embedded through puns and wordplay in soft news. To illustrate, a video covering a lumberjacking competition uses punchlines like "wood you believe it", "finished top of the chops," and "watch out for splinters" (VBBC_09, 00:29) to comedically comment on the subject. Here, comedy is much more concentrated in the presenter's narration with little complementary audiovisual enhancements, in contrast to DW, which strongly utilizes highly humorous elements like memes to entertain.

The last entertainment strategy – informality, interprets entertainment as a relatively implicit practice beyond comedy or drama. Informality entails narrative or stylistic strategies aiming to reduce the proximity between the medium and the viewer and invoke a personalized, relatable interaction between the two (e.g., slang, second-person addressing). An example of this strategy is found in a DW video reporting on Donald Trump's inauguration as US president in which the reporter opens the video with the address "Guys it's happening (…), let's have a look" (VDW_40, 00:02). Similarly, in another video the reporter addresses viewers by saying "that my friends is (…) Michael Barnier" (V_26, 00:11).

Moreover, throughout DW's sample, slang reoccurred in news reports - a certain example being "I call cap" (VDW_44, 2025, 00:15) when reporting on Trump's statements about birthright citizenship, followed by a visual illustration from the presenter putting a cap on their head. Another example, discussing martial law's declaration in South Korea (VDW_22, 2025, 00:59), introduces previous examples of imposed martial law with "let's read the receipts", which is a popular slang term that means proof or evidence. Remarkably, the video contains an exclamation from the presenter about martial law's declaration in the Philippines, calling it a "power grab!" (VDW_22, 00:43), which reduces the report's formality, introducing subjective commentary from the presenter.

Compared to DW, BBC utilizes this entertainment strategy much more, scoring the highest among others in the dimension, coded fifteen times in soft news. In line with the less serious information in soft news reports, informality complements the videos' storytelling through the incorporating second person addressing "I hope you are looking more festive than I am (…)" (VBBC_35, 00:32) and "For all you strictly fans out there" (VBBC_13, 00:28); colloquial phrases and personal comments such as "It's ta-ra (waving) from Tay-Tay" (VBBC_31, 00:29), when referring to Taylor Swift's tour end, or "Maybe he is looking for a contest (…) Bay blades at the ready!" (VBBC_36, 00:33).

Despite scholarship treating entertainment strategies as practices that commercialize serious journalism and turn it into spectacle (Savolainen, 2022, p. 956; Thussu, 2015, p. 2), this inductive code was incorporated because it encapsulates a fine line in the creative process of contemporary digital news reporting. From the findings in this study, entertainment is sometimes implicitly woven through informality as a strategy to retain the viewer longer and portray heightened cultural flow awareness, appealing to younger generations. In this way, DW Stories and BBC Newsround amuse the viewer while also indicating relatability that could gain the viewers' sympathy.

Collectively, the results show a variety of entertainment strategies available throughout the sample, which, when paralleled to the informational richness each story contains, leads to an interpretation that PSM predominantly delivers extensive, quality information without shying away from creativity. Especially for DW, the wide array of entertainment strategies and close connection to current cultural trends reflect an overarching objective of engaging young audiences by mimicking their digital ways. The same interpretation could be attributed to the BBC, which sticks to more

serious reporting for hard news but shows creative flexibility when reporting on softer phenomena. Based on this, the findings from the former two sections support what Wirz and Zai (2025) maintained in their analysis – legacy media's extensive entertainment strategies use is "a high-quality reporting indicator" (p. 17), symbolizing expertise in audience behavior and expectations, and professionalism in combining two seemingly counterintuitive practices without one being at the expense of the other (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020, p. 1720).

4.1.4 TikTok Logic

TikTok triggered a platform reset with short-form videos (Newman et al., 2024, p. 11), arguably evolving into developing its own media logic that guides the creative processes of its users (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020). The inclusion of a platform logic code separate from other entertainment strategies, despite investigating similar practices, was a strategic decision aimed at investigating PSM's balance of upholding its editorial standards and utilizing TikTok affordances to make its content well-known to the right audience. Between DW and BBC, stark differences in platform adaptation were found, with all subcategories coded within the German sample, but only three codes present for the British.

Starting with the German PSM, attention-grabbers were the most common TikTok logic symbol featured in the video reports, serving as storytelling enhancers, commonly combined with entertainment strategies to deliver highly dynamic reports. Comparably, although less common, the BBC also employed attention-grabbers, coded twenty times.

Related to DW's entertainment strategies, attention grabbers reoccurred mostly in videos coded under expectation (6), humor (5), and emotionalization (4). In line with the expectation strategy, audio-visual hooks were common introductory tools used to capture the viewer. For example, in a news report on Germany's mask surplus after COVID-19, the reporter starts the video by uncovering the camera with a mask and holding it up with the question, "Remember these?" (00:01). Essentially, hooks and expectation narratives become two sides of the same coin. While narrative expressions verbally set an unresolved question in the videos' introduction, the TikTok logic that takes the expectation hook one step further integrates performative elements such as physical movement, visuals, and audio that enhance this curiosity. The pattern of combining expectation and attention-grabbers signals the creative strategy of hooking the viewer from the get-go, and thus, has two-sided implications within its use – on one side it starts the entertaining cue for the rest of the video, on the other, it makes the viewer stop to watch the video in the first place.

Still, attention-grabbers were also used more simply with sound effects, transitions, or overlays that make the storytelling more dynamic or increase emotional and humorous

elements, consistent with the entertainment strategies. For example, BBC utilizes a visual hook when a presenter slides into the video frame on an office chair to visually illustrate a report on an office chair competition (VBBC_26, 00:22) (Fig. 3).

Figure 3

Screenshot from VBBC_26
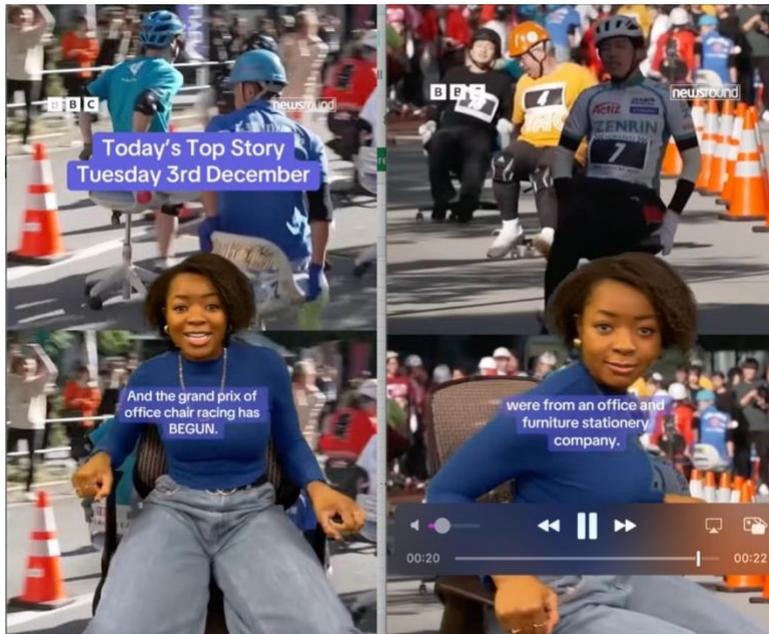
Note. Screenshot from BBC's TikTok account, demonstrating a visual hook (attention-grabber).

Alternatively, to accelerate the ironic reporting on the Romanian president-elect Georgescu and his relation to Vladimir Putin, a DW video (VDW_21, 00:67) incorporates funny images of Putin moving across the video or popping up in random placements (Fig. 4), indicated via sound effects (e.g. horse sound when inserting Putin's picture on a horse). While DW is highly experimental with these features as opposed to its British counterpart, their universal purpose is highly referential to TikTok logic – they aim to keep the video's pace high to visually stimulate the viewer and retain their interest in the video's end. Naturally, entertainment strategies have a similar objective of amusing spectators, yet here, technological and creative affordances brought by TikTok's infrastructure and highly influential algorithm, relying on user insights, extend their relevance to editorial strategies beyond brief incorporation (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020, p. 1729), becoming integral symbols and structures without which the news reporting style will not be the same for DW. In the BBC's case, they serve more as a complementary feature that does not drastically change the videos' flow.

Figure 4

Screenshot from VDW_21
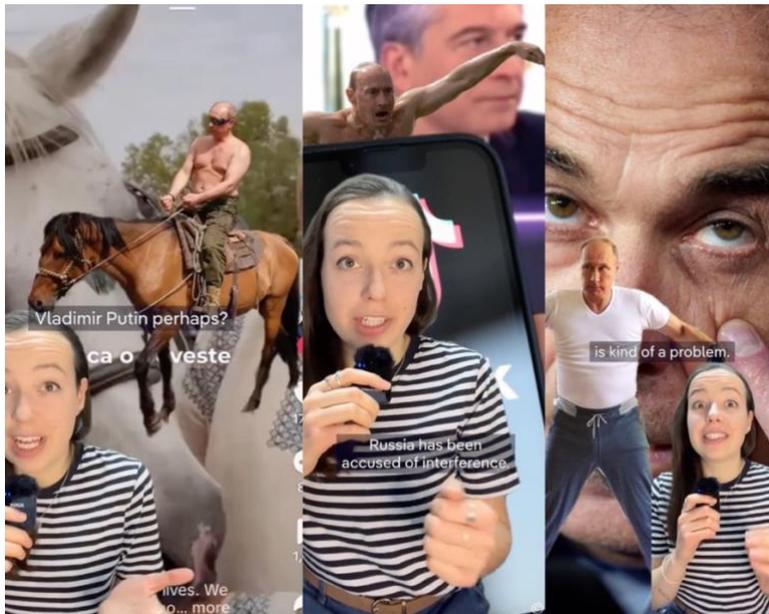
*Note. A c*ollage with screenshots from DW's TikTok, demonstrating attention-grabbers' use for humor.

Moving along, DW Stories' TikTok affordance awareness is extensive, showcasing their expertise in platform specifics. Interactivity and trend inclusion were the next most used strategies, which individually hold two distinct purposes but bring about the same effect – virality. Interactivity was coded six times within hard news reporting, as presenters ended videos with audience-centered questions asking them to share opinions or similarities in the comments (e.g., VDW_05, 00:44, ending with "Have you had a similar challenge?"). TikTok-native trends were coded five times, with a notable example being the "POV" trend (VDW_02, 00:52) and the DOGE meme, which used a popular TikTok sound at the time of publishing (VDW_08, 00:05).

Differently, BBC occasionally embeds TikTok native sounds concerning soft news reporting (VBBC_01, 00:28; VBBC_44, 00:26), with no found relation to entertainment strategies, primarily serving for aesthetic enhancement. While DW incorporated background sound in all their videos, most videos from the BBC had no background sound, making music integration from TikTok a deliberate strategy. Overall, BBC's platform adaptation is limited, with on-screen text being a major practice, utilizing subtitles and in-app headings, which not only have informational properties but also shape the algorithmic processes. Subtitles, also known as captions, have become the norm in vertical videos because they provide accessibility. It is believed that TikTok users watching videos on mute can still understand and enjoy the content through on-screen subtitles. Moreover, on-screen text influences TikTok's algorithm as it helps classify the video. Because of this, the predominant on-

screen text strategy across BBC and DW could be regarded as a social media norm rather than platform logic.

Back to DW, TikTok logic adoption transitions to full integration within their reporting with the utilization of the following strategies in the videos: looping/circulation, duets/stitches, and algospeak. Looping was coded five times and reflecting a hybrid technique between creativity and technological influence, in which the video starts the same way it ends to trick the viewer into thinking it is never-ending (VDW_06, 00:57; VDW_26, 00:53). This strategy has direct implications on algorithmic processes within the app as viewers watch the video more than once and thus increase its views. Similarly, duets and stitches were employed for self-referencing through other published videos or providing quick updates on an already covered news story (VDW_12, 00:44). Importantly, duets and expectation strategy also developed a repetitive pattern because of the way the video is editorially structured from the medium. The stitch feature allows the integration of another video at any point in its playing, allowing the editor to choose the right seconds with which to introduce the story. In video VDW_12 (00:01), the stitched video delivers an open-ended statement which sets an expectation for the rest, then the video transitions to another presenter delivering the update on the story and resolving the expectation. In this way, technological affordances become tools that shape storytelling techniques.

Finally, algospeak is the deliberate changing of words to avoid content moderation, commonly used when discussing controversial topics online. DW's reporting on war or drugs was covered with captions containing algospeak with altered words like "w@r" (VDW_19, 00:80). Resultantly, DW Stories evades algorithmic curation, which might hide the video from viewers, without compromising creative or editorial practices. This practice has dual implications, on the one hand, it could be perceived as fulfilling an end goal to inform audiences on important topics, on the other, it could resemble a commercial objective of wanting to maintain viewership, thus generating popularity. Consulting with literature, these strategies are absent from similar research, revealing practice expansion triggered by platform affordances. Evaluating the difference between DW and BBC, it is visible that DW has strong platform logic, altering its content in line with TikTok to replicate digital creators' voices (Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024, p. 1056).

4.1.5 Visual Location and Self-referencing

Understandably, short-form videos heavily rely on visual features for communication. In comparison to textual sources, illustrative elements within the TikToks hold both informational and entertaining value, becoming an irreplaceable part of the editorial output. As an inductive code, visual location was analyzed to understand more about the balance between traditional editorial practices and platform logic.

For DW digital visual setting was predominant, characterized by using chroma-key to show visuals highly relevant to the story. The green screen incorporation, despite its established use in

traditional broadcasting, has been popular on TikTok as a feature that allows the reporter to be present while utilizing visual space as much as possible. Therefore, the increased digital background use intensifies the embedded TikTok logic within the videos' creative flow. Moreover, in DW's videos, presenters are often filmed in neutral but informal locations (e.g., office desk, home setting), using editing features to insert photos and videos without a green screen (Fig. 5).

Comparably, for the BBC, the digital setting was mainly used and an integral part of the reporting style. Interestingly, among fifty videos, green screen use was accompanied by the presenter physically holding the phone as if video chatting with the viewer, symbolizing an interactive strategy where engagement is twofold – simulated interaction with the presenter and the background visuals (Fig. 5).

Figure 5

Screenshots from VBBC_55 and VDW_37
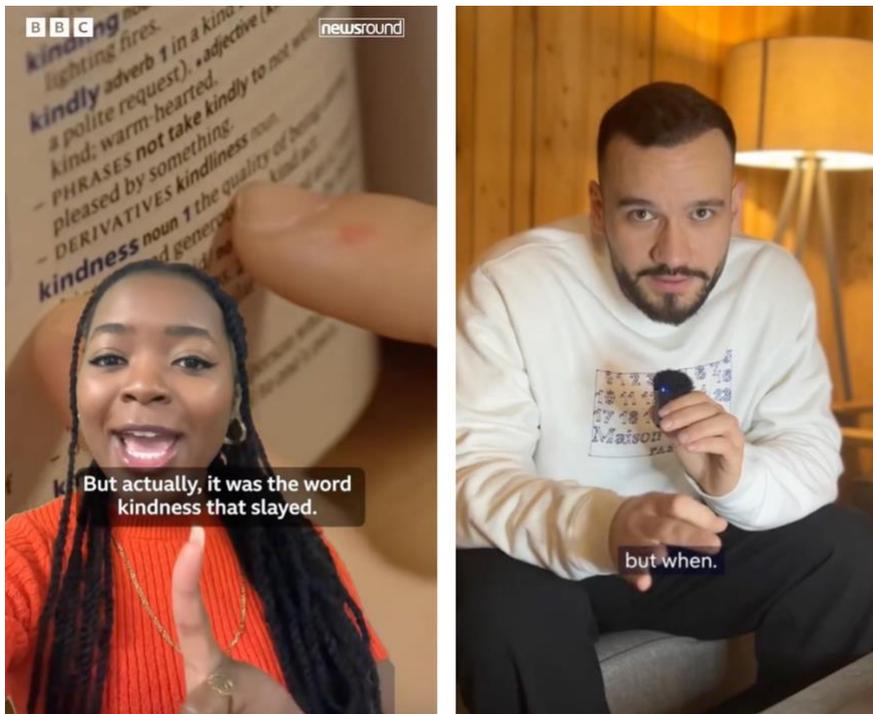
*Note. A c*ollage with screenshots from DW and BBC's TikTok accounts demonstrating digital and informal visual settings.

The use of digital, informal, and mixed settings collectively symbolizes the normalized transition into a digital-first environment and its inherent accessibility and acceleration in production (Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024, p. 1063). Reporters were successful in delivering highly engaging platform-native videos without sophisticated tools or professional settings. The lack of a studio-like setting in DW Stories hints at a greater platform mimicry and symbolizes the accessibility and relatability that the medium wants to convey. Similarly, BBC's constant employment of selfie-

like reporting reduces the proximity between the medium and the audience, reinforcing social engagement.

Self-referencing was the other inductive code within the framework developed to capture the balance between platform dominance and PSM legitimacy in video content. It noted visual, spoken, or mixed self-referential elements used (e.g., logos) with the presumption that such reminders would boost source credibility and awareness. Within the BBC, visual references became the norm, with all videos containing the medium's logo and a Newsround banner (Fig. 6). In DW, only twelve videos included self-referencing, specifically visual representation with logos or mixed through the inclusion of the slogan "let's unpack" (VDW_11, 00:09), related to their full TikTok title - DW Stories (The world unpacked).

Figure 6

Screenshots from VBBC_28 and VDW_11
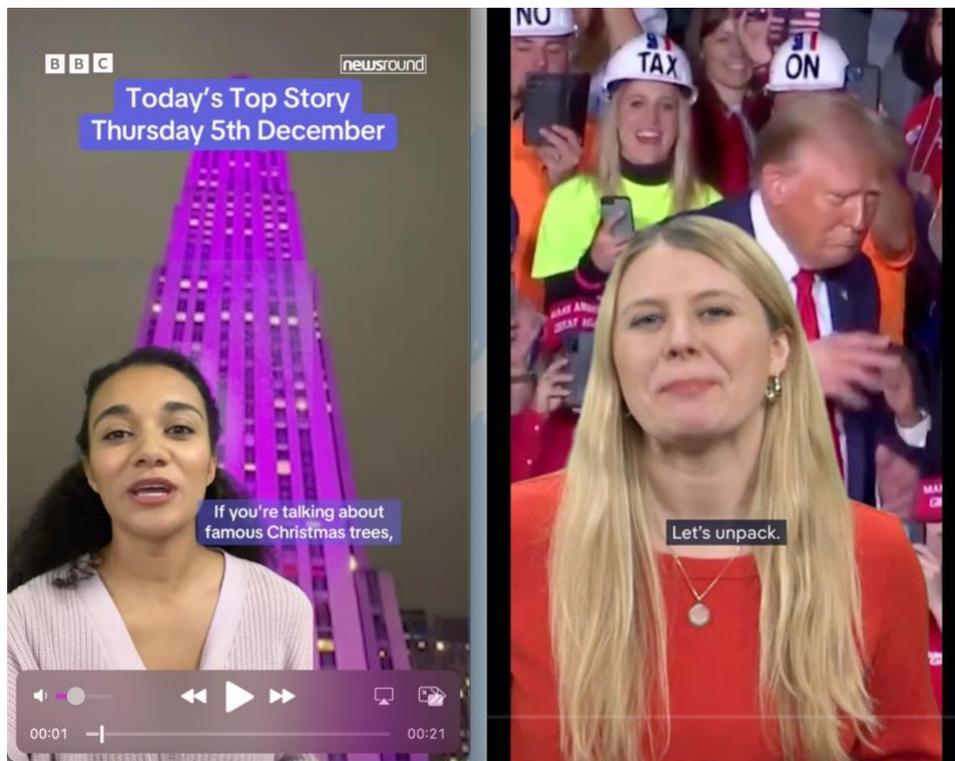
*Note. A c*ollage with screenshots from DW and BBC's TikTok accounts demonstrating visual and verbal self-referencing elements.

In line with scholarship discussions on digitalization's implication for PSM and the arguable acceleration of commercial competition in media, employing self-referential elements could be considered as an opposition strategy to platform dominance, with which news outlets could visually remind of their institutional origin even when participating in third-party distribution. Furthermore, the content's relatability would be easily attributed to the source, leaving a lasting impression on the

viewer, who would continue to watch these specific news reports. Resultantly, platform dominance, if not reduced, is at least mitigated, as audiences become aware of the source and could be consistently reminded of the organization. BBC's normalized use compared to DW's infrequency across the three months implies that the former organization benefits from branding efforts, potentially having commercial implications that contradict the PSM's public-first narrative.

Ultimately, digital participation also depends on the medium's organizational perspectives in terms of its platform adoption and its public service mission. Thus, the analysis of DW and BBC's reports is useful to understand whether these content strategies represent greater organizational objectives.

4.2 Public Mission

This study's objective is to bridge the gap between organizational principles and PSM's news reporting on TikTok for young audiences. This section will reveal the findings from the CDA analysis of DW's and BBC's reports, triangulating content strategies with stated public mission.

4.2.1 Core Principles

DW's report foregrounds democratic principles as organizational pillars for its editorial practices. The discourse is institutionalized through intertextual references to Germany's integrity as a country, symbolized by its membership in the EU and UN (2022) (Deutsche Welle, 2023):

> DW represents the values that Germany stands for: human rights, democracy, freedom, the rule of law, and social equality (…). Germany advocates these values as a member of the EU and the United Nations (UN), as is reflected in DW's programming mandate. (p. 3)

These direct references to established democratic institutions represent a lexical choice of legitimacy that centralizes DW's importance as a functioning PSM. Furthermore, the discourse builds on these credentials by framing "unbiased", "rational" and "straightforward" information as "brand essence and values" (Deutsche Welle, 2023, p. 10), portraying DW's commitment to independent journalism as more than a required practice, but a personalized determination.

Correspondingly, DW extends its role past informative contributions and into the role of an educator, attributing its functions to "enlightenment, freedom of expression and the strengthening of civil societies" (Deutsche Welle, 2023, p. 10). This word choice reflects an ideological strategy of solidifying the organization's democratic origin and legitimizing its functions in the current media landscape. Predominantly, DW's discourse underlines their public mission as a cooperation enhancer, associating PSM functioning to a necessity by integrating structural oppositions from which current social issues like "human rights, democracy and the fight against terrorism" (Deutsche Welle, 2023, p. 3) could be resolved with a "strong civil society needs independent journalism and unfettered access

to credible information for the formation of open opinions and decision-making" (Deutsche Welle, 2023, p. 3). Consequently, DW communicates its impartiality mission beyond factual information delivery, broadening its social relevance as a democratic standpoint and an active contributor to society's positive activation as a mechanism for cooperative good.

Comparably, BBC also underlines impartiality as a main social objective that guides its editorial practices with the intention "to help people understand and engage with the world around them" (Delivering our Mission and Public Purposes, 2024, p. 6), connotating educational benefits. Moreover, impartiality is reinforced as a long-standing value that is only going to improve, with the BBC utilizing modality to communicate an obligation to audiences repeatedly: "Our commitment to impartiality will remain at the core of the organization. Impartiality can be harder than ever to achieve in a world of polarization, misinformation and fragmented media choices" (Annual Plan 2024/25, 2024, p. 14). In this statement, impartiality is discursively opposed to obstacles in the current media landscape to portray the BBC as a qualified defender, providing public gains through its functioning.

Across the sample, BBC's public mission is predominantly related to uniqueness; phrases like "we will double down on what sets us apart (…)" (Annual Plan 2024/25, 2024, p. 14) and "offers something truly unique, that no other media company would – or indeed can" (Annual Plan 2024/25, 2024, p. 4) activate the PSM as a leader in the industry and legitimizes its practices through commitment, exemplified through consistent modality integrated into the discourse. Furthermore, the organization over-lexicalizes criticality to solidify its relevance and necessity within the industry with quotes like "it will be more vital than ever, in a year of such important democratic choices" and "critical role in ensuring free and widespread access to trustworthy and accurate news" (Annual Plan 2024/25, 2024, p. 5). Relating these goals to Newsround's TikTok content, it could be interpreted that entertainment strategies and limited TikTok logic for hard news mirror their commitment to informing and educating audiences. Identical to DW's informationally rich news reporting, here, organizational objectives explain the prioritization of informative elements within short-form videos.

Resultantly, while DW's public mission is communicated through repeated references to democratic values and mutuality, BBC's discourse largely focuses on distinctiveness to reinforce its legitimacy as a PSM. Collectively announcing impartiality at their public mission's core, both organizations tackle the goal differently, with the BBC framing its longstanding expertise and legacy as a discursive strategy, with which to communicate a dominant position within the industry and reinforce its necessity to function for social good. As for DW, impartiality is also ascribed to public benefit yet emphasizing its significance through the audience's experience and its direct implications for them rather than focusing on its internal capacity and expertise.

4.2.2 Catering to young audiences

Regarding PSM's mission and young audiences, DW acknowledges audiences' new social function as active public contributors and, unusually for public service media, redefines "a target

group in accordance with its mission" (Deutsche Welle, 2023, p. 11). The words "redefining" and "target" connote a strategic decision stemming from prior expertise and resembling commercial logic. Complemented with this statement: "DW primarily aims to reach individuals and organizations involved in forming political opinions, as they are multipliers of new ideas in politics, society and culture" (Deutsche Welle, 2023, p. 11), the practice of naming an audience directly contradicts public service's universality principle, however, here the core audience, identified as young people, is activated through the statement "multipliers of ideas", discursively positioning them as active agents in social improvement. Resultantly, targeting's commercial logic is reduced through the social group's justification as the central way to achieve societal improvement.

Aligning their mission to TikTok content, DW Stories' hard news concentration with a focus on politics and social affairs directly mirrors their organizational goal to engage idea multipliers. By focusing primarily on important current affairs in their TikTok reports, DW communicates its promise to reach socially engaged young viewers with information that encourages debates. Correspondingly, interactivity used as a platform-based content strategy illustrates how DW encourages young people's input into the stories they cover.

By contrast, the BBC's public mission does not separate audiences through demographics, upholding the traditional PSM universality principle (A BBC for the Future, 2024):

> The BBC is a universal service. We aim to connect, not divide; to bring together, not separate. (…) First, the BBC must be relevant to all. While others target profitable parts of the market and ignore other parts, we create a wide range of content that means the BBC can appeal to all UK audiences, across all our local communities. (p. 16)

Again, structural opposition is utilized as a discursive strategy to strengthen the BBC's legitimacy as upholding inclusivity principles, signaling a predominant emphasis on competition and comparison used to increase the medium's distinctiveness. Resultantly, this competitive overlexicalization and market dynamics imply an increased commercial logic from the BBC. While rare, the direct young audience address portrays their engagement and retention as "a key challenge" (*Delivering our Mission and Public Purposes*, 2024, p. 38). Across BBC's reports, TikTok and platform engagement are increasingly related to capturing this demographic: "seek to grow its brand (…) across these apps while developing routes back to BBC products" (Annual Plan 2024/25, 2024, p. 57). As discursive choices "seek to grow" and "routes back to BBC" unfold a structural opposition, hinting at an implicit tension between broadcasting independence and platform participation. Furthermore, 'seek to grow' connotes BBC's abovementioned commercial logic, focusing on distribution practices and promotional benefit more so than on the social growth or educational awareness, potentially triggered by popularizing content on TikTok.

Consequently, young audiences' extensive platform use gained significant organizational attention, with the BBC openly trying to mitigate its power and raise awareness of its industrial

implications. As stated in their Annual plan (2024), challenge and competition are over-lexicalized, becoming synonymous with each other with respect to technological companies dictating media dynamics:

> As the BBC – and public service broadcasting more broadly – continues to come under pressure from global streamers and content platforms like YouTube and TikTok, we will need to find more ways to maximize the value of UK content and maintain its scale in a competitive market. (p. 38)

Additionally, this narrative is reinforced to frame BBC as an alleviator of these obstacles through its mission, necessary to maintain the industry's integrity with statements like "what is at stake is a fair and prosperous media economy" (A BBC for the Future, 2024, p. 15) and "the huge opportunity of the next media era may be lost among its enormous challenges" (A BBC for the Future, 2024, p. 15). Importantly, these statements also reveal an underlying contradiction as the new digital era is portrayed as subsequently a challenge and an opportunity, signaling a duality in which the BBC accepts a victim and problem-solver position in changing social media dynamics. This dichotomy could be related to Newsround TikTok content through the self-referential elements used within videos and the limited platform adoption in videos.

Conversely, DW's discourse around public mission is explained as reflective of the young target group's expectations. The discourse suggests that digital innovation is framed not as a natural occurrence due to changing media dynamics but as a necessary adoption triggered by young audiences (Deutsche Welle, 2023):

> The behavior of the younger target audience is geared towards forward-looking media. The creation of a digital public sphere is both a chance and a challenge for international news providers. In light of these changes in media usage, DW and DW Akademie are assigning increased importance to digital and on-demand programming. (p. 4)

DW's mission becomes defined by the audience's digital preferences, implying that the only way to fulfil its objectives is through increasing its relevance across target groups, providing content wherever they are: "DW aims to enable people around the globe to form their own opinions based on independent information (…) to advance social debate. Content must therefore be available via platforms preferred by the users." (Deutsche Welle, 2023, p .15). The modality exemplified by "aim to" and "must" confidently outlines that this digitally-first mindset is grounded in expertise and current media developments awareness. Moreover, it sets an impression that digital transformation is the only way in which this could be achieved. This argument is reinforced with a structural opposition that portrays DW as a successful navigator in the public service realms, "despite increasing challenges

and clearly intensifying competitive situation in the target markets" (Deutsche Welle, 2023, p. 15). Connected to the statement above, digitalization's portrayal as an obstacle and opportunity represents the inherent duality that PSM face as legacy broadcasters having to stay relevant in an increasingly competitive commercial market (Olsen et al., 2024, p. 4).

Still, while DW acknowledges this tension repeatedly, it does not display opposing attitudes toward platform participation. On the contrary, DW attributes its success to its multi-platform strategy - "The highest growth in reach was attained with digital content via external platforms and distribution partners" (Deutsche Welle, 2023, p. 15). Digital content's efficiency is strengthened as DW refers to platform videos as "the most important usage driver" for its online presence. From this, words like "growth", "reach", and "usage driver" intensify the sense of commercial logic within the report, which conflicts with traditional public service principles. However, later the report restates its dedication to catering to young audiences as the catalyst of their digital transition. Through the symbiosis between stated target audience expectations and digitalization, DW establishes itself as innovative but socially responsive: "The proportion of videos and innovative multimedia formats will likewise be expanded (…) The young 14+ age group is to be addressed via learning formats specifically tailored to this group, in particular on YouTube, Instagram and TikTok" (Deutsche Welle, 2023, p. 29).

The extensive transition to social media platforms is justified through audience demand discourse, embedding platform transformation as a necessity to establish the public mission. Here, "social media content" and "innovative multimedia formats" connotate the organization's forwardness and communicate its use not just as a distribution tool but as an opportunity to expand audiences' knowledge. The use of 'tailored' implies that content will be shaped by audience and platform demands, reinforcing digital resources' significance for DW's successful mission delivery. DW's positive attribution to platform participation and heavy TikTok's affordances for employment, tailoring its content to the creative flows inspired by the platform (e.g., trends, editing style), exemplifies a match between TikTok practice and organizational preach.

4.2.3 Media systems' contextual relevance

Ultimately, DW's public mission is grounded in established principles relevant to traditional PSM values. Their vow to unbiased and quality information closely responds to expected public value objectives, yet it is largely underscored by a conflicting target audience categorization, prioritizing a specific social group and thus opposing the original universality mandate. What's more, DW's discourse on digital innovation underlines its public mission and target audience as the drivers for its digital transformation that serves to positively improve its mission's reach and influence.

This overemphasis on mutuality between the medium and its audience, defined by the objective of triggering social dialogue, illuminates principles found in the Democratic Corporatist model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 161). Guided by profound political pluralism and significant state

regulation, DW, as a representative of the Democratic Corporatist model, exemplifies the medium's turning into an institution (p. 163), discursively positioning audiences' well-being as its defining goal (p. 164), departing from competitive and market-related rhetoric. DW's limited acknowledgment of platform challenges and preferences towards collaboration with external technological infrastructures implies a stronger determination to engage with audiences and be a trusted online source, rather than protecting editorial independence by encouraging viewers to engage on DW's sites. This discourse reflects previously mentioned cooperation principles, specifically foregrounding digital preferences and content innovation as part of the public's expectations and thus an absolute requirement for PSM functioning.

Resultantly, in line with the democratic media system, enhanced knowledge and experimentation with content strategies, as demonstrated by DW, signals a consistent determination to display enhanced professionalism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 170). Despite TikTok being considered a platform for entertainment with limited quality, following Wirz and Zai (2025), increased platform logic was mainly shown by quality media outlets, thus outlining the utilization of underlying expertise for public betterment (p. 17). Building on this, cooperative discourse when referencing platform participation and its necessity for younger audiences, justifies TikTok's use as a social platform, among others, not for commercial profit or popularization but as part of a greater social objective. This interpretation matches Neff and Pickard's (2021) claims that high funding levels, increased social engagement, and political education strengthen democracies and shape a well-functioning public (p. 619). With DW striving to maintain these principles for its younger audiences, it is apparent that its discourse is contextually aligned with its membership as part of the Democratic Corporatist model.

As for the BBC, whilst similar organizational objectives underlie their editorial practices, the overemphasis on competition and challenge implies a growth-centered logic that combats their commitment to sustaining public value. Based on Hallin and Mancini (2004), UK media historically resembles the Liberal model, and its current organizational rhetoric is no different, overstating the difficult state of media brought by increased competition as a discursive strategy to accelerate its uniqueness and legitimacy in the industry (p. 198). Furthermore, this desire for distinctiveness could be attributed to their funding principles, with the BBC relying on securing its public license and needing to constantly prove its relevance. Moreover, the limited role of the state intensifies commercial logic as more players emerge in the industry and, most specifically, on third-party platforms, where younger individuals could instead prioritize their content (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 246). Differently from DW, their audience inclusivity partially reduces commercial impressions, underlining their mission, yet stated resistance to platform power signals profound market dynamics knowledge.

Resultantly, digital distribution's duality as an opportunity and a challenge reflects prevalent discourses on the asymmetry in the media industry, triggered by social media (Olsen et al., 2024, p.

4). Mainly reflected in its platform adaptation, the BBC's active restraint to platform dynamics could also be explained through the highly commercialized environment, underlining the Liberal model. More specifically, from Sehl et al.'s (2021) research on funding models, the exemption of gaining profit from social media explains the principle of bringing the audience back to the source (p. 1386). Here, the use of branding elements tied to a contradictory rhetoric on platform participation resembles the previously mentioned strategy, reminding of their existence and contributing to their informational process (Sehl et al., 2021, p. 1386). Despite clear replication of the Liberal model within the BBC's discourse, previous research has contested the UK's belonging to this system (Neff & Pickard, 2021, p. 614), with questions about its accuracy after all these years.

      As the authors put it (Hallin & Mancini, 2016, p. 167), "media systems are not static" and digital media's introduction critically alters the recognized media environment, transforming how we determine and interpret the media systems framework (Mancini, 2020, p. 5764). Platform integration has triggered a deinstitutionalization and re-institutionalization process, in which traditional media legitimacy and autonomy over the audience are jeopardized, allowing users' liberation in information consumption, which in turn has powered technological giants and their social networks (Mancini, 2020, p. 5767). This shift shapes how the regulatory asset within the media systems framework is understood, revealing the inherent contestation in the UK's adherence to a traditional media system (Mancini, 2020, p. 5766).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated the digital presence of two public service media organizations – BBC and DW, with a focus on their TikTok profiles, distributing content for young audiences. Guided by the following research question: "*How is PSM crafting its content to balance its public objectives and platform-determined engagement demands on TikTok for younger audiences*", this project explored content strategies in short-form video news reporting on TikTok and stated public mission in organizational reports from the two PSM, comparing BBC and DW's practices, triangulating the findings from the videos' content analysis with discourse on public service objectives.

To execute this, the study employed two qualitative research methods – QCA and CDA, using a codebook and CDA tools to gather and interpret qualitative observations necessary to fulfill research objectives. Moreover, this study was theoretically backed by platformization and infotainment for codebook development in line with TikTok functionalities and affordances, expanding established scholarship (Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024; Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020; Wirz & Zai, 2025). To contextually shape the discursive strategies of BBC and DW, Hallin and Mancini's (2004) comparing media systems framework was applied to reveal how organizational perspectives shape digital content creation and interpret ongoing developments in this transitioning media landscape.

Findings from DW Stories uncover hard news prioritization related to politics, socio-economic affairs, and war, with little inclusion of soft news. Still, hard news was predominantly reported with the help of various entertainment strategies (e.g., expectation and emotionalization) and TikTok logic (e.g., looping and attention-grabbers) to match audiences' consumption demands. Thus, DW's TikTok strategy leans towards infotainment, bridging complex, serious information with amusement triggers like humor to engage and inform.

Reflecting on BBC Newsround's TikTok, soft news dominated the sample (39), discussing leisure topics like sports and pop culture and employing entertainment strategies to better engage audiences. Though less than half of the sample (16), hard news videos were present, discussing the most pressing events in politics and society. Importantly, almost none of the hard news videos contained entertainment strategies, suggesting that the BBC avoids creative risks for serious information, departing from infotainment as a common TikTok content strategy and keeping hard and soft news representation separate.

Collectively, video reports were informationally rich as the content majority covered all information markers taken from Graber (1994 in Wirz & Zai, 2025, p. 5). Notably, this study's qualitative background allowed flexible notetaking across the video analysis, resulting in an interesting news information takeaway. Namely, DW's news reporting often increased its educational value through historical references, multiple perspectives, and premediation (Grusin, 2004), expanding viewers' topic understanding. Similarly, most BBC videos were heavily informational, often expanding beyond contextual information by providing diversified perceptions or professional

commentary. Resultantly, these insights confirm the findings from Wirz and Zai (2025, p. 13), which maintain that quality media are more informational. Previous research on audiences' perceived quality of German and UK PSM maintains that audiences attribute significant trust to PSM based on the extensive information they provide (Sehl, 2020, p. 366). Therefore, TikTok videos with informational functions can boost PSM's credibility.

Despite its concentration on hard news, DW's TikTok content utilized entertaining strategies with which to engage viewers, turning their content into a digital infotainment example. Specifically, emotionalization, expectation, and humor were dominant amusement features woven into presenters' storytelling. Complemented with various platform affordances, DW demonstrates an experimental attitude in its digital presence by heavily adopting the so-called TikTok logic, altering its content both creatively and technologically. The most common ones were attention-grabbers, represented by consistent sound effects and audiovisual hooks used, and interactivity, having editorial and algorithmic implications. These findings mirror previous research, maintaining that TikTok functionalities are increasingly included in news content (Degen et al., 2024, p. 691; Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024, p. 1063). Notably, looping and algospeak emerged as new strategies widely used on TikTok, absent from current research. These strategies are especially interesting due to their creative and algorithmic influence, with looping repeatedly matching expectation from coded entertainment strategies, resembling a distinctive structural format used in multiple videos. Similarly, algospeak expanded the platform logic code, demonstrating how public service media try to combat algorithmic influences when reporting sensitive and controversial topics that might result in content moderation.

Correspondingly, the normalized TikTok logic demonstrates platforms' profound influence on all journalistic processes (Van Dijck & Poell, 2014 in Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020, p.1729), signaling a controversial observation in which PSM employ practices to boost shareability (García-Ortega & García-Avilés, 2023, p.189). Based on Poell et al. (2023), media organizations operationally converge through algorithmic influence as performance metrics shape their editorial practices (p.1393). Therefore, increased platform logic and growth can push PSM to prioritize strategy over education.

Integrating an experimental mindset in editorial processes, DW echoes prior research observations stating that younger audiences are drawn to visual formats that include informational and entertainment features (Autenrieth et al., 2021, p.122; Frei et al., 2024, p.114). Moreover, young news consumers' incidental news exposure conditions them to accept novel news formats that will engage them when scrolling (Røsok-Dahl & Ihlebæk, 2024, p. 1239; Frei et al., 2024, p.115).

Correspondingly, DW's public mission discourse underlines mutuality and young audience engagement as top priorities shaping its editorial processes. Situating educational value as a main driver within its discourse, DW's videos illuminate this goal by providing content contributing to public knowledge, whilst demonstrating platform expertise and audience acknowledgment. In line

with the Democratic Corporatist model (Hallin and Mancini, 2004, p.163), DW's discourse concentrates on institutional and social cooperation to sustain the German democratic media environment, portraying all editorial and organizational practices as representative of society's demands, justifying strong platform reliance and experimental entertaining strategies via viewership demands (Olsen et al., 2024, p.10).

Diversely, BBC's entertainment strategies were employed differently, as hard news reports rarely utilized any entertainment strategies. However, informality, which appeared as an inductive code, together with expectation and humor, underlined soft news videos as dominant entertainment strategies. In line with Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero (2024), video news items on TikTok were explained in an informal style, distinct from traditional broadcasting (p. 1064). Platform use was limited compared to DW, as digital content mainly included on-screen text and attention-grabbers as a hint to platform influence (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020, p.1724), occasionally embedding TikTok native sounds. BBC's platform restraint was further implied through self-referencing and branding elements used in TikTok videos. This apprehension about adopting full TikTok logic represents Zao and Ye's observations (2023) on publishers' TikTok presence falling back on their traditional principles to maintain editorial integrity (p.683). Moreover, it uncovers a loophole to remind viewers of the source (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020, p.1730).

BBC's platform restraint could also be found in its organizational statements. Influenced by dynamic changes in media development and technological innovation, BBC's platform attitude reflects a general tension in scholarship – PSM's declining role in a market dominated by platforms (Dragomir, 2025, p.73). Therefore, its organizational attitudes discursively position PSM functioning as strongly challenged within a heavily commercialized industry. BBC's demand-driven rhetoric serves as a tool to restate legitimacy, replicating principles typical for the Liberal Corporatist model (Hallin and Mancini, 2004, p.198). Consistently, BBC's legitimization discourse matches Olsen et al.'s findings (2024) on the tension between reaping platform benefits such as audience reach and withstanding over-reliance that disrupts editorial independence (p.13).

As an answer to the research question, DW's stated public mission replicates its content strategies, heavily relying on platform logic and entertaining reporting for serious topics as a tool to engage young audiences. BBC's public objectives also reflect its TikTok content, providing informational video content for both hard and soft news with which to inform young viewers, while trying to restrict platform dominance through self-referencing that reminds the audience of the source and its expertise.

5.1 Limitations and Strengths

Despite this study's extensive inquiry into TikTok content and organizational discourse, some limitations are present. Firstly, this study focused solely on public service media in its sample, excluding research on for-profit outlets and digitally native organizations. Secondly, while diversified

insights on content strategies were presented, this project does not cover all potential practices since it relies on a coding framework, leaving room for additional findings from future research. Thirdly, this research did not account for the audience perspective as recipients of this content, limiting conclusions on the usefulness of these digital practices.

Nonetheless, research on TikTok's relevance for digital journalism is relatively scarce, with no present research specifically aimed at PSM and young audiences. Drawing on and expanding an existing research framework for news reporting on TikTok (Zai & Wirz, 2025), this study tests its wider applicability. Moreover, the incorporation of organizational discourse and its triangulation with TikTok data aimed to bridge the gap between practice and preaching in PSM digital operations.

5.2 Implications and Future Research

This study has significant theoretical implications. Primarily, it successfully adopts and applies a newly developed theoretical framework that operationalizes infotainment for TikTok content (Wirz and Zai, 2025), altering its use to fit qualitative research, and expanding its scope by integrating newly observed editorial and platform-based features. Similarly, it attempts to connect PSM organizational rhetoric to actual editorial practices, closing an academically distinguished research gap (Røsok-Dahl & Ihlebæk, 2024, p.1242). Additionally, this study compared two different media organizations, triangulating two data types to systematically present an under-researched phenomenon.

As for practical implications, this study sheds light on numerous content practices and discusses the achievement of a balance between informational and entertaining goals online. By revealing an extensive amount of engagement strategies, this project could be useful to other public service media outlets wanting to transition into publishing on TikTok.

Since young audiences' perceptions investigation on TikTok news reports is beyond this study's scope, future research could explore the effectiveness of infotainment PSM storytelling online, accounting for youth's attitude towards platform dependence and reporting styles. Furthermore, due to the ongoing relevance of TikTok for news reporting and the dynamic functioning of social media platforms, quantitative content analysis research could be carried out to explore larger data sets and interpret content strategies' consistency in legacy media and in comparison to other types.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study explored two European PSM's TikTok accounts - DW Stories and BBC's Newsround, focusing on short-form video content strategies and evaluation of stated public mission catering to younger audiences. DW Stories prioritized hard news reporting, foregrounding political and social affairs to engage the digital public in opinion formation. Despite its strong emphasis on serious content, noteworthy experimentation with entertaining and platform strategies

was found, demonstrating a continuous objective to engage audiences following their digital preferences. Comparably, BBC's Newsround provided informationally rich content, prioritizing soft over hard news reporting, employing entertainment strategies primarily for its soft news content. Differently from DW, BBC exemplified limited platform logic, seemingly disclosing a platform-resistant approach, communicated both within its content strategies and organizational principles. The findings from this study reveal legacy media's perception and pursuit of young audiences' attention, contributing to academic discussions on the role and relevance of public service media organizations in the rapidly transforming media landscape.

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Codebook

This codebook is used as an analytical framework for the investigation of content strategies in PSM content on TikTok. It utilizes the concept of infotainment and platformization to determine how BBC and DW craft their content to engage young audiences on their channels, Newsround and Stories (The World Unpacked). The code frame consists of categories and subcategories developed from the theoretical framework and past studies on TikTok news that include infotainment (information & entertainment) and platformization, together with data-driven dimensions emerging from the actual coding and analysis. Ultimately, the objective is to understand how the news content balances the abovementioned concepts and whether it involves alternative, novel strategies, building on previous research.

The codebook is inspired by Wirz and Zai's (2025) framework, which analyses TikTok news from Swiss media outlets. In line with them, infotainment in this project is defined as the incorporation of entertaining materials into news's format and topic (Brants and Neijens, 1998 in Wirz and Zai, 2025). Topics will be distinguished as either hard or soft news (Reinemann et. al, 2012 in Wirz & Zai, 2025), with infotainment being understood as the inclusion of entertaining elements in informational content. Since one of PSM's main principles is to inform and educate audiences, as positioned in their policy reports, it is safe to assume that they strive for their content to always include informational characteristics. Therefore, it is not necessary for us to determine whether the content is either informational or entertaining, but to understand the use of entertaining materials within the already informational content.

Additionally, the codebook includes insights from Vázquez-Herrero et al. (2022) and Hendrickx and Vázquez-Herrero (2024) on social media logic and platformization as shaping content strategies of news reporting on TikTok. While the codebook is based on deductive dimensions, it also accounts for inductive insights, leaving room for the inclusion of additional categories/subcategories.

Dimensions and Definitions

The following categories are included in the coding frame:

1. **News Topic Type (from Wirz & Zai, 2025; Reinemann et al., 2012)**
   a. Definition: Illustrates the topic of the video
      i. Hard news – when videos report on political, economic, civic, and religious matters.
      ii. Soft news – when videos report on lifestyle, fashion/art/culture, social matters (celebrities; gossip), travel, sport.
2. **Information Richness (from Graber, 1994, in Wirz & Zai, 2025)**
   a. Definition: Evaluates the depth of information about the reported news in the video
      i. Who – Present/Absent

ii.   What - Present/Absent

iii. Where - Present/Absent

iv.   When - Present/Absent

v.   Why - Present/Absent

vi.   How - Present/Absent

Interpretation → Basic information (the 4 Ws) vs. Full Information (Why and How)

3. **Entertainment strategies (from Wirz & Zai, 2025 and inductive)**
    a. Definition: Identifies what strategies have been used to entertain/engage audiences that <u>are not TikTok-inspired</u> but based on editorial choice and creativity.
        i.   Emotionalization – contains explicit mentioning of emotions or visual/audio symbols that imply certain emotions; dramatically enhances the content. (e.g., words like devastating, images of destruction; original sad/tensional music)
        ii.   Expectation – when the story creates an expectation for the viewer that is addressed during the video through an open-ended statement, question (e.g., Could this campaign message be what got him the election?)
        iii. Humor/Irony/Satire – visual/verbal/illustrative jokes, punchlines; comic exaggeration; meme-reference (non-TikTok native).
        iv.   Informality– news delivery that reduces social proximity through direct, informal language (e.g. slang, contractions) second person addressing, to make the news item more engaging or relatable, personalized to the viewer (e.g. hella expensive; guys, it's happening, this my friends is.; "no cap!"; let's be real, you better sign me up!)

4. **Platform Logic (from Vázquez-Herrero et al. 2022; Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024; Wirz & Zai, 2025, inductive)**
    a. Definition: Illustrates how TikTok's affordances and cultural/creative logic shape news content.
        i.   TikTok-trends/TikTok-native – visual/verbal/audio references to other viral TikTok content (e.g., POV trend)
        ii.   Attention-grabbers – introductory visual/verbal 'hooks' that grab the initial attention of the viewer. (e.g. "Did you know"; enter in frame; you won't believe what I learned, here are 3 tips...) editing features that increase the video's momentum and serve to audio-visually stimulate and engage the viewer (e.g., transitions, animations, jump cuts, zoom-in and out; overlays, sound effects)
        iii. Looping/circulation format – when a video ends with a statement or a visual that loops seamlessly with the introduction of the video, tricking the viewer into watching it again
        iv.   Interactivity – encourages users to comment their opinion/share personal experiences in the comments; ends with questions which might persuade users to comment (What are your highlights from the year, comment below; should the government do this, let us know)
        v.   On-screen text – textual features that improve the accessibility of the video but also algorithmically enhance it (subtitles, keywords, headlines)

      vi.   Algospeak – when on-screen texts with sensitive words and information are altered to avoid shadow banning and content moderation from algorithms. (e.g. G@aza; @lchoh0l; w@r; unaliving)

      vii. duets/stitches – affordances that allow users to embed other creators' videos into their own projects

5. **Video Duration**
   a. Definition: How long is the video in seconds?

6. **Visual Location/Setting**
   a. Definition: Provides insight into the visual and physical context in which the story is reported, outlining natural environments and constructed environments (sets and studios)
      i. Informal – home setting, desk
      ii. Formal – studio, set
      iii. On-site/Field reporting
      iv. Digital - Chroma-key/green-screen
      v. Mixed/Multiple

7. **Presenter in video** – Yes/No

8. **Self-referencing/ Branding elements**
   a. Definition: When the video explicitly refers to the organization, including visual, spoken or on-screen branding.
      i. Visual
      ii. Spoken
      iii. Mixed

Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

Student Information
Name: Iva Konstantinova
Student ID: 603683
Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000
Supervisor Name: Dr. Sergül Nguyen
Date: 26.06.2025

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools
I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:
- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- ~~Writing improvements, including~~ grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

☒ I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically **Grammarly for spelling and grammar** in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

☐ I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature: [digital signature]
Date of Signature: [Date of Submission]

Extent of AI Usage
☒ I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.

Ethical and Academic Integrity
☒ I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from

these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature:
Date of Signature: 26.06.2025

Appendix C
Statement of AI use

During the process of writing this thesis, I relied on Grammarly - a software for punctuation and grammar checks. Importantly, I used the free version that has no generative features (or they were disabled), therefore no contents in this thesis have been written by AI or external sources, it was used solely for punctuation checks (e.g. missing commas and periods), together with checks for misspellings and cohesion in American English use. I chose to use Grammarly due to the extensive length of this study, since it was convenient for me to detect for mistakes across the numerous pages. I understand the importance of academic transparency and the impact that AI bears on the credibility of my research, that is why I chose to rely on my own knowledge and judgement and use external assistance only for layout and formatting of the final version.