LOST GENERATION
OR
LOST MEDIUM?

Prof. Dr. Hermann Rotermund | Leuphana-Universität Lüneburg

Thank you for the invitation to this event. Perhaps I should explain with a few words where I come from and why I think it is ok to be here and share my insights and opinions with you.

I work now as a professor for media studies at the Leuphana University in Lüneburg, and have a long experience also with the design and the project management of digital channels in TV and in the internet. The strategy of German public broadcasters regarding their role in the digital age is a subject of interest for me since approximately 25 years.

The last two and a half years – until the end of July 2015 – I was leading an academic research project on the future of Public Service Media. One of our interests was the transformation of TV programming and format development under the conditions of digital media. We focused especially on the departure of younger generations from classical reception behaviour and the consequences for broadcasters. As a side-effect of this we developed a successful Youtube channel with the ambition to reach younger people with high quality content. This channel won a Grimme-Online-Award, Germany's most renowned award for internet content. One of the success factors of this channel was and is its conjunction with Social Media channels and activities.

In the next 28 minutes I will talk a bit about the change process of broadcast media in general, about some special problems of public media, about the growing incomprehensibility of serious content for large parts of the audience, about the chances of social media communication and about the strategy which should be adopted in the time of dynamic convergent developments.

Before I show you one little example from our Youtube channel, I like to explain the title of my presentation with a few pictures. This image shows students in a normal situation – apparently a lunch break. The use of laptops and in one case of a smartphone is what you can expect from such a scene.

This is somehow unexpected: Hurray, a whole family is watching TV. Nobody is busy with a second device, all are attentive. This is the ideal – for TV people, but I bet this is not a real scene.

But the photo gives us a hint: The family seems to watch live news from the BBC.

Live TV is the last genre that has still the capability to aggregate whole families before the screen.

The opposite is shown on this image. It is more realistic in common households, as we all know. There is a trend back to only one TV per households. We will come back to that later.

Another family situation, and it suggests: If if TV is not live, it's Netflix. Again, this is realistic, and you can exchange Netflix with the appropriate synonyms that point to non-linear use of video content.

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So – how to explain the ongoing change in the use of media? Apparently it goes side-by-side with a shift of relevance. The traditional mass media and their channels lose their position as most relevant sources of information and entertainment. Live shows, sports and to a certain degree news are the last strongholds of television. This is especially true for younger generations, people between 15 and 35.

Younger people still watch television. But – to give an example from Germany – they select commercial entertainment channels as their favourites: 51% of the teenagers like ProSieben most, only 2% the channels of ARD and ZDF.

A subproject of the already mentioned Public Service Media 2.0 lab produced within 24 months a lot of videos (360/370) and distributed them on Youtube, with parallel discussion on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. An important part of the content is the result of Social Media communication which is not seen as follow-up activity separated from content development. This could be contrasted to endeavours of broadcasters to generate considerable response in Social Media channels.

Again: How do you like that image – as a TV editor? Exclusive attention for TV programs, that must be a paradise for you?! But this paradise is lost, as you all know. And from the position of an educator, this model can be not recommended. Communication is one-directional, a backchannel is missing. Educational TV was always combined with other media and communications, and only therefore a tolerable solution. I don't know if it ever worked. But I know that most of the video content in schools was offered via film projector, VCR and DVD (and maybe still today). Educational TV is hampered by linearity. The discussion of recorded video material in classrooms is fine – but that's not TV. This may be one of the reasons why educational TV which is directed to school teaching is more or less out of order.

But times have changed anyhow. Video content in classrooms is still fine, but outside school TV is no longer an important source of instruction. There are still good journalistic documentary programs, though, and interested people of all ages know how to get access to them. The non-linear access is getting ever more important. If the content is not present in the on-demand repositories of the broadcasters, they will bei found on Youtube or somewhere else. That's fine, but I feel that the aspirations of TV editors go beyond the mere distribution of their content.

Smartphones are the most personal devices, the most interactive and they get the most attention of all. If you manage to get your content on the smartphone of this girl, it will be perceived. If not … you have lost.

Educational programs are niche programs. How to avoid to perish in ghettos?

If the educational niche is not well organised, if it is not attractive beyond its constituent parts, if it or its content is not findable, most of your efforts are given away. I think we all are aware that there are three target groups for educational programs: students, teachers and the general public. In this sense they belong to a virtual community. But there is no real community, not even in the Social Networks, which combines these groups and their interests. Findability across many devices: Smartphone, tablets, PCs, Smart-TVs is of course an issue, but it can not be isolated from attraction. If content and its environment is not attractive, nobody will talk about it (except teachers because they have to), and it is not possible to enlarge the audience.

I cannot offer a solution. But the building of communities around the subjects of the programs seems to be necessary.

TV programs in the web – live streams or on demand videos – have no other USP than their quality. Last year I read in a concept paper of a German radio broadcaster: Our position in the web competition is outstanding because we have an USP: audio. This is not true for two reasons: There is a huge amount of audio content in the web, and that covers audio of all genres. And the competition in the web is not about content features like audio or video. It is about the time of the users. If someone has read an illustrated report on Syrian refugees and spent 10 minutes with that, he may not be so much motivated to listen to a 5-minute radio report additionally. And in many real use cases it is not even possible to listen to an audio or watch a video – for instance if you are commuting in a train and are equipped with a smartphone.

The competition in the Web is about time. There is a huge flood of online videos and content of other sorts which are competitors with your products. If the users do not get the impression, that your product is a must-have, that they get definitely richer when watching your video for 30 minutes in the evening.

Since several years the concept of Crossmedia Production is featured at many events (like today in the afternoon), and there is a lot of literature about it.

I am very sceptical about this concept. It tries to bridge two different territories. But it does not intend to change any of them. And therefore it ignores – in my view – the dynamics of media development. If TV (the territory on the left side) does not understand itself as part and factor of online media, it will lose its options for the future.

Please readjust my opinion in the following discussion. I have the impression that the first rule still is: Content must work in television. And much of the planning for the online parts of the package is not done by TV editors and authors but by additional specialists, typically younger ones, interns. And the non-TV parts must not cost much because otherwise the budget for the TV part would be cannibalised. Of course I know some exceptionally good crossmedia productions. But the result up to now seems to be: Crossmedia has not yet left the state of an add-on.

More about this and the mindset of TV editors a bit later.

The future of TV is mobile

The greatest gains in the use of moving images are made in the mobile domain. Video is a key factor of smartphone use. There is a lot of unique web and mobile content, and if it is interesting enough to watch it, it beats any other media content, for instance the TV programs which are scheduled at the same time (with the exception of THE favourite show or the football match (all other content is accessible on demand).
If the content of broadcasters is not present and findable in the most visited repositories and aggregations, it will not be watched.

The future of TV is apps

Tim Cook – as a propagandist for his own cause – hits an important point. In short: The best cross media concept – if there is any - is the announcement of an app that is available parallel to a TV production. If you know that there is an app you have no problem with the positioning of your content (except the positioning in the app stores). What users are searching and downloading personally, gets the highest attention possible. If you announce in TV and in print media: Next Tuesday our Refugees docu app is available, and a week later a corresponding program appears in the TV, an first step is done. It would be even better, if the time-gap between the app release and the finishing of the TV docu would be so large that you could integrate questions and positions from app users in your program.
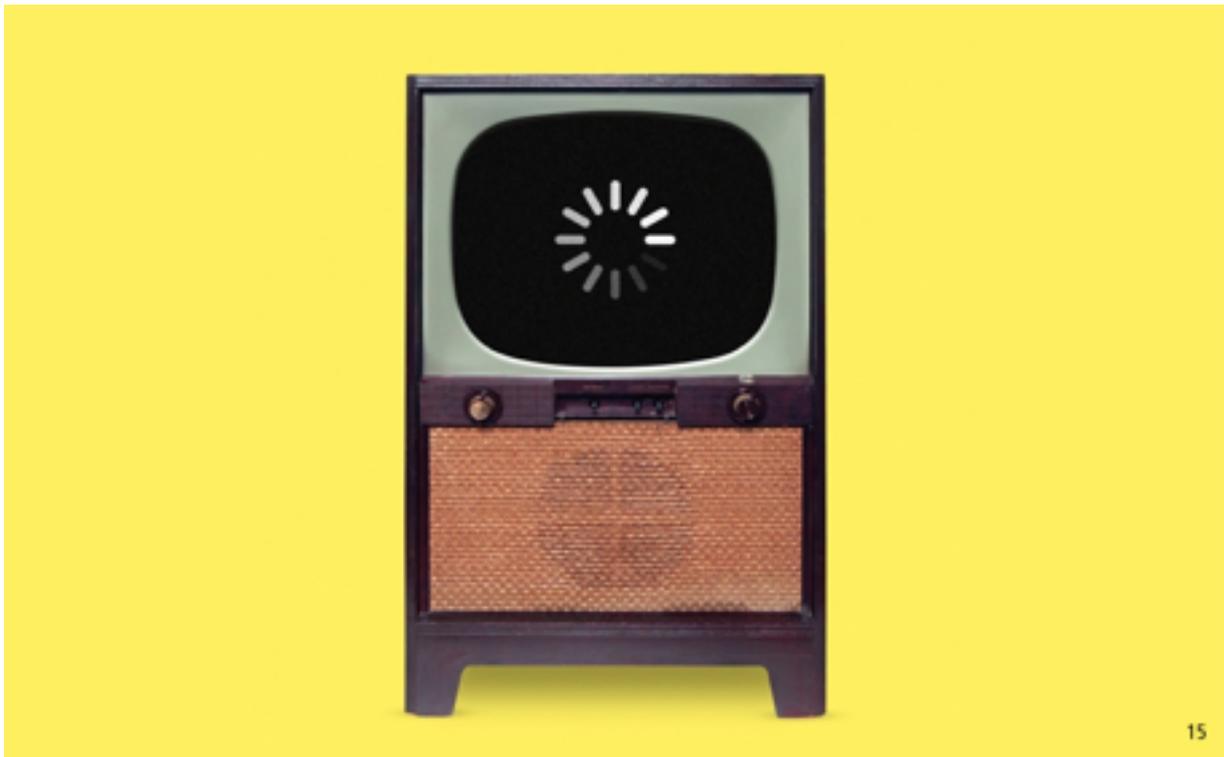
Maybe the future of television will be something else.
BUT THE FUTURE OF TV WILL BE FULL DIGITAL AND ONLINE, one way or
another

Back to only one TV set per household

But its function is the central family entertainment hub. Three of five people do not attend the TV program. Sometimes the family gathers to binge-watch a whole session of a TV series (like Vampire Diaries) at one weekend.
If there is a TV set in a childrens' room, it is used in connection with a Playstation or other gaming device.

The golden days of Television. Again: They are gone. This living room pictures the TV paradise that will never be regained. (I wonder what kind of beverage is in the bottles of the children).

But even in the family entertainment center we have the generation rift

For the adults – if they are around 40 and older – TV still may be the most relevant medium for entertainment AND information. They may still read a newspaper or have even subscribed one. The children generation does never read a newspaper if it is not a standard in the household to read one. And it feels informed about the world affairs without ever watching a TV news show.

The diversion from PSM TV is heavier than from TV in general

The market shares of German public broadcasters are still large, about 12 or 13 percent overall for each system. The public systems rule the senior generations, but in the younger cohorts the share is much smaller. Will these cohorts (the 10 to 20, the 20 to 30 year old people from today) change their attitudes towards television use and especially the reception of public service media, when they get older. Will they desire to sink into the cozy couch atmosphere in their living rooms when at their 40th birthdays?

Or will the ignorance towards the public media grow and in the end delegitimate the mandate of these institutions?

Research in the field of newspaper use shows that there is not much hope. Even non-newspaper readers judge newspapers as relevant (that is what they have heard of), but the motivation to read and subscribe newspapers, sinks constantly.

A similar observation about the gap between image and use is made amongst the youngest age cohort (12 to 19) in Germany. I will show you the numbers after introducing an additional point of view.

Public Broadcasters will lose the younger parts of the public if they do not position themselves as part of the culture of the younger generation. This lesson is already learned by the multitude of young radio stations – at least in linear radio –, but not in TV programming and only in a small part of the PSM web and mobile activities.

Germany 2015:

15% of the adults between 18 to 65 years are *functional analphabets*

40% of the adults are not able to comprehend news texts

No comprehension – no contact – no effect

Research on news comprehension

Comprehensibility is based on previous knowledge, and assumed opinions, and on the communication in peer groups and the social environments of the individual media consumer.

Journalists must assume that readers may not have read, or may have forgotten, previous information. Hence it seems to be important to introduce presupposed information of a particular kind and summarize it as background or context for actual events.
Novelty in the news is limited. It is the tip of an iceberg of presuppositions and hence of previously acquired information. Also, **complete novelty is by definition incomprehensible**: Without previous models and schemata, we cannot understand what news is about.

Recall of radio and TV news is generally low. Unaided recall for news in natural situations is less than 5% of items in a broadcast, whereas recognition (aided remembrance) may be at most about 40%. In more controlled conditions – like in university courses –, recall may be higher (from 20% to 40%).

Generally, previous knowledge, either by education or special interest for issues or topics, improves comprehension and recall. Frequent occurrence in the news of given issues tends to contribute most to people's awareness of political events. People tend to recall the information they already knew. Other factors that influence comprehension are individual interest and perspective.

Among the factors that enhance recall are primacy, the verbal or pictorial emphasis of structural factors like cause and consequence and the existence of narrative schemata that organize the understanding of news events.

Generally, people remember best the kind of negative or spectacular stories that also define

everyday and fictional storytelling, and/or that have most emotional appeal or everyday relevance: individual, street crime; accidents; disasters; etc. Although national politics is remembered fairly well (e.g., election coverage), more abstract and distant political topics tend to be forgotten.
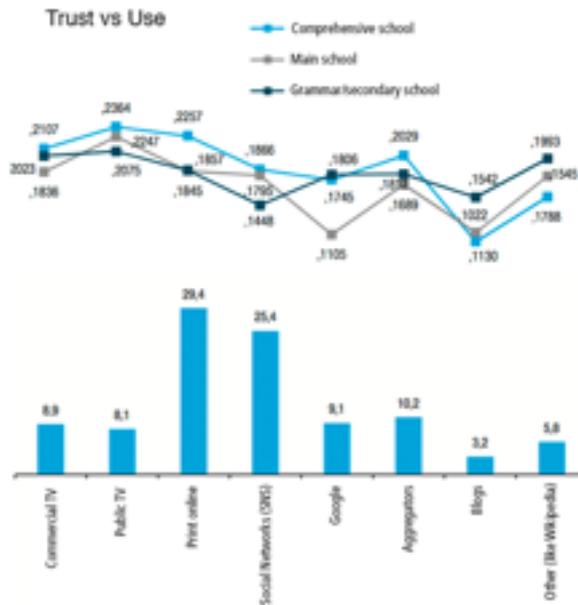
Most trusted is not most used (Germany 2014)

A study with young participants between 14 and 29 in Germany shows the effect of incomprehensability. Public service media channels are most trusted but not often used. Websites of print publishers which adopted very early elements of the yellow press and are much easier to read than their original print editions, are the favourite news sources. You remember: This group does not read newspapers at all, but it evaluates them as trustworthy and – why prefers it their websites over those from public broadcasters. Because they are more attractive and more comprehensible.

Second screen is the first screen
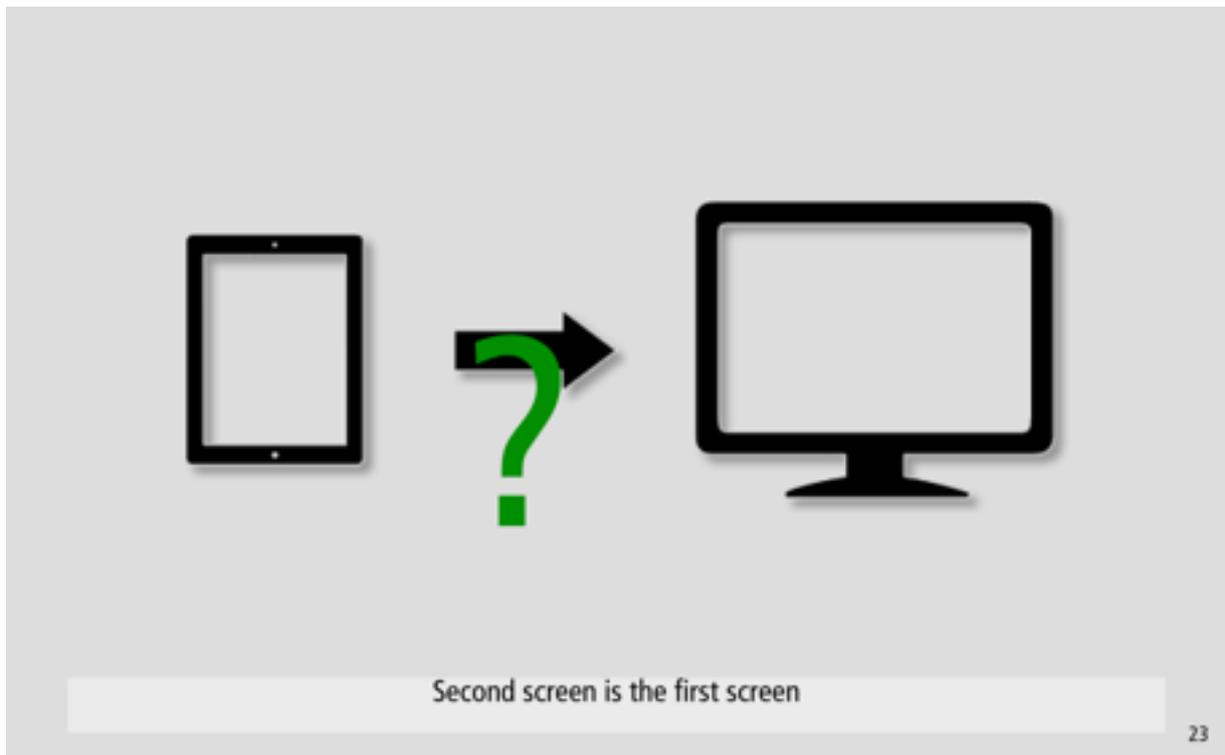
I will change now the subject and like to talk about Social Media and TV. Despite being commercial and alienating our personal profiles from us, the Social Networks seem to be ideal incorporations of basic concepts of the internet. Communication and user interaction are the top features of those commercial social network sites, and their main content.

Since the importance of these platforms is known, they are also used as distributors for media content – with more or less success.

A special case is the concept of second screen apps. They try to use mechanisms from Social media websites and combine them with partial or additional content from a TV program. It works sometimes when this is a popular live show. But in general the idea that the use of the second screen could lead the users to the first screen, is very questionable. Newspaper websites also do not lead their users to the printed newspapers.

Social Media Websites (Facebook, Twitter, …) with their statistical mechanisms – and also the personal communication via Whats App creates Filter Bubbles for groups of different sizes. Some of them are permeable, but an impulse is needed to get through. People change their attitude towards an object or a brand if they get an emotional stimulus. You never liked cars from BMW – and now you met someone who makes a ride in such a car with you; and the day after you tell your friend that BMWs are fine cars. If you want that people get aware what you are offering you have to distribute more than simple teasers with abstracts of your content. You have to shake and alert people, invite and involve them to new experiences, communicate with them, and only then you get them as part of your audience.

To get into the mindset of other people, you have to change your own mindset first.

Change the (your) mindset
– not only the tonality.

TV programming should be part of Social Media communication
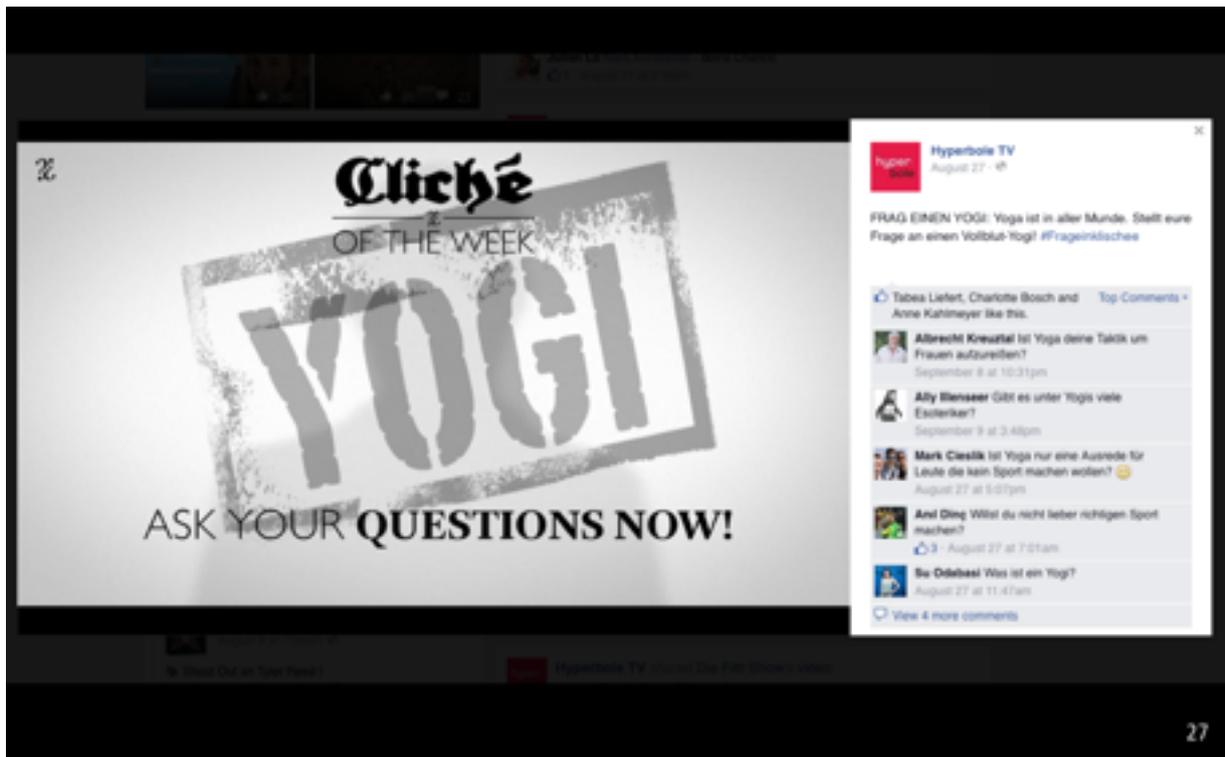
OK, *Cliché of the week* is a very short format, the pieces are not longer than 3 minutes, often only between 1 and 2 minutes. That makes it easier to react in a short period of one or two weeks on the demands of the public. For longer formats such a development in close communication with the audience has to be deliberated. Short teasers and related questions could be useful.

Social Media is about (felt) participation

Please do not judge this statement as cynical. If you look at strained endeavours of public media to contact and younger people and to communicate with them, they resemble often to the endeavours of teachers in the school.

It it not sufficient to ask questions like: Hey, what do you think about this piece of documentation? You will get much more interesting as communication partners if you question your own position and production

First listen. Than talk.

Nothing to add. This advice is hard to fulfil. We are all trained to deliver ideas, statements, messages, but not in the same extent to listen and to respect the positions of non-professionals. But we all should try …

Another short piece from the Hyperbole Youtube channel. It is from a series of long interviews with German military veterans who have been in Afghanistan, Somalia and Bosnia and are now suffering from Posttraumatic stress disorder. Also these difficult and complex videos gained extremely positive response from the young audience. Of course such a documentary cannot react itself to impulses from the viewers. The talk is done, and also most of the editing. But it is possible to build bridges from clip to clip by the active participation in the communication with users.

Cross and Trans is not enough. Act as Online editor who also delivers content for TV.

The transformation of traditional TV institutions to full digital enterprises is going on. Online and mobile users expect that you are able to deliver content which fits to their expectations, reception capabilities and the media they use. You cannot announce in an online medium which is fully capable to transport HD video: Look here, our little teaser shows what you can watch in TV this night. The Holy Grail of TV primetime audience flow is vanishing. For TV documentaries and educational programs it never existed.

Social Media communicators are very sensitive. If you as a TV station release only Public Relations statements or if you are apparently not the responsible person for a production or a project, you will not create trust and also not followers.

1 Das Erste	18:00 Quizduell ○ Moderation: Jörg Pilaw	18:50 Großstadtrevier (325) ○ Mit Pfand und Siegel		20:00 ○ Tagessch	20:15 #Beckmann ○ Die Angst vor den Wölfen – wie viel Wildnis	21:00 Hart aber fair ○ Moderation: Frank Pla
3 ZDF	18:05 SOKO 5113 ○ Ausgekocht	19:00 heute ○	19:20 Was nun, Herr C. ○ Fragen an den SPD-V	19:45 WISO ○	20:15 Tod in den Bergen ○ Alpenkrimi	
6 ProSieben	18:08 Die S ○ Der Itali	18:37 Die Simpsons ○ Simpsons Weihnachtsge	19:01 Galileo ○ Thema u. a.: Beste Schule Deutschlands, Information, D 2015		20:14 The Big Bang Theory ○ Ostereier im Juni, Sitcom,	20:43 The Big Bang The ○ Tritte unter dem Tisch	21:09 The Big ○ Ein erfreulic

One sidestep: Television is not dead, not even for the younger generations. At the beginning I reported that German teenagers dislike the public TV channels of ARD and ZDF. If you look at the schedule of one randomly selected evening, you can see that both public broadcasters are programming cheap police series in the pre-primetime. In the relevant family TV timeslot, between 7 and 8 pm, only the commercial station ProSieben schedules a family program - a popular science magazine, Galileo, 7 days per week. On this day, with The Simpsons, Galileo and The Big Bang Theory it offers a perfect mix of respectable content for the whole period between 6 and 10. The public broadcasters have very low-brow entertainment in their flows – and I doubt that they have consistent audience flows with these programs. ZDF offers news and journalistic content between 7 and 8:15, ARD has a documentary about wolves parallel to Big Bang Theory, but only ProSieben shows how to address the younger generations with affordable public value. The public broadcasters apparently want to earn money in the pre-primetime and do mainly care about their largest audience group: the older and retired beyond 60.

Online is not restricted to younger generations.

The other side of the argument that TV is not dead: Online affinity and media usage is spread over all generations from 10 to 80. The millennium generation, the so-called digital natives, are not more capable to handle and understand digital devices than others – rather less, as I can tell you from my experiences with students. There are indeed differences: Members of the older generations are not so impatient and do not communicate with the same tonality as the younger ones. If you look at the discussions on Youtube, you can find very aggressive communities, and from the outside you cannot distinguish authentic aggressively from a playful one.

A strategy which distributes special content only for the younger ones online and mobile is a big mistake, in my mind. The public media mandate is to address all strata of the society – and this should be done over all media channels. If you address the young in an online niche and change nothing else in your business strategy, you will fail. Instead you should produce younger content for all channels and spend a lot of money to move the whole institution into the direction of an online medium. The self-conception of traditional media has to be attacked and to be altered.

For me, the prototype for the reconfiguration of the broadcast media is the sentence from an internal strategic report of the New York Times: There should not be one process in the company which is thought and organised print-only. If you translate that to TV, it runs: There should be no process and production in your institution which is not directed to the online media.

Digital transformation
of your work has yet to be
completed.

Think of mobile/online first!

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Mobile/online first is not an advice for the time of publication. Science and education programs, serious non-fiction is most appropriate for non-linear platforms and combinations with user interaction and communication. The reception of such content has a much higher attention value and influence on further deliberations than linear TV reception.

Therefore this should be your priority – even if you get paid and understand yourself as TV editors or producers.

Education is interaction and communication. *Online* is interaction and communication.

It should work …

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There are many obstacles on the road to a full digital enterprise and the unified online media in which TV production could fill a new place. One of the obstacles is the legal mandate for public service media. If they want to do what is necessary to keep the legitimation for their work – reach all strata of the society on all available audio and video devices –, they have to turn their perspective altogether and define themselves sooner or later as online media institutions.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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