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Abstract:

Notions of the public in public service broadcasting policy for the digital era

The discourse on digital media is characterized by ideas of changing media user behaviour: more or less active audiences are described as turning into participants. In parallel, uses of new media platforms – especially the internet – seem to threaten the central role of broadcast television in the public sphere. In this situation, media policy is being revised across Europe. Concretely, the tasks of public service broadcasting are reconsidered. But does the users matter in these revisions?

This paper analyzes how public service broadcasting policy imagines the users that constitute the public in the digital era. It approaches the issue by comparing two recent government green papers – one from the UK (2005) and one from Norway (2007). How are the users considered as a factor for policy change? To what extent do the policy documents distinguish between audiences, users and participants, and their roles as consumers and citizens? Through its analysis, the paper problematizes both widespread ideas of media user behaviour, and the factors identified in ongoing media policy revisions in different contexts.