

## **Between television, web and social media: On social TV, *About:Kate* and participatory production in German Public Television**

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### **Abstract:**

This article investigates how social media and participatory culture affect public television in Germany. Against the backdrop of what José van Dijck and Thomas Poell (2015) have conceptualized as the ‘conflation of social media logic and television’s mass media logic’, I will present an additional perspective by emphasizing dynamics in a cross-media production process. As a consequence of the dynamics that Henry Jenkins described in *Convergence Culture*, public television and social media have sought new ways to interweave. As I analyze the German-French television series *About:Kate* (ARTE, 2013) with regard to the relationship of producer-generated content (PGC) and user-generated content (UGC), I will identify a particular mode of production practices which I will call ‘participatory production’. It is at the core of participatory production practices that the merging field of television, digital and social media at the levels of ‘institutional strategies’, ‘professional production’, and ‘content’ are affected in order to deliberately provide opportunities for anticipated audience engagement at the level of ‘audience participation’. Furthermore, participatory production practices in the case of *About:Kate* indicate a modification of what can be termed social TV or ‘Social TV 2.0’ (Schatz et al., 2008), respectively.

**Keywords:** Participatory Culture, User-Generated Content, Television Audiences, Social TV, Cross-Media Production, Public Television, Social Media

### **Introduction**

On April 27, 2013, the television series *About:Kate* was launched by the Franco-German television broadcaster ARTE.<sup>1</sup> The show was designed as a cross-media storytelling project for a new era of German public service broadcasting (PSB), in the age of digital and multi-

platform media. The series was not PSB's first attempt in the field of 'cross media productions' (Bechmann Petersen, 2006).<sup>2</sup> However, *About:Kate* offered a sophisticated concept that integrated the defined (and expected) forms and conventions of the 'lean-back medium of television' with the 'lean-forward mode of on-demand web and mobile use, in which users engage in diverse, highly personalized and individualistic forms of participation' (Debrett, 2015: 558). Sebastian Tschöpel, the Solution Architect of the series' smartphone app from the Fraunhofer Institute for Intelligent Analysis and Information Systems (IAIS), declared enthusiastically (in 2013), 'No television format has ever been so holistically cross-medial'.<sup>3</sup> The show was described by media critics as the first series to be considered 'genuinely new television' (Pilarczyk, 2013), and was praised for the exceptional quality of its cross-medial storytelling (Borufka, 2013).

Indeed, *About:Kate* examined new forms of story production and mechanisms of audience engagement by using social media and a smartphone application.<sup>4</sup> It also challenged the audience to create user-generated content (UGC) so that they could become part of the primary on-screen text. The series' well-oiled promotion machine invited the viewer to imagine himself a potential friend and fellow patient, invited to accompany protagonist Kate Harff (played by Natalia Belitski) through her struggles in a mental hospital. Kate, massively distressed by her life as a twentysomething, is on her way to regaining her 'true identity' as she anticipates her 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. Having discontinued her studies, and suffering emotional distress from too much Berlin nightlife and keeping up a permanent online presence, she has admitted herself to a hospital in an effort to calm down. Ironically, as she takes part in therapy sessions, she continues to be online, hoping to regain mental equilibrium as she sits in her hospital room and searches her own content on the net. But the fact that Kate *needs* to be permanently online is also the structural requirement for recipients to be actively engaged with her *beyond* the television screen. The character is designed for a way of storytelling that represents her excessive inner life, creating a stronger connection between the protagonist and the audience. The habits of this 'digital native' are aesthetically mirrored on the TV screen, underscoring the character as both a 'symbol' and a 'symptom' (Eder, 2010) of the 21st century's digital and mobile media culture. Over the course of fourteen episodes, recipients can watch Kate trying to literally be herself again. This happens during her therapy sessions and a patchwork of subjective camera shots that organize, for instance, memories via flashbacks, glances at (Facebook) photo albums or in self-descriptions (as she searches herself online). The second screen applications – a smartphone app, a Facebook profile, and a website – intensify this 'all about Kate' approach, inviting the audience to become part of a (digital) community around the series. In doing so, the show's concept primarily banks on user participation: from direct communication between the protagonist (and the producers) and the recipients on Facebook, to the possibility of *contributing* to the show's textual aesthetics through UGC.

As production and consumption continue to merge, academic attention to their expansion is increasing. This is both a part and a consequence of the rise of web 2.0 platforms and software's 'architecture of participation' (O'Reilly, 2005). Concepts like 'digital

prosumption' (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), 'produsage' (Bruns, 2008) and 'commons-based peer production' (Benkler, 2006) – each of them taking a different angle – highlight a tendency to attempt to somehow 'close the gap' between (professional media) production and (private, individual and group) consumption. The interaction of the 'power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer' (Jenkins, 2006: 2) reaches a new cultural and economic pinnacle in the complex entanglements of producer-generated content (PGC) and UGC in the realm of 'German networked mobile television culture' (Groebel, 2014). 'UGC has not simply disrupted television's onscreen content' (Caldwell, 2011: 285); rather, it has the ability to transform the production process of television content itself. Accordingly, *About:Kate* constitutes a novelty in the German PSB landscape by allowing audiences to become 'prosumers' of content that occurs as *part of the primary text* of the series on the TV screen. The inclusion of audiences in the sphere of professional practices seems to be key to the process of rearranging television for a networked and mobile media culture. Framed within the discourse on social TV in Germany, *About:Kate* has been considered a 'testbed' for trying out 'new storytelling and various forms of dialogue' (Buschow & Schneider, 2015a: 19). In so doing, the cross-media television series represents a modification of social TV, which Schatz et al. (2008) have labeled 'Social TV 2.0'. With their media logic altered by the entanglement of television and social media (van Dijck & Poell, 2015) – as I will discuss below – *About:Kate* yields particular production practices, which I call 'participatory production'.

My argument will proceed as follows: First, I will discuss *About:Kate* and its participatory elements as an example of the developing field of social TV in Germany. Second, in light of *About:Kate's* production process, I will introduce my understanding of the *practices of participatory production*. In so doing, I will present an additional perspective in the context of cross-media production regarding the 'conflation of social media logic and television's mass media logic', as recently introduced by José van Dijck and Thomas Poell (2015). Finally, I will offer some preliminary conclusions.

## **Dynamics and Developments of Social TV**

Introduced in the fields of computer and information science, social TV describes the different technological tools of communication one uses while watching a TV program (Chorianopoulos & Lekakos, 2008: 115, Buschow & Schneider, 2015b: 11). As Konstantinos Chorianopoulos and George Lekakos have put it, social TV aims at a form of 'computer-mediated interpersonal communication over distance or over time' to create 'the impression of watching TV alongside a group of friends' (Chorianopoulos & Lekakos, 2008: 116). But so-called social TV systems exist in different forms and developmental stages. At the beginning of the 21st century, media companies announced new 'living room' applications using a combination of a TV set and a messaging service such as 'Amigo TV' (Coppens et al., 2004) or Siemens' 'COSE' (Gneuss, 2006). More recently, these include new designs of so-called smart TVs like Samsung's 'Smart Hub'. These early stages of social TV – or initial forms of what is currently considered smart TV – focus on technological

innovations with the idea that ‘one device fits all applications’. Raimund Schatz, Lynne Baillie, Peter Fröhlich and Sebastian Egger describe these ‘single screen’ products as ‘Social TV 1.0’, which basically enables people to socially interact while watching television shows ‘in stationary contexts’ (Schatz et al., 2008). While the first stationary solutions failed on the market, the sustained commercial success of recent smart TVs should be observed.

However, the merging of TV and social media into social TV in its *current state* predominantly occurred as the result of audience activity. What we commonly understand as social TV (i.e. tweeting while watching TV) emerged as an extension of users’ everyday media practices. Furthermore, the development and dynamics of social TV in Germany can be seen as the consequence of a ‘crisis of legitimacy’ of Public Service Media (PSM). ‘While they [the PSM] are communicating their Public Value – and thus their contribution to the common good – to the stakeholders, they are lacking to include the audience which increasingly takes an active role in this communication’ (Buschow & Schneider, 2015a: 18). From this perspective, the television audience is framed as a ‘neglected stakeholder’ who is ‘represented by committees “on trust” or via methods of market research’ (Buschow & Schneider, 2015a: 18, cit. Scherer 2011). Since digital media and its tools for improving the ‘participatory culture’ have grown and expanded (Jenkins, 2006), audience engagement has reached a new cultural pinnacle of ‘connected viewing’ (Holt & Sonson, 2014). This engagement has also increased in the context of ‘prosumption’, with regard to PGC and UGC.

Social TV has therefore shifted from a ‘single screen’ product to a phenomenon encompassing audiences’ everyday media practices. It has adopted a user’s point of view emphasizing interpersonal communication, as smartphones, tablets or notebooks are used with relation to a specific TV program (Han & Lee, 2014, Klemm & Michel, 2014). From this point of view social TV is described as follows: ‘Social TV relates to the communicative exchange about linear television content, or that which is at least stimulated by it’ (Buschow, Schneider & Ueberheide, 2014: 131). Whether we differentiate between pre-communication, parallel communication or follow-up communication (Buschow, Schneider & Ueberheide, 2014: 131, Buschow et al., 2013, Chorianopoulos & Lekakos, 2008, Schweiger, 2007: 158-66), social TV mainly emerges as a phenomenon of the ‘second’ or ‘third screen’ cultural practices that exist in addition to TV content, a result of the mobile and networked media environment. According to Schatz et al. (2008), such mobile media-integrated manifestations of social TV can be characterized as ‘Social TV 2.0’, which has become ‘part of a portfolio of ubiquitous services which accompany users through their daily lives, migrating from device to device’. Instead of just allowing for communication while watching a TV program (on a single screen medium), ‘Social TV 2.0’ allows ‘chatting, messaging, tagging and sharing TV content’ as well as different ‘social interaction features’ like commenting (e.g. on Facebook), microblogging (e.g. on Twitter) and creating, ‘capturing and distributing DIY content’ (e.g. on YouTube). From this point of view, the authors understand ‘Social TV 2.0’ to be a ‘versatile ubiquitous media service. Such a service should

effectively address users' needs for spontaneous socializing and sharing of experiences in the context of TV' (Schatz et al., 2008).

Shortly after audiences' 'second' and 'third screen' social TV practices gained more attention, even TV executives discovered that the new coupling of television and social media was 'the next big thing' (O'Neill, 2011). Social TV suddenly seemed to have been called forth by broadcasters who used it to supplement TV's existing functions or to incorporate desired ideas. For instance, social TV might be seen as a way for broadcasters to bring back viewers to traditional linear TV (Buschow et al., 2013, Buschow, Schneider & Ueberheide, 2014, Busemann & Tippelt, 2014), or as a new instrument for audience research (Deller, 2011, Wohn & Na, 2011) or audience measurement (Franzen, Naumann & Dinter, 2015). 'And for many, it has already become an important basis for decisions concerning the development of programs, plots and characters' (Buschow & Schneider, 2015a: 19). Moreover, the development of features of social TV 2.0 favors modified aesthetic norms for TV content in the digital age, which Anne Everett described in a different context as 'digitextuality'. Everett's concept

suggests a more precise or utilitarian trope at once describing and constructing a sense-making function for digital technology's newer interactive protocols, aesthetic features, transmedia interfaces and end-user subject positions, in the context of traditional media antecedents. Moreover, digitextuality is intended to address, with some degree of specificity, those marked continuities and ruptures existing between traditional ("old") media and their digital ("new") media progeny and, especially, how new media use gets constructed (Everett, 2003: 6).

In the case of social TV 2.0, digitextuality refers to the 'textual references' of social TV content which link TV (i.e. the onscreen text) and social media aesthetically. A digitextual aesthetic norm of social TV 2.0 content emphasizes various connections between TV production and reception, due to options for participation which are embedded in the PGC. The textual features of social TV 2.0's digitextuality cover a spectrum of manifestations starting with basic elements like hashtags or additional onscreen references to Facebook and other websites. There are also rather sophisticated mechanisms like 'calls for contributions', which relate the audience's UGC to the onscreen text (e.g. in *About:Kate*), or the use of Twitter as an interactive communicative tool to bridge different parts of an episode (e.g. in the cross-media project *netwars/out of CTRL*, ZDF & ARTE, 2014). The connection of different screens (e.g. TV, tablets, smartphones, notebooks) became evident in the digitextual aesthetic norm of social TV 2.0, *reflecting the migration of content from one device to another*. This typifies the second or third screen practices within a mobile and networked media environment in order to address (younger) audiences.

However, since 2011, German TV executives have indeed tried to use social media platforms to increase user engagement with television content, but they have also

expanded features of social TV within experimental television formats. In addition to what Schatz et al. describe as social TV 2.0, new forms of structural conjunctions are evolving between television, the web and social media, further defining social TV as an adaptive phenomenon. Social TV takes on various manifestations and conceptual consequences within the 'matrix media strategy' (Curtin, 2009: 15) of TV executives hoping to affect audiences' mobile media practices as they are associated with PSB content. In so doing, current social TV features expand the characteristics of social TV 2.0, as evidenced by the production process of *About:Kate*.

### **German Multiplatform Television Series: The Case of *About:Kate***

As Beate Schneider and Christopher Buschow (2013: 9) have shown in a short exploratory study, the future of social TV in Germany depends on producers' consideration of social media in the very early stages of production planning. Whether they produce big shows or work in small formats, professional media makers must prepare a social media and TV strategy that rearranges television so it can take part in the vital world of social networks. The concept of *About:Kate* extends this thinking in an exemplary manner. The so-called 'cosmos' of the show unifies television, the web, and digital and social media (ARTE GEIE, 2013a: 11) to extend the series' storyworld across different media platforms, e.g. in a 'trans-fictional' manner (Ryan, 2013).

The *About:Kate* app for smartphones, for instance, was designed to synchronize the recipient with the show, and 'provides more in-depth information that can be interactively modified and accessed in a customized manner' (Wiehl, 2014: 86). The questions Kate must answer during her therapy sessions appear on the display of one's smartphone in real time. As an additional function, questions about 'the meanest prank you ever pulled on someone' or 'why you feel sorry for yourself lately' are also part of the 'psycho test' for self-analysis (ARTE Creative, 2013).

At the end of the respective sequence, the user is given a 'prognosis' of his or her ability to face similar challenges as presented on screen. Through this, the programme not only gains a further immersive, experiential dimension and provides more knowledge and insight, but it also stimulates self-reflection (Wiehl, 2014: 86).

Furthermore, in relatively calm scenes, the app simulates an incoming call from Kate with a prepared audio recording. The recipient can watch the protagonist's online links, clicking on the smartphone in real time. As a special feature, the app works not only for the episodes presented on the television screen, but also for the on-demand streaming on the series' website. To maintain a real time connection between the app and the episode's content, the IAIS invented a sound tagging algorithm that reacts to specific sound elements within an episode (Tschöpel, 2013).

Moreover, the recipient is able to ‘friend’ Kate on Facebook.<sup>5</sup> Messages the character writes on the show can be observed on Facebook and the ‘recipient-friend’ can answer her comments or write something else. Some of the statements written by the audience *outside* the show even appear *inside* the show. To simulate a more real-life approach, the character’s Facebook profile had already been designed in 2011. By the time the series premiered in 2013, the audience was able to browse through a relatively comprehensive history of Kate’s activity on Facebook. This ‘being-closer-to-the-character’ approach through various second-screen applications which act as social media surroundings of the primary text on the TV screen updates the very idea of ‘phatic communion’ (coined by Bronisław Malinowski) that had already been transferred and adapted to television (Wulff, 1993). As recently noted, this has become an important part of our understanding of digital networked media culture (Miller, 2008). The character-driven simulation of a ‘networked community’ is a significant aspect of the energy and pleasure of *About:Kate*. This is especially true since the cross-media mindset of the recipient is mirrored in the cross-media mindset of the series’ protagonist, not only on the TV screen, but on Facebook as well.

The participatory strategy of the show gained even higher value through the website.<sup>6</sup> The user can participate in a game-like ‘psycho test’ during the broadcasting of the show. After becoming a ‘long-term patient’ (participating in more than five episodes), the recipient can receive an evaluation of his or her activity in the online ‘therapy room’ (the evaluation is comparable to popular, but less scientific, tests of mental fitness in magazines). The website was also conceptualized as an archive of Kate’s online activity, so that it includes search engine keywords, downloads, and a browsing history (ARTE GEIE, 2013a: 11). Additionally, the recipient of *About:Kate* was invited to become part of the show’s textual structure as a director of his or her own UGC (via images or video clips in terms of specific tasks such as ‘Kate’s nightmare’ or ‘Kate’s object of hate’ that appeared on the website) following the third episode. The UGC needed to be uploaded to the series website. After an evaluation process, the selected contribution appeared on the TV screen. In order to do this – since shooting of the series was already completed by the time it was broadcast on TV – the production team integrated the UGC in the post-production process during transmission, from May to July 2013 (Nandzik, 2013).

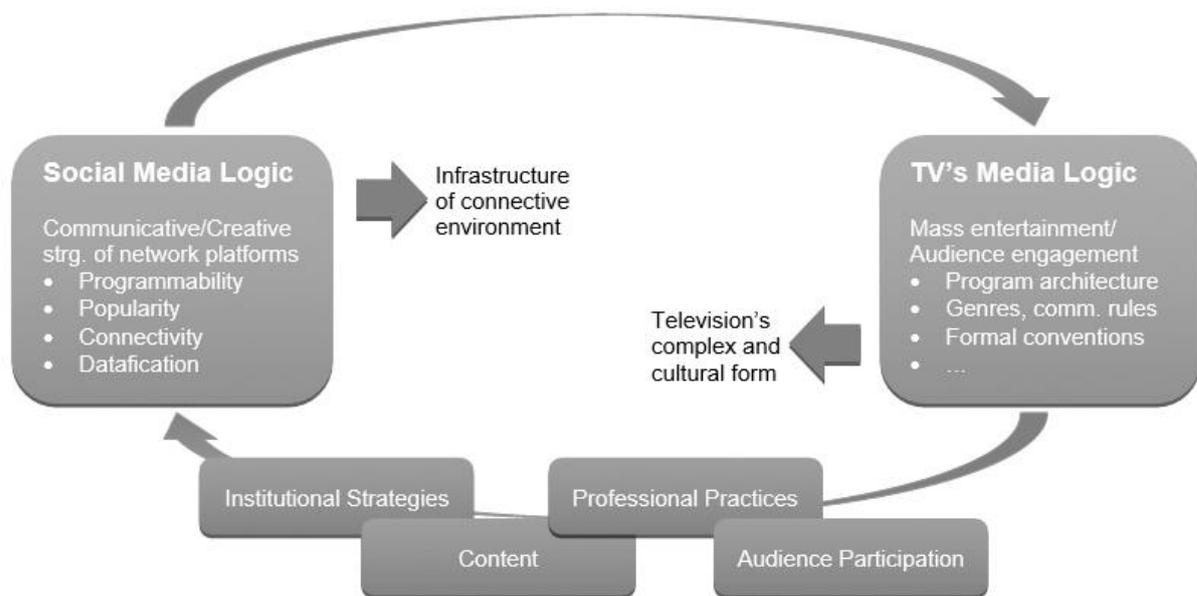
This approach in particular, of inviting contributions from the audience, brands the series a blueprint for practices of participatory production in German PSB’s social TV series culture. In order to reach a younger audience, and to convey TV as within the realm of digital and mobile media culture, ARTE pitched the idea of *About:Kate* in 2011. The Franco-German television broadcaster determined basic requirements such as its format (around twenty episodes of about twenty-six minutes, with second screen applications), the possibilities of audience participation, the concept of the protagonist (one central character who needs to be permanently online), and the integration of video art by the ARTE creative team. The project was initially planned as a video blog, but this was modified following evaluation of the applications by German and French production companies (Nandzik,

2014). In the end, the concept by Janna Nandzik and the German company Ulmen Television were accepted. As we can see in other European countries – such as Great Britain and the Netherlands – PSB executives and employees ‘were often among the early adopters of social media, integrating Facebook [and other platforms] in their professional routines and judgments as editors or producers of media content’ (van Dijck & Poell, 2015: 152). In Germany, the conflation of television and social media – especially with reference to production routines and storytelling principles – started only recently (Gugel, 2013, Weiß, 2010). Now though, it is an increasing phenomenon. In 2009, the first UFA Lab (<http://ufa-lab.com>) was launched in Berlin, with a section called ‘TV Meets New Media’. A second lab, based in Cologne, was opened in November 2012. Drivers of a creative hub for cross and transmedia storytelling and an interface between film and TV production and new media, the lab’s creative staff were involved in PSB transmedia television series such as *Rescue Dina Foxx!* (ZDF, 2011) and *Dina Foxx 2* (ZDF, 2014). Moreover, since 2011, social TV has become more and more integral to the augmentation of ‘traditional TV’ in Germany (Schneider & Buschow, 2013: 8). In light of series such as *About:Kate* or *Alpha 0.7 – The Enemy Within You* (‘Alpha 0.7 – Der Feind in Dir’, SWR, 2010), *Rescue Dina Foxx!* (‘Wer rettet Dina Foxx?’, ZDF, 2011), *Dina Foxx 2* (‘Dina Foxx: Tödlicher Kontakt’, ZDF, 2014) the German public TV landscape has become quite flexible by including digital and social media in its established media system, particularly in its professional practices and new forms of (participatory) production.

### **Practices of Participatory Production**

The policy of participatory production practices, as I discuss in the case of *About:Kate*, refers to the addressing of non-professionals (television audiences) by professional media producers, in order to involve them more deeply with TV content. Producers assume these non-professionals have the competencies and access that will allow them to engage with digital technology and create UGC. The UGC is considered to be a defined part of the post-production process, in addition to PGC. It also has a strong relationship to the structure of the primary television text, within certain pre-formulated and well-defined boundaries. Practices of participatory production aim at ingesting UGC into professional production procedures by intertwining ‘television’s mass media logic’ with the ‘logic of social media’ (Figure 1).

By *television’s mass media logic* I refer not only to the aspects of mass entertainment and the broadcaster’s longstanding capabilities to reach, define and engage with its audience (as target-group specific customers and as citizens). I refer also to the entire historical, socio-cultural, economic, technological and institutional complex which has allowed television to evolve as a ‘cultural form’ with defined program architecture and scheduling, established genres, communicative rules, a statutory basis, administrative arrangements, formal conventions and so on, which affect people’s everyday social lives (Williams, 1974, Altheide & Snow, 1979, Altheide, 1987).



**Figure 1:** Leveling of television’s mass media logic and the logic of social media on four levels (source: chart by the author, based on van Dijck & Poell, 2013, 2015)

Following Andreas Kaplan’s and Michael Haenlein’s rudimentary characterization of social media as ‘a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content’ (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61), by *the logic of social media* I mean the concept of van Dijck and Poell’s that emphasizes the ‘conversational and creative strengths of networked platforms’ (van Dijck & Poell, 2015: 149), as well as four basic principles of social media logic:

- (1) *Programmability* as ‘the ability of a social media platform to trigger and steer users’ creative or communicative contributions, while users, through their interaction with these coded environments, may in turn influence the flow of communication and information activated by such a platform’ (van Dijck & Poell, 2013: 5);
- (2) *Popularity* as a platform’s ability to measure and boost ‘people, things, or ideas’ which are ‘conditioned by both *algorithmic* and *socio-economic* components’ (van Dijck & Poell, 2013: 7) in a so-called ‘like economy’ (Gerlitz & Helmond, 2013);
- (3) *Connectivity* as the ‘socio-technical affordance of networked platforms to connect content to user activities and advertisers’. More exactly, ‘in a connective ecosystem of social media, the “platform apparatus” always mediates users’ activities and defines how connections are taking shape, even if users themselves can exert considerable influence over the

contribution of content’ (van Dijck & Poell, 2013: 8, see also van Dijck, 2013); (4) *Datafication* as ‘the ability of networked platforms to render into data many aspects of the world that have never been quantified before’. Moreover, when it comes to ‘computer-mediated communication, each type of content – be it music, books, or videos – is treated as data; more specifically with regards to social networking platforms, even relationships (friends, likes, trends) are datafied via Facebook or Twitter’ (van Dijck & Poell 2013: 9, see also Mayer-Schoenberger & Cukier, 2013).

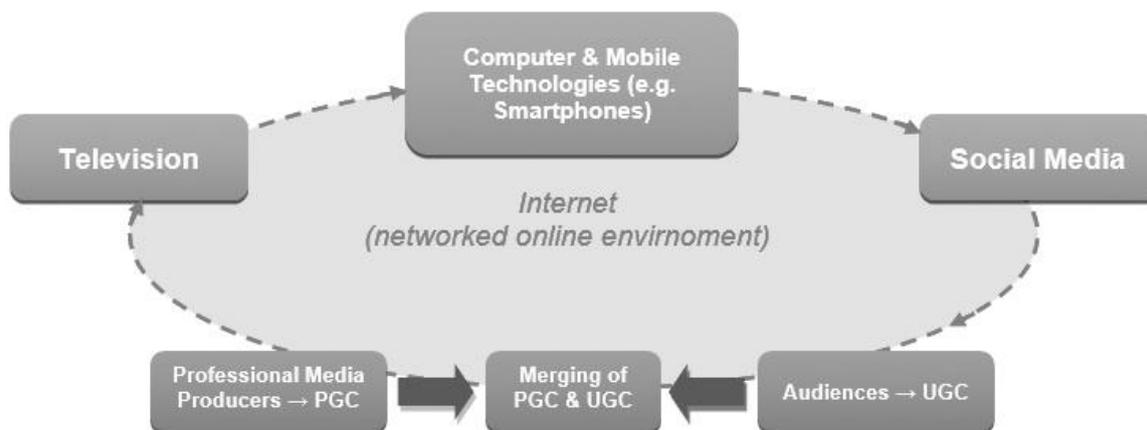
As José van Dijck and Thomas Poell (2013) have put it, the logic of social media and (traditional) mass media share significant characteristics. European television in particular, as they have discussed lately, ‘is gradually integrating social media logic in its already established mass media logic:’

Tweets, likes, and favorites are becoming a vital part of television’s sound bite and celebrity culture, while the tube itself gets extended by second screen applications. Attaching ‘social’ as an adjective to television increasingly means braiding the conversational and creative strengths of networked platforms with the mass entertainment and audience engagement abilities of broadcast networks (van Dijck & Poell, 2015: 149).

As the authors outline through a survey of three basic levels – (1) institutional strategies, (2) professional practices and (3) content – in British and Dutch television, the PSB hopes to benefit from the ‘new opportunities offered by social media to *promote user participation and encourage independent audiovisual creations*’ (van Dijck & Poell, 2015: 149; italics added). Van Dijck and Poell predominantly deal with the differences regarding the notion of ‘social’ in social media versus ‘public’ in public broadcasting, against the backdrop of the increasing commercialization of social media sites that threaten to ‘compromise [PSB’s] public value’ (2015: 149). Additionally, but from a different perspective, I would rather address the way PSBs encourage users to create their own content in relation to a specific TV show, within the context of television and social media logic. That gives cause to consider a fourth level within this conceptual framework – the level of audience participation. The integration of UGC into professional production processes does not necessarily encourage ‘independent’ UGC production per se, but rather deliberately provide opportunities for anticipated audience engagement to let the UGC become part of the on-screen text.

The policy of participatory production practices influences all important levels (television concept, actual TV series production, distribution, and reception), as we will see in the case of *About:Kate*. Offering, at least, the opportunity for a new and improved relationship between public television and its audience, participatory production has the potential to become a key factor in understanding the consequences of social TV for

professional practices in the realm of cross-media television production. By *cross-media production* I am referring to Anja Bechmann Petersen’s approach when she writes, ‘The term will be used to describe the communication of an overall story, production, or event, using a coordinated combination of platforms’ (2006: 95). In this respect, I use the concept mainly with an emphasis on an ‘inward perspective’ that focuses on media ‘organizations themselves’ in terms of their mechanisms of involving ‘cross-media facilities in the productions’, but also with an ‘outward [perspective] towards the users’ (Bechmann Petersen, 2006: 95-6). Due to a policy of participatory production practices, the creation of a cross-media television series such as *About:Kate* relies on coordinated procedures between television, the web, and mobile and social media to combine PGC and UGC (**Figure 2**).



**Figure 2:** Participatory production in a cross-medial production context (source: chart by the author)

The merging of TV and social media (as social TV) is mostly analyzed in the light of new interactive communication strategies regarding TV content and its related social media discussions – such as pre-communication, parallel communication and follow-up communication (Buschow et al., 2014: 131, Buschow et al., 2013, Chorianopoulos & Lekakos, 2008, Schweiger, 2007: 158-66). But participatory production – an outcome directly linked to new strategies of communication within the context of a ‘versatile ubiquitous media service’ which has been called ‘Social TV 2.0’ (Schatz et al., 2008) – follows different rules and values for the combination of PGC and UGC. ARTE is the first public broadcaster in Germany to introduce a ‘global’ cross-media concept – labeled *100% bi-medial* (2013a). This concept integrates TV and social media, not only with reference to new strategies of pre-, parallel and follow-up communication (which remain crucial for the new cross-media concept, ARTE GEIE, 2013a: 16), but also in terms of what I would like to refer to as their policy of participatory production practices (e.g. in the case of serial television dramas like *About:Kate*). ARTE’s global concept entails the vital transformation of work

methods (ARTE GEIE, 2013a: 16). Following van Dijck's and Poell's (2015) three basic levels of institutional strategies, professional practices, and content, I will go into more detail about these vital transformations from an 'inward perspective' on cross-media productions – particularly with regard to *About:Kate*. Additionally, I will raise questions for future research on the level of audience participation from an 'outward perspective' on cross-media TV series production.

### ***Level of Institutional Strategies***

On the institutional level, ARTE GEIE and ARTE France President Véronique Cayla and ARTE GEIE Vice President Gottfried Langenstein elaborate, 'Our goal is to create a program available to everyone, and to produce bi-medial quality content that anchors us in the present age. In doing so, ARTE will serve as the European cultural reference for [television in] the digital world of tomorrow' (ARTE GEIE, 2013a: II). Under the heading 'ARTE in Social Media: Television as Interactive Experience', the broadcaster presents its strategy of integrating social media in the existent media logic. The majority of social media users follow the broadcaster on Facebook (650,000 likes), and Twitter (170,000 followers of @artede and @arteifr), yet ARTE wants to expand its networking activity to include Instagram and Google+.<sup>7</sup> By virtue of its relatively relaxed policy of the 'uncensored moderation' of user activity and creativity, the network sees itself as a member of a 'creative community' that promotes an exchange between its employees and the audience (ARTE GEIE, 2013a: 21). The website assumes a key function (as an interface) between the broadcaster, the social media sites and second screen applications, and the audience.

Today's television must be understood beyond the traditional binary relationship of sender and receiver. Thanks to social media, ARTE meets the audience on every level of communication, offering them the opportunity to establish direct dialogue, and to become a member of a broad community (ARTE GEIE, 2013a: 21).

Nowhere in the document, however, are critical reflections on the increasing commercialization of social media to be found, nor can one tell whether the broadcaster considers the commercialized 'social' aspects of social media as somehow threatening to compromise the public value of their 'quality content'. While referring to a desirable 'international dialogue between creative producers, policy-makers, and academics to develop new perspectives on public value and on the technologies and practices through which such values should be created and facilitated' – due to the shift from PSB to PSM (van Dijck & Poell, 2015: 161) – at present, ARTE shows relatively little motivation to engage in such a discussion. In general, public TV's admiration for social media takes into account the relatively reckless commercialization of social media that is associated with increasing efforts to reorganize PSB as PSM. A 2014 ARD and ZDF online study indicates that 79 percent of the German public use the Internet, while every second person uses mobile

devices. Results of polls on the 'parallel use of TV and second screen-media' also show that specific TV-related second screen applications – especially social media – establish emotional contact zones and increase 'positive audience/customer loyalty' (Busemann & Tippelt, 2014: 411). Moreover, the average viewing time went up continuously in 2014, reaching 240 minutes per day for adults aged 14 years and older. Therefore, ARTE sees itself as part of a growing (digital) community which ingests second screen media. It expands the idea of public television as social TV while praising social media in almost all respects. 'Thanks to social networks, ARTE meets its audience on every level, offering them the opportunity to actively engage with each other and to become part of a larger community' (ARTE GEIE, 2013a: 21). In this regard, *About:Kate* is the broadcaster's exemplary model of participatory TV in a serial drama (ARTE GEIE, 2013a: 10-1). 'ARTE web fiction like *About:Kate* deconstruct conventional linear narration. The web user is at the heart of the story, free to create his/her own chronology between characters, countries, and points of view' (ARTE GEIE, 2013b: 33). This integration of UGC in particular (via calls for contributions on the website) led *About:Kate*'s post-production crew to take a step-by-step finishing approach.

### ***Level of Professional Production Practices***

On the practical level, series creator Janna Nandzik and her production team had to work together with the ARTE creative team in Strasbourg to coordinate the UGC that was uploaded on the website. 'It's very difficult for the workflow in post-production', Nandzik says. 'We have to keep open our picture log as long as necessary to insert video material provided by the users. I'll edit until the end of July and then I'll be busy finishing the series while the show is broadcasting' (2013). Usually within the post-production workflow, raw source footage must be arranged into a complete movie or episode by a collective of professional film and TV workers who specialize in fields such as visual effects, audio mixing, color correction, and so forth. Logging requires organizing the footage by taking notes on everything the editor sees and hears in relation to the time code. Since this takes hours, particularly for a television series with many episodes, professional (film and) TV workers use software containing metadata such as date, time, subject etc. The logging software helps editors find the material much faster, by the time they must decide which footage to use for the movie or episode (a step called capturing or ingesting). With *About:Kate*, editors paid special attention to the UGC, ingesting media files while the series was being aired. Thus, as a result of the show's participatory strategy, the post-production workflow was quite unique. In (post) production each worker is 'assigned a discrete physical subtask or routine' (Caldwell, 2008: 6) characterized by economic efficiency and control of the respective procedure. Together, the team of professionals comprise 'actor-networks' (Caldwell, 2008: 10, see also Latour, 1996): Television production staff (actors) 'follow trade conventions to collectively move the production along, using networks that "distribute cognition" across the group as part of industrial habit' (Caldwell, 2008: 10). Hence, to a limited extent, the ingestion of UGC as an addition to PGC constitutes an anomaly within the

production machinery. For one thing, it means that efficiency and control are lacking in the workflow; for another, the network of ‘distributed cognition’ is comprised partially of non-professionals. But the expansion of the agency of non-professionals does not necessarily lead to greater empowerment of the audience (Benkler, 2006, Jenkins, 2006). Practices of participatory production, as I understand them, incline rather to invite recipients to follow the viewpoint of professional media producers in the hope that they might become part of a show’s primary text (see also, but from a different perspective, Andrejevic, 2008: 27). For *About:Kate*, the UGC is related to a special task proposed by the production team, prior to any creative user activity. Consequently, the work of non-professionals functions as an anticipated, rather than a self-empowered, user practice in the workflow of the professional production.

### ***Level of Cross-media TV Content***

On the level of content, the new developments or ‘shifts in norms of operation [on the *levels of institution and professional production*] lead to changes in the textual production of the [television] medium and its role in culture’ (Lotz, 2009: 50) within a digital, networked and mobile media environment. For *About:Kate*, ARTE and the production team count on audience participation from the very beginning. The series was created to establish a community around the protagonist, of which ARTE itself wanted to be a part. However, *About:Kate* still stands in the PSB tradition of considering its audience as citizens who are to be entertained, informed and educated (van Dijck & Poell, 2015: 149-50). In Germany, public TV has an outstanding, but also critical, social position in the television landscape, a result of the educational mandate entrenched in the Broadcast State Contract (Weiß, 2010: 284). This mandates that public broadcasting programs must produce programs of cultural value for the public benefit.

Therefore, the *About:Kate* series concept initiated questions such as ‘How does media influence the way we think, dream, feel and communicate every day?’, ‘How do media devices shape our consciousness and the unconscious?’ and ‘How do we use media, and how are we trained by algorithms?’ (Nandzik, 2014). The series’ textual structure is designed to encourage recipients to actively engage in and deal with these questions. The audience was not ‘forced’ to use the social media surroundings to find answers to these questions (recipients do not *have to* check the Facebook account regularly). Rather, the social media structure (smartphone app, website, Facebook) in the series’ cross-media context was created to intensify this engagement (through the ‘psycho test’ for self-analysis, community-building with the character, UGC related to tasks connected with the show’s topic). Broadly speaking, on the one hand, if we only pay attention to the primary text, the series could be analyzed and discussed as a form of ‘edutainment’ about psychological stress or ‘Facebook burnout’. On the other hand, the participatory strategy of the show makes sense, not only in terms of the general transformation of TV in the digital age, but also in light of the changed perspective of the broadcaster regarding the attention it pays to its audience. Beside the use, for instance, of prominent popular cultural references (such as

music videos and films like *Star Wars*) as part of the series' aesthetic to attract a young audience, ARTE and the production team paid close attention to aspects of community-building in the realm of social media, and to forms of creative participation via UGC.

As Nandzik (2014) put it in several interviews and in her lecture at the German Social TV Summit in Munich, the identification of the recipient with the show and the protagonist was a key element of the whole project. The professional workers encouraged Kate's 'recipient-friends' to engage in a positive emotional relationship with the protagonist and the series, by investing a significant amount of time in it. ARTE and the production team not only initiated and encouraged interaction within the group of like-minded people regarding their 'fan object', they did so between the audience and the TV professionals behind the show. *About:Kate* was meant to literally become part of the recipient's daily life.

The audience feedback was the most beautiful part of the show. [...] We communicated with the people for about three months every day [on Facebook]; from good morning posts to ongoing communication all day long. An outstanding group dynamic arose in the Facebook community. This resulted in actual special evening events being organized between two episodes [of the weekly broadcast], as well as public viewings. People sent postcards to each other, and a packet to Kate. [...] Even the production team received letters and postcards. [...] It was really a great experience. (Nandzik, 2014)

The intention was also, as Nandzik (2014) explained, to increase the identification of the audience with the show itself through the 'creative exchange' via UGC. 'We asked the viewer [...] to submit images and video clips on the website. The UGC had to be related to the series aesthetically and dramatically. The winning entry appeared on the show'. Siegfried Schneider (President of the Bavarian new media authority [BLM] and organizer of the German Social TV Summit) described the underlying policy – not only in the case of *About:Kate*, but within the broader developments of social/participatory TV in Germany – as follows: 'Social TV provides great potential for media workers to know the audience much better, to raise awareness so they can continue their successful long-term relationship'. (BLM, 2014) However, the audience productivity that usually occurs outside the cultural industry has deteriorated into a series of television production value chains, as new digital media policy leads television producers to combine television, digital and social media into participatory productions.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Level of Audience Participation***

On the level of audience participation, the policy of participatory production seems to give the audience much greater potential to influence professional media productions. However, this is only true within pre-formulated boundaries. As Sue Turnbull makes clear in her discussion of forms of audience participation in the contemporary media culture, the

conceptualization of media audiences in terms of, like, ‘prosumers’ is hardly new. ‘Media audiences have been able to participate in their social world via the media since the media first came upon the scene’. (Turnbull, 2014: 63) Nevertheless, in the past the conditions of audience participation in a media environment has been mostly controlled by the media, she continues.

While this is still true for the most part, since the advent of the internet and related developments in mobile phone and tablet technologies, audience not only have more control over what they consume, but also the capacity to interact directly with the producers of the media product, thereby having much greater influence on the direction that interaction might take. (Turnbull, 2014: 63)

The role and function of the audiences have changed since broadcasters like ARTE but more efforts into reaching and binding its audience within a multiplatform environment. Addressing audiences in order to ‘invite’ them to become members of a ‘broad community’ (not only of a TV series, but the broadcaster as such), to give them ‘the opportunity to establish a direct dialogue’ beyond ‘the traditional binary relationship of sender and receiver’ (ARTE GEIE, 2013a: 21) and to offer them the possibility to become part of a professional media product’s aesthetic with UGC signals a different aspect of the relevance of audience participation in the media industry’s interest in audience engagement. However, as in the case of *About:Kate*, ARTE offers audiences specific roles within the social and cultural realm of the series’ production context thus attributing media audiences as ‘prosumers’ based on pre-defined parameters of participation. Thus, the policy of participatory production as in the case of *About:Kate* rather aims at rearranging a type of participation within a mode of communication in a mobile and networked media culture that James Carey (1992: 18) has called ‘ritualistic’ in order to bring together media professionals and media audiences as parts of a mediated community of participatory production that is anticipated, orchestrated and mostly controlled by the media.

As Nico Carpentier (2016: 73) puts it in his discussion of different forms of participation, the aforementioned mode of audience participation (in *About:Kate*) follows the formula of ‘partial participation’ which is defined (by Carole Pateman) as ‘a process in which two or more parties’ are involved ‘but the final power to decide rests with one party only’. Due to this partial participatory approach within such a policy of participatory production the following questions arise:

- (1) Given that the broadcaster and the production team of *About:Kate* want to involve audiences more deeply with (a specific) television content in terms of participatory production or community building aspects as well, what type of media audience – e.g. between mass-media audiences, fellows, production partners and even fans – does this expose?

- (2) Within the conceptually intended 'one-to-one'-approach in (partial) participatory production the rather oppositional relationship between media professionals and media audiences seems to be dissolved. However, even if media audiences are addressed as prosumers the policy of participatory production does not classify these prosumers as actors of equal positions. Thus, what kind of 'actor identity and role' does this expose in terms of the power imbalance and the cultural exploitation of UGC?
- (3) Additionally, what kind of characteristics of these 'audiences as prosumers' need to be discussed within a context of participatory production in terms of digital media literacy and educational qualifications as well as 'symbolic' and 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986)?

Since presumption does not necessarily lead to the creation of a prosumers' independent UGC (i.e. without specifications or formal and structural limits) the developments of audience participation in the cultural realm of television productions (Turnbull, 2014) needs to further discussed and analyzed in terms of aspects such as 'specific processes and fields', 'actors', 'decisions' and 'power relations' (Carpentier, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

The merging of public TV, the web and social media has challenged German PSB employees to find new strategies and forms of valuable content that prepare television for a mobile and networked media environment in the digital age. Since approaches to TV's media logic and cultural form have already pointed out that 'flexibility and mobility of communication technology' continue to play an important role in media culture (Altheide, 1987: 131, see also Williams, 1974: 26), the current phenomenon of social TV seems only logical. However, the mixing of television's media logic with that of social media must be critically analyzed in a 'new media ecosystem' (van Dijck & Poell, 2013: 3) whose multiplatform diversifications are arising within a digital and networked media culture.

The analysis of *About:Kate* on levels of institutional strategy, professional practice and content indicates that public broadcasters such as ARTE pursue varying goals. On the one hand, on an institutional strategic level, social TV promises to engage with audiences more comprehensively, thus seeming to expand on a form of interaction, and so-called community building, around a TV show and the broadcaster itself. On the other hand, the privileging of social media over television has the ability to put PSB's legitimate public value in jeopardy. PSB must manage the balancing act of being close to its younger audience through the net and social media, in order to remain relevant in a networked mobile media culture, without reducing the value of public assets within the commercialized social media environment. As Gillian Doyle said regarding UK public television,

For many, the need to move beyond broadcasting is more of a defensive move. Multi-platform provides a means to remain relevant to audiences and

advertisers whose interest has shifted away from broadcast to online and mobile media. For PSB operators, multi-platform diversification is also about trying to keep in step with evolving and, arguably, much more demanding conceptions of the key purposes public service provision ought to fulfil in the digital era. (Doyle, 2010: 437)

At the levels of professional practices, content and audience participation, the policy of participatory production in the case of *About:Kate* present an innovative approach to combining television, the web, and social media in cross-media story production. However, participatory production in this case provides only limited potential for audiences to create UGC. While the ingestion of user-generated content to producer-generated content is an anomaly in the realm of professional (post) production, the lack of efficiency and control inherent to this method proves a disadvantage to the workflow. Therefore, UGC only occurs as a defined part of a professional production circle, within specific pre-formulated boundaries. The so-called agency of the audience does not necessarily lead to a greater amount of empowerment. The policy of participatory production practices in *About:Kate* invites audience members hoping to become part of the series' primary text to follow the creative viewpoint of professional media producers. 'Empowered' user practices are downgraded, to practices anticipated by the workflow of media professionals. These simulate user participation related to specific tasks, which are proposed by the production team prior to any creative audience activity. Practices of participatory production, it seems, become part of the social TV media policy of television executives.

In addition, my aim has been to discuss *About:Kate* in light of the extended features of what Schatz et al. (2008) have called social TV 2.0. Cross-media social TV projects in Germany like *About:Kate* test new forms of story production by using mobile technologies, the web and social media to extend the storyworld (Ryan, 2013) or by adding user-generated content (e.g. texts, images or videos) to the primary on-screen text. In this context, the 'versatile ubiquitous media service' that typifies social TV 2.0 (Schatz et al., 2008) moves closely toward principles of cross-media production 'as a response to the proliferation of media and delivery systems that the digital revolution of the past fifty years has brought upon us'. (Ryan, 2013: 384) Thus, characterizations of social TV are mainly based on interpersonal communications. Practices conceptualized from a user's point of view (Buschow, Schneider & Ueberheide, 2014, Han & Lee, 2014, Klemm & Michel, 2014) do not adequately reflect the contemporary dynamics of multiplatform amalgamations of TV, the web, and social media. This is especially true if these dynamics rely on a modified media policy by television executives who face new technological and content-related challenges in the digital age. Social TV effects television on a much deeper level, thus rearranging its cultural form (Williams, 1974) within a networked and mobile media culture. While such transformations come as no surprise, pre-existing definitions and the characterization of social TV need to be revised and further developed in the course of academic discussions on new media culture.

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## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> The public television broadcaster ARTE (Association Relative à la Télévision Européenne) is an international joint venture of ARTE France and ARTE Deutschland which is organized as the European Economic Interest Grouping ARTE GEIE. Due to its specific history as European cultural TV, ARTE provides content grouped by 'culture' and 'art' that is primarily developed for French and German audiences (i.e. German and French titling, opposite-language subtitling, dubbing etc.). As a transnational TV broadcaster the part of ARTE Deutschland is a subsidiary of the German public television system (ARD and ZDF). ARTE plays a (rather marginalized) special role in the German

public television system that is managed by ARD (a consortium of public broadcasters with the flagship channel Das Erste as well as a variety of regional public broadcasters known as third channels) and ZDF (second German television). However, due to its special history and cultural function in the context of European television ARTE's programs are recognized as being of great social and cultural value for the public benefit (for a more detailed discussion see Rothenberger, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> In 2010, for instance, the science fiction series *Alpha 0.7 – The Enemy Within You* ('Alpha 0.7 – Der Feind in Dir') aired on the regional public broadcaster SWR. The storytelling of Alpha 0.7 combines radio, television and various websites together with Alternate Reality Games (ARG) to create an integrative cross-media storyworld. Further, the project tries to wash out boundaries between reality and fiction by integrating 'real-world documents' such as articles from the German magazine *Der Spiegel* or different lemmas from Wikipedia (Ryan, 2013). A year later, the public broadcaster ZDF aired the so-called interactive television crime movie *Rescue Dina Foxx!* ('Wer rettet Dina Foxx?'), 2011). At the climax the story left the TV screen and continued only on the net. Within a digital paper chase of about three weeks on [freidaten.org](http://freidaten.org), the TV audience became partner of the protagonist to help her find the real evidence of the murder of her friend. In 2014, the ZDF aired the sequel called *Dina Foxx 2* ('Dina Foxx: Tödlicher Kontakt', 2014). But the on-screen narrative occurs as rather conventional television storytelling, with closure after the second part that was aired one week later. Only the website ([dinafoxx.zdf.de/](http://dinafoxx.zdf.de/)) offers a 7-episode web series with new information as well as a browser game to analyze DNA sequences presented in the primary television text.

<sup>3</sup> All translations of German texts are provided by the author.

<sup>4</sup> An internationally more prominent example of a TV series production that also examines novel forms of story production by using social media and smartphone applications, but from a different perspective, would be the Norwegian series *Skam* (NRK, 2015-17). As Steffen Krüger and Gry C. Rustad have put it, 'Offering its target group a compelling view of itself, we argue that *Skam* fosters a distinct and productive kind of relationship between television and new media – one in which a public broadcasting agency, Norwegian NRK, provides teenage audiences and young digital-media users not just a teen web-series but rather a digital *space for interaction and experimentation* – a space deeply embedded in the users' networked lives and positioned in the interstices between fiction and reality, in which teenagers can negotiate their relation to their mediatized life-worlds' (Krüger & Rustad, 2017: 2, see also Pearce, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Kate's posts on Facebook were written by the series' creator (Janna Nandzik) and other members of the production team.

<sup>6</sup> <http://kate.arte.tv/de/> – the website is now offline (but see <http://web.archive.org/web/20140209184822/http://kate.arte.tv/de/>).

<sup>7</sup> In this sense, as a transnational TV broadcaster that develops content within the cultural and social context of Europe and the European Union primarily for a German- and French-speaking community ARTE also takes the opportunities provided by social media to further address an audience beyond specific national borders. Therefore, the dynamics and functions of social TV indeed raises questions on social media-driven cross-border communities – maybe even in terms of an 'emerging transnational public sphere' (for a critical discussion see Loader, 2014) – that need to be further evaluated in additional studies.

<sup>8</sup> What I did not address in this paper, but what also needs to be further investigated, is the ingestion of UGC in a textual structure of a series such as *About:Kate* as the return of a formula economics

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once called 'outsourcing' but now refreshed as so-called 'crowdsourcing.' Especially in the context of production culture, John T. Caldwell is quite pessimistic about it when he writes: 'A benign and utopian term, crowdsourcing represents in some way the ultimate form of outsourcing since the new crowds that collectively make media content today (1) regularly "work" for free; (2) have no employee entitlements or benefits; and (3) are disorganized and so incapable of invoking labor law protections' (Caldwell, 2011: 286).