

# Branding or visual storytelling? How legacy media use visual journalism to reach young people in the age of digitalization

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*This article discusses how legacy media companies are responding to the real or imagined challenge of reaching young people in the age of digitalization, by investigating two different strategies for how to make use of the so-called Generation Z's preference for sensory and visual journalism. Through expert interviews, we present how the Norwegian public broadcaster NRK P3 and the biggest newspaper in Norway, VG, approach the challenge of catching young people's attention. We identify two strategies for how legacy media companies work with visual expressions and designing their digital content when trying to reach a wide, fragmented young target group on digital platforms. VG is a platform-oriented storyteller where design is connected to the direction and mode of storytelling and tailored to fit certain platforms. Their area of focus is being where their target groups are and meeting the visual expectations of these audiences by taking cues from what is trending on different platforms. NRK P3 takes the approach of a traditional brander that works in both visionary and traditional ways to build a strong, trustworthy and visible brand. We conclude by pointing out possible problems with both approaches.*

Keywords: sensory journalism, digital journalism, digital natives, legacy media, media branding, expert interviews

## Introduction

Young people are important target groups for legacy media, since they as future audiences are vital for both the commercial survival of the media and a well-functioning public sphere. Often seen as a new media generation, with distinct media habits and preferences (Bolin 2017; Prensky 2001), a key narrative about young people is that they are hard to reach and perhaps even a 'lost generation' for legacy media (Lüders and Sundet 2022). Parts of this narrative explore the growing challenge of capturing consumers' attention through both traditional and digital media platforms in the 'age of freedom of choice'. The escalating use of social media is identified as a contributing factor to decreased news consumption (Schneider and Eisenegger et al. 2018). However, it is also perceived as a potential solution to involve young people in news engagement (Schulz et al. 2022). Additionally, research indicates that young individuals are drawn to sensory journalism, which captivates its audience visually and sonically (Schulz et al. 2022).

In this article, we take one step further and investigate how media executives imagine solutions to the potential problem of hard-to-reach youth and focus on the use of visual journalism, an area which to the best of our knowledge is little researched. We present cases from two Norwegian media companies, legacy newspaper VG and the public broadcaster NRK, two of Norway's most forward-leaning media companies, and show how both aim to reach young target groups and focus on the role of aesthetics and visual design when targeting young people with legacy media content. Norway is particularly interesting in this regard as the country enjoys high news penetration across different demographics and a high degree of technological adaption (Moe and Sakariassen 2018). Furthermore, the public broadcaster NRK enjoys a strong position, and even the tabloid VG has a strong ethos of journalistic quality and is therefore often termed a 'schizophrenic' paper, balancing popular and quality journalism (Eide 1997). Norway is thus a media market where legacy media indeed enjoy a strong position and would therefore probably experience the potential domain loss more acute than in markets where news penetration is lower. The strategies Norwegian legacy media use for reaching a younger generation in the age of smartphones can provide valuable insights into how technology, visual journalism and concerns for both quality and commercial viability are being balanced. Empirically, the aim of this article is to better understand how visual and sensory features form part of the possible solutions legacy media companies might employ to reach young target groups with their digital content. Theoretically, our contribution is a conceptualization of two distinct narratives of how visual expression and aesthetic practices come into play when targeting so-called digital and global natives.

We will continue the article by a literature review, where we first establish why it is challenging to reach young target groups with legacy media content, get an

1. understanding of the change in journalistic ideals and practices caused by digi-  
2. talization and finally examine how visual expressions and aesthetic practices have  
3. changed the way of creating attraction to digital content. We will then discuss our  
4. method, qualitative expert interviews, before we fill the knowledge gap by presenting  
5. our results: how legacy media executives envision and work with the importance of  
6. having a strong visual expression when trying to address their young target groups.  
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## 10. **Literature review**

### 11. **Legacy media and young target groups**

12. The idea that young people form a distinct media generation is well established  
13. in academic literature as well as in popular discourse (Bolin 2017; Murdoch 2005),  
14. and also largely framed as a potential problem for legacy media, including by media  
15. executives themselves (Lüders and Sundet 2022). When speaking about young target  
16. groups, the Generations Z and Y are often referenced. According to Turner (2015),  
17. Generation Z is the people who are born from the mid-90s to the end of the 2010s.  
18. Generation Y (millennials) is the people born from early 80s to mid-90s (Dimock  
19. 2019).  
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22. In Norway, almost everybody between the ages of 16 and 25 uses social media  
23. one or more times a day (Nordiske Mediedager 2018) and social media are now the  
24. main source for news consumption for Norwegian youths aged 9–18 (Medietilsynet  
25. 2020). The smartphone has become the most important asset for Norwegians' news  
26. consumption (Moe and Sakariassen 2018), and people born between 1980 and 2000  
27. depend on social media for news, entertainment and a sense of connection (Schulz  
28. et al. 2020). International research also indicates that social media platforms are the  
29. main source young people are using for accessing news today in favour of legacy media  
30. platforms (Boczkowski et al. 2018; Edgerly et al. 2018; Schneider and Eisenegger  
31. 2018; Geers 2020). Furthermore, a consequence of this development seems to be  
32. that millennials have largely adopted a 'News-finds-me' mindset where people are  
33. involuntary stumbling over the news, which has become the dominant mode of news  
34. acquisition (Schulz et al. 2020). Based on a comprehensive study analysing eleven  
35. nations, Curran et al. (2014) concluded that 37 per cent of young adults between 18  
36. and 34 years do not seek information on a regular basis. Many millennials tend to  
37. expect the news to find them through digital feeds and interaction with peers. As a  
38. consequence, legacy news organizations are aggressively using social media to target  
39. millennials (Schulz et al. 2020).  
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### 46. **The change in media consumption and journalistic ideals**

47. The field of journalism is one of the sectors that has been the most affected by  
48. digitalization (Grosser et al. 2016; Hedemann 2010). There is harsh competition to  
49. get the attention of impatient consumers, and legacy media companies are compet-  
50. ing with other big brands in getting this attention. Thus, even though young people  
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spend the most time on the internet, they spend the least time reading the news (SSB 2019). Another important change is that the general attention span is increasingly lower than it was twenty years ago (Subramanian 2018). It has decreased because of the constant supply of digital content. Generation Z's attention span is short, and they live in an eight-second world where they are looking for 'snackable' information and pictures in an integrated cross-channel experience (Brodeur Partners 2018). Considering digital development, there has also been a gradual change to the power balance between users and companies in the field of marketing. Activities from both users and companies on social media platforms happen on the user's terms (Labrecque et al. 2013). Digital feeds are personalized to different users and digital natives can choose their inputs on a bigger scale. When creating content for digital consumption, the media houses are competing with thousands of other actors in getting the attention of their target group. The term 'attention economy' has entered the debate. According to Davenport and Beck (2001), attention is focused on mental engagement with a particular item of information. Items come into our awareness, we attend to a particular item and then decide whether to act. The player that succeeds in the attention economy is the one that manages to get the attention of its target groups. We would argue that this constitutes a trend where legacy media adapt to its users to a larger degree than what has previously been the norm. Today's journalists must relate to their target groups and know whom one is writing for to a greater extent to succeed (Eide 2011). Claiming that the public press is on a mission to find the truth is no longer enough, and sometimes the selection of news for publishing is even based on performance, e.g. which types of articles have gotten the most readership and engagement through social media (Harcup and O'Neill 2017). One possible strategy in this regard is the extensive use of the audio-visual opportunities afforded by online content, so-called sensory journalism.

### **Sensory journalism**

Post-millennials (Generation Z) are attracted to sensory media, including sensory journalism, defined as news content that engages its audience's senses visually and sonically (Schulz et al. 2020). A comprehensive study done by Brodeur Partners (2018) found that nearly 48 per cent of Generation Y and 47 per cent of Generation Z prefer news media with elements of augmented reality. Generation Z even favours visual-only platforms, like Instagram and Snapchat (Ydav and Rai 2017). This has led to Generation Z's media consumption choices fuelling the growth of visual over verbal, as they e.g. prefer photo-based content over text-heavy articles. If Instagram and Snapchat are now the primary platforms for young people's news consumption, young media consumers will mostly see content that is no longer medium or publication specific. CNN, *The Washington Post* and National Public Radio (NPR) look much more similar today than they did three decades ago (Schulz et al. 2020). Considering these trends, one can question tendencies of how legacy media are inspired by traditional marketing and branding strategies in the competition of

1. getting a digital audience. Research on online legacy media has stated that media  
 2. websites should be edited in terms of brand extensions, and the leading idea here  
 3. is that the use of the same brand name in different channels represents an attempt  
 4. to leverage the brand's equity. Brand equity clarifies itself both indirectly as brand  
 5. awareness and brand image and directly as different consumer behaviour (Förster  
 6. 2015; Horppu et al. 2008; Tarkiainen et al. 2009).

8. Research in the field of aestheticization in journalism grapples with contradic-  
 9. tions arising from current trends in the media landscape. One key area of discus-  
 10. sion involves the infiltration of artistic techniques into journalism (Cramerotti 2009;  
 11. Novikova 2014), which expands the range of expressive possibilities. However, it  
 12. simultaneously signifies a departure from traditional professional standards. This  
 13. should be understood in connection with how journalism, as per Williams and Delli  
 14. Carpini (2000), constitutes a coded, professional practice that establishes cultural  
 15. and social order. Conventions of representation are interpreted as reality itself, with  
 16. individuals accepting the journalistic approach as a conveyer of linguistic and visual  
 17. documents of reality that relates occurrences to immediately understandable patterns.  
 18. This implies that the visual representation of journalism that a reader perceives can  
 19. be categorized as a presentation of reality itself, with visuals and aesthetic choices  
 20. significantly influencing how people perceive reality.

24. Expanding the focus to sensory media in a broader context, research indicates a  
 25. correlation between visual aesthetics, usability, satisfaction, pleasure and accessibility  
 26. (Coursaris and Kripintris 2014; Moshagen and Thielsch 2010). Aesthetically pleas-  
 27. ing web pages enhance website credibility by up to 90 per cent. Additionally, some  
 28. studies reveal that users form their initial impressions of a web page aesthetically and  
 29. quickly, and these impressions tend to remain stable (Robin et al. 2010).

31. Visual presentation, branding methods and the use of digital platforms are thus  
 32. important factors for young people to give their attention to digital content, and  
 33. hence also for how they can be reached by news, as they mainly consume news  
 34. through social media. However, there is a lack of research focusing on the specific  
 35. role of aesthetics and visual design as strategic elements when legacy media compa-  
 36. nies attempt to hit young target groups with their content on social media platforms.  
 37. Based on this, we seek to answer the following research question: *what narratives of*  
 38. *aesthetics and visual design elements are used by VG Z and NRK P3 when aiming to*  
 39. *reach a young target group with legacy media content?*

## 43. Method

45. This study is based on expert interviews with executives from the two depart-  
 46. ments in respectively VG and NRK responsible for targeting young audiences, VG Z  
 47. and NRK P3, supplemented with analysis of their visual profile and/or digital news  
 48. content.

50. Regarding case selection, NRK P3 and VG Z were chosen because of their success  
 51. in hitting young target groups with their content. It is worth mentioning that VG  
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Z does tabloid news reporting and NRK P3 is publishing a wider range of content. The common denominator is that they are both legacy media companies aiming to hit young target groups. At the same time, there are key differences between a public service broadcaster and a tabloid newspaper with quality ambitions, a so-called schizophrenic paper (Eide 1997) particular to the Norwegian and Swedish news market, which make them interesting to compare.

VG is a daily newspaper and since its establishment in 1945, it has become Norway's biggest newspaper in circulation (Eide 2021). It is currently owned by the largest private media conglomerate in Norway, Schibsted. Nordic tabloid newspapers such as VG have traditionally emphasized news about politics and economy way more than tabloid newspapers in e.g. England and the European continent. A concern with balancing the serious and the trivial, politics and entertainment, has long been a part of this format and is by some Norwegian media experts declared schizophrenic (Allern 2001). In the last years, VG has got remarkable success attracting audiences on the internet and digital platforms (Njaastad 2012). VG Z was established in 2017 and is a division in VG whose main mandate is to recruit young readers to VG. Their target group are people between 15 and 24. Furthermore, VG Z is about creating new, intriguing journalism about topics that VG traditionally are covering. They work to improve their journalistic content to fit young readers' preferences.

NRK P3 (P3) was established in 1993 as a radio channel for a wide target group of young Norwegian people. Today they aim to hit people between 18 and 29 years with entertainment, popular culture, news, etc. on all platforms. P3 is a sub-brand to Norway's biggest media company Norwegian Broadcasting Cooperation (NRK) which has since 1933 been a state-owned public service media company. Being a public broadcaster, NRK is expected to function as a national common arena. They must contribute to diversity in the total programme offered and ensure that both broad and narrow audience groups have their needs met. This means that audience numbers alone cannot determine which programmes are broadcast; the audience's need for information and entertainment needs to be considered. The obligations of a public broadcaster may involve sending programmes produced for niche audience groups or a type of programme that is not profitable in and of itself (Enli et al. n.d.). NRK still enjoys a strong position in Norway, politically and in terms of audience figures, but people between 14 and 29 is one of the so-called 'burning groups' that NRK wants to reach in greater number and quality (NRK Analyse).

Regarding data collection, the interviews were conducted digitally in spring 2022, and the interviewees were Mathias Jørgensen, head of VG Z, and Kim Erlandsen, project leader for web and social media, including visual design, for P3. Bogner et al. (2009) state that *expert interviews* are preferred as a method when one wants to create an introductory orientation to a field that is relatively new or weakly defined. The experts can help the researcher develop and structure a clearer idea of a phenomenon. Expert interviews are considered a common method for creating in-depth knowledge since the experts are determined deliberately (Abels and Behrens 2005; Bogner et al. 2005; Meuser and Nagel 1991; Schnell et al. 1999). The informant in this setting



1. is defined as an expert because of their connection to the research field, and the  
2. research is targeted against their specific contextual knowledge about the phenom-  
3. ena we are researching (Bogner et al. 2009). It is the informant's knowledge about  
4. the research topic that defines their expertise. The knowledge of how P3 and VG  
5. are working, what their strategies are, their know-how and philosophy is something  
6. that only a few people have access to. The best way to access information and knowl-  
7. edge is therefore through interviews with people at the core of various phenomena  
8. – in this case, people making decisions on how to use visual design to attract young  
9. target groups in social media channels with legacy media content in Norway today.  
10. The informants were recruited by approaching them directly, through contacts the  
11. researchers already knew in a professional capacity. Chosen as informants for their  
12. comprehensive understanding of strategy, content production, area of responsibil-  
13. ity and long lead time in visual branding targeting GEN Z, these individuals were  
14. identified through research and discussions with various employees in both compa-  
15. nies. Their names frequently surfaced as individuals with exceptional overview and  
16. in-depth knowledge. While it would have been ideal to interview employees beyond  
17. the management level, such as designers and journalists, this proved impractical due  
18. to the time constraints of the empirical phase of the study and internal policies at  
19. NRK and VG. To address this limitation, we supplemented our analysis by exam-  
20. ining the design guidelines at VG and NRK, along with the actual content they  
21. produced. This was not treated as a standalone method or dataset but served to illus-  
22. trate and compare the statements made by management with the actions of the news  
23. outlets. The strategies derived from the interviews thus guided our visual analysis  
24. of news stories and design features. Through our literature review, we developed a  
25. semi-structured guide that addressed the following areas. First, introductory ques-  
26. tions aiming to collect information about the companies including their mission,  
27. vision, values and target groups. Second, we discussed the link between aesthet-  
28. ics and journalism practices more generally before we spoke about the companies'  
29. design profiles, strategies and digital trends. Finally, we had open-ended questions  
30. to access more information that could be of importance. Both interviews were done  
31. with Zoom video calls and took 1.5 hours each. The transcription was done immedi-  
32. ately after the interviews and followed the interviews as closely as possible, but some  
33. vernacular adjectives were removed to make the quotes more understandable.

34. The transcribed interviews were analysed by inductive thematic analysis (TA).  
35. Widely used and recognized as a method in the field of psychology, TA is also applied  
36. in the social sciences and humanities and can be useful within many different frame-  
37. works. In this research, we analysed our data by inductive TA which is an analysis  
38. grounded in data, rather than in theory and concepts. Since this study aims to find  
39. meaning and discover topics, we found the inductive approach to be the most appro-  
40. priate. We wanted to let the experts speak and to create space for their views and  
41. knowledge without being led by any limiting frameworks. The TA was also informed  
42. by P3's design manual and VG Z's reporting on Snapchat, to illustrate, exemplify  
43. and sometimes broaden the informants' accounts.

Two cases, two expert interviews and supplementary visual analysis alone do not, of course, provide any representativity or generalizability. On the other hand, this article does not aim to find a general and normative answer to how one should use design to attract younger target groups, but rather to create in-depth knowledge from how two market leaders are working with these issues, thereby identifying possible strategies.

## Results

In this section, we will present the findings from our analysis that understand VG as a *platform-oriented storyteller* and P3 as a Traditional Brander. For VG design is connected to the direction and design of storytelling and aptness for platforms. Their area of focus is by being where their target groups are. P3 is in this research seen as a *traditional brander* that works to build a strong, trustful and visible brand. Ensuring that their content looks recognizable is a high priority for P3 and they prioritize building a brand without the use of different third-party platforms. These two strategies will be spelled out through the four themes identified in our TA: *visions of design, design principles, global natives* and *platforms and branding*.

### Visions of design

This theme refers to the broader understanding of what role design plays in VG and P3. This includes design-related processes and the importance of visual design when reaching out to young target groups. For VG Z, design is about fitting and shaping their content and stories for the target group and right platform rather than being strict in applying their design profile, while P3, by ensuring a strict use of their design profile, aims to build a recognizable brand.

For P3, visual requirements are highly prioritized, and the channel has practices for using their design manual and presenting their content in a certain way that reinforces P3 as a brand, and its mothership NRK '[i]t is obvious that design and journalism should go hand in hand'. Erlandsen elaborates on how, when everyone has a presence on social media platforms, there are so many identities in people's everyday life. All artists today are their own brand and Erlandsen finds there is so much importance in visual design and in building a brand and identity.

Daring to invest in quality is very smart. [...] It pays off in the long run.

(Erlandsen, P3)

If I go into VICE's universe, I know there's a lot for me there. I'm on the same page as them. I want to seek things out and I trust them. It will be a seal of quality. This is what we also want to do for P3 as a brand.

(Erlandsen, P3)



1. VG Z's Jørgensen states that the words they emphasize, the titles they create, how  
 2. they manage to compress a lot of information into a little snippet and how they use  
 3. the right photos and videos to build up the story so that the readers want to continue  
 4. are what is important for the degree of completion. VG Z is prioritizing producing  
 5. quality content and following trends for presenting it to their users on the various  
 6. platforms they use. This is more important to VG Z than being strict with internal  
 7. design requirements. 'The content trumps the design [...] There is a high acceptance  
 8. of bad design! It simply does not make much of a difference, surprisingly. [...] The  
 9. content is the most important thing' (Jørgensen, VG Z).

13. Table 1: Core findings from every generated theme in the thematic analysis.

14. Generated  
 15. themes



23. Visions of  
 24. design

25. Ensuring a strict use of the design  
 26. profile, P3 aim to build a recogniz-  
 27. able brand.

28. Design is about fitting and shaping  
 29. content and stories for the right plat-  
 30. form rather than being strict with design  
 31. profile.

28. Design  
 29. principles

30. P3 are slower and more determined  
 31. by restrictions since they are a part  
 32. of NRK as a whole and a public  
 33. broadcaster.

34. VG is flexible and spontaneously open  
 35. to try out new things.

32. Global  
 33. natives

34. P3 aims at GEN Z and Y simul-  
 35. taneously which makes them way  
 36. broader and harder in hitting  
 37. everyone. P3 as a *brander* working  
 38. traditionally with design processes  
 39. and with clear frameworks for how  
 40. they should look like.

41. VG is focusing on being a storyteller  
 42. that aims at GEN Z as a target group  
 43. and delivers 'snackable' content shaped  
 44. for every platform. They see the way of  
 45. meeting the target group by meeting  
 46. them on their home court.

40. Platforms

41. P3 sees third-party platforms as a  
 42. threat to be seen as a trustful brand  
 43. and to operate on a press ethics  
 44. basis.

45. VG sees third-party platforms as an  
 46. opportunity to inform and reach out to  
 47. young people.

45. Branding

46. Since P3 are a broad brand consider-  
 47. ing their content production, they  
 48. are having an identity crisis for how  
 49. people should see them. Traditional  
 50. branding methods and a compre-  
 51. hensive design profile help them to  
 52. be visible as a brand.

For VG it is important to show that  
 they are seen as VG in every case that  
 is necessary. Being really strict to their  
 design profile is not that important.

To sum up, we already see two key differences between VG Z and P3. VG Z underplays the role of design but at the same time clearly departs from the assumption that Generation Z's media consumption choices are based on visual over verbal and that it is necessary to produce content that is sensory engaging (Schulz et al. 2020). This includes adapting to the different platform logics. On the other hand, for P3, design is closely intertwined with content production. By strictly adhering to their design profile, they aim to construct a recognizable brand. The underlying idea engaging in this practice is that using the same brand name across various channels is an effort to leverage the brand's equity. Brand equity manifests indirectly through brand awareness and brand image, as well as directly through different consumer behaviours (Förster 2015; Horppu et al. 2008; Tarkiainen et al 2009).

### Design principles

While visions of design pertain to overarching ideas about the purposes and significance (or lack thereof) of design, this theme focuses on how design is implemented in day-to-day operational practices – how design features are actually used and the principles guiding these choices. P3 strictly adheres to its principles and design manual, whereas VG Z is more flexible and adaptable to trends.

Jørgensen states that VG does not have such restrictions as a whole and especially not as far as social media are concerned. 'I know that in NRK they have project groups that work for half a year with lots of research and workshops before they launch something, while here in VG we only test things out' (Jørgensen, VG Z).

Although VG has a book called the *VG Bible* including some guidelines for which colours, fonts and so on they should use (see Figure 1), Jørgensen puts forward that



Figure 1: VG's colour palette.

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Figure 2: Print screen from VG's unofficial design manual showing some of VG's visual design effects in the newspaper.

there is a very short way from idea to implementation in VG, which also means that the visual quality is not perfect; however, this is not crucial to the outcome. As our visual analysis show, this is even the case for the traditional newspaper, not only for the online content of VG Z (see Figures 1 and 2). 'We want people to be able to be creative and use colors, sizes, and animations that work in each case' (Jørgensen, VG Z).

P3, on the other hand, holds strictly to its principles to build a design that lasts, because it takes time to build up an identity that people get to know. P3 has clear frameworks for how they should present digital content in different channels. Erlandsen states that as they are part of the mothership NRK as a brand, they need to follow certain rules to ensure that NRK is always visible as a sender.

Remember that P3's design is part of a framework that both NRK and P3 must comply with. If we for instance making the series 'Rådebank', then it is a plus if people understand that P3 made it, but the main goal is that people choose to watch the series knowing that NRK is the sender.

Erlandsen furthermore states that P3's problem is that before they have established themselves, people in their target group have moved on, either by being too old or changing their interests. He underlines that their target groups' interests change extremely fast.

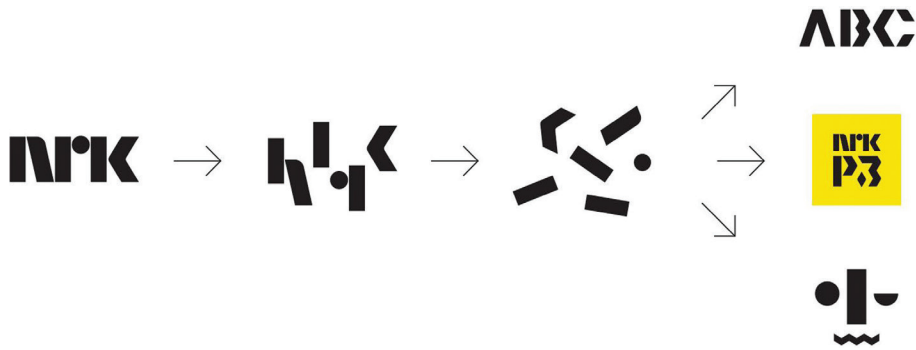


Figure 3: NRK P3's design profile is based on NRK's overall design.

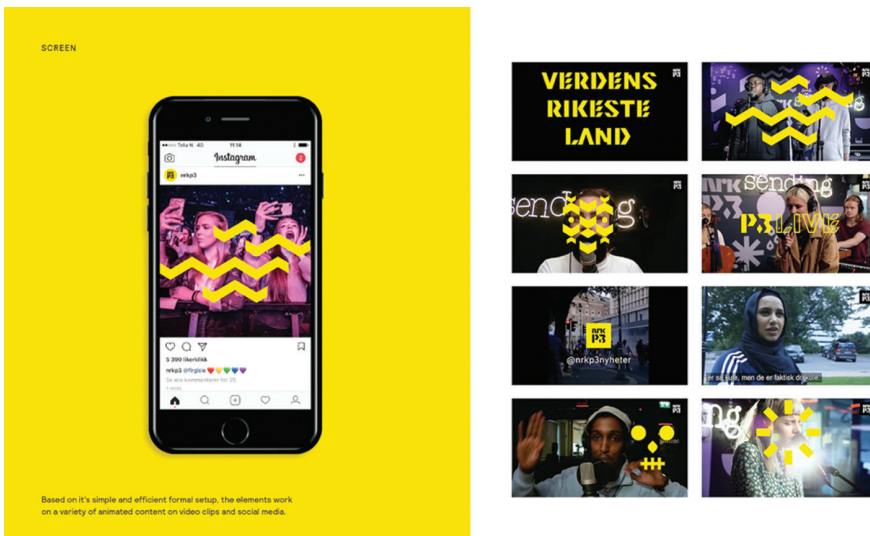


Figure 4: NRK P3's strict design manual showing some of P3's visual design effects including guidance for how to use it.

I think sometimes we build on some frameworks that are too strict and that we are not good enough at expanding. [...] The strength of VG lies in how they can be much more in the present. They can quickly latch on to a trend [...] If you look at the best in the industry, such as the brand Balenciaga, they are extremely good at sharpening and changing their design expression from one fashion week to the next. [...] We cannot change that fast, and that's a huge challenge for us.

(Erlandsen, P3)

Furthermore, Erlandsen states that since the world has become much smaller, but much more filled with competitors, they are engaged in a war of attention. They

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1. compete with Netflix, HBO, brands and artists in creating attention. ‘Nobody goes  
 2. to the kiosk today and buys *WE’AR DIFFERENT* or *Dazed*, you find it online in one  
 3. second. Everything is online and that is a huge challenge (Erlandsen, P3).  
 4.

5. For large companies, such as NRK, Erlandsen thinks it takes some time for every-  
 6. one to realize that audiences are now first and foremost online. He says that even  
 7. though everyone who works in NRK is online, they struggle to make their employees  
 8. understand the importance of being on digital platforms. Erlandsen puts forward  
 9. that, as a brand, one sometimes needs to change the design because the visual design  
 10. only works in the formats and platforms one is using right now. ‘In ten years, we  
 11. will probably be on completely different gadgets or screens and therefore we have to  
 12. change’ (Erlandsen, P3).  
 13.

14. Erlandsen elaborates that it is all about the material infrastructure we use for media  
 15. consumption such as computers, tablets and cell phones, affecting how a design  
 16. should look and, e.g. if a logo should be square or rectangular. When new gadgets are  
 17. taking over, it might change the parameters of how things should look like.  
 18.

19. Regarding design principles, there is a clear distinction between VG Z and P3’s  
 20. narratives of working with design. Where VG are flexible and spontaneously open to  
 21. try out new things, P3 are slower and more determined by restrictions since they are a  
 22. part of the public broadcaster NRK as a whole. This is a huge issue for P3, since their  
 23. target group changes preferences quickly; P3 wants to follow trends catering to them  
 24. but cannot. We find it interesting that both P3 and VG Z brought this problem up  
 25. in the interviews by contrasting themselves with their competitor, albeit Jørgensen  
 26. seemed less self-critical than Erlandsen. By being strict with its design profile, P3 is  
 27. creating a high level of brand recognition to its audience (Balmer and Gray 2000;  
 28. Kotler and Rath 1984; van den Bosch et al. 2006). At the same time, they struggle  
 29. with establishing a long-lasting relationship with its target group, as it takes time to  
 30. build a brand and the target group disappears when getting older. VG Z wants their  
 31. employees to experiment, find their own styles and try out following trends and ‘be  
 32. creative’. This is also connected to how the importance of design is underplayed on  
 33. management level, visible by how much less Jørgensen reflected on design principles  
 34. in the interview than Erlandsen. Because of the lack of public broadcast restrictions,  
 35. VG Z can operate more in the present and do quick evaluations to determine if  
 36. something is worth betting on or not. How this experimenting relates to the target  
 37. group is discussed in detail in relation to the theme below.  
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### 43. **Global natives**

44.  
 45. In this section, we discuss how the two news outlets imagine their target group,  
 46. how they get to know the target group’s visual needs and what they see most impor-  
 47. tant when engaging a young target group. While they tend to characterize their  
 48. target group in similar ways, the two different strategies become visible here: P3  
 49. clearly appears as a *brander* working traditionally with design processes and with  
 50. clear frameworks for what they should look like, while VG Z has a clear focus on  
 51.  
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being a good *storyteller* which makes them follow trends, be flexible and create the right stories for the right channels.

Erlandsen states that it is very difficult to hit their audience with content and design that fits everyone. P3 is a broad brand, and for the target group, it will be hard for them to identify with some of P3's content. What they do is therefore very fragmented, says Erlandsen. 'Young people's aesthetic preferences in digital content are linked to belonging' (Erlandsen, P3).

Erlandsen states that young people's aesthetic preferences are captured by who their influencers are or whom they are influenced by. Both brands and artists can create and shape other people's tastes. 'Those who are younger look up to those who are older, and those who are older want to be younger' (Erlandsen, P3).

Erlandsen states that if one dares to meet in the middle and make some untraditional choices to somehow create something new, he thinks that is a wise approach.

In VG Z, Jørgensen states that interests, preferences, education, going to the army, etc. are examples of circumstances relevant at a specific age in a person's life. What celebrities you follow, media usage patterns and so on is something that follows the wider generation. 'What is unique about Generation Z is that they have grown up with the smartphone and have always been connected to the internet and therefore they highly value user experiences and user-friendliness. They have high demands on it' (Jørgensen, VG Z).

Jørgensen states that for Generation Z, YouTube and social media are the norm for finding content. For Generation Z, it does not make sense for an online article to consist of black text on a white background. Young people's expectations and usage patterns will follow them throughout their lives.

Erlandsen highlights that P3 has a great deal of insight into what content preferences young people are having today. On the other hand, they have little insight into young people's design preferences. Erlandsen states that P3 works very traditionally in developing a design and that they in large projects do consider trends and who

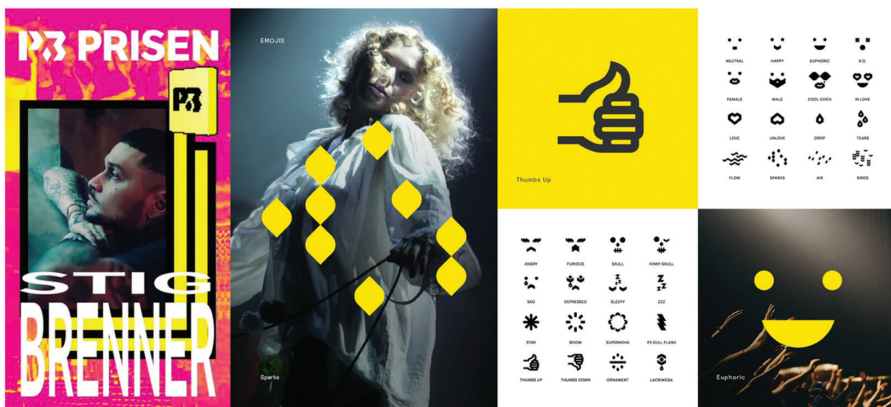


Figure 5: Screenshot/collage of some of P3's visual design effects adapted at current trends.

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1. in the industry is leading at that moment, etc. He says that they now are making a  
 2. series about football without knowing anything about it. For this project, they seek  
 3. to discover what the target group in that environment likes, how they are, what type  
 4. of clothes they wear, how they talk, behave and so on. P3 are in general working very  
 5. traditionally with regard to developing design, but because of their target groups  
 6. crossing preferences P3 also make some untraditional design choices motivated by  
 7. creating something new in hope of reach out to their audience.

9. Jørgensen states that VG is experimenting a lot with storytelling and formats for  
 10. presenting content. 'We know that older people like more text, while the younger  
 11. you are, the more you expect, preferring the combination of text, sound, image and  
 12. video' (Jørgensen, VG Z).

14. VG is working on designing its content to fit the right audience. They have inter-  
 15. nal guidelines saying that a story should always be presented in the format that is  
 16. best suited. Back in 2017, VG started using Snapchat, as the first Nordic publisher.

19. If it's a dramatic situation, then you should preferably show a video of it.  
 20. Strong emotions work great in video, but if there are a lot of numbers and  
 21. dates, then it works better with graphs and visualizing models, etc.

(Jørgensen, VG Z)

25. What we are witnessing in VG's focus on customizing their storytelling is a clear  
 26. example of the aestheticization of journalism (Cramerotti 2009). The facsimile  
 27. presented above is a story about sharks coming into Norwegian waters and one can  
 28. clearly see the references to popular culture, more specifically the movie Jaws, which  
 29. can be seen as a prime example of how many stories on VG are presented in a 'snack-  
 30. able' format in accordance with popular trends on different platforms. As we have  
 31. seen, Generation Z's attention span is short, and they live in a world where they are  
 32. looking for 'snackable' information (Brodeur Partners 2018). They are attracted to



51. Figure 6: VG on Snapchat visualizing a story about sharks in Norwegian waters.  
 52.

sensory journalism, defined as news content that engages its audience's senses visually and sonically (Schulz et al. 2020).

This helps them reach out to many people but also muddles the distinction between art and journalism, which may contribute to a superficial use of legacy media content (Cramerotti 2009). P3 is also adapting to its audience, but in a more basic way marked by lengthy processes. P3 seeks design that fits the platforms they use with a focus on creating visibility. They aim to build a design and a brand that lasts, which requires strictly following their direction over time, while also responding to technological and generational changes.

### **Platforms and branding**

In this section, we seek to get a deeper understanding of how the two companies work with platforms *and* the relationship between platforms and brand. Where VG is using third-party platforms to be visible and engage people, P3 is building a brand using its own platforms and visual recognition factor for attracting its audience.

P3 publishes content on Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram and NRK's own platforms. Erlandsen states that there is a change in NRK regarding their use of third parties right now. 'NRK will have all content on its own platforms' (Erlandsen, P3).

VG is publishing on Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook and on their own platforms.

Since their main objective is to recruit new young readers to VG, their mandate states that VG should be on the platforms where young people are, which leads to all their design-related choices being platform defined. 'When you are on a platform, you have an expectation of what things should look like when you scroll around. We must adapt to all of that' (Jørgensen, VG Z).

For NRK, having control of its own platforms, creating 'safe neighbourhoods' where you can rely on all content, is closely connected to NRK's role as a public broadcaster. According to Erlandsen, a lot of what P3 is making obviously does not work because it is governed by which platforms it is to be published on. One of the most important platforms for P3 is NRK web TV and according to Erlandsen, whereas VG has jumped on the TikTok trend, P3 could not possibly do that with the design framework they are having today. 'People would just perceive us as advertising, and we would not get any interaction at all' (Erlandsen, P3).

According to Erlandsen, being present on the platform's premises is very important, but on the other hand, he thinks it is going to backfire on those who do this as well, considering algorithms and the third parties' power of hiding and sharing content.

One thing is how you should be, but if you do things in NRK's way on Instagram or Facebook, then you will be punished in the form of becoming less visible to our target group. We are governed by external parties.

(Erlandsen, P3)

1. Erlandsen states that despite the issues third parties entail, it is very naive to believe  
2. that the target group will seek P3's own platforms in the future, which might have  
3. a negative effect on getting attention. Facebook and Instagram are owned by large  
4. American companies that make a lot of money from us publishing content. NRK's  
5. statutes state that NRK should not be led by that, and this is one of the main reasons  
6. why changes are made in that respect right now.  
7.

8. Erlandsen does not think P3 would have attracted more people to their own plat-  
9. forms by using TikTok.  
10.

11.  
12. If we were to use TikTok, it would be to build a brand that was only there and  
13. profiles that were only on that platform. I think it could have given us some  
14. cool hosts and profiles, but I'm not sure what it would offer beyond that.

(Erlandsen, P3)

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17. VG is adapting what is trending on different platforms. They find it more impor-  
18. tant to create content by following what is trending on the platforms than being  
19. strict with a design profile. 'Instagram is a shining image. In private profiles, people  
20. are posting pictures from the summit of the mountain, not the way up. It should  
21. show you from your best side' (Jørgensen, VG Z).  
22.

23. On Instagram, VG aims to get the visual design looking good, but on Snapchat,  
24. content such as selfies and people looking straight into cameras is what is trending.  
25. TikTok is rougher and encourages publishing unfinished things. People like to show  
26. themselves from an unflattering side on this platform. VG has not defined a specific  
27. style here yet, but the presenter profile will be much more important than visual  
28. design on TikTok than on, e.g. Instagram. 'VG must take the platform trends into  
29. account. We must not be so polished in our appearance, because then it will crash a  
30. lot with the rest of what is happening on these platforms' (Jørgensen, VG Z).  
31.

32. It is the design of how VG tells their stories, how they format their content and choose  
33. the most suitable format that are the salient points of how VG works with visual expres-  
34. sion. Jørgensen states that VG will often know that a certain topic will not yield a good  
35. readership on Snapchat but choose to write and share it because of its public importance.  
36. At the same time, Jørgensen says that VG does not need to make these concessions all the  
37. way, because then no one will see their content. One can write about the world's most  
38. important issue, but if no one reads it, then you have not accomplished anything.  
39.

40. For P3, on the other hand, the main priority on platforms is ensuring that people  
41. are recognizing their brand and style of content production. Erlandsen states that  
42. NRK has been 'best in class' in social media for a long time.  
43.

44.  
45.  
46. Our main goal is to create a brand that hits the target group. Age is the most  
47. important factor for the brand. We are extremely broad, which makes it diffi-  
48. cult to create this type of brand. We contain everything from *Mp3* and *VG*  
49. *Lista* to *National Rap Show* and *P3 Gull* and *P3 X*. We are a broad brand.

(Erlandsen, P3)

50.  
51.  
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It's one thing to put a logo on things, but creating a feeling like *this is something I like before I start reading it* is very important for us.

(Erlandsen, P3, original emphasis)

After P3 changed its design profile in 2017, they have noticed that NRK as a broadcaster stands out more clearly and is easier to spot on all platforms. They changed the logo to yellow, which according to Erlandsen is a signature colour that makes them much more visible when they are part of something else, which they often are.

Here, we can clearly see two different narratives from the *storyteller* VG and the *brander* P3.

P3 works with building a successful brand in accordance with their design profile and NRK's overall design philosophy. They aim to build a strong, recognizable brand. They want to own their content by using their own platforms to ensure that third parties and others do not cause them to be less visible. It is worth discussing if this move contributes to building a more trust-based relationship between consumers and NRK's content. NRK is considered one of the most reliable media companies in Norway (Moe and Sakariassen 2018). When NRK, in the years to come, will be scaling down the use of third parties and instead own all their content, they will get increased freedom to operate on their own premises. At the same time, Erlandsen highlights their fear of missing out in reach for their content caused by this change.

For VG, the target group's expectations for perceiving content lead to all design choices being platform defined. VG follows trends in digital consumption considering millennials' behaviour, which is a proven way of reaching out to an audience. The 'News-finds-me' mindset, where people are involuntary stumbling over the news, has become the dominant mode of news acquisition (Schulz et al. 2020). Curran et al. (2014) concluded that 37 per cent of young adults between 18 and 34 years do not seek information on a regular basis. VG's strategy of being present on the platforms where their consumers are is clearly a response designed to meet those trends.

## Conclusion

VG and P3 represent two different narratives for how a huge legacy media company should use visual and sensory journalism in reaching out to young people. Both VG and P3 agree that being visible on the platforms used by the target group is beneficial when reaching out to young people today.

For the *storyteller*, VG Z, it is important to reach out to the right and the most audience by using the right channels and platforms and the associated trends to ensure engagement. VG is focusing on telling stories using the best formats possible for each piece. By following trends in social media and adapting to how their users behave on different platforms, they consider themselves to be on the right track to reaching out to their target groups. Design for VG is connected to the direction and

1. design of storytelling and finding the best fit for platforms. It is about the rhythm of  
 2. the movie cut and following expression trends for the platforms youths prefer, rather  
 3. than using a specific colour or font to reinforce the VG brand and their visual profile.

4. For the *brander*, P3, it is important to ensure a strong visual expression that  
 5. clearly shows who the sender is and that reinforces NRK as a high-quality, trust-  
 6. worthy brand. Where P3 has issues with embracing its wide target group because of  
 7. its wide range of content, topics and restrictions, VG has a narrower target group  
 8. that is easier to measure for impact. NRK's role as a public broadcaster is creat-  
 9. ing boundaries to their freedom to operate and directs many of the design-related  
 10. choices of P3. NRK's strategy and vision of creating a quality stamp as a brand by  
 11. owning its content on its own platforms is the opposite of what VG is doing in  
 12. chiefly seeking audience attention.

13. These two narratives, we would argue, are used by the media executives as strat-  
 14. egies which affect how legacy media work with reaching young people. Further  
 15. research should address how these strategies actually work and how they are experi-  
 16. enced by young people, as well as discussing the potential wider repercussions for  
 17. news use. Some critical remarks are thus needed as a final point. Both VG and P3  
 18. have made design- and aesthetic-related choices which serve them well in reach-  
 19. ing out to their audience, but we would argue that both approaches have poten-  
 20. tial pitfalls. VG gains a short-term advantage in reaching out to its audience and  
 21. recruiting new ones by being very flexible in testing formats and storytelling. Over  
 22. time, however, this attitude might affect them negatively by undermining their  
 23. credibility as a trustworthy brand. The issue of diminishing trust occurs when the  
 24. target groups no longer see the difference between legacy media content and other  
 25. content. Aiming to follow aesthetic trends for hitting a wide audience could para-  
 26. doxically render a company such as VG invisible because the target groups see them  
 27. as 'something else', not necessarily as news. P3 will reduce their possibilities to hit  
 28. a wide target group when they stop using third parties, which might cause issues  
 29. in recruiting new generations. Further research should address the possibility to  
 30. balance these two strategies.

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