

Potential Risks and Benefits for Content Production after Merger of Latvian Public Service Media in 2025

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Abstract. The aim of the study is to investigate the possible risks and benefits of content production after the merger of Latvian public service media. The theoretical approaches of the work include the concept of public value, the concept of diversity in the media environment, the concept of media ecosystem, systems theory, organisational inertia theory and diffusion of innovations theory. The research methodology includes four research methods, two of which were used for data collection (semi-structured interview and survey) and the others for data analysis (content analysis and SWOT analysis). A total of 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with public service media content creators, media experts, reformers, and decision makers, thus eliciting what they perceived to be the risks and benefits of a merged public service media. The study also sought the views of company employees regarding the need for, and the foreseeable risks and benefits of, a media merger by analysing the results of a survey of 128 public service media employees. A total of 34 major risks and 17 major opportunities for content production after the merger were identified using a SWOT analysis. This means that potential risks are anticipated more than opportunities. Based on the data, it is concluded that several interviewees and survey participants consider that all possible risks and benefits are not sufficiently weighed up in the decision to merge the media. Furthermore, it has been found that there are different perspectives on how people at management level and content creators view potential risks and benefits.

Keywords: public service media, public service media mergers, organisational change, Latvian Radio, Latvian Television, Public Electronic Mass Media Council (SEPLP)

Introduction

Since the establishment of the Public Electronic Mass Media Council (SEPLP) in 2021 ([LSM.lv](https://lsm.lv) Ziņu redakcija 2021), there have been ongoing discussions regarding the merger of Latvia's public service media, which are legally composed

of two state-owned limited liability companies – Latvian Television (LTV) and Latvian Radio (LR). Although attempts to merge these public broadcasters date back more than a decade, discussions on media reform have intensified over the past four years. This is largely due to a provision in the transitional regulations of the Public Electronic Mass Media Law, which mandates that within six months of the council's establishment, it must submit a concept to the Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee of the *Saeima* regarding the formation and operation of a unified public electronic media organization (Sabiedrisko elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome 2022, 4).

Although the transitional regulations did not explicitly require the Public Electronic Mass Media Council (SEPLP) to implement the merger of public service media, significant efforts have been made to advance this reform. The initiative gained a definite momentum on 18 January 2024, when the *Saeima*, in its final reading, approved the creation of a unified public broadcaster by 2025 (Sabiedrisko elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome 2024), despite public opposition from Latvian Radio employees (LSM.lv Ziņu redakcija, Kincis 2023). At that time, the SEPLP expressed satisfaction with the *Saeima*'s historic decision (Sabiedrisko elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome 2024), emphasizing that these changes would be monumental, impacting not only public media employees but also the entire Latvian media ecosystem.

The research problem is that the merger of public service media will entail significant changes affecting several hundred employees, the content production process, and Latvia's media ecosystem as a whole. Major changes can introduce substantial risks, which may or may not be justified. The aim of the study is to examine the potential risks and benefits in content production following the merger of Latvia's public service media.

To this end, five research questions have been formulated:

1. What are the potential risks in content production when merging public service media?
2. What are the potential benefits in content production when merging public service media?
3. Do the identified risks and benefits differ between management-level individuals and public service media employees, and if so, how?
4. Are there more potential benefits than risks?
5. To what extent are the risks and benefits in content production, identified in this study, recognized by those responsible for the reform?

Methodology

In the study the author employs both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Data collection involved two distinct research methods: semi-structured

interviews and a survey. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in two blocks. In the first block, individuals responsible for the reform, its implementers, and content experts from public media were interviewed, while the second block focused on content creators from public media. Each interview block was prepared with its own set of questions. Some questions in both blocks were similar. The first block consisted of a total of 21 questions, whereas the second block contained 27 questions. The questions were designed to explore four aspects: attitudes toward the merger of public media, the progress of the merger process, the impact of the reform on public media content following the merger, and future forecasts after the merger of public media. In total, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted, ranging in length from 21 minutes to one hour and 14 minutes.

In the first interview block, seven individuals were interviewed: Jānis Siksnis, Chairman of the SEPLP; Ieva Aile, Board Member of Latvian Radio responsible for program and service development; Ivars Priede, Chairman of the Board of Latvian Television; Anita Brauna, Chief Editor of Latvian Radio; Sigita Rože, Chief Editor of Latvian Television; Anda Rožukalne, the Ombudsman for Public Media and Leila Rasima, Chair of the Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee of the *Saeima*.

In the second interview block, eight individuals were interviewed: Zane Eniņa, Editor of the News Department at Latvian Radio; Dagnija Neimane-Vēvere, Editor of the News Department at Latvian Television; Marta Cerava, Chief Editor of [LSM.lv](#); Agita Bērziņa, Chief Editor of LR1; Vikija Valdmāne-Rozenberga, Content Editor for news, informational documentaries, and sports programs at Latvian Television; Renāte Lazdiņa, Head of the Latgale Studio at Latvian Radio; Anna Stroja, Chief Editor of LR4 and Jekaterina Kolosova, Head and Chief Editor of the Russian-language content section at [Rus.LSM.lv](#).

A survey was also used as a data collection method. The survey consisted of 12 closed-ended questions with provided answer options. It was compiled and distributed electronically. A total of 128 employees from Latvian public media completed the survey, including 89 employees from Latvian Radio and 39 from Latvian Television. It should be noted that employees from the [LSM.lv](#) portal were not separately identified, as the first question of the survey was: “Which of the companies do you work for?” The term “companies” referred to the public service limited liability companies – Latvian Radio and Latvian Television. The [LSM.lv](#) portal is legally integrated into Latvian Television, so any employees from the portal participating in the survey would have to select the response option “Latvian Television”. The author is unable to determine how many employees from [LSM.lv](#) participated in the survey, as it was conducted anonymously. The decision to distribute an anonymous survey was made to

ensure that public media employees could provide honest responses regarding the necessity of the merger of public media.

The second part of the study consisted of data processing. The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis. The content analysis included seven categories. This method allows for the differentiation of various types of potential risks and benefits post-merger, including those directly related to content production as well as those that are secondary. Additionally, this research method helps to identify potential risks and benefits associated with internal changes within the organization – risks and benefits that could potentially jeopardize the implementation of the reforms.

The data obtained from the survey is automatically compiled, as the author created the electronic survey on the internet platform [VisiDati.lv](https://visidati.lv). The platform aggregates the collected data and also provides the results in *Microsoft Office Excel* format. The author accumulates and visualizes this data for subsequent analysis.

The data obtained from qualitative content analysis is compared and summarized. Additionally, the data is mutually compared and analysed by examining the survey results of public media employees alongside the results of the interviews, assessing whether the opinions of media employees differ from those of reform leaders and media experts, as well as the perspectives of content creators (mid-level managers). Using the SWOT analysis method, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to content production following the merger of public service media are consolidated. Strengths and opportunities are considered benefits, while weaknesses and threats are regarded as risks. Strengths and weaknesses are more reflective of the current situation, and theory suggests that they can be mitigated, whereas opportunities and threats represent future scenarios that are less subject to influence. Given that the public media reform is based on both internal and external factors, the author constructs the SWOT analysis matrix not by focusing on aspects that can or cannot be mitigated, but rather on risks and benefits that are related to the current situation and future projections.

Results

By compiling the results of the SWOT analysis categories, it can be concluded that the merger of public service media is projected to yield a total of 17 significant opportunities and 34 substantial risks. Thus, the risks associated with content creation could potentially be twice as numerous. However, it is important to note that eight possible risks and benefits were not included in these figures, as they could be considered both benefits and threats from various perspectives and in terms of execution.

The 17 significant opportunities in content creation are divided into two levels – primary and secondary. According to the author's assessment, primary opportunities are deemed the most significant, while secondary opportunities are considered less important. In total, eight of the most significant opportunities and nine lesser opportunities were identified. For instance, the support for the reform at the management level is viewed as less critical than the backing from LTV employees, as the management level is numerically smaller than the staff. Moreover, the new unified media will have a new board and a single chief editor, with the composition of the SEPLP being re-elected, suggesting that the management level is less stable than the employees, who hold their positions indefinitely. The support of employees for the merger of public service media is crucial, especially since many of them are content creators. If content creators are merged into a single media entity against their wishes, it could significantly impact the quality of the content.

Among the most significant benefits identified are: a stronger media organization, enhancement of regional content, overall content development, journalists focusing on more complex content creation, an increase in investigative and analytical content within public media, timely content distribution, and growth in user numbers. Additionally, other significant but somewhat less critical benefits include: opportunities for broader representation of correspondents abroad, specialization of journalists by field, creation of new formats, easier content accessibility, distribution of content across various platforms, technological advancement, improvement of children's and youth content, and synergy between LTV and LR employees in content creation.

In total, 34 potential risks associated with content creation in the merged media have been identified, categorized into two distinct parts on the basis of their significance: primary and secondary levels. The 17 most critical risks are primarily related to the reform process. These include inadequate management of changes, unclear and insufficient communication regarding the changes, lack of employee motivation to engage in the changes, uncertainty about the future, the perception of the merger as unsuccessful, difficulties in reaching compromises, insufficient explanation of the reform's objectives, and scepticism among some public media employees about whether the reform would be implemented or successful. Risks related to the change process are particularly significant, as they determine the success and development potential of content creation in the merged public media. Other identified critical risks, which are partially subordinate to the reform process, include the reluctance of LR employees to support the changes, as well as interviewees and survey respondents believing that all potential risks and benefits have not been adequately assessed. This raises concerns that the reform might not be successfully implemented.

The author's SWOT analysis also identified additional significant risks: extended decision-making and approval processes, unclear future funding, clashes of organizational cultures, challenges in maintaining editorial independence, the potential for employee turnover, decreased diversity of opinions in the merged media content, and a projection that the risks would outweigh the benefits as a result of the reform.

Among the identified potential risks, 17 less significant risks were noted: the media management model may not be similar to that of neighbouring countries, difficulties in development due to the reform, a generally negative assessment of the merger process, employees believing that the merger will not promote content growth or diversity. It was also determined that among these risks is a partial understanding among employees regarding the merger's objectives, a perceived lack of consideration for each media outlet's specificity, the potential loss of the uniqueness of radio and television, and concerns that the LR and LTV brands may be at risk of being lost.

Greater cybersecurity and overall security risks are not considered among the most significant risks, as the credibility of these aspects would need to be confirmed by competent security authorities; however, these risks cannot be entirely dismissed. Similarly, there are concerns that opponents of public media may exploit the reform to undermine the media's credibility. This category also includes risks related to competition, predictions of unequal salaries, increased workload for the Editorial Council, and various risks associated with the new board and chief editor positions.

Conclusions

In total, several potential risks and benefits associated with content creation following the media reform were identified, among which 34 significant risks and 17 major opportunities were determined.

By analysing the responses from the semi-structured interviews, the author concludes that the potential risks and benefits differ between individuals at the management level and those working in public media. At the management level, the risks and benefits primarily related to public media content (management-related risks and benefits) were articulated. In contrast, public media employees were able to forecast more risks and benefits that were directly associated with media content creation.

Based on the obtained research data, it is concluded that several interviewees and survey participants believe that when deciding on the media merger, all potential risks and benefits have not been sufficiently weighed. This leads the author to the impression that those responsible for the reform have not fully recognized all the risks and opportunities.

The most significant risks and benefits in content creation are based on the opinions of the interviewees and survey participants regarding the change process. The author concludes that the reform has not been managed successfully enough so far, and there is a lack of clear communication about it, leading to a sense of uncertainty among employees. This uncertainty could manifest as an inability to accept changes and even result in employees leaving the media, which would have a significant impact on the content creation of the merged media outlet. Moreover, the decision to leave important issues unresolved for the new board, which has not yet been established, is viewed negatively. Consequently, the entire responsibility is expected from individuals who have not yet begun their work.

In the study, the author concludes that the employees of Latvian Radio perceive the changes the most negatively, while those at Latvian Television predominantly support the reform. According to the theory of organizational inertia, it is more challenging to implement changes in older companies or those where changes occur less frequently. Since LR is an older organization than LTV, this theory applies. Through semi-structured interviews, the author found that LTV employees are less engaged and interested in the media merger compared to their LR counterparts. This may suggest that LR employees have a better understanding of the potential risks associated with content creation, leading them to express a more negative attitude toward the reform.

The author also concludes that the public media reform will not only bring fundamental changes to the landscape of Latvian public media but, furthermore, will impact the diversity of the entire Latvian media environment. For instance, the merged media could increase competition among commercial media, compelling private media outlets to further develop their content. Conversely, the competition could become so fierce that some media companies may cease operations altogether. Summarizing the findings of the study, it can be concluded that both positive and potentially negative impacts will arise from the reform. However, predicting the exact nature of these effects is challenging, as it largely depends on how the merger is implemented and executed.

Author's note. The current paper is based on a master's thesis developed and defended in the master's study programme "Communication Science" at the University of Latvia Faculty of Social Sciences. The research supervisor of the thesis is Assistant Professor Klinta Ločmele.

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