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Citation for published version (APA):

Esser, A., & Steemers, J. (2023). Transnational Encounters with British Screen Entertainment: The Experiences of young audiences in Denmark and Germany and the implications for public service media. In M. Kettemann (Ed.), *Public Value Studie: Öffentlich-rechtliche Qualität im Diskurs: Die Bedeutung Öffentlich-rechtlicher Unterhaltung in Zeiten des Digitalen Wandels* (pp. 82-103). (Public Value Studie). Österreichischer Rundfunk, ORF. https://zukunft.orf.at/show_content.php?sid=147&pvi_id=2401&pvi_medientyp=t&oti_tag=Studie

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Transnational Encounters with British Screen Entertainment: The experiences of young audiences in Denmark and Germany and the implications for Public Service Media

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Introduction

A broad interpretation of public service has always included entertainment as a vital component of the public service remit, that is not separate from education and information, but integral to a holistic understanding of public service. If public service broadcasters (PSBs) are unable to 'entertain' the public across entertainment, factual and educational programmes, they risk alienating audiences, and the legitimacy of public funding (Collins, 2001). In this sense, fictional (e.g., drama, comedy) and factual (e.g., cookery, lifestyle) entertainment are just as important as 'heavier' offerings such as news and documentaries.

This chapter investigates this broader understanding of public service through the lens of transnational encounters with British films and TV programmes by young people in Denmark and Germany aged 16 to 34. These two countries offer interesting case studies because they have a long history of public service provision, serviced by DR and commercially funded TV2 in Denmark, and ARD and ZDF in Germany. Yet they also exhibit notable differences. Denmark is a small country of nearly 6 million people, which imports substantial amounts of English-language content from both the UK and the US (Bengesser et al. 2023). Non-Danish content is usually watched in the original language with subtitles. Denmark also punches above its weight in producing internationally acclaimed crime dramas, commissioned by PSBs (Novrup Redvall et al., 2020). By contrast Germany, with approximately 83 million inhabitants, is a country whose PSBs and commercial broadcasters produce and schedule predominantly German content, supplemented with imported dubbed fiction, mostly from the US (Esser, 2007).

Since the end of PSB monopolies from the late 1980s, both countries developed a strong commercial sector, which has always relied heavily on US imports (Bondjeberg et al., 2017; Kevin and Ene 2015; Steemers, 2004). Public service broadcasters like ARD, ZDF, DRTV and TV2, on the other hand, have tended to buy more from other European PSBs and distributors, including from the UK. Today, with the rise of subscription video on demand (SVOD), Danish and German audiences have access to more UK content than ever. Yet most of this content is on Netflix (both countries), Prime Video (Germany) and HBO Max (Denmark), where the public service commissioning origins of many UK shows (e.g., *Sherlock*, *Peaky Blinders*) are no longer apparent. Also, as shown below, in both countries US entertainment is both more prevalent and popular than UK content among younger audiences by a wide margin.

This raises the issue of where domestic (and public service) content fits in relation to imports from the English-speaking world, foremost the US. Bearing this in mind, this chapter illuminates how young audiences in Denmark and Germany access and discover entertainment, their genre and country-of-origin preferences, and the reasons for these preferences. Subsequently, it explores the motivations for watching British content, offering insights into young audiences' yearning for humour, on-screen talent, and authenticity, as well as the role the English language plays in their screen choices. Finding some degree of dissatisfaction with local content, the chapter suggests that a better understanding of what young audiences look for and appreciate could improve their public service experience. This is not to suggest that UK content is 'better' than productions from other countries, and it should be noted that it is usually the most globally accessible UK shows that sell internationally (Steemers, 2004). However, exploration of young people's views about British content can reveal something about what they feel is lacking in domestic content, and why they are more attracted to overseas content, particularly from the US.

A public service context – why entertainment matters

Where does entertainment sit as part of public service media's (PSM) remit, and why is it an important ingredient for reaching younger generations? If a broad interpretation of PSM's remit is adopted then entertainment is an essential part of the core principle of 'universality' (BRU, 1986; EBU, 2012). Although difficult to define (D'Arma et al, forthcoming; Goodwin, 2020; Lowe and Savage, 2020), universality suggests access for all on the same terms, in respect of geographic and technical reach, quality of service, and the range of what is on offer *across genres* (see Born & Prosser, 2001; EBU, 2012: 4; Garnham, 1990). Collins (2001: 7-8) underlines the centrality of entertainment: "Public service broadcasting cannot succeed unless it is popular. It cannot therefore be consigned to a ghetto at the margin of the market, filling the gaps disdained by profit-maximizing broadcasters."

An additional consideration is "universality of appeal" (BRU, 1986: 3-6), that is, PSBs should cater not only to the interests of the majority but strive to reflect the views and interests of minorities, particularly those who may be underserved, identified for example by sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability *and crucially age* (Steemers, 2017). Not only is it important that all in society see themselves represented but, as Anne Bartsch and Christal Bürgel argue in this collection (Ch. 4), entertainment can make an important contribution to public discourse by offering viewers the opportunity to put themselves into the shoes of others, facilitating more empathy and understanding in society. This broad interpretation of universality interlocks with other PSB principles focused on 'enhancing, developing and serving social, political, and cultural citizenship' (Born and Prosser, 2001: 671).

Not all accept that to enhance citizenship, PSB content needs to be universally available, through large institutions that offer broad-ranging entertainment, representing diversity or a plurality of viewpoints. Some have argued that in today's world of multiple platforms and conflicting views, where audiences can schedule their own entertainment, PSB could be confined to "programming that the market might not provide" (see Murdoch, 1989). Even, UK regulator, Ofcom, posed the question of 'whether they [PSBs] should continue to offer a broad range of entertainment content,' but ultimately argued that entertainment genres

could 'generate societal value' that reflects diversity and contributes to national culture (Ofcom, 2020).

In Europe most scholars and policy makers maintain that popular entertainment has a crucial role in contributing to societal cohesion with public service offerings sitting alongside commercial offerings. In fact, in recent years some of the most popular programming has come out of private sector-public service collaborations, with PSBs benefiting from third party finance, and commercial players like Netflix or Amazon gaining access to high quality content, underpinned by a major public service brand. Recent examples include *Peaky Blinders* (BBC, Netflix), *Borgen* (DR, Netflix) and *The Chelsea Detective* (ZDF, BBC Studios, AMC). Additionally, SVODs are commissioning their own British entertainment with 'public-service values' (e.g., *The Crown*, *Sex Education* – both Netflix originals), in efforts to appeal to older and younger viewers.

This chapter adopts a broader interpretation of universality and suggests that to cater for all ages, including those aged 16-34, and to maintain relevance, PSBs should offer younger audiences opportunities to engage with a range of entertainment genres they care for, focus attention on aspects they feel are missing in domestic entertainment—above all humour, on-screen talent and authenticity—and provide opportunities to engage with popular screen content on social media, where discovery, 'loving', and sharing occur through user-created clips and memes.

The PSB challenge of engaging young audiences

Across Europe PSBs are challenged by global streaming services and YouTube, which further fragment national audiences and force them to rethink what constitutes their public service remit and how they should deliver it (D'Arma et al, 2021; Michalis 2022). Responses to the challenges of platformisation have included resistance, emphasis on PSBs' distinctiveness, and new offerings (thematic channels, VoD services) with nascent recommendation systems targeted at younger audiences (D'Arma et al 2021, Hildén, 2022). Many broadcasters have responded with initiatives to serve younger audiences better. In Germany PSB services targeting a younger demographic include:

- ZDF Neo, a channel for 25–49-year-olds, also available on the ZDF Mediathek video-on-demand service.
- Funk, a joint video-on-demand, and streaming service operated by ARD, ZDF and SWR, targeting 14–29-year-olds, available on SoMe platforms and the funk.net web app.

In Denmark it includes:

- TV 2 Zulu, a channel for 15–30-year-olds, known for Danish comedy and reality programming.
- TV 2 Echo, which started as a social media platform in 2018, replacing TV 2 Zulu in 2023 as a TV channel for 20–30-year-olds.
- A concerted drive by DR to offer 'digital first'.

In both countries, there is now a clear shift towards online-first strategies, allowing PSBs to be present where audiences are, including at least a promotional presence on YouTube (Michaelis, 2018), and there are strong indications that online will become the 'main entry point for access to PSM programme content and services' (D'Arma et al, 2021; cf Davie 2022; Johnson, 2019).

As this chapter shows, attracting young audiences is difficult for PSBs. Young people in both countries are avid consumers of screen entertainment on transnational platforms, particularly Netflix, YouTube, HBO Max (Denmark), Prime Video (Germany) and Disney+. But why is this so? Why is the appeal of these transnational streamers not dented by the "liability of foreignness" (see Stallkamp and Schotter, 2021 for a critical discussion) or the attractions of cultural and linguistic proximity from domestic channels and platforms (Hoskins and Mirus, 1989; Straubhaar, 2007)? Why are Danish and German PSBs struggling to attract younger viewers, despite their recent efforts, and home advantage as legacy media? The following sections aim to provide some explanations.

Research approach and methodology

Concentrating on young people aged 16-34 in Denmark and Germany, this chapter provides insights into their engagement with entertainment and public service offerings by focusing on how they engage with British screen content in a radically changing digital landscape. Our findings are based on two online surveys, carried out in Denmark in August-September 2022 (n=423), and Germany in January-March 2023 (n=426); followed by digital diaries over 5 days with 46 participants (20 in DK; 26 in DE); and interviews with 42 individuals (22 in DK; 20 in DE) (for discussion of methodology see Bengesser et. al, 2022).¹ To provide context, two further work packages (WP) preceded the audience research. WP1 included a) industry analysis to establish viewing trends; b) catalogue research to identify UK content on VOD services; and c) landing page and social media research to determine UK content promoted by selected VOD services during the survey. WP2 comprised 25 interviews with UK sales executives and local cultural intermediaries (programme buyers, film festival organisers, teachers).

The complete *Screen Encounters with Britain* project, funded by the British Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), underpins the two case studies for this chapter, and will see Denmark and Germany complemented by two further case studies, the Netherlands and Italy. Four of the project's six research questions are relevant for this chapter:

- 1) As viewing practices change, who are the young Europeans who watch UK screen content, what do they watch (and define as British), and how do they watch?
- 2) How do these audiences get to know about, find & access UK screen productions across different platforms?
- 3) Why do they seek out British screen productions? What are their motivations?

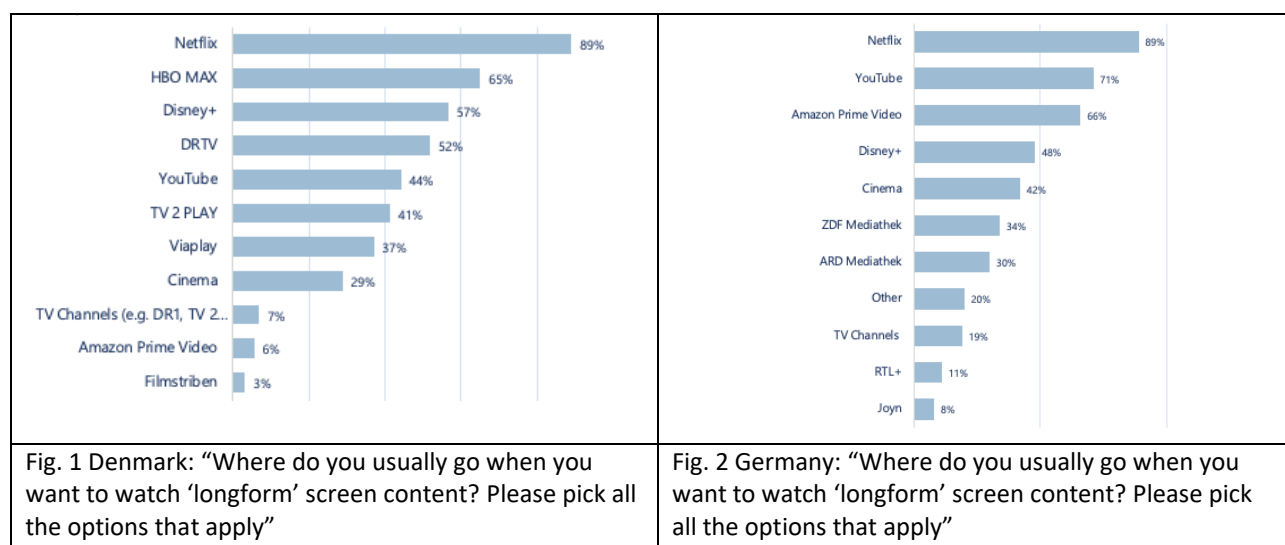
¹ Survey findings were weighted for age and self-identified gender in line with national statistics. Digital diary and interview respondents were recruited to reflect a balance across gender, age, occupation and different levels of interest and consumption of UK content, including those with low interest.

4) What values & experiences do young audiences attribute to British screen content and recognise as “British”?

Their relevance lies in findings that show the strong pull of transnational streaming services and the impact of algorithmic recommendations and social media in driving young people’s screen consumption. It lies in a) the strong desire to watch content in English, even in Germany with its dubbing tradition, and b) in young people’s perceptions of domestic content as not always as relevant to them as imports. Survey and interview evidence suggests that the best British entertainment is appreciated not only for its “high quality”, but also for its humour, on-screen talent, and authenticity — all features that many young people believe they do not always find in domestically produced programming. Understanding why they seek out imported content, usually US entertainment, offers potential lessons for PSM about what younger generations look for, what they value, and why.

Access and discovery

In both countries Netflix is the favourite platform for accessing ‘longform’ entertainment, defined as programmes longer than 20 minutes in duration. Asked, “where do you usually go when you want to watch such screen content? Please pick all the options that apply,” 89% of survey respondents in Denmark (n=423) ticked Netflix, compared to 52% ticking public service streaming service, DRTV (Fig. 1). In Germany (Fig. 2) 89% of respondents (n=426) ticked Netflix. The ZDF and ARD Mediatheken were ticked by 34% and 30% respectively, performing less well than their Danish counterparts, but better than local commercial streaming services, RTL+ (11%) and Joyn (8%). Yet, German TV channels (public service and commercial) are used by significantly more young people (19%) than Danish TV channels (7%). This may be due to the initial slow development of transnational streaming in Germany, a more competitive marketplace for licenced content with more outlets, and the greater availability of German ‘free’ channels (see Jenke & Vonderau, 2017).



The findings above match other research on Germany (Egger & Rhody, 2022: 432) and Denmark (DR, 2022), revealing that the offerings of transnational VODs and YouTube are clearly more alluring than those of national legacy media. Catalogue research shows that

SVOD offerings are also significantly larger than public service streaming services. For example, on 31 July 2023 Netflix offered 7,470 titles in Germany compared to 502 on the ZDF Mediathek (justwatch.com/de). In Denmark, Netflix offered 6,581 titles compared to 879 on DRTV (justwatch.com/dk). Sheer catalogue size is a clear advantage for transnational streaming services over domestic platforms, representing a “hurdle” for those who do not regard public service streaming services “as a competitor for my attention, because the others are so omnipresent.” (Didier, Germany, 29).

Drilling down, it is the youngest (aged 16-19) who are most attracted to transnational providers and away from PSBs. In Denmark, VOD service DRTV only attracts 26% of respondents aged 16-19, compared to 52% for all 16-34-year-olds. In Germany, similarly, the use of PSB Mediatheken among 16–19-year-olds drops to 17% for the ZDF Mediathek and 13% for the ARD Mediathek, compared to 34% and 30% respectively for 16-34-year-olds. This marked age discrepancy also becomes visible when looking at respondents’ Top 3 platform choices. The follow-up question, “What are your three favourites among the options you just ticked?”, revealed that only 13% of 16–19-year-olds in Denmark chose DRTV (Fig. 3); in Germany only 4% each chose the ZDF and ARD Mediatheken (Fig. 4).

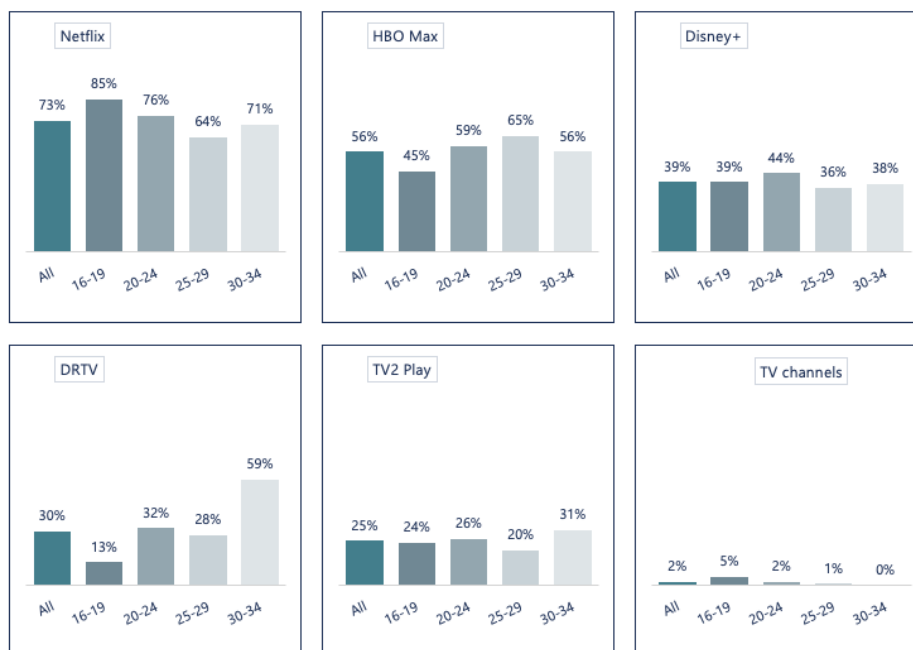


Fig. 3 Denmark: What are your three favourites among the options you just ticked?

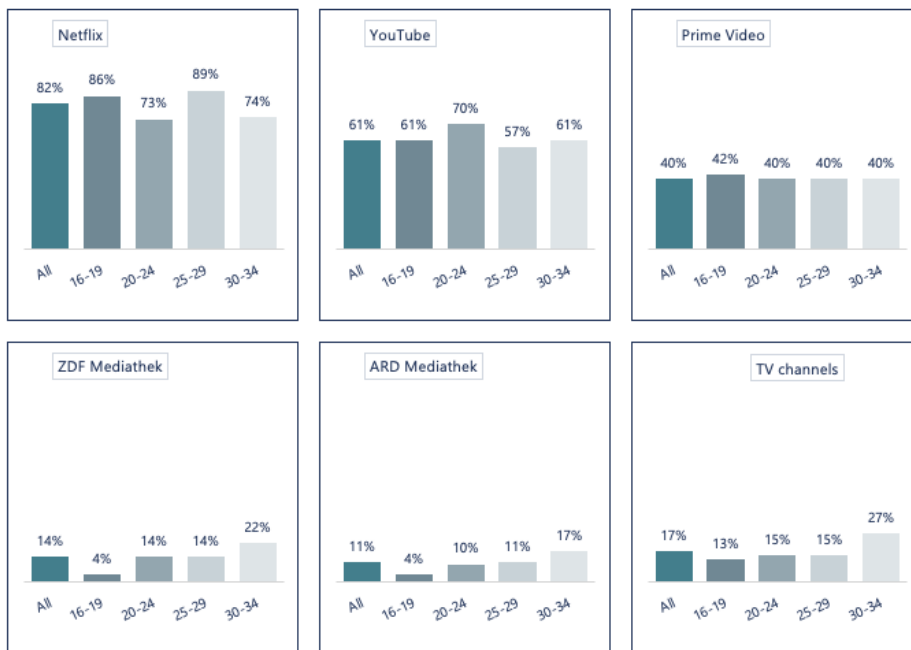


Fig. 4 Germany: What are your three favourites among the options you just ticked?

Figures 3 and 4 also further illuminate the status of TV channels. As noted above and for the reasons highlighted by Jenke and Vonderau (2017), it is still higher in Germany than in Denmark: 17% of German respondents opted for TV channels as one of their Top 3 platforms against only 2% in Denmark. Yet among 16-19-year-olds in Germany this drops to 13%. In Denmark the youngest are the group with the highest use of TV channels, with 5% against the average of 2%. Interviews with this age group suggest that viewing with families (e.g., news, popular drama, sport) does increase their TV channel usage.

Netflix is also the clear No. 1 in both countries for accessing UK content, averaging 91% in Germany and 76% in Denmark, not least because Netflix distributes popular youth-oriented UK fiction, including those shows most frequently mentioned in the survey such as *Sex Education* (3rd in Denmark; 2nd in Germany) and *Peaky Blinders* (2nd in Denmark; 5th in Germany). Here too there are discernible differences. In Germany the ARD and ZDF Mediatheken are not a major access point for UK content, mustering only between 4% and 7% for those aged 16-29. The highest use is among 30–34-year-olds (17% for ARD Mediathek; 14% for ZDF Mediathek). This is in marked contrast to Denmark, where PSBs have traditionally acquired more UK content, and promote it more on their channels and VOD services (Esser et al, 2022a; Esser et al., 2022b). 55% of 30-34-year-olds access DRTV to watch UK shows, 30% access TV2 Play. Yet here too, there is an age-related shift: for the youngest (16-19) only 9% use DRTV to access UK content, and this drops to 8% for TV2 Play. Although UK shows are more present on Danish PSB platforms, as in Germany the focus on older-skewing detective and crime drama such *Midsomer Murders*, *McDonald and Dodds*, and *The Chelsea Detective* renders them less interesting to teen audiences.

Asking survey participants to indicate their 3 favoured methods for locating British content, provides pointers about how they discover entertainment (Fig. 5 & 6). In Denmark and Germany, the most important means of discovering British content are recommendations from streamers (64% and 73% respectively) and friends or family (64% and 61%). Yet there

are age differences. In both recommendations from friends & family are less important for those aged 16-24. In Germany, clips and trailers on social media take second place (62% of 16-19-year-olds ticked this, as did 52% of 20-24-year-olds). In Denmark social media are in third place for 16-24-year-olds, but with 47% for 16-19-year-olds and 53% for 20-24-year-olds the significance of social media is notably higher than for 25-34-year-olds.

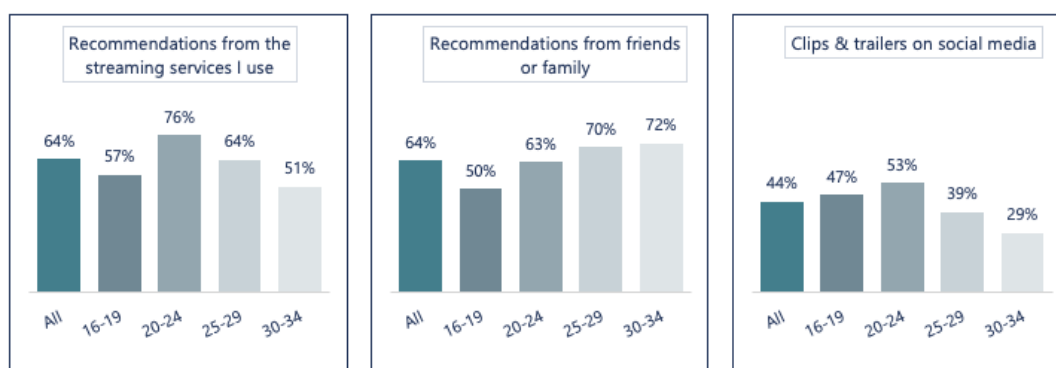


Figure 5 Denmark : “How do you usually find out about the British screen content you watch? [max 3 options]”

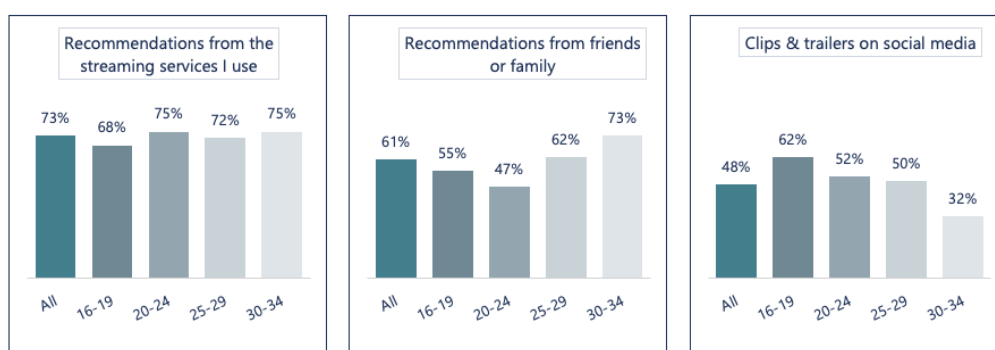


Figure 6 Germany: “How do you usually find out about the British screen content you watch? [max 3 options]”

Younger interviewees in both countries confirmed the importance of social media, particularly TikTok, as important drivers for discovering screen content in general. They remarked on how YouTube and TikTok’s advanced algorithms made them trust these recommendations more than other sources – a problem for PSBs who operate less advanced recommendation systems. Interviews strongly suggested that user-generated clips are more important for driving engagement than official trailers, which were seen as too long, and “not funny,” unlike user-generated memes and clips, which showed what “people are loving.” For interviewees, humour on social media was crucial for creating a ‘buzz’ and getting them interested in a show. 19-year-old Lotte in Germany summed up this sentiment: “If a trailer makes me laugh, I usually really want to watch it because that’s a good sign.”

For example, *Cunk on Earth*, a British mockumentary, commissioned by the BBC and aired by Netflix at the time of the German survey, was mentioned a surprising 17 times by survey respondents, and by 4 interviewees. Promoted by Netflix on TikTok during the German survey, there are suggestions that the show developed its own momentum when TikTok fan clips appeared, putting into play algorithms that pushed the show to more people.

YouTube is also an important entertainment platform, but its role as a driver for discovery in Denmark is linked to greater familiarity with British content overall. Here YouTube was particularly popular for seeking out UK celebrities and comedy, which respondents already knew from Danish television, something which was not apparent in Germany, because there is less exposure on mainstream media. Male respondents aged 16–19 in Denmark sought out ‘fun’ clips featuring UK celebrity chef, Gordon Ramsay (*Kitchen Nightmares*, *Hell's Kitchen*), motoring presenter, Jeremy Clarkson (*Top Gear*, *Clarkson's Farm*), and UK internet personalities, Sidemen. Older respondents in Denmark reported seeking out highlights and full episodes of British panel shows and comedians that they knew from television.

Content preferences

Questions about genre preferences, combined with country-of-origin preferences, provide insights into what type of entertainment this generation prioritises. Asked to pick their top five genres, respondents in both countries were interested in a wide array of entertainment genres, led by the categories Fantasy/Sci-Fi, Comedy/Comedy Drama, Action/Adventure and Crime/Thriller (See Fig. 7).

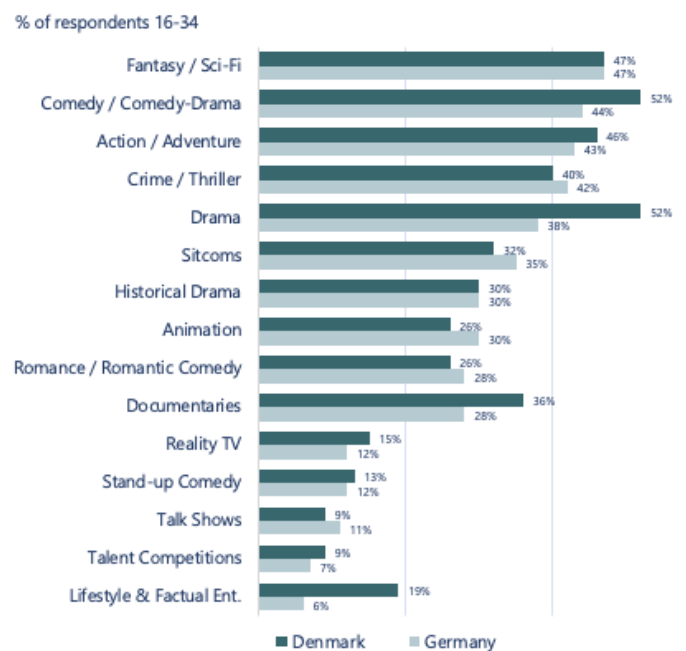
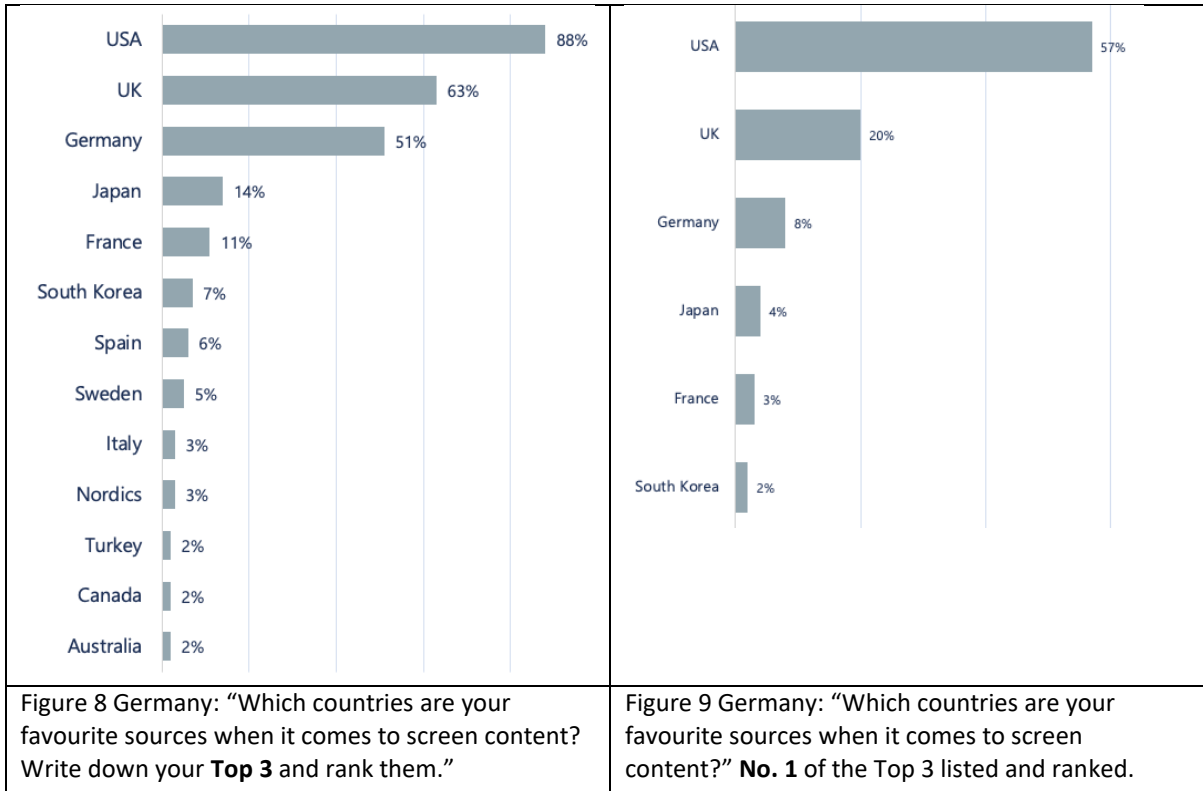


Figure 7: Denmark & Germany: “What type of screen content do you like best? [max 5 options]”

The popularity of these genres across all age groups also explains a passion for US content (Fig. 8 & 9). Asked to note down their top 3 countries of origin for screen content, German survey respondents named the US most often (88%), followed by the UK (63%) and then Germany (51%). Ranked in the top position, the US also came out as No. 1 with 57%, followed by the UK (20%), with Germany in third position (8%), ahead of Japan (4%).



For the top 3, scores in Denmark were even higher for the US (91%), but Denmark came second (80%), closely followed by the UK (78%). When asked to pick one country only, the US again came top (55%), followed by Danish content (24%), ahead of UK content (18%).

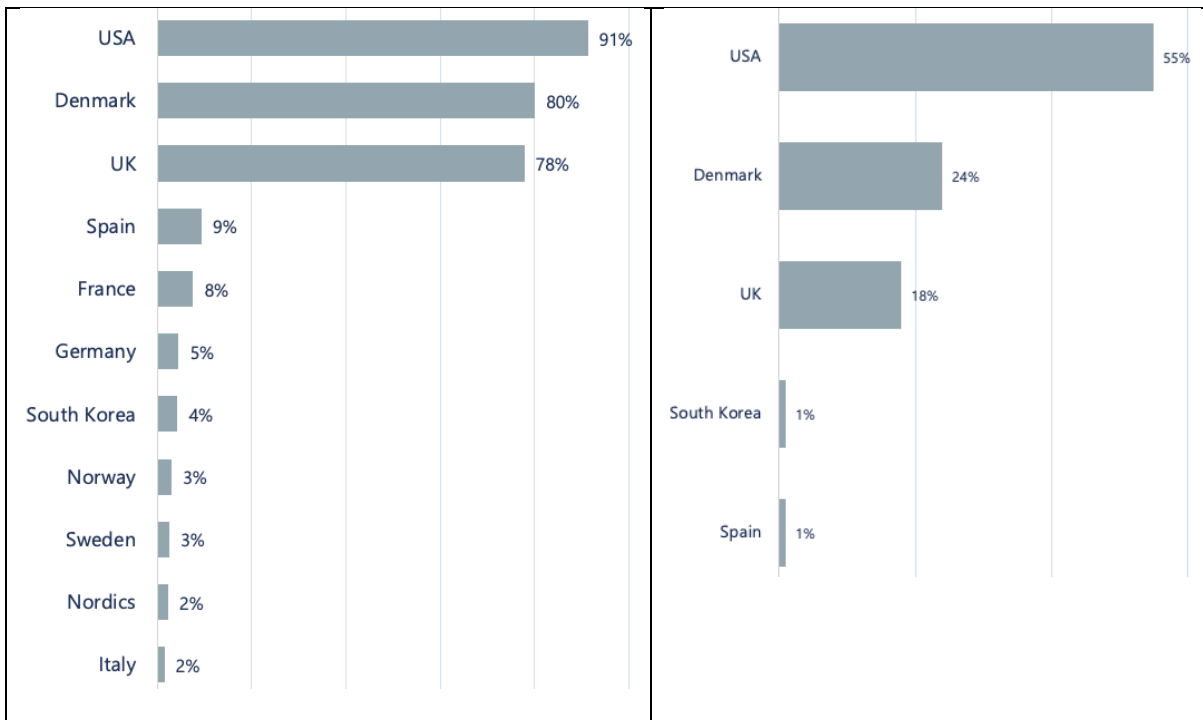


Figure 10 Denmark: "Which countries are your favourite sources when it comes to screen content? Write down your **Top 3** and rank them."

Figure 11 Denmark: "Which countries are your favourite sources when it comes to screen content? **No. 1** of the Top 3 listed and ranked."

One surprising finding is how low German content is ranked and appreciated by the young, a finding confirmed by another question. Only 7% of German respondents agreed that "German content feels more relevant than British content" compared with a still low 20% in Denmark who agreed that "Danish content feels more relevant."

Interviews reinforced the perception that young people in Germany are not always appreciative of German content. Unprompted, 19 out of 20 interviewees, felt that German content lacked quality and relevance, with multiple descriptions labelling it as 'quite bad', 'boring' and 'redundant'. In those instances where they mentioned favourite German shows, they referred to them as 'exceptions', particularly comedy on Netflix such as *Türkisch für Anfänger*, *Isi and Ossi*, and *Fuck You Göthe*. According to Max, aged 17:

German media is not that good. Netflix is kind of an outlier with this - there were some really, really good Netflix shows from Germany (...) this is quite the mainstream opinion many, many people, especially young people, really don't like German entertainment that much.

Interviewees in Denmark were less damning about Danish content, but the youngest also expressed disinterest in domestic content. According to Jasper, aged 17:

I would say we have produced a good amount of movies, but Danish television, just in general, like, the normal channels, doesn't really pique my interest. I want to watch something about other places in the world, because with Danish, it's just that you can understand too much.

In both countries, several 16–19-year-olds used the word 'cringe' to express their feelings about some domestic content. According to Helle (17) in Denmark, distaste for Danish fiction was stronger than for light entertainment:

I don't really like the Danish stuff – (...) because I think it's kind of *cringe* in some ways to see my own language being used. But I love Flow [linear] TV shows in Danish, like *Buying Houses in Blind* or decorating shows and baking shows. I think it's fine because there's a competition, so there's something else than acting.

Digital Diaries, over 5 days, confirmed interview and survey findings about the dominance of US shows. In Denmark, 31 out of 63 viewed shows were US productions (49%), 15 were British (24%), and 14 were Danish (22%). In Germany, 40 out of 82 shows were US productions (49%), 17 were British (21%), and 16 were German (20%).

The unrivalled appeal of US content, all interviewees agreed, lies in the enormous quantity and generally high production values of US fiction. Other factors that emerged were the appeal of familiar, renowned actors and the fact that US content is promoted more heavily

by distributors, and by viewers on social media. Among interviewees, close familiarity with US content and actors generated positive expectations that influenced viewing choices.

Greater familiarity with British content may explain why more Danish respondents listed the UK amongst their top 3 country of origin choices - 78% compared to 63% of German respondents. Asked to indicate their agreement with the statement 'UK content feels familiar because I grew up with it,' only 31% of survey respondents in Germany agreed, compared to 42% in Denmark. It was also apparent that Danish interviewees were able to discuss a greater range of British shows, comedians, actors, and presenters, and did so with more ease and in-depth knowledge than German interviewees. This is no surprise given that historically they have had more exposure to a greater range of UK content, including panel/game shows like *QI*, *Would I Lie to You?* and *Taskmaster*, which viewers in Germany would not encounter on mainstream channels when they were growing up.

Motivations for watching British screen content

Even though US content is most favoured in both Denmark and Germany, questions about motivations for watching UK content can provide insights about the type of entertainment young people favour. Interviews and survey questions aimed at finding out what young people like about UK content revealed what they value in general and what they believe is lacking in domestic productions.

Humour

In both countries humour is extremely important for younger audiences. Humour, the main motivation in Denmark for watching UK shows (68%), came second (63%) in Germany. Asked to note down words they associated with British programmes they remembered; humour-related terms came out on top. Asked to describe British humour in a Digital Diary task and during interviews, the same words occurred as in the surveys, used in both countries with surprising consistency: 'unique', 'special', 'dry', 'sarcastic', 'dark', 'black', 'intelligent' and 'daring'. Per (25) in Denmark summed up the views of many:

The humour is a really big part [of defining British content]. It's very special (...) probably the main thing I think about when I think about British stuff.

Some interviewees thought there was affinity between domestic and British humour, that it felt 'culturally proximate,' or sometimes even better than humour in domestic productions. Many remarked that they found it superior to American humour, 'less predictable', more 'subtle' and 'sarcastic'. However, there was a marked age difference in both countries when it came to appreciating British humour. While 80% and 81% of 30–34-year-olds in Denmark and Germany agreed respectively with the statement that they watch UK content because they 'like the humour', only 43% of 16-19-year-olds in both countries agreed, suggesting that appreciation and/or discovery of 'British humour' is age-related.

One key aspect of British humour is that it is perceived as being present in almost all types of content - across genres, no matter how "sad" or "dark" the narrative. Statements like this one from Max (17, Germany) were common in interviews in both countries:

[UK content has] usually quite a lot of humour in it – obviously not every show, but many shows are quite focused on the humour, and it really also is a contrast to German television, where if you watch a normal show – like, for example, crime drama or something like that – it's very serious. There are no jokes in it. (...) I think it's more enjoyable if you can sometimes laugh about it.

While humour is just one aspect in the appeal of British programming, interviews in both countries strongly suggest that young people appreciate humour as an intrinsic part of a variety of fiction and non-fiction, rather than being confined to comedy genres. Like Max, many bemoaned that there was not enough humour in Danish and German productions.

On-screen talent and authenticity

Closely connected to humour, is strong appreciation for the quality of UK actors and presenters, especially in Denmark, where respondents historically have seen more British game, reality, panel and talk shows. Many interviewees compared British presenters unfavourably with domestic presenters, who were seen to lack wit. According to two respondents:

I find British reality to be funnier, more humoristic. The hosts are typically more fun and more goofy [than those in Danish or US TV shows] (Melanie, 23, Denmark)

You know in German TV show you have Thomas Gottschalk asking one dumb question after another, and you have a Graham Norton teasing and almost, yeah, mobbing his counterparts, and I really love that humour. (Didier, 29, Germany)

In both countries the survey revealed that the 'quality of British acting' was highly valued. In Germany 71% of survey respondents agreed with the statement that British 'acting is of high quality' as did 69% of Danes. Many interviewees, like Helle in Denmark (see, p. 12) or Emilia noted that they appreciated British acting because of its apparent authenticity:

I think the most important thing is authenticity (...) a lot of German shows are so staged that they're not believable. So, I mean, I watch them, and they sound like, I don't know, a one hour long commercial or something, because the voices - how they speak - are so weird that I always think no one in real life would ever talk like that. (...) for me, at least, it's not the case in British series or movies, but maybe also because I'm not like an English native speaker. Maybe if I were, I would think that too. (Emilia, 24, Germany)

Perceptions of good acting are important because recognisable actors are a key reason for young people getting interested in a show and deciding to watch. This was apparent in several interviews:

(...) especially recognisable actors like the cast from *Harry Potter*... And even with the BBC *Sherlock Holmes*, if I see Benedict Cumberbatch or the actor who plays John somewhere, I recognise them and I think, 'OK, I like those actors. They are in this. I'm gonna watch this.' (Lotte, 19, Germany)

I prefer British over Danish TV fiction, just because I like a lot of the actors (...) even if you'd just watched *Harry Potter*, then there's so many brilliant actors and actresses that are in a lot of the British things. (Kirsten, 29, Denmark)

British actors mentioned in addition to 'anyone who was in Harry Potter' and Benedict Cumberbatch, included Cillian Murphy, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Richard Madden and many others, whose careers have been nurtured by British PSBs, and who featured prominently on Netflix and/or Prime Video during our research. Importantly, several interviewees highlighted that they know many British actors from major US productions, raising their status, visibility and hence 'familiarity factor.'

English - the language of advantage

Finally, the English language emerges as a strong appeal factor for both UK content, and for transnational streaming platforms. Several interviewees suggested that watching in English enhances feelings of authenticity:

(...) when I think of *After Life* right now, I would say very humorous, but also emotionally charged and authentic. Also, because I think this whole thing with the accents lets you immerse yourself a bit more in this world. When you watch German films, everyone speaks the same language, speaks German, or if you watch the German dubbed version (...) you have the feeling that everyone comes from the same country or place. Which is something I don't experience with British television. (Markus, 26, Germany)

It's easier for me to understand the characters because I can hear, like, 'OK, they speak this language or have this accent - they must come from this part of the country.' It just gives a fuller character. (Rosa, 26, Denmark)

Watching English-language productions in English (with or without subtitles) is the norm in Denmark, but in Germany there is a clear trend towards it, enabled by VOD platforms, especially among those with higher education, or those in high school, who are often encouraged by teachers to watch in English, and who want to raise their English language proficiency. This was confirmed in interviews with both teachers and young people. For example, Lotte in Germany explains how her desire to improve her English skills was propelled by her engagement with YouTube, and how watching in English then seemed more 'authentic':

Well, it started through the Internet because when I was younger, I wanted to better my English skills, so I started watching some English Youtubers. And just watching that kind of made me interested in watching more and more and more, and so it got to the point where I just started only consuming English content and basically kind of abandoning the

German content. (...) I usually watch it in English because I feel it's more authentic to watch a show in the actual language that it was produced in. (Lotte, 19, Germany)

In Germany, learning English is a strong motivation for watching in English. 53% of survey respondents agreed, but in Denmark only 27% agreed (although 47% of 16–19-year-olds did). This could be explained by Danes being more used to watching English-language content in its original form and ranking higher in the global EF English Language Proficiency Index (Esser et al, 2023b: 6). In Germany the picture of how young people watch is hence also still more complex, depending on English proficiency, who they watch with (e.g., parents), what they watch, and even their mood (ibid: 28). Our German interviewees estimated that among their acquaintances 25-50% watch in English, with or without subtitles, surpassing the findings of a YouGov survey from 2016, where 27% of 18-24-year-olds reported watching 'funny' series mostly or always in English, and 22% 'funny' films (Schmidt, 2016).

In both countries what makes English the 'language of advantage' (Collins, 1989), benefiting US and UK productions, is the comparative ease of following shows in English over other languages. 78% of German survey respondents selected 'ease of following' in English as a reason for choosing British content, as did 63% of respondents in Denmark. Another factor may be urgency as dubbing takes time, and audiences do not always want to wait. According to one Sales Executive based in Germany the time it takes to dub creates 'a tricky situation' 'if titles really pick up and become famous', and streamers are 'always a bit quicker'.

In sum, we can tentatively identify six language-related reasons that might encourage young people to choose English-language shows on transnational VOD platforms – benefiting British productions, and US content even more. In both countries these include 1) speedy access to a wide range of content in the original language on SVoDs; 2) the desire to access entertainment with high production values and known performers; 3) the attraction of humour, which extends beyond sitcoms and comedy drama; 4) a more 'authentic' experience; 5) the ease of following shows in English over shows in other languages; and 6) the desire to improve English language skills.

Conclusion

This chapter has used transnational encounters with British entertainment to explain the entertainment experiences of young audiences in Germany and Denmark and the implications for public service media. Of course, UK content is just one small part of young people's viewing in these countries. However, the way they access and discover it, their genre and country of origin preferences, and what they say they appreciate shows their strong interest in entertainment. It also reinforces the need for public service media, as part of universality and societal value commitments, to offer entertainment in ways that connect with young people's lives and preferences (see Goetz in this volume). PSMs are already changing the way they operate, but these findings underpin the need to think more deeply about the extent to which popular entertainment remains part of the public service remit, if PSMs want to remain a discoverable part of young people's lives.

In both countries transnational streaming platforms with enormous catalogues are favoured by young people over public service platforms (figs. 1-4), because they are 'omnipresent' and provide speedy access to the entertainment programming that young people want (fig.7), including those that specifically appeal to youth (e.g., UK shows *Sex Education* and *Heartstopper*). Asked to indicate their top three platforms for accessing content, public service platforms lag streaming competitors, although this is less apparent in Denmark. Digging deeper into genre and country of origin preferences reveals the overwhelming preference for US (figs. 8-11), over domestic content, with German content ranking lower than Danish content in terms of appreciation and relevance, findings borne out by interviews.

Tangentially, interviews and survey questions about what young people like about UK content provide some tentative pointers to what they believe is lacking in domestic productions. Perceptions of high production values and familiarity with known international performers are a key draw for getting people to watch. Discovery is a crucial component of this entertainment experience. While recommendations from streaming services and friends and family remain significant (figs. 5-6), young people discover, 'love' and share content on social media through user-created clips and memes on TikTok and YouTube. They are looking for humour and 'fun' clips, that then drive their engagement with long-form content. Humour is therefore crucial for discovery and enjoyment, with indications that young people want to see humour more integrated across genres, not just confined to comedy drama and sitcoms. A much harder hurdle for domestic providers is the growing trend towards watching in English, enabled by VoD platforms, and driven in Germany especially by a desire to improve English language skills and for a more 'authentic' experience. Transnational providers can therefore easily fill the entertainment gaps left by domestic legacy providers, because young audiences are increasingly watching in English the 'language of advantage'.

Data Statement

The data supporting this article has been deposited in the King's Open Research Data Repository at 10.18742/22153928 with an access embargo until September 2025. Earlier sharing will be considered on request.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council [grant number AH/W000113/1], part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) .

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