

The appeal of public service fiction in an internationalised media context

Findings from a survey of 8–17-year-old Danes

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an inquiry into Danish children's and adolescents' media habits and preferences when it comes to fictional screen content, with a specific focus on the role of Danish content and platforms. The inquiry reveals a strong preference for and large consumption of content originating from the US on global streaming platforms, and, when it comes to specific fictional screen content, Danish children clearly favour American films and series over those from Denmark or elsewhere. When asked to rate specific films and series, they favour genre-driven titles over titles with "higher" artistic or cultural value. The chapter shows that on the global streaming platforms, Danish children and adolescents find an abundance of what to them is high-quality content, perceived as more relevant to them than domestically produced content. A concluding discussion points out the potential implications of the findings for existing curatorial practices in domestic public service broadcasters, both in general as well as in terms of national funding models.

KEYWORDS: audiovisual fiction, children, adolescents, Denmark, reception, streaming, public service, audience

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Introduction

In this chapter, we inquire into Danish children's and adolescents' media habits and preferences when it comes to fictional screen content, that is, films and series. This inquiry focuses on the role of Danish content and Danish platforms in relation to young audiences' habits and preferences, and what this may imply for the curatorial practices of domestic broadcasters and funding bodies. Methodologically, this is done through a survey ($n = 313$) of 8–17-year-old Danish children and teenagers, through which we explore how they relate to various fictional screen content and the platforms providing it. As such, the chapter offers insights about the children's use of and relationship with Danish public service providers of fictional screen content, namely the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR, and their dedicated children's channels Ramasjang and Ultra, plus TV 2 and the global providers Netflix, Disney+, and YouTube. The survey also presents children's favourite YouTube channels, films, and series. The respondents were free to define what they themselves like, creating a contrast to the fact that the majority of the content provided is produced, commissioned, and curated for children by *adults*: parents, teachers, and industry professionals.

We begin the chapter by positioning children's fictional content in the Danish context, followed by a theoretical argument on why it is important to investigate children's media from the perspective of children themselves. After this, we discuss the methodological challenges in doing so and introduce in detail how we conducted the survey. Subsequently, we outline the findings from the survey, relating to platform preference, frequency of use, types of content (genres) watched on each platform, favourite content (that is, films, series, and YouTube channels), as well as the children's specific opinions on 14 film and series titles. Finally, we sum up and reflect on the findings in relation to what they may entail for the curatorial practices of domestic funding and production institutions of children's audiovisual fiction and for the future consumption patterns of the children as they become adults.

Children's content in the Danish context

Children's content occupies a prominent place within the Danish audiovisual landscape. The importance of children's films and television programmes is emphasised in the primary policy instrument – Filmaftalen 2019–2023 (Kulturministeriet, 2018) – stipulating that the Danish Film Institute (DFI) shall invest 25 per cent of its budget in content for children and young audiences. In addition, Denmark is currently the best performing country in Europe when it comes to the share of domestic children's films (Ebert, 2019: 9). Moreover, DR has one broadcast channel (Ramasjang) and two online channels (Minisjang and Ultra) specifically targeting children from the age of 1 until the age of 14.

Danish audiovisual policies stipulate generous production investments and public service engagement in content for children, and there are several media literacy initiatives where children receive access to different kinds of fictional and factual content and learn how to reflect on it. The most comprehensive initiatives in this regard are the Filmcentralen [The Film Centre] project, which offers a lot of fictional content and teaching material online as well as its subprogramme – *Med skolen i biografen* [School Cinema] – that focuses on theatrical screenings of films for children of all ages.

While DFI and DR have different remits and purposes guiding the films and series they curate on behalf of Danish children, they share some overarching criteria for quality: The content they fund or produce, on the one hand, must necessarily have an artistic or cultural value, while on the other, this cultural or artistic value must be balanced with an evident audience appeal (Mitric & Levie, 2016). For example, according to DFI's own document, the core of a quality project combines a strongly relevant theme for Danish culture, history, society, and everyday life, with an original tone and the filmmaker's personal involvement in the film (DFI, 2014). When it comes to DR, and as is evident in the chapters from Christa Lykke Christensen and Eva Novrup Redvall (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, respectively, in this volume), the public broadcaster's productions must also address the value of children's issues, for example, puberty, bullying, or the so-called performance society. In addition to this, both DFI and DR only fund and produce content in the Danish language. Despite the fact that the School Cinema programme also screens foreign films, the leader of the film literacy programme, Jacob Breuning, evokes similar criteria to DFI and DR when explaining how films are chosen:

We want our films to represent different nationalities and create cultural diversity. We also pick art films; our catalogues contain very few mainstream titles. Themes of the films are also important. Finally, the films need to be well-made to be able to keep children's attention, but also provide a cultural experience and have an educational value. (As cited in Mitric, 2022: 7)

Yet, despite these incentives for development, production, and promotion of children's content in Denmark, Danish children spend an increasing amount of time consuming content from non-domestic providers such as YouTube, Netflix, and Disney+. Hence, Danish children are watching proportionally less domestic Danish-language audiovisual content on Danish platforms. This general development has been documented in several reports (DR, 2020, 2021, 2022; Hansen et al., 2020; Kulturministeriet, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c) and is a reflection of media systemic changes and the ensuing increased competition from global Anglo-American players. English is usually no obstacle in itself to Danish children (English is taught in school from the age of seven), and Danes have the highest per-household uptake of subscription video-on-demand

(SVoD) platforms in Europe (Grece, 2021). Thus, English-language content, predominantly from the US – with both universal and niche appeal and high production and entertainment values – is readily accessible to a large proportion of Danish children. In 2019, 15–24-year-old Danes accessed content on no less than five different streaming services, on average (DR, 2020: 18). In addition, younger viewers are the most difficult to please when it comes to content – and the least sentimental when it comes to the platform on which they choose to watch it (DR, 2021: 32).

The changing media landscape, primarily the increasing competition of social media platforms and SVoD services, challenges legacy providers of children’s fictional content. An interesting question is whether the consistent focus on quality in the domestically produced and publicly funded content matters to audience preferences. This chapter presents a survey that investigates how appealing children and adolescents find global providers and international content – as opposed to Danish providers and content – and what it is they like and maybe even prefer about these platforms and content, and how it relates to their use of Danish fictional screen content and platforms as curated by institutions such as DFI, DR, and School Cinema.

Children’s conceptions of quality and relevance in media content

Deeming children’s content to be “bad” suggests that children need to be protected from themselves – from the consequences of their own dubious tastes and uncultured desires. [...] Disparaging children’s cultural consumption is an act of power that works to perpetuate and reinforce distinctions between the child and the adult, often reinscribing adult culture as the “valued” culture. (Coulter, 2021: 23–24)

The above quote points to the fact that often, in scholarship as well as in popular and interpersonal discourse, children’s and adolescents’ preferred media content and media use is considered of poor quality and bad taste: ridiculous, artless, sensationalist, vulgar – or all of the above (see also Drotner, 1999). The quote also reminds us that such labelling of children’s media is an act of power on behalf of adults that not only belittles and disparages children, but also assesses children’s media from an entirely adult perspective. From this perspective, children and adolescents must be protected from their own “dubious” tastes by the intervention and content curation of adults, be they teachers, producers, platform providers, broadcasters, or parents.

This perspective overlooks the fact that children’s media diets are often more complex than assumed (Lange, 2014), and that children’s media habits (also) act to defy adults whilst at the same time defining their own identities (James, 1998). It also stands in the way of getting to know precisely what

children do with media, and why. What media content and practices do children actually like, and why? The point of departure in this study is to map what content on which platforms Danish children themselves prefer and use, as well as why. This aim is associated with particular methodological challenges, which are discussed more in-depth in the next sections.

We focus on audiovisual fiction – that is, series and films – as a cultural experience that in some way impacts viewers positively (Carnwath & Brown, 2014). Our research question is to identify the value attributed to films and series by children – free from adult notions of primarily high and low culture, or good and bad taste.

Methodology and survey design

The survey providing the empirical base for this chapter forms part of a larger two-step and so-called “sequential” (Creswell & Clark, 2017) mixed-methods study on Danish children’s and adolescents’ notions of quality and relevance in audiovisual fiction, in which the survey was the first exploratory step that was later followed by a qualitative study.¹ The survey itself was divided into three sections, each featuring different types of questions to illuminate the preferences of the respondents when it comes to audiovisual fiction on various platforms: multiple-choice questions, yes–no questions, and open-ended qualitative questions. The answers to the first two question groups were quantified in our analysis, whereas the open-ended questions provided nuanced and qualitative insights into the children’s preferences and opinions. As such, the survey was designed to give us, first, an idea of what Danish children and adolescents like and don’t like about audiovisual fiction and the platforms that provide it, and second – via the open-ended questions – some preliminary indications as to the reasons behind their likes and dislikes that could later be explored in more detail in the qualitative second step of the overall study.

Understanding the world from a child’s point of view and finding a way to give children a voice was a methodological challenge when constructing the survey. Methods such as interviews, focus groups, and on-site participant observation run the risk of a power-misbalance between adults and children, which may lead to the children manifesting the tastes and behaviours they think are expected by the adults, rather than freely speaking their minds (Dobson, 2021; Taylor & Rooney, 2017). In such situations, researchers run the risk of creating a school-like setting and, instead of generating new insights and perspectives, achieving little more than reproducing the adult–child power-misbalance and too quickly confirming the pre-assumed patterns of children’s tastes and behaviours (Willett & Richards, 2021). Having reflected on this issue, a survey seemed the best way of “staying invisible” to our respondents – to the extent possible – in the collection of data. Accordingly, a

digitally distributed and fully anonymous survey crystallised as the best solution (using SurveyXact). Respondents could answer all questions anonymously and provide unfiltered opinions in their answers. The only personal data they were asked to provide were gender, age, location, parents' occupation, and languages spoken to assess the sociodemographic diversity of the sample. Making the survey completely anonymous had obvious advantages, such as minimising any desirability bias in responses, but it also presented some challenges. While encouraging respondents to provide uncensored answers, the anonymity prevented us from making the link between their socio-demographic background, or social habitus, and their media preferences. We did, however, include questions about which languages respondents speak and about the profession of their parents, which gave us at least a general idea about the sociodemographic milieu of the entire sample.

While sampling respondents, we prioritised achieving diversity in terms of sociodemographic background, geographical location, gender, and ethnicity. To achieve this, we collaborated with Absalon, one of the Danish regional centres of education, whose representatives connected us with three provincial schools. Additionally, we reached out to several teachers from different parts of Denmark, asking them to circulate the survey link among their students. In addition to distributing the survey link on social media, a total of seven teachers distributed the survey among students within the age group. This meant that we received answers from children from four out of five of Denmark's regions: Central Jutland, Southern Denmark, Zealand, and Greater Copenhagen. Respondents came from different places within these regions and had different sociodemographic backgrounds. The sample included equal shares of boys and girls as well as just under 1 per cent who identified as non-binary.² Approximately 8 per cent of the respondents had an ethnic minority background, which we concluded based on the languages the respondents could speak. An analysis of the jobs of the respondents' parents suggested a diversity of social backgrounds and, as such, the respondents are likely to have been exposed to different types of content through the media preferences and habits of their parents (compare with Lindell, 2018). Thus, even though the survey consisted of a convenience sample and *not* a representative sample, we are confident that the 313 completed surveys represent a fairly typical snapshot of Danish children's and adolescents' opinions and preferences. This is supported by the fact that the general findings to do with, for example, platform use and favourite content, were very much in line with the trends of representative surveys conducted by institutions such as DFI, Nordisk Film, DR, The Ministry of Culture, and The Media Council for Children and Adolescents (DR, 2020, 2021, 2022; Hansen et al., 2020; Kulturministeriet, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).

Findings

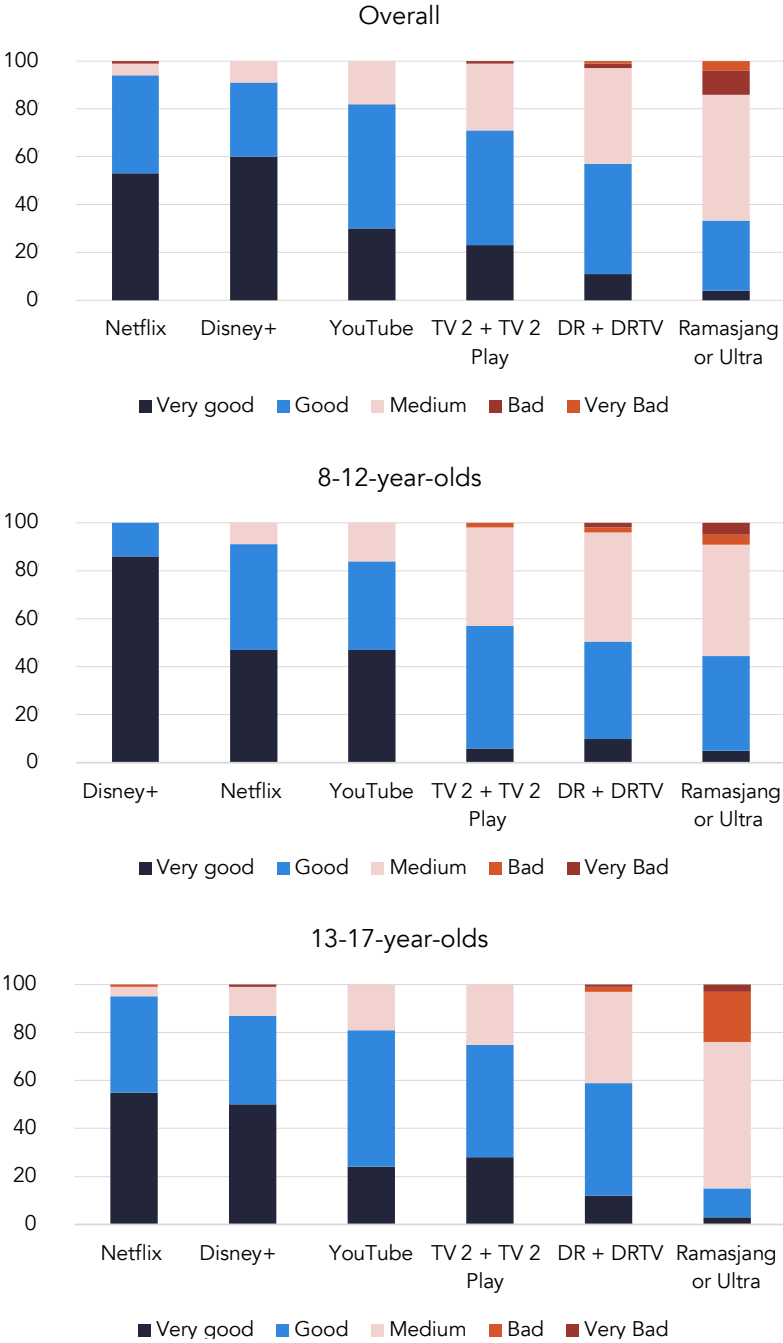
We now present and discuss the overall survey findings. First, we present the children's platform preferences and the frequency with which they use the platforms. Then, we present what types of content (or genres) the children watch on which platforms in order to know specifically where they watch fictional content (and where they do not). After this, we account for and discuss the patterns in the children's favourite films and series, as well as their favourite YouTube channels. Finally, we analyse and reflect upon the patterns in the children's responses to the 14 specific films and series they were asked to rate and comment on.

Platform preferences – Netflix is king

In the first part of the survey, we explored the children's relationship with six relatively popular content providers in Denmark: two global SVoD providers, Netflix and Disney+; public broadcaster DR, with two channels for 5–14-year-old children, Ramasjang (for 5–8-year-olds) and Ultra (for 9–14-year-olds, online-only); and the two national public broadcasters and their BVoD (broadcast video-on-demand) services, DR and DRTV, and TV 2 and TV 2 Play; and finally, YouTube, an AVoD (advertiser-funded video-on-demand) service.

Overall, and as is evident in Figure 8.1, the respondents thought the highest of Netflix and Disney+ (over 90% of them thought that these two platforms are either “very good” or “good”). YouTube follows next with 80 per cent of respondents answering either “very good” or “good”. As for the Danish platforms, TV 2 and its streaming service TV 2 Play had the best score, with 70 per cent positive opinions (i.e., “very good” or “good”), followed by DR and DRTV's 55 per cent. The dedicated children's channels Ramasjang and Ultra were rated as “very good” or “good” by just over 30 per cent – the lowest score. Ramasjang and Ultra are also the only two platforms that a distinct number of respondents (15%) rated as “very bad” or “bad”. Nevertheless, this changes slightly if we divide opinions by age. As seen in Figure 8.1, the 8–12-year-old children's opinions on Ramasjang and Ultra were slightly better than the rest, but they still clearly preferred Netflix and Disney+. At the same time, the interest in and opinion of Ramasjang and Ultra noticeably, and quite logically, decreased among teenagers (outside the identified target group).

FIGURE 8.1 Opinions about content providers, by age (per cent)



Comments: n = 313. Survey question asked: "Hvor godt synes du om [platformnavn]?" ("How well do you like [platform name]?")

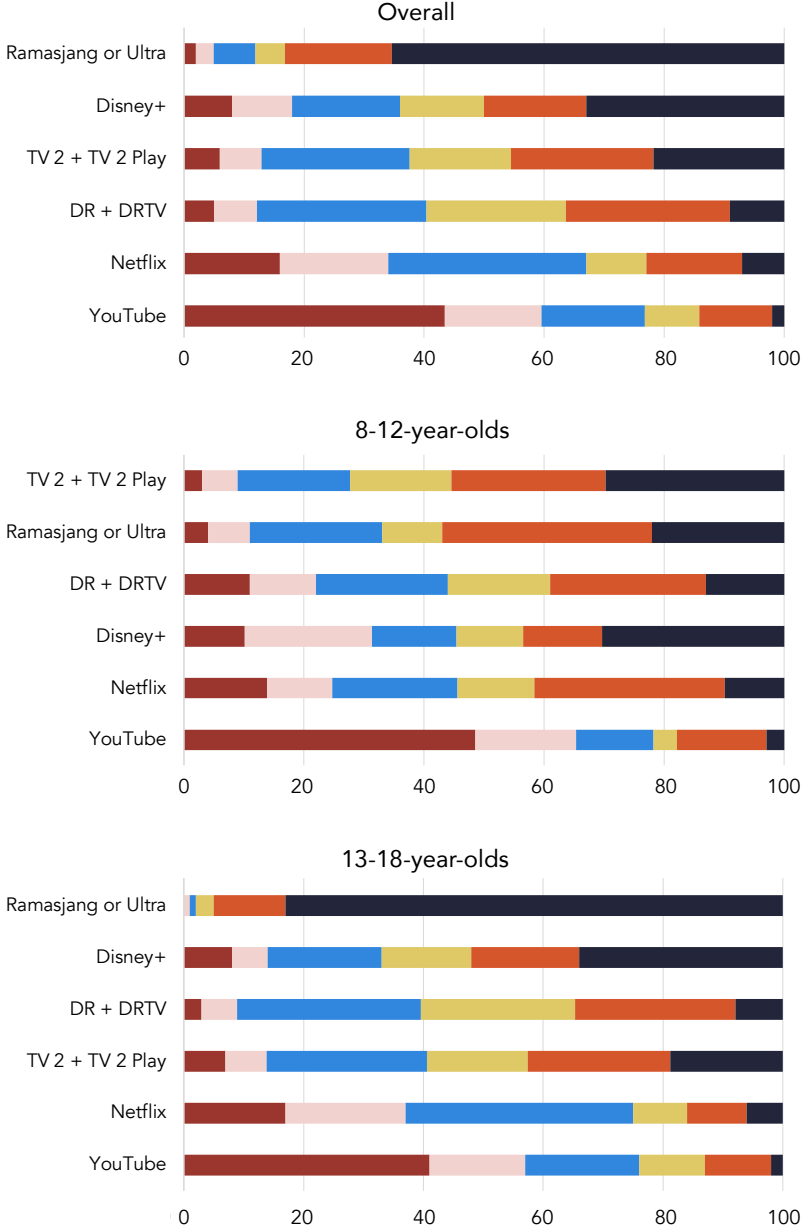
It is important to note that, while Danish children do really like, and also prefer, the global Anglo-American platforms, their opinion of DR and TV 2 rises with age, indicating that children remain open and exposed to Danish content as they get older. The rising popularity might also point to a lack of Danish-language content for adolescents over the age of 13, a group that is no longer a prioritised audience for Danish content providers and producers. Even though teenage children's interest in Netflix and Disney+ remains unabated, the number of respondents who replied that Netflix, Disney+, and YouTube were "very good" decreases with age. It indicates that teenagers are not uncritical of global streaming platforms, inviting further research on the opinions of global SVoD services among older children.

Children prefer YouTube over other providers of media content

Children of all ages watch YouTube most frequently (see Figure 8.2), with 40 per cent of them spending time on YouTube daily. Netflix is the second most frequented platform, while Disney+ is watched less than the two Danish providers TV 2 and DR. 30 per cent never watch Disney+, even though Danish children, as shown in the previous section, have a very positive opinion of the platform. This is likely due to the recent introduction (September 2020) of Disney+ in Denmark at the time of survey collection (March 2021), which meant that the Danish subscription uptake of Netflix was much larger than that of Disney+. However, one can argue that the fact that almost as many children watch Disney+ on a weekly basis (after only half a year on the Danish market at the time of the survey) than TV 2 and TV 2 Play is indeed impressive and testifies to the robust popularity of Disney+ among Danish children.

FIGURE 8.2 How often children watch content from different providers, by age (per cent)

Every day 5–6 days a week 2–4 days a week 1 day a week Less often Never



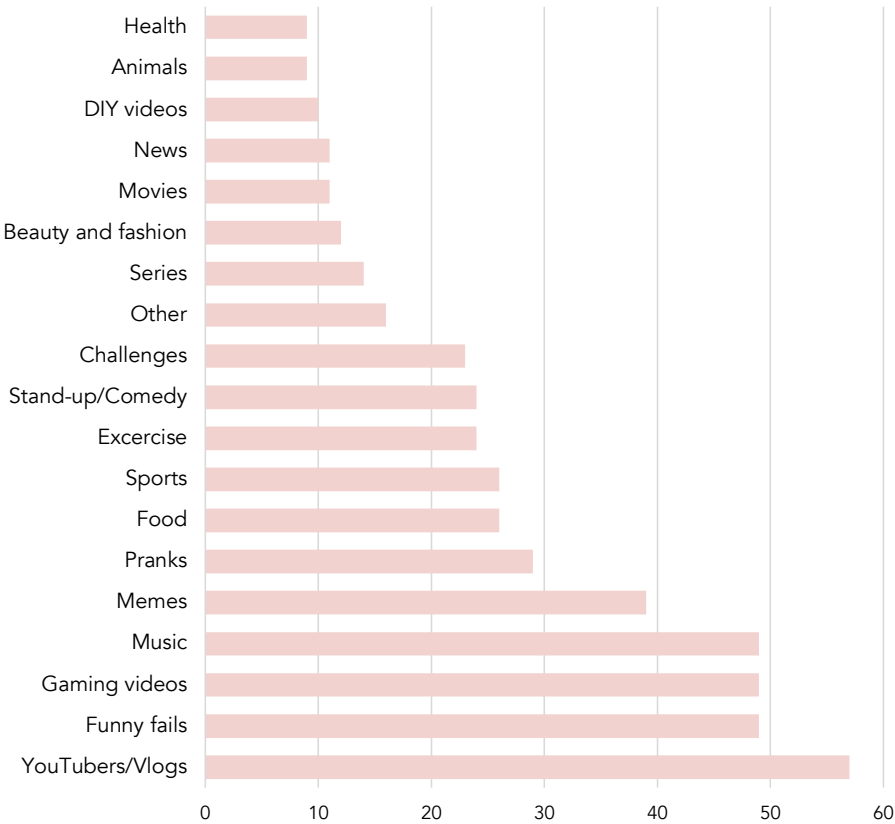
Comments: n = 313. Survey question asked: "Hvor tit ser du [platformnavn]?" ("How often do you watch [platform name]?")

As for the Danish providers, the respondents relatively often frequent DR and DRTV (just over 60%) and TV 2 and TV 2 Play (just over 50%) at least once a week. Around two-thirds of the children never watch Ramasjang or Ultra (as indicated by their general opinion shown above). However, the situation changes if we single out the answers from the 8–12 age group: They frequent the public service children’s platforms (Ramasjang and Ultra) more often than the older ones do. Additionally, once they become teenagers, it seems that these platforms almost disappear from their media diet, which is a natural consequence of the fact that the two platforms cater to children up until the age of 14.

Genre preferences among Danish children

Although YouTube is the most frequented platform among Danish children and adolescents, only a marginal share of their time on YouTube is spent watching fictional content (see Figure 8.3). Most of their time on YouTube is dedicated to following YouTubers as well as gaming, memes, and music videos. The taste and preference for YouTube genres vary across age and gender. Younger kids primarily want to watch gaming videos, while teenagers spend most of their time watching YouTubers and music videos, even though gaming remains popular (for more details on specific findings relating to YouTube, see Jensen et al., 2021). Despite certain overlaps, boys and girls show different preferences for the YouTube genres. While gaming videos are extremely popular with the boys, they are only the tenth most popular genre with the girls. Instead, girls primarily watch videos by their favourite YouTubers, followed by videos featuring food, music, and exercise (Jensen et al., 2021).

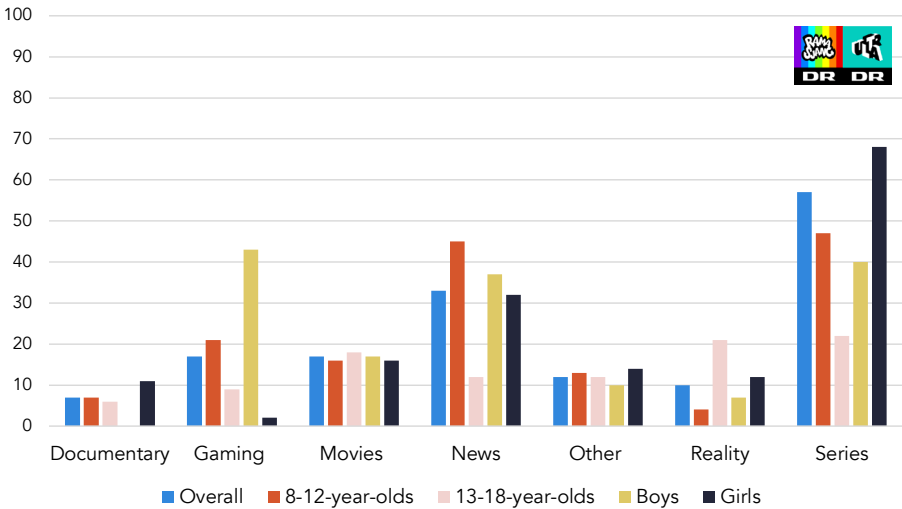
FIGURE 8.3 Genre use on YouTube (per cent)



Comments: *n* = 313. Survey question asked: "Hvilke genrer ser du på YouTube?" ("Which genres do you watch on YouTube?")

Children and adolescents do not seem to use YouTube for watching films and series, even though a lot of films and series are in fact available on the platform. As we shall see in the following, this is most likely because they use other content providers to watch fiction and, as such, do not associate YouTube with films and series. When it comes to Ramasjang and Ultra, on the other hand, children often watch films and series, even though factual genres such as news, documentaries, and reality are also prominent genres. For example, 35 per cent frequent these two platforms to watch news, while 21 per cent go there for programmes on gaming (see Figure 8.4). However, this picture changes if we consider boys and girls separately. The boys frequent Ramasjang and Ultra primarily to watch programmes on gaming (43%), followed by series (40%) and news (37%), while the girls most often watch series (68%), followed by news (32%) and films (16%).

FIGURE 8.4 Genre use on Ramasjang or Ultra, by age and gender (per cent)



Comments: *n* = 313. Survey question asked: "Hvilke genrer ser du på Ramasjang eller Ultra?" ("Which genres do you watch on Ramasjang or Ultra?")

Similar tendencies are evident in the case of the other two Danish content providers – DR and DRTV, and TV 2 and TV 2 Play. The only difference is that the genres children watch on these two platforms are even more diversified (as evident in Figure 8.5a–d). Reversely, genre consumption is less diverse when it comes to the two global streaming platforms Disney+ and Netflix. The children (or, rather, their parents) sign up for Disney+ primarily to watch films (97%) and series (73%). The situation is similar in the case of Netflix, where 94 per cent and 93 per cent of children log in to watch films and series, respectively. On Netflix, a higher percentage of children also watch documentaries, stand-up and comedy, and entertainment. The latter genres are more popular among older children.

FIGURE 8.5a Genre use on DR + DRTV (per cent)

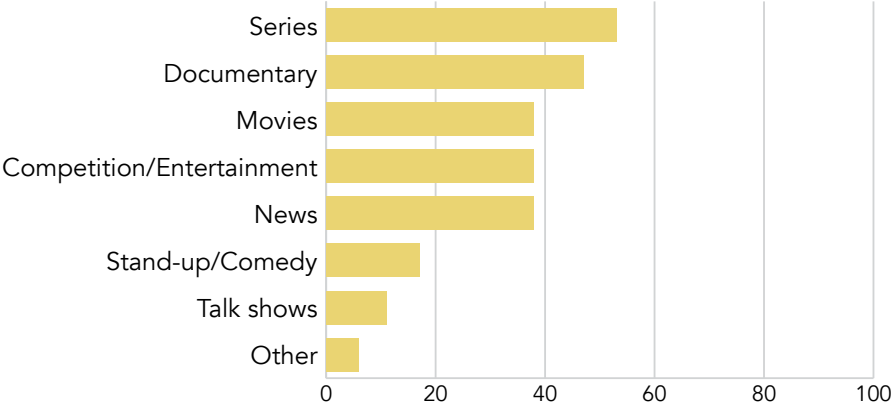


FIGURE 8.5b Genre use on TV 2 + TV 2 Play (per cent)

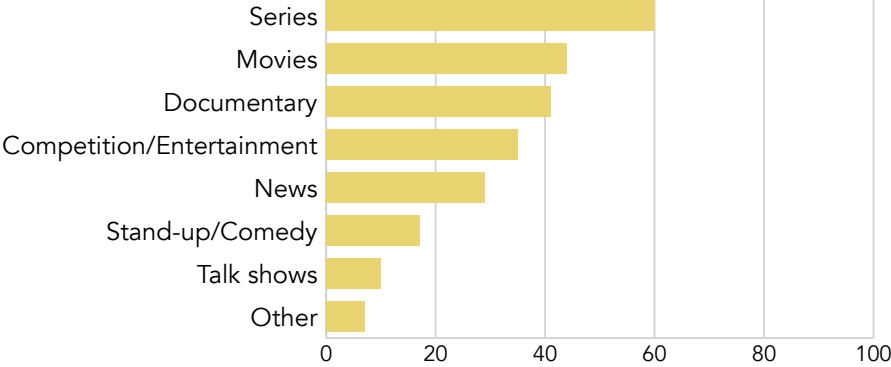


FIGURE 8.5c Genre use on Netflix (per cent)

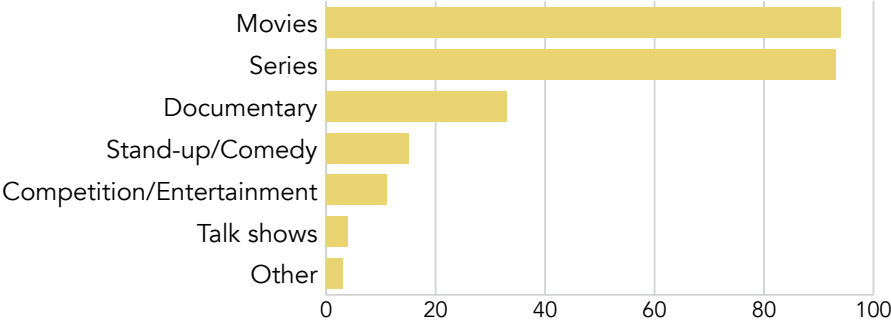
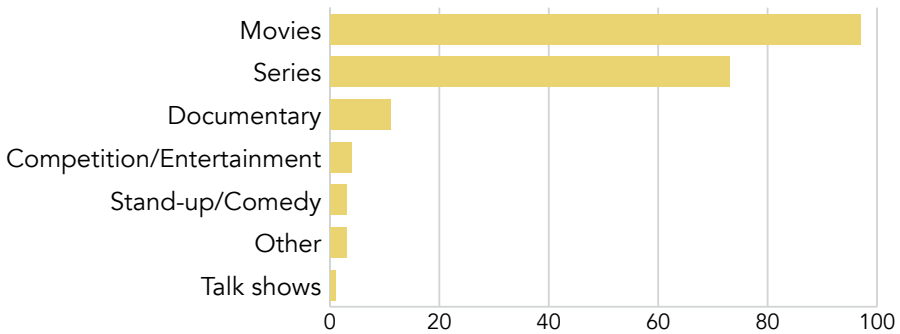


FIGURE 8.5d Genre use on Disney+ (per cent)



Comments: $n = 313$. Survey question asked: "Hvilke genrer ser du på [platformnavn]?" ("Which genres do you watch on [platform name]?")

The above analysis clearly shows how respondents associate certain genres with specific providers. The platform they watch most, YouTube, caters to their need for non-fictional content such as vlogs, music videos, and gaming. When they want to watch a series or a film, they log in to Netflix or Disney+ or the national players DR and TV 2. Children also use DR and TV 2 for watching various factual genres in Danish (e.g., news, documentaries, and gaming). It also becomes evident that, as far as the boys are concerned, gaming content on YouTube is a competitor to watching fictional content in the form of films and series. This is in line with the results of a report from The Danish Film Institute that showed how boys, if given the choice, would rather spend three hours of leisure time playing videogames than go to see a movie in the cinema (Hansen et al., 2020).

Favourite content

The qualitative part of the survey asked children to provide the titles of up to five of their favourite films, series, and YouTube channels, to provide a picture of what respondents perceive to be the best content. As is evident from Table 8.1, the list of the top ten rankings of the most mentioned films contains no Danish titles. Of the twelve movie titles occupying the first ten rankings, ten are American productions, while one is a co-production between the US and New Zealand (*The Lord of the Rings*) and one is a British production (*Harry Potter*), which is in first place. The list of the top ten most mentioned series is also dominated by American series, although it does contain one Danish title (*Those Who Kill*), tied at tenth place, one Spanish title (*La Casa de Papel*), one Canadian-Irish series (*Vikings*), and three British series (*Sex Education*, *Peaky Blinders*, and *The Office*). It is also worth noting that among the most

popular series are a couple of old-time staples: *Friends* (originally running from 1994–2004), *Breaking Bad* (originally running from 2008–2013), and *How I Met Your Mother* (originally running from 2005–2014), while the multi-award-winning movie *Shawshank Redemption* (from 1994) also made it into the top ten.

TABLE 8.1 Most-mentioned favourite movies, series, and YouTube channels

Rank	Movies	Series	YouTube Channels
1	<i>Harry Potter</i> (UK) 47 mentions	<i>Friends</i> (US) 26 mentions	<i>MrBeast</i> (US) 32 mentions
2	<i>Avengers</i> (US) 33 mentions	<i>Stranger Things</i> (US) 25 mentions	<i>KSI</i> (UK) <i>Morten Münster</i> (DK) <i>Sidemen</i> (UK) 14 mentions
3	<i>After</i> (US) 24 mentions	<i>Breaking Bad</i> (US) 18 mentions	<i>Kender du det</i> (DK) <i>Alexander Husum</i> (DK) 13 mentions
4	<i>Star Wars</i> (US) 20 mentions	<i>Lucifer</i> (US) 17 mentions	<i>Josefine Simone Dahl</i> (DK) <i>Emilie Briting</i> (DK) 12 mentions
5	<i>Hunger Games</i> (US) 19 mentions	<i>Riverdale</i> (US) <i>The 100</i> (US) <i>The vampire Diaries</i> (US) 14 mentions	<i>Pewdiepie</i> (SE) 11 mentions
6	<i>Spiderman</i> (US) 17 mentions	<i>Outer Banks</i> (US) <i>Teen Wolf</i> (US) 13 mentions	<i>Signe Kragh</i> (DK) 9 mentions
7	<i>Fast and Furious</i> (US) 16 mentions	<i>Cobra Kai</i> (US) 12 mentions	<i>Emilie Malou</i> (DK) 7 mentions

8	<i>The Kissing Booth</i> (US) <i>Shrek</i> (US) 15 mentions	<i>Falcon and the Winter Soldier</i> (US) <i>How I Met Your Mother</i> (US) <i>La Casa de Papel</i> (ES) <i>Vikings</i> (Canada/Ireland) 11 mentions	<i>Emma Chamberlain</i> (US) JKFIFA (DK) <i>Julia Sofia</i> (DK) Marckoz (DK) Paluch & Momme (DK) <i>Naja Münster</i> (DK) <i>Rasmus Brohave</i> (DK) <i>Rebecca Charlotte Dahl</i> (DK) 6 mentions
9	<i>To All the Boys</i> (US) 12 mentions	<i>Alexa and Katie</i> (US) <i>Grey's Anatomy</i> (US) <i>Modern Family</i> (US) <i>Peaky Blinders</i> (UK) <i>Sons of Anarchy</i> (US) <i>Star Wars</i> (US) <i>The Office</i> (UK or US) <i>Flash</i> (US) 10 mentions	<i>Daily Dose of Internet</i> (US) Guldborg (DK) <i>Johnny Gade</i> (DK) <i>Niki Topgaard</i> (DK) <i>Tine Maria</i> (DK) W2S (UK) 5 mentions
10	<i>Lord of the Rings</i> (NZ/US) <i>Shawshank Redemption</i> (US) 10 mentions	<i>Bridgerton</i> (US) <i>Those Who Kill</i> (DK) <i>Gilmore Girls</i> (US) <i>Sex Education</i> (UK) 9 mentions	<i>5-minute Crafts</i> (RUS) <i>Anomaly</i> (SE) Comkean (DK) <i>Dude Perfect</i> (US) <i>Jonas Risvig</i> (DK) <i>Logan Paul</i> (US) <i>Mathias Ong</i> (DK) <i>Natasja Vind</i> (DK) <i>Spørg Casper</i> (DK) 4 mentions

Comments: $n = 313$. Survey question asked: "Nævn op til fem af dine yndlingsfilm/-serier/-YouTube videoer eller -kanaler" ("Name up to five of your favourite movies/series/YouTube videos or channels").

As Table 8.1 also shows, the most popular content is extremely diverse, especially on YouTube. This is arguably because of the high degree of choices on, for example, YouTube, Netflix, and Disney+. As far as most mentioned films are concerned, the picture is a little less diversified, because we have bundled film franchises such as *Star Wars* and *Avengers* together, with the most popular film franchise, *Harry Potter*, being mentioned 56 times. Considering the total – that is, *all* the series (a total of 329) and films (a total of 230) mentioned – more titles from Denmark and other countries appear,

although the dominance of content from the US is still obvious. Also, if we group the series mentioned by the content provider or franchise that produced them, so-called Netflix Originals take centre stage (for more detail, see Jensen et al., 2021). As for preferences regarding film, there is a large variety of individual titles, but most of them also originate in the US. As with series, Netflix Originals are quite popular, but other franchises mentioned are Marvel, Disney, Star Wars, Pixar, and, of course, Harry Potter. Of these five popular franchises, the streaming rights of the first four belong to Disney+, explaining the large popularity of Disney+ and how a relatively large uptake of the platform had happened in a very short period.

That Danish children are drawn to American films and series is by no means a surprising finding, let alone is it something new. In 1996, professor Torben Fridberg and colleagues carried out a large representative survey study mapping out 15–18-year-old Danes' wider media use (including television and video, cinema, music, radio, computer, and reading) (Fridberg et al., 1997). They also found that young Danes were very much inclined towards American television series, which in 1996 included would-be classics such as *Beverly Hills 90210* and *NYPD Blue*. One of the scholars behind this study, professor Kirsten Drotner, also carried out qualitative interviews with young Danes that showed how American media content (such as *Donald Duck* and Disney's wider universe) had become what she termed “domesticated” among Danish audiences because of the fact that most young Danes at the time had grown up with Disney cartoons, in print as well as on television and in the cinema (Drotner, 2001, 2002). The survey findings presented in this chapter show a continuing strong “domestication” – or, maybe better, appropriation – of American content by Danish children and adolescents. Indeed, due to a wide exposure to American content via various global providers and even more broadcast channels, the appropriation seems to encompass the whole palette of American films and series, particularly blockbuster films from the many Marvel and Star Wars franchises and series such as *Stranger Things* and *Friends*. For Danish children and adolescents growing up with the past decade's video-on-demand abundance, content from the US clearly appears to be the standard, most likely even “the norm”. As a consequence, Danish films and series appear as nonstandard and, arguably, an anomalous supplement.

With the strong preference for American films and series in mind, the list of favourite YouTube channels is interesting because it distorts the image of a US-dominated media diet. Although the most mentioned YouTube channel, MrBeast, is indeed from the US, a majority of the most mentioned channels belong to Danish YouTubers such as Kender du det [Do you know that], Morten Münster, Alexander Husum, Emilie Briting, Josefine Simone Dahl, and many more. This indicates that Danish children and adolescents do in fact enjoy watching Danish content if found on YouTube and, interestingly, as produced within the logics of one of the most popular and globalised VoD

providers in the world and *outside* the logics of publicly funded institutions with cultural mandates such as DR or DFI.

Opinions on selected films and series

After we asked the children to write down their favourite content, they were asked to watch, rate, and comment on trailers of 14 films and series that we had curated based on the quality content criteria set out by public institutions (such as DFI, School Cinema, and DR), our idea of what children may consider to be quality, as well as two Netflix originals. As we were particularly interested in the children's opinions of Danish content, a majority of the trailers were Danish titles, of which one was a Netflix Original, and they also included an American Netflix Original movie and a French arthouse film. Six of the titles were produced specifically for younger children and were shown only to the 8–12-year-olds; eight were produced for and shown to the 13–17-year-olds. The titles included theatrical hits, films from the School Cinema programme, DR series produced after extensive audience research, one web series, and two Netflix Originals. Each trailer was 3–5 minutes long.

In defining quality screen fiction for children and adolescents, we followed four specific criteria: distinct cultural or artistic value, high production value, good storytelling, and high audience potential. We made sure that each curated title combined at least two of these elements, and then we grouped them in four clusters. The first cluster included titles supported by public funds or broadcasters with a strong cultural mandate. This content does not necessarily have a large production value, a classic narrative, or a clear genre identity. These titles take a critical point of view on a socially or politically engaging theme and the authenticity of their visual style. The titles in this category included *Young Ahmed*, *Efterskolen* [*Boarding School*], *Natten til Lørdag* [*Saturday Morning*], and *Puls* [*Pulse*].

The second cluster consisted of culturally relevant screen fiction for wider audiences. This content also insists on cultural value as it pursues themes relevant to society and children's education, which is why public institutions have supported it. The production and promotion of this content resulted from extensive audience research. The content is marked by a classic narrative, faster pace, genre elements, and larger audience appeal. The titles in this category include *Akavet* [*Akward*], *Klassen* [*The Class*], *Skyldig* [*Guilty*], *Valhalla*, and *Hacker*.

The third cluster contains self-produced web series that YouTubers create for their online followers. This content normally has a low production value, but its narrative style, storyline, and genre is tailor-made for reaching specific target audiences. *Centrum* is a representative title for this category.

Finally, the genre-driven content produced by market players makes the fourth cluster. This is entertaining screen fiction for a large Danish or global

audience, with high production value and genre-driven storytelling. It normally does not have a critical take on social or political themes and is, to a significant degree, financed on a more commercial basis, although Danish genre films also receive public funding. The selected titles representing this cluster are *The Rain* and *Let it Snow* (Netflix Originals) and two Danish films, *Gooseboy* and *Iqbal og den indiske juvel* [*Iqbal and the Indian Jewel*].

The children were the least interested in and impressed by the titles from the first cluster. Only one-third rated positively this content and expressed a wish to see more. Among the minority who were positive towards the content, some respondents expressed appreciation in their comments³ that these titles “focus on important topics”, “provide insights into other cultures and religions”, and “talk about serious things in an easy way”. Others liked the content for personal reasons, such as recognising the shooting location or an actor they like. Most respondents, however, found the style and stories of this category to be “boring”, “strange”, “confusing”, “too realistic”, “difficult to follow”, or “too much like school”. These feelings become even more evident when a title is neither in Danish nor in English. Some respondents rejected the French movie *Young Ahmed*, for example, because “it is annoying to see anything that is not in English”. They were also critical of the production values of the relatively low-budget content and of the slow-paced rhythm, as these titles do not necessarily contain multiple exhilarating plotlines.

When it comes to the Danish-language films and series with cultural value and a wider target audience in the second cluster, around a half of the children rated positively the selected titles. However, the remarks remained reminiscent of those about the arthouse titles, ranging from the generic ones – “I simply do not like DR series”, “not my style”, “I never watch Danish films and TV series”, and “it reminds me too much of school” – to the more specific ones – “bad acting”, “I do not like that the characters are quarrelling so much”, “seems like it is poorly produced”, and “it is unrealistic because the characters don’t use the professional terminology”. The children, however, expressed a slightly higher opinion of the three DR series (*The Class*, *Guilty*, and *Awkward*) than of the two films (*Valhalla* and *Hacker*). This may be explained by the fact that the audience-building process for films starts only when the films are finished, while in the case of the DR series, the process starts as early as the development phase (Redvall & Christensen, 2021).

The respondents’ opinion of *Centrum* – the only self-produced YouTube web series that we tested – did not differ much from the opinion of the DR series above: Around half of the children liked *Centrum*. This similarity is not surprising, considering that *Centrum*’s audience development and production models are similar. The only difference is that the children’s qualitative comments about *Centrum* were more positive: They appreciated, for example, that *Centrum* “focuses on everyday problems”, “is relatable”, and “represents LGBTQ teenagers”. At the same time, they think that the web series had a

“funny plot” and “good acting”. Finally, some children liked that “many stars appear in the series” and commented that “all of my friends saw it”, which indicates that some audience-building strategies such as word-of-mouth and collaboration with social media influencers worked well in *Centrum*’s case.

The respondents were the most affirmative about the commercial titles produced by market players. *The Rain* and *Iqbal and the Indian Jewel*, were positively reviewed by more than two-thirds of the children, becoming the most popular among the curated titles. The other two titles from this cluster were reviewed positively by around half of the children. However, judging from the qualitative comments, the respondents’ opinions about this type of content can still be mixed and critical. For example, some respondents differ in their opinions of the first and second seasons of *The Rain*. While the first season “has an exciting storyline” and “does not resemble other Danish series”, the second season “gets pretty boring”, “has a bad storyline”, “shows nothing new”, and “reminds us that Danes just cannot make good TV”. Likewise, the children were divided about the Netflix rom-com *Let It Snow*. While some respondents praised the production value, acting, and story of the film, others dismissed the story as “banal”, “cliché”, “too romantic”, “too sweet”, and “too emo-like”.

Concluding remarks

Summing up, the findings of the survey reveal a strong preference among Danish children and adolescents for the global VoD platforms YouTube, Netflix, and Disney+, which they frequent more often than the Danish counterparts DR’s and TV 2’s channels and online portfolios (with the exception of Disney+, which had only been recently introduced to the Danish market at the time of data collection). Least popular and least frequented are DR’s dedicated children’s channels Ramasjang and Ultra. When asked about types of content watched on the different providers, nuances emerge. Only very few children, for example, watch films and series on YouTube, instead spending their time on vlogs, funny fails, gaming, music videos, and memes. On DR and TV 2 and their online players, as well as on Ramasjang and Ultra, the children watch a much larger variety of genres – including documentaries, entertainment, and news – than on Netflix and Disney+, where they mainly watch films and series. When it comes to specific fictional screen content, the children favour American films and series over those from Denmark or elsewhere; and when asked to rate specific films and series, they favour genre-driven titles over titles with a “higher” artistic or cultural value, produced with public support from institutions such as DFI or DR. Additionally, many comments suggest that the respondents are not devoted to audiovisual fiction from Denmark. However, when asked about favourite YouTube channels, the respondents mentioned a fair number of Danish YouTubers. This indi-

cates that Danish children and adolescents do in fact watch and like Danish content from YouTubers as well as DR and TV 2 documentaries, news, and entertainment. But when it comes to films and series, the children's most cherished content – and arguably the benchmark which, for example, Danish films and series are judged by – is indeed American.

If the goal is to make Danish content more popular among young Danes, this might signal a necessary re-evaluation of the national curatorial practices vis-à-vis children's audiovisual fiction. If Danish YouTubers can appeal to Danish children and adolescents, it is likely that changed curatorial practices and quality criteria within institutions such as DFI and DR could change the children's attitudes to Danish films and series, and that the future of domestic audiovisual fiction is to be found not only in traditional formats but also in shorter narrative formats suited for consumption on, for example, YouTube, as was the case with the web series *Centrum*. On the other hand, domestic films and series may also represent an important alternative to what the children find on the global providers, as is argued by, for example, DR's commissioners and creators in Christensen's and Redvall's chapters in this volume (Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, respectively), or by the commissioners and creators of the Norwegian public broadcaster NRK's youth series *Rådebank*, as described by Ewa Morsund in this volume (Chapter 6). The verdict is still out on these matters. However, with this chapter's findings in mind, there is certainly something to suggest that, on the global Anglo-American platforms, Danish children and adolescents find an abundance of what they consider to be high-quality content that in many ways feels just as relevant as – if not more than – domestic content. If we look at the consumption patterns and tastes of children and adolescents as the metaphorical canary in the coal mine when it comes to what may lie ahead in the consumption patterns of these generations when they grow older, one may argue that there is a danger of accepting the status quo.

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Endnotes

1. In the mixed-methods set-up, the survey formed the first step, whose findings were later explored in more detail in a qualitative mobile ethnographic study of 20 children aged 8–17 years old.
2. These very few non-binary children are not included in the results that are divided into gender. However, their answers are included in all the remaining results.
3. All comments were originally written in Danish but have been translated by us for use in this chapter.