

The Case of *Deutschland 83*: Global Internet-Distributed Television and Its Effects on Local Viewing Behavior and Industry Practices

Kristina Brüning

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

kristina.bruning [AT] utexas.edu

Abstract

This article examines the German drama series Deutschland 83 and its unexpectedly low German viewership as a case study. Highlighting the benefit of integrating audience research into analyses of shifting industrial practices, this article illuminates the complexities of negotiating local tastes in an era of global content flows. Viewer feedback reveals the importance of understanding viewing behavior in the streaming age as a confluence of content-based preferences and expectations of a specific technologically afforded user experience. This shift in viewing behavior not only has implications for production practices and local producers but also informs how local private broadcasters adjust in order to remain competitive within the growing German television landscape.

Keywords: *viewing behaviour, local, broadcast television, drama, Germany, global television, Internet-distributed television*

In December 2015, headlines such as “This series does not fit into German television”¹ and “The RTL series ‘Deutschland 83’ was critically acclaimed, but a flop”² abounded in German newspapers. They referred to the unexpectedly low German viewership of the German TV drama series *Deutschland 83* (D83), which had previously successfully aired on the American subscription channel Sundance TV (which acted as a co-producer for the series) and later won an international Emmy award in November 2016. Despite a sizable promotional campaign and positive feedback from American viewers and critics, only 3.2 million Germans

watched the series' first episode on broadcast television on November 26, and no more than 1.63 million viewers persisted when the final eighth episode aired in mid-December. After the success abroad, producers, creators, broadcasters, and journalists alike were baffled by the glorious local failure of the high-end production, which had been hailed as "a breakthrough moment for German television."³

Analyzing viewer feedback on social media, popular and trade press articles, broadcast schedules, and an interview with a producer of the series, I employ a critical media industries approach⁴ to examine the reasons for the unsatisfactory performance of D83 in Germany, as well as the lessons the series' reception offered German producers and private broadcasters. Developed and aired in a time of large technological and industrial shifts within German and international television, the case of D83 offers a glimpse into an early stage of Germany's transition into the streaming age, illuminating the interconnected shifts in consumption, production, and distribution practices initiated by the entrance of Amazon Prime Video and Netflix into the German television market. The analysis of viewer feedback reveals the importance of understanding viewing behavior as a combination of content-based preferences and expectations of a specific technologically afforded user experience. I argue that the arrival of global SVODs has instigated a confluence of interdependent preferences in content and viewing experience, which manifests in the target audience's inclination to watch high-end drama series exclusively on streaming platforms, without commercial interruption, and in their own time. Because the viewing experience offered by private broadcaster RTL was perceived as incompatible with this predilection in terms of both high-end content and a non-linear, commercial-free viewing experience, the German target audience for D83 did not watch the series on broadcast television. This study thus provides audience-based evidence for Lotz, Lobato, and Thomas' suggestion that "content is not necessarily the primary explanation of viewer adoption or use of internet-distributed television series"⁵ and similarly argues against overemphasizing the importance of programming and for more research into the viewing experience-related reasons why local viewers gravitate toward global SVODs. Furthermore, this study signals the importance of integrating audience studies into examinations of production and distribution practices in order to gain a fuller understanding of the effects of global content flows on local tastes in national markets. In Germany, the shift in viewing behavior not only has implications for production practices and local producers, who are mostly enthusiastic about the increased international demand for German high-end drama, but also informs how local private broadcasters adjust in order to remain competitive within the growing German television landscape, such as by investing in their own streaming services and focusing on other genres like reality TV, which has retained satisfactory viewership on private broadcast television.

Global Content Flows and National Television Industries

Research on the effects of global SVODs on local consumption, production, and distribution practices indicates stark variances between different national contexts, demonstrating that

even amid increasingly global content flows in the age of “online TV,”⁶ “the answer to the question ‘What is television?’” still “very much depends on where you are.”⁷ For instance, while Turner’s investigation of the Australian context yields evidence that the rapid adoption of Netflix has caused deep structural change “on all levels—production, distribution, and consumption,”⁸ Wayne documents that Israeli pay-television executives expect Netflix to have little impact on their national market.⁹ In general, although some research to an extent supports the zero-sum logic that continues to permeate media commentary and some industry discourse, warning that global SVOD services displace local with US content and fundamentally threaten the survival of national television industries,¹⁰ most scholars agree that the relationship between global SVODs and local markets is more multifaceted. In fact, existing research—including this present study—indicates that there is great variation not only between different national contexts but also within local industries and among their different sectors of consumption, production, and distribution. Accordingly, focusing on shifts within UK distribution practices following the arrival of Netflix and other global SVODs, Steemers finds that international sales of British drama have increased and illuminates the tensions that have emerged between local broadcasters’ national orientation and independent producers and distributors’ global aspirations¹¹—developments that likely are not confined to the UK context. Indeed, examining the impact of Netflix on local production practices, Castro and Cascajosa similarly note that the global streamer has facilitated the export of Spanish TV production, which has in turn prompted local producers to adopt different production practices such as reducing episode length in order to increase Spanish TV series’ suitability for the international market.¹² My study illustrates parallel developments in the German production sector following the international success of *D83*, as producers are excited about the introduction of innovative creative practices and increased global demand for German high-end drama.

In contrast to local producers’ enthusiasm about global opportunities and in order to differentiate themselves from global competitors, however, local distributors, such as the Spanish SVOD Moviestar¹³ or the Australian pay-television channel Foxtel,¹⁴ as well as local broadcasters like Germany’s RTL and Denmark’s TV2,¹⁵ increasingly focus on local content for local audiences. Rios and Scarlata’s study of local SVODs in Australia (Stan) and Mexico (Blim) further supports this trend and highlights the importance of examining how local distributors and producers react and adapt to the arrival of global SVODs and resultant shifts within national markets.¹⁶ In Denmark, for instance, efforts to “future-proof” local broadcaster TV2 center around integrating linear programming and SVOD services within the television station—moving from traditional scheduling to “trans-programming,” which Bruun identifies as a key competitive strategy for broadcasters going forward.¹⁷ Furthermore, despite a shared focus on local content, considerable variation exists between the adaptation strategies of local broadcast networks and pay-television channels or SVOD services regarding production and commissioning. Whereas pay-television channels like the Australian Foxtel¹⁸ and SVODs like Stan¹⁹ are heavily investing in high-end drama productions, local broadcasters like the Australian FTA network²⁰ and the German RTL increasingly focus on news, live event and casting shows, sports, and reality TV. This division is in line with Lotz’ finding that “different programming suits different distribution technologies, and different distribution technologies enable different types of programming.”²¹

In order to better understand the dynamics that play into viewing behavior and the consumption of different genres via local versus global and linear versus non-linear providers, detailed audience research is needed. Amid a dearth of audience research, Llamas-Rodriguez' recent case study of *Luis Miguel: La Serie* (Netflix, 2018–) and its reception in Mexico constitute a notable exception. Arguing that the series' distribution by Netflix contributed to its success with local audiences, Llamas-Rodriguez provides the reverse case to the present study and finds that “being tied to a foreign streaming service rather than a legacy broadcast network also enhanced the presumed expectation of quality for the series,”²² a tendency which also manifests in the German context. As Krauß shows, German industry professionals and media commentary have lamented the German television industry's seeming inability to produce “quality TV” due to financial constraints and incompatible production practices for years.²³ Correspondingly, previous scholarly work on D83 examines the production sector and discourses of “quality TV” surrounding the series' perceived textual distinction.²⁴ Moving beyond content-based explanations for viewing behavior and analyzing the case of D83 within its industrial nexus of consumption/production/distribution, this study contributes to the growing literature on the complexities of negotiating local tastes in an era of global content flows and sets out to further integrate audience studies into analyses of shifting industrial practices.

Deutschland 83: Production Context

The spy series, which follows an East German soldier to West Germany on an unexpected undercover mission during the Cold War, was created by American author Anna Winger, who has been living in Berlin since 2002. Her husband, Jörg Winger, who is known in Germany as the showrunner of the long-running prime time crime series *SOKO Leipzig*, acted as executive producer and co-creator for the series. From 2016 to 2020, he was also managing director at UFA Fiction, a major German television and film production company, which produced D83.

The series was commissioned by RTL, Germany's largest private broadcaster.²⁵ With around 11.4% (as of November 2020), RTL has been the market leader in audience share of the advertiser-relevant 14- to 49-year-old target group for decades.²⁶ FreemantleMedia International also contributed to the financing of the series and acted as the global distributor, selling D83 to 200 territories worldwide, including the British Channel 4 and US-American subscriber-funded pay-television channel Sundance TV, owned by the AMC Network.²⁷ Mid-production, just in time for the series' world premiere at the Berlinale in February 2015, Sundance TV became co-producer of the series. According to Jörg Winger, Sundance TV was subsequently involved in reviewing and developing screenplays and made a “healthy” financial contribution.²⁸ As part of the deal, Sundance TV also acquired the broadcast rights for the series and was the first to air D83 in June 2015, making the series the first German-language drama production to air on a US TV network. Amid predominantly positive reviews from the United States, the series premiered on Germany's RTL five months later. The network aired the series two episodes at a time in its Thursday prime time slot at 8.15 p.m. Notably, while Germany's private broadcasters are notoriously known for canceling new series right after the first episode if ratings are unexpectedly low, in the case of D83, RTL stuck with the series and aired all eight episodes.

Following the underwhelming performance at home, the question of whether a second season could be produced was up in the air for almost a full year. In October 2016, UFA Fiction, FreemantleMedia International, RTL, and Amazon Prime Germany reached “a landmark deal in coproduction history,” according to Nico Hoffmann, co-CEO of UFA.²⁹ Per the deal, Amazon helped finance the second season and secured the exclusive rights in Germany, with RTL optioning to air *Deutschland 86* on German free TV after Amazon’s first window. Importantly, Amazon Prime did not secure the exclusive worldwide streaming rights for the series but opted for later windows in several countries. In the United States, for instance, Sundance TV and Hulu obtained the first and second window, with Amazon airing the series in the third window. According to Christoph Schneider, managing director of Amazon Prime Video Germany, the ability to produce and to be the first to offer the series in Germany was a top priority that led to the closing of the deal, explaining “German series and movies are very important for our Prime members and we are happy to continue to expand our engagement with the German production industry and to bring great new content to our customers.”³⁰ Two weeks before the second season premiered on October 19, 2018, Amazon Prime Germany greenlit the production of a third and final season, *Deutschland 89*, which premiered in Germany in September 2020.

What the German High-End Drama Audience Wants: Quality, Uninterrupted

In response to the low viewing numbers for D83, production company UFA Fiction turned to Facebook on December 4, 2015, asking on their page for viewers’ and non-viewers’ input on “what went wrong?”³¹ The public post was shared 32 times and received over 250 comments. While the post and its responses can hardly be considered a traditional audience study, it did very much function as such for UFA Fiction. Ultimately, the company’s analysis of the viewer feedback gathered by the post led it to reconsider the series’ distributor, which in turn inspired RTL to adjust their strategy. The feedback on Facebook has thus informed substantial change within the German TV industry, which warrants its close examination and pole position in this case study. It also bears noting that rather than explain the big picture of why D83 did not achieve satisfactory ratings, my analysis focuses on the comments and explanations offered by the series’ target audience: those with an affinity for high-end drama series and what they reveal about shifting viewing behavior among these viewers.

The reasons commenters gave for either never tuning in in the first place or not sticking around until the last episode were diverse but can be broadly summarized into the following three overarching categories in order of proportion:

1. Viewing preferences: non-linear, commercial-free viewing as default for high-end drama
2. RTL as a network and the RTL brand’s lack of cultural capital
3. Content-related shortcomings

While some users explain that they didn't watch D83 because they were either not interested in a series about the GDR or stopped watching because they were frustrated with historical inaccuracies within the storytelling, content-related reasons were by far the fewest given. In fact, many commenters stress that there is nothing wrong with the series itself. The majority of the comments (around 60%) focus on viewing preferences, closely followed by and intertwined with explanations of why RTL was the "wrong" channel to air and promote the series.

In the context of viewing preferences, commenters explicate that they do not have time to watch TV on a broadcast schedule but would be happy to watch it sometime through a video-on-demand service. Relatedly, many prefer to binge-watch drama series, rather than having to wait for the next episode. Another prominent reason for these individuals to opt out of watching D83 on RTL was the disruption through advertisements. Some even recommend purchasing and watching the series on Amazon Prime Video in order to avoid the commercial breaks. Significantly, many commenters explicitly mention Netflix and Amazon Prime Video as their principal destinations for watching TV series, as one user explains:

Watching Deutschland 83? Yes, definitely! But I've long stopped watching broadcast TV, and instead am part of the spoilt species that watches films and TV series on Netflix . . . to put it simply: for me, the option to watch it digitally is missing. (My translation)

Whereas SVOD used to be a "niche phenomenon" in Germany in 2017,³² viewers have since quickly caught on to the new distribution form, with 37% of Germans using streaming services (including Amazon Prime Video, Netflix, iTunes, Sky Go) in 2019.³³ Notably, among the advertiser-relevant target group of 14- to 29-year-olds, this number more than doubles, with 67% using any of the streaming platforms. As of late 2019, Amazon Prime Video remains the frontrunner in terms of subscriptions in Germany, with 46.9% compared to Netflix's 35.7%, although daily usage of Netflix (60%) is almost twice as high as Amazon Prime Video's (36%).³⁴

The explicit implication of the majority of people who listed their viewing preferences and the ability to watch the series on a streaming platform, without ad-breaks, and on their own time as the reason why they did not watch D83, is that they would watch it through a streaming platform such as Amazon Prime Video or Netflix, which they believe offer a superior viewing experience for narratively complex serial content (what Jason Mittell terms "complex TV"³⁵). One comment summarizes this prevailing inclination:

It just doesn't fit with your target groups' viewing behavior. For example, I hardly know anyone who still watches series on linear TV. At maximum, sitcoms that don't have a continuous, complicated story are being watched. Anything that has a gripping, continuous story, and is of high-end production value, I watch on Netflix, Amazon, or Sky. (My translation)

While RTL had made the series available on their own streaming platform "RTL NOW," the platform's free version only offered access to episodes for one week after the original air date and still contained commercial breaks. Dissatisfied with the platform's viewing experience, many users commented that they do not consider RTL NOW an acceptable option for streaming content at all and instead expressed their appreciation of Netflix and Amazon Prime Video's more sophisticated, advertising-free streaming experiences that allow for uninterrupted binge-watching.

The reasons people give that relate to RTL as a network interestingly entwine with the arguments described earlier about the preference for watching complex TV series on global streaming platforms. Many commenters state that while they would have watched D83, they were not aware that RTL was airing it, because they pay no attention to the network and its programming. They further claim that the series is too complex for the mean RTL viewer and thus doomed to fail on the network known for “trash TV,” a popular German descriptor for reality shows such as *Der Bachelor* (RTL, 2003–), *Schwiegertochter gesucht* (RTL, 2007–), and *Das Sommerhaus der Stars* (RTL, 2016–).³⁶ Through references to their personal preference of watching complex television series via SVODs, these viewers are thus adamant about distinguishing themselves from the “mainstream TV viewer” in general, and the culturally even less esteemed, stereotyped RTL-viewer, specifically. One Facebook user’s comment explicates this tendency:

The series was completely fine, but the channel that aired it, RTL, has been ruined with garbage for the past 20 years. So many viewers with at least slight expectations [of quality content] have given up, and the RTL audience doesn’t understand the series. (My translation)

This derogatory discourse around RTL and its content is prevalent in German popular media, often also includes VOX and other private broadcasters, and has produced such disparaging descriptors as “*Unterschichtenfernsehen*” (underclass television), demoting both this type of television content and its audience.³⁷ Commenters who readily self-identify as viewers of distinguished taste, or, as Tryon eloquently puts it, “television fans wanting to be congratulated for their tastes of programming”³⁸ therefore present their combined content and viewing preferences as incompatible with the viewing experience (including content) offered on the private broadcast network RTL. Essentially, these viewers equate global streaming services with complex high-end drama productions and private broadcasters and RTL specifically with “trash TV,” invoking popular and scholarly discussions of the contested notion of “quality TV,” which has preoccupied German industry professionals and media commentators for years. These viewers’ feedback to some extent mirrors German TV professionals’ and popular media’s criticism of German television series in general and their perceived inferiority to US series like *Breaking Bad* that are frequently quoted as examples of “quality” television.³⁹ German scholars have demonstrated that elevations of some television content, usually US-American drama series, as “quality TV” go hand in hand with the simultaneous dismissal of other, usually German private broadcasters’ shows and series as “trash TV.”⁴⁰ This dialectic is also evident in the feedback on D83, which commenters seem to elevate to the same “quality” status as some US series. Crucially, however, the series’ target audience goes beyond expressing their disapproval of German private broadcasters’ typical television content but explains that their expectation of a certain technologically enabled viewing experience which for them is inextricably linked with global SVODs such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video has been an even more important factor deterring them from watching D83 on RTL. The prevailing discourse of distinction surrounding global SVODs in regard to both their content *and* the viewing experience they offer thus evidences the effectiveness of Netflix’s branding efforts to “reconceptualize streaming as a more engaging form of television, one that exists on a technological and cultural cutting edge”⁴¹ with German audiences.

This self-professed “quality” audience may not be entirely identical to the industry-produced “elite audience,” which Göbel-Stolz defines as “the most desirable in the niche television market amongst the commercial broadcasters, . . . signif[ying] purchasing power and influence,”⁴² but nevertheless visibly translates into viewership numbers. As the case of D83 shows, the combination of prevailing assumptions about the quality and cultural value of content on national private broadcasters versus international streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, together with expectations of a certain viewing experience, has large viewership implications, which informs German television producers’ decisions about the distribution of high-end serial drama going forward.

Implications for Producers: Bringing “the Golden Age of TV” to Germany

In his Netflix study, Ramon Lobato discusses how the SVOD’s development and the internet’s general facilitation of transnational television revive old debates about fears of US cultural domination.⁴³ However, drawing on Chalaby and other localization scholars, Lobato explicates that already “by the 1990s, television executives . . . understood that international markets do not simply exist, waiting mutely for great content, but must be made—which is to say that they must be primed, cultivated, and maintained.”⁴⁴ In Germany, US-American content, specifically television series, has long been a staple in broadcast television. Especially for private television networks, which (in contrast to the tax-funded public broadcasters ARD and ZDF) do not typically have the financial means to produce original drama content that could compete with American high-end drama, purchasing US-American content has been an inexpensive and convenient way to fill the schedule.⁴⁵ German audiences have thus long been primed to expect high-end content in the form of US-American exports, rather than private broadcasters’ local German productions. On Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, US-American TV series, such as *Riverdale*, *The Walking Dead*, *Lucifer*, and *Stranger Things*, remain the most sought-out content in Germany.⁴⁶

Nonetheless, to counteract continued fears of US cultural domination in Europe, regulations have recently been passed that require streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video to include at least 30% local European content in their streaming libraries. This regulation of course incentivizes streaming services to invest in local original productions. To date, Amazon Prime Video has produced seven German original series: *You Are Wanted* (2017–18), *Der Lack ist ab* (2017–), *Pastewka* (2018–20), *Deutschland 86+89* (2018–20), *Beat* (2018), *Der Beischläfer* (2020), and *Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo* (2021). Netflix so far offers a staggering 16 German series, including *Dark* (2017–20), *How to Sell Drugs Online (Fast)* (2019–), *Unorthodox* (2020), *Biohackers* (2020–), *Barbarians* (2020–), and *Über Weihnachten* (2020).

For German executives and creatives, this new interest in German productions sparked by the international success of D83 marks a potential watershed moment that finally allows to produce “complex, special [German] series and films that appeal to audiences all over the world,” as *Deutschland* creator Anna Winger explains.⁴⁷ Streaming services have become

exceptionally lucrative partners for German creatives and producers alike, who are excited to expand the German television landscape, which was previously confined to linear crime procedurals, medical series, reality TV, and “the odd event movie about history,” aspiring to bring the “golden age of TV” to Germany through “developing a new way of doing TV.”⁴⁸ Importantly, Netflix and other transnational streaming services are not only offering financial means previously unattainable for German TV productions,⁴⁹ but they also facilitate the often immediate export of German original content to other markets, notably the US-American and British television markets. As UFA producer Naomi Marne explains, “a lot of people are thinking more internationally, so now when shows are being made its rare for them to be produced exclusively for the German market.”⁵⁰ In fact, the international success of *D83* has paved the way for further German high-end drama productions such as the Netflix miniseries *Unorthodox* (2020), also written by Anna Winger, for which director Maria Schrader, who was also involved in the *Deutschland* trilogy, received an Emmy. Similarly aiming to build on the success of *D83*, in 2020 UFA has launched Big Window Productions, a new label focused on international high-end drama production, headed by Jörg Winger. By successfully exporting and thereby popularizing German content worldwide, global SVODs (incentivized by local content quotas) can thus work to actively counteract the “one-way-flow”⁵¹ of television from the United States into Germany—a win-win for German television creators and international streaming services.

Implications for Private Broadcast TV: Making Adjustments

In recent years, private broadcasters including market leader RTL and ProSieben, which targets the same advertiser-relevant audience of 14- to 49-year-olds, have continuously lost audiences. While RTL remains market leader of the young audiences, their numbers too are fast declining, dropping one full percent in the course of 2018, and their overall market share has decreased from 14.5% in 2010 to 8.5% in 2018.⁵² Generally, the young audiences targeted by RTL and ProSieben are increasingly watching television through streaming services and have reduced their consumption of linear television over the past years. For instance, from 2018 to 2019, 14- to 29-year-olds have reduced their daily linear television exposure from 78 to 52 minutes.⁵³

RTL and ProSieben both used to heavily rely on US-American television imports, and series such as *Grey’s Anatomy*, which has been airing Wednesdays at 8.15 p.m. on ProSieben for over a decade, have enjoyed fairly consistent high ratings in the double digits. Recently, however, new US drama imports such as *This Is Us*, *Supergirl*, and *The Resident* have not drawn the anticipated large audiences and were subsequently discontinued. In addition to the concerns over preferred viewing experiences as mentioned in relation to *D83*, viewers’ comments on an article in the German news magazine *Die Zeit* reveal that the German audience for US drama series now prefers to watch them in the English original and is deterred by German dubbing that is customary in broadcast television.⁵⁴ This reaction is in line with Netflix’s self-understanding as a transnational television service and its role in local markets,

as its “signature brand of edgy English-language content appeals to those audiences already predisposed to imported content”⁵⁵ as well as Jenke and Vonderau’s observation that German Netflix subscribers seek out the service in order to catch up on US drama series in the original English version.⁵⁶ Similarly, Marne explains that American television drama has become less profitable on German broadcast television “because everyone’s watching it online.”⁵⁷ As a consequence, private networks have become less interested in buying US-American content. For instance, RTL has not renewed their licensing deal with Sony Pictures Television in 2017, ushering in a new era in German television. With Germany having long been the second-largest buyer of US-American content worldwide,⁵⁸ this shift likely has implications for the American television industry as well.

Early on, both RTL and ProSieben have reacted to their dwindling viewer numbers and the need to fill their schedules with content other than American imports by announcing their own plans of investing more in local German productions, hoping this will lure viewers back to private free TV.⁵⁹ RTL’s decision to commission D83 constitutes such an early reaction and attempt to increase their audience and overall market share by producing competitive original content. As producer Marne recalls, “RTL wanted to rejuvenate its image, try to do something different, because they’re often put in a box—there are certain shows that are ‘RTL-shows’, and *Deutschland 83* was meant to re-define their brand.”⁶⁰ In order to produce a series that could compete with US productions, RTL adopted completely new production practices, including granting the creatives unprecedented freedom, usually deemed a distinguishing feature of streaming services and their support of creative vision.⁶¹

As the performance of D83 with the German audience illustrates, however, creating competitive original content alone is not enough to (re)gain viewership. The main takeaway from the Facebook survey was that RTL was not the ideal distributor for the series, or rather, in Marne’s words, RTL’s “attempt to expand their brand and bring in a wider audience wasn’t as successful as we would have liked,” which UFA regretted since RTL had provided “a platform to tell this story, and allow[ed] us so much creative freedom to do so.”⁶² Ultimately, RTL could not commit to another season, let alone the larger budget the creators were hoping for. For the producers and creatives of D83, the deal with Amazon not only ensured that the series would continue and reach its audience but also allowed for a larger production budget for the second season.

Currently, aside from live television sports including soccer World Cups and Formula One races, the formats that remain successful on private broadcast television are German reality TV productions such as the long-running *Ich bin ein Star, holt mich hier raus* (RTL, 2004–), or *Bauer sucht Frau* (RTL, 2005–), and live event and casting shows such as *The Voice of Germany* (ProSieben, 2011–), which have drawn fairly consistent viewership. This development parallels Lotz’ prediction for the future of the American television landscape, and her argument that

we often presume the new will replace the old, but there are also good reasons to expect that broadcast, multichannel, and internet television distribution will coexist. The different technological capabilities of broadcast and internet suit them for different uses and thus may enable a long future for both. Such a future likely requires considerable adjustments in broadcast television.⁶³

In the German context, there is a clear trend among young audiences to use different television distributors for different content, as they prefer to watch high-end drama series (German or American) on global SVODs, while they fall back on private broadcast television's offerings for their regular fix of reality TV, sports, and live event shows. On the surface, it seems that genre thus has become the decisive factor in German audiences' decisions on whether or not to opt for local distributors. The analysis of viewer feedback indicates, however, that preferences for particular viewing experiences and German audiences' related assumptions about and expectations of different distributors actually mediate this relationship. Understanding this development after the D83 debacle, Germany's private broadcasters have thus recently begun to heavily invest in reality TV production *and* are expanding their own streaming platforms to allow for a smoother, more competitive non-linear viewing experience, aiming to ultimately integrate broadcast and streaming television.⁶⁴ Since 2016, TVNow, a hybrid between ad-supported catch-up service and SVOD, unites offerings by RTL and its eight sister channels (including VOX and RTL2), and the platform's steady growth has pleasantly surprised umbrella company Mediengruppe RTL.⁶⁵ RTL Group reportedly aims to invest more than 1 billion Euros annually into content production overall and 350 million into TVNow's streaming content specifically.⁶⁶ In 2019, TVNow began producing original content and has since debuted more than eight original German reality TV series geared toward younger audiences, including the successful shows *Temptation Island* (2019–), *Paradise Hotel* (2019–), and *Prince Charming* (2019–), evidencing a shift toward actively and productively embracing RTL's reputation for German reality TV. So far, this appears to be a promising strategy, not only in financial terms given reality formats' significantly lower production costs, but also because reality television has long been popular with German audiences, particularly with the most lucrative yet elusive young audiences.⁶⁷

Conclusion

In *Netflix Nations*, Lobato cautions that national regulations and policies, as well as fears about the imperial power of transnational television, are based upon assumptions about audiences that often diverge from actual local tastes.⁶⁸ He ultimately concludes that a “both/and understanding” of the place of Netflix and other streaming services in local television markets is most realistic, explaining that

audiences do not choose between the local and the global but combine both in their everyday lives. . . . Audiences understand that local programming is good for some things (news, sports, comedy, reality TV), while American imports are often better for other things (high-end drama, spectacle, thriller).⁶⁹

This case study indicates that not content (both in the sense of local versus global and in terms of genre) alone but a combination of content and preferred viewing experience determines what Germans watch and where they watch it. The analysis of viewer feedback in response to D83's underperformance on RTL illustrates that the audience targeted by the series actually prefers to stream high-end drama of any language in

HD, without commercial breaks, and on their own time. This study therefore suggests that the consumption of local versus global content is not only genre-specific, as Lobato argues, but also fundamentally tied to expectations of a certain viewing experience that is enabled by particular distribution technologies. Further research in other local contexts is needed to identify whether this shift in viewing behavior following the emergence of global SVODs is a Germany-specific or a transnational development.

For Germany's creatives and producers, as well as private broadcasters, the arrival of global streaming services has set in motion a series of still ongoing industrial shifts. The D83-experiment proves that the adoption of new production practices, such as the increased creative freedom RTL offered the series' writers, enables the production of high-end drama that viewers all over the world perceive as comparable to US-American productions in quality. German producers and creatives are thrilled about this development and are excited by ever-increasing opportunities to produce and export German content. Nevertheless, D83's content-related international critical acclaim alone did not suffice to guarantee satisfactory viewership of the series on German free-to-air television. This is because the German high-end drama audience has come to understand textual distinction as inextricably linked with a technologically sophisticated viewing experience that allows for non-linear and commercial free television consumption, which these viewers first and foremost associate with transnational streaming services.

Adjusting to this restructuring of the German television market, and acknowledging the stickiness of their long-established brands, private broadcasters and RTL in particular are moving away from high-end drama production. Instead, original reality TV series such as TVNow's *Temptation Island* and *Prince Charming* have successfully drawn subscribers to the streaming service. Although no concrete numbers have been released, CEO of umbrella group Mediengruppe RTL Deutschland Bernd Reichart has announced that TVNow is the leading German streaming platform in terms of subscription numbers, calling it the "local hero" within the German television market.⁷⁰ In line with the viewing behavior outlined earlier, the different local and global distributors' signature offerings currently satisfy different kinds of television cravings, with Netflix and Amazon Prime Video predominantly attracting those looking for high-end drama and "edgy English language content" and private broadcasters relying on German reality TV, sports, and German-dubbed versions of selected US series, which appears to allow for a peaceful coexistence within the German television landscape—for now.

I would like to thank Amanda Lotz for her help and guidance in conceptualizing and developing this research project, and for offering valuable advice and generative comments on an early draft.

¹ Markus Ehrenberg, & Huber, Joachim (2015, December 18), Diese Serie passt nicht ins deutsche Fernsehen. *Der Tagesspiegel*. www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/medien/deutschland-83-endet-mit-quotentief-diese-serie-passt-nicht-ins-deutsche-fernsehen/12701524.html;my translation.

- ² Michael Hanfeld (2015, December 19), Wieso sieht das keiner? *Frankfurter Allgemeine*. www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/medien/die-rtl-serie-deutschland-83-war-hochgelobt-aber-ein-flop-13973730.html; my translation.
- ³ Thomas Rogers (2018, October 30), “‘Deutschland 83’ was a hit abroad but a flop at home. What about ‘Deutschland 86’?” *New York Times*. www.nytimes.com/2018/10/30/arts/television/deutschland-86-germany.html.
- ⁴ Timothy Havens, Lotz, Amanda D., & Tinic, Serra (2009), Critical media industry studies: A research approach. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 2(2), 234–253.
- ⁵ Amanda D. Lotz, Lobato, Ramon, & Thomas, Julian (2018), Internet-distributed television research: A provocation. *Media Industries*, 5(2), 41. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mij.15031809.0005.203>.
- ⁶ Catherine Johnson (2019), *Online TV*. London: Routledge.
- ⁷ Graeme Turner, & Tay, Jinna (Eds.) (2009), *Television studies after TV: Understanding television in the post-broadcast era* (p. 8). London: Routledge.
- ⁸ Graeme Turner (2018), Netflix and the reconfiguration of the Australian television market. *Media Industries*, 5(2), 138. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mij.15031809.0005.208>.
- ⁹ Michael L. Wayne (2020), Global streaming platforms and national pay-television markets: A case study of Netflix and multi-channel providers in Israel. *The Communication Review*, 23(1), 29–45.
- ¹⁰ See, for example, Charles Davis, & Zboralska, Emilia (2017), Transnational over-the-top media distribution as a business and policy disruptor: The case of Netflix in Canada. *The Journal of Media Innovations*, 4(1), 4–25.
- ¹¹ Jeanette Steemers (2016), International sales of U.K. television content: Change and continuity in ‘the space in between’ production and consumption. *Television & New Media*, 17(8), 734–753.
- ¹² Deborah Castro, & Cascajosa, Concepción (2020), From Netflix to Moviestar+: How subscription video-on-demand services have transformed Spanish TV production. *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, 59(3), 154–160.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Turner, Netflix and the reconfiguration of the Australian television market.
- ¹⁵ Hanne Bruun (2020), From scheduling to trans-programming. *Media, Culture & Society*, 12.
- ¹⁶ Sofia Rios, & Scarlata, Alexa (2018), Locating SVOD in Australia and Mexico: Stan and blim contend with Netflix. *Critical Studies in Television*, 13(4), 475–490.
- ¹⁷ Bruun, From scheduling to trans-programming.
- ¹⁸ Turner, Netflix and the reconfiguration of the Australian television market.
- ¹⁹ Rios & Scarlata, Locating SVOD in Australia and Mexico: Stan and blim contend with Netflix.
- ²⁰ Turner, Netflix and the reconfiguration of the Australian television market.
- ²¹ Amanda D. Lotz (2018), *We now disrupt this broadcast: How cable transformed television and the internet revolutionized it all* (p. 178). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- ²² Juan Llamas-Rodriguez (2020), Luis Miguel: *La Serie*, class-based collective memory, and streaming television in Mexico. *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, 59(3), 139.

- ²³ Florian Krauß (2018), Im Angesicht der 'Qualitätsserie': Produktionskulturen in der deutschen Fernsehserienindustrie. *Navigationen—Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturwissenschaften*, 18(2), 47–66.
- ²⁴ See, for example, Florian Krauß (2020), When German series go global: Industry discourse on the period drama *Deutschland* and its transnational circulation. *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture*, 9(17), 158–169, and Florian Krauß (2018), 'Quality series' and their production cultures: Transnational discourses within the German television industry. *Series—International Journal of TV Serial Narratives*, 4(2), 47–59.
- ²⁵ Since the early 1980s, Germany maintains a dual system of private/commercial and public broadcasters. While both offer free-to-air content, they rely on different funding models. Commercial broadcasters are ad-funded, and public broadcasters such as ARD and ZDF are mostly tax-funded (but have recently integrated advertising revenue into their funding model). For a more detailed account of the distinction and increasing convergence between the two systems, see Bärbel Göbel-Stolz (2014), Public industry: The commercialization of public broadcasting. In Marcel Hartwig, Evelyne Keitel, & Günther Süß (Eds.), *Media economies: Perspectives on American cultural practices* (pp. 79–100). Trier: WVT.
- ²⁶ Bernhard Weidenbach (2020, December 1), Zuschauermarktanteile (14 bis 49 Jahre) der TV-Sender im November 2020. *Statista.de*. <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/227003/umfrage/zuschauermarktanteile-der-tv-sender-14-bis-49-jahre/>.
- ²⁷ Leo Barraclough (2017, November 17). Globalization of drama market offers UFA chance to build on successes. *Variety*. <https://variety.com/2017/tv/global/ufa-export-german-drama-1202616412/>.
- ²⁸ Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg GmbH (2015, December 16), Symposium quality series—Jörg Winger und Jens Richter—Case study 'Deutschland 83'. *YouTube*. www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFYf7zOhL7E.
- ²⁹ Thomas Lückerrath (2016, October 13), Jetzt offiziell: 'Deutschland 86' zuerst bei Amazon. *DWDL.de*. www.dwdl.de/nachrichten/58173/jetzt_offiziell_deutschland_86_zuerst_bei_amazon_/; my translation.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*; my translation.
- ³¹ The post including comments is publicly accessible via Facebook. Originally posted by UFA Fiction, it has since been archived as a photo on UFA Production's page: <https://www.facebook.com/UFAProduction/photos/a.622815174425380/1093244720715754>.
- ³² Marion Jenke, & Vonderau, Patrick (2017, August), Germany. *Global Internet TV Consortium*. <http://global-internet-tv.com/netflix-country-reports/germany/>.
- ³³ Natalie Beisch, Koch, Wolfgang, & Schäfer, Carmen (2019), ARD/ZDF-Onlinestudie 2019: Mediale Internetnutzung und video-on-demand Gewinnen weiter an Bedeutung. *Media Perspektiven*, 9, 379.
- ³⁴ Thorsten Mumme (2019, November 2). Für Netflix und Amazon ist die heile streaming-Welt zu Ende. *Der Tagesspiegel*. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wirtschaft/appletv-und-disney-fuer-netflix-und-amazon-ist-die-heile-streaming-welt-zu-ende/25181352.html>.
- ³⁵ Jason Mittell (2015), *Complex TV: The poetics of contemporary television storytelling*. New York: New York University Press.

- ³⁶ Alina Bähr (2018, June 20), Trash-top-five: Wir haben uns durchs TV-Sommerloch gezappt–damit Sie’s nicht müssen. *Focus Online*. https://www.focus.de/kultur/kino_tv/trash-top-five-das-bringt-der-fernseh-sommer-die-neuen-reality-shows-im-ueberblick_id_9131405.html.
- ³⁷ Brigitte Frizzoni (2014), Zwischen Trash-TV und Quality-TV: Wertediskurse zu serieller Unterhaltung. In Frank Kelleter (Ed.), *Populäre Serialität: Narration–Evolution–Distinktion* (p. 340). Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.
- ³⁸ Chuck Tryon (2015), TV got better: Netflix’s original programming strategies and binge viewing. *Media Industries*, 2(2), 113.
- ³⁹ Krauß, Im Angesicht der ‘Qualitätsserie’: Produktionskulturen in der deutschen Fernsehserienindustrie, 48.
- ⁴⁰ Frizzoni, Zwischen trash-TV und quality-TV: Wertediskurse zu serieller Unterhaltung, 339–340.
- ⁴¹ Tryon, TV got better: Netflix’s original programming strategies and binge viewing, 106.
- ⁴² Göbel-Stolz, Public industry: The commercialization of public broadcasting, 83.
- ⁴³ Ramon Lobato (2019), *Netflix Nations: The geography of digital distribution* (p. 50). New York: New York Uork Press.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.
- ⁴⁵ Bärbel Göbel-Stolz (2015, March 25–29). *On-demand television: The business of U.S. TV program sales in Germany*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Montreal, Canada.
- ⁴⁶ Matthias Birkel, Kerkau, Florian, Reichert, Max, & Scholl, Eduard (2020), Markt und Nutzung kostenpflichtiger Streamingdienste: Pay-video-on-demand in Deutschland. *Media Perspektiven*, 1, 22–32.
- ⁴⁷ Timo Niemeier (2019, February 13), Anna Winger macht vierteilige Miniserie für Netflix. *DWDL.de*. www.dwdl.de/nachrichten/70987/anna_winger_macht_vierteilige_miniserie_fuer_netflix/; my translation.
- ⁴⁸ Marne, Naomi, Personal Interview, December 5, 2018.
- ⁴⁹ Whereas the cost of upscale German TV drama usually ranges from 9.000–10.000€ per minute, high-end drama productions commonly amount to more than 15.000€ per minute. See Oliver Castendyk, & Goldhammer, Klaus (2018), *Produzentenstudie 2018*. Leipzig: Vistas Verlag.
- ⁵⁰ Marne, Personal Interview.
- ⁵¹ See Lobato, *Netflix Nations*, 139.
- ⁵² Manuel Nunez Sanches (2018, November 1), Der TV-Markt im Oktober: ZDF dominiert und versagt zugleich, ProSieben kommt RTL etwas näher. *Quotenmeter.de*. www.quotenmeter.de/n/104894/der-tv-markt-im-oktober-zdf-dominiert-und-versagt-zugleich-prosieben-kommt-rtl-etwas-naeher.
- ⁵³ Beate Engel, Mai, Lothar, & Müller, Thorsten (2018), Massenkommunikation trends 2018: Intermediale Nutzungsportfolios. *Media Perspektiven*, 7–8, 340; Beate Frees, Kupferschmitt, Thomas, & Müller, Thorsten (2019), ARD/ZDF-Massenkommunikation trends 2019: Non-lineare Mediennutzung nimmt zu. *Media Perspektiven*, 7–8, 318.
- ⁵⁴ Carolin Ströbele et al. (2018, January 14), Die besten TV-Serien im Januar. *Zeit Online* www.zeit.de/kultur/film/2018-01/binge-watching-young-sheldon-mcmafia?page=2#comments.

- ⁵⁵ Lobato, *Netflix Nations*, 157.
- ⁵⁶ Jenke & Vonderau, Germany.
- ⁵⁷ Marne, Personal Interview.
- ⁵⁸ Göbel-Stolz, On-demand television: The business of U.S. TV program sales in Germany.
- ⁵⁹ Lisa Priller-Gebhardt (2018, September 18), TV im Kampf gegen Amazon und Netflix: Die neuen Plattformen könnten als Brandbeschleuniger fungieren. *W&V*. www.wuv.de/medien/die_neuen_plattformen_koennten_als_brandbeschleuniger_fungieren.
- ⁶⁰ Marne, Personal Interview.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁶² *Ibid.*
- ⁶³ Lotz, *We now disrupt this broadcast*, 177.
- ⁶⁴ Timo Niemeier (2019, December 2), TVNow wird künftig von einer Doppelspitze geleitet. *Dwdl.de*. www.dwdl.de/nachrichten/75203/tvnow_wird_kuenftig_von_einer_doppelspitze_geleitet/.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁶ Kurt Sagatz (2019, May 26), Späte Aufholjagd: Deutsche TV-Sender nehmen Netflix & Co. ins Visier. *Der Tagesspiegel*. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/medien/spaete-aufholjagd-deutsche-tv-sender-nehmen-netflix-und-co-ins-visier/24383646.html>.
- ⁶⁷ Joan Kristin Bleicher (2018, July 1), Reality TV in Deutschland: Dein Leben–Unser Fernsehen. *Der Tagesspiegel*. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/medien/reality-tv-in-deutschland-dein-leben-unser-fernsehen/22755870.html>.
- ⁶⁸ Lobato, *Netflix Nations*, 138.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.
- ⁷⁰ Thomas Tuma, & Bialek, Catrin (2020, January 26). Bernd Reichart im Interview: RTL Sichert Sich Umfangreiches Fußball-Rechtepaket–‘Wir Wollen Flinker und Mutiger Werden’. *Handelsblatt.com*. <https://www.handelsblatt.com/unternehmen/it-medien/bernd-reichart-im-interview-rtl-sichert-sich-umfangreiches-fussball-rechtepaket-wir-wollen-flinker-und-mutiger-werden/25469648.html>.

Bibliography

- Bruun, H. (2020). From scheduling to trans-programming. *Media, Culture and Society*, online first, 1–16.
- Castro, D., & Cascajosa, C. (2020). From Netflix to Moviestar+: How subscription video-on-demand services have transformed Spanish TV Production. *JCMS*, 59(3), 154–160. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cj.2020.0019>
- Davis, C., & Zboralska, E. (2017). Transnational over-the-top media distribution as a business and policy disruptor: The case of Netflix in Canada. *Journal of Media Innovations*, 4(1), 4–25. <https://doi.org/10.5617/jmi.v4i1.2423>

- Frizzoni, B. (2014). Zwischen trash-TV und quality-TV: Wertediskurse zu serieller Unterhaltung. In F. Kelleter (Ed.), *Populäre Serialität: Narration–evolution–Distinktion* (pp. 339–352). Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag.
- Göbel-Stolz, B. (2014). Public industry: The commercialization of public broadcasting. In M. Hartwig, E. Keitel & G. Süß (Eds.), *Media economies: Perspectives on American cultural practices* (pp. 79–100). Trier: WVT.
- Göbel-Stolz, B. (2015). On-demand television: The business of U.S. TV Program Sales in Germany Annual Meeting of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Montreal, Canada.
- Havens, T., Lotz, A. D., & Tinic, S. (2009). Critical media industry studies: A research approach. *Communication, Culture and Critique*, 2(2), 234–253. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2009.01037.x>
- Jenke, M., & Vonderau, P. (2017, August). Germany. *Global internet TV consortium*. <http://global-internet-tv.com/netflix-country-reports/germany/>
- Johnson, C. (2019). *Online TV*. London: Routledge.
- Krauß, F. (2018a). Im Angesicht der “Qualitätsserie”: Produktionskulturen in der Deutschen Fernsehserienindustrie. *Navigationen–Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturwissenschaften*, 18(2), 47–66.
- Krauß, F. (2018b). “Quality series” and their production cultures: Transnational discourses within the German television industry. *Series. International Journal of TV Serial Narratives*, 4(2), 47–59.
- Krauß, F. (2020). When German series go global: Industry discourse on the period drama Deutschland and its transnational circulation. *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture*, 9(17), 158–169. <https://doi.org/10.18146/view.212>
- Llamas-Rodriguez, J. (2020). Luis Miguel: La serie, Class-Based Collective Memory, and Streaming Television in Mexico. *JCMS*, 59(3), 137–143. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cj.2020.0035>
- Lobato, R. (2019). *Netflix nations: The geography of digital distribution*. New York: New York University Press.
- Lotz, A. D. (2018). *We now disrupt this broadcast: How cable transformed television and the Internet revolutionized it all*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Lotz, A. D., Lobato, R., & Thomas, J. (2018). Internet-distributed television research: A provocation. *Media Industries Journal*, 5(2), 35–47. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mij.15031809.0005.203>
- Mittell, J.. (2015). *Complex TV: The poetics of contemporary television storytelling*. New York: New York University Press.
- Rios, S., & Scarlata, A. (2018). Locating SVOD in Australia and Mexico: Stan and Blim contend with Netflix. *Critical Studies in Television*, 13(4), 475–490. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749602018798158>

- Stemers, J. (2016). International sales of U.K. Television Content: Change and Continuity in “the Space in Between” Production and Consumption. *Television and New Media*, 17(8), 734–753. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476416653481>
- Tryon, C. (2015). TV got better: Netflix’s original programming strategies and binge viewing. *Media Industries*, 2(2), 104–116.
- Turner, G. (2018). Netflix and the reconfiguration of the Australian television market. *Media Industries Journal*, 5(2), 129–142. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mij.15031809.0005.208>
- Turner, G., & Tay, Jinna (Eds.). (2009). *Television studies after TV: Understanding television in the post-broadcast era*. London: Routledge.
- Wayne, M. L. (2020). Global streaming platforms and national pay-television markets: A case study of Netflix and multi-channel providers in Israel. *Communication Review*, 23(1), 29–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2019.1696615>