

RESHAPING PRODUCTION PRACTICES IN THE AGE OF GLOBAL STREAMING

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Abstract: *In the last decade, television and cinema markets have undergone significant production transformations driven by the rise of global streaming platforms. The rapid expansion of Video-on-Demand (VOD) and Over-the-Top (OTT) services has introduced new challenges as media industries seek strategies to secure content and reach increasingly fragmented audiences. This article offers a radiograph of emerging production practices shaped by the evolution of television and the mass adoption of streaming. Within this digital framework, traditional broadcasting patterns are reexamined and reconfigured, revealing new trends that define the contemporary global media landscape.*

Key words: *streaming platforms, platformization, television production, global media, audience practices.*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the rise of global streaming platforms has accelerated the reconfiguration of audiovisual industries, prompting scholars (see Chalaby, 2023; Lombato, 2017) to reconsider how television is defined, produced, and circulated. Rather than representing a simple technological upgrade, this shift reflects a deeper structural transformation in which platform logics such as datafication, algorithmic curation, and multi-sided market dynamics, reshape the conditions of cultural production. As streaming services expand their global reach, they increasingly influence not only audience practices but also the creative, economic, and institutional frameworks that underpin contemporary media systems.

This article examines the shift from broadcast television to platform-based media, showing how streaming services reorganize viewing habits, blur the boundaries between television and online video, and introduce new industrial logics that reshape how audiovisual content is produced, circulated, and valued. Taken together, these developments show that streaming platforms function not merely as distribution channels but as infrastructural actors that reorganize the cultural, economic, and institutional foundations of television.

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2. From Television to Online Platforms

The 2010s marked a decisive shift in media ecosystems, as emerging digital technologies brought television and the internet into a shared operational space. This convergence produced a hybridized television economy in which platforms, apps, and on-demand services sought to meet audiences' growing appetite for flexible visual entertainment. Consequently, scholarly work expanded significantly, addressing the influence of new media environments on viewers and on the broader media market (Osor, 2016; Auletta, 2014; Bachman, 2013), patterns of television and digital media consumption (Espinoza Mata, Polanco & Tusev, 2017), the circulation of content across digital and broadcast infrastructures (Chalaby, 2006; Waisbord, 2004), and transformations in media history (Bastiansen, 2008).

The rise of internet distributed television introduced a new set of industrial logics and business practices, offering fertile ground for academic inquiry. As broadband infrastructures expanded, online delivery models moved from experimental to mainstream—reaching widespread adoption in UK by 2008 and in the United States by 2010. This shift reconfigured the television experience by decoupling viewing from fixed broadcast schedules and enabling on-demand access across devices. For audiences, this flexibility represented a significant enhancement of television's usability and appeal, signaling a broader cultural transition toward personalized, time-shifting modes of media consumption. Emerging industry trends distinguish between two related but distinct services: Video-on-Demand (VOD) and Over-the-Top (OTT) delivery. The boundary between them is subtle, and for those unfamiliar with the video sector, the terminology can easily become confusing. OTT services, which once relied on satellite or cable transmission, now operate via the internet, enabling live-streamed communication through platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Skype, or WhatsApp. VOD, by contrast, represents the inverse of traditional broadcast scheduling, allowing viewers to access content whenever they choose, independent of fixed airtimes.

Beyond the diversification of OTT and VOD models, streaming platforms have also distinguished themselves through their ability to scale rapidly across global markets while simultaneously localizing their catalogues. As Chalaby (2024) notes, platforms expand internationally at "breakneck speed," leveraging cloud infrastructures and global value chains to reach hundreds of territories within short timeframes. Yet, as Lobato (2017) emphasizes, this global expansion is always uneven: catalogues remain shaped by territorial licensing, regulatory constraints, and local content strategies. This combination of global scale and local differentiation has become a defining feature of the platform era, allowing streamers to operate as both transnational distributors and regionally embedded media actors.

Nevertheless, OTT and VOD are increasingly functioning in parallel. This alignment reflects the broader shift of television providers toward new technological infrastructures, which enables them to deliver services that respond to emerging market expectations (Lotz, 2014; Ulin, 2014). In addition to cable and satellite operators, telecommunications companies now offer television services, attracting consumers through bundled packages that combine multiple offerings at competitive prices

(Auletta, 2014). Today, the landscape of Video-on-Demand includes a wide range of formats: SVOD (subscription video on demand), TVOD (transactional video on demand) with its subcategories EST (electronic sell-through) and DTR (download-to-rent), AVOD/BVOD (advertising-financed or broadcaster video on demand), PVOD (premium video on demand), as well as numerous hybrid models that continue to emerge. These business models represent contemporary extensions of the classical modes of accessing visual entertainment, namely television and cinema.

These distinctions are not merely technical; they signal a deeper reorganization of the television industry as providers adapt to platform-based infrastructures and recalibrate their strategies to meet evolving market expectations.

3. Redefining Platforms in the Media Landscape

A key challenge in this evolving media landscape is defining the boundaries of television within this rapidly evolving media environment. The distinction between film and television becomes increasingly blurred as platforms like Netflix present both formats together in their interfaces and release films directly online without theatrical distribution. Equally ambiguous is the line separating “television” from the vast array of “video” circulating on social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok, where individuals act as their own producers, creating, posting, and sharing visual content with global audiences. These video sharing platforms host a growing population of creators whose work is often marked by precarious labor conditions and ongoing struggles for sustainable income (Poell et al., 2022). At the same time, broadcasters and sports organizations make extensive use of these platforms to engage fans and generate interest around their events (Chalaby, 2022).

The precarity experienced by creators on these platforms is closely tied to the governance mechanisms that structure platform labor. As Poell et al. (2022) argue, creators’ visibility and income are mediated by algorithmic ranking systems, opaque monetization rules, and shifting platform policies that determine which content is promoted, demonetized, or deprioritized. These governance structures create a volatile working environment in which creators must constantly adapt to algorithmic changes and platform expectations, making precarity a direct consequence of platform level decision-making. These dynamics illustrate how platform governance reshapes not only labor conditions but also the broader boundaries of what counts as television in the digital era.

In this context, the boundary between technological innovation and traditional media becomes increasingly difficult to delineate. Cunningham and Craig (2019) propose a useful way of addressing this issue by distinguishing between social media entertainment and the more established industrial sector of audiovisual production, particularly in relation to YouTube creators. More broadly, the challenge reflects the wider digitalization of media industries, which has led to a proliferation of audiovisual distribution devices and platforms. These developments stem from the technological advances of the 21st century, which have enabled the widespread use of gadgets such as smartphones, tablets, and gaming consoles, and have fostered new patterns of media

consumption across social media, crowdsourcing environments, and VOD platforms.

The expansion of Video-on-Demand platforms has enabled users to access a wide range of audiovisual content instantly, reshaping established viewing habits. As a result, practices such as “binge-watching” and “marathoning” have become especially prevalent among younger audiences (Mikos, 2016). Research by Mikos (2016), Frolova (2017), Baker (2017), and Perks (2015) shows that younger viewers tend to “prefer linear content” (Podara et al., 2019, p. 70), yet often “get annoyed” when required to skip frequent advertisements, as is common on platforms like YouTube. Patterns of online consumption are also shaped by variables such as gender, age cohort, education, occupation, and access to technology (D’heer & Courtois, 2014). Overall, online viewing of television content is most widespread among individuals under 30, while significantly less common among adults over 60 (Bury, 2018). In mature media markets such as the United Kingdom, young adults now spend substantially more time on social media and streaming services than on linear television (Ofcom, 2022).

While these shifts in viewing habits illustrate how audiences navigate an increasingly fragmented media environment, they also reshape the conditions under which audiovisual content is produced. The same digital infrastructures that enable flexible consumption simultaneously to generate new forms of labor and economic precarity for creators operating on platform-based ecosystems.

4. Digital Television vs Streaming Platforms

Understanding the migration from broadcast television to online services also requires situating these developments within the broader process of platformization. Van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal (2018) conceptualize platforms as sociotechnical ecosystems that reorganize cultural and economic activity through datafication, algorithmic selection, and infrastructural integration. Their framework helps explain why streaming services do not simply distribute content differently but reshape the institutional environment in which television operates.

The digitalization era has generated an unprecedented proliferation of channels and television content, much of which has gradually migrated to streaming platforms that “not only license television series, but also documentaries and children’s programs” (Mikos, 2019, p. 11). Unlike earlier periods when television was defined primarily through cable, satellite, and broadcast signals, the 2010s mark a phase in which television becomes deeply intertwined with internet distribution. As Gray and Lotz (2019, p. 10) argue, it is essential to recognize that these new technologies point toward the future of the medium, while also remaining attentive to the institutional structures that continue to persist. This shift echoes earlier transformations: during the 1990s, “the center of gravity of American popular television shifted away from the broadcast networks and towards the basic cable sector,” a moment that Reeves, Rogers, and Epstein (2007, p. 83) describe as “probably the final moment in the age of television.” Their observation is partly affirmed by the rise of streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon, which have entered the marketplace to “jostle for their position as providers of original TV content” (Akass, 2015, p. 744).

Today, the social significance of digital television continues to expand. “Traditional media has been really successful throughout the years, even though it needs to make some adjustments in order to survive this new digital era” (Espinoza Mata, Polanco, Tusev, 2017, p. 130). Despite repeated predictions of its decline, classic television remains highly present (Mikos, 2019, p. 11). At the same time, television-industry research increasingly examines how digitization reshapes long-standing industrial practices. The early 2010s saw millions of television programs circulating globally, contributing to a more niche-oriented media environment (Chaney, 2019). In this context, it becomes plausible to argue that “all types of media are born digital” today (Bondebjerg, 2017, p. 23).

5. Cultural Production Practices in the Age of Global Streaming

For television studies, an important point of debate concerns how to conceptualize internet distributed television. Lotz (2017) argues that services such as Netflix or CBS access should not be understood as a “new medium,” but rather as a new technological infrastructure for distributing television. Similarly, Johnson (2017) situates internet-distributed television within a broader video ecosystem, emphasizing its interdependence with other digital forms. In the European context, Esser (2016) highlights the significant cultural influence exerted by private U.S. networks and notes that the recent expansion of TV format trade has contributed to the emergence of large European production groups. As Esser (2016: 3586) observes, “the leading traditional U.S. media players have also acquired the largest of the newly formed and rapidly grown European production groups.” This dynamic has facilitated an intensified flow of formats across continents, contributing to the increasing global circulation of television adaptations in recent years.

Although streaming platforms create their own productions annually, a large part of their libraries is based on old television programs and series. Gilbert (2019) draws attention to the risk associated with original productions, which become financially expensive, and emphasizes that television productions become the salvation for streaming platforms in the context in which they become “marketable commodities” that bring profit. The transition from television to online distribution platforms represents a fundamental change in the media landscape, which has managed to overturn industry and audience practices. If television is based on the rebroadcasting of programs and the viewer becomes passively gratified, then streaming platforms rethink gratification by giving the viewer the ability to search and choose what they want to see (Robinson, 2017; Gilbert, 2019).

Increasingly, streaming platforms rely on data driven commissioning practices that shape both the development and creative direction of new productions. Platforms draw on granular performance metrics—completion rates, viewer retention curves, genre preferences—to inform decisions about which projects to greenlight and how stories should be structured. As Idiz (2025) shows, this data-informed approach can constrain creative autonomy by encouraging producers to align narratives with platform-identified audience expectations. Similarly, Asmar et al. (2025) note that

platform-level discourses about diversity and global appeal often translate into specific editorial guidelines that influence casting, pacing, and thematic choices.

Across Europe, the SVOD platforms with the largest subscriber bases are U.S.-based companies such as Netflix and Amazon, a situation that effectively integrates the European audiovisual market into the broader U.S. entertainment economy (Vlassis, 2020). Bondebjerg (2016, p. 5) observes that increasing global competition requires more robust cross-national collaboration across platforms and between industry actors that had not previously worked together, noting a persistent tendency toward mergers and integration among media producers. Within this landscape, the geographical patterns of format trade identified by Chalaby (2012) and Bourdon (2012) continue to be shaped predominantly by producers and distributors from Europe and the United States, even though formats can, in principle, be created and circulated by content creators anywhere in the world.

6. Conclusion

Contemporary media industries operate within a rapidly evolving and highly competitive environment that is reshaping established structures of audiovisual production and distribution. Understanding the strategies adopted by streaming services; alongside the roles of key industry actors, emerging market dynamics, and the implications for legacy media; enables scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to better navigate this shifting landscape. As streaming platforms continue to expand their global reach, sustained innovation and institutional adaptability will remain essential for responding to ongoing transformations in the sector.

Understanding these transformations requires sustained attention to the interplay between global platform strategies, local industry practices, and evolving audience behaviors. Future research must therefore continue to examine how platformization restructures cultural production across different regions and sectors, and what this means for the future of media diversity and creative labor.

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