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Review paper

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## **THE IMPACT OF NETFLIX AND VIDEO STREAMING SERVICES ON CHANGES IN DISTRIBUTION, PRODUCTION, AND AUDIENCE OF TELEVISION SERIES**

This paper analyzes key changes brought by video streaming services, with a specific focus on Netflix, in the realm of television series. Through the lens of technological determinism, media ecology theories, and the Toronto School of Communication Theory, transformations in the production, distribution, and consumption of serial content are explored. The paper highlights how digital distribution has reshaped the geographic and temporal boundaries of traditional television, enabling global access and personalized algorithm-based recommendations. Changes have also emerged in production, where high-budget series and new narrative formats have become the standard. Finally, the study explores the impact of streaming on audience behavior, including binge-watching practices and the creation of globally recognizable cultural products. The paper concludes that these changes have transformed not only the media landscape but also social practices related to series consumption, indicating a continuous process of evolution that warrants further investigation.

**Key words:** streaming services; Netflix; television series; digital distribution; algorithms; media production; binge-watching; technological determinism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Technological determinism, as a theoretical framework for studying media and social phenomena and changes, has often been criticized as an overly simplistic and outdated approach (Kline 2015). However, rapid technological innovations and changes over the past two decades have brought this approach back into relevance. According to technological determinism, the available technology and its logic directly determine how almost every segment of society operates. This theory, most prominently featured in media studies through the Toronto School of Communication Theory and approaches framed under Media Ecology theories, can be summarized by the famous statement of one of its most prominent proponents, Marshall McLuhan: “The medium is the message” (McLuhan 1964). The idea behind this statement is that in any form of communication, the primary importance is not placed on the content of the message itself, but on the medium or the media through which it is transmitted. The internal logic and operational nature of this intermediary are transferred onto the content, the communication flow, the effects, and even the communicators, thereby transforming all of these elements according to the logic of the medium.

This manifestation of technological determinism and its more developed and similar variations has become particularly noticeable in the broader societal context with the development of digital technologies and the media associated with them. Although considered outdated by some theorists, this school of thought has been chosen because it clearly and precisely explains the causal relationship between the emergence and popularity of certain technological trends and the subsequent transformations in the media and broader social spheres. Compared to other approaches, such as political economy of communication and platform studies, the selected theories provide a specific focus on how media shape social practices and cultural patterns, which is essential for understanding changes in media systems. These technologies and media have altered communication patterns and the functioning of modern society as a whole. Numerous studies examine the changes brought about by digital technologies in areas such as communication (Car, Osmančević 2024), attention (Ra et al. 2018), methods of information dissemination (Bennett 2007), social organizations and systems (Radić 2023), and business practices (Pavlović, Milosavljević 2017). However, it is important to note that the digital world cannot be viewed as a homogeneous, unified whole. Within it, various segments continue to develop and further alter different aspects of society, media, and communication. For instance, the transformation from WEB 1.0 to WEB 2.0 most certainly led to more significant social changes than the

advent of WEB 1.0 itself, as it opened up possibilities for interaction in the internet environment and the creation and uploading of user-generated content (Naik, Shivalingaiah 2008). This led to the emergence of phenomena such as blogging, citizen journalism, and social networks. Furthermore, each of these phenomena had broader practical societal implications that changed the way we perceive and interact with the world.

One of these technological changes is the development of audio and video streaming technology, which allows “online access to content, that is, access to content without the need for permanent data transfer to the user’s device, regardless of the technological means that ensure this transfer is avoided or managed subsequently” (Maciejewski, Fischer, Roginska 2014: 10). This now taken-for-granted feature of the digital world represents a significant shift compared to earlier methods of accessing audio and video content on the internet, which often involved downloading these materials for later reproduction. One of the most noticeable changes has been the emergence of specialized streaming services such as Netflix, YouTube, and Spotify, which are focused on the free or subscription-based distribution of content in real-time.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate, primarily through the example of Netflix, how the emergence of these services and streaming technology has impacted the realm of television series, both in terms of their distribution, changing viewing habits, and user approaches, as well as in terms of production and the transformation of the structure of this type of content. To understand these changes, it is first necessary to explain the traditional approach to television series.

## **2. TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO THE PHENOMENON, DEVELOPMENT, AND CLASSIFICATION OF TELEVISION SERIE**

Television series, as a genre, have often been neglected in media and cultural studies despite their long history and widespread impact (Simeunović Bajić 2015; Đurković 2005). Scholars who have addressed this format have done so from various perspectives, leading to a range of interpretations. In English-language research, terms like TV series, TV serials, TV shows, and TV dramas are often used interchangeably to describe scripted television content with a narrative structure that spans multiple episodes (Stanković 2018; Himes & Thompson 2007; Davison 2013; Richardson 2020). Some scholars, such as David McQueen, differentiate between “series” (where

each episode has a self-contained story) and “serials” (where the narrative continues from one episode to the next) (Mek Kvin 2000: 101). However, this distinction is not always seen as relevant, with some scholars, including Nataša Simeunović Bajić (2015), arguing that such classifications do not meaningfully apply in all cases because this terminology relies on and depends on social context, industry, and external frameworks, and no classification is definitive and necessary for a fundamental understanding of series.

Further complicating the matter, terms like “TV show” are overly broad and can refer to unscripted formats like variety shows or reality TV, which do not follow the narrative structure typical of TV series. “TV drama” is often considered a subgenre of TV series (Carrasco Campos 2010), specifically referring to scripted drama content produced and broadcast on television. Despite these terminological debates, there is broad agreement that TV series are distinct from other forms of television content, particularly in terms of their serialized nature and the complexities involved in their production and consumption.

Television series evolved from early radio soap operas and serialized novels, particularly in the years following World War II. These adaptations were initially simple and low-budget, with formats like situational comedies and anthology series becoming prevalent. In the 1950s, the first Yugoslav TV series, *Servisna stanica* (RTS 2022), marked the beginning of TV series production in the region. The early formats were simple, with episodes standing alone, a format that persisted into the 1960s, often referred to as the “golden age” of television series. This period saw a dominance of standalone episodes and relatively simple storytelling.

The 1980s marked the beginning of a “second golden age” for TV series, characterized by more serialized narratives, complex characters, and larger budgets. This shift allowed for more intricate storytelling and high production values, attracting Hollywood talent to television (Zagalo & Barker 2006: 1). The 1990s saw an increase in cable TV offerings, further improving production quality and enabling TV series to reach new heights of creativity and popularity.

As TV series evolved, they also diversified in terms of genre. Initially rooted in film genres, the longer runtime and flexible narrative structures of television allowed for greater experimentation, leading to hybrid genres like sitcoms and dramedies (Mansour 2019: 30). However, the fluidity of genre classification presents a challenge for scholars, especially given that many TV series blur the lines between genres or evolve over time, defying simple categorization (Vidmar Jovanović 2020). For instance, Ángel Carrasco Campos’ classification system divides TV content into

movies, series, and miniseries, further subdividing series into dramas (e.g., soap operas, telenovelas) and comedies (e.g., sitcoms, dramedies) (Campos 2010: 184). On the other hand, Rojas-Lamoren et al. (2021) have proposed more specific subgenres within TV drama, such as crime series, action series, and teen dramas, though challenges remain in defining each category fully.

The difficulty of categorizing TV series is compounded by their nature as ever-evolving forms. Early classifications were feasible, but as series have grown more complex, with blending elements of different genres and narratives that evolve over multiple seasons, it becomes harder to neatly fit them into predefined categories (Levy 2019). In addition to genre classification, TV series are defined by their serialized format and their specific creation for television. The production of a TV series follows a multi-stage process, from concept development and pitching to the production of a pilot episode, audience testing, and final production, which includes casting, filming, editing, and marketing (Levy 2019).

TV series have historically been a social activity, often viewed as a shared experience that fosters socialization and family bonding, particularly in contrast to the more expensive movie-going experience. This accessibility has made TV series powerful cultural products that play significant roles in socialization and the transmission of political and ethical messages (Đurković 2005; Nærland 2018). These characteristics were especially pronounced in traditional TV series. However, the rise of streaming platforms has radically transformed the nature of TV series, amplifying the serialized format while introducing new patterns of viewing and production that are more flexible and tailored to on-demand consumption (Zagalo & Barker 2006; Stanković 2018).

## **2.1. Changes in the Distribution of Serial Content**

The real question is whether TV series in the streaming world can even be called “television series”. This dilemma holds not only semantic significance but also practical implications, as the constraints of television broadcasting no longer apply to them. This became evident during the first phase of streaming services’ operation, thanks to the different distribution of content. The distribution model introduced by Netflix and similar services has impacted both the spatial and temporal parameters in relation to series, in several ways.

Traditional TV series required viewers to be in a specific place (in front of a television) at a designated time. However, the advantages of the new media supporting

streaming services allowed users to choose where and on what device they would watch a particular series. Every laptop, desktop, tablet, console, or smartphone became, alongside the television, a place where users could access the service and watch a series, no matter their location, as long as there was an internet connection. This feature, stemming from the networked nature and convergence of new media, has stripped much of the monopoly on series distribution from television channels. Yet, the spatial change does not end there, as Ramon Lobato notes that the internet has not simply linearized and one-directionally altered the legacy of television, but added a new complexity to the existing geography of distribution, especially by diminishing the significance of national or other borders (Lobato 2019). In other words, users from any part of the world where the service is available no longer have to wait for a particular TV station in their country or their cable provider to acquire the rights to a series — they can simply watch it via Netflix. In October 2022, the service offered over 17,000 titles (Cook 2022). Importantly, this type of distribution also involves subtitles and dubbing in many languages worldwide. In the early phase, content providers themselves ensured subtitles, but today, when Netflix produces its own series, a small army (over 200 translators per series) is dedicated to the subtitling, with additional external collaborators for many translations (Lobato 2019). Thanks to all these specifics of digital distribution, for the first time, there is no “discrimination” when it comes to accessing and properly accessing series. At the moment a series appears on the service, it can be accessed by an American from their console at home or a Serbian from their phone at work. True, Netflix has not completely ruled out the possibility of restricting access to certain content in specific regions or nations. Since each device that accesses the internet has its geographical location and IP address, the service can block access to certain content according to licensing laws or other circumstances. This approach allows Netflix to ensure that each region, typically defined by national borders, has access solely to content for which it holds licensed rights. As a result, when a subscriber travels across international borders, the available content library adjusts accordingly (Alvarez León 2019). This is often the case when a local distributor or TV station acquires the rights to broadcast a series offered by Netflix, and in agreement with them, Netflix blocks other ways of watching. Still, the majority of available series and movies are identical on a global scale.

In addition to the spatial fluidity of access, the temporal dimension of fluidity in distribution is also crucial. Here, the focus is primarily on the fact that subscribers can watch a particular program at any time but also pause, rewind, and review it an unlimited number of times. However, when it comes to distribution itself, an ex-

tremely significant fact is that content is no longer necessarily distributed episodically, one episode per week, but entire seasons of series are made available at once and remain available permanently. This possibility has many consequences, one of the most significant being the phenomenon named after this platform — the “Netflix effect”. The term was introduced by theorist Sidneye Matrix to explain the impact that Netflix’s distribution system has on the increased popularity of certain content, actors, genres, and the changes in viewing habits of TV series (Matrix 2014). A good illustration of the importance of this distribution model are globally popular series like *Breaking Bad* and *Mad Men*, which, after a few seasons of airing on television, became available on Netflix. As a result, they became much more popular, with many users who had never watched them before getting familiar with the entire storyline in a relatively short time and eagerly awaiting new seasons on the streaming platform, significantly boosting their popularity (Biesen 2020). It is fascinating how a TV series can be originally conceived and produced to be broadcast on a conventional or cable channel for an hour once a week at a set time with commercial breaks, but there are viewers who never watched it on conventional television (Biesen 2020).

Such a possibility of quickly catching up on missed content would be unimaginable in the world of traditional television distribution, and it greatly influences the future and development of a particular series. In fact, the term “possibility” is not the best one, as whether the next episode airs or not depends not only on the user but on Netflix’s system itself, which automatically moves on to the next episode after a certain number of seconds (the post-play function), creating a continuous flow (Jenner 2018), similar to what Raymond Williams spoke about in relation to television. Of course, the user can always choose to pause or stop the playback. The authors argue that due to the shift from strict schedules and the ability for content to be viewed in the amount and time desired by the user, it is no longer accurate to speak about “television series” at all, as the episodic nature of the narrative ceases to be a relevant criterion (Radošinska 2017). However, although all of this is true, due to the fact that these programs can still be broadcast in episodic formats on television without major problems and that there are certain genre characteristics that remain shared, it is still reasonable to talk about them as “series” (Lima, Moreira & Calazans 2015).

The last significant change regarding series distribution concerns genre specifics — more precisely, the definitions related to the content available and why these become highly important. As previously mentioned, the genre in traditional distribution was relatively easy to define, but the methodology of classifying and positioning series in the streaming world is much more complex. In fact, it is not only about general



genre classifications of series and movies, but a series of labels that describe them more closely. According to current data, in addition to 14 main genre categories, there are over 4,000 different category codes for all content on this service (Moore 2023). In fact, based on the data about which of many specific genre and subgenre tags follow, Netflix has defined around 2,000 taste communities, based on which it segments its viewers (Shatuc 2019). The detailed genre definition is a significant change from the distribution perspective precisely because the most beneficial system is one that can be considered a type of internal personal distributor for each Netflix user — the algorithm (Pajkovic 2022). Specifically, it is a whole system, a set of interconnected algorithms that exchange data and actions to ensure more precise personalization (Gomez-Uribe & Hunt 2015). It communicates, recommends, directs users toward various content based on their activity data, with the main network it uses in this process being the network of genres and subgenres to which each piece of content is meticulously assigned (Varela 2017). In this way, it much more efficiently replaces posters, trailers, critics, or friends' recommendations. Summarizing all these roles into one and personally guiding the user to content that aligns with their taste, it definitively plays a micro-distributor role, connecting the user to content that, although available on the service, would likely remain undiscovered. This is particularly important when considering the competition and abundance in the world of series in the age of streaming services, on one hand, and the fact that viewers of serial and TV content do not spend more time on this activity than they did before (Frey 2021). The role of the algorithm is, in fact, the reduction of the tyranny of choice that Renata Salecl (2011) describes, explaining it as a problem of modern society in which we are given the freedom to choose what we want to do, consume, or use, yet this environment of hyperproduction and excessive choice leaves us paralyzed and highly anxious.

Many public media services in Europe, such as the BBC in the United Kingdom or ARD in Germany, have responded to these changes by developing specific strategies to adapt to digital transformation. For example, the BBC launched iPlayer, a streaming platform that provides flexible access to content. In Central and Eastern Europe, similar efforts, like HRTi in Croatia or RTS Planeta in Serbia, emphasize the importance of localized content in combating the global dominance of platforms like Netflix.

Each of these changes in how media products are distributed to users via Netflix and similar services has inevitably altered the habits, needs, and desires that users have.



## 2.2. Changes in User Engagement

The identity of television as a family medium and the definition of watching TV series as a form of family activity has been completely changed by the rise of online streaming. This transition began with the practice of purchasing multiple TVs within a household and introducing cable or satellite television, which allowed greater freedom in selecting and watching content for each family member. Online television has transferred TV content to portable personal devices, allowing each individual to independently watch what interests them (Radošinská 2017). This trend has been further complicated by algorithmic methods of personalizing the experience, based on the (usually correct) assumption that all data from a subscriber's account — such as habits, desires, and genre preferences — are about the activities of an individual, not a collective.

Netflix does not structure its subscription model around a specific demographic or “prestige audience”. Instead, it provides an extensive digital “warehouse” of content. On one hand, Netflix's approach appears to depend significantly on users' willingness to curate their own “schedules” based on their preferences, including content type, viewing time, and method of consumption (Zündel 2019). Thus, what was once a family activity, watching TV series, becomes a deeply personal experience tailored to the individual, and this experience is much more immersive than the collective one. Of course, this is primarily because watching content alone allows for greater concentration, fewer distractions, and less noise, but also because the entire interface and recommendation system on the service are designed in a way that best suits each individual user. Moreover, Ana Cabral Martins points out that this immersion is especially high because it is active due to complete control over the experience, such as when and where to watch, pause, skip, or stop (2019).

However, while the experience is fully individualized at the micro level, there are concerns that it is rapidly becoming standardized on a global level. The general availability, thanks to new distribution methods, raises the question of the origin of the content being distributed. While some authors highlight the positive aspects of diversification, glocalization, and the fact that users have the opportunity to watch series from distant countries (Higson 2021), this mostly applies to audiences in the United States (Pekárková 2019), who predominantly watch domestic content. On the other hand, Amanda Lotz (2022) and her collaborators point out that there is a danger of a certain type of cultural imperialism in which American serial programs dominate globally, and that the rule that every audience watches content that is linguistically,

culturally, and historically close to them no longer holds in the era of digital distribution (Lotz et al. 2022). This is further supported by data showing that in 2021, 69% of the content was in English (Stoll 2022), while in the following year, 8 of the 10 most-watched series and 9 of the 10 most-watched movies on Netflix were from English-speaking regions, mostly from the U.S. (Tassi 2022). Since language is one of the determinants in the algorithmic recommendation system, the most-watched content (those in English) will appear more frequently in recommendations, reducing the significance of the proportion of content in various languages.

One related issue is the ability of algorithms to trap users in a particular type of filter bubble by directing them toward predefined preferences. This happens especially often with Netflix's original content, as the company strives to promote it as much as possible on the platform (Zündel 2019). Therefore, one of the more significant changes discussed by many authors is the change in audience taste (Esack 2017). According to a study by Frey, this is reflected in the inability of the algorithm to understand the current emotional state of a person watching a particular program that they would not normally enjoy, especially for users who like to watch a variety of genres (Frey 2021). The reasons for this are that the algorithmic system "constructs taste within a 'social vacuum,' relying exclusively on data generated within and by the recommendation system, and it undertakes the 'quantification of taste' by 'matching' users with content through endless attributes, creating taste communities and subgenres" (Gaw 2019 according to Pajkovic 2022).

This problem can become even more complex over time when, through such directed activities, data analysis leads to conclusions about themes, attitudes, genres, and user desires, determining which series and genres will be suppressed due to lower demand and which will be emphasized. The result may be that those who watch less content will become fewer, while those suggested by the algorithm based on user activity will be more. This could eventually lead to the hypothetical total unification of the offering and the creation of a single, universal taste.

However, neither the device nor the place where users watch content, nor whether they do so alone, with a certain degree of immersion, is as significant a change as how they watch series, or how much they watch. The answer to this question is a direct consequence of the previously mentioned Netflix effect, which enabled subscribers to access series through binge-watching. The term originates from the English word "binge", meaning "an activity done in an extreme manner, especially the consumption of food, drink, or spending money" (Cambridge University Press, n.d.), and in the world of streaming media, it is often coined as binge-watching. It is most gen-

erally defined as the “practice of watching several episodes of a serialized program consecutively on a medium that is not linear television” (Jenner 2018: 109). As there are no limitations on how much content can be watched, and entire seasons are available at once, many subscribers have opted to watch a series continuously without stopping at the end of episodes. Of course, this practice did not originate with Netflix, as there were previously TV marathons, omnibus programs, or even VHS or DVD collections of certain series. However, Netflix, thanks to the vast amount of data it possesses about user activity, has determined that on weekends and during breaks, many subscribers watch episode after episode without long breaks, and decided to apply this to its new original series, which the audience quickly embraced (Chowdhury 2020). This move, which radically changed the way audiences watch serialized content by completely rejecting the weekly wait for a new episode, has made binge-watching synonymous with the Netflix experience (Zündel 2019) and with modern audience expectations for such content. The majority of users binge-watch at night alone (Steiner 2017), while group binge-watching is less stable, rarer, and much shorter (Zündel 2019), seeing it as a form of personal pleasure, reward, and relaxation, but also as addictive behavior to some extent (Steiner 2017), which can lead to feelings of shame, fatigue, exhaustion, and isolation (Pilipets 2019).

All these changes, along with many that have resulted from them, such as the “Netflix and chill” phenomenon (Netflix and chill), which refers to watching series on this service for intimate socializing, mostly among younger users (Pilipets 2019), have influenced serial production to a large extent, adjusting to the new audience in order to capture its maximum attention.

### **2.3. Changes in the Production of Serial Content**

A huge number of global subscribers and the growing popularity, status, and influence of Netflix and other video streaming services ensured that a large amount of money quickly flowed into this industry, allowing for more expensive and higher-quality productions. The six most expensive series of all time were created by streaming services in the last decade: two are Netflix’s (*Stranger Things*, *The Crown*), two come from HBO (*Game of Thrones*, *House of the Dragon*), one is from Disney (*WandaVision*), while the most expensive among them, costing \$58 million per episode, was produced by Amazon Prime (*The Lord of the Rings: Rings of Power*) (Ali Idrisoglu 2022). At the same time, thanks to stable monthly revenues combined with the help of algorithms, productions became much less financially risky (Osor 2016). More-

over, not only do actors benefit from their roles on a streaming service, as it provides a platform for further career advancement, as seen with Pedro Pascal or Rami Malek, but due to the money and popularity, many established stars and renowned directors have also transitioned to the TV series industry. Some of them include Steve Buscemi, Sylvester Stallone, Kevin Spacey, and J. J. Abrams... While in the era of traditional TV, it was easy to distinguish between a film and a TV series, the higher-quality production and the well-known cast together blur the line between films and series, especially in terms of visual presentation (Stanković 2018).

A significant part of the changes in TV series production has come from algorithms. Netflix's management emphasized that the first original series from the company, *House of Cards*, was created entirely as a product of algorithmic data analysis, which determined the content that users wanted (Osur 2016). While it is impossible to determine exactly how much user data influenced the creation and shaping of the series, and to what extent it is an exaggerated marketing myth (Frey 2021), examples like the series *Arrested Development* clearly demonstrate the influence that user behavior analysis has on the future of series production. This sitcom originally aired on Fox from 2003 to 2006 before it was canceled. However, when it became available on Netflix, and thanks to the Netflix effect that allowed for retroactive binge-watching, it was revealed that "the series has a distinct 'voice' and a loyal fan base but wasn't a big enough hit to be profitable in traditional TV broadcasting" (Smith Telang 2016: 146). Because Netflix can precisely target the group of users likely to watch the series, it decided to revive *Arrested Development* and produce two more seasons in 2013 and 2018 (Can 2022). Similar situations occurred with series like *Community*, which continued on Yahoo Screen, and *The Expanse*, which, after being canceled by SyFy, received three more seasons on Amazon Prime Video. These possibilities represent significant changes compared to traditional TV production, which lacked the resources, deep analysis, and ability to personalize and target niche audiences effectively.

However, it is precisely through examples like *Arrested Development* that we can observe some interesting transitions that separate streaming production from traditional TV production. While earlier episodes had a linear, relatively simple structure with stories that were self-contained within one episode (more in line with traditional series definitions), the new distribution and viewing methods on Netflix complicated the narrative structure, story dynamics, and character development. Netflix's fourth season raises the bar in reformulating the entire episode logic. Through the fourth season, we gradually learn the reasons why the Bluth family does not attend Lucille

Bluth's trial, in a series of overlapping narratives and timelines, rather than linear progression. As this structure becomes clearer, viewers quickly realize that each episode, when viewed in isolation, does not fully reveal its significance or how it fits into other narratives, creating a constant puzzle that invites viewers to piece it together throughout the entire season (Baker 2017). This is not an isolated case; series as a whole have become significantly more complex and different in the streaming realm. Simply put, since viewers can binge-watch entire seasons, there is a possibility of making the story more complex because viewers can comprehend it much deeper than if they were encountering it once a week for half an hour or an hour. This new structure eliminates the need for recap segments, reminders of important events from earlier episodes at the beginning of new ones, or even intro credits. Furthermore, since there are no advertisements, the viewer's attention and the narrative flow are uninterrupted (Buck, Plothe 2019), and the episode lasts as long as necessary to tell a complete story with much greater viewer immersion (Biesen 2020). "They are no longer tied to advertisers or TV broadcast schedules, and narratives can also break free from the tyranny of 21 or 42-minute episodes with built-in commercial breaks" (Buck, Plothe 2019: 2). Complex narratives, in this context, appear both as a possibility and a necessity, as linear, simple stories no longer have the power to keep viewers engaged and ensure binge-watching.

In his research, Sotiris Petridis concluded that episodes of modern series have changed in narrative form and do not necessarily follow a division into two, three, or four acts. However, it is very interesting that if we analyze entire seasons, they typically mirror the classic three-act narrative structure of films. Therefore, he concludes that even though Netflix calls them series, they can also be considered very long films (Petridis 2021: 3). Moreover, as huge communities form around modern series, and since these communities can communicate online and rewatch each new episode in detail, the influence of audience analysis becomes significant on the series' production and narrative. This analysis often occurs on websites where the shows are rated (IMDB, Rotten Tomatoes), on communities where they are discussed, or on video blogs where the plot is analyzed, explained, and further predicted, revealing hidden details. Consequently, completely new forms and formats of series and films have emerged, attempting to surprise audiences and leverage the specifics of new viewing experiences, such as interactivity and freedom of choice. The film *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*, within the *Black Mirror* anthology series, was designed to allow Netflix viewers to choose the direction of the film, with the user controlling the protagonist's decisions at key narrative moments, thus affecting the story's direction and ending

(Roth, Koenitz 2019). On the other hand, the 2023 mini-series *Kaleidoscope* is structured so that it can be watched in any order, with no first or last episode, allowing users to experience the story differently based on their choices (Carson 2023).

Another aspect that has changed, enabling the emergence of such series and films, is the level of freedom and creativity given to authors, as well as the trust they receive. This can be seen in another phenomenon related to production, namely that pilot episodes are no longer filmed, but entire seasons or series are planned from the start. This process is known as *straight-to-series* and, although not completely new, has been popularized by Netflix in the streaming world. Of course, this doesn't mean filming won't be canceled or halted (Levy 2019), but given all the factors mentioned, the chances of that happening are relatively small. Additionally, pressures on authors, censorship, and concerns over controversy and diversity issues are much lower, and authors have much more freedom and support to express themselves in their preferred direction than was the case in any TV studio (Zündel 2019; Fain 2019), with actors often deeply involved in the creation process and frequently working as producers or directors for individual episodes in series in which they act (Stanković 2018: 5).

However, there are limitations compared to traditional series production. Since streaming services target a global audience and aim to be watched worldwide, successful Netflix series cannot focus too much on local characteristics or engage with specific local issues, themes, and relationships. They must rely on universally recognizable, typical, and general concepts (Wayne & Uribe Sandoval 2021). This has become especially evident during Netflix's fourth phase of development, when it became available in 160 countries in one day.

### 3. CONCLUSION

No stage in the historical development of television series and serial programming has impacted the quantitative and qualitative transformation of these forms as much as video streaming, led by Netflix, and this impact has occurred on a global level, simultaneously everywhere. Thanks to new distribution technology, user habits and the reasons why and how they watch series have changed, and consequently, the series themselves had to adapt to cater to a different audience. This chain of changes is undeniably driven by technological advancements, but its implications far exceed the technological sphere alone.

Therefore, for a contemporary understanding of series and streaming services as a whole, it is essential to break down, identify, analyze, and systematize all forms of

transformation across all relevant elements of serial programming. However, this alone should not be sufficient. This overview of the most significant changes should serve as a means of updating knowledge and a starting point for further analysis of innovations and evolution in the world of serial and film programming, as it would be naïve to assume that the transition is complete.

Examples such as the introduction of ads, the growing number of streaming services and rising subscription prices, stricter control of account sharing, the “splitting” of seasons into multiple parts to ensure longer subscriptions, as well as the emergence of pirate streaming services, and users’ use of VPN providers to bypass geographical restrictions all indicate that this is a continuous process of transformation that will undoubtedly last for some time.

The aim of this paper was to provide a tool for understanding the changes brought by video streaming, offering a starting point and a summary of a historical moment upon which future changes can be interpreted. Future studies could focus on comparative analyses of different streaming platforms, particularly regarding their business models, algorithmic practices, and the impact on local media industries.

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## UTICAJ NETFLIKSA I STRIMING VIDEO SERVISA NA PROMENE U DISTRIBUCIJI, PRODUKCIJI I PUBLICI TELEVIZIJSKIH SERIJA

### Sažetak:

Ovaj rad analizira ključne promene koje su video striming servisi, sa posebnim fokusom na Netfliks, doneli u sferu televizijskih serija. Kroz prizmu teorije tehnološkog determinizma, teorije medijske ekologije i škole komunikacionih teorija iz Toronta istražuju se transformacije u produkciji, distribuciji i konzumaciji serijskog sadržaja. Rad ukazuje na to kako je digitalna distribucija promenila geografske i vremenske granice tradicionalne televizije, omogućivši globalni pristup i personalizovane preporuke zasnovane na algoritmima. Promene su se manifestovale i u produkciji, gde su visokobudžetne serije i novi narativni formati postali standard. Konačno, rad istražuje uticaj striminga na ponašanje publike, uključujući praksu „binžovanja“ i stvaranje globalno prepoznatljivih kulturnih proizvoda. Zaključak rada je da su ove promene transformisale ne samo medijski pejzaž, već i društvene prakse povezane sa konzumiranjem serijskog sadržaja, što ukazuje na kontinuirani proces evolucije koji zahteva dalja istraživanja.

**Ključne reči:** striming servisi; Netfliks; televizijske serije; digitalna distribucija; algoritmi; medijska produkcija; binžovanje; tehnološki determinizam

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