Global streamers:
Placing the transnational at the heart of TV culture

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Abstract

As media globalization has progressed, transnational media have evolved, and this article contends that a new generation has emerged. The first which developed in the later part of the 20th century consists of cross-border TV networks and formats. The second is the rise of streaming platforms. During the first generation, the transnational remained a professional practice out of viewers' reach. With the arrival of the second generation, the transnational has become an everyday mode of media consumption and interaction. Online entertainment services have altered the status of the transnational within TV culture, and what was once at the margins now sits at the core.

This article theorizes the notion of the transnational before examining the first and second generations of cross-border media. Considering the advent of streaming, it divides the market into three spaces: Subscription Video on Demand (SVoD), Advertising Video on Demand (AVoD) and video sharing. This article demonstrates how transnational consumption makes SVoD platforms more cosmopolitan than cross-border TV networks. Turning to video-sharing platforms – YouTube in particular – it argues that in the history of TV culture this constitutes a shift in status of the transnational by turning a professional practice into a popular one performed by millions. Based on interviews, this article shows how international access lowers the threshold of economic viability for content creators, while users get involved in cross border conversations through memetic videos and comments. It is no longer place but technology that determines the fate of stories and ideas, and Internet delivery has loosened the ties between TV culture and national culture more than ever.

Keywords

Content platform, media globalization, Netflix, streaming television, transnational media, TV culture, video sharing, YouTube

Introduction: The old and new transnational

The object of this research is a keystone of media globalization: transnational television. As media globalization has progressed, transnational media have evolved, and this article contends that a second generation has emerged. The first, developed in the later part of the 20th century, consists of cross-border TV networks and formats. The second is the rise of streaming platforms. With the first generation, the transnational remained a *professional practice* out of viewers' reach. These media were transnational because they were professionally adapted for local audiences as they cross borders. With the second generation, the transnational has become *an everyday mode of media consumption and interaction*. Online entertainment services have changed the status of the transnational within TV culture, and what was once at the margins now sits at the core.

The article begins with a definition of the 'transnational', an elusive notion that is often evoked but rarely defined. The research introduces streaming television and contextualizes its advent in the history of the medium. It continues with an analysis of the first generation of transnational media, including cross-border TV networks and formats, and defines their characteristics. The article turns to streaming services, arguing that while both Subscription Video on Demand (SVoD) entertainment services and video-sharing platforms promote a new brand of transnationalism, their functionalities remain distinctive. Following a section on SVoD, the article focuses on YouTube as the leading example of video-sharing platform. It analyses the transnational nature of online conversations and exchanges, before examining how YouTubers use the platform to reach out to viewers across borders. The section relies on interviews in order to outline different needs and strategies.

Theoretizing the transnational

'Transnational' appears almost 700 times in *The Handbook of Global Media Research* and the *Routledge Companion to Global Television* combined (Shimpach 2020; Volkmer 2012). It is associated with terms such as audience, class, diaspora, mobility, movement, brand, corporation, network, content, text, television, culture, discourse, media, news flows, and public sphere. Yet, only one contributor among 93 attempts to clarify the term (Mikos 2020).

Though 'transnational' appears in a variety of contexts, two common connotations can be inferred, which can be retained for our own definition. The transnational denotes the *crossing of national borders while acknowledging their continued relevance.* A distinction is made between 'global processes [that] are largely decentered from specific national territories and take place in a global space' and 'transnational process [that] are anchored and transcend one or more nation-states' (Kearney in Mikos 2020: 75). Mikos cites the example of the European Union's media legislation, which is transnational because it applies across 27 countries, yet is negotiated and agreed to by member states, and must be enshrined into their law books in order to be enacted (Mikos 2020: 75). Similarly, an audience gathered for a sports or political event of worldwide significance may be deemed global, while an audience of migrants who watch TV channels from country A while in country B, is transnational (e.g. Aksoy and Robins 2000; Georgiou 2012).

In addition, the transnational is a process that denotes the imbrication of several dimensions within one artefact or phenomenon. For instance, a TV network is international when it crosses borders unchanged (e.g. BBC World News), and it is transnational when it absorbs elements from different geographies as it does so (e.g. The Disney Channel). A TV format is called transnational because it combines a structure that is immutable with local elements which vary from one territory to another. As a local show (e.g. the US version of Korea's *The King of Masked Singer* or the Brazilian version of the UK's *Come Dine with Me*), a format combines local and global elements. The evolution is identical at cultural level. The transnationalization of culture is a process whereby a culture absorbs, combines, and eventually integrates, elements from other cultures (Morley and Robins 1995: 61). Taking these elements into consideration, *an artefact or phenomenon is transnational when it transcends borders while being affected by them and is imbricated in multiple spatial dimensions*.

This definition enables us establish a clear distinction between the concept and two close terms. 'International' designates an entity or phenomenon that spread across national borders. MipCom and MipTV in Cannes are international trade fairs that bring together TV executives from 100+ territories. As used in this article, 'global' is a sociological, not a geographical notion. As Gary Gereffi explains: '"Internationalization" refers to the geographic spread of economic activities across national boundaries', while globalization 'implies the functional integration and coordination of internationally dispersed activities' (Gereffi, 1999: 41). 'Global' denotes integration and interdependence on an international scale. For instance, Netflix is altogether transnational because it takes into account of distinct cultures in its localization strategy, and global as it operates in an integrated manner across a vast number of territories, even though it has no presence in China or North Korea (Lobato, 2019: 57). The remainder of the article retraces the evolution of the transnational in the history of television, from the pioneers of the broadcasting era to present day's streamers.

Transnational pioneers of the broadcasting era

While television was born a national medium, TV channels began crossing frontiers when the first communications satellites became operational in the 1980s. In Europe at least, after surmounting difficulties, the planets aligned for satellite TV channels in the late 1990s, when the barriers and obstacles receded as new technologies broke through: digitization facilitated the formation of large-capacity international communications networks, regulation evolved (e.g. the Television Without Frontiers EU Directive), a viable international copyright regime was created (e.g. the 'SatCab' EU Directive), the number of cross-border subscribers expanded and advertisers began paying attention. This led to rapid growth of transnational TV channels across a wide variety of genres, including news and business news (Bloomberg, CNBC, CNN, Euronews, etc.), factual entertainment (e.g. the Discovery and National Geographic suite of channels), entertainment (AXN, HBO and Fox-branded channels), children's television (such as Cartoon Network, the Disney brands and Nickelodeon), sports (Eurosport, ESPN), music television (MTV, Viva, etc.) and films (e.g. Studio Universal, Turner Classic Movies) (author; Collins 1992, 1998; Esser 2002; Negrine 1988).

Today, some of these networks have lost their lustre, but those that have adapted to a multi-media environment are recognized TV brands. National Geographic operates 80 branded TV channels in over 90 territories and counts 316 million subscribers worldwide, and Disney-branded channels cumulate 520 million subscribers across 165 territories (Walt Disney 2019: 15). As these brands expand their geographical reach, they adopt a network formation which consists in centralizing resources while adapting locally.

These networks operate hundreds of channels worldwide, which are adapted to the audience they target. Local channels vary in terms of language, scheduling, promotional material and, to some extent, programming. Some networks simply reshuffle their global library of titles, while others add local or regional content in certain markets. These networks combine global elements (brand, infrastructure, library of content, etc.) with local differences. They are transnational in term of structure but are local for audiences: viewers have generally no choice and get to see the one version that is intended for the territory where they reside. The same applies to TV formats.

A TV format is the structure of a show that generates a distinctive narrative and is licensed outside its country of origin to be adapted to local audiences. The trade emerged in the 1950s and remained confined to game shows for several decades. It expanded to new genres in the 1990s and emerged from the shadows with formats such as *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, *Survivor*, *Big Brother* and *Idols*. The format trade boomed during the 2000s reality wave and remains strong. The game shows, factual entertainment programmes, and talent competitions that air worldwide are often the local versions of global brands. US networks obtain high ratings with formats such as *The Amazing Race* and *The Masked Singer*, while large European audiences continue to watch *Dancing with the Stars*, *Got Talent*, and *The Voice* (author; Esser 2013; Moran 1998, 2013; Wescott 2021)

Formats are transnational because they combine a kernel of rules and principles that are immutable (some formats are more flexible than others) and elements that are adaptable as they travel (Moran 1998). Formatted shows follow rules that are applied across borders, but which are combined with local ingredients to weave narratives designed for specific cultures. A format such as *Got Talent* is a global platform designed to generate local heroes and stories. Thus, at the heart of the format trade lays a transnational paradox: for the structure of a show to circulate internationally, its adaptations must resonate with audiences in each market in which they air. For audiences, however formats are local shows and most viewers are unaware of their transnational mechanisms and foreign origins.

The Advent of Streaming Television

Streaming is a mode of video delivery based on Internet protocols (IP) and infrastructure, and which is distinct from broadcasting and downloading. It consists in 'the delivery of video in a continuous set of IP packets for consumption once sufficient packets are available on the consumer device' (Martin 2010). IP delivery covers two types of transmission: Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) uses closed Internet networks operated by a single Internet service provider (ISP) to deliver video to a set-top-box, and over-the-top (OTT) delivers content (scheduled, live, or on demand) over the open Internet and across an open delivery chain, using multiple ISPs to reach multiple devices (Ingold 2020). IPTV is associated with large telecommunication operators (such as broadband providers) which can depend on their own network to distribute content, while streaming platforms such as Netflix or broadcasters' VoD services use OTT transmission mechanisms.

OTT (delivery) and VoD (mode of access) are often confused, but VoD can be delivered via various transmission mechanisms, including OTT, IPTV, and cable & satellite (Ingold 2020). Four payment models prevail in the VoD universe. With Subscription Video on Demand (SVoD), members pay a monthly fee for access to the full catalogue of a streaming platform. Transactional Video on Demand (TVoD) involves a financial transaction for each request, and Advertising Video on Demand (AVoD) implies an ad-based funding model. Video-sharing (e.g., YouTube, essentially financed through advertising), and Broadcaster Video on Demand (BVoD), which covers the platforms of commercial broadcasters, fall under the AVoD payment model but differ in terms of platform logic. The catch-up services of European public service broadcasters fall into the Free Video on Demand (FVoD) category, albeit users need to hold a TV licence which they have either paid or received for free as part of a means-tested regime. Some platforms adopt a hybrid payment model and use tiered pricing to offer different levels of package.

Streaming is an increasingly popular way of accessing content because it is the most efficient way of distributing content and the most convenient way of accessing it. Broadcasting consists in airing a single and continuous signal that is available to all passive devices on a specified wavelength. It is system that pushes content out to the whole audience, irrespective of demand. Programmes are scheduled in a linear fashion and received by all devices that tune in. By way of contrast, streaming is a pull system that delivers one piece of content at a time on request only. Information is stored centrally or cached locally using content delivery networks and is dispatched on demand when and where necessary. Every device receives their own copy with specifications that is adapted to local circumstances (available bandwidth and memory, device capability, etc.) (Martin 2020).

While the number of video originators expands, so does video consumption, driven by the affordability and convenience of streaming and VoD. VoD is a 24/7 universe where users expect to stream or download programming anytime and anywhere, regardless of where they are. As streamers have their entire catalogue online, viewers can choose what they want, and as often as they like. At home, hand-held smart devices are leading to multi-screening (the same person multi-tasking on multiple screens) and multi-watching (different members of the household watching their own screen). The spread of video-sharing platforms and streaming services has led to new forms of video consumption, such as binge watching (consuming several episodes of a TV show at once), casual watching (fleetingly watching mundane content on video-sharing apps), and background streaming (listening to music while conducting another activity). Connected hand-held devices are expanding the frequency of viewing: in households, streaming occurs in short but frequent sessions throughout the day and up to (an extended) bedtime (Widdicks et al. 2019).

Some of the earliest streaming platforms were established by broadcasters. In the UK, Channel 4's 4oD and BBC iPlayer launched in 2006 and 2007 respectively. Since then, most broadcasters have launched streaming platforms. Originally conceived as catch-up services, many feature original content usually targeting a young audience today. While, not all platforms have vocation to cross borders, streaming works best at scale, and the industry's leaders are global.

Considering SVoD alone, 197 services are accounted for in Europe (EAO 2017: 19), mostly the online services of local broadcasters. In term of market share, the SVoD space is heavily concentrated, and five providers were collecting 89 per cent of streaming revenues in Europe in 2018: Netflix, 52 per cent, Amazon Prime Video, 21 per cent, Sky, 4 per cent, HBO, 3 per cent, and Viaplay, 3 per cent (Briel 2019).

The scale and international coverage of leading streamers is without precedent in the history of television. Sky in Europe and DirecTV in the USA are world-leading pay-

TV platforms with 20 million subscribers. By way of contrast, Disney+ surpassed 100 million subscribers barely a year after its launch. Netflix, buoyed by the Covid-19 pandemic, reached more than 200 million subscribers late in 2020 and Amazon Prime Video soon thereafter (Table 1).

Table 1 Leading international SVoD services, by size, June 2021

	Netflix	**Amazon Prime Video**	**Disney +**	**Apple TV+**	**HBO Max**	**Paramount+**
Launch date	April 1998	September 2006	November 2019	November 2019	May 2020	March 2021
Total subscribers	204 million	150 million	100 million	40 million	37.7 million	30 million
Footprint	worldwide	worldwide	The Americas, Northern and Western Europe, selected countries in Asia-Pacific	worldwide	39 territories across the Americas and the Caribbean – 60 territories by end of year	The Americas, Nordic territories, Australia

Source: author

Cross-border AVoD platforms have yet to acquire the prominence of their SVoD counterparts. AVoD includes BVoD, which are streaming services that tend to operate nationally, as illustrated by Hulu and Amazon's IMDb TV, which are only available to US customers at the time of writing. In addition, the vast majority of AVoD platforms have adopted a hybrid monetization model, offering ad-free premium versions. However, the market is gaining momentum as advertisers are shifting their budgets online: globally, AVoD platforms generated US$5 billion from advertising in 2010, US$6 billion in 2015, and US$26 billion in 2020 (Aguete, 2021).

The sector's *international* leaders are Rakuten's Viki, ViacomCBS' Pluto TV, and Fox's Tubi (Table 2). The last two were relatively slow to roll out beyond the confines of the US market but have global expansion plans in place (Hunter, 2021). AVoD is also the model chosen by social media networks, such as Facebook (and, therefore, its own streaming platform, Facebook Watch), Instagram, and Snapchat.

Table 3 Leading international AVoD platforms, by advertising revenue (2021)

	Viki	**Pluto TV**	**Tubi**	**Facebook Watch**
Launch date	December 2010	August 2013	April 2014	August 2017
Parent company	Rakuten	ViacomCBS	Fox	Facebook
2020 Advertising revenue (US$ million)	55	49.5	33	/[1]
Footprint	Worldwide	The Americas, Europe	Australia, Canada, Mexico, USA	Worldwide

Sources: author; Brown, 2021 (advertising revenue).
Note[1] : Facebook does not disaggregate its advertising revenue, which stood at US$ 84.2 billion in 2020.

Video-sharing platforms rely on advertising as a source of revenue but form a distinctive space in the VoD ecosystem: they benefit from particularly strong network effects occurring across the platform's markets which imply that, in principle, its value to participants increases as their numbers grow: Youtubers attract viewers, viewers attract Youtubers, both sides growing mutually (Parker et al., 2016: 16-34). These effects generate 'economies of scale for the platform and economies of scope for the various groups that transact with each other' (Baldwin and Woodard, 2009: 26), and trigger ‘a self-reinforcing feedback loop that magnifies incumbents’ early advantages (Gawer, 2014: 1241). These advantages combine for the market leader, making it virtually impossible for competitors to challenge their dominant position. Thus, competition between platforms often results in winner-take-all situations and oligopolistic market outcomes (Sturgeon, 2019: 44). As these platforms are digital, these effects are exacerbated by their scalability: the ability to expand rapidly and adapt capacity in order to support increased usage.

The sector is therefore characterized by the presence of a powerful incumbent (YouTube), and challengers needed to find new functionalities to thrive (table 3). Twitch has achieved this by occupying the live streaming space and becoming popular with gamers; ByteDance’s TikTok lowered the participation threshold by focusing on short videos.

Table 3 Leading international video-sharing platforms,
by number of monthly users (June 2021)

	YouTube	**TikTok**	**Dailymotion**	**Twitch**
Launch date	February 2005	June 2017	March 2005	June 2011
Parent company	Alphabet	ByteDance	Vivendi	Amazon
Number of monthly users	Over 2 billion	689 million	Over 300 million	140 million
Footprint	Worldwide	Worldwide (banned in India and Pakistan)	Worldwide	Worldwide

Source: author

The SVoD space: Transnationalism and cosmopolitanism

Streaming is changing television culture by bringing the transnational to its fore, and SVoD and video-sharing platforms are making distinct contributions to the phenomenon. This section examines the former and the next will focus on the latter.

The programming of cross-border TV networks and the catalogue of streaming platforms are transnational in scope. Both invest in content of diverse origin in order to resonate with different cultures. Netflix, for instance, is aware of the ‘strong relationship between the degree to which SVoD catalogues have been localized and overall subscriber uptake’ (Bisson, 2017: 9). Three years ago, almost half (48 per cent) of Netflix’s commissions and productions came from outside the USA, and it rose to 63 per cent in 2020 (Bisson, 2017: 13; Gamerman, 2020). The quantity of non-US originals stands at 43 per cent on Amazon Video Plus, and 18 per cent on Apple TV+ and Disney+ (Gamerman, 2020). In 2020, Netflix commissioned originals from 32 countries: thirteen from India, Korea and Spain (each), eight from Mexico and the UK, seven from Germany and Italy, six from Japan, five from Canada, Finland, France and Taiwan, and four from Brazil and Belgium (Wescott, 2021).

There is, however, a key difference between platforms and networks. Cross-border TV networks are not transnational at the point of consumption. Once they reach their destination, the offering is an adapted selection of programmes to local viewers that is set up to mimic national television and reinforce the binds between nation, language, and culture (Waisbord, 2004: 373).

Streaming platforms work differently: their investment in foreign content is driven by the same marketing imperative but the entire catalogue can be accessed by audiences everywhere (rights permitting). Some Netflix foreign-language TV series have garnered far larger audiences abroad than at home, and a few have become global hits, such as *Dark* (Germany), *Shtisel* (Israel), *Money Heist* (Spain), *Elite* (Spain), and *Kingdom* (South Korea). Foreign drama is increasingly popular with Western audiences, and Table 4 lists Netflix's ten most popular non-English films and TV series in its domestic market. The list does not include *Parasite* or *Roma*, two critically acclaimed foreign-language films of recent times, also available on the platform at the time of writing.

Table 4 Netflix's most popular foreign films and TV series in the USA, 2020

TV series	Country of origin	Films	Country of origin
Barbarians	Germany	*The Platform*	Spain
The Rain	Denmark	*Lost Bullet*	France
Dark	Germany	*Rogue City*	France
Money Heist	Spain	*#Alive*	South Korea
Dark Desire	Mexico	*Ip Man 4: The Finale*	Hong Kong
Ragnarok	Norway	*Kidnapping Stella*	Germany
Always a Witch	Colombia	*Cuties*	France
To the Lake	Russia	*The Crew*	France
The Seven Deadly Sins: Imperial Wrath of the Gods	Japan	*The Paramedic*	Spain
The Protector	Turkey	*Freaks: You're One of Us*	Germany

Source: Gamerman, 2020.

Furthermore, if inclined, households can pick streaming services that specialize in foreign drama. In the USA, customers have access to platforms such as Acorn TV

(British-style shows), Viki (Asian content), Britbox (British drama) or Walter Presents (foreign-language TV series). There are a fair number of international shows on Sundance Now, AMC Networks's indie platform. Britbox alone had one million American subscribers in 2020 and Viki is growing fast (Klinge, 2020; White, 2020). These are niche platforms whose subscription numbers remain modest, but they nonetheless make foreign drama more accessible.

Choice expanded in the broadcasting era but streaming entrenched it. Transnational consumption makes SVoD platforms more cosmopolitan than cross-border TV networks because they open up Western TV cultures and contribute to loosen the ties between nation, territory, and culture (Beck & Grande, 2010: 412).

YouTube: Towards Transnational Intertextuality

YouTube sits squarely at the heart of contemporary televisual culture. As Burgess and Green write, 'YouTube is now mainstream media' (Burgess & Green 2018: 55). In many countries, young people spend more time on the platform than watching linear television. In the UK, the daily viewing minutes of young adults (18-34s-year olds) are as follows: YouTube, 64; Netflix, 40; ITV, 17; BBC One, 15; Amazon Prime Video, 9 (Ofcom 2019: 19). Alphabet, YouTube's parent company, announced a record US$15.1 billion in advertising revenue for the platform in 2019, and broadcasters are acutely aware of the presence of the streamer in the advertising market (Foster 2020).

The academic literature on YouTube is growing apace, but the AVoD platform's transnational dimension remains to be analysed in depth. This section argues that it is the streamer's most distinctive feature. Founded in 2005 in San Mateo, California, the platform was acquired for US$1.65 billion in stock by Google in October 2006 (Burgess and Green, 2018). Today, over two billion logged-in users visit YouTube each month, who watch over one billion hours of video every day, 250 million hours of which are viewed on TV screens. More than 500 hours of video are uploaded every minute (the equivalent of 82 years of content every day), and the library has an estimated 10 billion videos. With local versions in over 100 territories and navigation available in 80 languages, users upload and watch videos virtually everywhere. The platform has millions of creators to whom it makes payments in over 90 countries. Over the last few years, it has paid more than US$30 billion to creators, artists, and media companies. The number of channels with more than one million subscribers is growing by 65 per cent year on year, and the number of channels with a six-figure income is growing by 40 per cent year on year. Over half-a-million channels live streamed for the first time in 2020, accounting for over 10 million new streams on the platform (company source; Hale 2019; Kyncl 2017: 71). These metrics underscore YouTube's dominant position in the video-sharing space, which is reinforced by 'the hyperscale network effects of mega-platforms' (Sturgeon 2019: 48; see above).

YouTube rests on the world's largest proprietary communication infrastructure, which consists of 21 data centres (including some hyperscalers), 22 cloud regions, 140 points of presence, multiple investments in subsea cable networks, and availability in over 200 territories. Some of Google's data centres are 'hyperscalers', infrastructures of massive scale. They accommodate tens of thousands of racks and hundreds of thousands of servers, which are hosted in data halls that can exceed one hundred thousand square feet, spread over facilities of several million square feet, and built on campuses that occupy hundreds of acres. One of Google data centres, located in Iowa, is built on 300+ acres of developed area, the equivalent of 235 American football fields (Kava 2020).

Such an infrastructure is expensive to build and maintain, and requires significant capital expenditure; engineers are also necessary to develop the software technology that runs on top. In brief, YouTube is a global platform designed to work at scale. For the first time, '*anyone* in the world [can] share a video with *everyone* in the world' (Kyncl 2017: 71).

Users, by way of contrast, are rooted in one location. The juxtaposition of the local and the global is a fact that Cecile Frot-Coutaz, the platform head of content is well aware of:

> Obviously it's a global platform and it's a tech platform and tech has to scale. …. However, when it comes to the content that's hyperlocal, because the user, if you think about it users are Russian, French, German, Egyptian, Swedish, Norwegian, etc. etc., and the advertisers are also Norwegian, French, Egyptian, etc. etc., so the business piece is very, very local and the creators are local and the content partners are local. … . So what we have to do as a company is straddle the two, straddle the very global nature of the tech platform and the hyperlocal nature of the business (Frot-Coutaz, interview 2019).

Content originates locally and much of it stays local. However, without any obstacle to cross-border distribution, anyone can search or stumble on a video, hence contributing to its circulation. Many YouTubers are active users that like, share, comment, and sometimes react and transform videos (Oh 2017). These exchanges create cross-frontier conversations, making YouTube's participatory culture imminently transnational.

In terms of participation, videos can be divided into two main categories, virals and memes. A viral video is 'a clip that spreads to the masses via digital word-of-mouth mechanisms without significant change' (Shifman 2011: 190). Most viral videos may be mundane, but some generate significant cultural trends. Korean artist Park Jae-Sang's *Gangnam Style*, posted in July 2012, was the first to break the billion-view mark, eventually reaching nearly four billion views at time of writing. The video propelled the song to the top of numerous music charts and, in the process, contributed to the popularisation of K-pop. In its wake the 'global viewership of Korean artists tripled… with 91 percent of the views coming from outside Korea' (Alloca 2018: 18). Luis Fonsi's *Despacito* is among YouTube's most popular videos, posted in January 2017, it has passed seven billion views. The song topped the charts in 47 territories and helped establish Latin pop on the international music scene.

The second type of video is the meme, defined 'as a popular clip that lures extensive creative user engagement in the form of parody, pastiche, mash-ups or other derivative work (Shifman 2011: 190). The two key mechanisms used by memetic videos are remixing and imitation (Shifman 2011: 190). Remixing consists of any combination of several possible operations, including 'the selecting, manipulating, recombining, and restructuring of existing media', in order to create an original contribution (Alloca 2018: 55). Millions of memetic videos have been posted on YouTube, inspired by iconic cultural or political moments, classic media texts or original YouTube videos. Memes of Nyan Cat, Hitler's outrage in *Downfall*, or the Harlem Shake, count among the most widespread (Alloca 2018: 51-4, 70-1, 95-8). Pinkfong's *Baby Shark Dance*, a video that is approaching eight billion views at time of writing, has inspired thousands of memes. Popular songs, movies, and brands all feature in countless remixes. For instance, *The Empire Strikes Back Uncut* is a fan-made 2-hour long shot-for-shot recreation of the movie, which has required significant crowdsourcing and editing skills.

Memetic videos refer to another pre-existing text and do not make sense by themselves. For the viewer to appreciate a meme, she needs to be aware of the original text it refers to. The textual reference constitutes the essence of memes, conferring them an intertextual quality (Riffaterre 1984: 91). Memes on any popular theme travel to and from multiple countries, creating instances of *transnational intertextuality*.

YouTube could not have sustained its growth on viral videos alone and shifted emphasis from videos to channels (Burgess and Green 2018: 87-93). Users can tag any channel and turn on notifications, which then appear on their home feed. This system of free subscription enables creators to measure their popularity and YouTube to gauge their success. In 2018, the platform added a new product, channel membership, which needs to be paid for. For a fee, members can get content earlier and receive any additional benefit creators wish to offer them. Channel memberships add a new tool to creators' digital monetization strategy, complementing revenue from advertising, sponsorship, and donations.

YouTube's imbrication of the local and the global is manifest in its channel economy. The platform's usage varies from one territory to another and, in any given country, the most subscribed channels are invariably local (noxinfluencer.com 2020a). The platform's localized features, its look, feel, and content, differ sharply across markets. Local cultures are equally reflected in the scope and nature of YouTubers' output. For instance, 'agri-tubers' (pertaining to agriculture) are popular in France, as are those channels that help students revise for the *baccalauréat*, the national exam that gives access to higher education (Frot-Coutaz, interview 2019).

However, channels travel unfettered on Youtube, and many have subscribers in multiple territories. Some of the platform's largest channels are based in India, reflecting the country's growing presence in online entertainment (Thussu 2018). T-Series, SET India, Zee Music Company, Zee TV, and Goldmines Telefilms totalled 420.1 million subscribers at the time of writing. On average, their domestic viewers represent 36.6 per cent of their total audience (Table 5). While the geographical dispersion of their audiences certainly reflects the spread of the Indian diaspora, interest from other cultures should not be excluded.

Table 5 Audience analysis by geographical dispersion of India's five top YouTube channels, May 2021

	T-Series	*SET India*	*Zee Music Company*	*Zee TV*	*Goldmines Telefilms*
Genre	Music	Entertainment	Music	Entertainment	Films
Total number of subscribers (in millions)	181	103	72.4	57.7	52.9
India (% of viewers)	37	38	39	26	43
USA (% of viewers)	20	23	19	14	19
UK (% of viewers)	5	6	4	3	5
Spain (% of viewers)	5	5	5	3	5
Kenya (% of viewers)	4	3	3	13	3
Canada (% of viewers)	3	4	3	2	3
Taiwan (% of viewers)	3	4	3	/	2
Australia (% of viewers)	2	2	2	/	2
Indonesia (% of viewers)	2	2	2	7	3
Malaysia (% of viewers)	/	/	/	4	/
RoW (% of viewers)	19	13	20	28	15
Total (% of viewers)	100	100	100	100	100

Source: noxinfluencer.com 2021.

On YouTube, creators have access to an international audience at the start of their streaming journey. London-based entrepreneur Jamal Edwards founded *SBTV: Music* in November 2006. Four years into existence, he met an artist who wanted to branch out into the London underground music scene. The musician recorded a song and that video, of one Ed Sheeran, contributed to launching the singer's career. Today, *SBTV* has 1.18 million subscribers, and 36 per cent of its viewers are located in the UK, the others being USA (28 per cent), India (15 per cent), Canada (5 per cent), and other countries. *SBTV*'s cross-border reach contributes to the channel's advertising revenue, helping Edwards establish international connections and enrich his channels with films from multiple locations (Edwards, interview 2020).

The Great War is a history channel that covers the First World War and its aftermath from 1914 to 1923 in real time, one week at a time, one hundred years later. Produced by Florian Wittig and hosted and written by Jesse Alexander, the idea was to mimic the newsreels displayed in cinema halls. *The Great War* is on YouTube because of the 'potential even for a niche product to reach a global audience' (Wittig and Alexander, interview 2020). This reach entails several benefits. First, the team gets comments and feedback from an international community of contributors located in various countries, considerably enriching the team's understanding of the chain of events that occurred a century ago. Second, the Berlin-based team can reach, via YouTube, the English-speaking markets (USA, UK, Australia and Canada, by order of importance), where more than 80 per cent of its viewers and subscribers are located. Without access to these markets, the venture would simply be financially unviable (Wittig and Alexander, interview 2020).

On average, over 60 per cent of YouTubers' traffic comes from outside their country (Kyncl 2017: 72). For millions of YouTubers like Edwards, Wittig, and Alexander, access to multiple markets is not only essential to their business plan but informs their outlook. International access is what makes niche channels viable, and in turn attract viewers to the platform who find creators that match their tastes and interests. More than this, a reactive international audience creates a feedback loop which enriches creators' output with experiences and perspectives from beyond their national horizon.

YouTube's global reach is also attracting leading content rights holders. The growing presence of sports leagues and franchises on the platform provides a case in point. Their presence here is not purely driven by monetization. Online advertising revenues are negligible compared to sports organizations three proven sources of income: commercial, broadcasting and streaming rights, and match day. In addition, preparing professional-grade content involves costs. The reason lies elsewhere: fan engagement. Youtube enables them to grow their brands by widening access to their sport/team, maintain contact with fans during the off-season, give them additional content to enjoy, and reach them wherever they are. Europe's ten wealthiest football clubs have a strong presence on YouTube. On average, 69 per cent of their audience lies outside their domestic market, and the proportion never falls below 50 per cent (Table 6). In addition, the platform also hosts multiple local and international fan channels.

Table 6 Football's top ten European club's YouTube presence (key metrics), May 2021

Football club (revenue)	*YouTube subscribers (millions)*	*Total views (millions)*	*Total number of videos*	*% of audience outside domestic market*
FC Barcelona (€840.8m)	11.6	1,690	9,120	89
Read Madrid (€757.3m)	6.4	734	5,140	86
Manchester United (€711.5m)	4.0	738	2,200	61
Bayern Munich (€660.1m)	2.1	564	4,670	51
Paris Saint-German (€635.9m)	3.0	425	3,940	54
Manchester City (€610.6m)	3.2	803	5,520	65
Liverpool (€604.7m)	5.7	1,080	1,650	56
Tottenham Hotspur (€521.1m)	1.8	437	2,350	64
Chelsea (€513.1m)	2.8	554	3,570	91
Juventus (€459.7)	3.4	563	2,850	73

Sources: Deloitte Football Money League 2020; noxinfluencer.com; youtube.com.

American sports leagues and organizations are also investing significant resources into social media and have incorporated YouTube into their all-out effort for attention. Their presence on the platform is complementary to the rights they sell to broadcasters and streamers, and none of the videos they post weaken their value. These organizations run multiple channels and post content tailored and edited for the platform, such as interviews, previews, game highlights, (delayed) full games, documentaries, tributes, career highlights, public messages, alongside thousands of edited reels (best moments, best plays, best shots, etc.). Three leagues, in particular, are making a sustained effort: World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), which runs one of YouTube's most popular channels, the National Basketball League (NBA) and the National Football League (NFL). The Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Hockey League (NHL), and the Major League Soccer (MLS) have more modest outputs. While these leagues' audience remains predominantly domestic, 36 per cent of their viewers reside overseas on average. For WWE and the NBA, their international fan base represents billions of views (Table 7).

Table 7 American sports leagues' and sports entertainment brands' YouTube presence (key metrics, main accounts only), May 2021

Sports league	*YouTube subscribers (millions)*	*Total views (billions)*	*Total videos*	*% of audience outside domestic market*
WWE	76.7	58.2	54,650	35
NBA	16.4	8.6	35,740	36
NFL	7.8	5.5	21,800	33
MLB	2.9	2,4	280,500	35
NHL	1.6	1.1	23,300	37
MLS	0.7	393	15,270	40

Sources: noxinfluencer.com; youtube.com.

Not all YouTube creators want to be seen everywhere. Geo-blocking is a platform feature which allows them to block access to their channel in certain locations (Lobato, 2016). This tool can be used to narrowcast a channel to a selection of countries. *Free Documentary* is a YouTube channel owned by Quintus Media, a German distribution company. Like any distributor, Quintus is seeking to get as much revenue as possible from the IP it represents. They first propose content to broadcasters, and then turn their attention to selling AVoD and SVoD rights. In some countries, they sell both types of rights (linear and VoD), and in others, they sell none. When there is no expression of interest for the AVoD licence, Quintus puts the content on its YouTube channel, focusing on the three most lucrative markets: USA, the UK, and Australia. Thus, Quintus uses YouTube to complete its global puzzle of licenses, geo-blocking its documentaries according to which deals the company has signed. Either licences are sold to broadcasters or VoD operators, or the distributor retains them and puts content on YouTube. For Quintus, what YouTube offers is *à la carte* globalization (Kemming, interview 2020).

YouTube: worldwide adoption – local adaptation

YouTube has been globally adopted and provides borderless access through a dashboard that is fully adapted to local languages. In the history of TV culture this constitutes a shift in status of the transnational by turning a professional practice into a popular one performed by millions. Users can choose content irrespective of where it comes from, and take part in cross-border conversations through memetic videos and comments. For content creators, international access lowers the threshold of economic viability, and for larger organizations, the platform provides a complementary way to reach fans worldwide. Overall, YouTube is propelling the transnational to the forefront of TV culture.

Conclusion

The transnationalization of TV culture is a historical process. For several centuries, media have been entwined within national cultures, indeed printing facilitated their emergence. The spread of printing workshops helped dethrone Latin as Europe's language of learning because printers gradually shifted production to vernacular languages in response to local demand. Typography made books reproducible, transforming spoken dialects into print-languages with fixed grammatical rules and shared spelling (Febvre and Martin 1997: 248-332). The availability of reading material in common created a connection among fellow-readers:

> [Print-languages] created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars. Speakers of the huge variety of Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes, who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper. In the process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that *only those* hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged (Anderson 2006: 44).

Connection through print and a common language formed 'the embryo of the nationally imaged community' (Anderson 2006: 44). Centuries later, broadcasters were tasked with protecting and promoting national culture and identity. They exchanged programmes and set up international associations but operated within national boundaries. Television was tied up with the national project and no other cultural institution was more central to the intent of engineering national identity. In the words of Paddy Scannell:

> 'The linking of culture with nationalism – the idea of a national culture – was given new expression in broadcasting through those kinds of programmes [education and culture] that had the effect of, in Reith's words, "making the nation as one man"' (Scannell 1990: 22).

The dissociation between TV and national cultures has begun with cable and satellite broadcasting and is accelerating with online video delivery. While streamers take linguistic borders into consideration by adapting content (Lobato 2019; Waisbord 2004), it remains that SVoD platform catalogues are more cosmopolitan than broadcasters' schedules, and video-sharing platforms make content posted by anyone available to everyone in the world, irrespective of borders. Through search engines and recommendation algorithms, streamers personalize access to vast video libraries. Viewers choosing what to watch irrespective of where they live allows a focus of choice centered around personal tastes and interests. When viewers are given the opportunity to share content and interact, they form cross-border connections. These interactions raise awareness of transnational communities, changing how viewers think about them.

It is no longer place but technology that determines the fate of stories and ideas, and Internet delivery has loosened the tie between TV culture and national culture more than ever. By rendering TV cultures more cosmopolitan, global streamers are helping to bring about a new transcultural order.

Acknowledgements

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