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# Young Audiences' Engagement with Danish Film and Television: Gender, Sociality and Industry Perspectives*

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Reaching young audiences has become a challenge for broadcasters and content producers across Europe. This article examines the media consumption and tastes of children and young adults in the small market Denmark. It is based mainly on the qualitative data from two research projects, Reaching Young Audiences (Independent Research Fund Denmark, 2019-24) and Crescine (Horizon Europe, 2023-26). Findings reveal that supported by the abundant availability of content, young audiences display highly personalised, and gendered, preferences in media, influenced by their interests, hobbies, and gender. In social situations, such as co-viewing or going to the cinema, collective mood-management, group needs, and potential for fostering common talk become key factors for content choice. Young audiences' preferences for higher budgets, visceral genres and their need for choices that match individual as well as group interests challenge small markets like Denmark with limited production capacity.

**Keywords**: Young audiences; Danish audiences; Danish media; Co-viewing; Gender

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## Introduction

Domestic audiences are crucial to the film and television industries in Europe, particularly for small markets such as Denmark. Not only is reaching the domestic audience the main pathway to commercial success, but the legitimacy of the country's high levels of public funding for film and television is also linked to the local audiovisual industries' ability to reach the Danish public. The average population accesses Danish film and television to high degrees, but reaching young audiences is a challenge for domestic producers and providers in a media landscape characterized by fragmentation across platforms as well as strong international competition.

The consequences of digital transformations are particularly dire for national media institutions, as the young demographics are attracted to global, often US-American, media content and providers (DR 2020; DFI 2022). This leads some scholars to speak of a 'youth challenge' for national media (Andersen and Sundet, 2019). Public service media institutions with a remit to serve all demographics are thus faced with an existential threat at risk of losing entire generations of audiences to US-based platforms (Potter and Steemers, 2021). Danish content, broadcasters and their on-demand services still have a strong presence in the Danish population's media diets, but as we explore in this article, the 'youth challenge' materializes not only in absolute numbers of consumption, but also in (young) audiences' choice and valuation processes around content. Particularly, we want to focus on two contexts of young people's media choices: gender and sociality and investigate in which ways they affect Danish young people's inclination to engage with film and television from Denmark.

We ask the following research questions

- RQ1: In which ways are the audiovisual media diets of young Danish viewers individualised and gendered?
- RQ2: What impact do different forms of sociality have on the types of audiovisual content young Danish viewers engage with?
- RQ3: What do these gendered and social patterns mean in the context of the Danish audiovisual industries?

To explore these questions, we bring together findings from two audience studies concerned with the status of small market audiovisual production in a changing media landscape. The study Reaching Young Audiences (Independent Research Fund Denmark, 2019-24) focused on Danish children and adolescents between 8 and 17 and their perceptions of quality in audiovisual fiction. It entails a national survey (n=313) of the age group as well as mobile ethnographies of 20 children within the age group. The Crescine project's audience study (Horizon Europe, 2023-26) investigated the status of films from small European film markets among domestic audiences across seven markets. For this publication we use only the Danish data involving young adult audiences, drawing on five media diaries and interviews and three focus groups involving eight young adults. In our analysis of child audiences, the gendered nature of content preferences is in focus (RQ1), while in our analysis of young adult audiences we focus on the role of individual vs. social situations for

content choice (RQ2). We answer RQ3 through a common discussion of both studies' findings in the light of the Danish streaming market and audiovisual industries characterized by strong focus on domestic content, but also fragmentation in a highly developed VoD landscape.

## The Danish Streaming Market and Audiovisual Industry in Context

Reaching Danish audiences is a crucial goal in Danish audiovisual policies and industries. For the publicly funded broadcaster Danmarks Radio (DR) this is reflected in its public service remit that states the mission: "Public service shall bring together Danes around a common starting point [udgangspunkt] of Danish culture, society and history" (Socialdemokratiet et al. 2023: 1). For child and youth audiences specifically, DR is tasked with offering relevant "Danish speaking" and original "Danish produced" content (Socialdemokratiet et al. 2023: 3). To achieve the goal of relevance, the broadcaster, for example, engages in content production strategies that involve the young audience as co-creators (Redvall & Christensen 2021). Danish film's ability to reach young audiences has also become central to film funding. The Danish Film Institute has shifted towards audience-oriented funding criteria for films targeting young audiences, meaning that they need to demonstrate potential to achieve high reach among the target audience (Freudendal 2024). And of course, Danish audiences are also crucial for the economic viability of the Danish film industry which relies to a large degree on resonance in the home market (Nielsen, 2024).

Because of the rapid development of the Danish streaming market, Danish content providers face a fragmentation of their audience and strong competition from global players. Broadcast use has become an exception among Danes under 31 (DR Analyse 2025: 6). Danish 15- to 25-year-olds use on average seven different streaming services over the course of three months (DFI 2025:6). YouTube and Netflix are the first choices for Danes from 9 to 31 years of age (DR Analyse 2026: 40), with YouTube also drawing a much higher viewing time among young males compared to females (DR Analyse 2025: 25). While young Danes (15-25 years) are visiting the cinema more often than the average Danish population, their frequency of going to the cinema has halved since 2012 (DFI 2025: 8).

Small markets such as Denmark face specific challenges in coping with the international competition through their limited resources for production of film and TV, which increase dependence on imports and make it harder to offer a diverse spread of content while at the same time keeping up with expectations of budgets and production values set by US-American material. The offer of domestic content from small markets is often limited on transnational streaming platforms popular with young audiences while imported British film and television is the most prevalent European content (Bengesser et al., 2025). In Denmark, where levels of English-language capabilities are high, US (and to some extent British) films and series have indeed become a familiar choice for young audiences that can even feel more proximate than other Nordic material (Bengesser et al., 2023; Freudendal et al., 2026;

Jensen and Mitric, 2023). Among the child audiences (8-17 years) covered by Reaching Young Audiences, an even more clear cut hierarchy emerges: perceptions of the quality of content offered by Danish providers are much lower than the perception of quality of content by globally operating services such as Netflix, Disney+ or YouTube (Jensen et al., 2021; Jensen and Mitric, 2023). This preference shapes their perceptions of quality standards which the lower production values of Danish content cannot meet (Freudendal et al., 2026).

Still, young audiences in Denmark *are* in touch with Danish content: 29 percent of Danish 16- to 25-year-olds claim to watch at least one international film or series a week, while for Danish content these figures are at 11 and 13 percent respectively for films and series.

[1] Danish young audiences also perceive domestic content more favourably than young audiences in Italy, Germany, and The Netherlands (Esser et al. 2025). So, despite the youth challenge and the rapid development of the streaming market, young Danish audiences have not lost their connection to domestic content, but findings from our studies point to differences in how motivating or attractive it is for young Danish audiences to watch domestic content. In this article, we will explore in more depth what these differences in perceptions are, and which contexts shape them.

## Method

The two studies we bring together in this article both explore the viewing patterns of young Danish audiences and their motivations to watch or not watch domestic content. They do so from a predominantly qualitative perspective and combine several methodological steps.

The Reaching Young Audiences project employed a two-phase “explanatory sequential” mixed-methods research design, as described by Creswell and Clark (2017). This approach began with a quantitative phase, followed by a qualitative phase designed to deepen and contextualize the initial findings. In the first phase, a nationwide survey was conducted with 313 children and adolescents aged 8 to 17. The results revealed a clear preference for and high consumption of US-produced content, particularly through global streaming services such as Netflix and Disney+ (see Jensen & Mitric, 2023; Jensen et al., 2021). Building on these findings, the second phase involved a qualitative investigation using mobile ethnography. This phase focused on a smaller group of 20 children within the same age range, observed over the course of one week. The primary aim of this stage was to gain deeper insights into the children's media habits and preferences, with a strong emphasis on capturing their authentic voices and perspectives.

When researching children’s voices, traditional qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups can unintentionally create hierarchical dynamics, where the children may feel pressured to respond in ways that align with adult expectations (Taylor and Rooney, 2017; Dobson, 2021; Willett and Richards, 2021). To avoid this, we chose mobile ethnography as a more child-centered and less intrusive method. This approach allowed participants to use their smartphones to document aspects of their everyday media use, sharing their experiences through notes, photos, and videos uploaded via a dedicated app.

The tool used for this purpose was 'Indeemo', a qualitative research platform that enabled researchers to assign daily tasks related to media consumption. These tasks were communicated through short videos and written instructions, and participants responded using a mix of selfie videos, text entries, and images. This method allowed data to be collected in the participants' homes, minimizing adult influence, and creating a more comfortable and authentic setting for expression.

The qualitative phase was designed not only to explore the reasons behind the strong preference for US content but also to examine broader patterns in media engagement. Over the week, participants completed daily assignments on topics such as what they enjoy about watching films and series, their favourite content and why they like it, their opinions on Danish versus US productions, and how other media activities like gaming and YouTube fit into their overall media habits. To ensure a diverse and representative sample, participants were recruited from various regions across Denmark, including both urban and rural areas, and from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. This approach provided a rich and nuanced dataset that offered valuable insights into the media preferences and behaviours of Danish children and adolescents, also in relation to the dominance of US content in their viewing habits. Table one shows a pseudonymized list of the 20 participants, their gender, age and location, plus each participant's favourite movie and favourite series.

| PSEUDONYM | GENDER AGE | LOCATION | FAVOURITE MOVIE & SERIES† |
|---|---|---|---|
| AMALIE | F 12 | Greater Aarhus | *Notting Hill* (UK, 1999), *Friends* |
| ANNE | F 10 | Central Jutland | *Lassie* (2006), ***The Class*** (DK) |
| ASTRID | F 10 | Central Jutland | *Lassie*, *The Babysitters Club* (2020) |
| BENJAMIN | M 12 | Central Jutland | i (1994), *Family Guy* (1999-) |
| EMMA | F 12 | Eastern Jutland | *Feel the Beat*, *Mako Mermaids* (AUS, 2013-2016) |
| EMIL | M 9 | Central Jutland | *Titanic*, *Richie Rich* (2015) |
| MADS | M 10 | Eastern Jutland | ***Checkered Ninja 2*** (DK), *Grizzy & the Lemmings* (France, 2016-) |
| MAGNUS | M 11 | Eastern Jutland | *Deadpool* (2016), *Rick & Morty* (2012-) |
| NIKOLAJ | M 11 | Greater Aarhus | *Die Hard*, *Gravity Falls* (2012-2016) |
| SOFIE | F 10 | Eastern Jutland | *A Dog's Journey* (2019), ***Sammen til sidste spring*** (DK, 2021) |
| BRIT | F 17 | Falster | *Jagten* (DK, 2021), *Euphoria* (2019-2022) |
| BERTA | F 16 | Funen | ***All Inclusive*** (DK, 2014), *Family Law* (CA, 2021) |
| CAROLINE | F 17 | Greater Copenhagen | *After*, *Grey's Anatomy* |
| FRIDA | F 14 | Greater Copenhagen | *Avengers*: *Infinity War*, *Mr. Iglesias* (2019-2020) |
| HUGO | M 15 | Greater Aarhus | *Ratatouille* (2007), *Big Mouth* (2017-2023) |
| KASPER | M 13 | Central Jutland | *Pacific Rim* (2013), *Lucifer* (2016-2021) |
| KARL | M 16 | Funen | *Harry Potter* (all) (US/UK), *The Witcher* (2019-2024) |
| LAURA | F 13 | Northern Jutland | *Harry Potter & the Prisoner of Azkaban* (UK), *Stranger Things* (2016-2025) |
| MIKKEL | M 14 | Western Jutland | *Karate Kid* (1984), *Cobra Kai* (2018-2023) |
| TOBIAS | M 14 | Northern Jutland | ***Flickering Lights*** (DK), ***Those who Kill*** (DK, 2019) |

*Table 1 - Overview of the Participants in the Mobile Ethnographic Study in the Reaching Young Audiences Study.*
*†Most of the films and series are from the US. Non-US movies and series have their national origin shown in the parentheses. Danish content is highlighted in bold.*

The Crescine project's audience work considers the reception of films produced in seven small markets in Europe (Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Flanders, Ireland, Lithuania and Portugal) (see also Damasio et al. 2025, Gracio et al. 2025). In this article, we are only focusing on the Danish data involving young adults between 19 and early 30s. Media Diary and interview data was collected in 2023, while the focus group data was collected in 2024. Participants with cultural backgrounds outside Denmark have been living in Denmark for at least five years. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, patterns in the young Danish audience's attitudes and behaviour were similar to young audiences in the other markets. We use data from the following participants (Table 2):

| | Age group | Gender | Cultural Background | Location | Education | Frequency of watching domestic film | Opinion on domestic film |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Geryon | 26-40 | M | Greece | Aarhus | Master | Once or a few times a year | Same |
| Barbara | 16-25 | F | Lithuania | Aarhus | Bachelor | Once or a few times a week | Same |
| Jens | 26-40 | M | | København | Master | Once or a few times a month | Same |
| Ulla | 16-25 | F | | Aarhus | Secondary | Once or a few times a month | Same |
| Andrea | 16-25 | F | Colombia | Aarhus | Bachelor | Less than once a year | Same |

*Table 2 - Overview of the Participants in their 20s and early 30s from the Crescine diary and interview study in Denmark*.

During the 5-day media diary phase, participants recorded all audiovisual content they consumed and completed activities related to domestic and international film, such as rating trailers. The diary data and results of the activities were used to understand the individual's media repertoire and tastes in preparation for the qualitative 1:1 interviews.

During the interviews the importance of sociality for the choice and experience of domestic small market film became evident across all markets. Therefore, the focus group phase explored the social practices surrounding film: how groups negotiate tastes, discover titles, and decide what to watch together. The focus groups brought together existing social groups (friends, family), who regularly watch films together. They were recruited through convenience sampling involving local student helpers. Conducted on-site in local languages, sessions featured a sorting exercise in which participants discussed recent popular and critically acclaimed domestic films. Groups then planned either a cinema outing or a joint streaming evening while researchers observed their decision-making. For this article, we focus on the Danish groups that involved young participants (Table 3).

| Group ID | Group composition |
|---|---|
| DK-FG2 | Karoline (50s) and her daughter Nina (late teens) who regularly stream together at home |
| DK-FG3 | Konrad, Villiam, Magnus and Peter, friends in their 20s who regularly organise streaming evenings together in the dormitory where they all live. |
| DK-FG4 | Andreas, Tanja and Jakob, friends from university in their 20s who regularly go to the cinema together |

*Table 3 - Overview of the Participants in the Crescine Study's Danish Focus Groups Involving Young Audiences*

## Findings

### *Young Audiences (8-17-year-old Children and Adolescents)*

Needs for autonomy, emotions, and insights are driving preferences. The 8- to 17-year-olds demonstrate a thoughtful and introspective approach to the films and series they choose to watch. Rather than consuming content passively, they actively consider what value fictional narratives bring to their lives, emotionally, mentally, and socially. This reflective attitude influences their viewing choices, as they seek out content that resonates with their personal experiences, emotional needs, and aspirations (also see Freudendal et al. 2026).

One of the key aspects they appreciate is the constant and unrestricted access to a vast array of content available at any time of day, not surprisingly leading to highly individualised viewing patterns. This on-demand availability, particularly through major streaming platforms like Netflix and Disney+, gives them a strong sense of autonomy. They enjoy the freedom to select content that aligns with their current mood or interests, whether they are looking for something light-hearted, thrilling, emotionally intense, or intellectually stimulating. These platforms offer extensive libraries, predominantly filled with US productions, which cater to a wide range of tastes and preferences. Young viewers often gravitate toward content that delivers a strong emotional or sensory impact, such as stories featuring characters who overcome significant challenges, or films with visually stunning special effects, especially in genres such as action and fantasy. These elements provide a sense of excitement and emotional engagement that they find much less frequently in Danish productions.

Also, they do not shy away from intense emotional experiences such as fear, suspense, or thrill. Instead, they see these feelings as part of the entertainment experience. Such moments are seen not just as enjoyable, but also as mentally enriching, offering a kind of imaginative rehearsal for real-life situations (Freudendal et al. 2025). In this way, fictional content becomes a space for exploring emotions and building psychological resilience, contributing to their sense of competence and autonomy.

As Table 1 shows, and as also became evident in the nationwide survey (see table 4), Danish 8-17-year-olds' favourite films and series predominantly originate in the US. Although the number one movie (franchise) was British, namely *Harry Potter*, all other movies in the top 10 were US; and of the series that made it into the top 10, only five originate outside of the US, and of these only one was Danish (*Those who Kill*) and just made it into the top 10.

| NO. | MOVIES | MENTIONS | SERIES | MENTIONS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Harry Potter (UK) | 47 | *Friends* (US) | 26 |
| 2 | Avengers (US) | 33 | *Stranger Things* (US) | 25 |
| 3 | After (US) | 24 | *Breaking Bad* (US) | 18 |
| 4 | Star Wars (US) | 20 | *Lucifer* (US) | 17 |
| 5 | Hunger Games (US) | 19 | *Riverdale* (US)<br>*The 100* (US)<br>*The Vampire Diaries* (US) | 14 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | Spiderman (US) | 17 | *Outer Banks* (US)<br>*Teen Wolf* (US) | 13 |
| 7 | Fast and Furious (US) | 16 | *Cobra Kai* (US) | 12 |
| 8 | The Kissing Booth (US)<br>Shrek (US) | 15 | *Falcon and the Winter Soldier* (US)<br>*How I Met Your Mother* (US)<br>*La Casa de Papél* (ES)<br>*Vikings* (CA/IE) | 11 |
| 9 | To All the Boys (US) | 12 | *Alexa and Katie* (US)<br>*Grey's Anatomy* (US)<br>*Modern Family* (US)<br>*Peaky Blinders* (UK)<br>*Sons of Anarchy* (US)<br>*Star Wars* (US)<br>*The Office* (UK or US)<br>*Flash* (US) | 10 |
| 10 | Lord of the Rings (NZ/US)<br>Shawshank Redemption (US) | 10 | *Bridgerton* (US)<br>***Those Who Kill*** (DK)<br>*Gilmore Girls* (US)<br>*Sex Education* (UK) | 9 |

*Table 4 - Most-mentioned Favourite Movies and Series among 8-17-year-old Danes*
*Comments: N = 313, 2021. Survey question asked: "Nævn op til fem af dine yndlingsfilm/-serier" ("Name up to five of your favourite movies/series"). Danish titles highlighted in bold.*

When comparing local Danish productions to their US counterparts, the 8- to 17-year-olds tend to perceive a significant disparity in terms of emotional engagement and relatability. As the quote below from 14-year-old Mikkel shows, despite being more culturally and linguistically familiar with Danish content, they often find US films and series much more compelling:

> I really like American films and series, because there are good cinematic tools and better props and often the actors are also quite a bit better. And plus, I really like that it's in English, because I think it's interesting and it's such a world-renowned language, so it makes it more exciting. And then because most well-known series and films are made in English, and that's just how it is in general, and that's why you want to see them.

The Danish content is seen as less compelling. It is as if the familiarity sometimes works against Danish films and series, as it leads viewers to scrutinize the authenticity of characters, dialogue, and scenarios more critically. The closeness to their own culture makes them more aware of what feels artificial or forced, which this quote from 13-year-old Laura demonstrates:

> I don't watch a lot of Danish films [and series], but if I do, it's either because it's a cartoon or a thriller... I've seen a little bit of *The Chestnut Man* with my classmates, and I actually think it was really good, but the thing about Danish films is that they always must be a bit strange. That is, it's not like that people they talk, as if the producers or the directors, they don't know how people really talk.

In contrast, US content benefits from a kind of cultural distance. Because the Danish children and adolescents are not as intimately familiar with US social norms and linguistic nuances, they are less likely to question the realism of what they see on screen. This allows them to

immerse themselves more fully in the narratives without being distracted by perceived inauthenticity. Ironically, this distance fosters a stronger emotional connection, as they are more willing to suspend disbelief and engage with the characters and stories on a deeper level. Participants report feeling a strong sense of familiarity and emotional closeness with American characters, storylines, and even actors. This connection is particularly evident in genres such as emotional dramas, comedies, and romantic films, where identification with characters plays a central role. They enjoy laughing along with comedic characters, feeling deeply moved by romantic or tragic storylines, and just generally experiencing a wide range of emotions behind the screen (also see Freudendal et al. 2025).

Ultimately, what drives their engagement is the desire to be emotionally entertained. They are highly motivated to seek out content that provides a sense of emotional fulfillment, through laughter, tears, or awe. The ideal content, in their view, is one that offers a rich emotional journey while maintaining a balance: intense enough to be engaging, but not so overwhelming as to have real-world consequences. In this way, films and series become a form of emotional companionship, helping them feel good, connected, and entertained.

The children also demonstrate relatively gendered and stereotypical preferences in their choice of films and series. Children's access to global streaming platforms has considerably broadened the range of audiovisual content available to them, offering forms of sensory and emotional stimulation that domestic productions rarely provide. This also leads to highly individualised viewing patterns. Within this expanded media landscape, clear gendered patterns also emerge in how Danish boys and girls describe their preferences for films and series. These patterns align closely with widely recognised and often rather stereotypical cultural scripts about what boys and girls are 'supposed' to be like suggesting that children's media choices are shaped not only by personal taste but also by broader social expectations surrounding gender-appropriate interests.

Boys tend to favour content characterised by high-intensity visual and auditory stimulation. Something that also shows in their favourite films and series (see Table 1). They express strong preferences for productions featuring large-scale special effects, humour, and fast-paced action, which is illustrated by 13-year-old Kasper, describing his 'dream movie':

> My dream movie should be about something with war or something like that. Where there's shooting, because I really like that. When there's action and stuff. It would be nice if it was filmed kind of like in World War II, maybe on the border with Germany or something [...] Something like that, with lots of action. Maybe based on real events with some good actors and stuff, maybe some comedy, I think it's called, or humour.

Narratives centred on cars, stunts, warfare, speed, noise, and general chaos are particularly appealing, as these genres present scenarios in which characters appear to 'master' or exert control over challenging and unpredictable environments. Only a small number of Danish productions are considered capable of delivering this level of spectacle, with *Checkered Ninja*, *Those Who Kill*, and *Flickering Lights* cited as exceptions. These choices echo familiar masculine-coded ideals of action, technical prowess, and physical daring - or what Raewyn Connell (2005) calls 'hegemonic masculinity' - ideals that circulate also in children's culture

and may reinforce boys' sense of what they are expected to enjoy (see also Geena Davis Institute, 2020).

Girls, on the other hand, articulate a set of preferences oriented more towards emotional engagement and interpersonal narratives. They are especially attracted to the exoticism of foreign, predominantly US-American, settings, which offer a sense of distance and novelty not found in Danish productions. Their preferred content emphasises strong emotional narratives, such as 'tear-jerkers', love stories, glamorous aesthetics, and portrayals of relationships, through which they, too, explore forms of 'mastery', albeit within the social and emotional domain. This, for example, is evident from Brit's (17) description of what her dream movie would look like:

> I think the movie should be about a family and some family problems that they have. And then maybe also bring in some world problems, and then do it in a funny way, so it can be both reflective but also a fun movie to watch. And I think it should be a comedy, because everyone could use a good laugh. And the language, I think it should be in English, because you can express yourself better in English, and they have a bigger vocabulary. I feel like you can give a few more feelings when you speak English.

In comparison, Danish content is often perceived as too familiar, too realistic, and lacking the glamour or 'bling' that makes international productions appealing. These preferences similarly resonate with long-standing cultural notions of femininity that emphasise relationality, empathy (and possibly even compliance and nurturance), romance, and aesthetic pleasure – what Connell (1987) terms 'emphasized femininity' – indicating that girls' viewing practices are also shaped by gendered cues about suitable forms of engagement (also see Schippers, 2007). This becomes clear when, for example, 14-year-old Frida and 12-year-old Emma talk about why they like *Alexa & Katie* and *Feel the Beat*, respectively:

> I love *Alexa & Katie* (2018-2020). It's great fun and has a really good message. There are also so many things happening that you can relate to in everyday life. Because you are about the same age as they are. Therefore, I can relate to what is happening. And then recognize it from my own life and be absorbed into what is happening. I can watch it, too, so I can use it for when I get older and will experience some of it. Then I know how they coped.

> My favourite movie is *Feel the Beat* (2020), on Netflix. I really like it because there's a girl in the big city, or she's from a small Wisconsin town, and then she moves to New York to become a professional dancer, but then she gets kicked out and must teach some little girls. And it's really hard for her because she thinks it's hard to see others live out the dream she wanted. At first, she is really hard on them, but later on she starts to love them really sweetly, like their mother does. And I think that's just really nice [laughs]. There's a whole lot of emotion in the film.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that although boys and girls seek different forms of stimulation, whether more visceral or emotional, both groups rely on international, and particularly US, films and series to satisfy desires that they feel domestic productions seldom meet. At the same time, the clear alignment between their stated preferences and conventional gender stereotypes highlights how global media consumption remains

entangled with culturally persistent ideas about gender, even within an expanded and, at least on the surface, more diverse media environment.

## *Young Adults*

During the media diary phases of the Crescine audience research, we gathered evidence for the individualization of audiovisual consumption in people's everyday practices. During their 5-day media diary period none of the young Danish participants shared any programme watched and they also displayed very different patterns of media use. They gravitated towards the global streaming services, mainly for US-American content, though Danish platforms and material (bold) also featured in their media diets (Table 5).

| | **Day 1** | **Day 2** | **Day 3** | **Day 4** | **Day 5** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Geryon** | ***Den Skyldige*** (illegal streaming) | | ***Kvinden i buret*** (illegal streaming), Various gaming-related videos, (Youtube) | | *What is a Woman?* (illegal streaming) |
| **Jens** | *Amazing Spiderman 1+2 - Worse than you can imagine* (Youtube), *Sam Rami's Spiderman Trilogy - Worse than you remember* (Youtube), *Every single Warhammer 40k* (WH40k) *Faction Explained \| Part 1+2* (Youtube), *Every Age of Sigmar Faction in under 25 minutes* (Youtube) | *Every Illumination Movie Ranked* (Youtube), ***Smuk*** (Netflix), *The Last of Us*, s1 e1 (HBO) | *The Last of Us*, s1 e 2 (HBO), *Black Mirror*, s6 e1 (Netflix) | *Black Mirror*, s6 e2 (Netflix), *The Flash* (cinema) | *X-MEN*: *All Movies Reviewed* (Part 2) (Youtube), *Asteroid City* (cinema), *Prey* (Disney+) |
| **Barbara** | *The Last Dance* (Netflix) | *Knives Out: Glass Onion* (Netflix) | *Murder Mystery 2* (Netflix) | *The Holiday* (Netflix) | *Focus* (Netflix) |
| **Ulla** | ***Bachelorette*** **(TV 2 Play)** | | ***Væbnet med ord og vinger*** **(Filmstriben)** | **TV2 *Nord Undersøger* (TV 2 Play)**, *Selling Sunset* (Netflix) | ***Bachelorette*** **(TV 2 Play)** |
| **Andrea** | *911* (Disney+) | *911* (Disney+) | *Veronica* (Netflix) | *House MD* (Amazon Prime) | |

*Table 5 - Media Diaries of the Young Participants in the Crescine Study*

In the interviews we got more detailed explanations of the motivations behind these media repertoires, including habitual viewing such as putting on a film on Netflix every day after work (Barbara), individual mood management by choosing relaxing Danish and international Reality TV content, interspersed with following interests in Danish culture and current affairs

(Ulla) or a general interest in film, particularly of the Sci-Fi and adventure genre that informs content choices across platforms, including YouTube viewing (Jens).

When Danish material resonated with our young interview participants, it was connected to individual interests, biographical experiences or a sense of cultural recognition. Jens, for example, watched *Smuk* on Netflix after he had heard about it during its cinema release and on social media. The film depicts the controversial 'puttemiddag' in Copenhagen-area high schools, where girls entering the high school are 'invited' for parties with the boys of the final year, often involving alcohol and sex. He remembered the ritual from his own time in school and argued that it was great to have a film made about it. Speaking about Danish comedies, Jens also claimed he enjoyed becoming part of the cultural vernacular, getting him to seek out more productions from creatives like Anders Thomas Jensen. This sense of national cultural recognition was also reiterated by our interview partners in other countries (see Gracio et al, 2025). Specific for Denmark was a high level of recognition and awareness of Danish films among the young Danes, even if they did not watch the Danish films they were talking about.

The interviews also revealed how social activities around film viewing motivate people to diverge from their individual viewing patterns.

> It kind of depends on which group of friends I'm in. I have some friends who are very fond of these slightly more obscure films [like the Danish Dogma 95 films] that I might not put on myself, but that are very cool when you just watch it with some other people and can just interpret it together, right? But then I also have some other friends where it just needs to be a little more, well, simple entertainment, right? So yes, it depends on who I'm with. (Ulla)

Because word of mouth and social viewing situations often emerged as key factors for choosing or not choosing domestic films, our focus groups explored the role of sociality in film viewing relating to recommendation behaviour, choice and negotiation of taste within different existing social groups.

The focus groups revealed that when watching together, people form what we call "situational taste communities", where participants are quickly classifying titles as suitable or unsuitable for social viewing as well as determining whether cinema or streaming are the right environment for seeing the film. Criteria vary, though. Younger cohorts across the seven countries tended to associate genres of spectacle and intense emotion (e.g. action, horror, adventure) with joint cinema trips; while streaming was more prevalent among people already gathered under one roof as in the case of the family in DK-FG2 and the students living in a dormitory (DK-FG3). In these settings, groups tended more towards seeking relaxing or fun experiences. The horizon of emotional expectations appears to be key for the choice of films in social settings.

This is exemplified by a group of (mixed gender) friends in their 20s who regularly go to the cinema together (DK-FG4). Though they individually also explore European films such as the Danish Oscar-nominated documentary *Flugt* or the Amy Winehouse biopic *Back to Black*, when the whole group is together the decisive factors are high-budgets plus genres with entertainment value (action, sci-fi, war) that "justify" spending money on the cinema.

Therefore, they gravitate towards Hollywood blockbusters, which they perceive to be to the taste of their friends. The pop-cultural capital of a film is also important for the group. As Jakob remarks: "To be on top of pop culture references you need to see *Dune 2*. […] I believe there are just fewer [people] who would get jokes about *Checkered Ninja [DK, 2018].*" The pop-cultural appeal also feeds their online conversations about the series and films they stream together. When talking online about for example, films and series from the Marvel franchise, they exchange comments and jokes to foster their groups' coherence through shared cultural references.

Anticipating the group's needs and finding a matching film was experienced as a tough task by the young adults. Choosing a film for the group required careful consideration and risk management. A group of young men living in the same dormitory (DK-FG3) who regularly organize streaming nights for their hallway highlighted that they usually do not dare to recommend films that they haven't seen beforehand. Konrad explained: "I think we often watch films that one of us has seen before. This is because then you dare recommend the film. And then you know you're not completely off the pitch." During the focus group exercise of choosing a film together, the group therefore sought out markers of safety when looking for a film which included knowing creatives and actors involved, or IMDb ratings. They considered, for example, the Danish dark comedy *Riders of Justice* (DK, 2020) because the film's star Mads Mikkelsen and its screenwriter Anders Thomas Jensen promise similar "vibes" to the Danish black comedies of the early 2000s. *Flickering Lights* (DK, 2000) by the same director and also starring Mads Mikkelsen was explicitly mentioned as a reference point. In the end, though, they chose the British war drama *1917* as the potential next film for their streaming evening. They did so because Konrad had already seen the film and vouched for it, but also because it had won three Oscars and promised action. The group talked about the war film's action potential more in-between the lines, acknowledging that this is also a "sad" film. Returning to the theme of film as collective mood management, they joked that they might need to watch the US college comedy *Superbad* afterwards, to not end the evening on a "downer". In this process, we see how signals about genre, mood, topics, as well as markers of quality (like Academy Awards or high IMDb ratings) were crucial for choosing a film together.

The search for markers of what to expect from a film that would then be evaluated against the group's needs also repeated in the family setting. The daughter in group DK-FG-2 immediately rejected the US drama *Private Life* when it came up on the Netflix screen: "It looks weird". Questioned why she reacted like this, she explained:

> [I saw in the blurb] that it's about people who cannot have children and then there was something with their niece […] it just sounded uncomfortable. Like there are going to be things that are not good. I don't know, maybe also [things that are] very wrong.

Instead, the two of them settled for a US-comedy *No Hard Feelings*, because the daughter Nina argued she had seen a lot about the film on social media and "it looked fun".

Mood-based motivations persisted across individual and group-based film choices, such as seeking emotional experiences, relaxing, or visceral genres. The films chosen for group

settings are furthermore judged on their potential to foster social activities around the film, such as talking about pop-cultural references. In these processes, individual tastes and topic interests can become relegated for the sake of consensus and the wellbeing of the group. When young people share film suggestions and experiences with their friends and families, the process can be understood as a bid for common emotional experience and activity where the giving part can feel a high level of responsibility to make the right choice, making them gravitate to experiences that feel 'safe'. Beyond the individual qualities of the film, its affordances for social practices such as pop-cultural shareability and discussion potential are important for making a film suitable for social consumption. Across the markets, domestic content had a harder time signaling whether it could meet the situational taste communities' needs in the relatively short process of choosing content. Domestic small market films may be at a disadvantage here for several reasons: The genre portfolios from small markets seldom include action or Sci-Fi and budget limitations are obvious. Furthermore, young audiences' previous experience with domestic films is often limited or based on outdated perceptions. Lastly, the domestic films that could be attractive for them are not necessarily present on the platforms they consult for information about films, particularly on social media as well as not necessarily being present on their preferred streaming services.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Our studies show that individualised media consumption is the norm, driven by the on-demand availability of vast catalogues predominantly comprising US-American productions. For both children and young adults, everyday viewing is structured by practices of personal mood management, following niche interests, and habitual routines. Domestic content competes in an environment where international content and global US-owned streamers not only dominate attention but also set expectations for production values, emotional intensity, and genre diversity. Danish content, particularly for younger viewers, is viewed more critically because it mirrors everyday Danish culture. Paradoxically, this cultural proximity can reduce the domestic films' and series' appeal among young audiences who seek either spectacle or, what could be termed, aspirational distance.

The media diets of young Danish viewers remain significantly gendered, particularly among children. Boys tend to favour action-driven, visually intense genres aligned with longstanding ideals of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell 2005), while girls gravitate towards emotionally relational narratives reflecting "emphasized femininity" (Connell 1987). These preferences are reinforced rather than challenged by global streaming platforms, whose expansive US-dominated catalogues give boys and girls ample opportunity to encounter content that resonates with culturally familiar gender scripts. Although individualized, these viewing patterns are thus neither random nor neutral. They are intertwined with socialized ideas about what kinds of stories and aesthetics are appropriate or appealing for different genders.

Social viewing contexts elevate individual practices of mood management, genre-based choices, and following specific interests onto a collective level. Among friends or families, young Danes' selection processes are characterised by caution, consensus building, and a focus on collective mood management. In these settings, viewers form situational taste communities: temporary, socially negotiated clusters of taste that prioritize films and series capable of satisfying the emotional, entertainment, and social needs of the group. These needs often involve 'safe choices' for example of high-budget blockbusters, titles with recognizable talent, or clear genre signals to minimize the risk of selecting something that may fail to entertain or dampen the shared atmosphere.

These dynamics have important implications for domestic content. Danish film and television face several structural disadvantages in selection processes, including limited availability of high budget spectacle and visceral genres, fewer external markers of being a safe choice, such as international awards, widespread social media visibility, weaker pop-cultural presence among young people, and less familiarity with domestic titles. Therefore, Danish productions may struggle to be selected. This disadvantage is amplified by the risk-averse nature of collective decision-making, which often leads groups to default to known international content with clear entertainment value and cultural currency.

Despite these challenges, there remain pathways for domestic content to resonate with young audiences. Individual experiences, biographical recognition, and cultural specificity can still foster powerful connections, as demonstrated when young adults seek out Danish films that mirror their own lives or social contexts. In rare cases, Danish titles (e.g. *Flickering Lights*), directors (e.g. Anders Thomas Jensen) or actors (e.g. Mads Mikkelsen) also achieve lasting pop-cultural visibility, becoming shared reference points. At the same time, social dynamics can also push young audiences to watch something they would not normally choose on their own, potentially broadening their horizon of knowledge and expectations regarding domestic content.

Overall, our findings highlight that the "youth challenge" facing small market audiovisual industries like Denmark's is not merely a matter of declining audience numbers. It is equally a challenge of visibility, relevance, and emotional resonance within individualized viewing cultures and socially risk-averse group practices. As young Danes continue to navigate abundant, globalized media landscapes, the Danish industry faces a complex task: to produce content that not only speaks to individual interests and cultural identities but also carries enough cultural visibility and emotional clarity to function as a 'safe' and appealing choice in social settings.

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## Notes

[1] Calculated based on data from the 2025 Cultural Participation survey published by Danmarks Statistik (2026).