Combining New and Old Viewing Practices

Uses and Experiences of the Transmedia Series "Skam"

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Abstract

In 2015, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) released a new youth series, Skam, which was acclaimed for its accurate portrayal of Norwegian teenagers but, above all, for its distribution as a transmedia narrative spreading content across several platforms. Through focus-group interviews, this article investigates how Swedish Skam viewers took part in the content and perceived the role and relation between the platforms. While the interviewees followed Skam in different ways, they nevertheless accepted and appreciated the transmedia format. While they argued that the core content needed to be video based, other content was also seen as a natural part of the series and essential in building the narrative. Furthermore, the idea of contemporary media consumption as being less constrained by time and space was partly contradicted. Especially real-time content and discussions with peers motivated the participants to abide by a new kind of TV schedule, reminiscent of TV viewing practices of the past.

Keywords: TV, media convergence, audience reception, viewing practices, youth

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the TV industry has undergone dramatic changes. TV viewing that used to be characterized as a passive form of media consumption, typically taking place in front of the TV, has become considerably more active and can occur almost any time or place (Askwith 2007; Evans 2011, 2015). Especially young people are increasingly less likely to watch traditional linear TV, instead preferring on-demand services that allow them control over when, where and how to watch TV (Napoli 2011; Matrix 2014).

During the 2010s, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) observed declines in numbers of young viewers. Being a public service, it was important for them to offer content to all segments; hence, in 2015, they released a new online teen drama: Skam[1], aimed specifically at teen girls (Krüger & Rustad 2017). The series focused on teenagers in Oslo, and each season followed a new main character. The series touched upon topics

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such as relationships and identity but also on more sensitive subjects: sexual assault, religion, mental illness, sexuality and eating disorders (NRK Kommunikasjon 2017). Skam rapidly became a huge success.[2]

The series was acclaimed for its accurate portrayal of Norwegian teenagers but, above all, for its unique distribution, where the creators integrated various platforms and content to adapt to active TV-viewing styles (Magnus 2016). Skam was broadcast on NRK's website through short video clips that unfolded in real time and came up during irregular hours that were not announced in advance. At the end of each week, the clips were brought together into complete episodes with variable length, which were published on NRK's website and broadcast on Norwegian linear TV and the Swedish on-demand service SVT Play. Besides video clips, the website feed included photos, sms and email conversations between characters (Galli 2016). Instagram accounts were created for the characters, and in season four, YouTube was also integrated (NRK 2017).

Skam's design reflects technical as well as cultural changes that occurred within the TV industry in the 2000s. According to Evans (2015), transmedia storytelling is becoming routine – the industry is expected to offer content in various platforms – but it is also a strategy used by the industry to regain control in a changing media landscape. Today, TV series are often integrated with other media; TV viewing occurs increasingly independent of time and place and is characterized by active choice (Askwith 2007; Dena 2009). These changes question many of the basic concepts of television as a medium (Lotz 2007), leading to questions such as: What is TV today, and how is it consumed? If a programme is watched through different types of devices, is it still perceived as TV? What roles do the format and the platforms play? What roles do time and space play when the content is constantly available? These questions are actualized with Skam's design.

We know that Skam has a large audience, but we know less about how this audience actually uses the different platforms of the narrative and experiences the relation between them. By investigating this, the article aims to contribute to an understanding of how TV today is used and experienced. We specifically look into the following two questions:

1. How, when and why do viewers take part in the series?
2. How do viewers experience the role of and relation between the series' platforms?

Transmedia has been theorized and studied by authors such as Ryan (2004), Ryan and Thon (2014), Jenkins (2006), Dena (2009) and Evans (2011, 2015). However, while offering crucial insights on transmedia narrative, previous research has often focused on how transmedia narrative is structured and organized or intended by the producers. Reception studies, however, have often targeted engaged audiences on the whole (both viewers who watch only the TV content and those who also use the other platforms involved). This gives us knowledge about the audiences as a whole and why some viewers opt out of the alternative platforms, but it also risks obscuring experiences of those who actually do take part in the whole transmedia narrative.

Our study contributes to the understanding of how transmedia narrative is used and experienced, specifically by viewers who take part in the whole transmedia narrative with all its platforms. Whereas user motives and experiences are interesting themselves, the case of Skam is particularly interesting, because it represents a Scandinavian example in a world otherwise dominated by Anglo-American transmedia productions.

In the following section, we contextualize the analysis in relation to changes in TV format and media use. The method and data for the empirical study are then described, and the empirical analyses are presented and discussed.

Background

TV format under change: media convergence and transmedia

In the contemporary media landscape, new and old media integrate, while media companies expand to new markets and spread their content on various channels, screens and platforms. To explain this phenomenon, Henry Jenkins uses the concept of "media convergence", which refers to "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (Jenkins 2006: 2). Media convergence can be exemplified by cell phones being used also as cameras or game consoles and by media companies producing not only movies and television but also theme parks.

Media convergence is partly characterized by technical developments that enable new types of content. However, convergence is also about changed relations between consumers and technology, industries and markets. A central aspect lies in consumers' active participation, such as searching for information, selecting media content and sharing it with others. Media convergence thus implies a shift in how media is both produced and consumed, and it should be understood as a cultural as much as a technical process (Jenkins 2006).

From Jenkins' thoughts on media convergence, theories of transmedia have emerged. Evans (2011) defines "transmedia" as the relationship between several platforms that together present a fictional world. Transmedia narrative is a type of aesthetic, dependent upon the consumer him/herself participating in creating fictional worlds. By actively searching for pieces of the story on different platforms and participating in online-based discussions with others, a richer entertainment experience is acquired (Jenkins 2006). According to Jenkins' view of transmedia, each part of the narrative (i.e., all platforms) needs to be clearly distinguished from the others and tell a story that stands alone. The various platforms contribute different things, depending on what they are best suited for, but together, they create a larger, coherent fictional world that expands across multiple platforms.

As Dena (2009) acknowledges, Jenkins' emphasis on the platforms' independence means that his theory covers only part of the transmedia phenomenon. Dena instead distinguishes between two types of transmedia structures: intercompositional and intracompositional.

Intercompositional transmedia narratives are the kinds of works covered by Jenkins' concept. These works integrate multiple narratives on multiple media platforms. All narratives are independent (like the movie and the computer game of The Matrix), but together they make up a larger whole. In *intracompositonal* transmedia narratives, however, one single story expands across several media platforms. All units add something unique to the story but are not independent compositions. To get the whole story, the viewer needs to take part in content from all platforms. An intracompositional work can consist of either several equal media platforms that together create a story or one larger

platform with one or several smaller complementary platforms (such as a TV series and a website) (Dena 2009).

Jenkins' and Dena's theories of transmedia narrative have been applied in previous research on TV series. Some of these studies (e.g., Brooker 2001; Evans 2011; Simons 2014) have examined the use and perception of transmedia stories. The studies show how content on multiple platforms can serve different purposes for viewers but together contribute to a broader overall experience (Evans 2011). However, in both inter- and intracompositional stories, viewers expressed the need for a central platform offering traditional TV episodes, while other platforms were seen as complementary. What respondents saw as valuable contributions from the complementary platforms varied; some felt that these platforms enabled a deeper contact with the characters (Simons 2014), while others only saw them as sources of information (Brooker 2001).

A common result of the previous studies referenced above lies in the respondents' reluctance to take part in narratives from several platforms, particularly online platforms. The respondents emphasized the importance of comfort and preferred watching via a large TV screen, sitting on a sofa, without being interrupted or distracted. Dhoest and Simons (2016) also found that their respondents disfavoured an active role in the unfolding of the story, as this hinders their immersion into the fictional world.

The development of transmedia storytelling has been described as occurring in three waves (Evans 2015). In the first wave, transmedia primarily aimed to fill gaps between episodes by providing content in other platforms, such as websites and games. In the second wave, focus shifted towards broadcasting content onto new portable devices, such as mobile phones and tablets. The third wave, which we see now, combines the two previous waves. It is described as layered transmedia (Evans 2015), where several platforms are used simultaneously in so-called second-screen viewing. Here, apps in mobile devices are used to enhance the viewing experience for content in the primary platform (e.g., live-streamed TV).

Jenkins' and Dena's theories are specifically relevant to discussions of the first wave of transmedia, as they focus on the parts and platforms of the narrative and the relations between them. This can also be said about the studies referenced above. To some extent, our study continues in their tracks, since we, too, are interested in how viewers use and experience content on various platforms – the fact that content from different platforms can now be accessed simultaneously does not mean that the relation between them becomes irrelevant. But, we are also interested in the mobile devices' enabling of consumption "on the go", brought about by the second wave. Finally, the third wave, as described by Evans, includes applications in mobile devices, where the audience can participate in diverse activities organized around the content from the primary platform. As for Skam, tools that enable user activity around the content can be found in the form of commentary fields on Instagram and YouTube accounts and on the website. Some research has been done on the use of these; for example, Krüger and Rustad (2017) analyzed how viewers interacted with other viewers and with the content in commentary fields on the production's website. Our participants did not take part in those arenas; however, as is shown in our analysis, there was still quite a lot of peer interaction around the content – both with and without the use of screens.

Media use under change: uses and gratifications in new media

The theory of uses and gratifications assumes that individuals actively and consciously choose media content based on individual motives and needs. McQuail (1987) distinguishes between four categories of motives for media use: information, personal identity, integration/social interaction and entertainment. The theory is useful in the initial stages of new media forms, and especially now, with increased variety of media choices that digital technologies present to people, it becomes important to look into audiences' motivations (Ruggiero 2000). However, even if we continue to use traditional tools and typologies, we must be prepared to expand them to take into account changes that have occurred in the media landscape since the theory was developed. Here, Ruggiero presents three attributes that distinguish new media from traditional ones. *Interactivity* refers to how new media emphasize the theory's view of media users as active. *Demassification* refers to the process where mass media and mass communication are increasingly abandoned, while media usage is individualized. Digital media offers a wide range of media content from which to choose, along with opportunities to tailor "content packages" according to individual needs and preferences. Finally, *asynchroneity* means that messages, movies and images can be sent, saved and retrieved at any time, allowing individuals to control their media usage, as they can choose when to take part of it.

Uses and gratifications theory can help us understand the participants' motives for watching a transmedia narrative such as Skam, while Ruggiero's additions of demassification and asynchroneity cast light upon how the narrative allows and encourages flexibility, thus increasing viewers' power to control and tailor their media consumption.

Method

To investigate how viewers take part in the series Skam and how they experience the relation between its various platforms, focus group interviews were performed with 16 Swedish Skam viewers.

Focus group interviews are well suited to study individuals' opinions, thoughts and attitudes on various topics. The discussions involve an exchange of thoughts and experiences, which stimulates the participants' memories, experiences and ideas about the topic (Berg 2004). In the discussions, participants voice different opinions and experiences, thus making visible perspectives that may not have come up without the interaction. An important advantage compared to individual interviews is also that, in focus groups, the discussion is driven by the group rather than by the specific questions asked by the researcher, allowing for insights that the researcher may not have expected beforehand (Wibeck 2010).

Since the study focuses on the uses and experiences of transmedia and its different platforms, we targeted only viewers who had at least some experience with the various platforms where Skam distributed content. While it might have been interesting also to include viewers who only watched the series on TV and to ask about their motives for opting out of the additional platforms, such viewers would not have been able to answer questions about the way the various platforms relate to and complement each other.

We wanted participants with varying degrees of commitment – very dedicated, but also less devoted viewers – as their consumption of the series could differ (cf. Brooker

2001). An additional criterion was age; we wanted the participants to be between 16 and 29 years.[3]

Participants were selected partly through snowball sampling: we found our first interviewees through acquaintances, and they in turn directed us to further interviewees. We also recruited participants through the Facebook group "Kosegruppa Sverige"[4], which is a community of about 18,000 Skam fans who use the group to discuss the story and characters. We posted a call for participants in the group, where interested people were informed to contact us via email or Messenger for further information and recruitment. The final selection consisted of four participants from "Kosegruppa Sverige" and 12 from snowball sampling. The participants came from different parts of Sweden, although, at the time of the interviews, they lived in Gothenburg. Most participants were students in high schools or universities. Some participants (those who directed us to other participants) knew other participants from before; however, the focus groups were composed so that no one would know the other participants. The choice to target Swedish Skam viewers was mostly one of access, convenience and language skills. However, it is also interesting that, in a media landscape so dominated by American series, a Norwegian production came to be almost as popular in Sweden as in Norway.

Four focus group interviews were conducted during the spring of 2017, that is, during the series' fourth and last season. The groups included 16 participants: three men and 13 women. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the material was coded using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2008).

We have followed the Swedish Research Council's ethical guidelines (2002), informed consent was obtained, and all names of participants have been changed in order to protect their privacy. All quotes have been translated from Swedish to English.

Our results are presented in two sections, where the first relates to questions of how, when and why participants took part in the series, and the second relates to how they experienced the roles and relations between various platforms in building the narrative.

Results: how, when and why?

All participants followed Skam regularly but with different frequency and in different ways. We could identify two main types of viewers: what we called real-time viewers who continuously took part in Skam content from various platforms and traditional viewers who preferred to watch all content once a week. In the next section, we present the viewing practices of the two groups.

Real-time viewers

Real-time viewers followed the constant updates. The typical real-time viewer watched every day, most often with the website's feed (including video clips and sms conversations) as a basis, but s/he would also take part in content from Instagram and YouTube. For real-time viewers, it was important to watch content in chronological order, even if published on different platforms. The story had to be logical; thus, an sms conversation could not be read before the video clip that preceded it. If participants found themselves in a situation where they were not able to watch all updates, they would therefore save

all content until they could take part in them in chronological order. If possible, however, they preferred watching content directly when released. They would typically get notified that a clip, sms or Instagram image had come up, or their friends would announce that there was new content to see:

> Ingrid: It feels like there's a lot of chat groups going on everywhere. "Now there's a new clip", and you've got five friends looking at it and you have to check it out immediately. I was studying with a friend last Friday and she was like "Take a break from everything, I have to check this out".

Real-time viewers typically watched content "on the go". The participants said that it felt like the content was intended to be consumed during breaks at school, as updates were short and well suited to fill idle time between other activities. This kind of viewing was facilitated by the mobile phone, allowing constant access to all platforms, independent of place.

> Josefine: It's often on the tram, when I see something has happened. You sit and scroll and then you see that something's come up and then you watch it.
>
> Moderator: So you're open to watching on the phone?
>
> Josefine: My computer recently broke down so I do like everything on the phone right now.
>
> Magnus: Yeah, you do that kind of things on the tram. I watched on the tram before I got here. You've got some idle time there, you can't do so much there.
>
> Josefine: And it's the perfect amount of time to watch it on the tram too.

The real-time viewers had two main reasons for following Skam every day, which can be summarized by the words "sense of reality" and "focus". When content was consumed directly when released, participants experienced the narrative as more "real". This sense of reality would be lost if they watched whole sections once a week. The connection became particularly clear when participants reflected on the fact that video clips could be released at any time during the day, without warning:

> Chris: But you know like the clip that was released the other day. When Sana sat there, and the Pepsi Max gang came. We were having lunch at school then, and they too were having lunch at school. And that effect, that it's real-time, makes it feel real. It's a nice trick.
>
> Josefine: Yeah, the dimension that they release it the exact moment, it makes it feel like they're sitting there now, at the same time. Only in another school canteen, you know.

One participant pointed out how Skam, by its continuous release of content on various platforms, displayed time in a more realistic way compared to what is generally the case in TV series and film. While the convention in TV and film narrative is to compress time, in Skam it more often worked the same way as in the viewers' real lives. This made time passing between events more tangible and contributed to the understanding of the narrative:

> Sara: Another thing that I feel affects is that you actually get an idea of the time passing between events. "Oh, Yousef is at Sana's place the day after". That you can somehow relate to how long it's been since things happened, and that gives a certain dynamic. You know "Damn, it's been long since they spoke now", or "That was pretty direct". Those things add something.
>
> Mari: And you lose that when you watch everything at once.

Traditional viewers

Traditional viewers preferred watching one long episode once a week. For traditional viewers, chronological order was not as important as for the real-time viewers. Some of them took part in the weekly episode first and then in the content on other platforms, whereas others took part in sms conversations and Instagram posts during the week but saved all video-based content until it was released as a weekly episode.

Traditional viewers enjoyed watching Skam with others, and some even arranged "Skam evenings", where they gathered to watch the weekly episode together. Some traditional viewers found watching via mobile phones to be tiresome, especially because of the small screens. They would rather use their computers or TVs than their mobile phones; hence, their viewing more often occurred in the home than "on the go". Sometimes, the traditional viewers only watched the televised episodes. It was not that they actively opted out of other platforms but rather that they forgot to check for updates if they did not get notifications about released content from the website, social media or friends.

The reason why traditional viewers watched the way they did can be summarized by the words "coherence" and "anticipation". They felt that narratives were best told as longer episodes and experienced short clips as taken out of context, forcing the viewer to jump in and out of the story. This, they said, made it more difficult to follow the narrative, and therefore, they preferred watching whole episodes at once.

> Linn: I started watching the video clips in season four. I actually found it less fun, I have to admit. It was like everything got spoiled. That nothing was left. I thought it was boring to get so little at a time.

The importance of the surrounding environment, like a big TV screen or a comfortable sofa, which Simons (2014) highlighted, sometimes influenced traditional viewers' preference for whole episodes over video clips, but it was not the primary reason. A central explanation was rather that they liked the thought of looking forward to episodes. Postponing viewing and arranging "Skam evenings" added something extra by making them look forward to the episodes as the highlight of the week. They could take part in the other platforms during the week, but the "real" episode needed to be there, waiting for them at the end of the week, so they could sit on the couch in front of the TV and enjoy it with friends or family.

Motives for watching

There were some general patterns that applied to both real-time and traditional viewers' motives for watching Skam. Regardless of whether they watched every day or once a week, Skam was perceived to offer a distraction. Viewers said they watched when they

were bored and needed a break from something tiresome or demanding in their everyday lives. Particularly certain types of situations, like exam weeks, worked as "triggers", making them watch more.

Another central factor underlying participants' choice to watch Skam was the communities that emerged around Skam. Several participants said that the extent to which they watched was directly related to discussions they had with other viewers. One participant explained that before, when most people in her social network did not watch Skam, she felt no need to be updated constantly. However, when she moved to a context with many Skam fans who often discussed the series, her viewing patterns changed. The risk of ending up outside the peer group was an incentive that contributed to many participants' willingness to keep up to date, if not on all platforms every day, at least every week.

The participants discussed how the various platforms and their constant updates stimulated discussions, where the Skam community was perceived as quite different compared to those of other TV series.

> Magnus: If all three of us had been following House of Cards, I bet we would be sitting in our own homes, binge watching. And then when we got back on Monday we'd say "Wow, I loved that season of House of Cards". Whereas now, we talk about it in the meantime instead. You wonder what will happen next to Sana, what she will do and so on. It's a completely different thing. It's something social in it, that they make us do.

Comparing Skam to House of Cards, Magnus felt that other series, especially when watched through on-demand services, give the viewer all the content at once; thus, discussions about content can be finished. In contrast, Skam's real-time updates on various platforms were perceived to lead to a very unique kind of interaction. Even though the content could be seen any time, several participants talked about abiding by the TV schedule (i.e., to watch updates at the time of their release), to be able to discuss new content with others. In other words, they perceived the Skam community to be important enough to motivate a return to the less flexible viewing practices associated with traditional, linear TV.

The motives described above are in line with common motives for watching TV series: entertainment and social interaction. However, even though overall motives for watching Skam were similar to those for other TV shows, by its special design, Skam offered new prerequisites and incentives, especially with regard to the motive of social interaction. What is different with Skam is not so much the motives for watching but rather how these motives are actualized.

Changed viewing practices?

In her study on the TV series 24, Evans (2011) saw that participants were reluctant to watch the series via mobile phones, since they felt that their immersion in the narrative was hindered by the small screens and stressful environment, if used on the go. Some of our participants also saw mobile phones as a hindrance to their viewing experience and therefore chose to watch on other devices. However, most participants were used to using the mobile for a variety of purposes and did not mind watching on a small screen. The differences between our results and those of Evans' study can partly be explained by the

technological developments since 2011, allowing smoother connections and interfaces, and by people having become more used to and positive with taking part in various media content from their mobile phones. However, another possible explanation is that Skam is partly composed of Instagram images and sms conversations, which are generally read on screens of mobile phones anyway, especially by young people, such as our participants.

Ruggiero (2000) describes media today as characterized by demassification, where media usage is becoming individualized. Our participants felt that they had many viewing options in the variety of content on different platforms that Skam provided, and they tailored individual "Skam Packages" based on what suited them best. Another aspect highlighted by Ruggiero is asynchroneity, offering media consumers more control over what to consume and when. Here, our results challenge Ruggiero's view of a media landscape that is becoming independent of time and space. For our participants, flexibility and control were above all related to the spatial factor. All content was published online and could be accessed from almost any location. This opportunity was frequently used; the participants talked about accessing Skam content at school, in waiting rooms and on the tram. However, the desire to follow Skam in real time made many participants opt out of the flexibility in time.

Platform roles and relations

Central platforms

Participants expressed the idea of a central platform but had varying ideas of which platform this was. For traditional viewers, it was the *episodes* (compilations of all video clips published during the week): this was where the story was told, and they felt that any viewer could manage watching only the episodes. Real-time viewers, however, considered the central platform to be the *feed* (i.e., content published on NRK's website, including short video clips, photos of the main characters' Instagram accounts, sms and email conversations). Of this content, the video clips were seen as most important.

An element of the feed in which both groups took part was the sms conversations. Some participants did not think of them as necessary, as one would get the story anyway. Others felt that the text conversations were just as important as the clips and said that, without them, more clips and/or longer episodes would be necessary. The sms conversations were perceived to contribute several aspects: background information, extra depth and increased understanding of the characters and story. They were also perceived to contribute to the sense of reality discussed above. Seeing the characters' actual sms conversations made the story more credible, said the participants, as this is what it typically looks like in real life.

Secondary platforms

Besides the episodes and feed, Skam published content on Instagram and YouTube. Neither Instagram nor YouTube seemed to contribute significantly to the narrative but, rather, were seen as secondary platforms, extra resources that provided background information while sparing the central platforms from being overloaded. The worth of both was described as letting viewers get to know the series' side characters and increasing understanding of characters' relationships to each other.

> Christoffer: I think it's fun to get to know… because they're not so much in focus, they're just the group of girls, sort of. But then it's fun to get, without them having to squeeze it into the series. To get another place where you can get to know them.

The Instagram and YouTube material along with sms conversations constitute a type of transmedia content known as "diegetic extensions", i.e., additional narrative content presented as "diegetic artefacts" from within the programme's fictional world, requiring viewers to pretend they are interacting with objects and persons from within the fictional narrative (Askwith 2007). The participants perceived this material to be crucial in adding a sense of reality. The characters' Instagram posts, for example, looked exactly like real Instagram content, blending into the users' regular Instagram feeds, mixed with posts from real friends and acquaintances. Consequently, as Krüger and Rustad (2017) saw in their content analysis of the commentary fields of Skam's feed, the audience would not only interact with other viewers but also write responses to the fictive characters' posts.

A mix of units with different purposes

Skam's platforms do not meet the demands of independence that Jenkins (2006) sets up for transmedia narrative. Being dependent upon each other, they better fit Dena's (2009) description of intracompositional transmedia narrative. The distinction that Dena makes between inter- and intracompositional transmedia narrative is useful for understanding Skam's format but also for the viewers' experiences of it. The participants perceived Skam as one all-encompassing narrative spread across multiple platforms: one central and a few secondary. However, both groups agreed that, to understand the story entirely, all platforms were needed.

Intracompositional transmedia stories are characterized by a decrease in volume of each unit and an increase in dependency between them (Dena 2009). This describes Skam's format quite well. All updates are small, and there is a chronological order for the content that applies not only to each individual platform but also to the content of all platforms. The chronological order was vital to the overall picture, and it had implications for the participants' ways of consuming the content. Especially the real-time viewers would not watch the content in a different order from what producers intended, as this would "spoil" the story.

Several participants emphasized the connection between the platforms' content, saying that the narrative was more detailed and nuanced than if the series had consisted only of episodes. The participants' impression of the characters could sometimes change with the consumption of content from multiple platforms, and they felt that the platforms together created an overall image that none of the platforms would manage to do on its own.

> Christoffer: I've got an example, a couple of weeks ago. When they do this sms roulette and he sends it to Vilde, and you get to see her answer. Then you realize that Vilde is kind of interested in these guys, actually. Is she really that much in love? Because in the episode, she is super cuddly with Magnus and shows just small signs of it. But in the sms's you can see that she's got kind of a crush on… whatever his name is. Yousef or someone else of the guys. And then you kind of like "Oh shit!"

Lisa: It becomes clearer.

Ingrid: Then you see the clips in another way, actually, you see *her* in another way.

According to previous studies, TV producers' visions of how TV should be extended to other platforms often have not matched the audiences' viewing preferences (Brooker 2001; Simons 2014; Dhoest & Simons 2016). Some viewers have seen purpose in content from secondary platforms, such as enabling a deeper understanding of the characters and the story that unfolds between episodes and seasons. However, in previous studies, such viewers have been in the minority. In 2001, Brooker (2001) foresaw a shift in how TV would be consumed and experienced, with an increased appreciation of transmedia narrative. This shift may be what we witness in our study – compared to previous studies, our results point to a considerably higher appreciation of secondary platforms.

Discussion and conclusions

This study set out to investigate how viewers took part of, and experienced, the transmedia series Skam and its various platforms. The participants could be categorized into two types based on their viewing practices: *real-time viewers*, who watched daily, and *traditional viewers*, who watched Skam on a weekly basis. Both groups felt that the series allowed flexibility and talked about tailoring "Skam packages", according to their individual preferences. They felt in control of the platforms, thus joining a pattern characterizing large parts of contemporary media use, described by Ruggiero (2000), under the notions of *demassification* and *asynchroneity*.

Participants accepted and appreciated that the story extended across multiple platforms. They considered the feed and episodes to be most important but felt that all platforms contributed something unique to the narrative. None of the participants questioned the use of any of the platforms; if they opted out of one, it was because the content was not perceived to contribute a sufficiently valuable or consistent piece to the whole.

Our results contrast those of previous studies of the reception of transmedia narratives, which found viewers to be largely reluctant to take part in content beyond the central platforms (see, for example, Brooker 2001; Simons 2014; Dhoest & Simons 2016). There are several possible explanations for this. First, Skam producers had a very well thought out narrative strategy for which *platforms* to use and how, taking into account how the target group generally uses these platforms. For example, the audience usually accesses Instagram via mobile phones and would also probably be open to taking part in Skam content that way.

A second explanation lies in Skam's specific *narrative*. The participants' degree of appreciation of Skam's transmedia elements was not so much determined by their willingness to use a specific platform, but the crucial factor was rather the content's relevance. This is consistent with Askwith's (2007) claim that a determining factor for audiences' appreciation of narrative extensions is their effectiveness in capturing the appealing qualities of the core programme and consistence with the show's "core narrative". In her study of *Spooks,* Evans (2011) comes to similar conclusions, as the game became popular first when it clearly integrated its story with that of the TV series.

Still another explanation lies in the studies' respective *samples*. Previous studies have typically targeted "engaged viewers" overall, including both users and non-users

of secondary platforms. We, however, targeted only viewers who had actually used the platforms, meaning that they were positive enough to have tried them at least once. Furthermore, our focus on specifically young viewers may also have influenced the results. Young people's media consumption typically occurs through a variety of screens, more often through computers, tablets and mobile phones than through regular TV sets. Through social media, they receive links to other various media content. Thus, to start, their regular media use is more similar to transmedia narrative, as compared to older viewers who are more used to treating different devices, for example, the TV or the phone, as independent units.

TV today and in the future

In the introduction, we asked the question of what TV is today. Media convergence has led the concept of TV to expand, to include many types of senders and screens. In addition to this, our participants also seemed to be open to what kind of *material* should be included in the term. While the core content needed to be video based, the participants also saw Instagram posts, sms conversations and YouTube clips as essential for the narrative and considered them natural parts of the series.

Another question concerned the role of time and space. According to Ruggiero (2000), media consumption today is much less constrained by time and space than it used to be. True as this may be, we found some interesting contradictions regarding the temporal aspect. Even though content would be available after its release, our participants were still very much concerned with when new content and updates were released. For them, watching Skam implied abiding by a new type of TV schedule, reminiscent of how linear television used to be viewed in the past. Skam's format thus encouraged a combination of old and new viewing practices, or, in Evans' (2015: 113) words, it provides "a context of both change and continuity".

As stated in the introduction, young people as a group have been pointed out as being particularly unlikely to abide by TV schedules, instead preferring to access content in ways that allow them to control when, where and how to consume TV (Askwith 2007; Napoli 2011; Matrix 2014). How, then, is it that Skam has managed to turn this trend?

Evans (2015) describes how the development of second-screen, app-based expansions of TV programmes encourage viewers to take part of several platforms simultaneously. This, says Evans, has led to the re-formation of television's temporal structure, as the app content directs viewers' attention to what is happening in the live-broadcast programme. Evans' conclusion is similar to ours: new forms of TV-related content can work to promote old forms of TV-related temporality. For our viewers, however, the reason for choosing to view in real time does not lie in the simultaneous use of secondary platforms that steer them into the central one. Rather, there are three other specific factors that motivate them:

- First, the *sense of reality* that many participants appreciated followed specifically from watching Skam in real time.
- Second, by publishing on digital platforms and keeping down the size of the updates, Skam offered a great deal of *flexibility* in the viewers' choices of screens and devices. This compensated users for giving up their temporal flexibility by making it possible to watch from just about anywhere.

- Finally, Skam's format with short daily updates on various platforms stimulated constant discussions in *communities* that emerged among Skam fans. Discussions made up a vital part of participants' everyday lives and motivated them to keep up to date.

Our explanations for the return of the TV schedule are thus partly found in the new format but also in an old, familiar motivation, namely that of integration and social interaction. According to Evans (2015), producers use transmedia to regain control over the audience. Our results suggest that their chances to succeed are not necessarily tied only to technical solutions but also to the extent to which they allow and encourage social interaction and community.

The study's results point towards several aspects to explore further. For example, the study does not compare different segments of users, but the participants largely belonged to the same generation. Comparing how older and younger viewers use and experience transmedia narrative could show whether our results reflect only the viewing practices of young people or if it is a development involving a broader audience. During the course of the work, we also reflected on whether Skam affected participants' preferences in their consumption of other media content. In the future, will viewers want to see more TV productions designed like Skam? Skam has inspired producers in other countries to make similar transmedia series. Future studies will show if their viewers experience those narratives in similar ways, as our participants experienced Skam.

Notes

1. Norwegian for "Shame".
2. Skam is the most viewed webcast television series ever in Norway, with an average of 1.2 million unique visitors per week during the broadcast period (Sweney 2016). During 2016, NRK's number of streams increased more rapidly than those of Netflix, especially among viewers between 15 and 29 years of age (Jones 2016). Skam gained huge popularity in Sweden as well: in January 2017, SVT Play streamed it over 20 million times, making it the most watched webcast television series (Nylander 2017).
3. While Skam's producers had intended a somewhat younger target group, this age group seems to be where the majority of actual viewers was found (Jones 2016).
4. The name "Kosegruppa" is inspired from the series and can be translated as "Snuggle group".

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