

ABSTRACT:

Narration in Streaming Fiction Series: A Quantitative Content Analysis of Plot, Style, and Characters in Netflix Originals (2013-2024)

Keywords: streaming, fiction series, quantitative content analysis, narration, platformization

Digital streaming platforms shape the production and consumption of cultural content in modern society. Big tech companies such as Netflix are poised to gain from this transformation, as binge-watching has become the dominant type of consumption. These changes are caused predominantly by *platformization*, which refers to how logics of datafication and commodification affect 'the production, distribution, and circulation of cultural content' (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4275). Studies on production and consumption are arguably key to television and streaming research in the platform era; nevertheless, research on streaming *content* and its constitutive feature, *narration* (or storytelling), has been underdeveloped apart from a few recent exceptions (Heiselberg et al., 2026; Lotz & Lobato, 2023).

This paper examines longitudinal changes and continuities in the narration of the most popular original fiction series on Netflix (the world's leading streaming service) from beginning to present (2013-2024). It performs a quantitative content analysis of over 150 episodes selected through a stratified sampling strategy (Riffe et al., 2023). The focus is threefold: plot, style, and character. Taken together, these three dimensions are constitutive of narration, just like narrative is constitutive of a fiction series. Drawing on narratology, manuscript literature, and recent theory on serial narration (for instance Altman, 2008; Bordwell, 1985; Christensen, 2023; Field, 2005; Heiselberg et al., 2026), this article presents a quantitative framework for analysing narration in fictional and serial platform content. The subject is relevant and timely given the growing production and consumption of such content in the platform age.

Being a work in progress, the paper will first perform statistical analyses of the constitutive variables of the three narrational dimensions. Secondly, it will compare the findings to popular hypotheses circulating in the academic and critical debate: Have Netflix's streaming fiction series become more complex and intensive? Or is it rather the opposite: simpler and extensive? Finally, it will discuss the usefulness of the framework for future studies on related, yet different, types of platforms, for instance, Broadcast Video-on-Demand services.

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Bio

Thomas Spejlborg Sejersen is an Associate Professor of Media Production and Management at the Danish School of Media and Journalism. He is also a PhD fellow at the Center for Tracking and Society in the Department of Communication, University of Copenhagen. His research focuses on the platformization of media practices and content. He is the author of *The Institutional Development of Podcast: From Participatory Practices to Platform Content* (2025) (together with Aske Kammer).