Shame Across Borders

The Transnational Appeal of the Norwegian Teen Drama *SKAM*

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Abstract

Since 2015, the Norwegian teen drama *SKAM* has been attracting teens and adults from all over the world. Six European remakes and one American remake followed, which too, are enjoyed by the transnational cult fandom that surrounds *SKAM*. This goes against Straubhaar's cultural proximity theory (1990), which argues that audiences prefer local media productions as they can recognize values and cultural references. This theory is often used to explain the success of the format trade, which is based on adapting ideas to local cultures (Waisbord, 2004). The aim of this research is to analyze why and how non-local *SKAM* fans consume foreign versions of the show despite having a local adaptation available to them. For this purpose, seven focus groups have been conducted with Dutch *SKAM* fans. This was followed by a thematic analysis.

Based on the results, this research argues that these fans are aware of the cultural distance between them and non-local versions of *SKAM*. However, it is non-cultural values such as 'diversity', 'realism' and 'curiosity' that attract them to the series and its multiple non-local adaptations. The collaborative nature of fandom, in which fans supply knowledge and access to each other, is used to make the series more understandable and accessible to non-local fans. The fact that these fans consume multiple formatted versions of this TV show could indicate that we should consider a different, less localized perspective on the format trade and TV in general.

Keywords: Transnational fandom, cultural proximity, TV formats, scripted formats

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1. Introduction

What started as a task of the public broadcaster to bring teenagers back to the channel, turned into a global phenomenon. This is the story of the Norwegian hit series *SKAM* in short. With the Norwegian word for 'shame' as the title, the series was first commissioned by the NRK (Norwegian public broadcaster) to approach teenagers, with a special focus on sixteen-year old girls (Leszkiewicz, 2017). This seemed like an impossible task, as this group of viewers was getting increasingly estranged from television in general. Creator Julie Andem took on this difficult assignment, and did so by doing a lot of research. In an interview, the makers claimed they wanted to create something that would feel so real that it would be easy for teenagers to relate to (Leszkiewicz, 2017). An extensive amount of interviews and fieldwork followed, diving into the lives, thoughts and humor of teenagers (Kommunikasjon, 2018). What followed was a series that was distributed and written in an unusual way. When *SKAM* first aired, it was published on the site of the NRK, with clips of each episode being spread throughout the week. If a clip got released of the characters going to school at ten o'clock, the clip would be published at this time as well. Additionally, social media pages had been made for the characters, updating the viewers throughout the week on their whereabouts. The way *SKAM* was distributed led to audiences being particularly invested in the story, since it felt more realistic to them (Sundet & Peteresen, 2020). Additionally, the series featured plotlines concerning sexuality, sexual assault, religion, and mental illness, and audiences found a safe haven within this series to discuss these issues (Krüger & Rustad, 2017). Therefore, it is not hard to imagine how *SKAM* became a national phenomenon in its four-season runtime. In the end, it had become the NRK's most successful program (Gunderson, 2019), even reaching far outside of its target audience with older and male audiences also joining in for the irregular *SKAM* updates.

However, foreign audiences were also intrigued by the distribution and the realistic style of *SKAM*. Since access to the website of the NRK is restricted, all over the world viewers turned to alternatives such as Dailymotion and piracy websites to follow their favorite Norwegian teenagers through their lives. The popularity of *SKAM* outside of Norway inspired adaptations in other countries, some of which were made with the collaboration of the makers of the original version. Germany, The Netherlands, France, Italy, The United States, Spain, and Belgium followed up Norway with their respective remakes. All these versions followed the same concept of distribution on multiple platforms and the basics of the story line.

Nevertheless, these versions were also adapted to their new target audience. These adjustments featured changes to the script, the setting, and often cultural references. This made *SKAM* accessible and understandable to thousands of non-Norwegian teenagers, since they could enjoy a version of the same realistic story set in their own culture and spoken in their own language.

Although most adaptations of *SKAM* were met with significant success, a lot of its audiences was once again made up of non-local viewers. Even audiences that had a local version available to them still seemed to enjoy other versions as well. In fact—as can be seen by the fan activity of these viewers on sites such as Tumblr, Twitter, and Instagram—it is quite typical for a *SKAM* fan to have watched and interacted with more than two versions (Tumblr.com, Instagram.com, Twitter.com). This is quite peculiar, since the success of international TV adaptations is often attributed to the way they can be adjusted to what is familiar to national audiences (Chalaby, 2015) . This adaptability to other cultures is generally argued to be the strength of this 'format trade', since it makes it more accessible to local audiences (Beeden & de Bruin, 2009). However, when it comes to *SKAM*'s fandom, this does not seem to apply. If adaptations are often made to appeal to local audiences, why would a non-local fan feel engaged with such a version?

This paper will be looking into why and how they feel engaged with these localized adaptations. This will be done by analyzing the thoughts and opinions of Dutch fans. The research question this thesis will be working towards is as follows: How and why do Dutch fans of the series *SKAM* interact with international adaptations of the show, while having a local version available to them? This will be done through seven focus groups, followed by a thematic analysis

1.1 Scientific relevance

By analyzing Dutch *SKAM* fans, this research provides a deeper look into international (or transnational) fandoms. These fandoms are often met with cultural differences and access barriers (Lee, 2016). Collaboration (Lee, 2016) and discussion (Jenkins, 2018) have been argued to add to the accessibility and knowledge of these international fans. However, since *SKAM* is a fandom that incorporates cultures and broadcasters from all over Western Europe and North America, the cultural differences and access barriers seem to be even more defined. This research can add to this discussion by providing the perspective of a fandom that is intertwined, not just by the many nationalities of the viewers, but also the multiple nationalities of the media text itself.

Furthermore, this research can add to the debate about the transnationalization of the TV audiences (Esser et al., 2016). Even though it is argued that the format trade is localizing TV even more (Waisbord, 2004), the *SKAM* fandom shows that this theory does not always hold up. The international adaptations of *SKAM* seem to make the series more global. This is the case since the adaptations themselves are set in local cultures, but still attract many non-local viewers. The answer to why this is the case can lead to new insights on how exactly the transnationalization of TV audiences is increasing.

1.2 Social relevance

The existence of the *SKAM* fandom is an anomaly to the way we think about TV and culture. Even though TV is often seen as an aspect of our lives that is localized and very much affected by national identity (Waisbord, 2004), *SKAM* shows that TV can be enjoyed by global audiences alike. Since these adaptations are all produced by the public broadcaster, which are often expected to communicate national identity, local culture might not be as important to audiences as originally expected. This could lead the way for more internet-based, global initiatives such as *SKAM*. This research can add to this perspective by showing what motivates fans to watch adaptations that differ from their own cultural perspectives.

1.3 Following

In the following section, theories and previous research on this subject will be explained and discussed. Several terms and theories will be explained that can later be used to understand and relate to the results of the research. In the second section of this thesis the methods of the research will be explained. Thirdly, this research will discuss the patterns and themes that were found during analysis. This part has been divided in two parts; the first related to 'how' non-local fans engage with non-local adaptations and the second to 'why' they do this.

2. Theoretical Framework

This research will look at how and why the *SKAM* fandom interacts with non-local versions of the series despite having a local version available to them. The following section will discuss several concepts and pieces of academic literature that are fundamental to understand *SKAM* as a case study. First, we will discuss globalization and how this phenomenon influenced the TV landscape. Related debates about how globalization influences local cultures are addressed as well. Secondly, the format trade will be illustrated. It will be discussed how it commenced and why it is argued to be successful. Furthermore, cultural proximity will be discussed in more detail. Additionally, this framework will look at the most important argument against cultural proximity: the existence of transnational fandoms. This will be tied to the case of the *SKAM* fandom and how it—along with other transnational fandoms—defies the boundaries of cultural proximity. Finally, this frame work will discuss earlier research to the appeal of *SKAM* and what we can learn from those articles.

2.1 Globalization

The *SKAM* fandom has not only connected fans from all over the world—the media text itself is also multinational. This exchange is the result of an increasing interconnectedness of different parts of the world through flows of information. Therefore, an overview of globalization and the debates it generates is necessary to understand how such a transnational community could come to be established. The following paragraph will discuss globalization, cultural imperialism and the connection of these concepts to *SKAM*.

Historians have argued that globalization is a development that has been advancing for centuries (Stearns, 2009; Athique, 2013). However, the increasing use of mass media since the 1950s has intensified this development exceedingly (Appadurai, 1990). This acceleration lead to vastly different opinions on this transition. On one hand, people with positive views on globalization believed that this would let the world move past political divide (Calhoun, 2007). On the other hand, some others had a more dystopian view that globalization would bring even more power to Western countries and remove them from the rest of the world (Athique, 2013). Much of the discussions on globalization concerns the economical aspect of it, as it is part of the growth towards a global trade network and growing economical connections (Stearns, 2009). The rise of the internet and the advances in transportation technology are believed to have played a part in this. However, some scholars have argued that globalization has a significant influence on culture as well, since economical transitions can significantly influence cultural processes (Tomlinson, 2007). These influences are spread

by the transmission of cultural products all over the world, accompanied by the diaspora of people themselves. This can also been seen in the television industry, in which productions and services travel the world through the internet. *SKAM* is an example of this, finding audiences in a vast array of areas.

Appadurai (1990) explains that cultures and economies are increasingly influencing each other through different flows. These flows are explained in his five 'scapes', each explaining a different way globalization travels across the planet; ideoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ethnoscapes. Appadurai (1990) sees this as a development that has been occurring for centuries, and concluded that in this process, cultures often merge. This happened all over the world in different intensities. However, recent technological advances have made the flow of these 'scapes' faster and more intense. Nevertheless, it can be argued that these flows are not as equal as Appadurai claims. Especially in the 1970s and 1980s, concern grew over the soft power that Hollywood movies and TV had over the rest of the world (Banerjee, 2002). Around that time, technology improvements allowed TV stations to broadcast longer and more often (Waisbord, 2004). However, most countries did not have an efficient production culture yet and could not fill up that new airtime. Since the United States had developed a strong postwar economy, they could provide a significant amount of content that could then be sold to broadcasting stations in other countries. For countries with a smaller production culture, this was significantly cheaper than producing their own content (Havens, 2019). This motivated a lot of discussion on the 'Americanization' that accompanied this phenomenon (Banerjee, 2002), which essentially entailed that the growing popularity of these media products had such an impact on local cultures that they would take over certain aspects of American culture, and cultural diversity would therefore erode (Havens, 2019).

The process of Americanization is often also described as 'cultural imperialism.' The theory of cultural imperialism claims that bigger, more influential cultures purposely set out to engulf smaller cultures, that have practically no power to stop this (Gray, 2014; Havens, 2019). Banerjee (2002) sets out four different reasons scholars have been worried about this phenomenon. First, he mentions increasing wealth differences between developing countries and the US and Western Europe. Furthermore, he points out that western products are increasingly becoming global ones, alongside the effect of capitalism as a cultural force. Concludingly, Banerjee (2002) argues that the argument of cultural imperialism assumes that media has a significant influence on culture. However, Banerjee (2002) follows this up by arguing that that is not necessarily the case. The audience is not as passive as the cultural imperialism theory suspects, and often negotiates the meaning and production of certain

media products. In that way, media is more of a reflection of culture. The hybridity theory also provides an argument against cultural imperialism. This theory essentially claims that cultures do not replace each other, but rather get integrated within the local culture (Havens, 2019). In that sense, cultural imperialism is too black-and-white in its approach.

Globalization brings forth important concepts when it comes to this thesis. *SKAM* goes against the domination of American TV on the global market. In fact, *SKAM* is more global than that, originating from different nations and spreading in media flows to even more countries. Contrarily, these adaptations have also been localized to fit the culture and customs of the countries they were produced in. This kind of trade of television concepts has not been a new phenomenon. Since the previous century, the trade in TV 'formats' has been a cheap, low risk opportunity for broadcasters to keep television tied to the national (Havens, 2019; Banerjee, 2002). Even though the trade of concepts for television series is global, the adaptations are often localized.

2.2 The Format Trade

In the following paragraph, the format trade will be introduced further and its ties to the case of *SKAM* will be mentioned. The motivators for trading in formats will be discussed along with the cultural consequences that come along with changing the formats to fit the local audience. This is necessary knowledge to consider when trying to understand the reasoning behind *SKAM*'s adaptations and why this case differs from other television adaptations.

Waisbord (2004) explains how TV is often more local in nature due to its ties to the domestic and the national. This is likely because nations have often used TV as an approach to create a sense of belonging. Nevertheless, the *trends* surrounding television tend to be more global, since producers are often part of a global network. This leads to broadcasters often having similar features around the world (Waisbord, 2004). A good example of the global nature of TV is the format trade. During this trade, producers sell ideas and the copyrights of said ideas to other producers. In other words: formats are remakes often produced in another area with local cast and producers (Havens, 2019). These formats are accompanied by production 'bibles' with information about what can be adapted and what makes the idea work (Chalaby, 2015).

Waisbord (2004) names a few reasons for the popularity of the format trade. One of them is that it is often difficult to predict the popularity of a certain TV show before it airs. Formats have a significant advantage in this regard, seeing that the success of the idea has at

least been shown in one other area or version. This gives formats a sense of predictability, which is scarce in the TV industry. This was also the case with *SKAM*. Its popularity within in Norway provided non-local broadcasters with a project that was already low budget to begin with but could additionally save them the time and money it takes to write an entirely new story. The success of the original in Norway, but also among teenagers in their own area, secured popularity along its target audience.

The rise of the trade of formats can be traced back to the 80s and 90s. Before that production studios often did not have the resources to produce a lot of content. However, when these studios starting maturing, they found that producing local content was more profitable than airing American TV shows (Waisbord, 2004). Formats provided ready-to-go structures for producers to create popular content with a local twist to it. The formats were then localized by filming in a nearby setting and casting local talent. At the time, this adaptability was believed to be one of the aspects that made the format trade work (Chalaby, 2015). Especially game shows and reality TV constituted an exceedingly popular genre for formats (Chalaby, 2015). These non-scripted formats (Chalaby, 2015) were significantly similar in its adaptations. However, the feeling of national belonging through language and recognizable people provided for the popularity of these concepts (Waisbord, 2004).

Scripted formats (which include dramas, comedies, and other fictional genres) enjoyed rising popularity sometime later (Chalaby, 2015). The reason for this late response seemed to be the fact that these series were more culturally sensitive in nature. The adaptation of these kind of formats would require more funds and working hours to sufficiently customize the idea to local context and values (Chalaby, 2015). However, the rise in the popularity of scripted formats commenced in the twenty-first century and showed a new demand for fictional stories that have been proven to be successful. Waisbord (2004, p. 368) describes formats as 'culturally specific but nationally neutral'—and this is particularly the case with scripted formats. They arrive at production studios with just the basics—devoid of cultural references or meanings. These basics can then be customized along social context and traditions of the culture in question. The recognizability of the actors, the social issues that are discussed and the references that are made, are believed to be the reason why audiences prefer these local adaptations over the original (Beeden & De Bruin, 2009; Berg, 2007). Notably, language is believed to be a main contributing factor that connects national audiences to a production (Waisbord, 2004). *SKAM* is an example of a scripted format, and therefore the script also includes a significant amount of cultural references and local values. The adaptations of *SKAM* not only included local actors and local settings, but also referenced

local music, TV, celebrities, and social issues. This could lead to local audiences feeling attached to this adaptation and at the same time it can drive away non-local watchers. This makes these adaptations essentially a product of the local culture, customized especially for the teenage audience of their respective countries. However, all these adaptations reached further than the public of their respective countries. The success of the format trade is often used as proof that there is still a large focus on national identity within television (Beeden & de Bruin, 2009): audiences seem to enjoy local versions over non-local versions. Therefore, *SKAM* is an exception in the way that formatting the series did not make the adaptations more localized, but more global. Making adaptations of the series has led to an even bigger international following, defying the purpose of localization by consuming this localized content.

2.3 Cultural Proximity

The appeal of recognizability can be explained with the cultural proximity theory by Straubhaar (1991). He explains that audiences often prefer local productions over foreign ones since they recognize themselves in the culture, values and ethnicities that are portrayed on the screen. The local productions feel closer and more relatable to the local audience than the foreign ones. Straubhaar (1991) uses the term 'cultural capital' to describe on which aspects the choice to consume a certain media text is made. This often relates to what people know and what is familiar to them. Aspects that could be recognizable to them are traditions, values, ethnicity, language, fashion and more (Berg, 2017). Straubhaar (1991) argues that people use cultural capital to make decisions on their media consumptions and therefore mostly prefer local productions over non-local ones. The fans of *SKAM* do not necessarily seem to fit this theory, consuming a version of the series local to them, but also enjoying adaptations that are culturally further away from them. This paragraph will further elaborate on the cultural proximity theory and the exceptions that have been named for this theory that could apply to the *SKAM* fandom.

As local products are usually preferred, foreign productions seem to have a less preferred status, selling with a 'cultural discount' (Hoskin & Mirus, 1988). This refers to the argument that media products become less valuable when they cross cultural boundaries. A reason for this is that non-local audiences often do not understand certain references or humor. However, the concept of cultural discount can also be seen in the use of subtitles and dubbing (Berg, 2017). This does not only make the product feel 'foreign', but it is also considered impractical. For instance, when it comes to subtitles, the audience cannot look

away from the screen and have to pay attention at all times (Berg, 2017). Additionally, dubbing can feel 'strange' when a local language is seemingly spoken by a culturally or ethnically different cast (Berg, 2017).

In this regard, but also in others, language plays a vital role in the cultural proximity theory. Waisbord (2004) explains language as a pillar for culture and national recognition. According to him, language is inevitably tied to the national and therefore excludes and includes people. In other words: not only does language literally exclude anyone who does not speak a certain language, it is also a symbol of belonging. Additionally, language also plays into the argument of recognition. Subtitles can provide a way for audiences to understand a media product in another language, but a product in their own language can be recognized as familiar. Furthermore, language can also provide an international market for these communities (Athique, 2013). Production in Mandarin-speaking East Asia (Chua, 2004) or Spanish-speaking South America (Waisbord, 2004) are often exchanged in this regard, as they do not experience the same exclusion as nations that speak other languages.

However, language is not always tied to the nation-state (Esser, 2016), and neither is cultural proximity. La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005) explain how audiences don't always relate to national products and feel more of a connection with remote products. This can occur when certain values are shared with these remote products and not with the national products. In their article (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005) they provide the example of telenovelas in Brazil. Audiences in rural areas seemed to be more attracted to Mexican telenovelas since they shared more values and traditions with those series than the ones from Brazil that were more focused on urban culture. Examples like this can be found in several other areas, mostly in cultures that are similar to each other. They either share a religion, language, or similar history. Straubhaar and La Pastina (2005) refer to these communities as 'supranational cultural linguistic communities', and these are argued to enjoy the same media products because of their shared values and cultural capital. These groups can be seen as 'imagined communities' that are connected by culture and, similarly, by pop culture, even though they experience a geographical distance (Athique, 2013).

Furthermore, La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005) introduce two exceptions to the rules of cultural proximity theory. These exceptions could explain why *SKAM* fans do not necessarily prefer to watch (solely) a local adaptation. Firstly, they argue that audiences can prefer a non-local production over a local one if the non-local production is of better quality. Most production studios around the world cannot produce the same quality as Hollywood movies. Additionally, some genres need more resources and budget than others. Not all

studios can produce these genres and therefore audiences might be tempted to turn to foreign productions for these productions. This can indeed be seen in the way audiences in multiple areas around the world watch Hollywood movies. However, in East Asia as well some countries turn to China and Japan for their content (Chua, 2004). An American version of *SKAM* has been made, and it would be interesting to see whether this is a preferred version for non-locals. In general, differences in budget or quality between the adaptations could be a reason for *SKAM* fans to prefer non-local adaptations.

La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005) further introduce overarching genres and plotlines and personal reasons as exceptions to the cultural proximity theory. Drama is often mentioned as a genre with overarching plotlines that can be attractive to non-local viewers as well (Straubhaar & La Pastina, 2005). Since *SKAM* is a drama series as well, this could also be the case when it comes to non-local *SKAM* viewers. Furthermore, class and education can divide a culture as well (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005). For instance, higher educated people are often introduced to other cultures through their education and are therefore more likely to have a more extensive cultural capital.

According to the cultural proximity theory, audiences prefer a local tv series over a non-local one because they recognize their own values and culture in a local production (Straubhaar & La Pastina, 2005). The audience of *SKAM* does not seem to conform to this theory. Even though some fans have local adaptations available to them, they still choose to watch other adaptations of the series as well. These other adaptations are often spoken in another language and set in a different social context. However, exceptions on the rules of cultural proximity have also been named. Quality, genre, and class could play a role in the reasons why non-local *SKAM* fans could enjoy adaptations outside of their cultural capital more.

2.4 Cosmopolitanization of the audience

The format trade and the cultural proximity theory seem to argue for globalization working in favor of localization and cultural diversity, since formats are adapted to the local culture, making it less likely for non-local audiences to consume the original content. At the same time, there are also some voices that claim cultures are growing more interconnected (Jin, 2019; Esser et. Al, 2016; Appudurai; 1990)—not in the forced manner that cultural imperialism claims this to happen, but in a more voluntarily manner. The coming paragraph will look at cosmopolitanism and banal transnationalism, as they could provide an explanation for how non-local fans can get in touch with foreign television shows.

Cosmopolitanization is the process of cultures and nations growing increasingly towards a world society (Calhoun, 2007). This concept implies that audiences are increasingly aware of internationality and international TV along with that. Esser et al. (2016) have observed that as well in their research on the perception of different versions of reality TV shows. For their article they conducted multiple focus groups in several different countries, asking the participants about singing contests and their different remakes around the world. They found that most participants were very aware of the different non-local versions and even had seen some. Several participants even expressed that they liked some non-local versions more than their local versions. Furthermore, Esser et al. (2016) claim that banal transnationalism, the way the international is spoken about in a more normalized way, is becoming an increasingly bigger part of our lives. This can be seen in the way we are progressively more aware of other parts of the world. This can also be seen in the fandom of *SKAM*, since they are very aware of the adaptations made in other countries, even with access problems making this more difficult, it would be logical to think that banal transnationalism is a regularly occurring phenomenon among these fans.

Cosmopolitanization can also be observed in the increasingly larger transnational audiences, despite the cultural proximity theory. This mostly relates to younger audiences since international media products have often become part of their cultural capital through the internet (Esser et al., 2016). These audiences are called 'non-resident audiences' (or cross-over audiences). 'Non-resident' refers to not belonging to a certain nation or culture (Athique, 2013). These are groups of people that are willing to set aside their cultural capital to enjoy productions from foreign cultures. Even though these audiences are still considered a minority among the rest of the viewers, they are getting more prevalent by the day (Athique, 2013). This can be the case for *SKAM* fans as well. The fandom largely exists of people under thirty, making it more likely for them to receive cultural capital through the internet. They are essentially not part of a certain culture when they are online, but rather "nowhere in particular" (Athique, 2013, p. 11).

These transnational audiences can also be used as an argument against the cultural proximity theory, since these audiences fail to conform to the rules that Straubhaar and La Pastina (2005) have argued for. Transnational audiences show that in a society where economic and cultural flows travel faster and easier (Appadurai, 1990), culture is increasingly a choice. In that case, would the cultural proximity theory still hold up in a world in which the internet is increasingly central to our media consumption? Additionally, it can also be said that cultural capital is not entirely dependent on place, religion or language either (Esser,

2016). For example, the choice audiences make about what they are watching could also be dependent on what the people around them recommend, or on whether they are coaching a soccer team or are part of a student association. Therefore, the concept of one culture that is bounded by nation or tradition is significantly questionable (Esser, 2016). It could be a possibility that *SKAM* fans are not moved by national cultural motivations, but by other influences.

At the same time, the national is still integrated in the way we think about ourselves and others (Esser et al., 2016). Since we know increasingly more about the international, we also compare ourselves more to other nations or cultures. This leads to 'banal nationalism', a way of talking about certain aspects as if they are typical for a certain country (Esser et al., 2016). This can be seen in Cuelenaere's research (2020) on how Flemish and Dutch people react to remakes of each other's movies. Regularly, participants took one aspect of one of the versions and described it as 'typically Dutch' or 'typically Flemish'. This reveals the way of banal nationalistic thinking they showed, considering they often used similar aspects to describe the other version of the same movie. Cuelenare (2020) considers these observed differences in culture as 'perceived cultural differences', since The Netherlands and Flanders do not differ very much in culture and actually co-produce a lot of media products.

In conclusion, many scholars claim that audiences are increasingly aware of the international and of the media products attached to this. This mostly concerns younger generations, for whom knowledge about global media is part of their common cultural capital. *SKAM* fans consist mostly of that younger internet-bound generation, consuming international content much easier. This could be a significant motivation for *SKAM* fans to consume outside of their cultural circle; it is more normalized among them.

2.5 Transnational Fandoms

To understand *SKAM* fans, it needs to be understood what it actually means to be a fan and how the communities called 'fandoms' actually operate. Therefore, this paragraph will discuss the concept of 'fan' and 'fandom.' Of particular importance is the concept of international or 'transnational fans.' According to Lee (2016, p. 195), a fandom can be considered transnational when it crosses 'national, geographical, cultural and linguistic borders'. In the following passages this concept will be further explained, and an example will be given of a transnational fandom which shares some similar aspects to the *SKAM* fandom.

Firstly, 'fan' and 'fandom' hold two different meanings. While a 'fan' merely depicts an affectionate bond with the media product, a member of a fandom is part of a community or

a subculture (Jenkins, 2018). This implies that members of a fandom do activities together and live a similar lifestyle. However, one of the most important implications of these kinds of audiences is the fact that they discuss the media product together and essentially negotiate its meaning. According to Jenkins (2018) this happens in 'imaginative communities' that discuss the true meaning of storylines or songs, implying an interactive relation to the media product. Additionally, fandoms are diverse groups, with individuals that are all trying to find a way to make the media text work for their identity. Therefore, they can be very flexible in the degree to which they are interactive within the community (Min et al., 2018). Some fans stay on the sidelines, only occasionally liking a comment, while others create fan content and have a great amount of friends within the fandom. Everyone holds their own reasons for joining a transnational fandom while also having their own role in it. These reasons and roles overlap in 'affinity spaces', in which transnational fans meet (Min et al., 2018). Even though transnational fandoms must resort to the internet and social media for their interaction with the rest of the community, this can still provide a deeper connection to the media text and to other fans. According to Min et al. (2018), this digital intimacy and the interactivity can be a big motivator to become or stay a member of a transnational fandom. It can not only be seen in the interaction fans have with each other, but also in the interaction of the artists with their fans.

One of the best examples of a transnational audience is the fandom surrounding K-pop (Lee, 2016; Min, et al., 2018). K-pop and its fandom defies all boundaries of cultural proximity by attracting fans far outside of East Asia. From South America and Europe to the Middle East, the K-pop fandom has taken a hold in all these areas. The research that was written about this fandom can be very valuable in showing how transnational fans interact with each other and with the media text that is culturally far away to what they know. Therefore, this could provide some insights to what can be expected from *SKAM* fans as well.

The transnational audience of K-pop are not just passive listeners. Fans of K-pop hold an emotional bond with this type of music, a media product that is produced outside of their supranational cultural linguistic circle. This makes international fandoms one of the most compelling arguments against cultural proximity. At the same time, it is worth noting that transnational fandoms are not to be compared to the popularity of American media content (Lee, 2016). This is because transnational fandoms are a 'contra flow' instead of a 'dominant flow.' American movies and series are well established and known within the developed world and every media product that follows is according to this trend. K-pop was never

essentially meant to attract international audiences and therefore presents a contra flow. Essentially, they resist the ways of popular English-spoken pop culture.

According to Min et al.'s research (2018), K-pop fans are attracted to the differences between their own culture and the culture of the media text, rather than being pushed away by this. The Chilean K-pop fans that they interviewed expressed a sense of wanting to see something different from their local music and American music. Athique (2013) also mentions this, as he explains how exoticism can be a motivator for a transnational audience to watch non-local television. The 'strangeness' and the differences in culture attract the viewer and they want to know more about it because of it. This should be taken in consideration as a possible motivation to consume non-local content for *SKAM* fans as well.

Lee (2016) also mentions the way fandom can become a way to provide access and understanding to non-local fans. Since K-pop, and its connected K-drama fandom as well, was never really meant for audiences outside of Eastern Asia, access to certain material or subtitles can be very difficult. Lee (2016) explains that fans translate episodes and songs and explain certain aspects to each other as a service to their own community. They also provide each other with access to material that is not available to audiences out of Korea. This often takes up hours of work and these volunteers gain nothing from this (except appreciation). The phenomenon of providing accessible material to others can be something that could be found in the *SKAM* fandom as well. It could be a way of fans to cope with the cultural and practical difficulties of being a transnational fan, since *SKAM* adaptations are often not easily accessible as well.

Alongside the K-pop fandom, *SKAM* is also a perfect example of a transnational fandom. *SKAM* fans meet in digital affinity spaces such as Tumblr, Facebook, Instagram and Discord, on which fans discuss the latest episodes, share theories and write fanfiction. Just like the K-pop fandom, *SKAM*'s fan activity predominantly takes place online. This is where the discussions take place, but at the same time social media also plays a big role in *SKAM*'s distribution and the contact between the creators and their fans (Krüger & Rustad, 2017). After all, due to the physical distance, there is no other way to create this kind of intimacy. However, one thing that *SKAM* does not have in common with most other transnational fandoms is the fact that it has been produced among several different cultures and in a diverse array of languages. In the case of the K-pop fandom the exchange is mainly from Korea to the rest of the world— the distribution of *SKAM* works different. It establishes a complicated exchange between several cultures and nations. Therefore, it will be interesting to look at this

fandom in particular, to see how they defy cultural proximity rules and what role fandom plays in this.

2.6 Earlier research to the appeal of *SKAM*

Since *SKAM* has such an unusual way of distributing and telling its story, some research has already been done to the appeal of this series. However, this scholarship is mostly concerned to why the Norwegian fans were attracted to the original version, which is local to them. The adaptations were distributed in the same manner: through short clips throughout the week and with social media as additional insight into the world of the characters. Therefore, it can be expected that non-Norwegian fans experience the same motivations while watching their local version. However, when watching non-local versions, fans would be faced with access issues, often being forced to wait for a translation or to not see certain content at all. This means the unusual distribution of *SKAM* loses its value. In this regard, it can be expected that non-local fans share some similarities in motivations with local fans, but also some differences. Therefore, it seems necessary to work out the motivations that have already been mentioned in previous research.

Firstly, scholars have revealed that the way the show is distributed leads to the series blurring the lines between actors, characters and fans, making it part of the lives of the viewer (Krüger & Rustad, 2017). Through this, the fans often fall in love with the characters or the relationships in the show, giving off an addictive feeling (Sundet & Peteresen, 2020). Even though this feeling of love has been found in studies to audiences of other series as well, Sundet and Peteresen (2020) argue that the way *SKAM* gets integrated in the lives of the viewers, making the characters feel real and not fictional, makes this feeling even stronger. Although, it can also be expected that non-local fans skipped this interactive way to watch the series due to access difficulties. It will be interesting to see whether non-local fans experience this connectiveness with the story as well.

Secondly, Krüger and Rustad (2017) discuss the realistic portrayal of social issues and problems that are common to teenagers. They argue that through the research that was done by the makers of the series and the publishing of videos on the internet, they created a platform for teenagers to discuss these problems. Since the distribution and discussion surrounding the series takes mostly place online, Krüger and Rustad (2017) argue that, to the viewers, the series feels like an environment in which they can discuss sensitive topics away from parents and other adults. They claim that in these transnational spaces, "new cultural practices are rehearsed" (Krüger & Rustad, 2017, p. 75). This is the case since traditional

television is often consumed by adults while the internet remains a place that is best known to the youth. During this research, attention will be paid to the way *SKAM* provides a platform for discussion.

At the same time, this attraction to the way social and minority issues are presented can come from a demand for diversity in television. Television has become more varied and open to minorities in the less years, most notably since it has become more lucrative to market to audiences that would want to watch that (Jenner, 2014). However, there is still an imbalance when it comes to portrayal of LGBTQ+ individuals, women, and ethnic minorities (Dhoest, 2015). *SKAM* is known for portraying these issues more often and in a less stereotypical way (Kommunikasjon, 2015). This could lead to audiences that want to see this kind of representation being especially attracted to *SKAM*.

In conclusion, previous literature on *SKAM* argues that the distribution of the show and its realistic portrayal of teenage lives can be a motivator for Norwegian audiences to consume this series. A chance exists that this could be the case for non-local fans as well. However, this leaves the question why they would consume more than one version of it. The adaptations follow a similar storyline and distribute the series among the same lines. Why would non-local fans go out of their way to consume another version apart of their local adaptation?

2.7 Conclusion

In previous paragraphs, several pieces of literature have been discussed that relate to the case study of this thesis: *SKAM* and its non-local fans. The impact the adaptations of *SKAM* had on non-local audiences does not seem to fit the purpose of the format trade: to localize and draw in local audiences (Waisbord, 2004). The transnational fandom of *SKAM* breaks the cultural proximity theory by consuming media that is culturally distant from them, and does this despite having a local adaptation available to them. Even though transnational fandoms often face access, language, and culture barriers, they still take these hurdles on to consume non-local adaptations. A possible explanation for this could be the help of the community spirit of other fans by providing knowledge and access to others. (Lee, 2016). At the same time, possible motivators to consume this local media have been given in the previous paragraphs. All of these motivators previously mentioned will be analyzed and considered in this thesis.

3. Methods

This research will look at how and why the *SKAM* fandom crosses cultural and linguistic borders by consuming transnational content and by communicating with other transnational fans. In this chapter, the methods that were used to analyze this are introduced. First, the overall research design will be discussed. The second paragraph will discuss the methods that were used for sampling and will provide a short overview of the sample of participants that was settled on. Thirdly, the paragraph 'ethics' will shortly touch upon informed consent and the use of participant's information in this thesis. After that a paragraph will be dedicated to the data collection and the practicalities of the focus groups. For the next paragraph, attention will be paid to the analysis of the collected data. And finally, the quality criteria for this research will be evaluated.

3.1 Research Design

To investigate the research question, a qualitative research has been conducted. Qualitative research has a focus on interpreting and analyzing meanings of the research object (Boeije, 2009). Since this research deals with qualitative subjects such as opinions, connection, and attraction, it benefits from qualitative research. Additionally, qualitative research can produce descriptions of social settings (Silverman, 2019). Since the *SKAM* fandom is a social setting in the form of a community (Jenkins, 2018), this seemed appropriate. The fans have been observed through focus groups and the transcripts were later put through a thematic analysis.

The choice for focus groups has been made because of the group nature it captures (Barbour, 2008). Since this research is analyzing a community of fans, it is necessary to also have a look at the way their views come to be. Fans are influenced by each other in affinity spaces where they meet to discuss the series (Min et al., 2018). This was later confirmed within the focus groups, when some participants mentioned that they were influenced by other fans on Twitter to watch other versions of *SKAM*. This kind of interaction was recreated in the focus groups. Furthermore, since *SKAM* handles issues that can be quite heavy, it might also be the case that this particular group of people benefits from being among a group of peers with similar life views as them. As was also confirmed during the focus groups, many of them held similar values when it comes to diversity and representativity, which they might not have spoken up about so openly without those similar minded individuals around them. This might provide a sense of openness between them. Furthermore, focus groups are an efficient way to collect a variety of different perspectives in a shorter amount of time (Barbour, 2008) For the

phase of data analysis, a choice has been made for a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis can capture the recurring themes that the participants discuss in a structured but interpretive way (Ibrahim, 2012). Through several rounds of coding, certain patterns could be established and analyzed (Boeije, 2009).

3.2 Focus groups: sampling

In total, seven focus groups were conducted over a time span of two weeks. The focus groups were attended online, through Zoom, and each group had three to six participants. The size of the groups was deliberately kept on the small side, since online focus group often have the tendency to not flow as well as face-to-face focus groups (Zwaanswijk & Van Dulmen, 2014). The effect that the amount of participants had on the group was mostly noticeable in how the speaking time was divided over the participants. In larger groups one or two participants had the tendency to dominate the conversation while in smaller groups everyone spoke similar amounts. Therefore, even bigger groups would have been impractical. The sessions lasted 90 minutes on average with the shortest group taking 69 minutes and the longest 130 minutes. All of them were recorded through screen recording for later transcription.

Recruitment was done through social media. Recruitment messages were placed in Facebook groups, LinkedIn pages and Discord servers, however the most responses came from individually addressing fans on Instagram. Through the Instagram page of *SKAM NL*, active profiles were approached in a private message. This elicited multiple responses. The rest of the sample was recruited through snowball sampling. The participants that were approached through Instagram often knew other fans that were willing to participate as well. Snowball sampling seemed necessary since it is often challenging to find Dutch *SKAM* fans. This was mostly because Dutch fans were often difficult to separate from other international fans. A lot of times they did not add their nationality to their account and sometimes did not even show their real names.

The sample consisted of 29 participants between the ages of 16 to 24. The average age is about 19 years old. Three of them were male, twenty-six of them were female and one person identified as non-binary. This reveals a heavy gender imbalance, but since most participants were picked from their interaction on social media, without knowing their gender in advance, it could be possible that this is a relatively accurate representation of the balance in the *SKAM* fandom as well. Most of them had the Dutch nationality, however they lived throughout the entire country. One participant turned out to be Belgian at the start of the focus

group. This did not affect the results since she was able to interact with the other participants because she spoke the same language. Furthermore, her answers were mostly along the same patterns as the other participants. In two groups it was the case that two participants already knew each other. This could not be avoided due to the availability of the participants. However, in both groups it did not seem to be an issue since the whole group was still included in the conversation in both instances.

Jenkins (2018) defines a fan as someone with 'an intense affectionate bond with a media text.' Therefore, participants were chosen along the following criteria: they need to have watched at least two versions and need to have been active on the subject on social media. The criteria of participants needing to have watched at least two versions makes sure participants are able to compare multiple versions to each other, but also separates fans from casual watchers. Since the adaptations have mostly similar storylines, casual watchers might not go as far as to watch another version. Activity on social media also shows an affectionate bond with the media text since they interact with it and sometimes even negotiate its meaning (Jenkins, 2018). Fans were mostly active on Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr, but could also be found on Reddit, Discord and fanfiction websites.

After recruitment, the participants were asked which adaptations they had seen, and this information was later used to divide the focus groups. Seven groups were established, loosely based on the versions the participants had seen and on availability. An attempt was made to divide the participants in groups with fans that had watched similar adaptations to them. Even though the watched adaptations of the participants varied, it was still possible to loosely establish focus groups in this manner. In some groups this differed more than in others, but it was done in such a way that people had at least some similarities with their groupmates. This was done so the participants were able to discuss details about the plot of an adaptation that other groups might not have watched. All participants had seen more than one version and the average was at about three to four adaptations. *SKAM NL* was the most watched version, since everyone had watched this version, however a reason for this could be that a lot of participants were recruited through the *SKAM NL* Instagram page or Twitter page. The original Norwegian version of *SKAM* and *SKAM France* were the second most watched versions. *SKAM España* was the least watched adaptation by the participants.

3.3 Ethics

All participants agreed to be interviewed, recorded and their data to be used in this research. This was done through an informed consent form. This form included a description of the research, risks and benefits, time involvement, participant's rights, and contact information. Furthermore, it was made clear to the participants that the researcher was still a student and the subject of the study was shortly explained to them in advance. This was done to assure that participants were informed of what they were going to participate in. The participants stated that they had read the form thoroughly and gave their consent either by signing the form or by consenting orally before the start of a focus group. Since a few participants were minors, these forms were then signed by a parent or guardian.

Almost all participants agreed to having their name, age and gender be used in the data and the final version of this thesis. One participant wanted to stay anonymous and therefore did not appear on camera during the focus group. Her name was changed to a pseudonym in the data and results. However, she did give permission to publish her age and gender.

3.4 Focus group: data collection

The focus groups took place online. This was for several reasons, the first being the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Due to regulations of the Dutch government, gathering face-to-face had been made difficult. Additionally, it was preferred for the participants to feel at ease and under such tense circumstances of face-to-face meetings, this would have likely not been the case. The distance between some of the participants was also an issue that had been solved through moving the focus groups to an online environment. Ultimately, this group of individuals knew their fan identity as an online identity and communication between fans takes place in an online environment as well. This might made the online focus groups feel familiar and this lead to more natural and open conversations.

At the same time, the online environment also brings along issues. For instance, certain parts of the conversation, such as body language or fidgeting, could be lost (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2016). This could make for a less comprehensive image than if the focus groups would be conducted face-to-face. Additionally, surveys among online focus group participants have shown that they often found the conversation not as smooth in online focus groups as in face-to-face groups (Zwaanswijk & Van Dulmen, 2014). To increase the involvement of the participants, several interactive elements like polls were introduced. Additionally, this helped to spark conversation.

The topic guide consisted of five different sub sections that all touched upon several theoretical concepts (appendix. II). These topics would lead to data that could answer the general research question. In the end, not all questions were used in every group since some of them seemed not understandable or unnecessary during earlier groups and were therefore removed during later ones. In other words: the topic guide was semi-structured (Barbour, 2008) and functioned rather as a structure than as a question list.

The first section of the topic guide consisted of icebreakers. Participants were asked about their favorite characters, versions and what made them start to watch *SKAM*. Even though the purpose of these questions is mainly to get the conversation started, these still provided useful insights. For instance, their choice of a favorite version showed to which version they identify with the most. If this version was non-local, this could be interesting in relation to the purpose of the format trade, which is to make a story that is more relatable to local viewers (Waisbord, 2004).

The second part of the topic guide relates to the broader appeal of *SKAM*. This section handled probable motivations for fans to relate to *SKAM* and its seven adaptations. It was also discussed whether the multiple adaptations added value for the fans. For transnational K-pop fans, the differences in culture added value to the appeal of these artists (Min et al., 2018). Whether the *SKAM* fans frame the differences in culture as a positive or a negative aspect can explain their attraction to adaptations of other countries despite cultural differences.

The third section concerned 'access'. This relates to the way the participants deal with restrictions on the access to non-local episodes and the in-time extras that are often shared in a different language. Moreover, the issues that arise with subtitles were touched upon, such as waiting for them instead of watching the clips as they are released. According to the cultural discount theory (Hoskin & Mirus, 1988), the lack of access and the impracticality of subtitles can lead to a media product losing its value over borders. In the case of *SKAM*, these fans watch adaptations regardless of its lack of functionality. The data that could be collected through these focus groups could provide an answer to whether this cultural discount applies to the *SKAM* fandom as well and, more importantly, how they managed these impracticalities and why they chose to ignore them.

The fourth section of the topic guide provides questions on topics concerning 'differences and misunderstandings.' This section dove deeper into how these fans frame the different adaptations and whether they feel a cultural distance between non-local adaptations when consuming those. Whether they fall into banal nationalistic patterns can highlight the way they look at foreign adaptations. Do they view these adaptations as the 'other' or as

characters and plotlines that have a broader appeal (Cuelenaere, 2020)? In this part of the focus group attention was also paid to how fans compare the different adaptations and whether they relate more to the local version or non-local versions. Questions were also asked about cultural differences and misunderstandings these fans encountered when watching non-local adaptations. According to the cultural proximity theory (Straubhaar, 1991), audiences are mostly attracted to characters and plotlines that are culturally close to them because they experience recognition and feel like they can relate to the product. Whether the participants experience a distance between them and the non-local versions can be interesting in this regard. Additionally, inside jokes and other contextual aspects of the adaptation can also be misunderstood by non-resident viewers (Beeden & de Bruin, 2009). In the focus group attention was paid to whether this impacted their attraction to non-local adaptations and why this was or was not the case.

The final section of the topic guide relates to the experiences of 'fandom' to the participants. This section questioned whether the community feeling of a fandom increases their interaction and attraction to *SKAM*. According to Min et al. (2018), 'affinity spaces' are places in which fans of a transnational fandom meet. These fans can have different levels of interaction and time spent in the community but meet in these spaces where their interests overlap. The last part of the focus group took a better look at how their connection to these international affinity spaces can affect their consumption of transnational content. This part of the topic guide includes questions on what kind of contact they have with other fans and what is discussed within these fan groups.

An iterative approach was taken in regard to the focus groups. Several interesting findings from the first focus groups have been used for further questioning in later focus groups. For example, in the first focus group a participant mentioned that he thought the fans of *SKAM* have similar morals and values, taken the subject the show deals with. This was not elaborated on in this focus group but was rather brought up during later focus groups to further explore his statement. This kind of analytical induction can help build a theory later in the phase of analysis (Boeije, 2009).

3.5 Thematic Analysis

After all the focus groups were conducted, the recordings were transcribed in a coherent manner. To establish themes and patterns, the transcription was put through a thematic analysis. The choice for thematic analysis was made because of its ability to discover themes and patterns in a body of media texts (Boeije, 2009). Since this research wishes to

uncover overarching opinions and motivations from the participants, thematic analysis seemed the most fitting for this.

To achieve this, Boeije's approach to thematic analysis (2009) was adopted. Using this method, the coding is divided over three coding phases. During 'open coding', the text is divided into loose categories. In this phase it is also considered whether the passages are important for this research. During 'axial coding', the categories are reconsidered and merged or divided if necessary. Subcategories are created and named during this process. During the last phase named 'selective coding', the codes are compared and theories arise from the patterns and connections. During this process, new codes were compared to already coded data. This increases the validity of the research (Silverman, 2019). This kind of analysis will produce theories and reduce the data in an organized manner. Furthermore, returning to the data in three different stages and re-evaluating them every time can ensure the reliability of this research. Microsoft Excel was used for the coding since this program could easily provide a structured overview of the coding tables. In Excel, coding tables were made which provided counts of all the codes, their coding name, a description and an example quote.

3.6 Quality criteria

Qualitative research is often assessed through the values reliability, validity, and generalizability. These values reflect the trustworthiness of a research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This research has taken a few steps to ensure this trustworthiness, and these will be reflected on in this short paragraph.

To ensure validity, 'member checking' has taken place. This entailed that participants were sent a draft version of the thesis, so they could possibly comment on interpretations they did not find believable. This was done according to the article by Carlson (2014) who warns for traps in member checking. For instance, she argues that properly informing participants on what to expect during the checking process is very important. Therefore, it was made sure the participants knew what to comment on and which parts to check. Only ten participants responded to this and they stated they agreed with the image that was painted of the non-local *SKAM* fan. They said that they could recognize themselves in the conclusion and therefore no adjustments were made following the member checking process.

Another important influence on the reliability of this research is the role of the researcher in the data collection and analysis. Since qualitative research is a personal and interpretive process the background, gender, age, and other aspects of the researcher can influence the way data is collected and interpreted (Dumitrica & Pridmore, 2019). Therefore,

this will be shortly reflected on. The researcher fell in the age range of the fans that participated in this research. This could have a positive effect because the participants would feel more at ease or would feel like the researcher was part of the group. This could have led to more natural conversations. During the analysis, the role of the researcher as peer to the participants could have led to a deeper understanding of the age group. At the same time, the decent distance that researchers should have from their research object could have been too small. It should also be noted that the role of the interviewer as 'researcher' could lead to participants giving arguments they think are important for the research. This could have lead to answers that were studied in air or not as natural as they would be in a more casual situation.

Lastly, to ensure reliability even more, a thick description of the research method has been given in this chapter (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, transcripts of the focus groups are provided in addition to this thesis and can be looked into for clarification.

4. Results

This research investigates why and how non-local *SKAM* fans interact with the original Norwegian version and its non-local adaptations. In the following part of this research, the results concerning the behavior of these fans towards these foreign versions and the international fan contacts that come along with it are introduced. In the end, several themes emerged from the analysis. These have been divided under two main sections that will be presented here. The first one concerns themes that relate to *how* non-local fans deal with barriers that come with being a part of a transnational fandom. The second section deals with their motivations to do so.

4.1 Overcoming barriers

In this first section, the way that non-local fans overcome transnational barriers will be discussed. Three main themes arose from the analysis. The first main theme relates to 'access' and the troubles that come with that. The second main theme concerns 'language' and the misunderstanding that arise from it. The third theme is called 'knowledge through community' and deals with the way fans use fandom to get past misunderstandings and access barriers.

4.1.1 Access

A remarkable aspect of the transnationality of the *SKAM* fandom is the lack of access non-local fans have to the episodes. Even though some versions have chosen to distribute their episodes to YouTube, many seasons are still geoblocked, obstructing fans from accessing the episodes. The same goes for the official websites of the adaptations. When fans can bypass geoblocks with a VPN, they are often met with a lack of subtitles. This leads to them turning to illegal uploads of the non-local versions of the show. Regarding the ease that these audience could reach all types of other content through Netflix or Disney+, or even their local version of *SKAM*, it is remarkable that they still consume so much of the media content that takes a significant amount of effort to reach.

According to the analysis, more than half of the participants find the lack of access burdensome. For more than half of these participants, the lack of access can also influence whether the participants watch a certain adaptation of *SKAM*. For instance, they will move on to another adaptation or a different show when they find a non-local adaptation difficult to access. However, access is solely an important factor with adaptations they are not as

involved in. From the moment they are emotionally committed to an adaptation, they are willing to put in the effort to find a watchable version of this adaptation of *SKAM*. Jenkins et al. (2018) also argued that audiences that are willing to go through this much effort to consume a product, could be regarded as a valuable marketing tool for the TV production, since these are predominantly the most passionate viewers that will recommend these series to their friends. This was also noticeable in the way non-local fans of SKAM often bypassed geoblocks and other obstacles for their favorite version.

Despite that, a large minority of the participants expressed not finding these episodes difficult to reach. In one of the groups one girl reacted to another participant explaining that they found some versions difficult to access in the following way: "But I do not think it really is that difficult. I have a website on which I can access all versions and I just watch everything there. I don't know, is it difficult for you guys?" (Roosmarijn, 19) One explanation for why this does not bother this group could be that they grew up with technology and easily know their way around these types of access obstacles. One participant even confirmed this by explaining that she did not mind looking around illegal or sketchy websites since she had been doing that since before she had Netflix. According to Esser et al. (2016), global content has been part of the general knowledge of younger people, since the internet is more integrated in their lives. This could lead to having less trouble with finding content that is more difficult to access. Another explanation for fans not having much trouble with access can be the help that is often provided through the fandom. The results of the thematic analysis also shows that participants find access to non-local adaptations through the help of the fandom. However, this will be discussed in more detail in a coming paragraph.

So overall, access can play a minor role in how much content they consume, but not in whether they consume non-local content. When an emotional connection has been made, the effort would be worth it. This means that a lack of access does not play a very significant role in the consumption of non-local adaptations. Additionally, it shows that transnational audiences are increasingly able and willing to cross the restriction that television has often put up for non-local viewers. The help of other fans could play a significant role in this.

4.1.2 Language

When it comes to language, a few themes arose from the analysis. Firstly, the analysis showed that Dutch *SKAM* fans were well aware of jokes and differences in the several *SKAM* adaptations. Coming from this, a pattern emerged of the misunderstandings that non-local fans come across when watching foreign versions of *SKAM*. These passages included

participants explaining how they sometimes did not understand a joke or cultural reference. This is a recurring pattern during the focus groups. Some of them also expressed a preference of watching the Dutch or Flemish version because of the ease in watching it. For instance, one participant responded like this: "And that is why I am such a big fan of the Flemish version because…and the text messages are easy to understand and I can just watch it without waiting, because the language is almost the same." (Beatrice, 19) This shows that participants find a certain ease in watching a version in their own language in which they understand every reference and joke.

However, even though participants described a significant amount of misunderstandings, in almost all cases they mentioned that they did not seem to mind these misunderstandings. This is remarkable since some previous research to format adaptations has shown that non-local series were less popular as adaptations because of these references and recognizabilities (Beeden & De Bruin, 2009). An explanation for this is given in another pattern. Explanations for why non-local fans did not mind the misunderstood also arose from the data. For instance, they were often helped by explanations in the subtitles. Others explained how their curiosity for the language and the culture led them to research the parts of the episodes they did not understand. In these instances, they turned to the internet to read up on national holidays, TV show references or local music in order to understand what the characters meant by a certain phrase or why they expressed themselves a certain way. In other circumstances they turned to social media and the fans that are local to a specific version. These fans were then able to explain the situation to them. One of the participants explained this in the following way:

Yeah, I think I get most of my information out of the fandom itself. Most of the time, after I have watched an episode, I look up the clips on YouTube and look in the comments. After that I always understood better what had happened in a certain scene. (Fee, 22)

Furthermore, a pattern of non-local fans finding the difference in language more interesting than off-putting also erose from the analysis. This can be found in the pattern of non-local fans admitting to having learned one of the languages that is connected to a foreign adaptation. In most cases these were whims, however in others these whims turned into a motivation to finish it and learn a new skill in the process. One girl explained her experience like this:

I have the same thing. It's just, I have been learning Norwegian now for literally four years. I have also watched a bunch of other Norwegian shows. I can understand them now when I watch them, you know? I have even put in on my resume. I just speak Norwegian now. (Sophie, 23)

However, even the shorter-lived motivations of fans to learn the language of the version that lies closest to their heart, shows an interest in the differences in language rather than an annoyance by. This shows that the differences and references in the language of these versions were not as much a hindrance to them as it was a motivator to watch and interact with them. A similar phenomenon occurs in the fandoms surrounding anime and K-pop, where fans develop an interest in the culture and language attached to the media products (Lee, 2016). An explanation for this could be that fans recognize language as an aspect of the series that is connected to it. In other words: they view it as a way to dive further into the details of the series and its surroundings.

Another obstacle that is often addressed in articles discussing transnational audiences is the use of subtitles and dubbings. The data shows a pattern of participants being bothered by the impracticality of subtitles. In a few instances fans explained how they had to keep their full attention to the screen and therefore could not look away. This is in accordance to Berg's research (2017) in which Arabian interviewees responded to Turkish dramas. Some participants, including the one who spoke the following words, view this as a nuisance:

Well, if you come back from a long day of work and you just want to relax and watch TV, then you just do not want to be paying attention all the time. For instance, when I am watching a Dutch or English series, then I can just understand it. And at the same time, I can just scroll through my phone or do something else, but with a series such as *SKAM* which is in Norwegian, you just have to really pay attention and read along, because you do not want to be missing an important part of the plot. (Daniël, 18)

However, a bigger part of the fans expressed that they did not mind using subtitles. These passages could be split into two subthemes: those who were used to using subtitles and therefore did not mind them and those who found subtitles practical to use. An example follows of the last explanation: "I actually quite like having subtitles. I often put on subtitles with English shows as well, just because I'm afraid I will mishear something." (Fee, 22).

Following this, it can be concluded that, similar to inside jokes or cultural references, subtitles are considered a slight annoyance, but not a major inconvenience. Even though some participants mention being annoyed by the use of subtitles, most of them feel indifferent or positive about them. This contradicts are research to non-local audiences (Berg, 2017). Overall, the participants do not consider language obstacles much of reason to skip non-local versions. They use the explanation of other fans and their own curiosity to get past these barriers. This is remarkable since language is often used as an argument to why formats are localized or to why non-local adaptations do not find as many audiences as local ones (Waisbord, 2004; Beeden & de Bruin, 2009).

4.1.3 Knowledge through community

A pattern that emerged from the data indicated a shared bond between fans. This feeling was explained as a community feeling in connection to other fans. Participants felt this bond regardless of how much time they spent with other fans. In one focus group a girl who had admitted earlier to not having much contact with other fans, said later:

Yes, I think…The fact that you know that there are people in other countries who are watching the same thing and are also watching different versions is really fun. Even if you do not speak with them, you know? You have that feeling of community even if you are not necessarily a part of something. (Malou, 16)

This community feeling relates to the way they viewed fan contact as a way to experience a shared watching experience. Alongside this pattern, the data also showed the several activities they considered to be a part of this shared watching experience. 'Sharing' opinions, feelings, and experiences were often mentioned to explain how fans would participate in mutual watching. Also, the analyzing of the story and the characters was often mentioned. This corresponds with Jenkins' (2018) research on fandoms, in which fans negotiate with the media text and analyze and interpret what certain aspects mean. In one focus group, the importance of this became particularly clear when the group started discussing a controversy surrounding the makers of the French version sharing their work process on Twitter: "The director of *SKAM* France at one point started to interfere with the storyline. Every time a clip was released, he started answering fan questions over and over again. There was just no space anymore to fill in the gaps for yourself." (Isa, 21) This goes to show that in a fandom of a series that particularly highlights minority groups, the fans find it

important that they have a space to negotiate their identity within the media text and to discuss this among others who share a likeminded view.

Furthermore, this feeling of community also leads to the functioning of the *SKAM* fandom as a knowledge hub. As discussed before during the earlier paragraphs, the data has shown that fans gain a lot of knowledge and access from each other. Fandom can therefore provide explanations of cultural references, but also discussions, rumors and controversies surrounding the show. Additionally, fans provide content in multiple shapes and forms for each other. Translations of social media posts, subtitles, fanfiction, links to episodes—all of it is shared within these affinity spaces. This also derives from a feeling of charity, providing for those who cannot reach this type of content normally (Lee, 2016). Through sharing this knowledge and content with each other, the fandom makes *SKAM* more accessible for transnational fans.

It can therefore be said that non-local fans of the series *SKAM* see the fandom as a community that engages in a shared experiences of watching, analyzing, and comparing the show. This community feeling can lead to fans wanting to provide access and knowledge to those in the community that cannot normally reach those aspects (Lee, 2016). Therefore, it could be said that fandom aids non-local fans in getting past access and language barriers that are often used as argument for the cultural proximity theory.

4.1.4. Conclusion

Even though access and language can be barriers for transnational audiences, *SKAM* audiences do not mind these barriers much. This can be attributed to the fandom that provides each other with access to the non-local versions of the series, explanations on cultural differences and subtitles. This makes even the foreign versions of *SKAM* accessible and understandable to Dutch *SKAM* fans. This sharing of information and access comes from a feeling of community and a shared watching experience.

4.2 Motivations

When asked to compare non-local versions with the local Dutch version, participants often fell back in banal aboutness and describing the non-local version as the 'other' (Cuelenaere, 2020). This type of thinking is not out of the ordinary, since banal nationalism is ingrained in our way of talking (Esser et al., 2016), however, this does reveal that non-local *SKAM* fans view versions made outside the Netherlands as culturally different. They are

aware of the cultural differences between their local version and the non-local adaptations, but still choose to consume both. This is against the principal of cultural proximity, since it argues that audiences prefer productions that are close to them culturally. This is mainly based on the assumption that people of similar cultures hold similar values (Straubhaar & La Pastina, 2005). In the following passages, the motivations of non-local *SKAM* fans to consume foreign versions will be discussed. From the data, three main themes, or motivations, emerged: 'diversity', 'realism', and 'cultural curiosity'. These motivations will be explained in detail, and it will be argued that these concepts can be seen as values that were formed outside of the local cultural sphere. But first, the relationship between empathy that the participants feel towards a certain remake will be related to their enjoyment of it.

4.2.1 Empathy and enjoyment

The participants were asked which version they related to the most. A majority of the participants chose their local version. Reasons given for this were mostly day-to-day aspects that the participants related to and cultural references that were shown in the series. These varied from the architecture of the houses, the food that they ate and the clothes that they wore. One participant explained this by an example of a scene in *SKAM NL*:

Yeah, there was a clip in the Dutch version in which they had to pick songs for class. They played Watskeburt by the Jeugd van Tegenwoordig[1] or something. I just think… everyone knows that. And then they also used songs from André Hazes, and I think that piece of recognition is really nice. I have that feeling a little less with remakes from other countries, you know? (Manon, 20)

Some of the participants tried to describe the 'typical' Dutchness of characters and storylines while answering this question. They described this as a feeling but were often struggling trying to explain what exact aspects of the Dutch version felt that way and why. For instance, in the following quote a participant was asked why she thought a certain character was typically Dutch:

Yeah just, a little bit…uhm, just not caring at all and just…very spontaneous, direct, and during parties she is just…Yeah, I do not know what to call it. Because for example Chris, in

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[1] 'De Jeugd van Tegenwoordig' and 'André Hazes' are Dutch musical artists.

every remake uhm, she was kind of like that country itself. For example in Spain she was very open, a little bit like the Spanish personality. Uhm yeah, and the French did the same as the original, for example. Germany had a bit of a German version, so to say. And then the Dutch version had Janna of course. I really thought Janna was…yeah, I think she is my favorite character of the Dutch version. She was just really fun. (Blade, 20)

In case a participant chose another version they related to the most, they often admitted that they would have chosen the Dutch version if it had had a season three and four. This related to a personal experience they had had that shared similarities to the storyline of these seasons. The cancellation could have been a significant reason for a lot of fans to consume more non-local content of *SKAM*.. For instance, in the following quote a participant is trying to explain that he relates most to the original because of a specific character that did not have his own season in the Dutch remake:

I think that if *SKAM NL* had gone on for longer I might have picked *SKAM NL*. Especially because Lucas, the way they were building him up… But yeah, the reason I started watching *SKAM* was because of Isak, and he is still the most relatable character to me. (Jelle, 18)

The difference between why participants related to a version is clear. When it comes to the local version, participants mostly name aspects of culture or surroundings. If participants picked the original, they pointed out the storyline or social issues that were discussed.

The participants were also asked about their favorite version. In this case most of the fans chose a non-local adaptation. By far the most chosen version was the original. When asked why, they often explained that it was simply because it was the original or that it was the version they had discovered first. Cuelenaere (2020) explains this as 'romanticizing the original' and the participants in his research tended to favor the original as well. Hills (2005) argues that this phenomenon is caused by audiences wanting to be seen as early adapters. When participants chose the Dutch version as their favorite, they often still relied on the recognizability of cultural elements or surroundings. Other non-local versions were often chosen because of the aesthetics, the storyline, or an issue they related to or were emotionally attached to. Overall, the version they identify the most with and the version they enjoy the most do not always overlap. This could show that these non-local fans do not rely on localized

cultural values to enjoy an adaptation. They possibly found other reasons to enjoy non-local versions as well.

The participants were also asked about the things they did not like about certain versions. The analysis reveals that in relation to all versions except the American adaptation, they fell back on two types of criticism: either a plotline was unrealistic or there was a controversy surrounding the cast or crew. These controversies were mostly based on how the story or the cast treated certain types of minorities. Of both types of criticism follows an example:

I could not really get into it and that added to the fact that the cast was, well in my opinion, really problematic. They just said things which I did not really agree with and that just changed my view on the entire remake. It just makes it less fun to watch. So, I really did not want to keep watching after that. (Lianne, 21)

Yeah, I had the same thing with *SKAM NL*. There were just some scenes that made me think "That does not happen in real life"

Researcher: Like?

Yeah, that wedding dress scene. That she did that when she was still in high school. It made me feel like "I do not think it is like that, but…" No, I just do not think it is realistic. (Maan, 20)

From these results, it becomes clear that the reality of the show and the way minority issues are handled as important aspects to the non-local fans of *SKAM*. In a later section these aspects will be further elaborated on, since a lot of fans also named 'reality' and 'diversity' as facets they did enjoy about the series or one of its remakes.

Remarkably, the American version was one of the versions receiving the most criticism. Straubhaar and La Pastina (2005) have named productions coming from the United States as one of the exceptions on cultural proximity since they produce movies and series of higher quality and can produce genres other areas cannot because of the high costs. However, not a single participant chose the American version as their favorite version or as the version they related to the most. At the same time, a significant amount of participants picked *SKAM*

Austin as the version they would not want to see or want to see again. The analysis revealed a few motivations for this. The participants argued that there were enough American productions on TV and that the 'stereotypical' American portrayal of teenagers would not fit the format of *SKAM*. Furthermore, they believed America was intruding in a "European thing" (Nikki, 18). They believed America was too distant from them to participate in that. The following participant had a strong opinion about this:

I was just thinking the same thing. It is such a European show and I think that America…that American people could easily spoil it. It would be the same thing if America would suddenly want to join Eurovision. You'd think "What are you doing? You're spoiling everything." (In-Sook, 18)

It can be said that participants experienced a feeling of belonging with other Europeans, despite also being aware of the cultural differences. Sporadic remarks by some participants can be used to argue for this statement. For example, in the following passage one of the participants explains a feeling of belonging with other European countries:

'And we are all countries which…I mean Europe, I do not know if it is the same for you guys, but we are sort of citizens of Europe, you know? We easily cross borders, and we eat each other's food. But at the same time, you feel really Dutch when you're in, for example, France or Germany.' (Charlotte, 21)

Overall, it can be concluded that for these fans cultural recognizability does not equal enjoyment. They recognize themselves in other aspects of the non-local versions and find other values more important. At the same time, they feel a distance to the American version and therefore do not enjoy it as much as the others.

4.2.2 Reality

One motivator to watch *SKAM* that arose from the analysis was the realistic aspect of *SKAM*. The non-local fans that participated in this research mentioned 'realism' when asked why someone should watch *SKAM* or when they were explaining why they enjoyed a certain version. This pattern was found in relation to both the local and the non-local versions. This 'realism' has been related to several aspects of the series. Small daily things were mentioned substantially:

Firstly, the conversations…for instance, they actually talk about school. For example, in a lot of American shows they just, you know, do crime at sixteen. Not very realistic. And in this show they just talk about exams, and fights with their parents, and cleaning their room. (Roosmarijn, 18)

This presentation of a life that came very close to their own made them feel represented and they recognized their own lives in it. Most of the participants were still in secondary school or have watched SKAM when they were in secondary school and this realistic approach made the show feel more real to them. They described this as something that is rare in television. Some of them mentioned as well that they felt like the show really understood them and knew how to portray realistic teenage lives.

A lot of the time when I'm watching teen shows, it is noticeable that it is written by some forty-year old who is trying to understand the youth, you know? At the same time, the original *SKAM* is also written by someone who is older but watching that I always had the idea that it was a realistic portrayal of how the youth acts and speaks. (Sophie, 23)

The real-time distribution of the clips and the posts on the Instagram accounts contributed, according to the participants, to the realism of the various versions. Watching a season live was described as 'an experience' as it became part of their lives. In one of the focus group a girl described following along live like this:

Sometimes I would be studying or doing something else and then a clip was released and I would think "Oh, let me just watch this for two minutes." And then I would look outside at the weather and then at the weather in the clip and sometimes it would be the same. That was really fun to see. (Beatrice, 19)

It was a noticeable pattern in the analysis that the characters and the story start to feel real, due to the live aspect. This, in combination with the realistic details of teenage lives, gave *SKAM* fans the impression that they were watching and corresponding with a friend. One of the participants described meeting some of the actors of the Dutch version and having a temporary moment thinking they were these characters:

But, I have seen them on parties before, that group of friends, and I must say if I met them, the actors, they really felt like it was "their little project" or something. Like, "We have done this, and we are always together". I don't know that felt like—in the show they always try to incorporate you as much as possible and then you're everything to them. And then in real life that's just less. So, I don't like that. (Max, 19)

Since *SKAM* clips and social media posts are released daily, fans would be occupied with the series every day. And as realistic elements of the show could be contributing to the addictiveness of the series (Sundet & Peteresen, 2020), fans would often describe watching clips whenever and wherever they were at that time. One of the participants explained an instance in which a clip of *SKAM* was published during class:

I have literally watched clips during class. I was in class and suddenly my friends told me that they dropped a clip. I was thinking, "Oh no, not now!" And I would then put my phone in my inner pocket so I could watch it. It was really bad at one point. (Ellen, 18)

When a clip would be of a non-local version, this would sometimes even mean watching it without subtitles. The same participant of the last quote also mentioned that earlier: "I have literally watched clips without understanding anything, but at least I had watched the clip." (Ellen, 18) This could possibly also be caused by a fear of missing out (Conlin et al., 2016). When a clip would be released, friends and other fans would start talking about it, analyzing it and sharing their opinion. To be able to contribute to these discussions, they would have to watch the clips. Additionally, they described 'having extra *SKAM* content as a reason to watch other non-local versions. If they had finished one version and would not want it to end yet, they would watch another version. Some even mentioned a feeling of 'comfort' watching another version of the same story, since they knew they were going to like it.

Overall, one of the motivations for fans to watch *SKAM* is the reality of the show's portrayal. This is being enhanced by the distribution of the series that makes *SKAM* part of the lives of the audience. Fans experience a feeling of addiction through this and have the feeling like they must watch wherever they are or whatever time it is. It can be argued that this type

of addiction can also lead to fans wanting to consume more content, which can be found across borders in non-local adaptations.

4.2.3 Diversity and representativity

A pattern that was revealed by the analysis was participants mentioning the representation of personal issues they have dealt with as a motivator to why they enjoyed watching *SKAM* or one of the versions, in particular. They found representation in deeper personal issues, but also in simple day-to-day problems or issues they could be dealing with. The enjoyment of this representation can be seen as a sense of affirmation in the searching of identity. This last aspect is even more relative since most participants were teenagers themselves in the years wherein they watched the series. This can be seen in the following interaction in one of the focus groups:

Malou, 16: …But also simple things such as in *SKAM NL* when they have the issue that Engel, that she does not know if she has to shave her vulva or not and that all of them go to the waxing thing together, and also to the doctor for birth control. Those kind of things, well, they're still taboo. We all act like it is good and normal, but it is still a taboo. And in this show they're just like 'no, we're just going to do that. We want this in the show and we are not going to make a big deal out of it.

Anne-Fleur, 17: Yeah, that is really nice.

Suzanne, 16: Yes, I liked that as well.

Fenna, 18: Yeah.

Anne-Fleur, 17: Sometimes there are things that you do not want to discuss with others because you feel like it would be weird. And if those issues are discussed in *SKAM* than you just think, "This is great."

Malou, 16: It's also a bit of a reassurance. It's like "hey, it is all okay."

Anne-Fleur, 17: "We are not alone in this."

In this case, these girls found representation of a problem which they wanted more information on, but found difficult to discuss. They, and other fans alike, found this kind of representation reassuring. Since they do not find these kind of issues discussed in other series often, they return to *SKAM* and its international remakes. Other participants found representation in bigger, even more personal issues. These issues could vary from sexuality to religion to race. Following are a few examples of this:

Well, I am gay myself, so at the time, I was not yet—I was just out of the closet, so back then that was really cool to see. Mostly because, like we said, it is so relatable, and it feels so real. Uhm, but the battle he goes through… It was relatable on some points and on some not at all. So, it was really nice to see someone on TV who was so different than me, but still the same. (Jelle, 18)

Uh, her name is Sana, that Muslim girl. I'm not Muslim, but I am Christian, and I recognized myself a lot in that storyline. The fact that she was looking for someone to have a relationship with, but at the same time really clashed with certain values. (Nora, 21)

These quotes are from people that could directly relate to the issues that were discussed in *SKAM*. However, not everyone could relate to the larger overarching themes and social issues that play a part in the storyline. At the same time, the data reveals that these participants still seemed to find representation of these issues important. They often expressed wanting to learn about issues that did not directly concern them. Such as the following example in which one of the participants talks about his experience watching season four, in which a Muslim girl is the lead character.

Yeah, I was raised Christian—I am an atheist right now—but I have been raised Christian and I have not learned much about the Islamic culture. That was also because I went to a Christian primary school and a Christian secondary school, so I did not learn anything about that. So, when that came on… That season was very intriguing to me. (Jelle, 18)

Furthermore, in general, diversity and representation of minority issues seemed to be a motivator to watch *SKAM* and its remakes. This was particularly noticeable in their

enthusiasm over season three. This season features a person struggling with their sexuality and all the issues, such as coming out to friends, that come with it. At the end of the season, it turns out that their partner is diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Mostly the portrayal of sexuality, but also to some extend the mental health issues are praised by the participants and named as the number one reason why this season was considered so good.

In general, diversity seems to be a value that they collectively find important in media products. If this is true, then this could also be a critical reason for them to watch non-local versions of the series, because the Dutch version of *SKAM* was cancelled before the seasons in which minorities could hold the limelight (seasons three and four). However, according to them, this kind of diversity is, in general, lacking on mainstream television. One participant noted that one of the reasons he watched multiple versions of the same story was that there was too little queer content on TV and at least this way he could consume more of it:

Series have changed a lot in the last five to ten years, but especially in the beginning, you are just hungry for queer content. Then it does not matter to you that it is all the same. It's like, "More happy queer people? Why not?" (Marc, 24)

Overall, non-local fans of *SKAM* see diversity and the representation of minorities as an important value that they cherish in series. They find this representation too little in other TV series and therefore attach themselves to the many versions of *SKAM*. Even if this means consuming versions that are culturally distant from them. Some of them related directly to the issues portrayed in the show, giving them a feeling of reassurance and being heard.

4.2.4 Cultural curiosity

During the focus groups, the participants were asked what they thought was enjoyable about watching adaptations from other countries. From the analysis, it became clear that the most common motivator was the cultural differences between the versions. This goes against the cultural proximity theory, which claims that audiences prefer television that shares cultural similarities to this audience (Straubhaar and La Pastina, 2005). In the following quote, a participant describes how she enjoys to learn the more day-to-day, under the surface cultural practices, which people normally do not get to experience through tourism and other media:

So, it is sort of a way to take a look in a country which you—For example Germany, we live next to them and we know a lot about them and we are in contact with them through politics or whatever. But you never really experience their culture. And in *SKAM* it is interwoven in the story you like so much and the characters you know…It is a sort of layer of Germany you might not totally know about. (Charlotte, 21)

This kind of attraction to media products that are foreign to audiences can be explained because the culture of that country is deemed 'exotic' and therefore interesting to learn about (Athique, 2013). This phenomenon is also noticeable in other transnational fandoms such as the fandoms surrounding anime and K-pop (Lee, 2016; Min et al., 2018). In these fandoms, Japanese and Korean culture has become an extension of the knowledge fans possess. They often also recognize certain words in Japanese and Korean or even try to learn the entire language. As they learn about culture of these countries, they often discover other media products by that country as well (Lee, 2016). Some of the participants admitted to being deeply interested in the culture of one of the remakes as well. This culture could be discovered through *SKAM* or through an earlier interest in other media products of that country. Lee (2016) already argued something similar. She claimed that through one media text, transnational fans often discover other media texts from the same culture. Following is an example of both scenarios:

I do not actually remember anymore how I discovered the Norwegian version. I think it was because I was really into Norwegian culture, because I had a friend who was Norwegian. (Tess, 18)

I am a really big Norway stan[2]. It is actually almost really embarrassing. People ask me sometimes: "What is your thing with Norway?" Because I speak the language and I watch the series. But I've literally become entirely infiltrated with that country because of that show. (Sophie, 23)

Conclusively, non-local *SKAM* fans are conscious about the differences between their culture and the culture of the adaptations they are a fan of. At the same time, they are

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[2] The word 'stan' is an abbreviation for 'stalker fan'. However, in this context she is referring to an obsessed fan.

intrigued by the 'exoticness' of these versions and are therefore eager to learn more about the culture and language of the countries in question. When describing what kind of fans *SKAM* attracts, a description that often comes by is 'open to other cultures.' The way they use this to describe themselves, can be considered an important value to them.

4.2.5 Conclusion

In the end, non-local *SKAM* fans hold importance in other values than cultural values. They share a feeling of importance for the realism of TV shows, diversity and the treatment of minority issues and a willingness to learn about other cultures. They find all these values within *SKAM* and its remakes, and along with an addictive feeling that derives from the distribution of the series, the non-local *SKAM* fan craves more content and therefore consumes non-local versions, overcoming cultural and access barriers.

5.   Conclusion

According to the theory of cultural proximity (Straubhaar, 1991), audiences are often attracted to local productions because they recognize themselves in the culture. This is also the principle on which the format trade is based: adapting a format to the local culture and customs so the production would not feel too foreign to them. However, when it comes to *SKAM*, this way of making adaptations has led to fans watching multiple versions of the series, even when local adaptations would be available to them. This leads back to the main research questions of this research: how and why do these non-local fans engage with non-local adaptations of *SKAM*? In order to answer this question, this research has used focus groups with Dutch fans of *SKAM*, followed by a thematic analysis.

When it comes to the 'how' section of the research question, the results show that language and access barriers can indeed be considered inconvenient to non-local fans if they are not yet emotionally attached to a certain version. However, the fandom that surrounds *SKAM* makes the non-local versions more accessible to fans from all over the world. They do this by providing subtitles, knowledge, translations of social media posts and other extra content. This corresponds with Lee's article (2016), which claims that fans provide access and knowledge for each other because of a feeling of community. Furthermore, language differences and cultural differences are rather seen as an extra dimension of the series which they can further dive into. Therefore, it can be concluded that, like in other transnational fandoms (Min et al., 2018), fans are rather attracted by these differences than scared off by it.

The emotional attachment which helps fans overcome the cultural and access barriers and accompanies the transnational viewing experience can be connected to collective values that fans find important. Even though they seem to relate culturally more to the local version, they also relate to the overarching values of 'realism', 'diversity', and 'cultural curiosity' that are present in other versions as well. These are values that are not necessarily tied to culture or nation, but rather to the fan community. According to the results of this research these leads to fans returning to this story over and over again. The realistic aspect of *SKAM* is known to lead to a feeling of addiction (Sundet & Peteresen, 2020), which has led to fans turning to non-local versions to consume more content. 'Diversity' is a value that can still be considered underrepresented in the television industry (Dhoest, 2015). Therefore, it is natural to turn to content they know has this representation. 'Cultural curiosity' is different in this matter. The prospect of learning about a culture that is distinctively different than theirs makes them turn to non-local versions of the familiar story they know and love.

5.1 Implications

Overall, the *SKAM* fandom and transnational fandoms in general can add to the theory of cultural proximity, by claiming that the values that attract audiences to media products do not necessarily have to be geographical or even cultural. This can be seen in non-local *SKAM* fans enjoying localized versions of the series and still feeling emotional attached to it. After all, the cultural capital audience possess does not have to originate from local media or the state (Esser, 2016). The values that these non-local fans cherish can be emerged from personal contacts, other interests, or, most importantly, social media.

This attraction of non-local audiences to localized versions forces us to look differently at the format trade as well. Even though the aim of the format trade has been mostly centered at localizing formats to make it attractive to local audiences (Beeden & de Bruin, 2009), this research shows that by implementing non-cultural values, global audiences can be attracted to the cultural differences rather than put off by it. This can be used in the future to recreate the success of *SKAM*.

5.2 Limitations and Future research

This research has some limitations that can be addressed and further investigated in future research on this topic. For instance, this research only analyzes one group of non-local *SKAM* fans: Dutch fans. Even though they have a local adaptation available to them, this *SKAM* version was short lived and only aired for two seasons. It is logical for viewers to turn to other versions to see how the story continues. Therefore, it could be useful for future research to compare the results of this research with, for example, local fans of *SKAM France,* which has enjoyed a seven-season runtime. It would be interesting to see in which aspects those fans differ from the group represented in this research. Additionally, it could be interesting to analyze fans that do not have a local adaptation available to them. In some areas, there is a demand for a local version of this show and in several countries fan productions have been made ("Roche PE", n.d.). This could add another perspective to the current research. Furthermore, looking into the global, non-cultural values that SKAM fans possess, could provide us with information on how these kind of values commence. Therefore, it could be really interesting to look further into the internet aspect of fandom and how they develop mutual values. Finally, it could be possible that this topic could benefit from a quantitative perspective, for instance tracking the engagement with non-local adaptations online or setting up a worldwide survey to get a real idea of the global view of *SKAM* fans.

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Appendix I. List of participants

Name	Age	Gender	Group
Anne-Fleur	17	Female	1
Beatrice	19	Female	7
Blade	20	Female	7
Charlotte	21	Female	2
Daniel	18	Non-binary	2
Ellen	18	Female	6
Fee	22	Female	3
Fenna	18	Female	1
In-Sook	18	Female	3
Isa	21	Female	5
Jelle	18	Male	7
Jennifer	20	Female	4
Lianne	21	Female	4
Maan	20	Female	6
Madeleine	17	Female	3
Malou	16	Female	1
Manon	20	Female	5
Marc	24	Male	4
Marije	19	Female	5
Mariska	24	Female	5
Max	19	Male	5
Nikki	18	Female	2
Nora	21	Female	2
Rianne	17	Female	4
Roosmarijn	19	Female	6
Ruth	17	Female	4
Sophie	23	Female	5
Suzanne	16	Female	1
Tess	18	Female	4

Appendix. II Question list

<u>Introduction round:</u> Could you all introduce yourself? Please tell us your name, age, what you do at the moment and your favorite *SKAM* character.

<u>Icebreakers</u>

Which version of *SKAM* did you see first? (Question in the form of a Menti poll)

How did you come into contact with other versions?

What persuaded you into watching?

<u>Appeal of *SKAM*</u>

How would you persuade someone to watch *SKAM*?

What does *SKAM* have that other teen shows do not have?

What is your favorite version of *SKAM?*

Are you interested in the culture behind the countries of the adaptations?

Are there versions you would not want to see? (Question in the form of a Menti poll)

And versions you still want to see?

<u>Accessibility</u>

In which ways do you access *SKAM*?

Why are some versions worth the effort?

What do you think about using subtitles?

In what way do you think you miss out when using subtitles?

Did you follow a version live? What do you think about it?

Did you follow the social media posts? In which way does it add to the experience? How do you find the translated versions?

<u>Differences and misunderstandings</u>

Which versions differs the most from the Dutch version? And why?

Are there things you do not understand from the foreign versions? Can you name an example?

Which version do you relate to the most? (Question in the form of a Menti poll)

Why don't you relate to the others?

SKAM is known for portraying the lives of teenagers and young adults really well. Do you think that counts for every version? Why (not)?

Are there things you do not like about other versions? How about the Dutch version?

Why is it fun to watch versions from other countries?

Fandom

In what way do you have contact with other fans?

Why is that fun?

In which way are you interacting with *SKAM* online?

What kind of fans does *SKAM* attract?

Summarizing question: Why do you watch multiple versions of the same story?

Appendix III. Examples of coding tables

Comparing	Banal aboutness				when a participant used vague terms to describe why something is 'typical' for a certain country	gewoon Nederlands is het. En dat merk je bij die serie als je dat kijkt. Van die typisch Nederlandse dingetjes dat er in komt (3)
				25		
	otherness				when a participant describes non-local people as 'others'	Ik denk dat lang en blonde culturen over het algemeen best wel veel voorkomen, uh uh, en ja, ik kan helemaal niet meer specifiek zeggen waarom de Italiaanse anders is. Maar ik denk….ja, het is toch wel echt anders. (3)
				9		
	Technical differences				when a participant compares two versions with the help of non-cultural practical differences	
				5		
	Asthetic differences				when a participant describes an easthetic or cinematic difference between two versions	, de esthetic vond ik dus heel erg op zichzelf staan, gewoon, de kleuren patronen- ik weet niet zo goed hoe je het moet uitleggen. En ja ze hebben ook hele goede cinematography vind ik zelf dan. Maar Nederlands of zo was gewoon heel erg op zichzelf staande zoals ze het hebben vormgegeven. (6)
				13		

Fan activities	*Sharing*		when a participant expresses wanting to share their opinion or their experience with others as motivation for fan behavior	Ik vind dat altijd gewoon zo leuk gevonden om andere mensen zo…Want je voelt je altijd zo samen, daar precies naar aan het kijken (6)
		15		
	Analyzing		When a participant expresses that fans among each other analyze certain clips or episodes	ja, alles wat er een beetje gebeurd en gewoon en alles wat er zeg maar te 'unpacken' is in zo'n clip, wordt eigenlijk wel besproken, denk ik. Want ja, er zit altijd wel een verhaal achter en mensen hebben er altijd heel veel over te zeggen of complottheorieën, weet je wel ? (4)
		15		
	trips		When a participant expresses that they have gone on trips or want to go on trips to visit places shown in the series	ja, als je in Utrecht- zeg maar, het ligt redelijk centraal in Utrecht. Uh, en ik heb toen later met iemand anders die ik via Twitter, zeg maar ontmoet heb, zijn we langs plekjes geweest waar ze gefilmd hebben, en zo. Gewoon als, als excursie voor ons, of zo. (4)
		7		

Appendix III. Coding Trees

How	Access	Difficult	Willing to make effort
			Skip
		Not difficult	
	Language	Hindrance	Misunderstandings
			Dutch has a preference
		Not a hindrance	Not aware
			Explained
			Looking it up
	Subtitles	Hindrance	waiting
			impractical
		Not a hindrance	Practical
			Used to subtitles
	Fandom	Community feeling	Bond
			Providing for each other
		Fan activities	Sharing
			analyzing
			trips
		Values	Open-minded
			Open to cultures
			alternative

Why	Overall motivations	Reality	Overall reality	
			Understanding teenagers	
			Could have been my friend	
			Recognizability	
			Feel like it's real	
		Diversity	Representation	
			Personal empathy	
			Learning about other problems	
			Something for everyone	
		Cultural curiosity	Learning about other cultures	
			One specific culture interesting	
			Learning a new language	

		Addiction	Extra content	
			Comfort	
			Watching whenever	
	Comparisons	Favorite version	Original	Because it's the original
				Artistic reasons
			Local	Relatability
				Artistic reasons
				Found it first
				Emotional attachment
			Non-local	Personal experience
				Artistic reasons
				Emotional attachment
		Empathy	Local	recognizability
				Artistic reasons
				realistic
				Emotional attachment
			Non-local	I would have picked NL if
				Relatability
				Artistic reasons
		Critique	Local	Angry about cancelling
				Artistic reasons
				Not realistic
			Non-local	controversy
				I just don't like the language/country
				Not realistic
				Artistic reasons
			American version	America is interfering
				Enough American content
				Not realistic
				Stereotypical American
		Banal Aboutness and othering		