

The gulf between the real world and streaming has never been wider



Stop me if you've heard this one. You're at a holiday gathering and some very offline family member starts chatting about the show *Yellowstone*. Pretty soon after a very online family member looks up in confusion and asks either what the show is or why they keep hearing about it when no one they know seems to watch it.

But maybe it's not *Yellowstone*. Maybe it's *La Reina Del Sur*, or *The Glory*, or maybe it's *Ginny & Georgia*. What those three shows all have in common is they're three of the most watched shows on Netflix between January and June 2023, and if you haven't heard of them it's probably because you're part of the increasing gulf between the shows people talk about online and the ones everyone is actually watching.

These new Netflix numbers come from one of the most detailed reports Netflix has ever publicly dropped. It shows an approximation of how many hours a season of a show or film has

been viewed, when that content initially premiered, and whether that content is available globally (and thus may have a larger international audience). You can scroll through the whole report here – that’s what I’ve been doing the last few days. Sometimes I was just looking to see if a show I liked was better or worse than the approximately 18,213 other pieces of content on the list, other times I was chuckling at the winners and losers. (I, for one, think its hysterical that *White Chicks* has been streamed for more hours than *Better Call Saul* season 3.)

Mainly, I’ve just been thinking about how different this list is from what many people would have expected. When you talk to people online, the Netflix shows they’re talking about are usually pretty rooted in genre (*The Witcher*, *Stranger Things*) or in a very specific kind of prestige television (*The Crown*). But those shows don’t always have the legs you’d expect. *The Crown*’s fifth season premiered in November 2022 and came in at 153. Given we don’t have the numbers from 2022, we can’t say how far a drop it saw from release to January 2023, but it’s safe to say it was a much larger one than *Wednesday*, which premiered at around the same time and was comfortably in the top 10 most viewed shows on Netflix.

The Witcher’s third season, meanwhile, came out on June 29th and managed to just barely crack the top 550 most viewed shows. But when you compare its previous seasons to how well *Ginny & Georgia*’s previous season did, its’ no contest which show more people were willing to play catch up on. Despite coming out in 2021, the first season of *Ginny & Georgia* was firmly in the top ten right alongside its new season which premiered in January and landed at number two overall. *The Witcher*’s previous seasons came in at 165 and 227, respectively.

All of this suggests that *Ginny & Georgia* is part of that whole range of stuff that lots of people watch but maybe don’t post about on Threads or use to build a following on TikTok.

And the confusion and bafflement I've seen over *Ginny & Georgia*'s popularity recalled for me similar conversations in the '90s where Usenet boards would explode with activity after a new episode of *The X-Files* or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, then people would be shocked when Monday Night Football and *ER* were at the top of the Nielsen charts released the next week. They forgot that actually their very vocal community is a lot smaller than the community of people who just watch stuff and don't really talk about it after.

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Susan Allnutt

And it's easy for people to have forgotten that this is the way TV ratings have always worked – with shows driven by quiet audiences dominating the chart. For years, streaming has been a black box of cherry-picked numbers designed to promote the shows streaming services want you to talk about and then subscribe to watch yourself, rather than the less buzzworthy stuff many people spend their days quietly watching and never discussing. It's one of the big reasons many critics and analysts were so frustrated with the black box method. They knew this was happening, it was just hard to measure externally when the people watching shows like *Ginny & Georgia* weren't immediately flocking to a easily tracked platform to talk about it.

But in the last year things have changed radically, and surprising data dumps like the one Netflix shared are going to happen more often. First, because streaming services are now contractually required to share viewing metrics with the actors and writers who make their content. Unions in Hollywood scored big during the strikes over the summer and fall and will now have access to all the viewership numbers services like Netflix have been reluctant to share.

And second, the 0 percent interest days, where a streaming service could throw everything at the wall to see what stuck, are over. Netflix and its competitors are now highly dependent on their rapidly growing advertising businesses – which means they need fewer super expensive shows that get lots of buzz (and often have big drop-offs in viewership) and more affordable shows that rake in those quiet casual viewers who will sit through a Tide commercial to see what happens next.

And because the advertising business is quickly becoming so core to these companies that means, again, these numbers are going to start appearing more. Advertisers need real metrics to understand where they should place their ads.

And I think that means, in the coming years, how we talk about all these streaming shows is going to change, too. *Ginny & Georgia* will probably stop being the show you had to furiously Google when you started reading this article and start sitting in the same place in your brain as *NCIS* or *Grey's Anatomy*. And that's a good place for it to be, because we didn't know it, but it was already there to begin with.

<https://www.theverge.com/24003126/netflix-viewing-data-ginny-georgia-witcher>