



Media and  
Communications

## Media@LSE Working Paper Series

Editors: Bart Cammaerts, Nick Anstead and Richard Stupart

### **The Netflix Phenomenon in India**

A qualitative enquiry into the urban Indian youth's  
engagement with Netflix

**Richa Sarah George**

Published by Media@LSE, London School of Economics and Political Science ("LSE"), Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. The LSE is a School of the University of London. It is a Charity and is incorporated in England as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act (Reg number 70527).

Copyright, Richa Sarah George © 2019.

The author has asserted their moral rights.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission in writing of the publisher nor be issued to the public or circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published. In the interests of providing a free flow of debate, views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the compilers or the LSE.

## ABSTRACT

*The introduction of Internet TV technologies such as Netflix is of crucial importance in the field of audience research, especially on account of how it privileges new viewing practices such as binge watching. Adopting a domestication theory approach, this study analyses the integration of Netflix into the everyday life context of urban Indian youth from a dual perspective of negotiating with the ideologies of its texts and technologies and the pleasures they offer. As such the research uses and builds on existing uses and gratifications research about television and the Internet. Empirically, the research is based on 15 semi-structured interviews of respondents selected through advertising and snowball sampling, and analysed using Attride-Stirling's thematic analysis procedure. The analysis shows that the texts and technologies of Netflix, the targeted audience and the social interactions they engender are all interdependent elements in this domestication circuit. It provides evidence for the textual transformations of Netflix's content and also finds the use of subtitles as a domestication tool for urban, English-educated Indian audiences in engaging with Indian as well as transnational content. This research is considered of value for its de-westernising inclination, the ethnographic enquiry into Netflix's next biggest market, and for its attempt at marrying the study of media texts and media technologies.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Yeah, I love it too much, Netflix. Like it's really, I'm so hooked to it, I love it so much. Like any free time I have, I go to Netflix on my phone and I continue watching whatever.

(Ritwik)

Roger Silverstone remarks about how the media is the most pervasive technological intrusion in the conduct of everyday life, and how it is undeniably inscribed in the circulation of symbols in our social and everyday existence; a chronic process of mediation enabled by our interactions with media and communication technologies such as the press, television and lately, of utmost importance, the Internet (Roger Silverstone, 2002). Livingstone (1998, p. 4) argues that as the television's role in structuring audiences' experiences and understanding of the social world is increasing, as a result of the development of newer technologies that ease usage, and the increase in leisure time, it is especially important to analyse audience engagement with television as 'knowledgeable, skilled, motivated and diverse'.

One such technology development is the Internet TV, which allows audiences to view television programmes distributed through online streaming to desktops, smart TVs, and portable devices such as notebook computers and smartphones (Becz, 2016; Cha & Chan-Olmsted, 2012; Grenman, 2016; Ishita Tiwary, 2017; Li, 2013; Matrix, 2014; Merikivi, Salovaara, Mäntymäki, & Zhang, 2017; Napoli, 2012; Raikar, 2017; Schweidel & Moe, 2016; Wood, 2007). Online streaming platforms such as Netflix, Hotstar and Amazon Prime Video combine technological and programming innovation to draw audiences through the rhetoric of control (Jenner, 2016), audience autonomy (Napoli, 2012) and quality content (Raikar, 2017; Seetharam, 2017; Wayne, 2018), changing the television landscape by influencing how audiences select, view, share and interpret television. This changing landscape has engendered several new concepts in the television audience research arena such as 'cord cutting' by Michael Strangelove – the consumer trend of dropping or foregoing cable TV to

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

adopt streaming platform subscriptions (Becz, 2016; Tryon, 2015) and called for the reconceptualisation of older phenomena - the rapidly and extensively popularised (especially amongst millennials) television viewing practice of binge watching.

Arguably, amongst the various online streaming platforms, Netflix commands a pioneering position (Becz, 2016; Spangler, 2013; Tryon, 2015). In India, it falls behind the national favourite - Hotstar and Amazon Prime video – attributable to Netflix's target audience - niche, urban, affluent youth (Deuskar, 2018; Iyengar, 2018); yet CEO Reed Hastings predicts that the "next 100 million subscribers shall come from India" (Borgohain, 2018; Sachdev, 2018). India is an important site for audience research in emerging media for two primary reasons. First, although online streaming is an emerging media technology, and consequently primarily associated with younger users (Evans, 2013; Pisharody, 2013), amongst the 1.25 billion Indians, almost half are below twenty-five (Ishita Tiwary, 2017), which indicates a growing relevance of new media studies in the Indian context. India, with around 500 million Internet users (Ishita Tiwary, 2017) is of particular interest, especially to global media producers. Second, audience research, and particularly new media studies, is historically western in pedagogy. India has been subaltern to Anglo-American 'material' force and concomitant 'intellectual' parochialism that is influenced by a different set of structural and historical social relations (Marx & Engels, 2012, p. 31; Park & Curran, 2000; Spivak, 1988). This research seeks to essentially contribute to the de-westernisation of audience scholarship and make it more applicable to a particularly located audience.

Additionally, a further point of interest is how Netflix audiences in India, originally conceived as seeking English language content (Ishita Tiwary, 2017), engage with new 'glocalised' products such as Sacred Games, Lust Stories and Love per Square Foot – programmes that are regionalized and diversified to adapt to local tastes while retaining the brand of quality content (Morley, 2006). Thus, this research aims to explore how young urban Indians, hitherto marginalised as subjects of study, integrate Netflix into their everyday contexts. By adopting the theory of domestication by Roger Silverstone (1994), the study attempts to analyse the symbolic discursion, motivations and pleasures involved in audiences' engagement with Netflix's technological artifact as well as with its textual structures. The project proceeds in three stages. First, it scrutinises the literature on audience

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

engagement with television in India and abroad, and the evolution of streaming practices that situates domestication as the ideal approach to audience analysis. Next, it unpacks the methodological rationale and actual study conditions. Finally, it interprets the findings and concludes that situating new media audiences as users as well as viewers is especially imperative to glean a comprehensive portrayal of domestication in light of Netflix's textual transformations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1 India: television research and new media landscape

Television commands an undeniably tremendous presence in Indian media, with over 183 million TV owning households by the end of 2017, a figure that's expected to hit close to 200 million in less than 5 years time (Laghate, 2017). Hence there can be no arguing that India is a compelling site for the investigation of the production, circulation and consumption of televisual products (Punathambekar & Kumar, 2012). However, scholarship addressing the role of the television in the sphere of popular content in India is less than prolific (Sen & Roy, 2014). A significant proportion of audience studies in India has mirrored the early positivist approach adopted by behavioural theorists in the United States, in an attempt to discern patterns of media use and its effects, overlooking television's contribution – in form and content - to the politics of culture. To counter the mass society theory, and the universalistic claims made by western scholarship about media audiences residing in the west, critical and cultural theorists such as Mankekar, Roy, and Kumar analysed several topics in the Indian television environment such as gender perceptions in soap opera narratives (Mankekar, 1999), the rising popularity of global television (Roy, 2014) and the inadequacy of the Western informed public/private dichotomy in the Indian context (Punathambekar & Kumar, 2012), to establish that television cultures are heterogeneous (Sen & Roy, 2014).

In the last decade, a technologically and politically transformative media landscape has promoted the entry of mass-market and niche channels and television technologies. These new platforms of engaging with television media, largely through smart phones and now through Internet TV/ Video-On-Demand (VOD), give rise to evolving viewing practices and

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

cultures of participation (Punathambekar & Kumar, 2012; Tryon, 2015). Taking advantage of an audience base that is increasingly growing accustomed to consuming entertainment content through smartphones (Laghate, 2018), online streaming platforms have swooped in to take their slice of the market. As the features, contents and contexts of this TV viewing differ sufficiently from traditional TV, it remains a challenge to investigate how far traditional media theories and methodologies can inform research on the 'changing audience' (Livingstone, 2003, 2004, 2007).

## 1.2 Netflix and the culture of binge watching

The most popular amongst VOD platforms in India is Hotstar, launched in 2015 and owned by Star TV (India's biggest private broadcaster), with a loyal user base of 75 million people in urban and rural centres, followed by Amazon Prime video with 11 million subscribers (Aadeetya, 2018). While Netflix only comes in third with around 5 million subscribers, it nevertheless offers a more interesting focus of enquiry on account of its many differences from other players and the more particular audiences it targets – niche, English speaking, affluent, urban youth (Joglekar, 2018). Netflix, the world's number one streaming service offers not only the biggest content library in the world, but is also a leading producer of original programming in a variety of languages (Netflix Media Center, 2018). Its technological features allow users to play, pause and resume viewing at their own convenience, without the interruptions of advertisements or even the title sequence (Hussain, 2018). More interestingly, Netflix maintains a global pricing strategy that in a price-led consumer market like India limits its market share and yet rakes in money from the 'exclusive'. Sen and Roy argue that such new platforms have the potential to play a dual role in a society that is marked by expansive social and economic differences; they may foster 'discursive spaces' that are more 'egalitarian' in nature, and just as likely draw more attention to incumbent 'social divisions' (2014, p. 2).

Binge watching can be defined as viewing several episodes of a programme, back-to-back, in the same sitting (Spangler, 2013). It is by no means a new concept and can be traced back a few years to when television networks would run programme marathons (Merikivi et al., 2017). Several theorists, media producers and critics conceptualise binge watching along

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

different dimensions – in terms of the number of episodes watched, as a measure of time, in terms of genre preferences and even as a practice that drives programming decisions (Conlin, Bissell, Bowman, Kim, & Leeper, 2015; Jenner, 2016; Jurgensen, 2012; Netflix Media Center, 2013; Pittman & Sheehan, 2015). There has been considerable academic interest in situating binge watching within the frames of health effects (Krisberg, 2016), uses and gratifications (Pittman & Sheehan, 2015), narrative immersion (Conlin et al., 2015), addiction (Tukachinsky & Eyal, 2018) and TV substitutability (Cha & Chan-Olmsted, 2012). Today, binge watching has been appropriated by online streaming platforms (Conlin et al., 2015; Jenner, 2016; Raikar, 2017; Spangler, 2013) and discursively enculturated as the preferred way of engaging with their text and technology offerings (Jenner, 2016; Pisharody, 2013). This has led to some interest in investigating the ideological positioning of binge watching, especially by Netflix, which promotes it as ‘the new normal’ (Netflix Media Center, 2013).

This research seeks not to explore the ideological assertions of Netflix’s messaging, but instead, how audiences perceive of the ideological influences implicit in their viewing experiences, the negotiations they make and the pleasures they derive. Since binge watching, as a newly revived viewing practice, is still only gaining popularity as streaming audiences expand, this empirical research is especially judicious, as in a few years, audiences would be hard-pressed to recollect the specific motivations and meanings involved in the integration of Netflix into their everyday experiences (Evans, 2013, p. 79).

### **1.3 Television in the context of everyday life**

Many communications researchers have advocated extending the investigation of audiences’ experiences from the specific event of engagement to the wider realms of everyday life (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998) including the choices audiences make about television engagement (Evans, 2013) and the promotion of individual cultural programming in the new media age (Lull, 2006, p. 55). Silverstone (2002) argues that broadcast media are central to the way audiences shape not only the order of their quotidian activities but also the symbolic apparatus with which they make sense of the intricacies of the day-to-day. He also asserts that it is by being completely immersed in a technologically shifting culture, that the



# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

relations between television media and audiences, and among individuals in the audience, are fundamentally influenced in their everyday lives (1994). This is predicated upon the belief in the cyclical nature of reception: audiences carry meanings interpreted from media experiences into the conduct of everyday life just as the structures and complexities of everyday life shape the meanings audiences make of semiotically encoded texts (Livingstone, 2003, p. 12).

## 1.4 New media audiences: users and viewers

Livingstone argues that in the new media environment, articulating television qua media as both technology as well as text is imperative. However, the challenge for new media audience research is the dearth of a bona fide analysis of media while taking into the everyday life context its 'texts, technology, and cultural form' (Livingstone, 2004, p. 81). While locating media as the object involves an analysis of its use or domestic consumption, locating media as the text warrants an analysis of how the symbolisms inherent within the text relate to the interpretative contexts of audiences (Livingstone, 2003, p. 13). Livingstone posits whether reception studies that were previously located between the text and the reader, can be extended to the study of new media interpretation of text and technology use. Reception theory is considered the middle ground between the two camps in audience research – the uses and gratifications (U&G) theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973) that stresses on active audiences making choices about media use whilst acknowledging the social psychological context of viewing, and the critical cultural studies that theorises how audiences negotiate meanings found in media texts depending upon a variety of socio-cultural elements (Hall, 2003; Sandvoss, 2011). The relative non-success at analysing new media through the dual lens of use and reception has been attributed to the historical changes in televisual development.

## 1.5 Audience research during TVI, TVII, TVIII and TVIII

Jenner (2016) describes the period in the United States from the 1950's to the early 1980's – TVI - as one marked by TV channel scarcity, a small audience and the hegemony of the three major traditional networks - ABC, CBS and NBC. Livingstone (2003, p. 15), remarks about how during this era, Western audience research was focused on the television's messages as

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

opposed to the contexts of use, as these television programmes were all offered for family viewing, and the dynamics of family life were considered more or less homogenous and well understood. Jenner (2016) chronicles the expansion of channels and networks, of networking marketing strategies and proliferating content, from the 1980's to the 1990's, as the TVII era. TVIII is described as the period from the late 1990's to the present as TVIII – where television networks acquired online distribution platforms and fragmented audiences. Livingstone (2003, p. 15) remarks that this period of multiple television sets, the digital offerings of TV networks and smartphones intrigued audience researchers to analyse the context of media use more than media texts. These new media technologies were considered to carry recycled programming formats, and as such, show no evidence of a transformation in textual forms. Hence, placing reception and use within the same frame of audience analysis has not been of much interest to media scholars.

However, in light of this, Netflix and other Over-the-top (OTT) platforms, heralding TVIV, is evidence of the need to rethink the way television's use and reception have been previously conceived as 'disconnected' (Livingstone, 2003, p. 26). While digitisation and associated branding strategies by television networks was a part of TVIII, the programming conventions and social connotations of the period are still rooted in traditional television. In contrast, VOD platforms catapult themselves to the next stage (TVIV) by completely alienating itself and its branding from the all-important television set (Jenner, 2016, p. 259). To look at Netflix, as an object is to remark on the technological transformations that have changed the way audiences engage with content. Primary amongst them is the streaming capability on multiple personal computers and smartphones, offering the option to download and view offline, multiple screen sharing, instant playback, and skip-intro. The recommendation algorithm, however, is widely regarded as Netflix's game changing technological feature; it shapes not only how audiences are introduced to highly individualised programming, but also serves as a demand predictor and content creator (McCarthy, McGrath, & Coughlan, 2018).

Whereas Livingstone saw no evidence of textual transformations in new media, this research argues that Netflix has indeed veered away from traditional modes of storytelling, by foraying into original programming. Gershon (2014) claims that by eliminating advertisers

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

who pay premiums for gender specific, 'happy' sitcom audiences, Netflix is able to create 'darker TV' – exploring darker themes, realistic portrayals and more intense narrative styles (Becz, 2016). Becz compares the Marvel cinematic universe and the Marvel Netflix universe, where the latter is able to portray grimmer roles, and deeper character arcs. These transformations are closely associated with the cultural phenomenon of binge watching that Netflix enables by releasing all episodes of a serialised drama at once, promoted as the new way of viewership (Petersen, 2016) and termed as the 'instant mode' by Becz (2016, p. 106). Binge watchable content on Netflix allows for non-linear narrative structures that converge at the end of each episode, prompting viewers to watch the next episode to resolve narrative complexities (Conlin et al., 2015), also known as 'enigma webbing' (Jenner, 2016, p. 266). Thus, as argued by Tryon, (2015) Becz (2016) and Curtin (2009), it can be seen that Netflix restructures the media landscape, not just with new technologies but also with radical notions of content, thereby indicating the value of analysing it through the combined lens of use and reception.

## 1.6 Domestication: through a lens of ideology and motivations

Silverstone introduced domestication theory to doubly articulate the media as objects of consumption as well as messages of symbolic circulation, insisting upon combining approaches of uses, satisfactions, and economics with representation, cultural influences and interpretation (Livingstone, 2007, p. 18; Roger Silverstone & Haddon, 1996). It is simultaneously interested in the nature of the symbolism in media content, as well as how the 'technological artifact becomes the object of meaning attributions' (Peil & Roser, 2012, p. 225). Meaning then, is constructed through negotiations. Domestication finds its roots in the cultural studies paradigm, and is hence mindful of the ideological positioning of texts and technologies by media elites and analyses how audiences use everyday domestic practices to subvert the strategies of powerful organisations. Although this sphere of research is analogous to the ethnographic enquiry of media as content and technological artifact, most empirical studies have condensed around the 'appropriation' of the latter into households, while ignoring the symbolism of the former (Haddon, 2006; Hartmann, 2013; Hynes,

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

Vuojärvi, & Isomäki, 2010; Miliany, 2015; Roger Silverstone & Haddon, 1996). While previous audience research has approached domestication through various concepts such as mobilisation, personal construct and gender identities, this study employs the dual interrelated concepts of ideology and motivations to analyse the consumption and reception of Netflix in the everyday context of users-viewers.

## 1.7 Ideology

Silverstone (1994, p. 136) argues that no research can adequately analyse the audience by ignoring the formation of ideologies and how they wrestle subject positions in the audience's relationship to the text and the technology. He maintains that domestication of a media product begins at its production stage - by offering audiences what they want, in an easily accessible manner, is sustained through the marketing phase and finally consummated through its consumption and reception by audiences (1994, p. 83). This argument provides evidence of a hegemonic struggle between media producers and audiences in negotiating the usage and meanings constructed. The Gramscian notion of hegemony here can be seen as the struggle between subalterns – different audience groups – and the media elites, one that involves negotiating both, the meanings imposed by media content as well as popularised cultural practices (Gramsci, 1999; Ien Ang, 1990). Ideology thus has distinctive material and discursive power in shaping this hegemony.

In terms of Netflix, this research investigates the extent to which its technological features and discourses about content influence its consumption through binge watching, offering particular pleasures. Many media critics and scholars have assessed the inherent ideological nature of Netflix's (and other VOD platforms) strong messages of freedom, choice and autonomy in watching what they want, when they want and how they want to (Ang, 1996; Becz, 2016; Jenner, 2016; Seetharam, 2017). Tryon (2015, p. 105) points out Netflix's discourse of 'prestige, plenitude and participation' in positioning itself as the 'future of TV'. Binge watching, which earlier carried negative connotations, has now been reframed as 'feasting'. Thus, as new viewing practices develop in the TVIV age, it is imperative to pay heed to the ideological privileging of particular practices over others.

## 1.8 Motivations

According to Strathern, domestication theory is concerned with how audiences interact with media in response to one's motivations (Roger Silverstone, 1994, p. 98). In the uses and gratifications approach, audiences are conceived as being motivated by psychological, sociological and socio-cultural influences to seek exposure to mediated communication (1994, p. 238; Swanson, 2009). While many studies have successfully established links between gratifications seeking and media exposure, an inordinate amount of focus on the gratifications seeking has drawn criticism from other traditions for its tendency to propose predictions about media engagement. However, as McQuail soberingly reminds audience researchers, media use is governed by complex interactions between interacting forces in society as well as individual motivations, and hence, identifying 'patterns of audience behaviour' has limited scope (Roger Silverstone, 1994, p. 143).

However, there is a push to integrate the gratifications theory with the traditions of domestication (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 6). Swanson (2009) urges uses and gratifications theorists to analyse audiences along these dimensions – the role of gratifications in media engagement, how gratifications shape the interpretative frames audiences apply to media content and the relation between motivations and media content. In the contemporary context of VOD platforms, uses and gratifications is a crucial approach to analysis, as these new technologies offer audiences an explosion of choices, therein indicating the value in exploring new motivations; further, the interactivity afforded by these platforms strengthens the core U&G tenet of audience activity (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 15). In this study, the concept of interpretative frames is extended beyond Swanson's model of motivations inherent in attending to media text, to consider even media technologies. The interpretative frames may include several elements that would be investigated in the current project, and it is understood that several factors besides the motivations constrain the interpretation, thereby integrating the ideological aspects of media exposure into the model (2000, p. 243).

In seeking to differentiate between gratifications related to the content and those related to the platform, this research follows the approach by Stafford et al. (2004), which is considered

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

especially relevant for its focus on new media. The three gratifications defined by this research includes:

**Content Gratification:** Content gratifications refer to the motivations that audiences have to engage with the content or messages of the medium. Although Stafford et al's (2004) model is particular to the content found through surfing the Internet, with motivations such as education, information, and research arising, this concept shall be recontextualised to fit within the scope of Internet television.

**Process Gratification:** Process gratifications influence the pleasures audiences derive from the actual use of the medium. In the model prescribed by Stafford et al. (2004), gratifications obtained from using the Internet are in relation to the convenience and ease of surfing the Web. The technological transformations made possible by the development of VOD platforms such as Netflix make the analysis of process gratifications sought crucial to the question of how and why audiences integrate Netflix into their everyday lives.

**Social Gratification:** Several prior U&G studies have explored the social motivations of viewing television and recently, binge watching (Ahn & Shin, 2013; Canary & Spitzberg, 1993; Derrick, Gabriel, & Hugenberg, 2009; A. M. Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985; R. B. Rubin & Mchugh, 1987). These studies have established motivations such as social and cultural inclusion, shared social identity, social networking, parasocial interaction and so on. This study is focused on gleaning the social influences and consequences perceived by audiences in engaging with Netflix.

### **3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH PROBE**

It has been seen that technological transformations and transnational influences have introduced several new media products into the Indian household. While the average rural household is constrained by limits on purchasing power and infrastructural capabilities, young urban households are spoilt for choice when it comes to new media offerings such as Netflix. Such media products promote new cultures of media engagement, such as cord cutting and binge watching. The reviewed literature has revealed, not only the scarcity of

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

research on Indian audiences, but also a historically informed scarcity in research that imbricates media as both object and medium.

Silverstone (1994, p. 38) argues that the fundamental expression of the ways in which society shifts is through the practice of everyday. In light of this, this research uses as an analytical tool the theory of domestication that recommends the ethnographic contextualisation of engaging with mediated communication in the everyday (1994, p. 45). In this study, Netflix is analysed both as object – a technical artifact – as well as text, and meaning is considered to be born both through the usage of its technology, and through the viewing of its content. As most prior empirical domestication studies have concentrated its focus on the integration of the technical artifact into daily living, while ignoring the symbolic media content' (Peil & Roser, 2012, p. 226), this study focuses on the 'intellectual, symbolic and social contexts' for and the consequences of engaging with Netflix as media (Livingstone, 2003, p. 26). Hence, it borrows only marginally from the appropriation, objectification, incorporation and conversion model of traditional domestication research (Peil & Roser, 2012). Instead, it proposes a new model that integrates the concepts of ideology and gratifications as key influencers of how and why audiences integrate Netflix into their everyday contexts.

Ideology here is used to analyse how Netflix's discourse and textual and technological design are influential in privileging particular methods of engaging with its media (Tryon, 2015). The uses and gratifications construct, earlier criticised for its highly individualising approach, is considered especially relevant due to the contemporaneous media environment that promotes the culture of individualisation. The research uses Stafford et al's (2004) three-pronged classification of content, process and social gratifications as a probing tool.

## 1.9 Research question

As shown in the literature, there seems to exist a disconnection between the reception and use of media products. The study represents an attempt to evaluate the audiences' engagement with Netflix within the everyday context by validating it as both object and content. Using the conceptual framework and the reviewed literature, the research attempts to answer the following question:

What role does binge watching on Netflix play in the intellectual and leisure lives of urban Indian young adults?

## 4. RESEARCH DESIGN

A pilot of the research was conducted in April using 3 respondents from a slightly different sample population. The present research is informed by the successes and challenges encountered during the theoretical formulation, data collection and analysis conducted for the pilot. For instance, although uses and gratifications was not considered as an analytical tool during the pilot, the analysis of the data showed evidence of motivations as shaping much of the audiences' experiences as they engage with the texts and technologies of Netflix. Additionally, although uses and gratifications theory is not largely associated with ethnographic enquiry, the pilot demonstrated the appropriateness of using qualitative interviews for eliciting accounts about motivations and is hence used in this study (H. J. Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

### 1.10 Methodological rationale and research design

Although this research employs uses and gratifications theory as an analytical tool, it does not subscribe to the positivist inclination that has characterised much prior work in this field. Positivism is predicated upon finding knowledge that is measurable and observable about social worlds that are independent of each other, with the agenda of prediction and control (Ang, 1996; Baran & Davis, 2010, p. 12; H. J. Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As the study aims to elicit deeper meanings, motivations and perceptions of ideology, it adopts, instead a social constructionist approach that views reality as socially defined, comprehensible through the subjective experience of everyday life (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and also recognises the researcher's role in co-constructing this reality (Johnson, R B Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Besides, Katz identifies social constructionism as a formative approach to study viewers' interpretations and motivations towards television (Livingstone, 1998, p. 21). In light of this, the in-depth interviewing method is used for primary data collection for its ability to provide elaborate accounts of interviewees' experiences, emotions and opinions



# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

(Byrne, 2012; Rapley, 2011; Warren, 2002) about their interactions with Netflix as both users and interpreters (Livingstone, 2003).

In-depth interviews are considered especially appropriate for its focus on locating the interviewees in the specific context of engaging with Netflix, which includes everyday lived interactions between culture, urbanity and social structures (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Warren, 2002). Thus, interviewing audiences who share the same 'cultural arena' which include their common cultural identity, millennial, urbane and socio-economic status is considered to evoke shared meanings and themes implicated within similar social structures (H. J. Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As can be seen from the literature review, there is a dearth of ethnographic enquiry into binge-watching and the gratifications aspect of television watching, mostly due to the behaviourist positioning of both concepts, resulting in a multitude of research using hypothetic-deductive surveys as the preferred instrument of enquiry (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998). This project rejects the use of surveys as the respondents would be limited by the repository of knowledge assumed by the researcher in designing the questions (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997), which themselves would, at best, be a mere approximation of the respondents' experiences (Barker, 2009). Further, depth interviews are preferred over other mechanisms of ethnographic enquiry, such as participant observation, since, as Livingstone (2003) argues, the increased privatisation of new media usage has made ethnographic observation unfeasible; as well as focus groups, to avoid the challenges involved in moderating dominating perspectives, disruptions, dissent and consensus (Hojjer, 1990).

However, qualitative interviewing involves certain challenges. Primarily, the transference of interpretations from the respondent to the researcher is contingent upon the extent of communicability (Hojjer, 1990), especially when it comes to contemplating everyday contexts that respondents are usually mindless of (H. J. Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In this regard, more vivid accounts by respondents tend to be more noticeable to researchers than subdued ones (Hojjer, 1990). Another central concern is the role of the researcher - subject to individual biases, from the very formulation of the research interest, to the data collection and analysis, consequently building, not a 'reflection', but a 'discursive representation' of the audiences' social reality (Ang, 1996, p. 183; Holstein & Gubrium, 1997; Schröder, 2013). My own

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

experiences of interacting with Netflix regularly, adopting binge watching as a viewing practice and incorporating this engagement into my everyday context have informed my empirical interest in the research topic and may prompt some expectations from my respondents narratives as Warren (2002) warns. These expectations pose the danger of the researcher amplifying the centrality of those themes that conform to the former (Hojjer, 1990). However, Hoijer assures us that reliability of the research can avoid jeopardy by reflexive thinking about the researcher's interpretative framework and moral-political stance, and being transparent in the analysis and discussion (Nicolson, 2008; Schröder, 2013).

## 1.11 Sampling strategy

The first step taken was to define the sample universe using Robinson's (2014, p. 26), 'inclusion criteria' – a set of features considered compulsory for participation in the study. The inclusion criteria included being Indian, urban and a young adult between the ages of 18 and 35 as the younger generation is more associated with new media usage such as Internet Television (Pisharody, 2013). As India has a significantly large number of cities, the selection of the research participants was done to incorporate wide representation, and also using guiding data that showed evidence of cities with the most Internet television viewing (Bhattacharya, 2018). Most importantly, only those participants were selected who reported engaging in binge watching more than once a week. As claiming wide generalisability outside the scope of the research is not sought (Banaji, 2006), various dimensions of sample homogeneity and heterogeneity were established as considered important for the research (Robinson, 2014, p. 26).

Homogeneity was maintained along ethnicity (Indian), age range and largely, the socio economic group. Although all participants are urban, heterogeneity was maintained in geography, gender and occupation. Since the project has idiographic aims, the sample size range was designed so as to avoid analytical overload for the researcher and was kept between 10 and 20 interviews (Robinson, 2014). Keeping in mind the inclusion criteria, a purposive sampling strategy, with advertising and snowball sourcing was used to recruit participants. As life history homogeneity was an unintentional consequence of recruiting participants through social media networks during the pilot, efforts were taken to reduce this

limitation in this project. Only four of the respondents were selected out of personal social networks, who then referred (Robinson, 2014) a further five participants who fit the criteria. Print advertisements requesting participation were put up on the notice boards of housing societies in Cochin where the researcher was based during the data collection period and two participants were recruited thus. This advertisement was also posted on the 'Netflix India' Reddit community and the last four respondents were recruited through this route. A particular challenge faced was to recruit female participants who are less active on such forums and also more suspicious of such advertisements, which could be attributed to the cultural and social concerns regarding women's safety in India. As researchers need to be vigilant about personal biases during interviewing and analysis, the personal unfamiliarity with a majority of the respondents was considered crucial (Boyatzis, 1998).

## 1.12 Interview guide

The use of a semi-structured interview guide encouraged open, flexible and elaborate narratives, unrestricted by the stringent inflexibility of structured interviews, while still guiding the focus on topics of empirical interest (Brinkmann, 2013; Byrne, 2012). The formulation of the topic guide was iterative; it was first refined after the pilot project by reconsidering the theoretical framework to include motivations, and to remove the questions that applied specifically to the pilot sample population (Rapley, 2011). It was iterated once more after the first three interviews, to include the topics of subscription cost and parasocial relations that emerged as common motifs.

The topic guide was designed to include nine main questions to permit ample time to elicit elaborate, vivid and rich accounts (H. J. Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Probing questions were included to prompt responses about particular topics of academic interest. The interview guide was designed such that questions have a natural flow (Kvale, 1996) and link well together (H. J. Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The first section investigates how the respondents fit Netflix into their routine, and what encourages them to do so. The next few questions probe into the respondents' perceptions about the shows or movies they engage with and how binge watching influences this experience (if any), while the last set of questions enquire about the social aspect of interacting with Netflix. Finally, as Rubin & Rubin (2005)

recommend, the interview closes with a probe into whether the respondent would like to discuss any topic related to the past interview that was not investigated.

## 1.13 Interviews

A total of fifteen interviews were taken that ranged between 30 and 80 minutes and averaged 55 minutes. The three interviews that were taken in Cochin (research base) were conducted in person, in the researcher's home or in quiet coffee shops, whilst the rest were conducted either over Google Hangouts, as it was difficult and expensive to schedule travel to seven other cities, especially when most respondents would only confirm interview appointments last minute. All interviews were audio-recorded, after asking express permission from the respondents, using two recording devices – the iPhone and a Dictaphone – to prevent technology failures, and transferred immediately to secure the data. Following Rapley (2011), the researcher refrained from taking notes during the interview to ensure a more seamless, continuous interaction, and catch non-verbal cues (H. J. Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Instead, immediately after the interview, notes were jotted down about particular challenges faced, recurring themes or iterations to be made to the topic guide. The interviews were transcribed verbatim.

## 1.14 Coding framework and analysis

The analysis was done using Attride-Stirling's 6-stage analytical approach towards thematic analysis, for its ability to flexibly identify, analyse and interpret patterns in the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding - the first stage of analysis and the process of dissecting the data into smaller segments by assigning labels - was done after reading the transcripts entirely, listening to the recordings and returning to the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process was primarily theoretically driven while still allowing for inductive codes to emerge from the data. Similar codes were grouped together with all accompanying text segments, and salient themes that were identified were refined using Braun and Clarke's homogeneity criteria (2006, p. 91). These basic themes were then arranged into mind-maps to deduce organising themes that upon further analysis were summarised as

the main assertions or global themes. The text was then revisited to ensure its fit with the thematic networks (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

## **1.15 Ethical considerations and reflexivity**

The design of the ethical procedures was approved by the supervisor prior to participant recruitment. During recruitment, all participants were sent the information and consent forms (that were signed and returned) that detailed the purpose of the study, the ways in which confidentiality and anonymity would be ensured and their right to withdraw from the research at any phase (Warren, 2002). This was reiterated at the beginning of each interview. Anonymisation was conducted during analysis, and names in the findings are invented (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Many of the respondents requested for copies of the final dissertation that the researcher shall send across once published by the LSE Media and Communications department. The research would also be offered to Netflix officials in India with an aim of beneficence to the research audience. Additionally, following Rapley's (2011, p. 24) directive of 'reciprocity', the interview was preceded by the researcher offering her own experiences as a binge watcher, to ensure that the respondents were made comfortable talking about a subject that might be deeply personal.

### **1.15.1 Reflexivity**

Although a majority of the interviewees were completely unfamiliar, interactions with them were purposively made light hearted, where the interviewer made her own experiences and frustrations with the research topic known to the interviewees, to counteract any potential power differential that may be experienced as academic versus layman (Warren, 2002). The use of binary (yes/no) questioning was largely avoided to evoke rich discursive data, yet as Hoijer (1990) commented, one particular interview was limited by the reduced communicability of the participant, although the researcher engaged in a number of probes and follow-up questions. Further, as some accounts were more vivid than others, efforts were taken to balance representing all the interviewees in the findings and using data that summarised arguments well. Although genre and television shows investigated were non-

specified in order to elicit a wider range of motivations, this was not a limitation as it evoked thick descriptions from the respondents in the event of unfamiliarity with the show (H. J. Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Recruitment over Reddit was quite challenging, for the time consumed in finding the right community, the number of irrelevant responses received and in particular, to enlist female participants. However, the selected participants were found to be quite engaging and particularly enthusiastic about discussing Netflix.

## 5. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The next section entails a detailed discussion of the main findings in the research. The outcomes of the study are found to support the theoretical arguments made in the literature review, wherein the study explored how Netflix shapes the everyday contexts of its audiences while taking into account its texts, technology as well as cultural form (Livingstone, 2004, p. 6). The main themes that the researcher identified as prevalent (Braun & Clarke, 2006) include the audiences' negotiation with the attributes of the content, how binge watching is privileged by both content and technology, and finally, how Netflix is incorporated into the 'social' fabric of everyday living. These three facets are found to be mutually dependent.

### 1.16 Negotiating with the discourse of quality television

#### 1.16.1 Attributes of quality content

I think the intensity of the shows like I said, it's – it's not a – you know, streaming channel that will be like, 'Oh, we have everything, please come watch.' No, I mean, if Netflix had a voice, I think that would be like a husky, husky voice.

(Lena)

All respondents were asked about what made viewing shows on Netflix so enjoyable, and the most prevalent response was regarding the quality of the content, thereby challenging the arguments made by a majority of uses and gratifications theorists, who postulate that

aesthetic features of the content hold less salience in comparison to personal and social needs such as passing time and shared experiences (Li, 2013). The finding supports the theoretical position of this study that not only has content transformed in TVIV, but also that this transformation has engendered new kinds of gratifications different from those associated with traditional TV. What makes these accounts further interesting is how respondents referred to the ways in which storytelling have become innovative in the original content that Netflix provides.

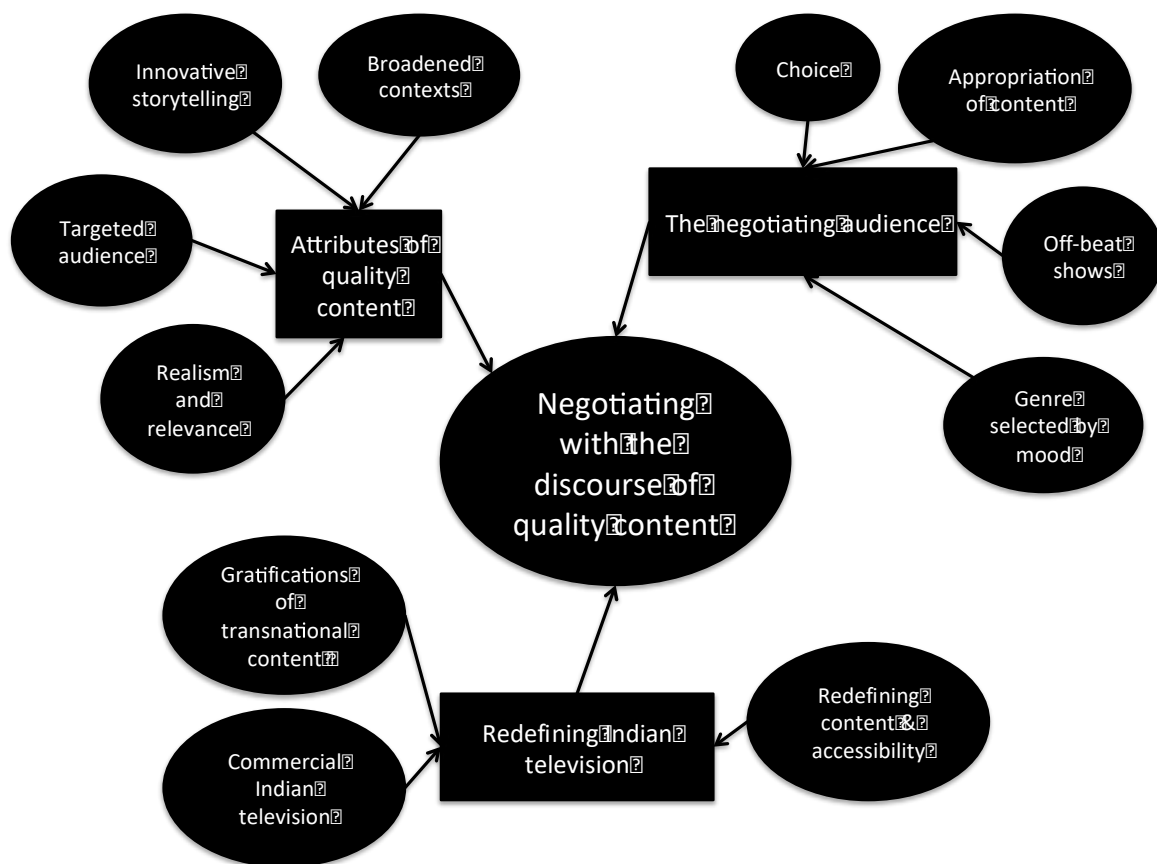


Figure 1: Thematic network – Negotiating with the discourse of quality content

The most common themes regarding storytelling revolved around the finesse in acting and direction, slow and deep transformations of characters who are ‘multi-dimensional’, and the weaving of complex narratives.

I loved Dark... there are multiple characters, and there is a past, a present and a future of these characters as well... So if you don't, like if you don't focus, you will

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

probably not understand it as much, and it's very subtle with the hints you know... And I really like that, don't make it very obvious, it's like 'be a little intelligent', don't always put it out right there.

(Poulumi)

A majority of the interviewees remarked about how portrayals of characters and conflicting story outcomes do not follow heavily beaten paths inherent in the dialectical portrayals of good versus evil or the triumph of the former in traditional television. Participants spoke about being drawn to the content with motivations to broaden their contexts and perspectives, and the relevance and realism of the themes explored in the original content – from the boldness of giving intelligence about drug cartels still in operation in *Narcos*; to the portrayal of teenage bullying, sexual assault and suicide in *13 Reasons Why*; the exploration of anti-normative sexuality in *Sense 8*; to the experiences of minorities in an Ivy League Campus in *Dear White People*.

(About 13 Reasons Why) It was brilliant – Hannah didn't get justice, Bryce didn't get jailed, but that's how it is. Yeah, that's how the world runs. Bryce will not get jailed, he comes from an affluent family... The other guy, who doesn't come from an affluent family, went to jail. It's as simple as that. It's hard hitting, but true.

(Aditi)

I'm very interested in hearing about the experiences of people with whom I don't share any context. Erm, so just hearing about the experiences of black people on an Ivy League Campus is something that I may come face-to-face with soon.

(Paul)

Contrary to Livingstone's (2003) assertion that no textual transformations are overtaking the way television is produced in the new digital era, these accounts support the theoretical argument made in the study that Netflix's original programming is a powerhouse of complex storytelling and realistic portrayals - 'darker TV' (Gershon, 2014). The use of



# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

'enigma webbing' (Jenner, 2016, p. 106) in drawing audiences can be seen as enabled by a variety of factors that emerge as interconnected themes in this research, including targeting niche audiences that in India are associated with urban, upper middle class, educated young adults. The respondents credited their *urban* exposure and *millenniality* for the openness to try the off-beat, creative content on Netflix, which they believe is curated exclusively for them (see appendix). Besides this, the technological assistance made available by the platform that allows multiple viewing through easy rewind and play-back features, the promulgation of binge watching as a viewing style to resolve the enigma and finally, using the expanding online and offline community of 'fans' to forensically deconstruct the narrative complexities for each other are all interdependent actors in the circuit of Netflix's domestication (Mittel, 2015).

## 1.16.2 Redefining Indian Television

A huge attraction for Indian audiences to the Netflix platform is the recent foray into Indian original programming, a move to slice into the world's second most populous country with access to cheap mobile data. The three organising themes identified in this section include the gratifications of transnational content, the perception of traditional Indian television and Netflix's transformation of Indian texts and accessibility. Almost all respondents reported the various gratifications they obtain watching transnational content such as identification with non-western themes, cultural learning and even respite from American formats (see appendix). The respondents' affinity towards the Indian show – Sacred Games – on Netflix is interpreted as primarily influenced by their perceptions about traditional Indian programming.

While some respondents reported no necessary discrimination towards 'good' Indian content, all of them expressed a disinterest towards commercial Bollywood style programmes that follow the same storyline, are melodramatic, enshrine gender normative roles and are heavily censored for even implicitly expressed controversial themes that include sexuality, politics and profanity (see appendix). The censorship battle between Indian audiences and the government is not fought on Netflix's platform, which again, owing to its digital-only nature circumvents censorship certifications subject to all other

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

media in India (Pant, 2018). Thus, Netflix's Internet artifact can be seen as playing a role in the transformation of the text.

...the amount of liberty that you have on Netflix platform, is insane, especially for Indian content, because Indian censor board is a joke. So that's why in Sacred Games, there are like open abuses, a naked transgender person; I mean you can do what you do... Obviously, in Indian cinema, you can't say certain words, you can't do certain things, but here you don't have that blocking your mind.

(Akash)

Underlying much of the preference for English television over Indian television is the unfamiliarity with Indian languages that can be attributed to the multiplicity of ethnic languages, but is also symptomatic of a niche, English speaking urban way of life (see appendix). Sacred Games was a hit across the board of interviewees; respondents spoke enthusiastically about the direction, storyline and authenticity in the portrayal of difficult themes – much of the same content gratifications discussed above and look at Sacred Games as launching quality Indian content for the world. The biggest draw for the respondents however, was the availability of subtitles, expressed by a majority as enabling accessibility to otherwise obscure texts. Once again, the technology transforms the text.

Sacred Games, you see that it has been dubbed in Portuguese; it has been dubbed in Spanish, in Turkish. So you're not just going to an Indian audience, you're going all over the world. It's authentic. It's authentic to the level that it's not even in Hindi; it's in Marathi. Even I need subtitles

(Nikhil)

### 1.16.3 The negotiating audience

When it comes to the content on Netflix, the platform can be seen as a site for audience negotiation. Interviewees reported the diversity of content available to them, and use a number of factors to exert their choice (see appendix). Further, almost all respondents

## The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

reported the appropriation of the platform – the process whereby the medium is purchased, and integrated into the household (Peil & Roser, 2012)– as being contingent upon the quality of the content, thereby evidencing that the symbolic nature of media content is just as important, if not more, as the physical artifact or the Netflix technology platform (Hartmann, 2013).

I'm not dedicated to Netflix ... like I'm pretty active on YouTube as well; there are content producers on YouTube that I follow, whose stuff I watch. Wherever there is good content, I'll go.

(Rishabh)

The respondents also reported exercising their choice when it comes to content that is pushed heavily by Netflix's marketing and/or cultural buzz. Many interviewees described their active selection of 'off-beat' content as a way of negotiating with the hegemony of highly popularised shows. Viewed from the analytical lens of Uses and Gratifications theory, and reviewing the gratification typologies for new media (Sundar & Limperos, 2013)), this suggests the salience of 'novelty' as a gratification sought and obtained in an era of abundant choice and culturally hegemonised texts (future research). Another area of negotiation largely reported by the respondents is the selection of genres as dependent on audiences' mood in the context of viewing; this mood is seen as shaping the involvement limit and expectations of the audience. This supports and builds on previous uses and gratifications research on binge watching that theorises content selection as dependent on the type of attention required (Flayelle, Maurage, & Billieux, 2017).

Sometimes you know, you really do need a change, you want something that is more refreshing, like other than the ones that you know that are just bombarded constantly like Westworld, Altered Carbon - everyone is talking about and watching it...

(Manisha)

You should also be in the mood for expectations. (...) 'Today I want to watch something valuable, I want to watch something that people are talking about, let's see how we like it.' But sometimes, when my mood is crap, I don't want to think much, then obviously I know what I'm watching is crap and I'm not going to expect anything out of it.

(Aditi)

## 1.17 **Binge watching as a site for negotiation**

They (Netflix) are making us the brand ambassadors of the series because of how much we love and believe in it. So, there is this energy and this compulsiveness that 'Oh, my god, you are not binging it. If you are not binging it, you are not liking it.'

(Poulumi)

When asked about whether respondents equated Netflix with binge watching, many of them said yes, but also reiterated that they believe binge watching is negotiable, and that engaging with Netflix is not always through the practice of binge watching. The main themes identified with respect to binge watching are how the content and technology privilege the practice and the ways in which audiences negotiate this push.

### 1.17.1 **Process push to binge watch**

In analysing Netflix as an object, it is seen that the technology of the medium is designed to be appropriated in a way that changes how audiences engage with the medium - particularly through the practice of binge watching, thus corroborating the argument made in the theoretical review. The most prevalent theme amongst the respondents is the ubiquity of access that Netflix engenders. Some respondents remark about the instant gratification of content this VOD platform promotes, by designing its interface such that it takes less than 3 clicks to start watching (see appendix), while others comment about the access to high definition viewing even while the Internet is slow. A major gratification found is that of mobility, where respondents stated how being able to not only stream content on their

smartphones, but also download shows for off-line viewing means they can watch Netflix while travelling, waiting in hospitals and during work-breaks.

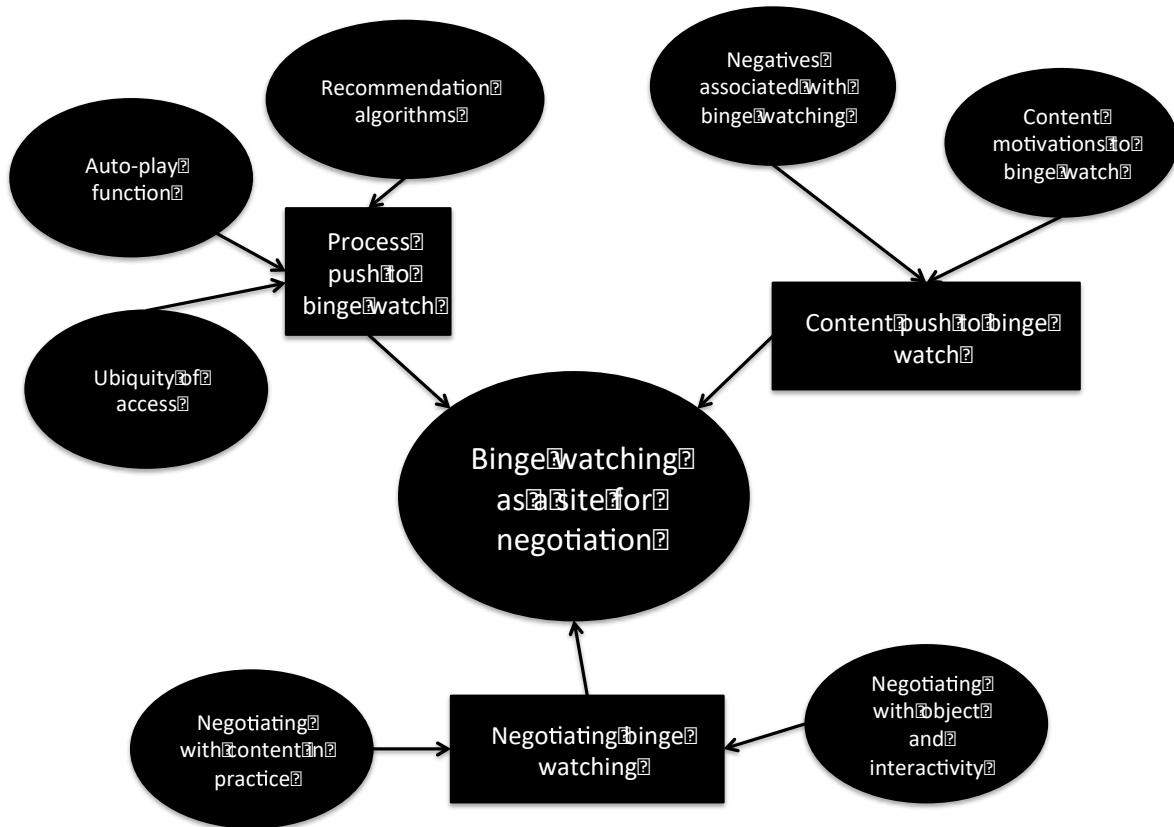


Figure 2: Thematic network - Binge watching as a site for negotiation

Ubiquity is also reported by respondents in terms of how Netflix encourages more viewing by conspicuously guiding access to new trailers and unfinished shows.

As soon as you open Netflix like a trailer might play, I personally find that annoying, but I can see how that might be, you know, enticing to some people to start watching something.

(Paul)

## The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

So it also notifies you, because sometimes you do forget, you know, that you were watching that. It says, 'Continue watching.' So when you open Netflix, it shows you still have that to watch.

(Manisha)

A feature ubiquitously mentioned by all respondents in encouraging the bingeing of shows is the post-play function that automatically queues up the next episode for viewing - designed such that effort is required to *stop* viewing rather than *continue* it. Respondents regarded this feature as bingeing with zero effort.

The main thing that's very well put is the 'next episode in 4,3,2,1...' because it doesn't take you any time, by the time your hand reaches the laptop, the next episode has started and if you're in the right mood, there will be a next one and a next one and a next one. It keeps going.

(George)

It's a very brilliant thing. It makes you want to watch more; you have to take more effort to not watch, it's reverse engineering.

(Kurian)

What is of interest is that both George and Kurian are aware of the purposeful design of the feature to encourage bingeing, which points to their acknowledgement of how Netflix promotes the discourse of binge watching; some respondents discuss how they negotiate with post-play for control over their watching (see appendix). Another feature that was widely spoken about was the recommendation algorithm. Respondents looked upon predictive algorithms favourably - as effort and money invested by Netflix in understanding their preferences, a guide to navigate through Netflix's immense content library, as constantly evolving with the viewer, as well as viewing it as empowering audiences to drive the quality of content.

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

When you open the platform, apart from the 5 shows that you're watching, there are like 10-20 other things suggested right there. They obviously have an algorithm running to look at what you have seen - 'this is a 90% match with what you've watched' / this is '60% match'. It's giving you stuff that you will potentially enjoy and it has its validation as well. So even if you've finished a show, there's a second show they've lined up immediately saying, 'you can watch this also'. So, it's all set up like that.

(Nikhil)

The interview accounts suggest that the algorithmically-driven automation personalises how audiences begin the sequence of watching new shows – a process termed as 'entrance flow' by Perks (2015). Additionally, they suggest that algorithms shape not only consumption practices such as binge watching, but also the dynamics of content creation, as argued by Napoli (2014). He points out the consequences of the Matrix era (Curtin, 2009) as choice-fragmentation in terms of diversity of content and audience preferences, and argues that platforms such as Netflix use predictive algorithms to navigate the unforeseen complexity in demand prediction and consequently, content creation. This also evinces the interdependent, almost cyclical nature between technology, content and negotiation of practice on the Netflix platform.

## 1.17.2 Content push to binge watch

...the best part about this (Sacred Games) that made me binge watch it was the fact that the cliff-hangers were on point... Like I had to see what happens next.

(Manisha)

The primary push in Netflix's original programming to binge watch is, as discussed earlier, 'enigma webbing', or complex narratives that converge at the end of the episode, prompting viewing of the next episode to resolve plot entanglement – what respondents referred to as cliff-hangers. Several respondents expressed their motivation to resolve these cliff-hangers

## The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

through *immersion, being in the zone, not wanting to break the flow and obtaining closure* (see appendix).

Usually I prefer binge watching anything because if I watch like one episode today and then I watch the next one the next day, it kind of breaks the flow

(Kritika)

This process of prolonged and focused attention is what Perks (2015) refers to as insulated flow. She argues that while insulated flow is dependent upon textual quality, it is also enabled by the design of content delivery services that allow immersion through binge watching, such as releasing the entire series simultaneously and through features such as post-play and skip-intro. Further, as evidenced by the interviews, mobility, enabled by platform access through smartphones further ensures the perpetuation of immersive watching.

It is important to reflect that several respondents commented on the detractive aspects of engaging with content through binge watching. Participants found that when they binged through a series, often in the rush to complete it, they miss out on details, citing the limits on their attention span (see appendix). They reported that binge watching does not offer viewers time to stop and reflect on the diegetic elements of each episode, and that engaging discussions regarding these elements only happen post the consumption of the entire season/series and not during – a research finding that is supported by Perks' study on new media marathoners (2015, p. xxiv). Further, some participants also noted that binging through a season quickly leads to diminishing loyalty towards the show, in that audiences lose interest and involvement in the wait for the next season. These deficient engagement experiences have led respondents to negotiate their own binge watching practices to best fit into their circuit of everyday life – negotiating with the pleasures, demands and power afforded by the content and technology of Netflix.



### 1.17.3 Negotiating with binge watching

Respondents have been found to negotiate how they consume the content, manipulating their viewing practices and the technological features of the platform. All respondents demonstrated making choices about scheduling binge watching to fit into the schematic of everyday activities by relegating bingeing to weekends (professionals), or during their free time (homemakers) only, thus supporting Silverstone's (1994) argument about arranging media to the order of everyday life. Further several respondents reported that bingeing is contingent mostly upon the attributes of the content, ergo, shows that employ enigma webbing, and is not practiced while watching anthology series (*Black Mirror*) or documentaries. A positive consequence noted by respondents regarding the diminishing loyalty discussed above is the role played by viewers in driving content creation – programme creators have to earn loyalty back with sustained quality in subsequent seasons.

Because I binge them, I'm not necessarily loyal to shows. Because I have a huge library of shows that I've seen one season of or two seasons of... loyalty is a lot more open season; they've got to earn it.

(Akash)

A particular form of control exercised by respondents to counteract diminishing interest in the show is waiting for all its seasons to be released before bingeing it all at once, therein negotiating with the temporality of content production, as supported by Perks (2015). Although respondents reported that binge watching shows made it easier to move on from the parasocial relationships made with the characters of the show, they reported feeling a sense of loss upon breakup – when they finish watching the show. However, the accounts of several respondents demonstrate how viewers negotiate this breakup on their own terms. They reported slowing down the pace of watching towards the end of the show to prolong the relationship.

...so by the time I reach the last season, and then there's like, uh, maybe like 10 episodes to go, and I've warmed to the show and like the characters, I kind of slow down so that it doesn't end as quickly.

(Shweta)

Respondents negotiate with the interactivity afforded by the surveilling algorithms of the platform by viewing it as a trade-off for personalised and quality programming. Some respondents also reported using the 'resume play' function to help watch several shows simultaneously by seamlessly switching between shows. Further, Netflix is considered expensive in a price led consumer market such as India. Participants' accounts demonstrate that they justify the cost of the object – Netflix – by substituting Netflix in place of a traditional television subscription – a process called cord cutting, discussed in the theoretical review (see appendix)

## **1.18 Audience negotiation with Netflix in the social**

### **1.18.1 The social embeddedness of Netflix**

The accounts of the respondents towards the social influence of Netflix are multipronged, whilst they talk about how interacting with Netflix enables social engagements, they also point out those factors that make social interactions unfavourable. Participants were asked what role Netflix plays in their social life; almost all respondents referred to Netflix in a positive light, as enabling social interactions by drawing people into the conversation because of the ubiquitous interest in Netflix shows in their social circles – upper middle class urban young people; one respondent even mentioned that the many social circles he is a part of do not discuss books the way they discuss Netflix. They also attested to the role played by original programmes as conversation starters or ice-breakers, equating discussions around Netflix with the socialisation inherent in a typical smoke break. Several participants also pointed out the gratifications obtained by sharing genre/show preferences and interpretations and how the same enhanced relationships. This supports the gratifications of 'community belonging' and 'same interest' identified in Li's (2013) study on Internet TV.

It's a wonderful conversation starter. Like especially if you are meeting a new person for the first time. You can talk about the same show for an hour, two hours, talk about the characters, the plot, the screening... It's – because it's like smoking,

if you are a smoker, you are just like, 'Oh, do you smoke?' and then you start talking...

(Aditi)

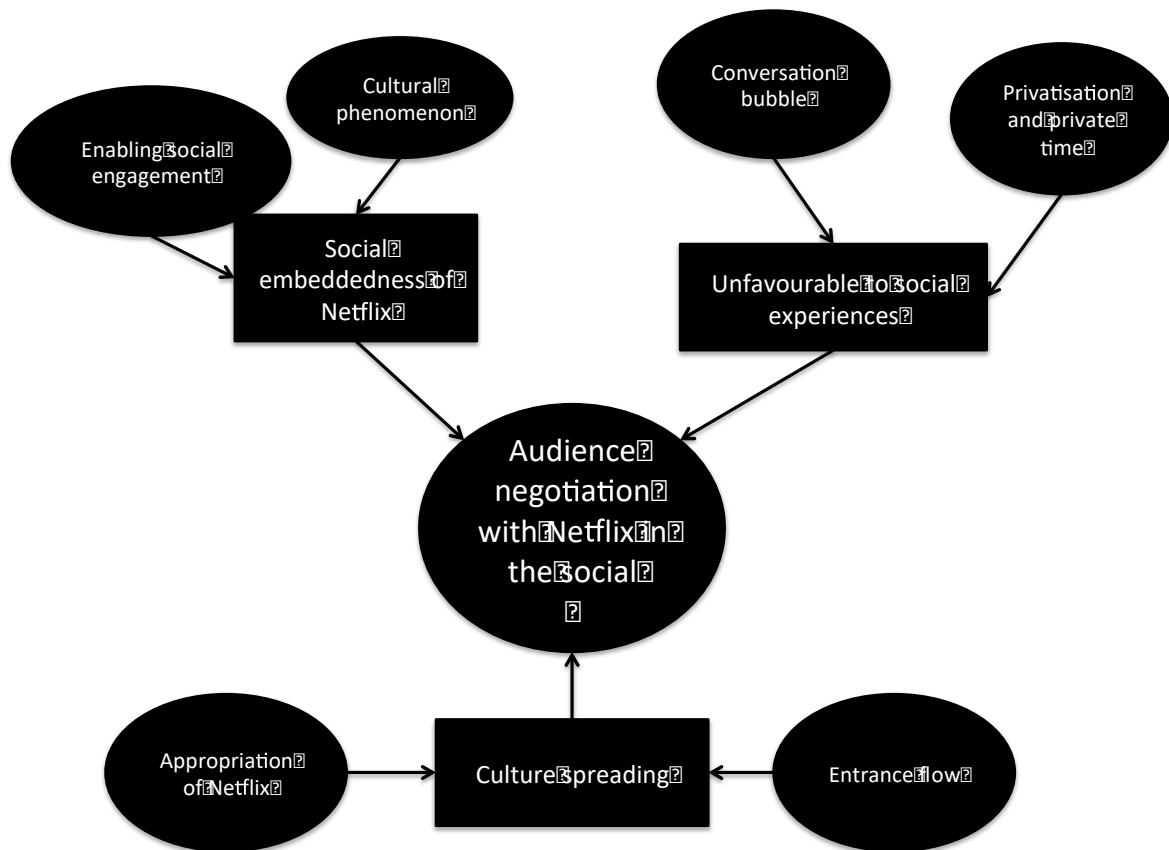


Figure 3: Thematic network – Audience negotiation with Netflix in the social

Several participants referred to Netflix as a cultural phenomenon that has engendered the transformation of dinner time – amongst millennials with access to the platform – as a session in engaging - individually or together - with Netflix as a secondary leisure activity; demonstrating how Netflix is ‘incorporated’ into the everyday routines and the social community of the household (Peil & Roser, 2012, p. 226). Interviewees also attest to how Netflix has driven conversations about its shows extensively, not during the actual viewing,

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

but immediately post viewing and for a long time after. Their accounts about engaging in 'Netflix and Chill' demonstrate how the hegemonic discourse of binge watching by Netflix is naturalised amongst its Indian audiences, albeit negotiated by them and appropriated in a distinctly different way than Netflix's western audiences (with less sexual undertones).

I mean Netflix has become associated with bingeing. I mean, nobody would say something like you know, 'Oh, I'm bingeing Amazon Prime.' They would just say 'I'm going to Netflix and chill, this is what I'm doing.'

(Manav)

## 1.18.2 Culture spreading

Drawing on the concept of 'spreadability' of media in networked society, the research has identified two modes of culture spreading in the case of Netflix. Users of Netflix who are also viewers of its content actively influence their friends and relatives, through direct word-of-mouth as well as social media activity to appropriate the platform and become its subscribers.

What got me on to it (Netflix) was because I'd heard so much about it from Reddit and my brothers in the US, so I – I mean, I knew of Netflix and I knew of the content library.

(Paul)

Besides the social influence in appropriating the platform, respondents' accounts towards selecting new shows to watch corroborated Perks' (2015) second mode of entrance flow. While the first mode involves algorithm driven recommendations, many participants also reported relying on peer recommendations as well as social media interactions as a major influence in programme choice, with comparatively little importance given to Netflix's own marketing material. Respondents attest to being enthusiastic about spreading the word about shows they enjoyed watching and simultaneously rely on the recommendations made by

peers who share similar preferences or just know the preferences of the respondents. As Perks argues, this form of entrance flow can be seen as a user led activity.

Because I'm the kind who, if I liked a show that I watched and I think my friends would enjoy it too, then I'll make sure that I promote it and make sure that all of them watch it too.

(Nikhil)

But yeah, it gets you talking, like that's the one thing you can talk about - shows, when you meet new people, you get to know about more shows and then that makes you watch it.

(Manisha)

### 1.18.3 Unfavourable to social experiences

However, respondents also pointed out how the usage of the platform was considered unfavourable to meaningful social experiences. Respondents recounted that watching shows together was particularly challenging as viewers found it hard to negotiate between the discourse of freedom and personalisation that Netflix engenders resulting in the fragmentation of audiences, and the shared social situations wherein individual preferences are compromised by the politics of viewing. Moreover, interviewees reported that even when common interests are pursued, viewers differ in terms of the 'passion' for the show, and how they like to consume it – the pace and place of binge watching. Thus the audiences' blinkered race to completion and unravelling the plot structure is not conducive to shared viewing.

What happens when you binge especially at the end of the night or whatever, one person drops off to sleep, or like one person just gets disengaged and starts texting, erm, then it just becomes a poor social experience.

(Rishabh)

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

Participants also reflected about the downside of the social embeddedness of Netflix that engenders social engagement – that most conversations take place in a bubble, hegemonised by discussions about the shows, effectively excluding those members who aren't users and viewers on Netflix.

...It's like not following football right. It's something that in a social setting immediately sparks off a discussion... So if you're not able to participate in those conversations, I can see how people might be hamstrung.

(Paul)

Some interesting findings arose out of the accounts of married respondents that might be of future research interest. One observation points sharply to Turkle's (2011) sombre caution about how new technologies by being mobile, blur the demarcations between private spaces (bedroom), special times (dinner time) and leisure pursuance. The other interesting finding is how married respondents gave accounts about how they use Netflix to mediate relational conflicts.

I mean, now I fall asleep with Netflix on... Before it was him, yeah so we were like kind of talking about it recently, we are like 'Okay, we should have like a no gadgets policy in the bedroom'.

(Shweta)

My wife and I, when we fight, our thing is, at the end of the day, we can watch something, but we have to end the fight and only then watch it. It's more like a reward, if we make up; we get this as a reward. So that was her thing, no fight can move to the next day, plus we really wanted to watch the show.

(George)

The findings reflect Putnam's (1995b, 1995a) and Lull's (2006, p. 55) critical stand on technologies such as Netflix that espouse the privatisation of leisure, the creation of

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

'individual cultural programming' and are symptomatic of reduced potential for social participation. However, they also suggest that Netflix offers the opportunity to enable social engagements and enrich interactions albeit amongst people who, if not share the same preferences for programming, at least share a passion for Netflix. This supports Silverstone's (1994) argument that the immersion in a technologically shifting culture, one that is predicated upon privatisation and personalisation, influences how television audiences negotiate with television media and each other in the everyday context.

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the role played by Netflix in the intellectual and leisure lives of urban Indian young adults. The research is considered especially valuable for its focus on new media technologies from a non-western perspective. It approached the research using the analytical tool of domestication theory that looks at Netflix as both text and object and used thematic analysis to interpret how respondents negotiate between their motivations and the ideologies of Netflix's content and technology. 15 participants were drawn from a wide sample pool, using a mix of advertising and snowball sampling, and selected for their self reported penchant for binge watching on the platform, and qualitative interviews were conducted post ethical considerations.

The themes identified in the research are used to answer the research question: the audiences' everyday interaction with Netflix serves as the site for three kinds of negotiations – with the discourse of quality content that Netflix promotes, with binge watching – a practice almost entirely appropriated by Netflix as the preferred mode of viewing, and the social interactions both enhanced and encumbered by audiences' engagement with the platform. It is seen that the four elements prevalent in these themes are interdependent on each other in a feedback circuit; the textual transformations found in Netflix's darker TV serve as primary motivation for the engagement with Netflix, this engagement is made possible through the technological design of the platform that allows an entire season to be viewed at a stretch (resolving plot complexities) as well as through functions that allow multiple viewings (post-play, play back and mobile viewing), these transformations – both

## The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

textual and technological – are seen to promote a new cultural practice of viewing – binge watching, a practice normalised through Netflix's discourses as well as enabled by other features such as the matching algorithm. Finally, to complete the circuit, social interactions, amongst similar cultural groups (urban, Indian, young) serve the dual role of promoting the platform and new shows as well as forensically deconstruct remaining textual complexities. In return, engagement with Netflix is seen as enabling new and enriching existing social relations. An interesting finding in the Indian viewing context is how subtitles enable the domestication of Netflix's transnational and even Indian programming.

The research is subject to limitations. First, practical considerations limit the sample size that, if increased, would benefit the analysis. Although a dual lens was employed to study Netflix as object and content, the focus was placed on the attributes of the content and not on the symbolisms encoded into the texts. As this research explores how audiences incorporate different kinds of content (no genre specification), an interpretation analysis of how audiences decode Netflix's many shows is outside the scope of this research, but provides grounds for further enquiry. Further, Katz, Gurevitch and Haas remind researchers to enquire about the forms and consequences of pleasures derived by people who are located differently in society than the study population (1973, p. 8). In this scenario, it warrants an enquiry about older people considered more resistant to technological changes (Evans, 2013), or even television audiences who cannot afford the infrastructure and subscription Netflix demands. In light of many respondents referring to older relatives appropriating binge watching on Netflix, this area proves to be apt for future enquiry.



## REFERENCES

Aadeetya, S. (2018). The Great Indian Video Battle: Hotstar Ahead of Amazon, Netflix - The Quint. Retrieved August 11, 2018, from <https://www.thequint.com/tech-and-auto/tech-news/hotstar-has-more-online-users-than-netflix-amazon-prime>

Abercrombie, N., & Longhurst, B. (1998). Changing Audiences; Changing Paradigms of Research. In N. Abercrombie & B. Longhurst (Eds.), *Audiences: a sociological theory of performance and imagination*, (pp. 3–37). SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446222331.n2>

Ahn, D., & Shin, D.-H. (2013). Is the social use of media for seeking connectedness or for avoiding social isolation? Mechanisms underlying media use and subjective well-being. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29, 2453–2462. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.12.022>

Andrews, T. (2012). What is Social Constructionism. *Grounded Theory Review*, 11(1). Retrieved from <http://groundedtheoryreview.com/2012/06/01/what-is-social-constructionism/>

Ang, I. (1996). *Living Room Wars*. (I. Ang, Ed.). London: Routledge.

Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. *Quality Research*, 1(3), 385–405. Retrieved from [https://utsc.utoronto.ca/~kmacd/IDSC10/Readings/text analysis/themes.pdf](https://utsc.utoronto.ca/~kmacd/IDSC10/Readings/text%20analysis/themes.pdf)

Banaji, S. (2006). Reading “Bollywood”: The Young Audience and Hindi Films. Reading “Bollywood”: The Young Audience and Hindi Films. Palgrave macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230501201>

Baran, S. J., & Davis, D. K. (2010). *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, ferment, and Future* (6th ed.). Wadsworth. Retrieved from <https://comsaucc.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/mass-communication-theory.pdf>

Barker, M. (2009). Changing lives, challenging concepts: Some findings and lessons from the Lord of the rings project. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 12(4), 375–393. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877909104244>

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

Becz, P. (2016). Netflix Goes to Cinema The new chapter of quality TV conquers the big screen. University of Copenhagen.

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). The social construction of reality. *Penguin Group*.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/323448>

Bhattacharya, A. (2018). India's biggest online binge-watchers are in its small towns. Retrieved August 14, 2018, from <https://qz.com/india/1211986/hotstar-report-indias-biggest-online-binge-watchers-are-in-its-small-towns/>

Borgohain, A. (2018). ET GBS 2018: The next 100 mn users of Netflix will come from India: Netflix CEO Reed Hastings - The Economic Times. Retrieved March 8, 2018, from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/small-biz/startups/newsbuzz/the-next-100-mn-users-of-netflix-will-come-from-india-netflix-ceo-reed-hastings/articleshow/63047513.cms>

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development. Sage. London. <https://doi.org/10.1177/102831539700100211>

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

Brinkmann, S. (2013). Qualitative Interviewing. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199861392.001.0001>

Byrne, B. (2012). Qualitative Interviewing. In C. Seale (Ed.), *Researching society and culture* (pp. 206–226). Sage Publications.

Canary, D. J., & Spitzberg, B. H. (1993). Loneliness and Media Gratifications. *Communication Research*, 20(6), 800–821. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365093020006003>

Cha, J., & Chan-Olmsted, S. M. (2012). Substitutability between Online Video Platforms and Television. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 89(2), 261–278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699012439035>

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

Conlin, L. T., Bissell, K., Bowman, N., Kim, Y., & Leeper, J. (2015). *THERE GOES THE WEEKEND: UNDERSTANDING TELEVISION BINGE-WATCHING*. The University of Alabama.

Curtin, M. (2009). Matrix media. In G. Turner & J. Tay (Eds.), *Television Studies After TV* (pp. 19–29). Routledge. Retrieved from <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781134021673/chapters/10.4324%2F9780203878316-7>

Derrick, J. L., Gabriel, S., & Hugenberg, K. (2009). Social surrogacy: How favored television programs provide the experience of belonging. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 45*(2), 352–362. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.JESP.2008.12.003>

Deuskar, N. (2018). Netflix may change pricing structure to attract new subscribers in India. Retrieved August 11, 2018, from <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/gujarat-e-auction-in-mining-sector-throws-up-new-entrants-and-ensures-windfall-for-govt-2832271.html>

Evans, E. (2013). Transmedia Audiences: the Consequences of Emergence. In E. Evans (Ed.), *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media and Daily Life* (pp. 65–82). Routledge.

Flayelle, M., Maurage, P., & Billieux, J. (2017). Toward a qualitative understanding of binge-watching behaviors: A focus group approach. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions, 6*(4), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.6.2017.060>

Gershon, L. (2014). Will the Fall of Cable Mean Darker TV? Retrieved August 12, 2018, from <https://daily.jstor.org/will-fall-cable-mean-darker-tv/>

Gramsci, A. (1999). *SELECTIONS FROM THE PRISON NOTEBOOKS*. (Q. Hoare & N. Smith, Eds.). ElecBook. Retrieved from [www.elecbook.com](http://www.elecbook.com)

Grenman, M. (2016). Discovering "The New Normal" - TV-watching as Social Experience in the Online Era.

Haddon, L. (2006). The Contribution of Domestication Research to InHome Computing and Media Consumption. *The Information Society, 22*(4), 195–203. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01972240600791325?needAccess=true>

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

Hall, S. (2003). Encoding / Decoding. In V. Nightingale & K. Ross (Eds.), *Critical readings media and audiences* (pp. 51–64). Open University Press.

Hartmann, M. (2013). From domestication to mediated mobilism. *Mobile Media & Communication*, 1(1), 42–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157912464487>

Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2011). Qualitative Research Methods. In *Qualitative Research Methods*. London: SAGE Publications.

Hoijer, B. (1990). studying Viewers Reception of TV Programmes: Theoretical & Methodological considerations. *European Journal of Communications.*, 5, 29–56.

Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (1997). Active Interviewing. *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*, 113–129. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(05\)64639-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(05)64639-9)

Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (2004). Context: working it up, down, and across. In F. C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium, & D. (eds) Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 297–311). SAGE Publications.

Hussain. (2018). Netflix vs Amazon Prime vs Hotstar: Which is the best streaming service in India. Retrieved August 12, 2018, from <https://www.theandroidsoul.com/netflix-vs-amazon-prime-vs-hotstar/>

Hynes, D., Vuojärvi, H., & Isomäki, H. (2010). Domestication of a laptop on a wireless campus. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 26(2), 250–267. <https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.1094>

Ien Ang. (1990). Culture and Communication: towards an ethnographic critique of media consumption in the transnational media system. *European Journal of Communication*, 5, 239–260. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0267323190005002006>

Ishita Tiwary. (2017). India – Netflix. Retrieved August 4, 2018, from <https://global-internet-tv.com/netflix-country-reports/india/>

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

Iyengar, R. (2018). Netflix has its first hits in India. It needs a lot more. Retrieved August 11, 2018, from <https://money.cnn.com/2018/07/17/technology/netflix-sacred-games-india-plans/index.html>

Jenner, M. (2016). Is this TVIV? On Netflix, TVIII and binge-watching. *New Media & Society*, 18(2), 257–273. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814541523>

Joglekar, R. (2018). Why Netflix's "Sacred Games" Is Facing a Court Case in India. Retrieved August 11, 2018, from <http://time.com/5339495/sacred-games-netflix-india-court/>

Johnson, R B Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14–26.

Jurgensen, J. (2012). Binge Viewing: TV's Lost Weekends. Retrieved August 12, 2018, from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303740704577521300806686174>

Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and Gratifications Research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509. <https://doi.org/10.1086/268109>

Katz, E., Gurevitch, M., & Haas, H. (1973). On the Use of the Mass Media for Important Things. *American Sociological Review*, 38(2), 164–181. Retrieved from [http://repository.upenn.edu/asc\\_papers](http://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers)

Krisberg, K. (2016). Binge-watching bad for mental health. *The Nation's Health*, 45(10), 35.

Kvale, S. (1996). Interviews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing. Evaluation and Program Planning. London. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0149-7189\(97\)89858-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0149-7189(97)89858-8)

Laghate, G. (2017). TV market in India: "46 million households to use free TV by 2020." Retrieved August 11, 2018, from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/media/entertainment/media/46-million-households-to-use-free-tv-by-2020/articleshow/59452071.cms>

Laghate, G. (2018). Smartphone is the new TV: Digital video may give advertisers reach that challenges TV's dominance. Retrieved August 11, 2018, from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/media/entertainment/smartphone-is-the->

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

new-tv-digital-video-may-give-advertisers-reach-that-challenges-tvs-dominance/articleshow/63980596.cms

Li, N.-S. (2013). Gratifications obtained from television shows on Internet TV and conventional TV by. Iowa State University.

Livingstone, S. (1998). *Making Sense of Television: The psychology of audience interpretation* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Livingstone, S. (2003). The Changing Nature of Audiences: From the Mass Audience to the Interactive Media User. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470999066.ch17>

Livingstone, S. (2004). The Challenge of Changing Audiences: Or, What is the Audience Researcher to do in the Age of the Internet? *European Journal of Communication*, 19(1), 75–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323104040695>

Livingstone, S. (2007). On the material and the symbolic: Silverstone's double articulation of research traditions in new media studies. *New Media and Society*, 9(1), 16–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444807075200>

Lull, J. (2006). The push and pull of global culture. In J. Curran & D. Morley (Eds.), *Media and Cultural Theory* (pp. 44–58). Oxon: Routledge.

Mankekar, P. (1999). Television Tales, National Narratives, and a Woman's Rage: Multiple Interpretations of Draupadi's "Disrobing." In P. Mankekar (Ed.), *Screening culture, viewing politics: an ethnography of television, womanhood, and nation in postcolonial India* (pp. 224–256). Durham: Duke University Press.

Marx, K., & Engels, F. (2012). The Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas. In G. D. Meenakshi & D. M. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks* (Second, pp. 31–33). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Matrix, S. (2014). The Netflix Effect: Teens, Binge Watching, and On-Demand Digital Media Trends. *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, 6(1), 119–138. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jeu.2014.0002>

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

McCarthy, A., McGrath, L., & Coughlan, F. (2018). Production. Retrieved August 13, 2018, from <https://thephenomenonofnetflix.wordpress.com/2016/11/10/blog-post-title/>

Merikivi, J., Salovaara, A., Mäntymäki, M., & Zhang, L. (2017). On the way to understanding binge watching behavior: the over-estimated role of involvement. *Electron Markets*, 28(111). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12525-017-0271-4>

Miliany, K. (2015). The Use of TV and the Internet in the Social Context. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research*, 15(1), 7–16. <https://doi.org/2249-4588>

Mittel, J. (2015). Why has TV storytelling become so complex? Retrieved August 18, 2018, from <http://theconversation.com/why-has-tv-storytelling-become-so-complex-37442>

Morley, D. (2006). Globalisation and cultural imperialism reconsidered: Old questions in new guises. In J. Curran & D. Morley (Eds.), *Media and Cultural Theory* (pp. 30–43). Routledge.

Napoli, P. M. (2012). Audience evolution and the future of audience research. *JMM International Journal on Media Management*, 14(2), 79–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14241277.2012.675753>

Napoli, P. M. (2014). On Automation in Media Industries: Integrating Algorithmic Media Production into Media Industries Scholarship. *Media Industries Journal*, 1, 33–38. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.831.7242&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Netflix Media Center. (2013). Netflix Declares Binge Watching is the New Normal. Retrieved August 12, 2018, from <https://media.netflix.com/en/press-releases/netflix-declares-binge-watching-is-the-new-normal-migration-1>

Netflix Media Center. (2018). About Netflix. Retrieved August 11, 2018, from <https://media.netflix.com/en/about-netflix>

Nicolson, P. (2008). Reflexivity, “Bias” and the in-Depth Interview: Developing Shared Meanings. In L. Finlay & B. Gough (Eds.), *Reflexivity: A Practical Guide for Researchers in Health and Social Sciences* (pp. 133–145). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470776094.ch10>

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

Pant, R. (2018). *India – Hotstar*. New York. Retrieved from <https://global-internet-tv.com/india-hotstar/>

Park, M.-J., & Curran, J. (2000). *De-Westernizing Media Studies*. (M.-J. Park & J. Curran, Eds.). Routledge. Retrieved from <https://books.google.co.il/books?id=jCULWZ9eo5wC>

Peil, C., & Roser, J. (2012). Using the Domestication Approach for the Analysis of Diffusion and Participation Processes of New Media. In H. Bilandzic, G. Patriarache, & P. J. Traudt (Eds.), *The social use of media: cultural and social scientific perspectives on audience research* (pp. 221–240). Intellect.

Perks, L. G. (2015). *Media marathoning: immersions in morality*. New York. Retrieved from [https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=JiDfBQAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR4&dq=Perks,+Lisa+Glebatis.+2015.+Media+Marathoning:+Immersions+in+Morality&ots=z5ZALrw\\_Ye&sig=8TxyDq-l7UIMyjmBXG3b2XwiPaQ#v=onepage&q=entrance+flow&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=JiDfBQAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR4&dq=Perks,+Lisa+Glebatis.+2015.+Media+Marathoning:+Immersions+in+Morality&ots=z5ZALrw_Ye&sig=8TxyDq-l7UIMyjmBXG3b2XwiPaQ#v=onepage&q=entrance+flow&f=false)

Petersen, T. G. (2016). To Binge or Not to Binge: A Qualitative Analysis of College Students' Binge Watching Habits. *The Florida Communication Journal*, 44(1), 77–88.

Pisharody, A. (2013). *The Future of Television: Will broadcast and cable television networks survive the emergence of online streaming?* New York University. Retrieved from [https://doc-04-8o-apps-viewer.googleusercontent.com/viewer/secure/pdf/nfnk9aevudp1i5rkidi92q6aecc3rv8b/acotso7ujtcii6b4qoef9ho70r608l2t/1533931200000/lantern/04073572340462595118/ACFrOgCTHMQzDIu\\_mzk5B0YLFUjGFg5yoFigJzHV-P-RKhbZ3sL6yvjv38PE0zUjpvKWg34FkFxFwX](https://doc-04-8o-apps-viewer.googleusercontent.com/viewer/secure/pdf/nfnk9aevudp1i5rkidi92q6aecc3rv8b/acotso7ujtcii6b4qoef9ho70r608l2t/1533931200000/lantern/04073572340462595118/ACFrOgCTHMQzDIu_mzk5B0YLFUjGFg5yoFigJzHV-P-RKhbZ3sL6yvjv38PE0zUjpvKWg34FkFxFwX)

Pittman, M., & Sheehan, K. (2015). Sprinting a media marathon: Uses and gratifications of binge-watching television through Netflix. *First Monday*, 20(10). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v20i10.6138>

Punathambekar, A., & Kumar, & S. (2012). Television at large. *South Asian History and Culture*, 3(4), 483–490. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2012.720058org/10.1080/19472498.2012.720058>



# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

Putnam, R. D. (1995a). Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6(1), 65–78. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1995.0002>

Putnam, R. D. (1995b). Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America. *Source: PS: Political Science and Politics*, 28(4), 664–683. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/420517>

Raikar, R. (2017). The Binge Watching Trend: An Analysis of Audience Behavior and Network Strategies in a Competitive Environment. Drexel University.

Rapley, T. (2011). Interviews. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, G. Jaber, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 15–33). London. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848608191>

Robinson, O. C. (2014). Sampling in Interview-Based Qualitative Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11(1), 25–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2013.801543>

Roger Silverstone. (1994). Chapter 6: On the audience.: EBSCOhost. Retrieved August 4, 2018, from <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.gate3.library.lse.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=07027026-6e51-480e-988b-e7edf961973a%40sessionmgr4010>

Roy, A. (2014). TV after Television Studies: Recasting Questions of Audiovisual Form. In B. Sen & A. Roy (Eds.), *Channeling Cultures: Television Studies in India* (pp. 17–40). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof>

Rubin, A. M., Perse, E. M., & Powell, R. A. (1985). LONELINESS, PARASOCIAL INTERACTION, AND LOCAL TELEVISION NEWS VIEWING. *Human Communication Research*, 12(2), 155–180. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1985.tb00071.x>

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing data*. (I. Rubin & H. Rubin, Eds.) (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452226651>

Rubin, R. B., & Mchugh, M. P. (1987). Development of Parasocial Interaction Relationships. *Journal Of-Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 31(3), 279–292.

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

Ruggiero, T. E. (2000). Uses and Gratifications Theory in the 21st Century. *Mass Communication and Society*, 3(1), 3–37. Retrieved from [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1207/S15327825MCS0301\\_02?needAccess=true&instName=LSE+-+London+School+of+Economics+and+Political+Science](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1207/S15327825MCS0301_02?needAccess=true&instName=LSE+-+London+School+of+Economics+and+Political+Science)

Sachdev, A. (2018). At half a million subscribers, Netflix still a 'premium' service in India | business news | Hindustan Times. Retrieved August 11, 2018, from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/business-news/why-netflix-isn-t-keen-to-expand-to-regional-languages-in-india/story-15BIUoXJJ1hZ8pAx5E8WQJ.html>

Sandvoss, C. (2011). Reception. In V. Nightingale (Ed.), *The Handbook of Media Audiences* (pp. 230–250). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444340525>

Schrøder, K. C. (2013). From Dogmatism to Open-Mindedness? Historical Reflections on Methods in Audience Reception Research. *Communication Review*, 16(1–2), 40–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2013.757485>

Schweidel, D. A., & Moe, W. W. (2016). Binge Watching and Advertising. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(5), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.15.0258>

Seetharam, G. (2017). Netflix vs Amazon: The battle to attract viewers with original content set to intensify in India - The Economic Times. *The Economic Times*. Retrieved from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/with-amazon-launching-its-streaming-service-in-india-battle-of-original-content-on-web-to-intensify/articleshow/56394918.cms>

Sen, B., & Roy, A. (2014). Introduction. In B. Sen & A. Roy (Eds.), *Channeling Cultures: Television Studies in India* (pp. 1–16). new Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Silverstone, R. (1994). *Television and Everyday Life*. Routledge.

Silverstone, R. (2002). Complicity and Collusion in the Mediation of Everyday Life. *New Literary History*, 33(4), 761–780. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2002.0045>

Silverstone, R., & Haddon, L. (1996). Design and the Domestication of Information and Communication Technologies: Technical Change and Everyday Life. In R. Silverstone & R. 47

# The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

Mansell (Eds.), *Communication by Design. The Politics of Information and Communication Technologies* (pp. 44–74). Oxford: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/64821/1/Haddon\\_Design and domestication\\_2016.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/64821/1/Haddon_Design_and_domestication_2016.pdf)

Spangler, T. (2013). Netflix Survey: Binge-Watching Is Not Weird or Unusual – Variety. Retrieved August 10, 2018, from <https://variety.com/2013/digital/news/netflix-survey-binge-watching-is-not-weird-or-unusual-1200952292/>

Spivak, G. (1988). Can the subaltern speak. In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271–313). Macmillan Education. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446212233.n7>

Stafford, T. F., Stafford, M. R., & Schkade, L. L. (2004). Determining uses and gratifications for the internet. *Decision Sciences*, 35(2), 259–288. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.00117315.2004.02524.x>

Sundar, S. S., & Limperos, A. M. (2013). Uses and Grats 2.0: New Gratifications for New Media. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 57(4), 504–525. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2013.845827>

Swanson, D. L. (2009). Gratification seeking, media exposure, and audience interpretations: Some directions for research. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 31(3), 237–254. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838158709386662>

Tryon, C. (2015). TV Got Better: Netflix’s Original Programming Strategies and Binge Viewing. *Media Industries Journal*, 2(2), 104–116. Retrieved from <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/p/pod/dod-idx/tv-got-better-netflixs-original-programming-strategies.pdf?c=mij;idno=15031809.0002.206;format=pdf>

Tukachinsky, R., & Eyal, K. (2018). The Psychology of Marathon Television Viewing: Antecedents and Viewer Involvement. *Mass Communication and Society*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2017.1422765>

Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone Together*. New York: Basic Books. <https://doi.org/10.5613/rzs.41.3.7>

## The Netflix Phenomenon in India

Richa Sarah George

Warren, C. A. B. (2002). Qualitative interviewing. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 83–101). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Wayne, M. L. (2018). Netflix, Amazon, and branded television content in subscription video on-demand portals. *Media, Culture and Society*, 40(5), 725–741. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443717736118>

Wood, H. (2007). Television is happening: Methodological considerations for capturing digital television reception. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(4), 485–506. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549407081956>

## APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE

1. Can you describe for me what activities you enjoy doing either in your free time or otherwise, on any average day of the week?
  - a. Probe for binge-watching
2. What online streaming platforms do you subscribe to and what is it about these platforms (Netflix) that you like?
  - a. How many episodes of a show do you usually watch in one sitting?
  - b. When did you get on Netflix, what brought you on?
  - c. In what ways, do you think Netflix, or other factors, encourage you to watch more – episodes or shows?
  - d. If you have come across any press releases/online articles about Netflix shows, in what ways have they influenced your decision to watch shows?
  - e. How do you feel about the cost of the show, what justifies the subscription cost to you?
3. How do you usually incorporate Netflix into your day?
  - a. Probe for scheduled watching or impulsive watching
4. Can you describe what genres you enjoy watching and why? What are some criteria you have while selecting shows to watch?
  - a. What are your expectations when you watch or binge a show?
  - b. In what ways do you think having grown up/lived in a city like xxx influenced your preference for Indian/international shows?
5. Can you describe for me a show you recently binged on that you really liked?
  - a. What is it about the show that you liked?
  - b. In what ways, if any, do you think you identified with the themes of the show?
  - c. How is it different from any or most Indian shows or series that you've watched?
6. In what ways do you think being able to binge-watch the show has changed your experience of viewing?
  - a. How is it different from traditional viewing?

- b. How does uninterrupted viewing change your experience of or engagement with the major themes and characters/ content of the show?
  - c. In what ways do you think the 'quality/characteristics' of the shows on Netflix are different from cable TV?
  - d. How do you usually feel once you've finished watching an entire show?
  - e. In what ways do you think making an emotional connection or being a fan of a show/character changes when you binge a show versus if it's on TV?
  - f. Do you equate Netflix with bingewatching? Elaborate.
7. How long have you lived or worked in your current location? Can you describe what your offline social connections are like – acquaintances and close relationships?
8. What role does binge watching on Netflix play in your social life?
  - a. How do you usually binge watch - alone or with someone(s)?
  - b. How popular do you think binge watching is amongst your friends or other social relations?
  - c. In what ways, if any, has your involvement with Netflix enhanced or deterred the quality of your social relationships?
  - d. In what ways, if any, do you use your involvement with Netflix in managing difficult situations – personal stresses or relationships?
9. For what reasons do you prefer to binge-watch on Netflix, in your leisure time, as opposed to other leisure or social activities?
10. Is there anything you believe I should have asked you or anything you'd like to talk about as part of this interview?

## APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEWEE PROFILES

The table provides the demographic details of the interviewees along with details of the interview. Names of the interviewees have been changed to retain anonymity.

Name	Age	Sex	City	Occupation	Interview mode
Kurian	19	M	Cochin	Student	In person
Akash	20	M	Cochin	Student	In person
George	35	M	Goa	Freelance consultant	Google-Hangouts
Nikhil	22	M	Delhi	Student	Google-Hangouts
Paul	27	M	Bombay	Management consultant	Google-Hangouts
Manisha	25	F	Hyderabad	Operations specialist	Google-Hangouts
Poulumi	25	F	Bangalore	Public relations executive	Google-Hangouts
Shruti	21	F	Delhi	Student	Google-Hangouts

Kritika	27	F	Hyderabad	Homemaker	Google- Hangouts
Aditi	22	F	Delhi	Student	Google- Hangouts
Manav	26	M	Pune	Financial analyst	Google- Hangouts
Shweta	33	F	Cochin	Stay-at-home mother	In person
Ritwik	23	M	Bangalore	Marketing manager	Google- Hangouts
Lena	23	F	Bangalore	Data analyst	Google- Hangouts
Rishabh	31	M	Gurgaon	Retail manager	Google- Hangouts