

The Perceptions and Challenges of Streaming Services in Malaysia: A Qualitative Study on Netflix

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Abstract

Online film streaming services have become an integral part of entertainment consumption today, offering convenience and a vast array of content. Among these platforms, Netflix has gained significant attention and popularity in Malaysia, attracting a diverse range of viewers. This qualitative study aims to explore the perceptions, experiences, and challenges associated with Netflix usage in the Malaysian context. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, involving in-depth interviews with 10 individuals, including adults and parents who actively use Netflix. The findings provide insights into the varying perceptions of Netflix's impact, accessibility, and content availability, along with challenges related to cost, parental concerns, and user experience. This study contributes to the expanding body of research on Netflix's role in Malaysia's digital entertainment landscape.

Keywords: Perception, Challenges, Netflix, Malaysia

Introduction and Research Problem

According to a study by Pasma Sanrawati Sitanggang (2022), the Harris Poll EquiTrend survey recognized Netflix as the Best Brand of 2014 under the Media-Video Streaming Subscription category. Additionally, research by Yuan (2023) highlights that Netflix has expanded its operations to over 50 different countries, allowing it to penetrate a larger market. The company has also actively improved its services by enhancing language accessibility, particularly in subtitles.

According to Asma Md. Isa et al. (2019), Malaysia is a country with laws that regulate the functions of media in the fields of print, broadcasting, and telecommunications. The Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 guarantees that the government will not impose any censorship on the internet, allowing greater democratic space for new media. However, this freedom has also sparked public debate regarding content available on platforms like Netflix. Netflix is one of the leading global Over-The-Top (OTT) media providers, offering

productions and content from various countries. Netflix, along with several other global OTT service providers, officially entered the Malaysian market in 2016.

A study by Asma Md. Isa et al. (2021) found that content commonly accessed through global OTT media platforms predominantly consists of films and TV series, making these genres highly popular among Malaysian audiences.

According to Tuti Widiastuti (2022), the perception of Netflix as a streaming service is increasingly positive as it gains widespread popularity. This is due to its ability to provide on-demand content that can be accessed by subscribers anytime and anywhere, allowing them to enjoy unlimited entertainment in the form of films and TV series of their choice. Consequently, the growing popularity of paid streaming services, particularly Netflix, is attributed to changing audience preferences, where viewers are willing to subscribe to access films and TV series from various countries, including Korea, China, India, the Philippines, and others.

Additionally, Teges Maulida and Febi Ariani Saragih (2023) argue that Netflix serves as an effective medium for foreign language learning, emphasizing the importance of accurate subtitle translation. Their research aims to determine the accuracy and acceptance of subtitles as a learning tool, particularly for young audiences interested in acquiring foreign language skills, especially English. This accessibility provides young viewers with the opportunity to enhance their English proficiency, as Netflix predominantly uses English as the primary medium in its films and TV series. Therefore, it is evident that Netflix can facilitate language learning among young audiences through the subtitles provided in its selected content.

However, Netflix also faces several challenges. One of the key challenges is maintaining its position as a leading streaming service provider in Malaysia. According to a study by Abdur Rahman Ahmad Raji et al. (2022), competition within the Over-The-Top (OTT) industry has created an open market where key industry players strive to dominate consumer influence, particularly in Malaysia. This intense competition has led to an imbalance, making it more difficult for local companies to establish a strong presence and influence within the domestic market.

Moreover, concerns have been raised regarding the content available on Netflix. According to Norhafzan Jaafar (2019), excessive exposure to negative elements in films and TV series on Netflix may lead to mental health disturbances. This is due to the lack of strict content regulation, which can potentially contribute to psychological distress among viewers. Furthermore, many Netflix productions feature genres such as thriller, action, and revenge, which may resonate with real-life experiences, further intensifying their impact on audiences. This issue has raised concerns among various stakeholders, as it could potentially lead to adverse psychological effects, including irrational behavior among certain individuals.

Preliminary observations indicate a lack of detailed studies on the perceptions and challenges of Netflix in Malaysia. Limited information regarding how different age groups perceive and experience challenges related to Netflix highlights the need for further in-depth and comprehensive research within the local context. With the rapid advancement of digital

entertainment technology and the growing penetration and impact of Netflix across various age groups and communities, it has become increasingly crucial to understand the perceptions and challenges associated with Netflix in Malaysia.

The swift expansion of streaming services has revolutionized worldwide entertainment consumption, with Netflix establishing itself as a leading platform in Malaysia since its inception in 2016. This study is pertinent and essential, as Netflix's impact beyond mere entertainment, influencing cultural exposure, language development, and familial dynamics. In a market influenced by internet accessibility and evolving audience choices, comprehending opinions of Netflix is essential to evaluate its societal impact. Although Netflix provides a wide array of content and exceptional ease, it also prompts worries around pricing, cultural impact, unregulated content, and exposure to inappropriate language. This research examines both advantages and obstacles, thereby filling a void in local studies, as studies on the experiences of Malaysian users are scarce. The results are notably important for various stakeholders: politicians can gain insights into legal requirements, educators can leverage Netflix for language and knowledge enhancement, and parents can make educated choices regarding their children's viewing practices. Furthermore, local content artists can utilize information to produce competitive, culturally pertinent works that appeal to Malaysian audiences. This study's value is in its capacity to facilitate balanced discussions on digital entertainment, ensuring that streaming services such as Netflix are utilized responsibly while promoting cultural integrity and favorable societal results.

Research Objective and Research Question

This study aims to :

Explore the perceptions and challenges of streaming services in Malaysia, with a specific focus on Netflix.

This study aims to answer this question :

What are the perceptions and challenges of streaming services in Malaysia, with a specific focus on Netflix?

Literature Review

The History of Netflix

According to Audrey Yolanda (2021), Netflix is a digital service provider founded by Reed Hastings and Marc Randolph in Scotts Valley, California, in 1997. Over time, Netflix has amassed more than 104 million subscribers and has recorded over 250 million views worldwide. Initially, Netflix's services were only available in the United States. However, the company has since expanded rapidly and now operates in over 130 countries. As a leading subscription-based streaming service, Netflix offers a wide range of content, including films, TV series, and various entertainment programs, making it a prominent player in the global streaming industry.

Audrey Yolanda (2021) also highlights that Netflix prioritizes high-speed and stable streaming quality, ensuring a seamless viewing experience. Additionally, the platform is accessible across multiple devices, including televisions, laptops, tablets, smartphones, and more. Netflix functions similarly to a digital DVD rental store, offering a convenient and user-friendly

way to access digital films online. Like other paid subscription platforms such as iQIYI, Viu, iFlix, and YouTube Premium, Netflix operates without advertisements, allowing subscribers to enjoy content uninterrupted and with full control over their viewing choices.

In Malaysia, Netflix has become a preferred video streaming service among viewers, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when nationwide restrictions increased the demand for digital entertainment. This popularity can be attributed to Netflix's extensive library of films and TV series catering to various audience preferences in Malaysia. According to Badra (2021), Netflix is committed to providing the latest films and TV series to its subscribers. Furthermore, the platform allows users to download TV shows, series, and films on multiple devices, including Android, Windows, and iOS, enabling offline viewing without an internet connection.

Thus, it is evident that Netflix has had a significant impact on viewers, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it provided an accessible and convenient platform for audiences to enjoy their favorite films and TV series.

The Perceptions Towards Netflix as a Streaming Platform in Malaysia

According to Muhammad Reza Putera Lesmana (2021), internal perception is related to an individual's values or experiences, which can serve as a reference and influence their decision-making process. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Netflix has gained widespread popularity as a preferred platform for online streaming of films and TV series. The experience of watching digital content has significantly shaped public perception regarding the usage of Netflix, particularly in terms of content regulation.

One of the key concerns regarding Netflix is content filtering, as it is easily accessible to audiences of all ages. Since Netflix offers a wide variety of films and TV series without strict censorship, there is a risk that inappropriate content may be viewed by the general public, particularly children. The lack of content moderation raises concerns about its suitability for younger audiences, as some films and series may contain themes that are not appropriate for children.

Additionally, Reza Putera Lesmana (2021) highlights that Netflix has the potential to influence viewers' perceptions through its multilingual subtitle options. The availability of subtitles in various languages allows audiences to learn foreign languages and understand the meaning of dialogues in films and TV series more effectively. This feature is particularly beneficial for children, who tend to absorb and learn new languages quickly through exposure to media. Even when watching foreign-language films or series, the presence of subtitles enhances their comprehension and facilitates language acquisition.

Thus, audience perception of Netflix is significantly influenced by its content accessibility and multilingual subtitles, particularly in terms of learning opportunities. For children and younger viewers, exposure to diverse linguistic content on Netflix can serve as an informal learning tool, allowing them to acquire new knowledge simply by watching films and TV series on the platform.

The Challenges of Netflix as a Streaming Platform in Malaysia

According to Haslina Mohamed Hassan and Mohd Azul Mohamad Salleh (2022), the internet has become an essential element in daily life for people of all backgrounds. However, weak internet connectivity remains a major challenge for users who rely on online applications, particularly Netflix. Since Netflix requires a high-speed internet connection for seamless streaming and content searches, slow or unstable connections can disrupt the viewing experience. This issue poses difficulties for users who wish to watch local and international films and TV series, as buffering and low-resolution streaming significantly affect their viewing experiences.

Another significant challenge associated with Netflix is subscription affordability. According to Nur Jannah Bukhari et al. (2021), the cost of Netflix subscription plans can be a barrier, especially for low-income users. Netflix offers different pricing tiers to accommodate various needs, with plans ranging from RM17 to RM55 and above, including Mobile, Basic, Standard, and Premium options. While some may find these prices reasonable, they can be considered expensive for users with limited financial resources.

However, Netflix's Premium plan allows users to share their subscription with friends or family, making it more cost-effective for those who opt for shared access. Despite this option, the financial burden of monthly subscription fees remains a challenge for many individuals, particularly those who must prioritize essential expenses over entertainment subscriptions.

Thus, internet connectivity issues and affordability constraints are key challenges for Netflix users in Malaysia. While Netflix continues to attract a large audience, its accessibility remains dependent on technological infrastructure and financial capability, which may limit its reach among certain groups of viewers.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach using interviews as the primary data collection method. A total of 10 informants were interviewed to explore whether Netflix has influenced audience perceptions and to understand the challenges faced by Malaysian viewers. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing for a diverse range of perspectives to be examined.

According to Syukr Abdul Hay Kamat (2022), qualitative research is a method that involves data filtering, interpretation, and analysis based on individual or group perspectives. It enables researchers to obtain unique insights through interviews and other forms of textual/content analysis, allowing for a deeper understanding of participants' varied interpretations and viewpoints.

Additionally, researches by Hennink and Kaiser (2021), as well as Creswell (1998), suggests that the appropriate number of informants for qualitative studies using interviews ranges from 9 to 17 individuals. In line with these recommendations, this study selected 10 Netflix users as informants, ensuring that data collection continued until data saturation was reached. Data saturation occurs when further interviews yield repetitive information, indicating that no new insights are emerging. In other words, the final informants reinforced previously gathered data rather than introducing novel perspectives. Upon completion of

data collection, thematic analysis was carried out, and all interview responses were transcribed verbatim to guarantee precision and accuracy in data interpretation.

Research Findings

Netflix is widely recognized as a streaming platform that provides a diverse selection of movies, TV shows, and other content for online viewing. With a Netflix subscription, users can access a vast library of titles across multiple genres, including films, TV series, documentaries, and Netflix Originals. The platform is accessible through various devices such as computers, smartphones, tablets, and internet-connected televisions, offering flexibility and convenience for its users.

The Perceptions Towards Netflix as a Streaming Platform in Malaysia

Netflix and Its Influence on Emotional Perception

From an emotional perspective, Informant 1 shares that Netflix has the ability to influence emotions, as watching films or series on the platform can help handle boredom and promote relaxation. The ability to engage in content that aligns with personal interests and hobbies contributes to an improved emotional state. Therefore, Informant 1 emphasizes that Netflix can positively impact one's emotions, especially when used as a source of entertainment that brings enjoyment and comfort.

Informant 1 added that Netflix is a highly popular application in Malaysia and is widely used by the public to watch a variety of films and TV series available on the platform. Similarly, Informant 10 believes that Netflix serves as a convenient platform that allows users to easily access their preferred content.

Additionally, Informant 10 highlights the importance of a high-speed internet connection, which is essential for ensuring smooth streaming and optimal video quality. A stable connection prevents buffering issues, allowing users to enjoy their favourite content without interruptions.

Netflix Strengthening Family Bonds

Both Informant 7 and Informant 9 expressed that Netflix offers numerous benefits for families, allowing them to spend quality time together by watching movies or TV series available on the platform. Watching content as a family provides an opportunity for bonding, relaxation, and shared entertainment experiences.

However, Informant 9 also noted that Netflix is not entirely suitable for young children, as certain content may require parental supervision. Without proper monitoring, children may be exposed to films or series that are not age-appropriate.

Informant 7 emphasized that Netflix allows parents to better manage their time and engage in meaningful interactions with their children through shared viewing experiences. In doing so, Netflix serves as a catalyst for strengthening family relationships by encouraging togetherness and mutual enjoyment.

From a family perspective, Informant 9 stated that they prefer watching movies or series that can be enjoyed collectively with family members. This shared experience fosters closer

relationships, reinforcing the idea that spending time together through entertainment strengthens familial bonds. Informant 9 also acknowledged that while Netflix offers a vast array of content, users have the ability to select and curate appropriate shows for their families.

For instance, Informant 9 prefers movies or TV series with general or family-friendly genres, ensuring that the content is suitable for all age groups and can be comfortably watched together. This highlights the importance of responsible content selection, allowing families to benefit from Netflix while ensuring that the content remains appropriate for all family members.

Netflix as a Platform for Expanding Knowledge

According to Informant 4, Netflix provides numerous benefits for society, allowing individuals to spend their leisure time with family and friends by watching movies or TV series available on the platform. However, despite its advantages, excessive viewing may lead to negative effects. Overindulgence in films or dramas could have unfavourable consequences, potentially affecting viewers' productivity and daily routines.

From an educational perspective, Informant 4 believes that Netflix contributes to knowledge expansion. While primarily known for its extensive collection of films and TV series, Netflix also offers a variety of documentaries that explore current issues and real-life events. These documentaries provide audiences with valuable insights into history, science, culture, politics, and global affairs, making Netflix a useful educational tool rather than just a source of entertainment.

Thus, Netflix serves as an informal learning platform, offering content that enhances awareness, critical thinking, and general knowledge. Its diverse range of informative content makes it a valuable resource for individuals seeking to broaden their understanding of the world while enjoying high-quality visual storytelling.

Netflix Providing Unlimited Entertainment Opportunities

Netflix has undeniably transformed societal lifestyles by offering unlimited entertainment. This view is supported by Informant 5, who believes that Netflix influences society in both positive and negative ways when it comes to watching films and TV series. Informant 5 also acknowledges that Netflix is a highly accessible streaming platform, available on multiple devices, allowing users to watch their preferred content anytime and anywhere. Furthermore, Informant 5 highlights Netflix's flexibility, which enables users to conveniently access the platform regardless of their location or time.

As a result, Netflix serves as a medium for relaxation and mental rejuvenation, allowing individuals to unwind by watching their favorite movies or series. Informant 5 further emphasizes that Netflix has changed people's perceptions of entertainment and lifestyle habits, as audiences now have the freedom to enjoy unlimited content tailored to their preferences.

This unlimited entertainment feature is particularly beneficial for young individuals, especially students who experience stress related to academic responsibilities. By providing an escape

through engaging content, Netflix helps individuals decompress and manage stress, making it an integral part of modern entertainment consumption.

Netflix as a Platform for Learning Foreign Languages

According to Informant 3, watching films and TV series on Netflix allows viewers to learn foreign languages. For example, as English is the primary language used in Netflix content, viewers, especially children, have the opportunity to improve their English proficiency through exposure to spoken dialogues and subtitles.

This perspective is further supported by Informant 3 and Informant 6, who agree that Netflix provides an effective medium for language learning. Netflix does not only offer content in Malay and English but also includes a wide range of languages from different countries, such as Indonesian, Korean, Chinese, Hindi, and many more. This extensive language diversity enables viewers to be exposed to various linguistic styles and cultural elements, helping them broaden their language skills.

Additionally, Informant 6, who is a parent, emphasizes that active engagement is key to effective language learning. Children benefit more when they interact with the content rather than just passively watching. For example, if children watch Malay-language films with English subtitles, they are more likely to develop better English language skills by associating spoken words with their written translations.

Therefore, the availability of multilingual subtitles on Netflix serves as a valuable language-learning tool, particularly for young viewers. It not only facilitates exposure to new languages but also enhances pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition, making Netflix a practical and enjoyable educational resource for language learning.

Netflix and the Use of Inappropriate Language

Public perception of Netflix can be analyzed from various perspectives, including concerns about language use in its content. Both Informant 2 and Informant 8 recognize Netflix as a widely popular streaming platform, valued for its convenience and accessibility, allowing users to watch their preferred movies and TV series with ease through various subscription plans.

However, Informant 2 and Informant 8 also express concerns regarding the lack of content filtering, particularly in terms of language use in films and series. Informant 2 argues that uncensored language in Netflix content may negatively influence audiences, especially children, who are highly impressionable and tend to mimic what they hear and see. This exposure may lead to the adoption of inappropriate speech patterns, as young viewers may unconsciously incorporate explicit or vulgar expressions into their daily conversations.

Similarly, Informant 8 highlights that subtitles in certain genres, such as thriller, revenge, and action films, often include coarse or inappropriate language. Some films or TV series within these genres contain explicit dialogue that may not align with societal norms, potentially influencing audiences to normalize the use of vulgar words in everyday conversations. This is a growing concern, especially for parents, who worry about their children picking up offensive language and integrating it into their speech.

Thus, the presence of unfiltered language in Netflix content raises ethical and social concerns, particularly in households with young viewers. While Netflix offers a wide variety of entertainment, the lack of strict content regulation regarding language use remains an issue that requires parental supervision and careful content selection to prevent negative influences on younger audiences.

Challenges of Netflix as a Streaming Platform in Malaysia

Network Connectivity Issues

Informants 3, 8, and 9 highlighted that streaming on Netflix presents challenges due to network connectivity issues. Informant 3 reported difficulties in accessing Netflix content due to the platform's high data requirements and the need for a fast internet connection. Residing in a rural area exacerbates this issue, resulting in poor streaming quality and frequent disruptions. Similarly, Informant 8 noted that despite subscribing to Netflix's most expensive plan, slow internet speeds hinder seamless viewing experiences. Thus, network limitations remain a significant challenge for Netflix users, particularly those in areas with inconsistent internet services.

Expensive Netflix Subscription Packages

Informants 2 and 7 expressed concerns regarding the high cost of Netflix subscriptions, particularly for young viewers and students. Although Netflix offers a budget-friendly plan at RM17 (RM18.90 as of January 31, 2025) per month, this mobile-only plan provides lower video quality. To enjoy uninterrupted, high-resolution content, users must subscribe to the Premium plan per month (RM62.90 as of January 31, 2025), which can be burdensome for individuals with limited financial resources. The premium pricing structure is influenced by infrastructure costs, market demand, and Netflix's strategic pricing, presenting an affordability challenge for many users.

Influence of Foreign Cultures

Certain Netflix films and series containing violence and unrestricted lifestyles may influence local audiences, particularly in Malaysia, where cultural and religious values differ. Informant 1 observed that exposure to action, crime, romance, thriller, and revenge genres could lead younger viewers to adopt foreign behaviors, which may conflict with traditional Malaysian values. Informant 6 added that excessive Netflix consumption could contribute to moral concerns, as many foreign-produced films promote lifestyles that may not align with local cultural norms.

Concerns About Unfiltered Content

Informants 5, 9, and 10 shared concerns about Netflix's lack of content filtering, particularly regarding its impact on viewers under 18. Unfiltered films and TV series expose young audiences to age-inappropriate content, often accessed without parental supervision. Informant 10 emphasized the importance of monitoring children's viewing habits, especially when content contains themes of drug use, crime, and violence. To mitigate potential negative influences, active parental supervision is crucial.

Use of Inappropriate Language and Behavior

Informant 4 noted that certain Netflix films and series feature explicit language that may influence daily speech habits, particularly among impressionable young viewers. Exposure to

action films that portray violent behavior raises concerns about the potential imitation of aggressive actions in real life. Regulating children's viewing habits and ensuring exposure to appropriate content is essential to mitigate these influences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides an in-depth exploration and understanding of the perceptions and challenges of Netflix in Malaysia, as outlined in the findings of this research. The exploration and understanding of these perceptions and challenges play a crucial role in shaping the future of creative content and the online streaming industry in Malaysia. By gaining deeper insights into audience perspectives on Netflix consumption, we can assess the extent to which this platform meets the needs of diverse viewers and whether it is perceived as a high-quality entertainment source. Taking into account these perspectives and expectations, collaboration between local filmmakers and streaming platforms can serve as an effective strategy to produce culturally relevant content that resonates with Malaysian audiences. This approach may further enhance Netflix's appeal and attract a broader and safer viewership within Malaysia.

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