

Netflix and Teenage Viewers: Analyzing Teenage Drama Market and the Marketing Methods of Netflix

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Abstract. With the hyper-speed development of the networks, online streaming is the future trend of watching films and TV series. Netflix, as one of the earliest streaming service companies, is indeed successful in the market. As the competition among online streaming companies is getting tougher, it is important to understand the market and marketing strategies. Against this background, this study aims to explore 1) the importance of developing and exploring the teenage drama market, 2) the benefits and possible problems of existing teenage drama, and 3) online and offline marketing methods used by Netflix targeting teenage audiences. Through literature search and case studies of existing teenage drama, it is indicated that teenagers learn from drama, which may imitate the behaviors of characters in the drama. Furthermore, there will be positive influences that lead to benefits for the growth of teenagers as they can learn to deal with things they may someday encounter. The findings also suggest that social media, which most teenagers use every day, is one of the best ways drama producers can access to those teenage audiences. Offline marketing is helpful in making direct interactions with potential audiences and can make audiences experience scenarios which make them feel more realistic. The findings may be helpful for companies in the industry to understand the market and audiences, also the marketing strategies to use.

Keywords: Netflix; Teenage viewers; Teenage drama; Marketing; Social media marketing.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, online streaming is the global trend that most people watch films and TV series online, and companies like Netflix are gaining more users. Netflix, a popular American subscription streaming service and production company, was established in 1997. In 2007, Netflix developed online streaming services and, in 2013, started making original programs and gaining significant numbers of subscribers. From the appearance of Netflix's original series, such as "House of Cards" and "Orange Is the New Black", they have gained large numbers of subscribers and raised revenue. However, as the past series mainly targeted adults, the adult user market of Video-on-demand (VOD) in the US is nearly saturated. Then in 2015, Netflix started to make programs about teenagers and has made some progress as they may seek that there are opportunities in the market for films or TV series that target teenagers. The strategies Netflix uses in the teenage market are both on the program content and the marketing.

According to Statista, 38% of young adult TV viewers aged 18 to 34 considered Netflix their default video service in the United States in 2022. This also showed the potential of the younger generation market. There is enormous potential in the teenage market, and there are previous research analyzing teenagers' habits, behaviors or the changes in people's TV or film-watching behaviors over time. For instance, the research, *Binge Watching on Internet Television Networks & Its Effects on Youth*, has studied one of the increasing behavior and trend among youth on Internet Television Networks (ITN) [1]. There are also some researchers using Netflix as a case to study either the company's success among youth audiences or its marketing methods of it in different countries. Some researchers also focus on particular teenage drama to analyze the company's role in highlighting some of the issues people are concerned about in teenagers, like bullying and sex. However, there are few pieces of research on Netflix's marketing methods and content relating to the teenage market. As the teenage market is the future, it is crucial to understand the group and what marketing methods are helpful. By analyzing the success of Netflix in the teenage market from angles of both the contents and genre of Netflix's drama, this study focuses on the success of the teenage drama of Netflix and

the trends of the industry's developments and the marketing methods of Netflix among the group and the teen viewers' views and responses to it. The results could be helpful for Netflix's future development or for other streaming service companies.

2. The importance of exploring the teenage drama market

In this era of hyper-speed internet development, there is indeed an increasing trend that traditional cable television and theatrical movies are gradually being replaced by emerging streaming media. People can easily watch and download videos or audios with their mobile phones, computers or other electronic devices through streaming services. As a result of the development of streaming media, there has been the emergence of streaming service companies that produce programs and licenses for their services. These companies, such as Netflix, Hulu, Amazon and Disney+, are now sharing the market against the old guard of Hollywood, broadcast television companies, and cable companies [2]. This Video-on-demand is this new form of video consumption, which is the digital distribution of movies or TV series through streaming technology and companies like Netflix [2]. The audiences can be grouped into different segments. Whilst in the past, the teenage segment of audiences was rarely getting noticed or focused on. Surely, there were dramas about teenagers or dramas with the main character, who is a teenager.

It is very important to explore and fulfill the teenage drama market with good programs. On the one hand, teenagers are in a state between children and adults; they are 'halfway matured', and many of them are in their rebellious period; without receiving appropriate and sufficient education, they may do things without thinking carefully, consequently leading to terrible results. However, due to their rebellion or negative feelings about the school, the teachers or parents, they sometimes choose to ignore their advice or teaching even if they knew that was right. They will rather choose to listen to and learn from people of the same age or to other things they have seen or heard, for instance, movies, television, interviews or speeches of celebrities. Hence, it is really important for the industry to produce more teenage drama to connect education with entertainment. The famous teenage drama *SKAM*'s production team defined their main mission as "trying to strengthen the self-esteem of 16-year-old girls through dismantling taboos, making them aware of interpersonal mechanisms and showing them the benefits of confronting their fears (Sundet)". As Andem, the leader of the team, says, "Fiction can be a good place to see how characters of the same age and in a similar environment act and argue or feel and fumble in their daily lives—and offer reassurance that other people are also experiencing challenges [2]." The success of *SKAM* proves how the public can empathize with the characters in the play and the massive impact it could have on the audience.

On the other hand, watching TV or movies is one of the most important parts of teenagers' relaxation to release pressure and get rid of the messes of academics or chaotic relationships. Viewing fantasy and unrealistic films or plays can bring audiences into a "new dimension" that they are unfamiliar with. In this kind of film like *Harry Potter*, people, especially adolescents, may get indulged in the magical world or fantasize about themselves as a student learning magic in Hogwarts or waiting for the owl to send them their admission notice letter from the school. Moreover, watching somebody else's story may give them ideas or inspirations about their own.

Furthermore, producing teenage drama that involves negative issues, for example, bullying, violence and premature sexual intercourse, could also have both negative and positive influences on teenagers. Due to teenagers' characteristics of imitation, some of them may try and act the same way as the characters in the play, especially actions or behaviors that seem to be more 'exciting'. Consequently, it may let them go astray. However, if the drama showed the right actions and solutions that the adolescents should have when they faced a similar situation and guided them in a positive direction, then there may be positive effects on society and may help some of them out of the situation. For instance, *13 Reasons Why* is an original series on Netflix about bullying among teenagers. In the series, one of the characters said that "when one indicates about it and shares the issue of being bullied, it becomes easier to solve the problem." It is very important for teenagers, specifically those in bad

situations be clear that it is OK not to be OK. The series also helped to question the Anti-Bullying Laws among teenagers at the college level and give a detailed inspection of different forms of bullying. A hidden aspect of *13 Reasons Why* is that a failure of anti-bullying laws could deepen the problem; in which overall, the series has a positive impact on teenagers by telling them what could be done [3]. It also affected the adults or parents to understand to listen without judging it, especially not the victim of the bullying.

3. Marketing and Developments of Netflix

3.1 Themes of Netflix's Program

Nowadays, increasing numbers of teen drama or drama that involves teenage issues are produced. In these dramas, there are many high-quality programs that people love. Many of these films or series are closely connected to issues faced by adolescents nowadays. For example, *Stranger Things*, *Sex Education* and *13 Reasons Why* are some of Netflix's famous TV series for teenagers in recent years.

3.1.1 Stranger Things

Stranger Things is a series about the mysteries that happened in Hawkins, a small Midwestern town in the 1980s, involving supernatural forces, secret experiments and a strange girl with a superpower. It is undoubtedly one of the most successful series on Netflix in the last ten years. From 2016 to 2022, Netflix produced 4 seasons of *Stranger Things* and gained a large fan base. As the second season was launched, there were 360 thousand audiences watching all episodes of the series in 24 hours, which is record-breaking [4]. The four seasons of the series have an average Tomatometer score of 92% and an average audience score of 90% on Rotten Tomatoes [5]. Also, 8.7 out of 10 on the IMDb, rating by 1.2 million users, and it is 19th place in the IMDb Charts of the most popular TV shows [6].

The scenarios of the *Stranger Things* are heartfelt but not overly melodramatic, mapping the life stories of teenagers as they grow up with their families and friends. The main characters learn how to get along with family members and friends better through their adventures. The story also shows how these children and teenagers deal with different things as the mysteries happen. Many critics think *Stranger Things* is not suitable for the teenage audience as it is a horror series. However, according to Lindsey Scott, who believes that the growing up of teenagers is as frightening as the monsters and themes in the series, *Stranger Things* is a horror genre series that is aimed primarily at teenage audiences, which they can learn the qualities such as trust, loyalty and courage from the main characters like Eleven [7].

3.1.2 Sex Education

Another well-known teenage series produced by Netflix recently is *Sex Education*, which is a British comedy-drama. The series follows the lives of students and people related to Morale Secondary School and focus on various dilemmas these people encountered. The main character of the series is a teenage boy Otis whose mother is a sex therapist. Its score on Rotten Tomatoes is 95% average Tomatometer and 92% average audience score. The critics' consensus on the website reads: "Bawdy, heartfelt, and surprisingly wise, *Sex Education* is a raucous romp through a group of teenagers whose sexual misadventures are so thoughtfully rendered, adults could learn a thing or two from them" [8]. Also, the IMDb rating of it is 8.4 out of 10 [9].

In the beginning, Otis feels inferior about being the son of a sex therapist, and he just wants to be an inconspicuous person at school. However, afterwards, he found that his knowledge and personality make him a good listener and adviser who can help others. Despite the theme and the title of the series being about 'sex', it is easy to find that the focus of the series is not only 'sex'. The series also focuses on the hormonal confusion and sexual exploration of adolescence, reflecting the physical and psychological dilemmas that contemporary teenagers are experiencing and, in a sense, with the intention of educational construction. There are many positive teachings *Sex Education* contains

about the sexual health issues that adolescents around the world are facing [10]. The series also shows some ways teenagers can deal with combat sexual harassment and cyberbullying, for example, by asking their friends, family, therapist or the authorities for help.

3.1.3 13 Reasons Why (Season 1)

As abovementioned, the series is about bullying among teenagers. “If you are listening, you are too late.” The story begins with the death of Hannah Baker, leaving behind 13 tapes that contain 13 reasons why she chose to commit suicide. The season has a 77% Tomatometer and 80% audience score on Rotten Tomatoes, one of the top critic reviews said: “Deftly intertwining past and present, the thirteen episodes are slow-burn-awful bombshells that, ultimately, expose both individuals’ and communities’ capacities for selfishness and cruelty” [11]. The IMDb rating for *13 Reasons Why* is 7.5 out of 10, rated by 292 thousand audiences [12].

No straw feels responsible until it crushes the camel. Sometimes people feel nothing for what they do or the jokes they make. However, once they find out that things, they have done are inappropriate, the damage may already happen. Thirteen people, from the boy she has a crush on to her friends and even her teacher and parents. Every one of them had the opportunity to do something to show concern or to help Hannah, but none of them did. People who are closest to her knocked her down completely. In the season, different kinds of bullying were shown, both physical and psychological. From watching the season, it may inform teenagers about the consequences of bullying and how they could deal with it.

3.2 Marketing Methods of Netflix

3.2.1 Online Marketing

Social media is one of the most important platforms for marketing that Netflix use. Especially among the teenage group who are the most frequent users of social media. Twitter, Instagram and YouTube are the social media that are most commonly used by teenagers, where they love to post, comment, share posts or pictures and watch videos. Another important function of social media is that people can follow celebrities, companies, brands or even strangers who have similar hobbies as them. People can access the latest social issues, organize events, expose recruitment announcements for a vacancy or search for job opportunities. On these platforms, information can be transferred rapidly through the platform. As the platform is where both parties gather around, the producers like Netflix and the consumers, bonds between them can be created more deeply, and as a result, there may be greater consumer loyalty as consumers may feel more concerned by the producers. On social media, viewers like to share their viewing habits, their feelings and feedback on the content; create humorous content about the film or television works; access more information and discuss it with other viewers; or engage with the production [13].

According to Statista, the number of social media users worldwide as of July 2022 have exceeded 4.7 billion, and TikTok is one of the most popular social media apps 23.8% of female and 17.9% of male aged 18-24 are user of the app. In the US, 67% of teenagers use TikTok, and 95% of teenagers use YouTube in 2022. Except for the video apps, Instagram and Snapchat are most frequently used by US teens; the usage of those teens for the two apps is 62% and 59%, respectively. Thus, social media marketing is one of the best ways to access their potential teenage audiences.

Netflix has frequently been hosting various social media-oriented events. In the premiere of the second season of *13 Reasons Why*, Netflix announced a Crisis Text Line for teenagers who are facing suicide, rape and bullying issues. This announcement has brought tremendous discussions on social media. As a result, it also brought more audiences to the series. Meanwhile, the success of *Stranger Things*, in addition to its compelling story and its accurate restoration of the elements of the 80s, is also a result of the boost of social media. The great word of mouth on social media is a key feature that made it become more popular at the beginning. Famous actress Reese Witherspoon excitedly expressed her favor for the series and the young actors on her social media after she watched the first season. Later in 2018, as the trailer of season 3 was released, the day became “Stranger Things Day”,

and fans on Twitter used the hashtag #StrangerThingsDay to discuss their favorite clips in the series and predict the story of the new season. This is a kind of viral marketing that exploits existing social networks by encouraging people to pass on messages about the product or brand to the people around them, who may then share them again. The fermenting influence on social media led to the show reaching 40.7 million accounts watching in the first four days since the show was launched, which is breaking Netflix records.

3.2.2 Offline Marketing

Major offline marketing methods include licensed products/co-branding products and pop-up experiences. Through offline marketing, audiences of the film or television show can get closer to the series they love, for example, costumes or dolls of a particular Intellectual Property (IP). One of the most well-known and successful brands for this is Disney. According to data from TitleMax in 2019, 8 of Disney's super IPs are in the 25 highest-grossing media franchises of all time, including *Winnie the Pooh*, *Micky Mouse*, *Star Wars* and *Disney Princess*. In the diagram Watt Disney drew of Disney's business model, the film studio is at the center, where all other elements such as music, merchandise licensing, Disneyland, and publications are around it. They first develop and produce a film with IP stories as the core, then launch it to the theaters and later sell it to streaming platforms. Secondly, Disney will add this new IP character to Disneyland and attract audiences who like the film to visit. Thirdly, through franchising, publishing and retailing products related to the IP, they maximize the profit of the IP, which at the same time boosts the popularity of the IP that extends its life of the IP.

Netflix is also working on licensed products or co-branding products for their own IPs. Take *Stranger Things* as an example. *Stranger Things* is one of the few series that have a huge range of co-branding products, from clothing, shoes, and watches to toys, cameras, guitars and even makeup. Co-branding with famous brands like Vans and MAC helps to introduce *Stranger Things* to the public and access more potential viewers. For instance, a famous Chinese actor once wore the co-branding shoes of *Stranger Things* and Vans, and his fans followed him to buy the same shoes. Consequently, many of these fans started to watch *Stranger Things*. This celebrity effect is a type of herding effect, which refers to the behaviors of people, especially teenagers liking to follow people around them, celebrities they like or the fashion trend. Apart from the co-branding products, Netflix was also developing Netflix Shop and entered the e-commercial market for the first time. All products of the Netflix Shop are licensed products of Netflix's IP.

Just a day before the fourth season of *Stranger Things* is officially released, Netflix celebrated its debut of it by lighting up fifteen iconic buildings in fourteen countries and regions around the world, including the Empire State Building in New York, Piazza del Duomo in Milan, and Shibuya Crossroads in Tokyo, to name a few. This high-key celebration attracted the fans of *Stranger Things* to visit the spot; it also attracted the attention of many passers-by. As many photos are taken and posted online, the offline activity of the series also increased its online popularity of it. Many pop-up experience stores are also organized around the world. For example, on 26th October 2022, fans of *Stranger Things* for a limited-time pop-up store immersed visitors in a 'Stranger Things' adventure and stepped inside the scenes in the series [14]. By visiting the store, the fans of the series can have an immersive and interactive experience. Furthermore, in 2018 Universal Studios announced that it was working with Netflix to bring the world of *Stranger Things* to 3 theme lands of Universal Studio, which would be one of the mazes featured in 2018's Halloween Horror Nights. This horror-themed maze will be both surprise and scary for the fans as they recreate the town of Hawkins, including the lab, Byers' home and the woods. Many people got to know about the series after they went to the maze in Universal Studios and posted their experiences of going to the *Stranger Things* themed maze, which further boosted the popularity of the series online.

4. Suggestions

Through the analysis of the existing teenage drama market and the marketing methods used by Netflix, there are some suggestions for both the industry and Netflix. For the themes or contents of

those teenage dramas, it would be a great method to collect feedback and communicate with the audiences to listen to some of their opinions. This could bring the producer ideas from different aspects and may give them inspirations and help them to build a bond with the viewers. Trying to seek the views of the teen actors by discussing the scripts and contents with them is also a great way to help improve the drama. This is because these actors know much better about the teenagers' behaviors, including their reactions to things and how they may deal with different people, so having discussions with them may make the drama much more realistic to audiences. Then for the marketing, developing the fans community of the series on social media; as a result, building up the place where audiences can express their point of view and communicate different ideas and expectations about the series can help to retain existing viewers and attract new viewers. Exchanging information is the nature of social media, which people love to share things they like with others. As a result, more discussions are taking place online. The more people will access to know about the series. Moreover, by trying to use transmedia narrative to disperse across different media platforms as the intermediaries between the fictional universe and the viewer and, as a result, develop relationships with the audiences like *SKAM* [15]. Through creating accounts for the virtual characters to make it 'closer' to the audiences, can help to make them more realistic. People can therefore see the life of them from different perspectives on different platforms, and by combining stories from different platforms, the drama would seem to be more solid.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to determine the current market of drama that mainly targets teenage audiences and the online streaming service company Netflix since watching films and TV shows online is becoming more and more popular. Statistics show that the younger generation is indeed the potential future consumers of the market. Hence, by analyzing the existing market and Netflix as a model and focusing on the developments of the industry, the results may be influential. The findings indicate that teenagers learn things from media, especially from films and television; they can see how characters at their age interact with different things and people and therefore influenced by the views and behaviors in it. The research has also shown that through drama, positive impacts will be brought to the growth of teenagers mentally, as they can also learn to deal with issues, they could encounter someday that may hurt them. It can also help teenagers to understand different things as well as develop their empathy to other people. The other major finding was that social media is used by teenagers most frequently. It is one of the best ways to access teenage audiences from social media marketing because of the nature of social media and people's habits of using it to share things and the herding effects. Furthermore, offline marketing, with co-branding and licensed products, as well as pop-up stores, helps the series to join people's everyday life and allows people to experience scenarios in the series in person.

This study has several limitations, including that only three of the existing Netflix series are being analyzed. This may result in a biased sampling profile, which leads to relatively low generalizability. However, since the teenage drama market is still developing, the existing drama that can be used are limited. Another concern about the finding was that there was a lack of existing research on the topic, making the literature research of the study less precise than the aims. The limit of the time for the study also made it not available to collect primary surveys of the market. Thus, future research on the topic should be undertaken to explore further the impacts films and television could have on teenagers. Also, to investigate the preferences of teenagers through primary research.

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