



POWER OF AUTHENTIC VOICES: EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT (UGC) IN SHAPING FILM VIEWERSHIP CHOICES ON NETFLIX

Adaobi Olivia Okeke (Ph.D.)¹, Chibuike Julius Nwosu (Ph.D.)²,

Lilian Chinazom Ajagu³, and Elozona Chinwe Okpala⁴

¹Department of Mass Communication, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Email: findolivia2k3@gmail.com

²Department of Mass Communication, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Email: nwosujuliusc@yahoo.com

³Department of Mass Communication, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Email: lilian_iroha@yahoo.com

⁴Department of Mass Communication, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Email: elozonaokpala5@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT: *In this digital age and with the rise of streaming services, user generated content (UGC) has revolutionized the way audiences engage with and consume films. Netflix, with its vast user base and personalized content has been proven by studies to be one of the leading platforms for film discovery with over 220 million subscribers. However, the factors influencing viewers' film choices on Netflix seem unclear. This study therefore examined the impact of authentic voices, embodied in user generated content on film viewership choices on Netflix shedding light on the transformative power of authentic voices in shaping audience engagement with film. Utilizing the quantitative research design specifically employing the survey method, the study sought the opinions of undergraduates in Anambra State. The study focuses on undergraduates as a result of the fact that studies have proven that Nigerian youths make up more than half of the subscribers to the Netflix platform and these undergraduates make up this youth population. Anchored on the Social Influence Theory, the study examined the extent to which UGC affects audience film choices on Netflix and the factors contributing to UGC's perceived credibility. Findings indicated that a significant majority of these youths rely on peer reviews over Netflix's algorithmic suggestions with detailed reviews being the most credible. Again, it was also revealed that UGC plays a critical role in shaping both the frequency and duration of film watching as well as expanding genre preferences. While UGC satisfies the audiences' need for relatable and trust worthy recommendations, the study discovered that the reliance on consensus-driven content might limit their exposure to diverse narratives. Based on these findings, the study recommended amongst others that the Netflix platform should collaborate with UGC creators to promote original content and also analyze UGC sentiment and feedback to improve content offerings to its film audience.*

KEYWORDS: Authentic Voices, Film Viewership, Netflix, User-Generated Content.



INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian film industry popularly known as Nollywood, has undergone significant transformations since its inception in the 1960s. From its humble beginnings as a low budget, straight-to-video industry to its current status as a global player, Nollywood has consistently demonstrated its resilience and adaptability. The advent of the digital age has brought about a profound transformation on how we consume films. The rise of streaming services, particularly Netflix has democratized access to a vast library of content, empowering audiences to make informed viewing choices. However, beneath the surface of algorithm-driven recommendations lies a more profound influence: the power of authentic voices. User generated content (UGC)-reviews, ratings and recommendations from fellow viewers has emerged as a significant driver of film viewership choices on Netflix. The authentic voices of users, rather than solely relying on critic reviews or studio marketing, now play a vital role in shaping viewing decisions.

In this vast content library, amidst hundreds of options, users are journeying through their viewing requirement to find personalized and curated experiences something that is extremely powered by user generated content or UGC annotations provided in form of reviews/ratings/recommendation by fellow subscribers (Sharma 2018). The film is heavily informed by these peer-generated insights personal preferences of Netflix viewers and that acts on their viewing behavior (Barka, Frey, Graw 2019)

This study is motivated by the fact that UGC has become a primary mode of entertainment consumption. Though the old modes of promotion and distribution continue to be valid, with UGC now anyone can have a say and that revision in how peers appear carries great significance(Wayne 2023).

The focus of this study is to examine the impact made by user- generated content on film selection as related (in)to Netflix among Nigerian university undergraduates in Anambra state during active subscription. The study examined the effect of user-generated content on Netflix films selection among active subscribers in Anambra state universities, Nigeria. The study aimed to explore how user-generated content might influence viewing decisions on this popular streaming service. The emergence of a new era in film consumption began with the establishment of Netflix in 1997. Initially, it operated as a DVD-by-mail service in the United States, signifying the start of a significant shift in how individuals accessed and enjoyed film content (Frey 2021). This pioneering method of film distribution set the stage for what would evolve into a worldwide transformation in media consumption. Expanding upon this initial concept, Netflix launched its streaming service in 2007, which fundamentally changed the way viewers engage with movies and TV shows (Lobato, 2019). However, this digital transformation did not quickly connect with every part of the world. In Nigeria and various other African nations, the uptake of streaming services was hindered by infrastructural issues and restricted internet access (Bright & Hruby, 2015). Alongside the rise of streaming platforms, another major change was transforming the media landscape: the rise of user-generated content (UGC). The explosion of social media platforms in the mid-2000s led to a new way of sharing information and forming opinions. Sites like IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes allowed users to rate and review films, introducing a democratic element to the film criticism landscape (Bore, 2017). This move towards UGC represented a substantial shift away from the conventional top-down approach to film criticism and recommendations.



As Netflix broadened its global presence, it acknowledged the significance of user-generated content (UGC) and began integrating user ratings and reviews into its platform. This incorporation of UGC within the Netflix ecosystem established a distinct combination of algorithm-based recommendations and suggestions from peers, providing subscribers with a more sophisticated method for selecting films (Gomez-Urbe & Hunt, 2018).

The introduction of Netflix to Nigeria in 2016 marked a pivotal moment in the country's digital media landscape. This entry into the Nigerian market coincided with a period of rapid digital transformation in the country. With increasing internet penetration and smartphone adoption, Nigeria was poised for a revolution in media consumption habits (NCC, 2021). This confluence of factors makes Nigeria, and particularly its youth population, an intriguing subject for studying the impact of UGC on film choices in the context of global streaming platforms.

Within this rapidly evolving digital ecosystem, undergraduate students emerge as a particularly relevant demographic for study. The focus on University undergraduates is especially pertinent for several reasons. Firstly, as digital natives, these undergraduates, typically aged 18-25, have grown up with technology and are more likely to adopt new platforms like Netflix (Macdonald & Smith 2018). Their high engagement with digital media makes them prime subjects for examining the influence of UGC on film choices.

Moreover, university undergraduates often act as trendsetters and influencers within their social circles, potentially amplifying the impact of their choices and opinions on others (Ngene 2019). This social influence, combined with their typically constrained budgets, may make them more reliant on UGC to make informed decisions about their entertainment choices. The unique cultural context of Anambra State, provides an opportunity to examine how Nigerian undergraduates interact with global platforms like Netflix while maintaining connections to local content and culture. This interplay between global and local influences is a crucial aspect of media consumption in the age of digital globalization (Bore 2017).

When comparing Nigerian undergraduates to their counterparts in other countries, both similarities and differences emerge. While Nigerian students share the tech-savviness and eagerness to engage with global content characteristic of their generation worldwide, they face unique challenges. These may include less reliable internet infrastructure and potentially higher relative costs for streaming services (Abubakar, Saidin & Ahlan 2019). Again, Nigerian students might have a stronger connection to local Nollywood content, which could influence their interaction with and expectations from a platform like Netflix (Akpan & Eteng, 2018).

Significantly, the rapid digital transformation occurring in Nigeria necessitates a deeper understanding of how these changes affect media consumption habits. As global platforms like Netflix become more prevalent, it's essential to examine how they interact with local content preferences and cultural values (Flew, 2018).



Statement of the Problem

Studies have proven the media consumption landscape has undergone a seismic shift with the advent of streaming platforms, with Netflix leading the chart in transforming how people access and choose content. This transformation is particularly evident among Nigerian youths, especially university undergraduates who are often early adopters of digital technologies (Abubakar, Saidin & Ahlan 2019). However, the abundance of content on these platforms has given rise to a phenomenon known as the paradox of choice, where users find themselves overwhelmed by the sheer number of options available. Despite the growing importance of user-generated content (UGC) in shaping consumer decisions, there is a lack of understanding about its influence on film viewership on Netflix. The rapid rise of social media platforms and online review sites has created an information overload, making it challenging for viewers to discern credible recommendations. Furthermore, Netflix's algorithm-driven recommendation system, while effective, may prioritize popularity over personalized preferences. The study therefore sought to investigate the influence of UGC on film viewership choices on Netflix exploring its potential to enhance user engagement, content discovery and platform success.

Research Objectives

This general objective of the study focuses on investigating the effectiveness of User generated content in shaping film choices on Netflix. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. To assess the extent to which University undergraduates rely on user-generated content in their film selection process on Netflix.
2. To identify the factors that influence the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of user-generated content among University undergraduates who use Netflix.
3. To examine the influence of user-generated content on the viewing habits of Nnamdi Azikiwe University undergraduates on Netflix.
4. To determine how user-generated content influences the discovery of new films and genres among Nnamdi Azikiwe University undergraduates on Netflix.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do University undergraduates rely on user-generated content (e.g., reviews, ratings, recommendations) when selecting films to watch on Netflix?
2. What factors contribute to the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of user-generated content among University undergraduates who use Netflix?
3. How does exposure to user-generated content on Netflix influence the viewing habits (e.g., frequency, duration, genre preferences) of University undergraduates?
4. In what ways does user-generated content on Netflix impact the discovery of new films and genres among University undergraduates?



LITERATURE REVIEW

User generated content (UGC): An Overview

User-generated content (UGC) refers to any form of content created and shared by end-users of digital platforms, rather than by professional creators or the platforms themselves (Mayrhofer, 2020). This concept encompasses a wide range of media, including text, images, videos, reviews, and audio content. UGC has become a significant force in the digital landscape, transforming how information is produced, consumed, and disseminated across various online channels. Types of UGC include social media posts, product reviews, blog comments, forum discussions, wikis, podcasts, and video content on platforms like YouTube and TikTok. The authenticity and reliability of UGC often make it more engaging and trustworthy to consumers compared to traditional branded content (Mayrhofer, 2020).

UGC plays a crucial role across multiple industries, particularly in e-commerce, tourism, and entertainment. For example, in the travel industry, user-generated reviews and photos on platforms like TripAdvisor significantly influence travelers' decision-making processes (Pajkovic, 2020). In e-commerce, customer product reviews and ratings have become essential factors in purchase decisions, with studies showing that UGC can increase conversion rates and sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2019). Brands increasingly leverage UGC in their marketing strategies, encouraging customers to share their experiences and incorporating this content into their campaigns. This approach not only provides authentic testimonials but also fosters a sense of community and engagement around the brand (Alvin 2020).

In the entertainment industry particularly the film marketing scenario, User-generated content (UGC) has become increasingly influential in shaping film choices for audiences worldwide. This phenomenon has been driven by the rise of social media platforms, review aggregators, and online communities dedicated to discussing and analyzing cinema. The impact of UGC on film selection and consumption patterns has been a subject of significant research and discussion in recent years.

One of the primary ways UGC influences film choices is through online reviews and ratings. Platforms like IMDb, Rotten Tomatoes, and Letterboxd allow users to share their opinions and experiences with films, creating a vast repository of crowd-sourced information. These platforms have become go-to resources for many moviegoers when deciding what to watch. A study published in the Journal of Marketing Research found that online user reviews have a significant impact on box office performance, particularly for independent and lesser-known films (Dellarocas, 2020).

Social media platforms have also played a crucial role in amplifying the influence of UGC on film choices. Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have become breeding grounds for viral movie-related content, from memes and fan theories to behind-the-scenes glimpses and actor interviews. This content often generates buzz and anticipation for upcoming releases or revives interest in older films. Research published in the International Journal of Research in Marketing suggests that positive social media sentiment can boost box office revenues and extend a film's theatrical run (Liu, 2022).

The rise of video-sharing platforms like YouTube has given birth to a new generation of film critics and analysts. These content creators, often operating independently, produce in-depth



reviews, essays, and video essays that can shape audience perceptions and expectations of films. Some of these creators have amassed large followings and significant influence within certain film communities. A study in the journal *New Media & Society* explored how YouTube film criticism has altered traditional power dynamics in film discourse and influenced audience reception (Smith, 2023).

Online fan communities and forums have also become important spaces for UGC that shapes film choices. Platforms like Reddit's r/movies or dedicated fan sites for specific franchises or genres allow users to engage in deep discussions, share recommendations, and collectively build excitement or skepticism around films. These communities can have a notable impact on word-of-mouth marketing and can even influence studio decisions regarding sequels, casting, or creative directions (Johnson, 2021).

The influence of UGC extends beyond just helping audiences choose which films to watch; it can also affect how films are experienced and interpreted. Fan theories, analysis videos, and discussion threads can enrich viewers' understanding and appreciation of films, encouraging repeat viewings or exploration of similar works. This phenomenon has been particularly evident in the case of complex or ambiguous films that invite multiple interpretations (Brown, 2023).

However, the reliance on UGC for film choices is not without its challenges. Issues of review bombing, where groups coordinate to flood platforms with negative reviews for various reasons unrelated to a film's quality, have become increasingly prevalent. This has led to platforms implementing measures to combat such practices and maintain the integrity of user ratings (Chen, 2024).

The film industry has taken notice of the power of UGC in shaping audience choices and has begun to incorporate strategies to leverage this trend. Many studios now actively encourage fans to create and share content related to their films, recognizing the marketing potential of organic, user-driven buzz. Some have even integrated UGC directly into their promotional campaigns, featuring fan art or reactions in official marketing materials (Thompson, 2023).

As we look to the future, the role of UGC in shaping film choices is likely to continue evolving. With the advancement of AI and machine learning technologies, we may see more sophisticated recommendation systems that can analyze and interpret UGC to provide highly personalized film suggestions. Additionally, as virtual and augmented reality technologies become more prevalent, new forms of immersive, user-generated film-related content may emerge, further influencing how audiences discover and engage with cinema (Davis & Wilson, 2024).

Netflix: An Overview

Netflix was founded in 1997 by Reed Hastings and Marc Randolph as a DVD-by-mail rental service in the United States. The company's initial business model was a response to the inconvenience and late fees associated with traditional video rental stores (Keating, 2019). However, Netflix's true disruption of the entertainment industry began in 2007 when it introduced streaming services, allowing subscribers to watch content instantly over the internet (Jenner, 2018). The shift to streaming marked the beginning of Netflix's transformation from a content distributor to a content creator. In 2013, Netflix launched its first original series, "House of Cards," signaling its entry into content production (Lobato,



2019). This move exemplified the concept of media convergence, blurring the lines between content producers and distributors (Jenkins, 2020). Netflix's global expansion has been rapid and far-reaching. By 2016, the service was available in over 190 countries including African countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon and South Africa, excluding only China, North Korea, Syria, and Crimea due to U.S. government restrictions (Lobato, 2019). This expansion has not been without challenges, particularly in terms of content localization and navigating different regulatory environments.

The entry of Netflix into African markets, including Nigeria, has had significant implications for local film industries and cultural production. Oyewole (2021) argues that while Netflix's investment in Nigerian content (Nollywood) has provided new opportunities for filmmakers, it also raises concerns about cultural imperialism and the potential homogenization of content to appeal to a global audience. In the same vein, Iroko TV founder Jason Njoku (2020) provides insights into the challenges and opportunities presented by Netflix's entry into the Nigerian market. He suggests that while Netflix's presence has raised production standards and increased global visibility for Nollywood, it has also intensified competition for local streaming services. On the other hand, Mboti (2020) examines the impact of Netflix in South Africa, highlighting how the platform has both disrupted traditional broadcasting models and provided new avenues for African storytelling. However, he also notes the persisting digital divide in many African countries, which limits access to streaming services.

Nevertheless, Netflix has revolutionized the entertainment industry by providing a streaming service that offers a vast array of content to subscribers worldwide. The platform's success is built upon three key pillars: its extensive content library, user-friendly interface, and sophisticated recommendation algorithm. These components work in synergy to create a personalized and engaging viewing experience for each user (Gomez-Urbe & Hunt, 2019).

Nigerian Youths and their engagement with Films on Netflix

Nigerian youths' engagement with films on Netflix is a complex phenomenon influenced by various factors. A study by Adejuwon (2020) found that 75% of Nigerian youths prefer international films on Netflix, with a significant portion of them watching films from the United States, United Kingdom, and India. This preference can be attributed to the globalized nature of Nigerian youth culture, which is shaped by social media, internet penetration, and urbanization (Obiaya, 2017). The diversity of content on Netflix is a significant draw for Nigerian youths. The platform offers a wide range of films, including Hollywood blockbusters, independent films, and documentaries. This variety caters to the diverse interests and tastes of Nigerian youths, who are looking for content that resonates with their experiences and aspirations (Agu, 2020). Moreover, Netflix's user-friendly interface and personalized recommendations make it easy for users to discover new content and explore different genres and themes.

Social identity plays a crucial role in Nigerian youths' engagement with films on Netflix. According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), individuals derive a sense of belonging and identity from group memberships, including fan communities. Nigerian youths who identify as Netflix users share a common interest and bond over their love for films, creating a sense of community and social identity. This social identity is reinforced through online discussions, social media groups, and fan communities, where Nigerian youths share their thoughts, opinions, and reviews of films.



However, there are concerns about the impact of Netflix on Nigerian youths' cultural identity and local film industry. Some argue that the dominance of international films on Netflix may lead to cultural homogenization and the erosion of traditional Nigerian values (Obiaya, 2017). Others worry that the popularity of Netflix may stifle the growth of the Nigerian film industry, known as Nollywood, which is struggling to compete with the globalized content on Netflix (Adejuwon, 2020).

To mitigate these concerns, Netflix has taken steps to promote Nigerian content and support the local film industry. The platform has partnered with Nigerian producers and directors to produce original content, such as films and series that showcase Nigerian stories and talent. This move has been welcomed by Nigerian youths, who are eager to see more local content on the platform.

Viewers Characteristics; Demographic, Viewing Habits, Tech-savviness and Trust in UGC

Viewer characteristics and user-generated content (UGC) engagement encompasses several key factors that influence how individuals interact with and perceive UGC. Demographic factors play a significant role in shaping UGC consumption patterns. Age, for instance, has been shown to correlate with different content preferences and platform usage habits (Perrin, 2018). Younger viewers, particularly those in the Millennial and Gen Z cohorts, are more likely to actively engage with UGC, creating, sharing, and commenting on content across various platforms (Khan, 2019). Gender also impacts content preferences, with some studies suggesting that male and female viewers may gravitate towards different types of UGC (Thelwall & Vis, 2020). Education level is another crucial demographic factor, as it can influence a viewer's ability to critically evaluate UGC and discern its credibility (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2018).

Viewing habits form another essential component of the framework. The frequency of online video consumption has been positively correlated with higher levels of UGC engagement (O'Neil, 2018). Viewers who regularly consume online video content are more likely to interact with UGC, whether through likes, comments, or shares. Additionally, the specific platforms and content types that viewers prefer can shape their exposure to different forms of UGC. For example, frequent YouTube users may encounter a wider variety of user-created videos compared to those who primarily use professional streaming services (Burgess & Green, 2018).

Tech-savviness is a critical factor in determining how effectively viewers can navigate and interact with UGC platforms. Digital literacy, which encompasses skills such as online information searching, content creation, and privacy management, significantly impacts a user's ability to engage with UGC meaningfully (Livingstone, 2019). Furthermore, device usage patterns influence the accessibility and consumption of UGC. Mobile users, for instance, may have different engagement patterns compared to those who primarily access content on desktop computers (Cha & Chan-Olmsted, 2019).

Trust in UGC is a complex factor that can greatly influence viewer engagement. Perceived authenticity of UGC plays a crucial role in determining whether viewers will engage with and share content (Ngene 2018). Users who perceive UGC as more authentic and relatable than professionally produced content may be more likely to engage with it actively. Additionally,



viewers' previous experiences with UGC can shape their attitudes towards future consumption. Positive experiences may lead to increased trust and engagement, while negative experiences could result in skepticism and reduced interaction (Mir & Rehman, 2019). However, it's important to note that these factors are often interconnected and can influence each other. For example, a viewer's age might affect their tech-savviness, which in turn could impact their viewing habits and trust in UGC. For instance, you cannot compare a typical African teenager viewing habits with that of a US teenager, same as comparing the viewing habits of a Young adult in a Nigerian university with a typical African parents (Ngene 2020).

Decision Making Process in UGC for Film Selection on Netflix Users

The decision-making process for Netflix users influenced by user-generated content (UGC) involves discovering films through reviews, ratings, and recommendations from other users. UGC helps users evaluate options by considering others' experiences and aligning them with their personal preferences. Trust in the authenticity of reviews also plays a crucial role in shaping decisions. Ultimately, positive feedback or recommendations can encourage users to choose a film, while negative reviews may lead them to avoid it, highlighting the strong impact of UGC on film selection.

Social Media Exploration

The role of social media in the film selection process for Netflix users has become increasingly significant in recent years. As Gong & Parker (2018) point out, platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook serve as initial touchpoints for users seeking information about trending or recommended films. This phenomenon can be understood through the lens of the "two-step flow of communication" theory proposed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (2021), where opinion leaders on social media act as intermediaries between mass media and the general public. Jenkins (2018) expand on this concept with their theory of "spreadable media," arguing that social media users actively shape and redistribute content, creating a participatory culture around film discussions. This participatory aspect is particularly relevant to Netflix users, who often engage in what Kozinets, (2020) term "electronic word-of-mouth" (eWOM) by sharing their viewing experiences and recommendations online. Moreover, the use of hashtags and following influencers on these platforms aligns with what Marwick and boyd (2021) describe as "networked audiences," where users curate their information sources based on perceived expertise and relevance. This curation process is not passive but rather an active form of engagement that shapes users' perceptions and expectations of films before they even access the Netflix platform.

Online Review Aggregation

The reliance on online review aggregators like IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes represents a shift in how audiences evaluate film quality. Hennig-Thurau & Chan (2019) highlight the importance of these platforms in providing a comprehensive overview of critical and audience reception. This phenomenon can be analyzed through the framework of "collective intelligence" proposed by Lévy (2017), where the aggregation of diverse opinions leads to a more informed decision-making process. Chakravarty, Hyne & Chau (2020) further argue that online reviews serve as quality signals, particularly for experience goods like films. Their research suggests that the influence of these aggregated reviews is moderated by individual



factors such as genre preferences and prior experiences with similar content. This understanding of review impact is crucial when considering the diverse student population at institutions like UNIZIK.

Furthermore, the use of local Nigerian film review sites introduces an element of cultural specificity to the information search process. This aligns with what Straubhaar (2013) terms "cultural proximity," suggesting that audiences tend to prefer content that is closer to their own cultural context. The integration of local review sources alongside global platforms like IMDb reflects the increasingly globalized nature of media consumption in the digital age.

Peer Recommendations

The significance of peer recommendations in the film selection process underscores the enduring importance of interpersonal communication in the digital age. Ngene's (2020) observations about the value placed on word-of-mouth information among University undergraduates aligns with classic communication theories such as the "diffusion of innovations" model proposed by Rogers (2022). In this context, early adopters among the student population play a crucial role in influencing the viewing choices of their peers. Katz and Lazarsfeld's (2018) concept of "personal influence" remains relevant here, as face-to-face interactions continue to hold significant sway in shaping media choices. However, this traditional model is now complemented by what Baym (2015) describes as "networked collectivism," where online and offline social networks intersect and influence each other. The perceived authenticity and relevance of peer recommendations can be understood through the lens of "homophily" (McPherson, 2017), which suggests that individuals are more likely to trust and be influenced by those who share similar characteristics or experiences. In a scene of University undergraduates, this shared experience of being students in the same institution creates a strong basis for trust in peer recommendations. Moreover, the interplay between online and offline peer recommendations reflects what Jenkins (2016) terms "convergence culture," where old and new media forms coexist and interact in complex ways. This convergence is particularly evident in how students blend face-to-face discussions with online interactions to form their opinions about Netflix content.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Uses and Gratifications theory. This is a communication theory that explains how people actively seek out media content to satisfy their needs and desires. This theory posits that audiences are not passive recipients of media messages, but rather active participants who use media to fulfill their own purposes (Kim & Lee, 2016). In recent years, UGT has been applied to various media contexts, including social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), online video streaming (Kim & Lee, 2015), and even virtual reality (Lee & Kim, 2020).

This study aligns well with UGT for several reasons:

1. **Active Audience:** UGT's emphasis on the active role of the audience is crucial here. Netflix users, particularly undergraduates, actively seek and share user-generated content (UGC) such as reviews, ratings, and recommendations. This content influences their film choices based on the gratifications they seek.



2. Cognitive and Affective Gratifications: Netflix users often look for UGC to gain information about films (cognitive gratification) and to find content that matches their emotional and aesthetic preferences (affective gratification). Understanding these motivations helps in analyzing how effective UGC is in influencing their choices.
3. Social Integrative Needs: UGC fosters a sense of community among Netflix users. Undergraduates, in particular, may rely on peer recommendations and social media discussions to make viewing decisions, fulfilling their social integrative needs.
4. Personal Integrative Needs: For some users, contributing to UGC can enhance their status and credibility among peers, making them feel more integrated within their social circles.
5. Tension Release: The escapism and relaxation offered by films are significant motivations for Netflix users. UGC helps users find films that meet these needs effectively.

In essence, the Uses and Gratification Theory offers a robust framework for understanding the motivations behind Netflix users' reliance on UGC for making film choices.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study was designed as a survey. The undergraduate students of the two universities that offer undergraduate programmes in Anambra state; Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Uli, a state university and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, a federal university respectively make up the population of study. Undergraduates were chosen as the respondents for this study because of their heavy usage of social media in accessing information which has been proven by media scholars. The population of Unizik undergraduates sourced from the university registry is 36,650 while that of COOU undergraduate students according to the university registry is 16,700. The totality of both populations of the respondents is 53,350.

Sample size and Sample technique

The sample size for the survey was decided by referring to sample sizes for various population ranges as worked out by krejcie and Morgan (1970). The sample sizes are seen in the table below;

Populations and sample sizes at 5% Error Margin, 95% Confidence Level

Population Size	Size
100	80
500	217
1,000	278
10,000	370
100,000	383
500,000	384
1 million and above	384



Therefore, since this study population is 53,350, the researcher settled for 370 as the sample size. Thus, the sample size of 370 is adopted at 5% error margin and 95% percent confidence level. The sample selection involved a multi-stage procedure. In other to ensure spread, four faculties were randomly selected through a lucky dip from each of the universities as follows: Nnamdi Azikiwe University (Management Sciences, Education, Arts and Engineering Faculties) and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu (Education, Basic medical sciences, Physical sciences and Enviromental sciences). At the second stage, two departments were randomly selected from each faculty as follows; Unizik Faculty of Management sciences (Public administration and Accountancy) Unizik Faculty of Education (Educational Management and Policy and Early Childhood) Unizik Faculty of Arts (Linguistics and Religion) Unizik Faculty of Engineering (Civil Engineering and Mechanical Engineering).COOU Faculty of Education (Education Foundation and Library & Information science) COOU Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences(Anatomy and Physiology) COOU Faculty of Physical Sciences (Computer Science and Mathematics) COOU Faculty of Enviromental Sciences (Urban& Regional Planning and Architecture). The third stage, the researcher randomly selected a predetermined number of respondents from each of the departments mentioned above. The number selected from each department is based on the number of sample allotted to each university as determined using the following formula to ensure proportionality:

$$R = \frac{I \times S}{N}$$

Where R=number of respondents allotted to an institution

I=Student population of the institution

N=Total population of the two institutions sampled

S=Sample size

Nnamdi Azikiwe University; $\frac{34,650 \times 370}{53,350} = 240$

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu; $\frac{16,700 \times 370}{53,350} = 116$

Hence, 230 students were randomly selected from Nnamdi Azikiwe University and 116 students selected from Chukwemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University totaling 355 undergraduate students. The selection is (as far as mathematically possible) distributed proportionally across the various faculties and departments selected.

The data collection instrument is questionnaire. The questionnaire contains only structured questions framed to generate quantitative data in line with the variables mentioned in the study. The method of data analysis is quantitative. Answers extracted through the questionnaire is recorded as numerical data. The frequency of each answer is found and the percentage computed accordingly. Statistical tables are employed for the presentation of these data.

**Table 1: Respondent's Age**

	Frequency	Percentage
16-20	100	28.0%
20-25	106	29.9%
25-30	131	36.9%
30 and above	36	10.1%
Total	355	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 1 shows age distribution of the population with 16-20 at 28% and 20-25 at 29% with the highest age group of 25 to 30 settling at 32% with respondent above 30 which are few and at 10.1% which implies that since most of the respondents are between 16-30 years old, the results of this study will mainly reflect the behaviors of a younger audience. This group is known to rely more on UGC when making decisions, which suggests that the findings will likely show UGC has a strong influence on their film choices.

Table 2. Respondent's Level

Level	Frequency	Percentage
100	71	20.0%
200	85	23.9%
300	92	25.9%
400	78	22.0%
500	29	8.2%
Total	355	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Regarding academic levels, there's a fairly even distribution across the first four years (100-400 levels), each representing between 20-26% of respondents. The 500 level has fewer students (8.2%), which is common as it often represents specialized or extended programs. This distribution indicates a balanced representation across academic years. This table indicates that this study will hopefully provide a well-rounded perspective on how UGC affects Netflix viewing habits among students at different academic levels, but it may be less representative of the experiences of older or more specialized 500-level students.



Research Question 1: To what extent do University undergraduates rely on user-generated content (e.g., reviews, ratings, recommendations) when selecting films to watch on Netflix?

Table 1: How often do you check user-generated reviews on Netflix before selecting a film?

	Frequency	Percentage
Always	78	22%
Often	124	34.9%
Sometimes	95	26.8%
Rarely	42	11.8%
Never	16	4.5%
Total	355	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Review Checking: 56.9% of respondents check user-generated reviews either "Always" or "Often" before selecting a film. This indicates a strong tendency to seek out peer opinions before making viewing decisions. The table indicates that a substantial number of users heavily rely on user ratings when choosing films on Netflix, emphasizing the importance of user-generated content in shaping viewing decisions. However, a minority of users remain skeptical or less reliant on these ratings, presenting Netflix with an opportunity to enhance the visibility and quality of user ratings to foster a more informed and engaged viewing community.

Table 2: To what extent do you rely on user ratings when choosing a film to watch on Netflix?

	Frequency	Percentage
Very much	92	25.9%
A lot	133	31.8%
Moderately	89	25.1%
A little	46	13.0%
Not at all	15	4.2%
Total	335	100.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The data above shows that 57.7% of students rely on user ratings "Very much" or "A lot" when choosing films. While 25% moderately rely on user ratings as 17.2% do not rely on user ratings during film selection. The table indicates that a significant majority of respondents (57.7%) heavily rely on user ratings when choosing films on Netflix, highlighting the critical role of user-generated content in viewer decision-making. While many users consider ratings important, a smaller segment relies less on them, suggesting a need for Netflix to enhance the quality and visibility of ratings and reviews. By doing so, Netflix could foster a more informed and engaged viewing community, ultimately improving user satisfaction and content discovery.



Table 3: Do you prefer user-generated content over Netflix's own film recommendations when selecting what to watch?

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	156	43.9%
No	89	25.1%
Not sure	67	18.9%
Probably	43	12.1%
Total	355	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 3 reveals that 43.9% prefer user-generated content over Netflix's own recommendations, with an additional 12.1% indicating they "Probably" do. This suggests that students generally value peer opinions more than algorithmic suggestions. The table indicates a significant preference for user-generated content among 43.9% of respondents when selecting what to watch on Netflix, suggesting that authenticity and relatability are crucial factors in viewer decisions. While there is still a notable reliance on Netflix's recommendations, the data reveals an opportunity for Netflix to enhance its platform by integrating UGC into its recommendation system, thereby creating a more engaging and trusted viewing experience. This approach could cater to a diverse audience and strengthen viewer satisfaction.

Research Question 2: What factors contribute to the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of user-generated content among University undergraduates who use Netflix?

Table 4: What makes user-generated content more credible to you?

	Frequency	Percentage
High rating (e.g., 4-5 stars)	98	27.6%
Large number of reviews	87	24.5%
Detailed and informative reviews	142	40.0%
Professional review	28	7.9%
Total	355	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 4 shows that the most credible factor in user-generated content is detailed and informative reviews, with 40.0% of respondents choosing this option. High ratings are the second most credible factor at 27.6%, followed closely by a large number of reviews at 24.5%. Professional reviews are considered the most credible by only 7.9% of respondents. The table indicates that detailed and informative reviews are the most credible form of user-generated content for 40.0% of respondents, underscoring the importance of depth in feedback. While high ratings and the number of reviews matter, they are secondary to the substance of the reviews. The low regard for professional reviews suggests a growing preference for peer insights. Netflix can leverage these insights by promoting quality user reviews, enhancing the credibility of its platform, and aiding viewers in making better film selections.



Table 5: Do you consider the profile of the reviewer (e.g., experience, expertise) when trusting user-generated content on Netflix?

	Frequency	Percentage
Always	45	12.7%
Often	98	27.6%
Sometimes	134	37.7%
Rarely	58	16.3%
Never	20	5.7%
Total	355	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 5 reveals that considering the profile of the reviewer is a common practice, but not universal. 12.7% always consider the reviewer's profile, and 27.6% often do so. The largest group, 37.7%, sometimes considers the reviewer's profile. 22% rarely or never take this factor into account. The table reveals that while some respondents consider the profile of the reviewer when trusting user-generated content on Netflix, the majority do not prioritize this factor. This indicates that the authenticity and substance of the reviews may be more influential in shaping viewer decisions than the reviewer's credentials. Netflix can leverage this by encouraging engaging, relatable content from users, while still providing options for those who value reviewer expertise. This balanced approach could cater to a diverse range of viewer preferences.

Table 6: Do you trust user-generated content (e.g., reviews, ratings) more than professional critic reviews when selecting films on Netflix?

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	187	52.7%
No	98	27.6%
Undecided	70	19.7%
Total	355	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Table 6 indicates that user-generated content is generally trusted more than professional critic reviews. 52.7% of respondents trust user-generated content more, while 27.6% trust professional reviews more. 19.7% are undecided on this matter. The table suggests that a majority of respondents (52.7%) trust user-generated content more than professional critic reviews when selecting films on Netflix. This indicates a significant trend toward valuing peer opinions, which could have important implications for Netflix's content promotion strategies. By emphasizing UGC and fostering an engaged community, Netflix can enhance viewer trust and drive content discovery while also considering the preferences of those who still value professional reviews.



Research Question 3: How does exposure to user-generated content on

Netflix influence the viewing habits (e.g., frequency, duration, genre preferences) of University undergraduates?

Table 7: Has exposure to user-generated content on Netflix increased your frequency of watching films?

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	213	60.0%
No	89	25.1%
Not sure	53	14.9%
Total	355	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

This table shows that exposure to user-generated content has increased the frequency of film watching for a majority of respondents. 60.0% report an increase in their viewing frequency, while 25.1% say it has not increased. 14.9% are unsure about the impact on their viewing frequency which indicates that exposure to UGC has led to increased film-watching frequency for 60.0% of respondents on Netflix. This highlights UGC's effectiveness in driving viewer engagement and suggests that Netflix can leverage user-generated content to enhance viewer habits and encourage more frequent usage of the platform. However, there remains a minority of users who are less influenced by UGC, indicating the need for varied engagement strategies to reach all segments of the audience.

Table 8: Has user-generated content influenced your genre preferences on Netflix?

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	224	63.1%
No	87	24.5%
Not sure	44	12.4%
Total	355	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The data in this table shows that user-generated content has influenced the genre preferences of a significant majority of respondents. 63.1% report that their genre preferences have been influenced, while 24.5% say they have not been influenced. 12.4% are unsure about the impact on their genre preferences. This table implies that UGC is highly effective in influencing genre preferences for the majority of users on Netflix (63.1%). This underscores UGC's power in shaping not only short-term content choices but also long-term genre preferences. Netflix can leverage this influence to promote a wider range of genres and further engage viewers, though there remains a portion of users (24.5%) who might not be as easily influenced by UGC.



Table 9: How often do you discover new films through user-generated content on Netflix?

	Frequency	Percentage
Very often	98	27.6%
Often	134	37.7%
Sometimes	87	24.5%
Rarely	28	7.9%
Never	8	2.3%
Total	355	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

This table shows that a significant majority of respondents frequently discover new films through user-generated content on Netflix. 27.6% do so very often, and 37.7% often, totaling 65.3% who frequently discover new films this way. 24.5% sometimes make discoveries, while only 10.2% rarely or never do so. This table demonstrates that UGC is a powerful and frequently used tool for discovering new films on Netflix, with 65.3% of users often or very often finding new content this way. This highlights the effectiveness of UGC in influencing film choices and suggests that Netflix can continue leveraging UGC to promote broader engagement with its content library.

Table 10: To what extent does user-generated content encourage you to explore new genres on Netflix?

	Frequency	Percentage
Greatly encourages	112	31.5%
Somewhat encourages	148	41.7%
Neutral	67	18.9%
Slightly discourages	18	5.1%
Greatly discourages	10	2.8%
Total	355	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

The data in this table indicates that user-generated content largely encourages the exploration of new genres. 31.5% of respondents are greatly encouraged, and 41.7% are somewhat encouraged to explore new genres, totaling 73.2% who are positively influenced. Only 7.9% are discouraged to some degree, while 18.9% remain neutral. This table therefore suggests that UGC is a powerful tool for encouraging users to explore new genres on Netflix, with over 73% of respondents feeling positively influenced. This highlights UGC's effectiveness in expanding content discovery, while also suggesting that Netflix can leverage UGC to promote a wider variety of films to its audience.



DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study focused on University undergraduates in Anambra state, with the majority of respondents falling within the 18-24 age range. The sample represented a balanced distribution across academic levels, ensuring a comprehensive perspective from students at various stages of their university education. The first research question sought to determine the extent to which University undergraduates rely on user-generated content (UGC) when selecting films to watch on Netflix. The findings revealed a significant dependence on peer opinions and reviews among the student population. A substantial majority of students reported frequently checking UGC before selecting a film, indicating a strong inclination toward seeking peer perspectives before making viewing decisions. This behavior aligns with studies that show how peer reviews have become central in shaping online consumer decisions, especially in the entertainment industry (Cheung, Lee & Rabjohn, 2018). The study found that most undergraduates rely heavily on user ratings when choosing a film to watch. This reliance on quantitative aspects of UGC serves as a quick and efficient way for students to gauge a film's appeal or quality. The prevalence of this behavior reflects the value of crowd-sourced opinions, where a collective judgment is often deemed more reliable (Gretzel, 2017). The data further reveals that recommendations from other Netflix users significantly influence students' decisions, demonstrating the power of peer influence in the digital age. This finding underscores the role of ****social proof****, where individuals are more likely to follow the recommendations of others, particularly those who share similar tastes (Cialdini, 2021).

Interestingly, a considerable number of undergraduates prefer UGC over Netflix's own recommendations. This preference may reflect skepticism towards algorithm-generated content, which students might perceive as being driven by commercial interests (Guzman & Lewis, 2020). The inclination to trust peer-generated recommendations over algorithmic suggestions highlights the importance of human input in content selection. As previous research has shown, consumers often view UGC as more authentic and trustworthy compared to platform recommendations (Dellarocas, Zhang & Award, 2017). The findings suggest that Netflix users value the collective wisdom of their peers, which often offers a more diverse range of perspectives than algorithm-based suggestions.

The second research question aimed to identify the factors that contribute to the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of UGC among the university undergraduates. The findings indicate that detailed and informative reviews are considered the most credible form of UGC. This preference for thorough reviews aligns with the Elaboration Likelihood Model, which argues that individuals are more likely to engage deeply with content that is well-articulated and informative (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Guzman & Lewis, 2020). The study further reveals that the number of user reviews is another critical factor in establishing trust, with many students relying on the volume of reviews as a sign of credibility. This reflects the broader literature on crowd wisdom, which suggests that people often trust collective opinions, especially when the number of reviews is large enough to signal a consensus (Surowiecki, 2014).

In addition, the consistency of reviews across multiple users was found to significantly influence students' trust in UGC. This suggests that university undergraduates are not just looking at individual reviews but rather assessing overall trends and patterns in the content they consume. Consistent feedback across different reviewers likely serves as an indicator of



a film's quality, thereby reducing the perceived risk of selecting unsatisfactory content. This insight echoes findings from prior research, which highlight the importance of consensus in building trust among users (Cheung, Lee & Rabjohn, 2018). Notably, the study found that a majority of undergraduates trust UGC more than professional critic reviews when selecting films. This shift towards crowd-sourced information over expert opinions suggests a generational change in how audiences evaluate content (Rubin, 2019).

The third research question explored how exposure to UGC influences the viewing habits of undergraduates. The findings revealed that UGC has significantly increased the frequency of film watching among a majority of students. This indicates that peer reviews and recommendations not only help guide content selection but also serve as motivators for increased engagement with the platform. As Sundar & Limperos (2023) suggest, UGC can satisfy multiple gratifications, including the desire for trustworthy and relatable content. Furthermore, over half of the students reported that UGC has led them to spend more time watching films on Netflix. This increase in viewing duration suggests that UGC might be enhancing the overall satisfaction of students with their film choices, prompting them to engage with the platform for longer periods.

Moreover, the study revealed that UGC has influenced the genre preferences of a significant majority of students, indicating that peer recommendations can shift individual tastes and expand horizons. This finding aligns with the "Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that media users actively seek content that meets their specific needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Nwankwo, 2021). UGC not only helps students discover more of what they already like but also encourages them to explore new content, thereby broadening their preferences. This behavior suggests that students are using UGC as a tool for content exploration, satisfying their need for novelty and diversity.

The fourth research question investigated the impact of UGC on the discovery of new films and genres. The findings show that a significant majority of undergraduates frequently discover new content through UGC. This underscores the role of peer influence in content discovery, as user reviews and recommendations serve as bridges to unfamiliar genres and films. The study revealed that many undergraduates are willing to explore new content based on positive peer feedback, demonstrating the trust they place in UGC. Positive reviews appear to reduce the perceived risk of trying unfamiliar content, encouraging more diverse viewing habits. This is consistent with the literature on "social proof" which suggests that individuals are more likely to engage with content when they see others endorsing it (Cialdini, 2021).

Conclusion

Based on the extensive data collected and subsequent analysis, it can be conclusively stated that user-generated content plays a significant and multifaceted role in shaping the Netflix viewing experiences of University undergraduates in Anambra State. The research reveals a strong and consistent reliance on peer opinions and reviews when selecting content, with user-generated content often preferred over platform-generated recommendations. This preference underscores the importance of social proof in the digital age and suggests a potential shift away from traditional marketing approaches in influencing young adults' media consumption.



The credibility of user-generated content, a crucial factor in its influence, is primarily established through detailed and informative reviews, the number of reviews available, and consistency across multiple users. This suggests a sophisticated approach to evaluating online peer opinions among the student population, indicating a level of digital literacy that allows them to navigate and prioritize the vast amount of information available.

Furthermore, the study concludes that exposure to user-generated content has a substantial and measurable impact on viewing habits, increasing both the frequency and duration of Netflix usage among university undergraduates. This finding highlights the potential of peer influence to not only guide content selection but also to drive an all-encompassing engagement with the platform. Furthermore, user-generated content plays a crucial role in broadening university undergraduates' genre preferences and encouraging exploration of new content, suggesting its potential as a tool for expanding cultural and media literacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings in this study and in line with the research objectives, the following recommendations are proposed;

1. To increase the reliance on user-generated content (UGC) for film selection among University undergraduates, Netflix could implement features that actively promote and encourage user interaction with UGC. This could involve creating more visible sections for user reviews and ratings on film pages, allowing users to post and respond to reviews directly. Building a community where undergraduates can easily share opinions, rate films, and discuss genres would foster engagement, making students more likely to rely on these peer-generated insights when choosing what to watch. Such community-driven content can increase trust and the relevance of UGC in their decision-making process.
2. If the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of UGC is a key factor for University undergraduates, Netflix could introduce mechanisms that highlight reliable and trustworthy reviews. This might include allowing users to verify their accounts, similar to verified accounts on social media, or implementing an upvote system where constructive reviews with detailed feedbacks are elevated to the top. By using algorithms that prioritize high-quality, consistent, and constructive user feedback, Netflix can ensure that credible UGC is more visible, enhancing trust among students. Such a system would encourage undergraduates to engage more deeply with reviews they perceive as authentic and reliable.
3. To align viewing habits with student preferences, Netflix should consider curating recommendations based on user-generated reviews and ratings that reflect the interests of University undergraduates. For example, Netflix could use UGC data to create curated playlists of films that have received high ratings and positive reviews from similar demographic groups, specifically targeting films or genres that students in the university might enjoy. This content personalization would make Netflix's algorithm even more relevant to student viewing patterns, encouraging continued engagement with the platform and its UGC features.



4. UGC has the potential to significantly influence the discovery of new films and genres, especially among university undergraduates. Netflix could leverage this by running promotional campaigns that feature user-driven recommendations. Highlighting popular user reviews or UGC from social media could encourage undergraduates to explore genres or films they may not typically consider. Netflix might also introduce curated lists or playlists that reflect trending user opinions, encouraging students to explore content based on peer recommendations. This approach would increase the visibility of less mainstream content, allowing university undergraduates to discover a wider variety of films and genres, enhancing their entire viewing experience on the platform.

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