



# Netflix's content remediation: new means of production and consumption

Meghana H.R.<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The media companies are striving towards streaming services resulting in new ways of production, distribution, and consumption. Employing novel methods to garner new audiences is a quintessential part of marketing strategies employed by these businesses that confront several streaming video challenges. Amidst all these challenges Netflix stands tall and dominates the world of video streaming market. The regulatory findings reveal that Netflix has grown 700% in India generating Rs.466.7 crore for the fiscal year 2018-2019. This paper attempts to examine the new ways of production and consumption patterns of Netflix both at the conveyor belt and at the consumers' hand limiting itself to specific cases and situations. Through examples and instances of refashioned content on Netflix, the paper hopes to appropriate and rethink Netflix content thereby contributing to theorising content remediation of Netflix.

**Keywords:** remediation, content, streaming service, streaming, audience

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 *The Indian Digital Media and the rise of the streaming world*

The rapid development of technology coupled with the growth of *video-on-demand (VoD)* options, allows media consumers to transcend time and place as opposed to traditional entertainment media platforms. While traditional media seems to be resilient in India, digital platforms are showing indications of exponential growth. The media and entertainment industry have witnessed rapid changes in recent years due to three main reasons - technological changes, affordable data and growing mobile penetration. Traditional media like print, radio, television, and cinema have all undergone a digital convergence. An online study conducted by Nielsen in 61 countries found that nearly two-thirds of global respondents (65%) watch some form of *VoD* programme, which includes long and short-form content. India's growing digital consumers, internet penetration and improving smartphone penetration are attracting many global players to introduce new content streaming channels.

## 2. Review of literature

### 2.1 *Revisiting the concept of remediation: A sneak peek into cases of anime, sonic branding and Academy Awards*

We live in the age of instant replay, and this is one of the most remarkable developments of any age (Staines, 2003). While investigating McLuhan's perceptions about media, the seminal works on media and medium provide far-reaching understanding about media perceptions. McLuhan observes that there is a constant interplay between the old and new environments making remediation of media a continuous phenomenon. McLuhan's work suggests that the content of any medium is appropriated from the other medium. While the new medium is devised, it retains some of the features of the older medium thus eliminating a few (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). McLuhan compares content to a juicy slice of meat that absorbs and diverts the watchdog of the mind. In an allegorical sense, the content of the past inspires the content of the new and thus remediation process in retrospect enables new modes of interaction for media audiences.

<sup>1</sup> Junior Faculty, Great Lakes Institute of Management [anbu.vizhi6910@gmail.com](mailto:anbu.vizhi6910@gmail.com)

The word remediation is derived from the Latin term ‘remederi’ which translates to *heal*. This might simply mean that remediation possibly allows rebuilding (healing) or improvising the existing medium with a newer media. The newer medium such as the digital platforms allows such experimentations. This is to state that remediation affects perhaps every form medium as the content of one medium is rendered to another medium. The classical instances stated by McLuhan that, around the 1930s majority of the Hollywood films were borrowed from popular novels of Henry James, Jane Austen, Edith Wharton and other popular writers of the era. Mythology and ancient texts inspired artists and painters to remediate content just as novels inspired films. However, remediation of digital content is more complex as repurposing from traditional medium involves a complete shift in the format. The digital forms depend on predecessors' digital forms. This might at times arise ‘anxiety of influence’ – a psychological struggle among content producers to overcome the influence of the forerunners' work (Bloom, 1973). The idea of anxiety of influence not only is a literary criticism tool but also an idea that manifests for the remediation of internet content. Along with the anxiety of influence, the newer medium also faces the challenge of having to bridge the inadequacies of the older media. This means that the onus of improvisation rests on digital platforms. Online content, especially on OTT platforms, depends on content from television and content on the internet itself. This repurposed content of the OTT platforms is ought to be better than the predecessors.

## 2.2 *Reconsidering the remediation of Netflix phenomena*

Netflix, which started as a film rental service in the United States, is now the leading on-demand content streaming service in the world extending its service to about 200 countries in the world. With more subscribers switching to alternative platforms for content consumption other than the traditional television service, Netflix continues to dominate the on-demand content streaming service despite the competition from Amazon Prime, Voot, Hotstar, Hulu and various Indian and International OTT/VOD services. Netflix offers a wide range of programs ranging from films and television shows to documentaries and anime among others.

Media theorist Steven Holtzman (1997) points out that remediation may be unique to digital media and the repurposing would find new dimensions in the digital platforms. However, media theorists Bolter and Grusin have varied opinions on the repurposing of digital media. According to them, digital media perhaps would never reach a state of transcendence but will continue to depend on the precursor forms which are agreeable to a large extent. The OTT (over-the-top) is an extended idea that is comparable to the cable or broadcast provider. Unlike the predecessor platforms like cable broadcasters, content on OTT platforms are delivered straight from the internet. Remediation is achieved through the process of linear OOT which enables users to subscribers to view channels via television or other select devices like smart phones, laptop or tablet. These channels are available on subscription basics monthly or annually similar to that of cable channel subscription.

## 3. **Research Methodology**

This paper examines the emerging trends on Netflix using specific cases such as anime content, recognition of Netflix films in Academy Awards and sonic branding. These cases showcase the power of an OOT platform that has refined how remediated content on digital platforms has paved the way for new ways of content production and consumption.

### 3.1 *Amiable anime fix*

Anime, short for animation in Japanese language, refers to art created either by hand or computer. However, to the outside world anime is recognised as any cartoon created in Japan. It is interesting to note that anime and manga are sometimes used interchangeably even though they are different forms of art. Also, anime can be understood as a mediated form of media, manufactured over the foundation of the manga. Traditionally, mangas are graphic novels or comic books while anime is broadly associated with television shows or movies. Anime and manga are popular storytelling techniques that have grown beyond the boundaries of Japan and have become the substance for American animation shows. Initially, with films like Astro Boy, Giganto or Speed Racer, anime gained popularity in the western world and television shows enhanced the espousal of anime to the small screen. From films to small screens the content remediation of anime is astounding. Originally, anime content was loaded with violent actions that were later eliminated to appropriate content for the western audience especially to children and young adults.

Today, anime is seen as one of the entertaining shows across the world and has a niche audience. The incorporation of films and television shows into legally licensed content streaming channels like Hulu and Netflix are further intensifying the ‘anime boom’ of the early 1900s. To combat competition from new rivals such as Disney, Apple and HBO Max (Warner Media), Netflix is investing in the production of original anime shows and is continuing to spend on exclusive distribution rights for specific anime shows.

According to Netflix’s official Twitter account, the most-watched show on Netflix *The Witcher* is likely to be made into an anime film by South Korean anime studio called Studio Mir. The remediation perceptions about Netflix only get amplified with acquiring streaming rights to Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata’s *Studio Ghibli*. The Ghibli venture has appropriated content to OTT platforms which were once available on DVDs or specific theatres where anime culture was rich. Studio Ghibli has produced some of the phenomenal anime films like *Spirited Away*, *Castle in the Sky* and *Princess Mononoke* which are popular worldwide and are available on Netflix. As far as Studio Ghibli's content remediation is concerned, it is interesting to note that *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) a science fantasy adventure film was inspired by Miyazaki’s manga itself that was published in the magazine *Animage*. McLuhan asserts that technology is the reification of a social process. In the streaming world, content can be ratified by attaching legal frameworks of purchasing licenses to streaming.

### 3.2 *Gaining space in the Academy Awards*

Netflix has redefined the entertainment industry and has also sought reactions for being nominated for the coveted academy awards. Netflix is spending more than half of its currency on making original content which is a huge make-shift strategy by a streaming company. When streaming platforms experiment with original content and receive over-whelming responses from media and audience alike, new ways of audience interactions challenge the traditional media culture. A Netflix production, *Roma* was nominated for 10 academy awards and eventually won 3 of them under the category of direction, cinematography and foreign films. This indeed is a disruptive ingredient introduced by Netflix despite facing flak by recognized filmmakers like Steven Spielberg who stated that the Netflix films must contend only in the Emmy arena pointing to the differences between streaming and theatrical releases. Nonetheless, the recognition for Netflix’s films in Oscars 2020 has only grown progressively with 24 nominations which are more than any other production house including *Marriage Story* and *The Irishman*. The film *The Irishmen* alone received 10 nominations while *Marriage Story* received 6. The other Netflix films that gained a mention in Oscars nomination include *The Two Popes*, *Klaus* and *I Lost My Body*. The last two years have been crucial to Netflix Originals in reshaping the quality of OTT content and by providing a space for film and show producers. Netflix is changing the ways of production and recognition of cinema. These technological and artistic shifts are products of the *Netflix effect* paving way to a deeper analysis of the understanding audience and producers of most streaming platforms.

### 3.3 *A sound strategy for strengthening brand identity*

New connections in the brain are formed and memories become more concrete when multiple senses are engaged. That is perhaps the logic behind sonic branding, a concept that is based on mnemonics – studying music or sound as a cue for retention of information. A sign of a successful brand lies in its recall value. Understanding the brands and learning recall value is an important field of research in marketing and consumer culture theories. Brands and businesses need to have a consistent connection between brand and sound (Jackson, 2003). According to *Forbes*, businesses like Disney, Intel, Apple along with Netflix are listed among the World’s best Sonic Brands (Armstrong 2019). Netflix's use of the effective audio logo is an important step towards better sonic branding focusing on enhancing the audience experience. As per the official Netflix brand assets webpage, *N* in the logo represents a never-ending stream of stories to its subscribers which enables spontaneous brand recognition. In the latest Netflix logo animation. The letter N breaks into a stream of vertical colours which gives the subscribers the time to anticipate a Netflix original. This technique is pioneered by the HBO channel’s static introduction that exemplifies the experience of the viewer who anticipate entering into not just television but a unique world of HBO (Jones, 2007). This is exactly what Netflix tries to attempt with its animated logo which focuses mainly on the relationship it has with the subscribers. The sound is simple enough for one to recreate the sound with one’s mouth. It establishes a quick connection with the users - the greatest accomplishment of any brand like that of the MGM’s roaring lion.

#### 4. Conclusion

In a media-driven mediated environment, the entertainments studies help understand the numerous ways in which the users live the simulated reality and carry forward mediated communication. In this context, entertainment studies help investigate the industry's current situations and help prepare for future challenges. While exploring the past and present situations within an academic framework, entertainment studies help bridge various disciplines of studies in understanding the future of the entertainment industry and production ethnographies. This paper explores some of the mediated content trends concerning Netflix which concretes new opportunities to original content producers and redefines new ways of viewing content for a subscriber which is essentially strengthening McLuhan's idea of a 'Global Village'.

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