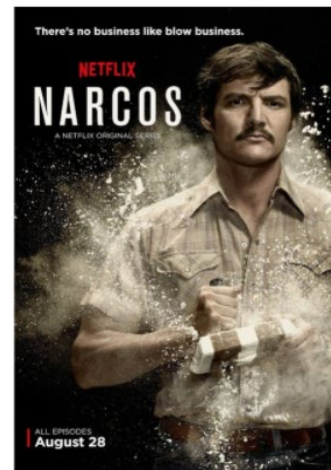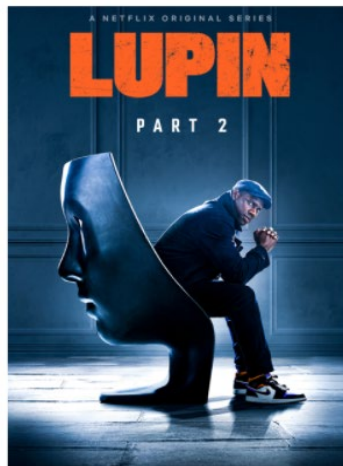# Distance and Global Television Engagement

An analysis of Dutch nationals' engagement with foreign Netflix original series

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ABSTRACT

Over the years Netflix has been producing original series. The company has branched out to creating international films and series with local creative producers around the world, which has led to some of the most popular shows this company has produced.This thesis explores how young Dutch nationals engage with global television as represented by Netflix. Foreign-produced Netflix original series are used to investigate global television engagement, which are shows that are produced outside the Netherlands and America, and that are in the country's national language. Six series from within Europe and outside Europe are used, Dark, 3%, La Casa de Papel, Narcos, Ragnarök, and Lupin were the selected series based on the international and local (Dutch) popularity of the series. Audience engagement is investigated through concepts of thematic and cultural proximity as proposed by Straubhaar (2007), as well as the uses and gratifications theory which serves as a basis for understanding the initial and continuation of engagement from audiences. Data was collected through twelve qualitative semi-structured online interviews, with eight females and four males who all identify and hold a Dutch nationality and have watched three of the six selected series. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis where the transcripts from the interviews were open coded then formed into axial codes, which then formulated three main themes: Motivations and expectations, cultural engagement, and story and character engagement. The results suggest that audiences are motivated by cultural distance to engage with the series due to the willingness and desire to explore other cultures and languages with entertainment. The participants were engaged with the culture represented in the series, as they enjoyed the differences, learning new aspects, and curiosity about country productions were a large factor in engagement. Moreover, participants who were familiar with cultural aspects enjoyed the small details as it brought back fond memories or nostalgia; however, participants who were unfamiliar either did not notice the cultural cues or enjoyed learning new aspects. Culture, however, was not their focus while watching the series. The focus was the plot and characters, how complex, authentic, and enticing they were, disregarding how relevant and similar it was to their lifeworld and experiences. Audiences enjoyed distance from themselves culturally and thematically.

KEYWORDS: Netflix Originals, Proximity, Foreign series, Motivations

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1. Introduction

The increasing popularity of streaming video-on-demand (SVOD) platforms such as HBO Max, Amazon Prime, Disney+, and most notably Netflix, has transformed the media entertainment landscape, which has gone from disrupting the entertainment sphere within local markets to how audiences consume and engage with content (Pardo, 2013). Netflix plays a large role as the main actor in advancing and leading entertainment transformations across the globe (Jenner, 2018). Netflix has been able to modify the understanding of today's television as they are a powerhouse in the emerging industry logics – from changing how viewers interact, consume, and engage with content through algorithms. Or prompting new modes of viewership such as binge-watching (Burroughs, 2018; Lobato, 2019). In 2012, Netflix invested around $70 to $100 million in original programs to bring in new subscribers. Since then, the company has expanded to 190 countries, with over 207 million subscribers and 133 of the users coming from outside the US and Canada (Netflix, 2021; Stoll, 2021). What sets Netflix apart from other competitors is the company's role in the international creation, disruption and reception of series and film content. The focus of the present research constitutes the increase in local original programming produced by Netflix in its international markets (Jenner, 2018).

As Netflix grew and continues to grow internationally, the production of international content increases. In 2018, Netflix invested around 12 billion US dollars on content, of which 85% of the budget went to original series and movies and over 30 international original series from Japan, France, India, and more were produced. Furthermore, the research conducted by Ampere Analysis found that around 52% of Netflix's original series are produced outside of America, therefore most of Netflix's content is produced in an international environment (Roxborough, 2019). This figure suggests that Netflix is increasingly exploring foreign markets and partnering with local producers to tell localized stories with a global appeal, rather than American-based content (Spangler, 2018). The reasons for and success of Netflix's local yet global strategy has been theorized by many scholars, for instance a reason to focus on localized content is to serve their international and diverse subscriber base, which allows Netflix to compete against local or national production companies (Lobato, 2019).

The success of local productions in international markets could be attributed to multiple factors, all of which are to be theorized as Netflix does not release copious amounts of audience data. From the perspective of Netflix, the company prides itself on authentic portrayals of

cultures with a universal appeal (Wayne & Sandoval, Forthcoming). However, with the concept of cultural proximity, suggests audiences gravitate to cultural productions that are like their culture and language, which allows engagement with and enjoyment of those series to increase due to similarities (Straubhaar, 2007). Therefore, suggest that individuals from distant cultures would not engage with foreign series. However, *3%* is a Netflix original series, made in Brazil and placed in a dystopian future. *3%* ranked as the most popular show on Netflix in 2018 (Dilley, 2018), with large audiences in places such as Brazil, Portugal, Angola, Senegal, and other African countries. Why the series was popular in those countries can be argued in the cultural-proximity lens as being due to language similarities, and the historical background of Portugal's colonization of those countries, hence the language playing a large role in explaining the successes (Dilley, 2018). However, the series was extremely popular across Europe as well (van Noord & Wilms, 2020), where cultural and linguistic distance is present. Therefore, there is a shift in expectations and predictions in how and why audiences engage with series from other cultures and countries.

Global television content is designed to be easily consumed and adapted in countries around the world. Therefore, containing broad universal themes, with notes to the production's country of origin. Netflix has adopted the concept of global television and is configuring its notions through the company's original series and movies. The company focuses on the "universal appeal" aspect in its production strategy. Reed Hastings, the CEO of Netflix, attributes the success of locally produced content to a global scale because it "reflects universal truths" that many can relate to (Kanter, 2020). Therefore, audiences around the globe can connect and imagine themselves in these characters or stories due to similar or understandable life themes. Netflix's local yet globalized approach has allowed local productions such as the German series *Dark* or the Spanish series *La Casa de Papel* to be enjoyed globally. Accordingly, this thesis focuses on how Netflix represents global television, however, the success of the series is investigated through audience reception.

As Netflix does not release audience data, assumptions about success from an audience perspective and why they engage with foreign content are needed to understand the ever-changing audience and entertainment sphere as they both grow from each other. For this reason, this thesis sets out to explore the ways in which Dutch nationals engage with global television through the consumption of foreign Netflix original series. Thus, the following main research

question was developed: *How do young Dutch nationals engage with global television as represented by Netflix?*

Engagement encompasses how audiences interact with the series or film at hand (Livingstone, 2013), in other words, how they relate to the show, how audiences talk about the show, how they watch the series, and many other forms of engagement. It is a broad concept and depends therefore on narrowing the focus. Engagement is investigated through the lens of cultural and thematic proximity, allowing the researcher to focus on the relevance of perceived distance or closeness of cultures within the series and the universal themes. Taking this perspective leads the research to investigate the way audiences interpret and how they engage with culture as represented by Netflix, as well as the role universal themes play in engagement with the overarching umbrella of culture. Therefore, the following sub-questions were developed to serve as a guide to investigate engagement and to answer the main research question:

Sub-RQ1: How does cultural proximity relate to the consumption of foreign Netflix original series by young Dutch viewers?

Sub-RQ2: How does thematic proximity interplay with the audience's engagement of foreign Netflix original series?

Sub-RQ3: Why do young Dutch nationals engage with foreign Netflix series, and why do they continue to consume the series?

The third sub-question focuses on the initial engagement and the continued reasons why Dutch nationals engage with the series. The initial engagement with the foreign series can help understand how culture or themes initially interact with how audiences engage with the series. Moreover, it also questions the motivations and gratifications audiences can receive while engaging with the series if culture continues to play a role if the similar themes they initially engage with continue to influence how they engage with a series (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005).

1.1. Social Relevance

American, Spanish, and Colombian populations (Naef, 2018; Pagone, 2020; Pekarkova, 2019) are currently focused on when researching Netflix and cultural engagement and interpretations. Thus, investigating audience reception within those places with locals is apparent. However, an understudied angle is through culturally distant cultures and how they

engage with the international depictions of countries by Netflix. Such populations include the Dutch population. An estimated 3 million households in the Netherlands use Netflix, ranking it the most popular SVOD service and outranking other Dutch providers such as NPO plus or VideoLand (Stoll, 2021). Therefore, investigating why Dutch nationals use Netflix as a primary source for series plus international programs can provide more insight into the multidirectional flow of culture in today's digitalized and globalized world. Investigating how Dutch nationals engage with international programs is beneficial to industry professionals from Netflix and other SVOD services with new consumer insights focused on how and why audiences engage with their content. Moreover, other industry professionals can learn how audiences view international content, which aspects audiences engage or enjoy the most, and which aspects are most important for engagement. Thus, it could allow competitors such as VideoLand or HBO to understand localized content and could lead them to implement similar strategies.

1.2. Scientific Relevance

The scientific relevance of the current study lies in its ability to add more knowledge and the possibilities to fill in the existing gap in academic knowledge regarding global television success, transnational audiences, and audience reception studies. Moreover, there is an increase in academic research into the factors that contribute to the global success of Netflix's original programming. However, an underexplored area is how locally produced non-English originals cross national, cultural, and linguistic borders, why they are successful, and how audiences interpret and engage with the content. Netflix claims to have copious amounts of data on their users that traverses beyond demographic categories and which Netflix uses to drive production- to create personalized viewing recommendations for its subscribers, though the company never releases its data in total (Wayne, 2018). Consequently, this lack of transparency leaves scholars with little information to answer long-running questions about transnational audiences' tastes and viewership (Gray, 2017). This research aims to develop an understanding of specific target groups' (young Dutch nationals) taste and viewership habits, what motivates them to engage with specific foreign content, why they continue watching it, and how they engage with the cultural and thematic aspects of the series.

As Netflix is a popular service in the Netherlands, it is essential to comprehend how audiences utilize this platform in their daily meaning-making. Therefore, investigating the

articulation of global media objects, in this case, foreign Netflix original series, local processes, and the genuine engagement of people with those cultural products, allows for more insight into how audiences within a society engage with this content and provide a path for future research. This study aims to contribute to cultural studies research.

1.3. Thesis Outline

This research is organized in chapters, which are structured in the following manner. The second chapter introduces and provides a literature review on the main theories and previous research findings relevant to audience engagement with global television. It takes the perspective of an active audience member and investigates how audiences engage with, and generate meaning-making from series and film. Netflix is discussed with a focus on the Dutch market and what global television is. Moreover, theories of proximity are investigated with prior studies that supported or contradicted the theory. Additionally, concepts of cultural capital, familiarity, and lifeworlds are investigated concerning how and to what degree audiences engage with media based on themselves. Finally, the uses and gratifications theory is discussed to understand the motivation for content consumption and how it interplays with foreign series.

The third chapter discusses the qualitative nature of this study. It provides insight into how this research was conducted and the choices with the reasoning behind the sampling of participants and series. Finally, the process of data collection, operationalization, data analysis is discussed and the validity and reliability of the current study.

The fourth chapter introduces the results that arose from the analysis. It is divided into themes as these were the main findings that allowed the researcher to answer the research questions. Moreover, this section also critically reviews the results using the theoretical framework.

The fifth and final chapter, the conclusion, provides an answer to the research question based on the findings. Furthermore, it discusses these findings and their theoretical implications. Finally, the limitations of this research are evaluated, and suggestions for future research are provided.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter is presented in four sections, each section discussing an essential theoretical aspect for this research. The first section, *Netflixen,* covers Netflix and its market in the Netherlands while discussing global television. The second section is divided into two subsections. First, Experiences through a Screen which covers how audiences engage, interact and interpret series. Second, Engaging with Series focuses on how audiences position the series to themselves, basing engagement on the forms of interactionism audiences have with themselves and the film or series they engage with. This section covers topics of lifeworlds, familiarity, and cultural capital and their relevance to audience engagement. The third section, Dimensions of Proximity, covers the relativity of concepts of cultural and thematic proximity regarding how audiences engage with foreign series. Finally, the fourth section, Gratifications, Needs, Wants, and Expectations discusses the uses and gratifications theory in relation to why individuals consume global television and investigates how culture and themes motivate individuals to continue watching and their gratifications obtained during and after watching.

2.1. Netflixen - To Netflix

What was once a DVD rental service is now an SVOD service with over 200 million subscribers in 190 countries (Netflix, 2021; Stoll, 2021). Netflix has become an entertainment media powerhouse with a diverse set of content available any time, anywhere, and on any device (Matrix, 2019). Netflix does not only influence audiences' content consumption but also over other markets. For example, the series *Queen's Gambit*, a massive hit across the globe (Dottle, 2020), which the series features a young girl who is a chess mastermind. After the series debuted, the sales of chess boards went up by 1,000%; the novel the series was based on became a bestseller after 35 years of its release, and more than 2 million people signed up to chess.com (Dottle, 2020). *In addition, La Casa de Papel* cultivated a large international audience and was 31 times more in demand than the average series globally, such as *Game of Thrones* or *Westworld* (Parrot Analytics, 2020), despite it being in Spanish.

As Netflix expanded to international markets, the vision of producing only US-based content was not for Netflix. Therefore, the company increased local-content productions in international markets (Spangler, 2018), expanding its content to a global television format. Global television is designed to be easily consumed and adapted in countries around the world.

Therefore, it has broad universal themes, with forms of national specific characteristics but are easily enjoyed, understood, and relatable by a wider international audience (Shahaf & Oren, 2012). Although production is in local countries with local cast and crew, the focus is to keep a global appeal. Global television results from the current globalized and digitalized world: there is a multidirectional flow of culture and exposure of culture through media has become embraced and consumed by global audiences (Shahaf & Oren, 2012). With the rise of global television, there is a need to investigate how large media entertainment conglomerates such as Netflix utilize the concept of global television and even more so to investigate audiences' interpretation of this formatting of television. Lobato (2019) discussed that Netflix's strategy was taken to serve the diverse set of users, implementing localized original content to accommodate the taste of local audiences (Lobato, 2019). However, the content is global enough through plot themes that international audiences would still enjoy the content with a touch of difference. For example, small details such as candy bars, subliminal themes, and detailed architecture can be noticed and enjoyed as cultural artifacts but are not too foreign that audiences cannot relate to or enjoy the disparities (Nguyen, 2019).

Narcos was, for example, Netflix's first globally successful non-English language series (Edelmayer, 2020). The series was able to "travel" across different nations and was enjoyed by many (Wayne & Sandoval, Forthcoming). Wayne and Sandoval (Forthcoming) describe travelable series to have specific characteristics, such as production value and authenticity. Netflix's Co-CEO, Ted Sarandos, attributes the travel success to blockbuster-like productions (Wayne & Sandoval, Forthcoming). As blockbusters do well in America, they are also likely to travel globally. High production costs, large marketing budgets, released in thousands of cinemas, and viewing audiences as fans already are the characteristics of blockbusters (Davis, Michelle, Hardy & Hight, 2012). Netflix has been able to keep the title of quality television due to their investment in high-production series and movies, with special effects, settings, casting, and so forth (Jenner, 2018). Hence with the quality title, it can be theorized that audiences trust Netflix's original productions regardless of which country it was made in, as it is known it will follow similar production values.

Netflix holds a grip on the Netherlands' entertainment sphere, with around 3.2 million subscribers (Stoll, 2021). Watching Netflix became a verb in Dutch -- *'Netflixen'*. Other Dutch broadcasters followed the current market trend of SVOD services- NPO, RTL, and SBS6-

created SVOD services - Videoland or NPO Start Plus. However, even with the already laid grounds and familiarity Dutch broadcasters have, they struggled to compete with Netflix in terms of subscribers. See Figure 1 and 2 which shows the estimated numbers of subscribers, subscription fee and details of the current competitors in the SVOD market in Holland (PWC, 2020; Stoll, 2021).
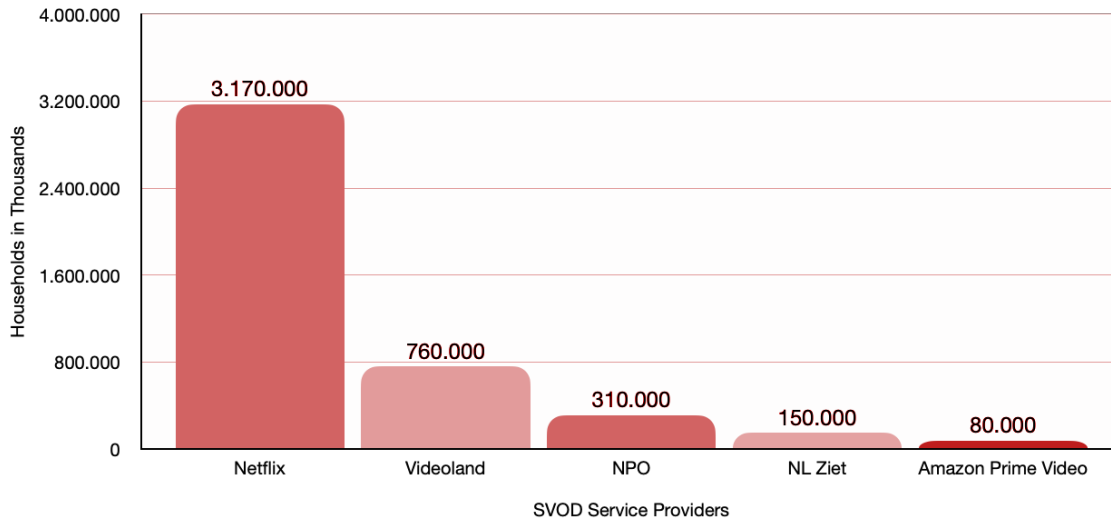

Figure 1. SVOD Service in Holland Overview

Figure 2. Brief overview of SVOD Services in Holland

NETFLIX	videoland.	npo st▸rt	NLZIET	prime video
International content and original productions	Mainly Dutch content, does offer HULU, HBO and RTL series. Original Productions as well	On-demand service from the public broadcasts. Re-watch programming and ad free	Started by NPO, RTL and SBS. Re-watching programming and early release. Ad Free	International content. With additional renting and buying in service. Original productions as well.
From €7.99	From €4.99	From €2.95	From €7.95	From €3.99

The viewers' confidence in Netflix's productions with a twist of non-English and non-Dutch productions could suggest why foreign content travels to markets such as Holland. Hence, the particular interest in how and why Dutch nationals watch foreign content on Netflix, what their motivations are and their general willingness to consume international television. Moreover, the Dutch television market has had Hollywood and BBC productions in their broadcasts for many years. In Holland over 90% of Dutch nationals speak English as their

second language (van Oostendorp, 2012), hence the consumption of American or English content is more widely accepted. However, why would they take it even further from non-English and non-Dutch? This thesis investigates if it is due to the familiarity with cultures as France and Germany are neighboring countries, or if the unfamiliarity of and the curiosity about cultures can motivate an individual to consume a show, and if so, why.

Netflix repeatedly attributes their success to authenticity, "the more authentically local the show is, the better it travels" (Wayne and Sandoval, Forthcoming). This does not mean that the more local the series the better it will travel, but rather that the process of localization while still maintaining global storytelling is the main component of authenticity (Wayne and Sandoval, Forthcoming). Which audiences are curious or are familiar with the country could be more motivated to watch a show with accurate depictions of cultures and lifestyles in a country with globally relatable themes. The German series *Dark* turned out to be the most-watched non-English show offered by Netflix and it is estimated that 90% of the viewers were from audiences outside of Germany (Roettgers, 2018). The series contains aspects of localization through the settings (e.g. German schools), characters, slang, and sometimes history to list a few aspects, but still have a global storytelling process that allows the series to travel: displaying the strategy of local content with global appeal through storytelling.

Popular genres, common themes plus a powerful algorithm allow Netflix original series to be at the forefront of audiences entertainment sphere. However, Pagone (2020) fears audiences get stuck in a content bubble, where audiences are stuck in a cycle of only seeing what is globally representable and not locally representable of countries in series, through the lens of Netflix productions. The cycle of producing what is popular, audiences consuming it, then Netflix producing more content as such and overlooking cultural importance, or the diverse ethnoscope of the area represented, and more consumption may be a fear. However, the ways in which audiences engage with such media messages and the degree it is internalized and used to create meaning is something that varies between individuals. The fear is viable, however, and should be studied from an active audience perspective to understand how audiences engage and interpret international series.

Research by Pekárková (2019) highlighted that in the era of Netflix and other SVOD services, concepts such as national identity are no longer a dominant factor when audiences select and engage with television and films. Netflix has a fragmented audience, defined by

engagement with specific texts across borders rather than a singular national context, as was the case in broadcast television eras (Jenner, 2018). Series such as *Narcos, La Casa De Papel*, and *Stranger Things* have large fan bases around the world due to the fragmentation of audiences (Lobato, 2019). Audiences now rather draw on their transnational identities for their engagement in global television while engaging and interacting with series (Jenner, 2018). The perspective on the ways in which audiences engage with series will be taken from a relative standpoint, in other words how audiences engage with the series based on their experiences and general identity.

2.2.a. Experiences Through a Screen

Some contemporary scholars investigate media by exploring the ways in which audiences interpret media around them. With the view that audiences do not merely absorb messages (Cloete, 2017) and that there is a more complex process involving how media audiences receive, interpret and create meaning from the stimuli around them, especially entertainment stimuli such as TV series (Mehrad, Eftekhar, & Goltaji, 2020).

This take on media audiences began with Stuart Hall (1973) who developed an encoding and decoding process that audiences do while engaging with media. Encoding is what the producers and screenwriting create in their content, who may have intended messages and meanings in their content. Decoding is a distinct process and is the audience's active way of decoding messages and creating their own meanings and understandings from the content. This can be inline with what the producers intended or could be something completely different. Audiences read the media products like series and movies that they encounter in everyday life as a text or a discourse (Livingstone, 2000). As audiences are decoding and interpreting the media texts and objects, they draw on their expectations, needs, identities, interests, values, and pre-understandings of the media phenomena (Livingstone, 2000). For instance, the same program can hold different meanings for different individuals.

Netflix can significantly influence how audiences view certain countries and their cultures through their series and movies. Pagone (2020) conducted a case study of three Spanish Netflix series, all of which display common themes of friendship, socio-economic inequality, or domestic abuse, these themes are showcased, which audiences associate with the Spanish people. Netflix avoids Spain's complex ethnoscape by focusing on popular themes and is driven by viewer habits data rather than local demographics (Pagone, 2020). Netflix's content,

recommendation system, and algorithm continue the cycle of reinforcing dominant discourses such as stereotypes. Floegel and Costello (2019) discusses how the recommendation system recycles dominant discourses or imagery of international countries. International in this case means outside of America or Hollywood productions. The already niche-representational international content that contains stigmas, stereotypes and is not fully representational, is promoted through their algorithm and thus consumed by audiences. According to Floegel and Costello (2019) the consumption of series continues to encourage large entertainment companies to produce international shows with certain themes such as narconovelas or crime. Thus, these shows continue to reinforce dominant discourses of certain countries.

However, if a Netflix user is only being presented with shows that depict Spain through the lens of socio-economic inequality and other countries such as Germany or Brazil depict certain family relationships, the recommendation system and algorithm Netflix has in place could sway the perception a viewer holds of a country's society. Hence the importance to investigate the actuality of how audiences interact and engage with global television, how the audience decodes messages.

2.2.b. Engaging with Series

There is a form of judgement that occurs while audiences consume media, in which the motives, actions, themes and other components are compared to the viewers own stance in those topics. Viewers connect with the storylines and characters in series, doing so consciously and unconsciously (Squires, 2018). For instance when a character that is loved commits an act of adultery, one forms a judgement due to the beliefs and values held, therefore if it is something the viewer does not approve of, this impacts their engagement with and liking for the character. The viewers relate themselves to the situation or the action that occurred, linking their values, beliefs, experiences, otherwise known as lifeworld. No matter the type of media, such as entertainment series, news, articles, social media, there are forms of interactionism and interpretation that occur from the audience's point of view (Eichner, 2020).

The concept lifeworld, is the perceived reality from the individual's perspective, which acts as the base for sense and meaning-making processes (Eichner, 2020). The perceived reality comes back to how the individual views themselves or who they identify themselves as, with their beliefs, values, background knowledge, experiences and so forth adding to how they

interpret and view the world around them. Lifeworld offers individuals a framework to explain and reference experiences that have happened or are happening (Eichner, 2020). A study done by Eichner (2020) investigated how viewers from around the world engage and interact with Danish drama series. The results show that viewers based their engagement on the series from their lifeworld, relating the characters and themes to their experiences. Identifying with certain themes such as success and travel among young adults, makes the series feel believable and the viewers felt as if they were a part of the series. Another example of how individuals engage themselves with the series is Liebes and Katz's research (1990). They investigated how individuals from different cultures living in America interacted with a popular series called *Dallas*. When participants were discussing the show and displaying involvement with or distance from with the series, a determining factor was repeated, and that was the comparison with their own cultures and identities.

An individual's lifeworld draws on experiences but also on their concept of identity. Identity entails aspects that makeup the individual, for example a person's upbringing in a certain country can formulate their national identity comparatively if they were raised in another country. This in turn makes up a part of who they are and what they use to make sense of the world in relation to themselves (Sharma, 2014). Individuals draw on their thoughts, experiences, background, upbringing, biological make-up among many other factors to formulate their identity as well as make sense and meaning of the world around them. Social identity refers to factors such as age, gender, race, class, sexuality and the intersections of those that impact how people respond to interpreting texts (Squires, 2018). Squires (2018) provides an example of how social identity can interact with a series. *Parenthood* features a child that has Asperger's, Squires compares her experiences she had with doctors, with her son, and other experiences to the child in the series and what they depict as his life. Her social membership in this interpretive community of parents with special-needs children allows her to interpret and understand the show differently than those who are outside the interpretive community. It is noteworthy that not all individuals within interpretive communities share similar opinions on the impacts, meanings and interpretations of certain topics, but there is a common shared framework, which also relates common but not homogenous values, beliefs, traditions and perspectives. This is an important perspective to investigate while discussing the forms of engagement Dutch nationals have while watching global TV. They can draw on forms of singular lifeworld experiences, national identity,

or an interpretive community perspective while engaging with the series, which could influence their level of engagement with the characters, culture, and plot among other aspects of a foreign series.

2.3. Cultural and Thematic Proximity

The ways in which series are relative to audience members can be alluded to as concepts of proximity. A theory coined by Straubhaar (2005), known as cultural proximity, is the notion that people gravitate towards media from their own culture or similar to their culture. Proponents of cultural proximity underline the significance of language in audiences preferences for certain media. Straubhaar states that the audience's ability to speak or understand the language of the media is a large component in audiences' choice of program and their enjoyment of it. Moreover, cultural proximity exists on multiple levels, corresponding to multiple layers of an audience member's identity (Ksiazek & Webster, 2008). These include cultural, geographic, religious, and ethnic, to name a few, which audiences consider when referring to cultural distance or similarity (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005; Straubhaar, 2007). Moreover, most aspects that make culture are associated with language, so the exact roles and distinguishing ability are more difficult. All, however, predict that with the accessibility to culturally diverse media, audiences will favor, and in turn select, media that are proximate to themselves. For example, Liebes and Katz (1990) investigated how individuals living in America from different countries interacted with a popular series called *Dallas*. The participants related to or distanced themselves from with the characters, plot, themes, and the country where the series was produced depending on how they perceived those aspects relative to themselves. Engaging or identifying with the aforementioned aspects does not fully mean that the audience sees themselves as the character or within the theme presented, it rather means forms of identification such as relativity to aspects of the character.

The theory developed due to notions of cultural imperialism that predicted one-way flows of culture from richer to poorer countries, such as Hollywood movies to international markets (Straubhaar, 2007). However, with regional production centers such as Hong Kong, Bollywood, Mexico and more continuing to grow, it increases market tensions with the more traditional centers of media production, and the notions of imperialism are being challenged. Especially as Netflix is an American company which is now branching out to produce content in international markets, allowing for a wider flow of culture through content. Diverse populations have access

to increasingly abundant media environments, therefore studying concepts of cultural proximity and global television as represented by Netflix can form a theoretical construct for explaining audience engagement with the now widely accessible diverse media. This research aims to investigate how cultural proximity functions in regards to audience engagement and the different functions that arise when consuming foreign content.

La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005) conducted an audience reception study with villagers in Brazil, investigating the barriers that stood between local Brazilian television and the engagement and identification for local audiences. The Brazilians in the study found that the imported Mexican programs were more relevant and appealing to their lifeworlds. The Brazilian series simply did not capture the depictions accurately and since Brazil and Mexico shared very similar values, history and cultural relationships, the local values and cultures may resemble other nations thus, allowing for an ease to engage fully with foreign series. Jackson (2017) investigated the phenomena of Korean dramas in China. China's entertainment market is highly competitive and closed off to international productions (Jackson, 2017; Lobato, 2019), however, Korean dramas were able to become a popular source of entertainment once Chinese audiences saw the cultural similarities between themselves and Koreans that were represented in the shows. Therefore similar cultures were a determining factor in the consumption and enjoyment of series (Jackson, 2017). Although scholars have proven cultural distance is what drives audiences to engage with series, as Jenson (2018) investigated the audience reception of Australian viewers with Danish television drama series. The concept of otherness is what drew the Australian viewers into the Danish series. Disregarding cultural distance rather motivated by curiosity, different production styles, aesthetics and the societal otherness of Danish shows allowed Australian viewers to engage with the series. Squires (2018) indicates that audiences do not only engage with the series at a content level, but inquire about the producers and their skillfulness to develop and write the storyline.

However, viewers' preferences and engagement can also be attributed to series that focus on broad and universal themes, for instance themes of hard work, successful lifestyles, and family relationships, love, which is known as thematic proximity in which audiences relate themselves to the themes represented in the media to their life and experiences (Straubhaar & La Pastina, 2005). Eichner (2020) attributes thematic proximity as a leading factor to why and how people relate, identify and engage with series rather than the culture displayed. Eichner's (2020)

study focused on the success of Danish television drama series and showed how international audiences engage with the story; finding that viewers generally engage with the realistic and authentic depiction of the story narrative and the characters within it, despite it being similar, relatable or distant from their lifeworld. Audiences enjoy the interconnectedness of certain themes such as crime in politics or they enjoy engaging with the ambivalent – often female – main protagonists juggling their professional and private lives as they push through trivial experiences.

General demographics such as gender, age, ethnicity, and culture are influential factors in regards to audience engagement (Eichner, 2020). Although those factors are simplifying concepts, constructing sameness based on large categories that are sometimes difficult to identify, whereas relatable life themes and curiosity about those themes are conceptually what audiences engage with on a deeper level over culture. As Athique (2016) argued, cultural proximity can refer to Pierre Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital: the more cultural capital one has, the less effective is the logic of cultural proximity. Hence cultural proximity is not an important factor of globalized citizens in relation to their engagement and consumption of foreign series. In general there is a lack of research that focuses on thematic proximity, especially a lack of research with Dutch individuals who are large consumers of foreign content and how concepts of cultural and thematic proximity interplay in their engagement. Therefore this thesis aims to develop those concepts in light of global television engagement.

The concept of a cosmopolitan viewer can explain why foregin series are successful (Straubhaar et al., 2015). Cosmopolitan viewers show a positive attitude and openness towards global culture, with experiences of different cultures through travel, education, work spaces, up-bringing and so forth. Audiences with a cosmopolitan background are interested in exploring different cultures and want to consume foreign content. Straubhaar et al. (2015) show insight which breach the surface of explaining Netflix's international series success, but investigating this further would provide a deeper understanding of audiences engagement and interpretations. This is one possibility and will be further expanded on in the following sections. It suggests how audiences relate themselves to the media they are engaging with, and how an individual engages with media from start to finish. Whether the audience is watching it for entertainment, informative or other reasons, an active process that occurs, in which the audience creates meaning based on themselves and the series.

2.4. Gratifying Needs, Wants and Expectations

The next theory used to investigate audience reception is the uses and gratifications theory (U&G). U&G is used to understand why an individual consumes media, the effects, and emphasis on the motivations for consumption (Ruggiero, 2000). Originally introduced by Katz, Blumler and Gurvitch in 1973, they sketched out the main aspects of the U&G theory: (1) The social and psychological (2) needs which then create (3) expectations of (4) media, which lead to (5) different patterns of media exposure or engagement, resulting in (6) the needs and gratifications for audiences and (7) other unintended consequences.

Since the 1970s, the U&G theory has undergone many changes, due to criticism of its being too vague, and needing to adapt to current media changes (Ruggiero, 2000). Media, technology and equally important, the audience who consumes it, have transformed. Sundar and Limperos (2013) discuss that if the theory were to not develop it would overlook the societal influences, cultural factors and technological impacts that occur when audiences consume and engage with media. For instance, early U&G researchers argued that psychological and social elements impact people's media selection and exposure which then results in gratifications (Katz, Blumler & Gurvitch, 1973), although culture and technology are overlooked in that case. Sundar and Limperos (2013) explained that emerging media technologies such as SVOD services have caused new habits to develop such as binging a series or access to a wide array of series which allows individuals to explore different genres or international series. Audiences use SVOD services differently than regular television channels. As with binging culture, audiences watch series in continuum because of, for instance, nostalgic reasons, or because it is simply available and will make them happy (Sundar and Limperos, 2013). There are several other needs and gratifications associated with streaming services due to the wide array of content from all around the world and different formats of watching, thus developing the U&G theory has to develop to keep up with the current media and entertainment world.

Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) list five basic needs media can fulfill. First, cognitive needs (e.g. information, knowledge and understanding). Second, social-emotional needs (e.g. the need for emotional and aesthetic experiences). Third, personal integrative needs (e.g. a need for self-assurance), 4) social integrative needs (e.g. a need to strengthen relationships with family and friends through interests). Fifth and final, tension-release needs (e.g. escaping current realities and stress relief). However, Ruggiero (2000) stated that contemporary models

need to incorporate more concepts such as interactivity, demassification, hypertextuality, and asynchronicity. For instance, with tension-release and factors of hypertextuality, stress can be relieved almost anywhere with a diverse array of content. With the anytime, any place service a new form of consumption arose, such as a quick break rather than scheduling in a TV schedule. This already displays a shift in the interactivity between audiences and media. Additionally, cognitive needs have evolved, audiences have the choice and selection of content developed all over the world due to Netflix's productions, although the motivations behind consuming this content and the gratifications experienced, still have to be investigated further.

A common and yet still occurring use and gratification for watching series from a non-native language is to develop fluency in that language. Bottomley (2018) and Barza and Memari (2014) found that younger generations consume series and films in other languages to understand slang, keep up with trends, and as a passive way of learning the language through interactions, allowing them to gain gratification on their cultural capital. Cultural capital is a multilayered concept, although it-can be explained as the demographic factors and life experiences that could direct cultural competencies and knowledge that are available to audiences (Straubhaar, 2007). Perkarkova (2019) found five important factors that influence an individual's cultural capital: immigration background, international friends and family, living in a multicultural environment, travelling abroad, and knowledge of foreign languages. These factors act as a base as to how open and willing individuals are to engage with foreign series, such as having a large group of international friends is expected to make an individual more open to international series, as they could watch it with the friend.

The degree to which audiences are involved with the series and motivated to use media, is swayed by how much an individual relies on it, and how well it satisfies the needs and has better gratifications (e.g. avoiding loneliness) (Ruggiero, 2000). Accordingly, audience forms of expectancy were incorporated into the theory, namely the gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO). Hussain, Shabir and Hassan (2020) supported this theory as they argued that saying needs gained was not enough to fully understand audiences' experiences with media as there are expectations involved with the gratifications received; and investigating-what audiences sought from an experience versus what they received from the experience (Hussain, Shabir & Hassan, 2020). Moreover, audiences evaluate the gratifications they received from the experience which also plays a role in their overall engagement with the media. For this reason,

this research aims to identify which gratifications were sought out by audiences and which gratifications they obtained. Allowing the audiences to reflect on their position while engaging with the series and why they did so in the first place can give insights into their engagement with other television series. Especially in the sense of foreign series, one may understand-not only if there are different GS and GO for productions made in different countries but also if there are similarities with for instance a German series and a Brazilian series.

More in terms of U&G, Halkoaho (2012) discuss that gratifying self-related to the original structure of the theory; under the term social-emotional needs, in which the self is gratified through consuming aesthetic and hedonic series. Lastly, enriching oneself is a matter of identity construction, and relating to or engaging with series, characters, and plots can allow audiences to feel self-fulfillment. This is to be noted, especially in terms of how identity interplays with why and how audiences consume media, and how the concept of identity factors into the degree of engagement audiences display or feel. Halkoaho's (2012) study found that individuals link products to themselves, through forms of engagement: such as emotional attachment, connectedness and self-connection, since individuals use media to link it with or dissociate it from their identity. Within the U&G there is a starting point of needs or gratifications sought ,which approach the media for different reasons and can experience the aforementioned forms of engagement of self, described by-Halkoaho (2012). Take self-connection, in which audiences experience gratification as the series connects and relates to the individual's identity and life themes. Whether it was intended or not to obtain such gratification from a series, it occurred, and individuals are able to identify with the series which provides a deeper and more complex relationship of gratifications (Halkoaho, 2012).

As with newer technologies and greater access to forms/types of entertainment, American audiences engage with foreign series, disregarding the cultural distance and rather seeking to watch foreign series for a multitude of factors (Pekárková, 2019). These factors include curiosity of life and/or productions in different countries, escapism, relating to themes, depiction of reality and so forth (Jenson, 2018). Supporting such an argument is the research done by Kim (2001). They found that theories about audiences' motivation to watch foreign films are thought to be affected by viewers' diverse backgrounds, involvement-in interpersonal interactions with people from different backgrounds, and the availability of foreign films, in addition to their experiences with other cultures and pre-existing cultural values.

To conclude, Entertainment media was bounded by either local or national productions or by American blockbusters maintaining a grip on the international film market (Davis, Michelle, Hardy & Hight, 2012). However, as mentioned earlier with SVOD services, all the affordances of Netflix and their global productions, there is a shift in the motivations and gratifications users receive from SVOD platforms as well as the type of content they are consuming. Here, it is necessary to consider the audiences' motivations, needs, gratifications sought, and gratifications obtained while engaging with foreign Netflix series. If audiences watch foreign films to learn about cultures, they could be motivated enough to accept others' culture; or if they are just interested in entertainment, it is unknown yet whether the more they are exposed to foreign films, the more they tolerate or appreciate different cultural ideas. The different gratifications are what needs to be investigated and the audiences' reception of these series regarding their wants and needs.

3. Methodology

The current chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research design and method used to answer the proposed research questions. The research design is where a general framework for this study is presented – followed by the sampling section that delves into the series used and the participants selected for this study. The operationalization of the theoretical concepts is reviewed by using the interview guide in the third section. The fourth section discusses data collection and analysis. Finally, the validity and reliability are covered to ensure all areas of concern are discussed.

3.1. Research Design

This study examines the phenomena of Dutch television audience engagement with foreign Netflix original series. Utilizing an audience reception angle allows the researcher to investigate how individuals interpret the media products they encounter and uncover their sense-making processes (Livingstone, 2000). This study investigates reception through the perspective of cultural and thematic proximity and the uses and gratifications theory. To investigate these concepts in-depth, a qualitative research approach was taken. Qualitative research allows the researcher to take an interpretive and naturalistic perspective to study certain phenomena in our society (Morrison, 2014). Qualitative methods allow the phenomena to be investigated by focusing on human behavior, internal feelings, and people's experiences (Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaie, 2017) to discover hidden meanings and patterns (Babbie, 2016). Thus, a quantitative approach would not have been appropriate for this research as it uncovers frequencies, trends, and correlations. In contrast, a qualitative approach uncovers subjective and social meanings (Brennen, 2017). To understand Dutch nationals' meaning-making process with the consumption of foreign Netflix original series under the assumption that the interpretations are drawn on expectations, needs, identities pre-understandings, it is a complicated process that requires an in-depth and personal method.

This research was designed and guided by the theoretical findings in the previous chapter. However, this study aimed not to test what is already known but rather to build on and grow the existing research on global television engagement in different contexts that have not yet been investigated, e.g. Dutch television audiences' uses and gratifications for foreign Netflix series.

A series of 12 online semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out through Zoom. Participants were sampled based on their having watched three out of the six sampled television series, which were sampled based on international and local popularity. The interviews were then analyzed using thematic analysis. The following sections delve into the details of the researcher's methods.

3.2.a. Sampling of Netflix Original Series

The lack of research found drove the decision to focus on Dutch viewers and their forms of engagement and reception of foreign-produced series. There has been research on American viewers and their reception of foreign content as America used to be a country resistant to foreign content, although that country is now increasingly becoming a major market for important non-English series (Hazelton, 2018, Pekarkova, 2019). However, in the Netherlands, entertainment content was either local or foreign as it came from America, the UK, and Holland with occasional German or French productions (Hagedoorn, 2021). In Holland, over 90% of Dutch nationals speak English as their second language, hence their willingness to consume international content has and is high (Statistics Netherlands, 2019). However, now with Netflix and other services producing more international content, Spanish, German, Brazilian, and more country productions are gaining attention. Therefore, the research focuses on non-Dutch and non-English as those aspects are out of the norm of American blockbusters or Dutch reality TV. American series were not considered for this study as these were already widely consumed in Holland, whereas Spanish series or Scandinavian series are increasing in popularity (Parrot Analytics, 2020).

A list of six non-English and non-Dutch Netflix original foreign-produced series was created for this study. The category of Netflix original series is defined as any show that was/is commissioned and produced by Netflix (Robinson, 2018). This means that shows produced by another broadcasting network for which Netflix has exclusive streaming rights, are not included in this research. Some of the most popular examples of Netflix's original series are *Dark* or *Lupin* regarding foreign content. The former show, according to Netflix, is one of "the most-watched entirely, non-English shows" (Roettgers, 2018), with over 90% of the viewers coming from outside Germany (Roettgers, 2018). *Lupin* reached over 70 million households within a month of its being released (Feldman, 2021). The show claimed the number one spot out of the top ten list

on Netflix in countries like France, Poland, the Philippines, and the Netherlands (Feldman, 2021).

Netflix rarely publishes viewer data (Wayne, 2018), therefore tools such as Parrot Analytics, FlixPatrol, and specific press releases about series were used to determine the popularity of series. These tools enabled the researcher to understand the demand for the series in comparison to other specific genre titles in the Dutch market, such as with *Lupin* it ranked in the top 90% in the drama genre, thus translating into a 90% higher demand than all drama titles in the Netherlands (Parrot Analytics, 2021). According to Netflix's annual "What We Watched in 2020" series, where the company releases series successes, *La Casa de Papel* was in the top 10 in 92 countries, and *Ragnarök* was in the top 10 in 89 countries (including the Netherlands) (Netflix, 2020). *Ragnarök* has placed in the upper 80% of the drama genre titles in the Netherlands, with a high demand for the series within the first month of its release (Mallikarjuna, 2021). *Dark*, *3%,* and *Narcos* are featured on TV Times' list of "Netflix's Top 20 most-watched foreign language shows" (Bucksbaum, 2017) as well ScreenRant's (2020) "Best non-English Netflix shows, ranked by IMDB." *La Casa de Papel* and *Dark* are ranked in the Top 3 in many series--ranking charts. With the release of season 3 of *La Casa de Papel*, the show was estimated to be 31% more in demand than the average series globally (Parrot Analytics, 2020a), exceeding the demand for popular shows like *Game of Thrones* or *Westworld* within the first month of its release. *Narcos* production has stopped. However, it was an extremely popular series throughout each season. For instance, the week when season 3 was released, 27.2 million estimated subscriber accounts watched it (Parrot Analytics, 2020a).

Shows produced inside Europe and outside Europe were sampled, such as *Narcos* was mainly produced in Colombia, and *3%* was produced in Brazil. The sampling was based on findings that many Dutch nationals mainly go on vacation within the EU, to countries like Germany, Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom (Statistics Netherlands, 2019). As discussed in the theoretical framework, familiarity with certain countries and cultures in the series can interplay in television audiences' engagement. For instance, as many Dutch nationals have traveled to France, this could be a motivator to watch a series like *Lupin* due to nostalgia, and remembrance can be a factor of engagement when they can understand specific slang or recognize a place (Kim, Kim & Petrick, 2017). In contrast, the lack of exposure seems to motivate audiences to engage with shows due to curiosity, hence shows from the EU and outside

the EU were selected (Kim, Kim & Petrick, 2017). Additionally, utilizing series from around the world provides a preferable environment for investigating the relations to cultural capital as it allows links to be traversed across countries of origin production that have different degrees of cultural and geographical distance to the Netherlands. Therefore, the following six shows were selected due to international and Dutch market popularity rankings, the available audience--viewer statistics, European and internationally produced shows: *Ragnarök* (Norway), *Dark* (Germany), *3%* (Brazil)*, La Casa de Papel* (Spain), *Lupin* (France), and *Narcos* (Colombia).
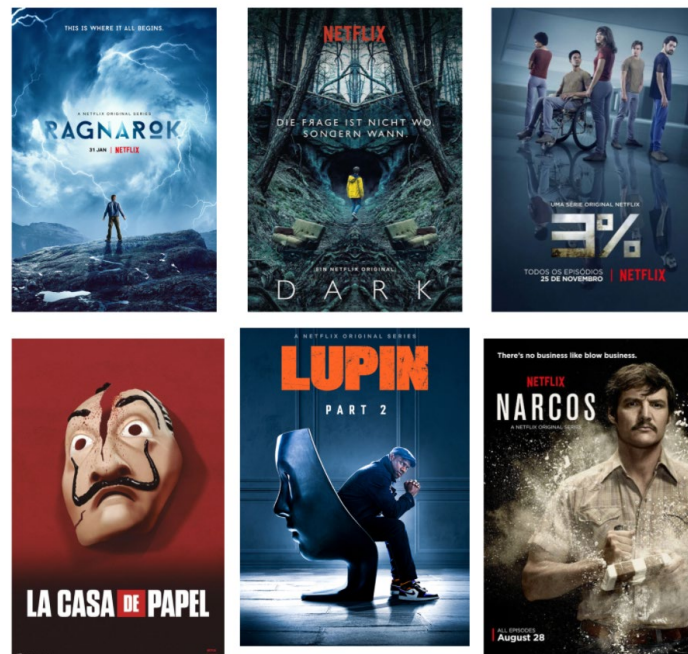
Figure 2: Posters of the Netflix original series

3.2.b. Participant Sampling

The unit of analysis for this research is Dutch nationals, those with Dutch citizenship, or a Dutch passport. As Holland has a multitude of citizens from the Caribbean, Morocco, Surinam, and many more countries, this research aims to be inclusive of all those who identify themselves as Dutch, which means that this research focuses on whether the person identifies with the Dutch culture and if it is a part of their lifeworld. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, lifeworld is the perceived reality viewed from the individual's perspective, which acts as a basis of sense-making processes and individual agency. In this culture, it typically functions as a large

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determinator of meaning-making processes. Hence someone may hold a passport or live in Holland but may not identify themselves as Dutch, and those individual were not used for this study. Instead, those who identify themselves with the Dutch culture were used. Dutch culture is a broad concept, however, what is essential is that they feel that they are Dutch, and participants were asked what being Dutch means for them. This allowed the researcher insight into the Dutch culture and saw what it meant for everyone, which was later used to compare other cultures. This decision did widen the sample population, which does impact the generalizability of the study. However, the focus is on Dutch nationals who have both attributes that consider national identity, namely a form of identification, and the sense of belonging through identification with the culture at hand (Tartakovsky, 2010). Hence, the researcher felt it was important to include multicultural individuals who may not be homogenous by skin color or lack an immigrant background but do have a similar sense of nationality and identity.

Furthermore, the sample was narrowed to focus on individuals enrolled at university or a recent graduate within the age range of 18 to 30 years old. Research has shown that this age group watches Netflix the most in the Netherlands, with around 88 minutes of watching Netflix per day (Stoll, 2021). Thus, the likelihood of those individuals having watched foreign series is higher as they are on Netflix the most and could have watched more series. Narrowing the sample allowed for focused research where the researcher could explore more nuanced differences in the reception of foreign series that might be overlooked if a larger age group were included or a broader sample regarding education level.

Another criterion of the sample is that those selected for the study need to have watched at least three out of the six selected foreign Netflix original series. The criterion for watching is having seen at least 75% of the series. Thus, if there are two seasons, the full first season and the majority of the second season should have been watched. However, some attention will be given to shows that the participants have not yet watched. This could provide information about motivations to watch specific series. Additionally, participants are not required to have prior experience with the culture and themes displayed in the series. However, if they do, this will provide insights into the comparison made between experiences in real life and through media. This will be compared to those that do not have experience with those cultures to see a contrast or lack thereof.

The participants were sampled through the method of purposive snowball sampling. This method permits the researcher complete control over the sample needed to answer the research (Brennen, 2017) rather than a randomized selection of a larger population. In snowball sampling, the researcher reaches out to those they know within the sample and asks to be referred to other people who could participate in the study and who fit the criteria (Dragan & Isaic-Maniu, 2013). A total of 12 participants were sampled, with seven females and six males, with an average age of 22.5 from different parts of the Netherlands, such as Rotterdam or Groningen. A complete overview of the respondents' demographics can be seen in Appendix i.

3.3. Data Collection

The data was collected through 12 semi-structured interviews. In the end, a total of 10.7 hours of interviews were recorded, with an average of 53 minutes per interview. All 12 interviews were organized through a video call on Zoom and the responses were audio recorded. An online interview was held because of the current circumstances of COVID-19 and social–distancing regulations. This ruled out face-to-face interactions with the interviewees, which typically is the best approach for interviews. To mitigate the loss of this naturalistic environment due to a new online environment, the researcher asked the participants to keep their cameras on during the interview. This allowed the researcher to read body language and pick up social cues more easily than if their video was not on. During the interview, stimuli from the shows were used to display some cultural actions or thematic scenes to allow the participants to relive a scene, and the researcher was able to delve deeper into their thoughts and feelings about the scene. Zoom allows the host to share their screen, and while doing this, the researcher can still see the participant and vice versa.

Semi-structured interviews were selected as these allow the researcher a freer flow in the interview, which enables a smooth conversation that is concentrated towards generating new meanings from the respondent (Galletta & Cross, 2013). A semi-structured interview is a form of standardization that is accomplished through pre-prepared interview questions, topics, and probes. This warrants that interviews are focused on relevant topics to answer the research question (Flick, 2011). If the interviewee steers away from the focus at hand, the interviewer can bring the focus back. However, the structure remains flexible and allows the researcher to follow up any different paths for exploration which may arise during the interview (Flick, 2011). This

structure also allowed the researcher to encourage participants to elaborate and explore their thoughts and experiences in depth, and a method of probing was constantly used during the interviews to ensure the researcher understood what the participant was discussing or to find out more about the topic (Galletta & Cross, 2013). The interview was then transcribed with the assistance of an application called temi.com; once it was generated, the researcher went through the interviews ensuring the transcription was accurate and editing it.

3..4. Operationalization

As previously stated, a semi-structured interview scheme was used for this research. The interview was led by an interview guide that focused on the themes and topics to be covered to obtain answers to the research questions. The guide was divided into four main sections, each section focusing on covering certain topics concerning participants' engagement. To recapitulate, it was a guide. The researcher would use it to start discussions, leading into different topics and themes. However, due to the semi-structured nature, there were many follow-up questions and discussions during the interview that are not on the guide itself.

The first section of the interview focused on creating a strong rapport with the interviewees during the interviews to simulate the sense of connection and immediacy experienced in a face-to-face setting. The strategies used to create the report included establishing contact with respondents before the interviews. This is where demographics were covered, such as age, and education, but to get the participants talking and already reflecting on their Netflix behavior, questions focus on the types of TV series they watched and why. This also allowed the researcher to understand interests and possible motivators which were asked about.

The second section of the interview focused specifically on their Netflix usage, why they use the platform, why they click on certain shows to begin watching them, and if they have any expectations from the show before watching it (e.g. quality, how it will make them feel, if they will learn anything). Then it transitioned to focus on why they watch foreign Netflix series, why they use Netflix specifically to watch it, and their motivations for watching. This section also focused on motivations for watching, such as the role of recommendations and algorithms in influencing viewing choices (Burroughs, 2018). In this section, if participants talked about the cultures, languages, or themes that motivated them, this was followed up and discussed in-depth

with the researcher. The focus on cultural motivators or thematic motivators allowed the researcher to transition and focus on the other sections, such as cultural and thematic proximity.

The following section focused on cultural proximity and cultural capital in order to investigate the participants' forms of cultural capital available to them, for instance, their familiarity with cultures due to travels, education, or upbringing. This allowed the researcher to follow up on motivations why they watched a show in a culture that they were (un)familiar with. The section later focused more on cultural proximity to uncover how they engaged their culture while watching the show, looking into cultural differences and similarities, and explored aspects of familiarity or foreignness that enabled them to enjoy the show.

The last section was divided into six subsections, as this focused more on the individual series. This allowed the researcher to focus on the cultural aspect of each show, such as French culture in *Lupin* or Brazilian in *3%*. Stimulus was also shown of certain cultural acts, such as the main character in *Lupin* dipping his baguette slice into his coffee, which is a French action. Following the specific cultural focus was a thematic focus. Where themes in the series were highlighted, such as divorce, break-ups, family relationships, workplace struggles (e.g. sexism or racism). Each participant was asked how these themes related to them, and if they were related, how did that make them feel and how they watched the show, as well as if they were unfamiliar with, or did not relate to it, and how that interrelated with their engagement. The stimulus was used in many sections to jog the participants' memory of certain scenes.

3.5. Data Analysis

The transcribed interview was analyzed through a thematic analysis. This method allows the researcher to identify and build new concepts without being constrained by existing theory (Boeije, 2010). The analysis was conducted utilizing Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software. Thematic analysis can be deductive or inductive. The interview guide was informed by existing theoretical concepts related to the engagement and reception of foreign content. Thus, it is necessary to note that the pre-existing ideas of specific topics had a contributing effect on the analysis. However, this research aimed to make it relevant to a specific market and create themes that reflected the data collected during the interviews. Therefore, the data represent even the experiences and meanings that may not have been present in current audience reception literature.

Thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify, examine, and report patterns in the data. This enables a large sum of data to be concise and grouped to explain the phenomena at hand, by categorizing the data into umbrella themes. The themes emerge from coding the data, categorizing, re-coding, and re-categorizing, by following three stages: open, axial, and selective coding, to reach the final themes that serve to answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This research followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-step analysis for a guide on thematic analysis. First, the researcher familiarized herself with the data, reading the transcripts, and made small notes of specific points of interest. Secondly, open coding entails tagging words, terms, and sections of interest with a label, either a word or a short phrase. Third, the researcher created categories based on these open codes, creating axial codes that group the open codes by commonalities. In the fourth step, the researcher created themes and reviewed the themes based on the axial codes. Themes are another set of umbrella terms to encompass the axial codes. The fifth stage was defining and naming the themes and how they could relate to the research. The final phase was reporting the data and themes. In each step, the researcher-constantly revised and reviewed the themes, ensuring a representational coding process. An overview of the coding stage is available in Appendix i.

3.6. Validity and reliability

As this research utilized purposive sampling, the participants sampled are dependent on the researchers' criteria. The criteria were set, and if another researcher wants to replicate this research, they can do so with similar participants. However, the results may vary as everyone has a different background even if they identify as Dutch, or has different exposures and experiences with cultures. However, this could provide more insightful data into the research, which allows for a broader understanding by comparing the more comprehensive sample, analyzing outlying cases, and finding possible commonalities.

Silverman (2011) claims that, through qualitative data interpretation, a technique to increase validity is the use of a deductive approach as it will be based on a pre-established and transparent theoretical framework with findings that are guided by the framework. By doing so, the research's validity is increased. In terms of reliability with thematic analysis, this is where problems can occur. In-depth interviews result in a large sum of data collected. Consequently,

there are copious amounts of data to interpret, resulting in aspects of the data being left out, which could be significant. This can be avoided by following the 6-steps of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The beginning stages include ensuring the researcher is exceptionally familiar with the data, then coding it, including re-coding, and evaluating the codes before categorizing and making themes.

Finally, the researcher has an emic perspective on the sampled series, which allows the researcher to have a deeper understanding when participants discuss certain characters, themes, and cultures represented in the series. The researcher can retain experiences and knowledge from her own experience from watching the series and be guided by the theoretical framework. Moreover, the researcher studied different shows and how culture was represented to understand a local's perspective if the show was accurate. Such findings showed the researcher keywords such as "*Gambiarra*" that were focused on in *3%*, which in Brazil is a popular word to describe that people do not deal with things the way they are "supposed" to, but rather, take the easiest and most convenient way possible (Carolina, 2017) This trend includes family relationships and eating habits, such as the French dipping a baguette in coffee. The experience of watching with the theoretical framework and the guidance of secondary research allowed the researcher to dive deeper into each series regarding culture and themes with the participants.

4. Results

The present study aims to explore how young Dutch nationals engage with global television as represented by Netflix. The researcher used thematic analysis to explore the motivations, and forms of engagement during and after consuming global Netflix television series. A total of 705 open codes were identified, and relationships among these codes were sorted based on similarities. Thus, 27 axial codes were derived. The final step of thematic analysis allowed four main themes to be formulated; (1) Motivations for engagement, (2) cultural engagement, (3) story and character engagement, and (4) positioning self. Positioning self was a recurring pattern within each theme, therefore the researcher believed it deserved to be highlighted as an umbrella theme throughout this research. Therefore there are subsections dedicated to how audiences positioned themselves within each aspect of engagement.

The themes provide a conceptual base in order to answer the research question, they serve as a lens to understand how culture and themes function as a form of engagement and the degree to which they interplay with Dutch nationals' engagement with foreign series as seen by Netflix. For an overview of the themes and the coding process, see appendix iv and v. The general findings are that many participants used culture or language combined with social motivations as a reason to begin watching the series, although while watching they paid little attention to culture, unless participants were familiar with the culture, only then would they comment on the cultural aspects. Moreover, cultural, and thematic aspects play a large role in how audiences engage with the series, with the common finding that the more distant it is from themselves, the greater the enjoyment they can experience with the series. The following sections will discuss the findings in light of the themes in order to answer the research question and sub-research questions.

4.1.1. Motivations and Expectations

To begin with, as the uses and gratifications theory was used to investigate why Dutch nationals engage with foreign Netflix original series, a pattern emerged. All 12 participants stated that the motivation came from wanting something more. More refers to the type of content; participants typically sought something outside of the American entertainment narrative, this forming one axial code. Other patterns emerged which were categorized into the axial codes that fall under this theme, those being; escaping life and self, social motivations, disliking Dutch

content, genre motivation, cultural motivations, high expectations and trusting Netflix. Social motivations proved to be the leading motivation in watching content in general, however, the participants relied more on their social circles, or social media in deciding to watch a foreign series. Other participants would look at ratings from IMDB or Netflix recommendations, but only three of the participants trusted Netflix's algorithm and recommendation system. Others were focused on the plot and whether it was recommended to them from a friend. For instance Robby (23, Male) signed up to Netflix for the purpose of watching the show *Lupin*, because all of his friends were talking about it. He also categorized himself as a "cinema-fanatic", so when he was unable to watch the series on other illegal sites (as illegal sites do not have subtitles), it was enough motivation for him to be motivated to buy a subscription and watch the series.

As social recommendations play a large role in motivations, high expectations come along with the motivation. There were three main expectations or, as referred to by Ruggiero (2000), gratifications sought, that participants used as motivations. The first was seeking and expecting a good plot and story, where participants sought out a story that would provide a sense of escapism in a story, plot, characters and at times cultures that were distant to themselves.

> Everything was really fantasy-isch. And I really do like that to like, I do that to distract me. I watched that to distract me because it's so far away from whatever happens here and from myself. (Carry, 21, Female)
> [...] I think it's really cool. And that makes me escape from my boring, ass working life, nine to five, bank work. And that's why I like it so much, and why I watch it. (Stormy, 23, Female)

As participants were motivated by a good plot, they were also motivated and sought out a story that could make them escape their life, which enabled the participants to continue watching and engaging with the series. It is a motivator from when they first start the show, and while watching it.

All of the participants were motivated by social recommendations but an added level of motivation was present when it was inline with their interests in genres and storylines. A common pattern among participants was the motivation to watch complex, thrilling, crime and mystery genres and if those were recommended to them from friends or family they are more motivated to watch it. However, the pressure from their social circle is very important because the content is in another language, it requires more attention and focus according to the

participants. Therefore they cannot multitask or be on their phone while watching the series, which demotivated them from watching foreign series at times. As Innie summed up:

> Usually when I watch a show, I would like to do other things. So maybe I do a little cleaning. I do a little phone scrolling. I do a little, you know, like being busy… With English, I can just understand it because I understand English, but I don't speak a word French. As I focused on the show constantly, and it's not really efficient because I like to do multiple things at the same time. And with the Spanish show, *La Casa*, I really have to focus. (Innie, 22, Female)

With the needed attention and focus comes the second expectation, higher expectations with the foreign series. The story needs to be captivating, complex and with high-end production, because it requires more focus therefore the participants want it to be really good. Not only was it a consideration to begin watching it but to also continue watching it, said Robby:

> Um, because the thing is that you need subtitles to understand the series. So if you're watching the series, you really can't be on your phone. Um, so I mean, the expectations are higher for me. If I want to continue watching a foreign series, then they need to be really good because otherwise I won't be able to follow it because I'll be on my phone the whole time. So expectations are a little bit higher. (Robby, 22, Male)

The third and final expectation focuses on the country where the series is produced. Participants stated that series that were produced in other countries motivated them to watch it. As the foreignness is a motivator due to their expectations to see a country and its culture represented, such series are a "sneak peak into a culture" (Tommy, 22, Male). Therefore they expect to gain some insights into the culture, or see some of the country. Although this is a motivator to begin watching the series, the focus on culture throughout the series is lost, unless the show is actively focusing on the culture. Participants discussed other Netflix series such as *Emily in Paris*, where culture is the core of the series, which they watched due to the country. This helped increase their cultural capital as participants learned about the culture through language, interactions, and scenery (Barza & Memari, 2014). Whereas with the series discussed for this research, participants believed these did not actively display culture. Such as *Lupin*, participants claimed there was little or no focus on culture, other than the buildings and scenery which they enjoyed because they saw France, but was not the main focus for them. The participants sought gratifications such as learning about the culture, seeing the country, but did

not obtain those gratifications, which according to Hussain, Shabir and Hassan (2020) should lessen their enjoyment or engagement. However, the participants did not care for that, as they began watching it, all their focus was on the plot with the occasional cultural or country displays, which allowed them to engage with the series.

For some participants there was a focus on the language either because they were learning the language, therefore wanted to watch a series that features the language. As language displays forms of culture through the interactions between the characters, which support similar findings by Bottomley (2018) and Barza and Memari (2014), the importance of language is assumed in motivations. However, the focus on language was predominantly with French, German and Spanish as these are the languages Dutch nationals can learn in highschool. As one participant (Rachy, 24, Female) stated "these are the languages I am most surrounded by [...] so I guess I like to watch it and pick up on some things, especially since I might go vacation there, it's right next door." The participants existing cultural capital influenced their attitudes towards series as they were exposed to these cultures and languages beforehand, which provided them with more incentive to engage with the series due to familiarity and interest.

4.1.1a. Engaged with Difference

Every series is American, everything on TV is American sort of like at least. And at one point I might be like, okay, well, I'm kind of done with the LA story or the New York story, you know, like the same setting. So now, I look for something different than the American stuff. (Som, 22, Male)

A shared feeling from all participants was wanting something different or "something more" (Marry, 22, Female) than the typical American content, mainly because "everything is the same. It doesn't surprise me anymore. [...] like Japanese or Scandinavian cinematography and films are so different and great" (Som, 22, Male). Therefore, participants felt motivated to engage and consume content from different countries because they were curious about other countries' production styles, or how they would develop characters in Spain or Brazil. Or how they would develop a common theme such as divorce, and if there were undertones of culture in how a family from Germany as seen in *Dark* would deal with it. This supports Squires's (2018) argument that individuals connect to productions not only on a content basis but also on a producer and writer level, as individuals were motivated to learn and engage with content due to

their interest in production levels of other countries. The perception of a country's distance from themselves was what motivated them to consume it, due to curiosity similar to Jenson's (2018) findings, where curiosity motivated viewers to engage with foreign series. Participants actively sought something different and for instance when they were able to see different scenery from what they were used to, or interactions between people this motivated them to continue watching. The cultural proximity between Dutch and for instance Brazil or Spain was something that motivated them to watch the series, arguing against La Pastina and Straubhaar's (2005) theory and suggesting the idea of a cosmopolitan viewer that should be considered. As all the participants had been to international schools, had international friends, travelled a lot, and had family members around the world. All these factors are what participants attributed to being why they believed they were open to international series. Moreover, Rachy states:

> Holland is a small country with people from everywhere, and we Dutch people accommodate everyone by speaking their languages and we like it and that's just what we have to do, we are just very open people. If you go to France you know you have to say *bonjour* but when the French are here in Holland we don't say *Hoi* we say *bonjour*.
> (Rachy, 24, Female)

Thus, instead of culture being a demotivator for watching, it is rather why audiences engage with series because they view themselves as cosmopolitan and have high cultural capital.

A large motivator to watch series from another culture was to escape their life and reality, and shows from another culture facilitated that as these shows were certain to be distant to themselves. "I watch something as far away as I can because I want something different from my life, that includes the language, culture, country, because I want something more than me to distract myself" (Sabby, 24, Female). When the participants were asked where they consumed the most foreign content, they all stated on Netflix. Some stated it was because they trusted Netflix's content and therefore their foreign content would be just as good. Others stated that other streaming services did not have foreign content, therefore it was the only available outlet for international content. Many of the participants also stated they disliked Dutch content because it was redundant with a lack of development or, as Innie (22, female) referred to it, as "trash TV. But Netflix has good shows in general so I just trust and like the content even if it's trashy TV, it's better than Dutch content." Thus, the trust the participants have with Netflix's original content allowed for an easier form of initial engagement with the foreign series. As

discussed in the theoretical framework, the general perception of Netflix original series as quality TV allowed their series to travel internationally (Davis, Michelle, Hardy & Hight, 2012; Jenner, 2018), and the participants shared feelings of trust and liking for Netflix's content in general. Therefore, the participants were more willing to engage with the series due to the platform and studio that produced the foreign content.

4.2. Cultural Engagement

An aspect this research aimed to examine was how cultural proximity interrelated with audience engagement. Under the cultural engagement theme, seven axial codes were assembled- comparing cultures, actions associated with character, focus on country, curiosity, focus on language, enjoying cultural details, and familiarity with culture. As mentioned previously, all the participants were motivated to engage with these series due to the different cultures. Participants enjoyed that the series were produced in another country. They said they originally had a focus on culture to begin watching, but the focus on culture while watching the series dissipated. For instance, the participants that had not watched *Lupin,* stated that they wanted to watch it because it was from France. "I want to watch Lupin because of the language and because it's based in France. I have not been there, but I want to go so this will help me see the country and culture, maybe learn some French." (Sammy, 22, Female). The participants attributed wanting to watch culturally foreign series to their interest in the language, familiarity with the country through travel, education, and friends, or because they were curious about different country productions. Sammy (22, Female) further added that she wanted international series because she was interested in how different countries produced series. For instance, Sammy would compare a French production with a Scandinavian series or a Brazilian series. Additionally, the participants compared the production value and style of the international series to Dutch productions. Innie (22, Female) stated "well, Dutch TV is either like documentaries or crap like Temptation Island, with the occasional good crime series, but Scandinavian productions have a different vibe and handle similar situations differently. Even French productions are also so different, and I really like that." Wanting something different from both American and Dutch content was a common trend among the participants. They sought out different cultural productions as they provided them with different or similar perspectives with different life themes, which interested the participants. Moreover, the different production value and focus of production caught the

attention of some participants, as mentioned earlier by Innie who spoke about different "vibes" or aesthetics of country productions.

Based on the participants' curiosity about other countries, the participants were asked how familiar they were with the country's culture from the series. When the participants were familiar with the country or culture, due to travel or other experiences, they stated it was enjoyable because they were able to notice the small details and "piece the whole picture, and really feel or see the whole scene" (Tommy, 22, Male). Another example was *La Casa de Papel*, which the participants stated rarely showed Spanish culture, however, when they would eat large meals at a late time and they would recognize the meals, this would give them a sense of understanding, or if they were familiar with the tradition, this would give them more insight into the actual experience, which they enjoyed. Participants that have traveled to the countries, experienced nostalgia or compared it to their own experiences in the country. Carry (23, Female) explained it as follows:

> When they went into the supermarket, I was looking at the prices to see if they showed it as how I experienced it, because everything was so expensive when I was there. I was looking at how they interacted with each other in the supermarket and how I experienced it. It brought back memories of my boyfriend and I there, and the good times and the shocked feeling we got when we saw the prices for a frozen pizza. Fun times.

Carry experienced a positive feeling towards the series due to her familiarity with or nostalgia for the country; this allowed her to engage with the series based on her understanding of Norway. A feeling of understanding which allowed for more enjoyment was felt among most of the participants. Robby felt that he was able to relate to a scene and found it more entertaining when he recognized some small cultural acts because it made him think back on those experiences with his friends, which as he said, "made me like the scene more" (Robby, 23, Male). Or for instance, in *Lupin*, there is a scene with delivery cyclists who wear the same outfit as in Holland, which made him relate to the show more because he could imagine a scene like this in the Netherlands. As there were aspects that are culturally similar in their home country and in other countries, this provides a different sense of familiarity as they can relate it to their own country and image the scene "as if it were happening in my city" (Denvery, 24, Male). This suggests with these participants that familiarity and relatability allow them to engage with the series differently than others as they are able to identify parts of their experiences within the

series and "see a wider picture" (Marry, 22, Female) that either made them laugh more at the scene or understand the significance more.

However, the participants that had not travelled to the country the series was set in, or were unfamiliar with cultural displays represented in the series, still enjoyed the series. They would simply not notice the cultural aspects, such as a popular cultural saying in Brazilian in *3%*, or traditional food in Norway seen in *Ragnarök*.When the participants were shown a stimulus from the series that displayed the countries culture, the participants stated it was enjoyable when they watched it before knowing and now it was also just as enjoyable. When the main character or a scene that displayed culture was shown, the participants stated that when they first watched it they mainly attributed it to just the character or the movie itself, not to the culture. For instance, in *3%* when the main character's father was talking to his son, he used the word *Gambiarra* which represents a motivated mindset in Brazil during hard times (Carolina, 2017), but the participants did not notice that and did not understand the deeper meaning of the word and the history behind it. They assumed it was common talk but still enjoyed the motivational speech between father and son just as much as the participants that knew the significance of the word. Those who knew what the word meant were able to connect to it more and draw on experiences. Although familiarity did not play an important role in the participants' enjoyment, when something was familiar there was a connection between themselves and the scene or series.

4.1.a. Positioning Culture

When the participants were asked to reflect on a particular series, they began comparing the culture depicted in the show to Dutch culture. Most participants stated while watching the series they tended not to focus on the culture itself because they were engaged with the plot, however when reflecting on the cultural aspects they were able to find differences. The participants that watched *Dark* stated that they never noticed the German culture in the series "because it is so similar to Dutch culture, like the schools are the same, the names, sometimes the words" (Denvery, 24, Male). The only cultural difference they noticed was the language, but even then it was so similar to Dutch and they had grown up around the language or went on vacation there, therefore the focus was not about culture with that series. With the other series, such as *Lupin* or *Narcos*, the participants did attribute the interactions between people as culture. Most participants stated they were curious to see the differences between how "Norwegian

friends act or like how Spanish friends behave with each other [...]" (Sammy, 22, Female). Another example, Sabby (24, Female) attributed the amount of emotion and passion shown bythe characters as a Spanish trait, while comparing it to Dutch culture. Other participants also focused on the emotions and the physical touching the characters did of each other and attributed it to Spanish culture. Most of the time it was compared to how Dutch individuals do not show as much emotion or men do not hug each other. Moreover, participants compared cultural differences not only on the basis of their Dutch culture, but also on their understanding of other cultures. The comparison was based on the aspects they picked up from watching different series, interactions, and experiences with those cultures. This suggests that the participants were consciously engaging with the differences between the cultures in the series, using their cultural identity as Dutch individuals to compare their understandings, although this was not an aspect that demotivated, but instead motivated them to continue watching. The participants enjoyed the differences as they were able to learn more about other cultures, which improved their cultural capital (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005).

Although the participants did notice minor differences in culture, this did not impede their enjoyment negatively, but positively: "I enjoyed it because it is culturally different to Holland" (Sammy, 22, Female). The cultural proximity theory suggests that different cultures would demotivate engagement, however these participants suggest otherwise. Participants were motivated to watch the series due to it being different, and while watching enjoyed it because it was something different from what they were used to. Others enjoyed the series because they were familiar with the culture and language, thus, it allowed them to relate it to their experiences: Eichner (2020) suggests individuals draw on their lifeworld while engaging. That argument is mainly in regard to thematic proximity but through these findings, it could be expanded to cultural experiences. The participants engaged with the series based on their experiences and understanding of whichever culture the series was displaying, by involving their lifeworlds and making sense of the series through their experiences or lack thereof.

Finally, the participants' cultural capital was high due to their experiences with travel, friend made from international study programs, and relationships and, as Athique (2016) argues, cultural proximity seemed to matter less for those individuals with high cultural capital. By contrast, it led them to enjoy the series independent of where it was from. Although motivated by the country and culture, participants enjoyed the series for what it was, with the added layer of

culture. Foreign shows allowed these participants to learn or recognize aspects of a foreign culture, and the participants were engaged with the difference rather than disengaged. culture did not play a large role while watching the series, as the participants believed the series itself was not focused on culture. They would attribute cultural representations to the surrounding architecture or the interactions between characters, but to repeat, the focus on those aspects once watching the series was not at the forefront of many of the participants' minds.

4.3. Story and Character Engagement

Another component this thesis aimed to investigate was thematic proximity in relation to engagement and what role it played compared to cultural proximity. Six axial codes were identified within this theme of story and character engagement, namely culture is not related, developed stories, engages with character, a focus on plot/theme and merely a story. Overall, it was found that participants were motivated to continue watching due to the themes and story within the series, despite the culture, language and if the themes were distant to themselves. Themes that were distant to themselves played an important role for participants' engagement, as the more distant to themselves the participants stated the series was, -the more, they enjoyed it due to the aspect of escapism and imagination: "this is something that will never happen to me, I'm not going to rob the Louvre (*Lupin)* or the Mint (*La Casa de Papel)* but it is fun and engaging to see how someone would" (Som, 22, Male). The thematic distance was especially linked to the genres participants were interested in, such as crime, heists, sci-fi and mystery as occurring within the series, as these were unlikely ever to happen to them. However, as mentioned previously, the distance did not lessen their enjoyment of the series.

4.3.a. Positioning Self

Participants were asked if and how they related themselves to certain themes in each series. To name a few of the themes, the friends or intimate relationships represented in *La Casa de Papel*, concepts of "right or wrong", the loss of a child, as seen in *3%*, family dynamics in *Dark*, youth and growing up in *Ragnarok,* or divorce, co-parenting and a parent going to jail in *Lupin*. Participants found it hard to relate to what they called distant themes such as a parent going to jail, the loss of a child, or the desire to resist and overthrow governments. However, a

total of five participants stated that they compared their situations to those in the series, for instance:

> In *Lupin*, the relationship between father and son, how he treats his son, is nice but he also avoids him so much. He has trauma from his father he is trying to deal with but he is also causing trauma with his son [...] when I was watching that, that one really personally hit me, like I was pissed while watching it. [...] And of course at this age in life, I was reminiscing, reflecting on a lot of things between my relationship with my parents and carrying that pattern on later on in life, if I choose to have children and so seeing that I was very triggered by it. (Sabby, 24, Female)

Sabby engaged with the show on a more personal level due to similar family circumstances and relationship issues. Other participants were able to relate to certain characters and themes which allowed them to become more involved with the characters in the series. This enabled a positive and emotional connection with the characters which "made me want to understand their situation and lives more" (Emmy, 22, Female). Compared to other participants who were unable to personally relate, they would comment on the situation by saying "it's sad" (Rachy, 24, Female) or for instance:

> I don't really know how I would react in the same situation. I just watched them go through the motions and tried understanding it, but at the same time it is a story in which the characters are built in a way that you get connected even if they aren't like you.
> (Tommy, 22, Male)

Even though the participants were unable to relate the themes to the characters, they related them to their general knowledge about the themes. Some participants based their understanding of the theme on their friends' experiences or the stories they heard about similar situations. With the more common themes such as divorce, participants were able to compare it to how their friends' parents behaved. Or if they were to go through a divorce, they would want either to behave or not behave as the character did. If the themes were vastly distant to themselves, the participants did not have any understanding or base points to compare the situation to, but the participants specifically stated that it did not matter because it was a story and "the point of it is to see something new and different that you can follow along and get attached to characters, imagine how you would react, or just what the directors could come up with that could completely shock you." (Marry, 22, Female).

In each of the series, a distant theme would be the main focus of the story, such as a heist, time-travel, dystopian monarchies, Gods and Goddesses walking on earth, but each of the series had universal themes that audiences were able to enjoy. Even if audiences were unfamiliar with the theme in their lives, common movie or series themes were depicted in the series in which audiences were able to relate their knowledge or understandings of universal tropes and topics used by popular and widely consumed American series, as well as new foreign Netflix shows. Therefore, a sense of familiarity was developed among audiences with the aforementioned themes, but with added twists of culture, or a plot twist that would keep the audiences engaged. Interviewees said that the selected foreign Netflix originals had many similarities to popular and enjoyable American series. For example, the participants compared *Dark* to *Stranger Things* or *3%* and the major US film productions, *The Hunger Games* or *Divergent*. The link between well-known American films and series that respondents-had previously watched or encountered and the foreign originals, has therefore provided an additional layer of proximity and familiarity; allowing the participants to relate to and follow the story while engaging with the characters' personal stories and themes.

4.3.b. Thematic distance

Although the themes were different to what they had experienced and are situated in another culture, the distance to their own life themes is what made the audiences engage with the series. The participants were originally motivated to watch something that was thematically distant to themselves: "it lets me escape my boring nine to five job at a bank and dive into a dystopian world" (Marry, 22, Female). Escapism was a strong motivator for engaging with thematically distant series, and the gratifications of escapism were the motivations to continue watching. Halkoaho's (2012) study suggests that self-connection plays a large role in the motivating factors to continue watching. This study claims that relevance and connectivity to the individual's self and life serve as a gratification for an audience and explain why individuals continue watching. However, the present study suggests otherwise. The participants wanted themes different to their lives, and even though they were able to relate to putting themselves in the characters' shoes, the significance and gratification of identification were unimportant.

Participants were also motivated to continue watching because they wanted to see the different perspectives, how countries would depict common themes, and how "a person in that

situation would go through these hurdles and go through different situations". The thematic distance was not an issue for the participants, as Sammy summed up:

> In the end it all feels relatable because we are all human and you can empathize with everyone. Divorce hurts all the same but different people deal with it differently and you get to see how someone is similar or different to you, based on whatever characteristics, personality or country. Even when someone is robbing a bank, I will never be doing that but then you see their life and what makes them who they are which is different to boring old me but it lets me imagine myself there and see how they deal with the situation and I sometimes imagine how I would. That is what keeps me going with the show, because I understand but I don't relate [...] (Sammy, 22, Female).

Participants were engaged with the characters and the realistic and authentic depiction of characters, the situations they were going through, and certain life themes. Importance was placed on how realistic the reactions and how the characters handled the situation. This thesis found similar results as those in Eichner's (2020) study with Australian viewers of Danish reality TV dramas; they were engaged with the general themes displayed with people, and the authenticity of situations was very important for audiences to engage with the story.

These results mirrored Eichner's (2020) findings in that the participants cared more about thematic proximity than cultural proximity. By contrast, Eichner's (2020) study found it was important that the themes were relatable because it was reality TV, which should represent what others went through. However, in the present study, the stories and characters were fictional but the themes in the series were representable of real-life occurrences, which allowed the participants to understand, relate to or position themselves in or with the character. Authenticity in this study refers to the character's emotions and reactions to situations. Accurate depictions of culture were important to the participants, such as Spanish traditions and celebrations in *Casa de Papel* or with French history and cultural artifacts such as the Queen's necklace in *Lupin*. Although the participants were mainly focused on where they got the authentic feeling from the plot and on the depiction of society and characters within the series. This added a multilayered textual universe about a country through language or place, while presenting widely relatable or understandable themes, for instance, women's empowerment in a male-dominated field (*La Casa De Papel)* or social and environmental activism (*Ragnarök*). The specific way that the fictional

world was built allowed the participants to engage with these topics, regardless of familiarity with the themes or where they were from (Eichner, 2020).

Moreover, the lack of familiarity and self-relevance with the themes and the high engagement rate could be attributed to the factor of Netflix's drive for local but global content (Lobato, 2019; Jenner, 2018). Jantje Friese, who is the co-creator of *Dark*, said during an interview with IndieWire that during the development process, *Dark* was never just a German show, but rather approached the production process by seeing it as a global show that could reach a global audience (Nguyen, 2019). Friese states in the interview, "even though the culture is different all around the world, there are certain things that are everywhere. The same people laugh, cry, they get born, they die – just fundamental human stuff". Ensuring that the overall narrative works for everyone was and still is important for Netflix. *Dark* did include certain references that would be familiar only to German viewers (e.g. a traditional chocolate bar that is present in each time-switch). Netflix also made sure to eliminate aspects that they believed global audiences would not grasp, such as interactions between characters that relied on a culturally specific form of sarcasm (Gill, 2017).

5. Conclusion

Netflix started as a streaming service offering titles from other production companies, in 2018 offering over 15,400 films and series, which have now dropped to around 15,000 (Trainer, 2019). However, this is due to Netflix's focusing its budget on original content, with over 1,500 original titles since 2013 (Trainer, 2019). The shift in focus has made defining Netflix as a company difficult, as it does not belong to one media category, but exists and competes within television, cinema, and new media (Lobato, 2019). Netflix has been developing strategies that allow their content to travel well across cultural and national borders (Jenner, 2018), developing a localized yet globalized strategy for their international films and series. Some of the most popular series Netflix has produced have been non-English and international series, such as *Lupin, La Casa de Papel* or *Dark* within international markets (Katz, 2020).

Netflix is defying traditional logics of a one-way flow from the West to "the rest" as they produce content from local international studios (Lobato, 2019). Despite Netflix's development and powerful stance in the entertainment sphere, the successes have to be understood from statements and minimal insights into the company's audience data. Therefore, investigating the audience's reception of globalized television as represented by Netflix is needed as it can provide greater insight into audiences' tastes and how they engage with the series. As a result, this thesis set out to explore how individuals within Netflix's Dutch market engage with Netflix's foreign original content, as this represents Netflix's take on globalized television. Moreover, this thesis explored how concepts of culture, themes, and the theory of uses and gratifications interplay with audience engagement. This chapter begins by answering the sub-questions as they serve to answer the main research question. A general answer is provided regarding the main research question, which is followed by the research implications, and limitations of this study. This research was guided by the following (sub-)research questions:

> *RQ: How do young Dutch nationals engage with global television as represented by Netflix?*
>
> *Sub-RQ1: How does cultural proximity relate to the consumption of foreign Netflix original series by young Dutch viewers?*
>
> *Sub-RQ2: How does thematic proximity interplay with audience's engagement of foreign Netflix original series?*

Sub-RQ3: Why do young Dutch nationals engage with foreign Netflix series, and why do they continue to consume the series?

5.1. Answers to the Research Questions

This thesis uncovered four main themes:, motivations and expectations, cultural engagement, plot and character engagement and, finally, positioning self. Positioning self was a recurring pattern through each theme; therefore, it was integrated within each theme, however a main finding was that participants engaged with the series by positioning themselves in relation to the culture, themes, and the gratifications they received. All the participants were motivated to engage with cultural productions, especially when the production was in a genre; they enjoyed genres such as crime or heists. Participants stated they wanted something outside the American narrative and they received this from foreign productions, but trusted Netflix's production quality, therefore they used Netflix for their foreign content. Participants enjoyed that the series was culturally distant to themselves, as they sought to escape their life and their reality and slip into a different world. Therefore, they positioned the series as culturally and thematically distant to themselves, but the participants enjoyed the series due to the distance.

Participants stated they did not actively compare the culture represented in the series to Dutch culture, but when asked to reflect on it, they made comparisons between Dutch cultures, but also compared other cultures, such as French to Scandinavian culture. While engaging with the series, culture was not at the forefront of the participants' viewing experience. Rather, participants attributed their enjoyment to the complex plots and characters in the series that were easy to relate to or understand.

The first theme, motivations and expectations, explained why the participants engaged with foreign series. It was due to the feeling of wanting something different, from Dutch television or American television. Because Netflix provides different content, they were able to receive the gratifications of escapism, learning, tension relief and social inclusion. Many participants were motivated by their social circle, to then be included in conversations -about the series online and offline, however culture motivated them just as much. Whether the participants were familiar or unfamiliar with a culture, it motivated them to watch the series due to curiosity. Rather than gravitating towards cultural productions that were similar, participants did not seem to care too much for similarities, suggesting that the role of a cosmopolitan viewer with high

cultural capital disregards the theories of cultural proximity, and supports the assumptions by Athique (2016). Sub-research question 3; *Why do young Dutch nationals engage with foreign Netflix series, and why do they continue to consume the series?* can be answered through reasons of curiosity, wanting to learn and the gratifications obtained while engaging with these series. Participants did state they were at times demotivated to watch due to their inability to multitask or fully "switch off my brain" (Stormy, 23, Female) as they had to read subtitles, but this was a minor demotivator. The participants stated that the plot was good, and this was what kept them engaged, and when aspects of culture did come up, such as landscapes, landmarks, cultural sayings, and traditions, the participants enjoyed those aspects because they were able to learn while being entertained by an "exciting plot with a different twist because it's from a different non-American producer" (Som, 22, Male).

The second theme, cultural engagement, focused on the aspects of culture that the participants were involved in. A common trend within this theme was familiarity, nostalgia and unattentively watching. Participants who were familiar with cultural acts such as dipping a baguette in coffee as seen in *Lupin,* stated that the small details were what helped them enjoy the series as they were able to piece together a wider picture. If there were aspects that were culturally similar, such as delivery drivers in France and Holland with similar outfits or similar humor in German or Dutch dialogue, this allowed them to understand the context more easily so that they could relate to or enjoy the scene a slightly more. Moreover, participants were not actively seeking culture while watching, although it was an original motivator. But when the participants watched a series about a country they had been to, there were positive associations due to nostalgic feelings which allowed them to engage with the series based on their lifeworlds.

When the participants were unfamiliar with the culture and there were cultural notes, the participants stated they did not notice that, which therefore indicated that the globalized yet localized strategy Netflix has utilized worked in their favor, as the participants who were familiar with the culture enjoyed the details and the participants who were unfamiliar,-focused on the wider picture of the series. Cultural proximity was a motivator for audiences' consumption but cultural distance served as a factor in enjoyment, although culturally similar themes also acted as a form of enjoyment due to the ability to relate to scenes. The participants did not actively position Dutch culture while engaging with the series, instead, they drew on their international

backgrounds or experiences when engaging with the international series, therefore displaying that cultural capital played a large role in the initial engagement and its continuation.

Finally, the third theme, story and character engagement, served as the most important reason for the participants' engagement while watching the series. The participants enjoyed a thematic distance from themselves which was in line with the genres they were motivated to watch. The participants felt distant to the series due to large, thematically unfamiliar themes of heists, violence, poverty, governmental uprisings and so forth. However, the distance was what they enjoyed and sought out. Participants stated it was hard for them to relate to unfamiliar themes because they were never in similar situations, however, it was easy to put themselves in the characters' world due to character engagement as well as being immersed in the plot. Although Netflix implemented common themes such as divorce, love, and family bonds, the participants would still place those as distant to themselves. They made comparisons between themselves and the situations represented, but the participants typically placed themselves distant to similar themes. However, it did induce reflection about what they would do in similar situations, or how the actions would make them feel. Thematic proximity to the participants played a large role, however, not similar to the suggestions proposed by Eichner (2020) or Straubhaar (2007). Instead, the distance was what allowed enjoyment, and when plots were similar, the participants were not motivated to connect the plots to themselves.

To conclude, young Dutch nationals engaged with foreign Netflix series through cultural distance and social motivations, as the engagement began with their openness to consumption of cultural productions due to their cultural capital. However, cultural engagement was not a concurring thought while watching a series, due to the lack of cultural representations, although when there were cultural displays, some participants enjoyed the small details, and other participants who were unfamiliar enjoyed the details just as much. An important aspect of engagement was thematic proximity, as individuals sought something to allow them to escape their lives, therefore thematic distance was important and allowed for higher forms of engagement due to complex, quality and in-depth plots. The participants were always positioning themselves in relation to the series, through culture or through themes, and the distance allowed for greater enjoyment as the nature of entertainment allowed them to escape from themselves.

5.2. Research Implications

The present findings add value to the existing literature in the field of transnational appeal, especially in the context of the leading media entertainment company, Netflix. This research has applied transnational appeal to a specific context of the reception of foreign Netflix originals by young Dutch audiences. This research has shown support for arguments by Eichner (2020), who suggests that individuals draw on their lifeworld while engaging. His argument was in regard to thematic proximity but through these findings, it could be expanded to cultural experiences and understandings. The participants engaged with the series based on their experiences and understanding of the cultures the series was showcasing, by involving their lifeworlds and making sense of the series through their experiences or lack thereof. As Straubhaar creates thematic proximity as a layer on top of cultural proximity, the concepts have similar importance in audiences' eyes, However, as suggested by the participants, cultural capital and lifeworlds interplay with engagement due to the initial openness to consumption and therefore engagement. The participants within the Dutch market displayed forms of interactionism of self while engaging with the series, but distance to self was a concept which individuals enjoyed and sometimes sought.

Furthermore, unlike previous studies related to the transnational travel and success of television products (Jenner, 2018; La Pastina and Straubhaar, 2005), this study investigates facets of motivation simultaneously, with concepts of cultural and thematic proximity. Hence it gives an interactive picture of how these concepts may relate to and intertwine with each other, across various levels of the viewing process. This research has merely scratched the surface of global television as represented by Netflix, as there are many other markets where concepts of cultural proximity or thematic proximity may have greater importance. As Netflix continues to grow and produce more foreign series, the company could become more experimental on typical productions and could attempt to include more cultural representations as a large motivator for Dutch audiences wanting to learn small aspects of the country through entertainment. This research displays how the concepts of cultural capital and general notions of lifeworlds can influence how audiences engage with series, as relativity plays a large role, but not in regard to wanting to identify but rather wanting to find self in a different narrative. This provides insight into how local content is received by viewers in the Dutch market.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

After presenting the contributions of this study, it is just as important to address the limitations and make suggestions for future research. First, as this study was promoted by the suggestions of industry observers about Netflix's international business model and local/global strategy, this study does display the excitement and engagement of young Dutch nationals. However, due to the qualitative nature of the study, -generalized findings are not possible, because of the limited extent to which this group of participants represents the "mainstream" Dutch audience. The participants form a small portion of a "specialized" audience with higher-than-average levels of cultural openness or cultural capital. Moreover, the sample was narrow and specific – consisting of young, highly educated adults, predominantly female. Therefore, a different sample of possibly more males, or of different educational levels, and general cultural exposure, could lead to different results and beliefs about foreign Netflix original series. Moreover, the sampling of the foreign Netflix original series may also lead to different results. As Netflix has produced other series such as *Emily in Paris* which has a larger cultural focus, could have led to different interpretations and engagement levels. This thesis has focused on the most popular cultural productions in the Dutch and global market, however, focusing on less popular titles and focusing more on culture might yield different results with the same participant sample.

Additionally, the research touched upon aspects of quality perception and how this interplayed with notions of engagement. Particularly in regard to engagement, future research could delve into aspects of quality and how these aspects interplay with cultural engagement as touched upon by Pekarkova (2019). The trust and feelings individuals have about the service may interplay with how they receive and interpret messages within text (Jenner, 2018).

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Appendices

Appendix i - Consent Form for Participants

<u>**CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH**</u>
FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:
Basia Raine Fourie, 3011DK, Rotterdam, basiafourie@gmail.com, and +31638900043]

DESCRIPTION
You are invited to participate in a research about audience engagement with global television. The purpose of the study is to understand how Dutch nationals engage with foreign Netflix original series.
Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be. In general terms, the questions of the interview will be related to your use of Netflix and how you relate, interpret and engage with Netflix's original series (Dark, 3%, Narcos, La Casa de Papel, Ragnarök and Lupin).

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a tape or a video recorder for the interview. This interview will be used only for the purpose of transcribing the interview and will not be published or available to anyone but the researcher.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point. There will be stimuli shown to you during the interview to serve as a reminder of certain scenes or themes. I will ask you for your consent each time before showing you this stimuli, you are always welcome to say no.
RISKS AND BENEFITS
As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information such as date of birth, age, and so forth not in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by using a pseudonym instead of your real name. I will use the material from the

interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take 45-60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish—Michael Wayne at the following email wayne@eshcc.eur.nl .

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you do not need to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name   Signature   Date

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name   Signature   Date

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.

Appendix ii - Interview Guide

1. Demographics:

- Name

- Age

- Nationality

- University

- Current profession & highest level of education:

- What Netflix series do you typically watch?

    - Out of this list; 3%, Dark, La Casa Del Papel, Narcos, Ragnarok, and Lupin which ones have you watched/still watching?

2. Netflix Usage:

1. How long have you had Netflix for?

    a. Why did you get Netflix?

    b. What other subscriptions do you have w/ SVOD services?

2. How often do you use Netflix?

3. What do you consider when deciding to watch a Netflix series?

    a. Recommendations from friends or Netflix itself? Actors, theme, culture? *relates to later section*

    b. If themes or culture come up (even values) follow up on that…

        i. Why does X motivate you to watch those series?

4. Do you have any expectations before watching a series?

    a. E.g., do you expect it to make you feel happy or serve as a distraction?

    b. Do you expect it to be a certain quality, with a certain theme?

    c. Tell me about a recent series that you've watched… How did watching it make you feel? Were those the same feelings you expected before getting into the series?

What about with foreign Netflix series? Why do you watch those series?

        i. What did you expect while watching those series?

        ii. What did you feel while watching?

        iii. What did you feel and think after you finished the series?

            1. Motivations?

a. Learning a language? Exploring Cultures? Etc.

iv. How would you compare the amount of foreign content you watch now compared to before you had Netflix?

1. Why and how did you watch it?

Cultural Proximity

As you may already know X is a show produced in X and therefore can be seen as a foreign cultural product. Thus, I would like you to reflect on your encounters with different cultures.

1. Can you think of life experiences that may have led you to watch the international series you do?

    a. E.g., family upbringing, immigrant background, education, travels, etc.

2. How often do you encounter Foreign cultures?

    a. What forms?

3. Do you think it's important to be familiar with the X culture to enjoy a series?

4. Were you familiar with X culture before you watched X?

    a. How?

    b. How do you relate that culture to your own? **

    c. When you were watching X, what aspects did you find it easy to relate to such as situations, events, characters, places?

    d. Did you learn anything from X about that culture?

5. While watching the series did any aspects of it feel distant to you?

    a. E.g., did the setting seem realistic, certain themes, cultural notes?

6. How different did you consider culture X to Dutch culture?

    i. Values, aesthetics, ways of life, family etc.

    ii. While you were watching X did you notice any cultural differences? How did that make you feel about the show/scene?

7. Did you pick up or learn something when you watched X?

    a. What was your favorite series out of the list you have seen (so if you watched Lupin, Casa, Dark and 3%, which one is your favorite and why?)

● **Note:** talk about favorite series first and compare...

5. Specific Series:

It is divided into each series, although most participants have seen most of them as each section highlights important aspects of the series with repetitive questions in each series.

I want to talk about more specific series, for example let's look at **Lupin.**

    a. Can you explain how you first learned about the series?

    b. Why did you click on it? What did you expect out of it?

    c. Did you watch it in French or dubbed?

    d. What were your original thoughts on it and why did you continue watching?

        i. Do you relate to the characters, themes, or culture?

            1. Elaborate and follow up.

            2. Show stimulus of all cultural artifacts depicted in Lupin (buildings and habits of Frenchmen) to see if they noticed it and what they think about it.

            3. So relating back to a previous question, how do you relate the French culture to your own?

                a. Did you see this while watching Lupin?

            4. Did you relate your culture while watching the series?

                a. E.g., Did you compare it to Dutch culture? Or were there certain things that were in the series that you found culturally distant or close?

                b. Did that have an impact on how you enjoyed the series?

                c. Do you feel like you have more of an insight into French culture? Or feel as if you understand what is happening in France?

Thematic Proximity (in series)

            5. Themes → how does that relate to you?

                a. Racial discrimination, corrupt police, the gentleman theif, divorced parents, etc.

                b. Does relating to a theme help you enjoy the show more?

                c. For instance → crazy dog lady scene, s1e4 -

6. Did you expect these themes before watching? How did they make you feel after watching it?

7. If the themes are unfamiliar with you, how does that make you enjoy the show?

8. Do you like it when shows are distant to your life and self? Why?

La Casa de Papel
- recurring themes of the series: rejecting modern capitalist society. His symbolic presence is likely due to the fact that Salvador Dalí gave life to anti-capitalism in many of his artistic works such as the melting clocks in the painting "The Persistence of Memory". This concept is extremely appealing to people today because it rejects how society is constructed, a recurrent movement in politics
- 'Bella Ciao'. Originating from World War Two, 'Bella Ciao' was an Italian bipartisan cry for freedom against the fascist regime but has been used all over the world as a cry for resistance, indignation, and skepticism towards the system

DARK
- Did you watch it in German or dubbed? Why?
- What do you think about the focus on nuclear energy throughout the series?
    - Did you associate that to Germany?

S02e01 → 8:00 Chernobly in 2020 -- fear of what will happen if we keep nuc energy

- What do you think about the family dynamics represented in Dark?
    - What about the relationships between individuals?
    - Did you notice the chocolate bar throughout the series (show pictures)
    - Were there any cultural aspects from Dark that you noticed that represent Germany?
- Show stimulus of the school and forest, do you relate to the scenic and architectural aspects of dark? Do you associate that to anything Dutch, yourself or with Germany?

NARCOS
e. Can you explain how you first learned about the series?

f. Why did you click on it? What did you expect out of it?

    i. Did you have any experience with Colombian culture before consuming this series?

g. Did you watch it in Spanish or dubbed?

    i. Why so? Where/are you interested in the language? Or the genre?

h. What were your thoughts on it and why did you continue watching?

i. What were some of the most outstanding scenes from the series in your opinion?

    i. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_gVmeOhiunU → shows off the beauty of Narcos /Colombia (00:00-1:00)

        1. What do you think of this?

    ii. I want to show you a scene from season 2 of Narcos. It is when pablo imagines he is president. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzU6B8XE-DY

        1. What do you think about this scene and do you think it says about Colombia?

    iii. Narcos also showed a lot of the slums and the poor in the area, could you relate to that?

    iv. How did it make you view Colombia? Did it change anything at all?

- While watching the series, did you at times feel any forms of connection or disconnection to what was going on? For instance some cultural ques or slang that you found distant?

    a. E.g., Did you compare it to Dutch culture?

    b. Did that have an impact on how you enjoyed the series?

    c. Do you feel like you have more of an insight into Colombian culture? Or feel as if you understand what is happening in Colombia?

        i. S1e1 → 7:21 history lesson

- What did you think of the aesthetics and cinematics of the series?
  - Was it familiar

Thematic Proximity:

There are certain themes that are represented in Narcos, what themes were you able to identify in the series?

- Again with the themes, how did they make you feel while watching the series?
- Did you expect these themes before watching? How did they make you feel after watching it?
- Do you relate to any of the themes that are depicted in the series?
  - Do you relate to the characters and or themes?
  - When relating to these characters or themes, what do you base it on? Yourself, history?
  - Do you feel like who you are plays a role in how you are able to connect/relate to character or themes?
    - Elaborate and follow up.
    - Show stimulus of certain scenes depending on what they say
  - Examples of themes;
    - Family over everything -- Collective societies -- Drugs and war -- Humane moments of an "inhumane" individual -- lack of female empowerment (Pablo's wife holding a gun to protect her family but laughed at)

Pivotal examples to show:
a. S02e01 -- pablo visits old neighborhood and gives people money
B. S02e09 -- pablo returns to medellin after hiding out at his fathers farm
C. S02e10 (46:39-47:13) Hermilda, Escobar's mother, grieves her son's death and claims he was a noble man → Although the show attempts to move away from the stereotypical rep of Escobar → it remains equally adamant about presenting the facts of Escobar's worst actions w/ the realness of family relations.

3%

a. Can you explain how you first learned about the series?
b. Why did you click on it? What did you expect out of it?
c. Did you watch it in Potugese or dubbed?

    i. Why so?

  d. What were your thoughts on it and why did you continue watching?

    i. Follow up if anything stands out.

  e. Did you learn anything about Brazillan culture from watching this series?

    i. If yes, what and explain?

    ii. Was that any part of your intention before watching the series?

      1. While watching the series, did you at times feel any forms of connection or disconnection to what was going on? For instance some cultural ques or slang that you found distant?

        a. Did you compare

          i. What do you think about this scene and what do you think it says about Colombia?

  f. Has the series played any role with how you see Brazil or Brazilian culture?

Thematic Proximity (in series)

      1. Again with the themes, how did they make you feel while watching the series?

      2. Did you expect these themes before watching? How did they make you feel after watching it?

      3. Do you relate to any of the themes that are depicted in the series?

        a. Why or why not?

        b. Morally good vs bad

          i. Doing anything to get the end goal

          ii. Loss of a child

          iii. Working for what you deserve mentality

          iv. The ideology of letting go of oneself

For example, Brazil has experienced a long time and large divide between the rich and the poor → income inequality

RAGNAROK

How did you find out about the show?

- Why did you watch this show?
  - Follow up on any cultural aspects.
- Why did you continue watching the show?
- How did the show make you feel?
- How did you relate yourself to the show?
  - Characters being in highschool
  - Clothing
- Focus on the aspect of global warming and the activist main character → she got bullied for her actions, how do you feel about that and why?
- Were there anytimes you found yourself relating to a character and why or why not?
- Did you notice any aspects of culture in the series?
  - E.g. supermarkets, dinner, drinking culture
- Did you feel distant to the show due to the culture or themes?
  - Really follow up with the participants here.

Appendix iii - Participant Data

*all participants nationality is Dutch

Name of interviewee	Age	Date of interview	Gender	Series watched
Stormy	23	01/04/21	Female	La Casa de Papel, Lupin, Narcos
Emmy	22	29/03/21	Female	3%, La Casa de Papel, Narcos, Lupin
Marry	22	03/04/21	Female	La Casa de Papel, Narcos, Lupin, Ragnarok
Carry	23	05/04/21	Female	Ragnarok, Lupin, 3%
Innie	22	06/04/21	Female	La Casa de Papel, Lupin, Dark, 3%
Sabby	24	07/04/21	Female	Dark, La Casa de Papel, 3%, Lupin, Narcos
Som	22	09/04/21	Male	Narcos, Dark, Ragnarok
Sammy	22	10/04/21	Female	La Casa de Papel, Narcos, Dark
Denver	24	14/04/21	Male	Dark, Lupin, Narcos, La Casa de Papel
Tommy	22	14/04/21	Male	La Casa de Papel, Ragnarok, Lupin
Robby	23	15/04/21	Male	La Casa de

				Papel, Lupin, Dark, Narcos
Rachy	24	16/04/21	Female	La Casa de Papel, Narcos, Dark, Lupin

Appendix iv - Open Coding

Examples of open coding from Atlas.ti

Esmee Transcription.docx | **Sonja Transcript.docx** | **Document 2**

Sonja Transcript.docx

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Interviewee - Stormy (19:12):

Uhm. I think I, no not the theme. No, no. I liked the theme. But it doesn't relate because the theme of Lupin was also quite like mystery and criminally, my life ain't like that. So no.

[code] Enjoys theme | *[code] Does not relate to theme*

Basia - Interviewer (19:32):

Were you just watching the show at a distance then?

Interviewee - Stormy (19:37):

I was watching, no, because even though the theme or the characters weren't related to me and my situation because of their act and because with their story, uh, and, and all that, they suck me into that. I was in the streets of Paris with them like that, that they didn't have to do anything with me being related to them or, or thinking, Hey, this is familiar to me. I also have this in my life. No, it was just how their story was that I thought, well, yeah, I'm in the story. I want to watch another episode. When is the second part coming.

[code] Themes not relating to self | *[code] Different themes emerage vie...*

[code] Immersed with cultural scenery | *[code] geographical familiarity*

Basia - Interviewer (20:14):

Okay. Right. So, okay. I think I understand. So what, what were your original thoughts when you watched Lupin? Take me through that proces

Interviewee - Stormy (20:30):

Um, I liked how it was in Paris. Okay. I like that because I've been to Paris too. And I think the first episode there were in the Louvre, I was okay. I walked there a year ago. That's why I liked it too.

[code] Geographical familiarity make... | *[code] Country was a motivator*

[code] Can picture surroundings

Basia - Interviewer (20:46):

And what else?

Interviewee - Stormy (20:48):

I liked how it was French. It was a little different than, uh, the Spanish and English and the Dutch. I liked that too. I liked how that character, how was, like I said before, how he was always one step ahead. How he was always one step ahead of the police. I thought that was really cool as well. So those things were my first thoughts from watching

[code] Exposed to different culture

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Maria Transcript.docx

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Basia Fourie

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lie, uh, like through food through maybe, um, checking out the mannerisms, watching videos on YouTube, or even watching like Netflix shows, you know what I mean? You get to see aspects of the culture and the country and what it's like, and maybe how you should act if, and when you go to the country and stuff like that.

[code] Learns about cultures through... | *[code] Netflix shows culture*

[code] Series show cultures

Basia - Interviewer (17:40):

So do you think you, can you, do you think you can learn that from a Netflix series?

Interviewee - MAB (17:45):

To a certain extent? I guess. I mean, like you, it is kind of like a cultural product, right. So, I mean, you do get like a sneak peek into what the country's like and what the people are like. I mean, it might be stereotypical, but there are like aspects where you can pick up on them.

[code] Insight into country and culture | *[code] familiar with cultural stereoty...*

[code] Aspects of sterotype is 'true'

Basia - Interviewer (18:06):

Right okay, and how, like, you actually watched quite a lot of these series, so maybe you can answer them for each of the series, but how familiar with you with, um, Spanish culture before you watched La Casa?

Interviewee - MAB (18:20):

Um, I feel like Spanish culture is similar to Lebanese culture and like just the Arabs in general. So I feel like I, to a certain extent, I am like somewhat, um, aware of what like of how they act and their mannerisms stuff like that. Um, I also tried to take Spanish in school and in university, so I got to get a bit of an idea from like my professors or my teachers.

[code] culturally similar

[code] Learned about country in sch...

Basia - Interviewer (18:57):

And what about Norwegian culture?

Interviewee - MAB (19:02):

Um, I mean, it isn't too far off, like the Dutch side of the family, you know what I mean? Um, there were parts where I wasn't like maybe a hundred percent related. I didn't feel a hundred percent related to the

[code] partly related

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Basia - Interviewer (10:55):
Right and do you have those expectations with foreign series as well?

Interviewee - RUB (11:01):
Yeah, I think even more with foreign series. Um, because the thing is that you, you need subtitles to understand the series. So if you're watching the series, you really can't be on your phone. Um, so I mean, the expectations are higher for me. If I want to continue watching a foreign series, then they need to be really good because otherwise I won't be able to follow it because I'll be on my phone the whole time. So expectations are a little bit higher, I think.

Basia - Interviewer (11:33):
Okay. And do they, like, for instance with, um, 3%, you said that you didn't really continue with that? Why is that?

Interviewee - RUB (11:43):
Yeah, I think that was part of the reason for that was that I did just, I couldn't be watching a series and do something else at the same time. So you really need to be focused on that. And like, it was a long time ago. I think that was like 2017. I still lived in Groningen back then, so I think it came out pretty long time ago. Um, so I don't really remember, but I, I just didn't really like the story. I think it was kind of strange with them going into this, into this building or something, I don't really remember, but I just didn't like it that much, and you fully concentrated on it the whole time, and the plot was bad so it was not worth it cause I couldn't just have it playing and focus on it here and there.

Basia - Interviewer (12:22):
Right. And, um, what about with, um, Lupin? Did you have any expectations out of that?

Interviewee - RUB (12:33):
Yeah, so I watched the trailer and it's sort of, it's pretty lighthearted or something. It kind of has these funny moments as well. And, um, so I expect it to be entertained. Um, but it's also, it kind of speaks to the imagination, you know, that's this guy, um, that has a lot of money and then it's this master thief without anyone knowing and has his family. It's kind of, I think a lot of people wouldn't mind having his life or something, so it's kind of, you know, it's, it's something that you look at like, Oh, okay

high expectations with foreign...

needs to be good becausee m...

high expectations with foreign...

foreign series need more atte...

english shows are easier to w...

expected entertainment

expected imagination to run

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Appendix v - Coding Table

Selective, axial and open code examples:

Selective Codes (Themes)	Axial Codes	Examples of Open Coding
Motivations and Expectations	Escaping life and self	• Boring life • Wanting distance • Seeking distance (19 total codes)
	Trusting Netflix	• Quality perception • Long time subscriber • Only uses Netflix (10 total codes)
	Social Motivations	• Friends watch • Recommended by family • Social media hype (12 total codes)
	Disliking Dutch content	• Trash TV • Only use when bored • Different content (12 total codes)
	Genre motivation	• Crime lover • Watches all in genre • Arthouse lover (8 total codes)
	Different from American narrative	• It is all the same • Same narrative • American narrative is predictable (9 total codes)
	Cultural motivation	• Curious about culure • Enjoys seeing culure • Language interest • Watches because it's different (20 total codes)
	High expectations	• Unable to multitask • Social expectations

		● Needing more focus ● Wanting a good plot (10 total codes)
Cultural Engagement	Country Productions	● Country has different style ● Production and genre of country ● Interested in production style (8 total codes)
	Familiarity with culture	● Noticed relationships ● Enjoyed unfamiliarity ● EU cultures are familiar ● Small aspects of enjoyment (40 total codes)
	Comparing cultures	● Compared to experiences ● Compared to Dutch culture ● Compared to other cultures ● Compared similar interactions (19 total codes)
	Focus on language	● Language shows culture ● Displays interaction ● Learning language ● Language demotivated watching (27 total codes)
	Actions associated with character	● Actions are characters not culture ● Not related to culture ● Distanced character to culture (14 total codes)

	Curiosity	• Difference makes more curious • Curious about culture • Curious about other lives (10 total codes)
	Enjoying cultural details	• Small details for enjoyment • Nostalgia • Personal experiences • Positive associations (16 total codes)
Story and Character Engagement	Culture is not related	• Not related to cultural acts • Doesn't care for culture • Not associated with culture (14 total codes)
	Developed stories	• Complex narratives • Attractive story • Series focus on story not culture (8 total codes)
	Engages with character	• Compares self to character • Positioning self in character • Distance to character (17 total codes)
	Focus on plot or theme	• Focus on plot • Focus on similar life theme • Show focuses on themes over culture (12 total codes)
	Merely a story	• Distant to self • Distant to life • Overall fiction (11 total codes)

Positioning Self	Imaging self	- Imagines self in character - Explains self in situation - Relates self to situation (20 total codes)
	Relating experiences	- Recognize self in similar experience - Based on life - Similar but different life (14 total codes)
	Unrelatable	- Distant to self - Different life themes - Wanting to relate but unable (9 total codes)
	Understanding distance	- Never me but i can see myself there - I want to understand - Basing on experience of friends (5 total codes)
	Placing distant or close	- Fiction therefore not self - Close to me - Distant because of - Distance is good (43 total codes)