

Disney Streaming Success

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Abstract

The Walt Disney Company has visibly evolved over the last few years to adapt to the constant changes in society. Disney went from barely releasing any films featuring diverse characters to showcasing diversity and inclusion in all of its new content today. Consequently, there are varying public opinions on these changes which have impacted consumers' views on the Disney brand. Through literature reviews and research, there is evidence that some people feel differently than others do regarding the changes Disney has made.

This research study specifically investigates how public opinion of Disney has impacted its streaming service, Disney Plus and poses the questions: how many people continue to utilize Disney streaming following the societal changes and have their opinions on these changes influenced their usage? This study includes varying opinions and input from age groups, geographical locations, and political standpoints. Introducing Disney Plus in 2019 was a huge undertaking for the company and this study proves to see if the service has truly been successful over the past few years. This research involves survey and interview questions based on consumer and subscribers' willingness to use Disney Plus considering the feelings they have toward the content provided and the Disney brand itself.

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Introduction

Over the last few years, Disney has begun to adapt to many societal changes in hopes that it will reshape how audiences perceive its brand. These changes are based on consumer preferences and viewpoints while still maintaining loyalty to the brand. Either there are those who are now offended by these changes or there are people who have a newfound appreciation for the Disney brand. These sources each explore the modifications, efforts, and changes made throughout the Walt Disney Company to become more inclusive and adapt to the current times as well as public opinions on this.

An article from Universe Narratives (2017) discusses the history of diversification at Walt Disney Animation Studios. The first Disney movie featuring a different culture was "Saludos Amigos" in 1943, with "Jungle Book" in 1967 being the only other cultural film for a while (Haner, 2017). Journalist Kimberlie Haner interviews Victoria Orozco who "remembers thinking as a child that there were no Hispanic [Disney] characters like herself" (as cited in Haner, 2017). After the release of "Pocahontas" in 1995, the animation studio slowly began introducing more films featuring different cultures.

Today, each new product the company releases has a variety of diverse characters and cultural themes. An article from Vanity Fair explains the many ways Walt Disney Studios has evolved to make inclusivity a priority. On creating a Pixar film with a black protagonist, chief creative officer at Pixar Animation Studios, John Lasseter said, "It's grown in importance over time. As you'll see in future films, we're really paying attention to that" (Desta, 2016). This further proves the historical progress the company has made throughout the years and how diverse audiences have felt in response.

An article from the Washington Post details all of the negative responses to the modifications Disney has implemented over the last few years and why conservatives are not happy. Gissen (2023) explains how Disney has recently been becoming more “woke” or aware of the injustices and what needs to be done to right them. However, conservative Republicans feel Disney is moving to an extreme left and are becoming offended. In an article specifying stakeholders’ viewpoints, billionaire investor Nelson Peltz, recently “declared war” on the company's 'excessive spending and mismanagement' (Gissen, 2023). According to this article, Peltz has been trying to secure a seat on the board which could see some reversals of the attempts to become more inclusive. Chmeilewski (2023) goes into more detail on the opinions of stakeholders regarding this culture war. This article also gives a statement from CEO Bob Iger defending the company when an investor said the company is becoming too concerned with social issues. Iger is quoted saying, “Our primary mission needs to be to entertain ... and to have a positive impact on the world...It should not be agenda-driven" (as cited in Chmeilewski, 2023).

On the other hand, there are plenty of Disney fans who appreciate these changes and have started to feel more seen by the company. In an article by Ashlyn Rinehart (2019) from Carroll High School’s online blog, students feel that while there are differences, this does not change the love they have for the brand. Student Aly Woenker was quoted saying that “the messages are still pretty much the same as they used to be and that messages such as be yourself or be kind to people are still present” (as cited in Rinehart, 2019). These high schoolers are considered Gen Z.

In an article from Medium.com, a blogger discusses the relationship between Disney and the various generations it has impacted over the years. She talks about how Baby Boomers and Gen X grew up with Walt having just passed and seeing his company grow and flourish in his

wake (2019). This proves the relationships various generations have built with the Disney brand over the years.

Background

The Walt Disney Company has had to continuously keep up with the societal changes over time and appeal to their customer base while also maintaining the heart of their brand. The company has faced challenges adapting to the culture shifts as well as backlash from more conservative points of view. This research is important because the way Disney adapts to societal changes can shape how its audience perceives the brand now and for the future. Understanding the impact of these adaptations on consumer attitudes, preferences, and loyalty is a key aspect of the research problem.

When Disney released its streaming service in 2019, CEO Bob Iger “staked his legacy on the success of Disney Plus” and has spent billions acquiring additional help from video platform companies (Barnes, 2019). The goal was to make it a Netflix-style streaming platform for adults as well as children with content from National Geographic, Marvel, Lucasfilm in addition to original releases. While Disney clearly spent a lot of money investing in promoting Disney Plus, recent statistics show it has not been as successful as anticipated. According to Isidore (2023), Disney Plus and its other two services, ESPN Plus and Hulu, together trimmed losses by \$228 million, or 13%, from a year earlier to \$659 million. The company’s efforts to cut losses and increase profits also means increasing subscription fees and implementing advertisements, which has upset consumers.

Some have been generally unenthused by the company, which may have had an impact in their willingness to utilize these services. An article by Chmielewski (2023) reported that

“Disney is struggling to make its streaming business profitable, improve the quality of its films, position its flagship sports brand, ESPN, to stream directly to consumers, and potentially shed its television networks”. This article from September 2023 stated that in its most recent quarter, “the company beat Wall Street's profit expectations but fell short on revenue” (Chmielewski, 2023). This proves the usage of Disney streaming and other entertainment offerings failing to procure the revenue that was expected. Current literature may support the theory that public opinion of the Disney brand has negatively impacted the usage of its streaming services. Specifically, Gissen’s study found the following: “Fox News featured 10 families who were swearing off the company ‘due to its left-leaning politics’” (2023).

This research intends to determine if it is perception or fact that Disney Plus viewings have been affected by the recent societal changes Disney has enacted. This study will answer the questions: How many people continue to utilize Disney’s streaming services following these changes and if their opinions on the changes have influenced their usage?

Procedures and Methods

The main question asked is: How many people plan to continue utilizing Disney’s streaming services following the societal changes the company has enacted over the last few years? Specifically, this includes Disney Plus and its content both original and classic. The following will review the participants involved, the design of the research, and the materials needed to conduct this study.

Participants

The population will include people in the United States who have either previously or actively used Disney’s streaming services. These are people from various regions of the country,

specifically Northeast, Midwest, Western, and Southern states. They are also grouped by age, being Boomers to Generation Y (80+ to 50) or Generation X to Generation Z (45-10); they will be referred to as “older” or “younger”. They will also be of all races, cultures and backgrounds.

Design

This research will utilize a mixed methods approach, with qualitative analysis of consumers’ opinions on Disney Plus’s content as well as quantitative using survey statistics. The independent variables will be the amount of time watching Disney’s streaming services as well as the reasons for subscribing or not. The dependent variables will be the number of subscribers as well as the stakeholders of the Disney company. Participant feedback will be on their willingness to utilize the service and will provide the variable results on the research.

This will be a within-subjects design because every participant will experience the same treatment. The research will compare related measures from the participants between the different conditions.

Procedure

Similar to High Speed Internet’s survey in 2020 asking subscribers how much they like Disney Plus (Wheelwright), participants will be given a survey. The survey will be provided through Typeform, a free online survey creator to send participants an online survey that includes the questions. This will inquire about how they feel regarding the service’s content, how frequently they watch, and if they plan to remain subscribed. These participants will be divided into groups by region and age. This will ensure a diverse perspective for broader results. If a participant would like to discuss their political stance or provide more personal information, the survey would instruct them to schedule a confidential interview. These will be conducted over Zoom video calls. Obtaining informed consent is essential in the interview process as the

participants' personal opinions and information will be utilized. Protecting the confidentiality of participants is also important by anonymizing data and reporting appropriate results.

In addition to the survey, the research will examine Disney's official reports, public statements, press releases and interviews to provide more qualitative results. These will show the success or downfall of Disney Plus and its other services. In an article from 2019, Disney had promised Wall Street that Disney Plus will have between 60 million and 90 million subscribers worldwide by 2024 (Barnes, 2019). Since then, there has been a 2% drop in subscribers with the addition of advertisements and an increase in prices (Isidore, 2023).

Measures

The data gathering tools will include surveys and interviews. The survey will collect quantitative data on participants' willingness to subscribe and watch Disney's streaming services. The survey questions will examine participants on their perceptions and opinions on Disney's representation of diversity in its content as well. This will determine how participants feel regarding Disney's changes because of the impact it has had on audience engagement. In order to procure accurate results on opinions, the survey will use Likert scale-type response anchors for some of its questions (Appendix One).

The research will also be measured by previously performed studies and statistics. This will be analyzed for any correlation with the surveys being performed. Specifically, an article from 2022 shows that although Disney Plus is gaining subscribers, the company itself "lost \$1.5 billion in direct-to-consumer revenue" (Roth, 2022). The reasons for this are determined to be related to the content Disney Plus provided which they are currently attempting to compensate for.

Results

This research intends to determine if it is perception or fact that Disney Plus viewings have been affected by the recent societal changes Disney has enacted. This research will answer the question: How many people continue to utilize Disney's streaming services following these changes and if their opinions on the changes have influenced their usage?

In order for the research to be successful, an appropriate amount of data needs to be collected, however, there could be some limitations. Limitations are those characteristics of the research design that are out of the control of the researcher. A potential limitation in the research would be determining an accurate sample size since the study will be covering a larger population. Additionally, there is no guarantee that every participant will agree to the research or if the participants will be truthful, therefore, the data is subjective. There is also the potential for cultural bias in this research relating to participants' personal views. For example, a participant with an extreme viewpoint might feel offended by the questions and answer in a negative manner. This could be a potential limitation which can create insufficient participant data for statistical significance.

The delimitations of a study are the boundaries of the research design to make it more relevant to what is being proven. For this research, the study is limited to the geographical locations the participants are in, their age ranges, and their positive or negative responses to the content in the questions. Therefore, based on the results procured, it may be necessary to revise the research methods or questions to gain more accurate research.

It is important to note that these limitations do not affect the conclusions drawn from this study and that the methodology is legitimate in gathering relevant data. While there may be

limitations in this research, they do not affect the main conclusions of the study. If needed, a future study can be developed to overcome these limitations while also utilizing the data drawn from the methods devised in this research.

After compiling the data, the principal investigator will separate the data into groups— participants who still use Disney Plus and those who do not— to indicate the findings for each age and geographical group. This data will be used in helping to determine whether public opinion of the company’s changes has affected the usage of Disney streaming services. In addition to the survey results, post-survey interviews will be conducted to further validate the data (Appendix Two).

Budget

Item	Expense
Typeform Survey	\$0
Zoom Video Chat (basic package)	\$0
Audio/Video Recording Software	\$20/six months =\$120 (riverside.fm)
Transcription Software	\$19/six months =\$114 (zapier.com)
Data Analysis Software (Microsoft Suite)	\$99.99/year (bestbuy.com)
Visual Representation (posters)	\$13.99/each (officedepot.com) (4) = \$55.96
TOTAL	\$389.95

The budget for this research is simple. The anticipated costs are displayed in the chart for a period of six months. As previously mentioned, the surveys will be created through an online survey platform called Typeform, which is free of charge. The principal investigator will utilize

Zoom video calls to conduct the additional confidential interviews, which will also be free of charge using the basic package. In order to record the responses from the Zoom interviews, a recording software will be utilized which will cost around \$20 a month. Transcription software will be necessary to transcribe the audio recordings from these interviews and this will cost around \$19 a month. For data analysis, data compilation, and designing the visual representation, Microsoft Suite will be utilized (Excel, Powerpoint) which costs \$99.99 a year. For the visual representation, posters would need to be printed, which cost \$13.99 each at Office Depot.

Conclusion

Based on the previously existing evidence and potential survey and interview results, the research question can be answered and supported. The hypothesis that the societal changes developed by Disney have impacted the usage of its streaming services has been proven through this research. The findings support this hypothesis through current statistics and survey responses. This research ultimately serves to determine how many people will still use Disney Plus according to their opinions of Disney's recent changes to become more inclusive.

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Appendix One

Participant Usage of Disney Streaming Services Survey Questions

1. How long have you been a Disney+ subscriber?
 - a. 2019- now
 - b. Within the last year

2. How many hours per week do you spend on Disney+ or its affiliates (Hulu, ESPN, National Geographic)?
 - a. 2-10 hr
 - b. 12-20 hr
 - c. 25-40+ hr

3. What factors would influence your decision to continue or discontinue your Disney+ subscription?
 - a. Price
 - b. Content
 - c. Company practices

4. How has your usage been influenced by the changes Disney has developed in their practices and content over the last few years?
 - a. Negatively influenced; I do not want to continue using
 - b. Negatively influenced; I will not watch as often
 - c. Neutral; I do not mind either way
 - d. Positively influenced; I love the changes

5. Do you feel offended by the content Disney+ has provided?
 - a. Extremely offended
 - b. Slightly offended
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Not at all offended

6. Do you prefer the classic Disney content over the new original content?
 - a. Classic only

- b. Both
- c. Original

7. How likely are you to continue subscribing to Disney+ in the future following these opinions?

- a. Highly unlikely
- b. unlikely
- c. neutral
- d. likely
- e. highly likely

Appendix Two

1. If you are happy with Disney Plus, what makes you want to continue watching?
 - a. Are there any specific films/shows that reflect your values?

2. If you are unhappy with the changes Disney has been enacting, how has this affected your willingness to watch content on Disney Plus?
 - a. Are there any films/shows that do not reflect your values?