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FULL PAPER

Expanding on non-users' beliefs about streaming television: Reasons for SVoD adoption and continued use

Wie nehmen Nutzer:innen und Nicht-Nutzer:innen Streaming-TV wahr? Gründe für Aneignung und Kündigung von SVoD

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Abstract: The diffusion of innovation (DOI) literature and the uses-and-gratifications approach (UGA) meet in the people's beliefs and expectations. We explore the users' and non-users' beliefs about streaming television (SVoD). A survey about *Netflix*, *Amazon Prime Video*, and *Disney+* reveals substantial differences in the mental representations of users and non-users. Nonetheless, the aspects that support the decision to adopt streaming television, or to cancel a subscription, are very similar. While there are relevant beliefs beyond traditional gratifications, its most influential aspect is still anticipated entertainment gratification.

Keywords: Subscription Video-on-Demand (SVoD), streaming television, media images, uses-and-gratifications approach, diffusion of innovation, adoption.

Zusammenfassung: Die Literatur zur Diffusion von Innovationen (DOI) und der uses-and-gratifications-Ansatz (UGA) ergänzen sich, wenn es um die Wahrnehmung und Erwartungen der Menschen geht. Wir untersuchen die Vorstellungen (Beliefs) über Streaming-TV (SVoD) bei Nutzer:innen und Nicht-Nutzer:innen. Eine Umfrage zu *Netflix*, *Amazon Prime Video* und *Disney+* zeigt deutliche Unterschiede in den mentalen Repräsentationen von Nutzer:innen und Nicht-Nutzer:innen. Die Faktoren, welche die Entscheidung für Streaming-Abonnements oder die Kündigung eines Abonnements beeinflussen, sind dennoch sehr ähnlich. Zwar beobachten wir Aspekte jenseits der traditionellen Gratifikationen, aber der einflussreichste Aspekt ist nach wie vor Unterhaltung.

Schlagwörter: Subscription Video-on-Demand (SVoD), Fernsehen, Streaming, Medienimages, uses-and-gratifications-Ansatz, Diffusion von Innovationen, Aneignung.

1. Introduction

In recent years, we observed a landslide shift from linear television to internet-based services, especially Subscription Video-on-Demand (SVoD) services such as *Netflix*, *Amazon Prime Video,* or *Disney+* (Beisch et al., 2021; Lotz, 2017). The massive diffusion of SVoD around 2020 (Büchel & Rusche, 2020; Budzinski et al., 2020) provided an optimal opportunity to research the processes underlying adoption

from a user perspective. The apparent traditions to consult about adopting information technology are the *diffusion of innovation* theory (DOI; Atkin et al., 2015; Rogers, 1962) and the *Technology Acceptance Model* (TAM; Davis, 1989). These theories, however, remain vague regarding what characteristics of an innovation predict whether people perceive a relative advantage in the new technology. When it comes to the individual decision, the *uses-and-gratifications approach* (Ruggiero, 2000) can fill the vagueness of what characteristics of media services are actually considered as advantages. The traditions are highly compatible (Camilleri & Falzon, 2021; Luo et al., 2011), as both, DOI and UGA incorporate the idea that people act more or less purposefully on the economic principle of costs and benefits.

SVoD describes a complex, multi-layered media service that differs from linear television in several ways. The most obvious difference from the users' perspective is the absence of program schedules. Yet, similarly to most innovations, the relevant differences and their practical implications remain unclear to non-users unless they become users. To better understand the mental image that non-users hold about SVoD and how that image affects adoption, we focus on the non-users' *beliefs* (Palmgreen et al., 1985) about SVoD. Why beliefs? The concept is promising in two ways. From the perspective of applied research, beliefs about what something is good or bad for do not only represent perception (Gibson, 1977) but also guide behavior (A. Egan, 2008) or the adoption decision, respectively. From a theoretical perspective, beliefs cover both positive and negative expectations (LaRose et al., 2001; Nabi et al., 2006), such as privacy risks. Therefore, beliefs go beyond uses and gratifications, but other than affordances, beliefs still fit the models established in the uses-and-gratifications tradition (Lin, 1999). This is even more important, as negative issues of streaming television (VoD) have been discussed in academic literature (Jenner, 2016) and media coverage. However, there is little evidence on the effects of anticipated negative outcomes of media consumption on the usage decision.

This paper aims to understand better how non-users perceive streaming television and how beliefs about it affect their willingness or reluctance to adopt SVoD. We employ concepts from the uses-and-gratifications tradition to explain diffusion but employ beliefs instead of gratifications in order not to miss out on effects from presumed negative consequences that may prevent people from adopting streaming television.[1]

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Streaming television services

Receiving audiovisual content over the internet is commonly known as *Video Streaming* or *Over-the-Top services* (Mulla, 2022), when traditional pay TV content is sent. The technology became available in the recent decades (Johnson, 2019; Shattuc, 2020) and by now several service providers make content available to the broad market, the most important ones for a monthly fee (SVoD). Kim at al. (2021)

1 The original data from the study is available at https://osf.io/t9nke/

and Tefertiller (2018, 2020) describe the substantial impact that SVoD had on the former linear broadcast television. VoD, including both paid-for VoD and advertised-financed VoD, challenges the leading position of "traditional" television (Budzinski & Lindstädt-Dreusicke, 2021).

The video streaming on demand market is manifold, especially regarding formats and financing. Based on financing, there are five groups: SVoD, *Transactional-Video-on-Demand* (TVoD), *Electronic-Sell-Through* (EST), which refers to providers such as *Google Play* or *iTunes* where payment is based on individual purchases, *Advertising-supported Video-on-Demand* (AVoD) such as *YouTube* or *Joyn*, and *Mediatheken*, that is media libraries of the public broadcasters (Büchel & Rusche, 2020). *Amazon Prime Video* allows for both SVoD and TVoD. Throughout the different models, SVoD services have become the main revenue growth driver on the VoD market (Grece, 2021).

This paper presents a study conducted in Germany, where the streaming market is notably smaller than in the USA (Cho, 2020). *Netflix*, *Amazon Prime Video*, and *Disney+* have established themselves in recent years despite a broad range of public broadcasting services and free-TV (Beisch et al., 2021). *Amazon Prime Video* is uniquely positioned among the major SVoD services: *Amazon* bundles free video access with free shopping delivery (Rahe et al., 2021; Tiwary, 2020). Consequently, there may be a different motivation behind subscribing to *Amazon Prime* than to *Netflix* or *Disney+*.

One driver for the success of SVoD (Lee & Cho, 2021; Leiner & Neuendorf, 2022) are the practical advantages in distribution. Given some financial and technological prerequisites (Massad, 2018), customers can access videos via SVoD anytime, not bound to a specific location or device (Beisch et al., 2021; Mikos, 2016; Panda & Pandey, 2017). Another driver is access to popular, exclusive content (Chiang & Jhang-Li, 2020; Hutchins et al., 2019). Program attractiveness is also crucial for continued use within the competitive streaming market (Kruse, 2009; Lotz, 2017). The service providers' marketing strategies differ and change over time. In 2020, *Netflix* was known for considerable investments in producing or licensing exclusive content (van Esler, 2021) but suffered bottlenecks from the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. The *Amazon Prim*e subscription included less exclusive content but offered its customers to rent or purchase additional titles (Wayne, 2018). *Disney+* initially offered tremendous amounts of exclusive content (Hutchins et al., 2019) and even access to movies before their official release (Hadida et al., 2021; Havard, 2021), then gradually adjusted their strategy.

2.2. Diffusion of innovations

The *diffusion of innovation* theory (Atkin et al., 2015; Rogers, 1962) describes and explains the process of societies adopting new technology. It describes diffusion as a process in which different people adopt a technology at different times. The concept of *technology* has changed since the information age, so we need to distinguish between the complex, interwoven devices and infrastructure that allow for video streaming (the physical technology) on the one hand, and the SVoD services offered on the market, on the other hand. From the consumers' perspective,

it is the service that they can buy and use. Even Rogers (2000) shows how to use diffusion theory on intangible innovations. Consequently, several studies have successfully employed the *diffusion of innovation* theory to explain adoption of new media (Coursaris et al., 2013; Oelrichs, 2023).

According to business reports (Iqbal, 2024), subscriptions to the SVoD market leader *Netflix* are still increasing. However, there is a strong indication that the SVoD market has become saturated. The zenith of grows seems to have passed in 2020. Applying Rogers's (1962) vocabulary to that situation, the people still subscribing to a SVoD service belong to the "late majority." These people most likely have an idea about the essential characteristics of SVoD, such as costs and what benefits to expect, which allows valid measures of the non-users' beliefs in a survey. Their adoption decision is mainly influenced by relevant others (Czepiel, 1974; Jahanmir & Cavadas, 2018; Mazzarol, 2011), for example, the personal and work environment (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000), the peer group, traditional opinion leaders (Atkin et al., 2015; Tobon & García-Madariaga, 2021) and social media influencers (Hudders et al., 2021; Kristensen, 2021), media coverage (Skjølsvold, 2012) and advertising (Redmond, 2004; Robertson, 1967).

Regarding the explanatory aspects, the diffusion of innovation theory covers social factors that facilitate spreading the information about an innovation, individual user characteristics making the consumer more or less apt to try and adopt new technology, and characteristics of the innovation itself that predict its diffusion. Our focus is on the perception of SVoD, so we focus on the service characteristics (Kapoor et al., 2014), and argue that the SVoD services available on the market meet at least three out of the four criteria described by Rogers (1962). SVoD is (1) highly compatible with previous technology through smartphones, tablets, and *Smart TV* sets, (2) easy to try at friends or through free test subscriptions, and bears (3) little complexity, as the provider spent remarkable efforts in making their platforms easy to use. Regarding the *ease of use*, current media innovations are very different from the technological innovations of the late 20th century, when using a computer (Davis, 1989) usually involved a command line if not punched cards instead of a graphical interface, and when most diffusion theory was written.

Assuming these three criteria met, we focus on the fourth criterion of an innovation, its *relative advantage*. As Luo and colleagues (2011) note, literature from the technology adoption tradition leaves it to the researchers what *advantage* means, depending on what innovation the study is about. Empirical studies support the relationship between *perceived usefulness* and adoption, finding perceived enjoyment to predict SVoD payment intentions, subscription, and continued usage (Guo, 2022; Menon, 2022; Mulla, 2022). Notably, the factors predicting adoption are not necessarily the same factor that explains continued use. More advantages are known from the uses-and-gratifications approach (below). Nevertheless, even when the advantages of media consumption are known, the benefit of a specific media service or content is still highly individual (also see the *perceived usefulness* in the TAM; Davis, 1989), because the contexts and goals of media usage as well as personal taste regarding the content are highly individual.

2.3. Beliefs and gratifications

The basic idea of the uses-and-gratifications approach is that people select and use media more or less consciously to satisfy their needs (Katz et al., 1973; Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1982). The benefits people get from media consumption or as its consequence were named *gratifications*. A substantial part of the traditional uses-and-gratifications research was dedicated to identifying and categorizing the gratifications obtained by media services (Krcmar & Strizhakova, 2009). An unclear gratification concept (Swanson, 1977), however, does not clearly distinguish what qualifies a benefit as gratification. The concept's fuzziness may also be the reason why there is no clear answer whether traditional gratification typologies suit new media or whether new media requires us to look at new gratifications (Ruggiero, 2000).

A line of research that goes deeper into the consumers' perception and cognition distinguished (1) media service attributes, that is features (Smock et al., 2011) and *affordances* (Sundar & Limperos, 2013), (2) the users' beliefs about the media service (Rayburn & Palmgreen, 1984), and (3) user motives (Bahromov, 2022; Palmgreen, 1984). As our focus is on non-users' perception of SVoD, we focus on the *beliefs* concept. A belief is a subjective attitude that a proposition is true (A. Egan, 2008; O. Egan, 1986). Gratification expectations specify beliefs, being attitudes that the media service (or content) will satisfy a specific need (LaRose & Eastin, 2004; Palmgreen et al., 1980). In turn, that means that beliefs are rather unspecific, which brings both theoretical advantages and challenges to discuss below. Above that, Babrow and Swanson (1988) present evidence that gratifications may affect behavior more directly than other beliefs.

Applying the expectancy-value model (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) to media selection, Palmgreen and Rayburn (1982) describe an additive (regression) formula that explains the overall evaluation of a media option by a person's beliefs, and the *affective evaluation* and *importance* of each belief.[2] Their model explicitly includes expectations about negative outcomes (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1985). However, most research in the uses-and-gratifications tradition clearly focuses on positive outcomes, which may be a bias of the term *gratifications*. The relevance of risks and benefits will vary considerably (Hastie, 2001). A few studies have included negative outcomes as predictors for media choice, and found them to affect the selection (Briones & Janoske, 2016; Lim & Ting, 2012; Nabi et al., 2006), although not necessarily in a negative way (Shim et al., 2018).

One negative outcome is that media consumption costs time (Panda & Pandey, 2017), which was mostly attributed to the consumer (Grunig, 1979), not to media usage. In Germany, the tedious rise of pay TV against attractive free TV (Messner, 2013) demonstrated that monetary costs are important. And there are further negative consequences related to SVoD: Energy required for SVoD became an issue when global warming rose in public attention. Social impact, ethics, and corporate

2 We avoid the term *gratification sought* that they use for the product of a single belief and its evaluation and importance, as other research used the term in a different meaning, rather addressing motives, i.e., gratifications that are sought in a specific situation (McLeod et al., 1982), also labelled *expected gratifications* (Galloway, 1981; Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1984), instead of an evaluation.

responsibility (Brunk, 2012; Iglesias et al., 2020) gained salience with globalization and the rise of *Amazon*. Privacy concerns (Heravi et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2020) became an issue with digitization (Smith et al., 1996), reflected in various US privacy acts and the European GDPR, and discouraging people from subscribing to media services (Kuckertz & Funk, 2015).

In-between positive and negative outcomes, there is the absence of negative consequences. Convenient navigability was found to affect media choice (Menon, 2022), and means that usage is not overshadowed by frustrating experiences with the user interface, which is a well-known factor from diffusion of innovation research (Davis, 1989). Usage flexibility or ubiquity (Leiner & Neuendorf, 2022) means that the desire to use a service is not hindered by the current location or time.

As stated above, the *belief* concept is unspecific, compared to *gratifications* or media-related *motives*. Attributes that are likely unrelated to media choice (the color of the *Netflix* logo, for example) may also be beliefs about a SVoD service. On the upside, beliefs enable us to include factors that may inhibit the choice of a media option, drawing more accurate models of media choice, especially regarding specific media services. A varying set of beliefs may better explain the choice of different media types, but on the downside, it complicates comparison between different media, and understanding of competition between different kinds of media activity. The decreased specification of beliefs also challenges us to think about what people consider as relevant for each specific medium. Describing the motives for using new media services and their potential gratifications, however, has been at the center of uses-and-gratifications research since the rise of the internet and new media. Television has also been a major concern of uses-and-gratifications research; therefore, we can rely on a broad empirical foundation regarding those beliefs that are relevant for SVoD.

Decisions on media usage are found on different levels, ranging from choosing a specific piece of content on low level (such as film) to choosing a content provider (such as a broadcaster) to the choice of a platform or medium on high level (Hartmann, 2009). Subscribing to a SVoD service is rather high level; therefore, people may consider very different aspects of the service. Most likely, people will not have SVoD as an infrastructure in mind. Instead, some may think about exclusive *Netflix* series, others may seek for their favorite films from adolescence on *Amazon Prime Video*, or they may just expect *Disney+* to become their digital babysitter (Beyens & Eggermont, 2014). This requires a decision from empirical research: One option is to scrutinize the details of the adoption decision, looking into individual motivation and considerations. The other option is to employ abstract categories, such as *entertainment*, and accept that people will fill that idea with their individual desires and taste, using an individual rating frame that will focus on different media content and genres for different service brands. Actually, the limited comparability is not a methodological problem, but an integral characteristic of any decision between different media options, or with non-media options. The entertainment of watching a series is fundamentally different from the entertainment of playing chess, but still both options may compete in this aspect. We are interested in comparing inexperienced non-users and experienced users,

and in SVoD as a service, rather than service providers or individual styles of media usage. Consequently, we have to opt for abstract beliefs.

2.4. Sources of beliefs about media services

The decision to use a medium (or not) occurs in the pre-communicative phase (Bonfadelli & Friemel, 2015) and relies on the beliefs about that medium, other media, and non-media options. Regular users can rely on first-hand experience, which will adjust their beliefs over time based on what gratifications they obtain from usage (Palmgreen, 1984). Experiences from prior usage are considered a major source for the beliefs and expectations about a media service (LaRose & Eastin, 2004; Rayburn & Palmgreen, 1984). Such experience is unavailable when a new medium challenges an established one. As shown above, however, the uses-and-gratifications approach, diffusion of innovation theory, and other models of human behavior, such as the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the theory of planned behavior (for example Rossmann, 2021), follow the same idea that people base their decisions on what they believe is good for them.

Consequently, the uses-and-gratification approach has also been able to explain the substitution of old media options for new ones (Katz et al., 1973; Shade et al., 2015). What the approach does not explain is where people draw their beliefs from. How do non-users know whether they need SVoD?

Non-users may have gathered some primary experience by watching streaming content with friends or acquaintances. Yet, watching at a friend's home does not allow for gathering long-term experience (does the service bring out new series regularly?) or experiencing autonomous use (does the service fit my daily routines?). One option to fill the gaps in their beliefs is primary experiences from related media services that share characteristics with SVoD. Linear television provides a rough idea of what content and gratifications to expect from pay TV (Weeds, 2016). In Germany, the public service broadcasting *Mediatheken* offer a broad range of content on demand. Such free video-on-demand options as well as *YouTube* provide an idea of how video streaming works technically (Massad, 2018), and how to connect the laptop to the television set, for example. A second option is media coverage and the providers' advertising campaigns (Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1984). The third option is secondary experience, including interpersonal communication (word of mouth, Romaniuk & Hartnett, 2017) and social media (Lee et al., 2018; Sabrina et al., 2022) that provide third-person opinions and evaluations (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Given a broad range of public sources for beliefs, there are "popular stereotypes about gratifications" (Rosengren, 1974, p. 281). Nevertheless, there is little research on what these stereotypes about SVoD are. Market research from Indonesia shows that *Netflix* is a well-known brand, people believe that the server provides a complete collection of films, including exclusive content, in high image and audio quality (Sabrina et al., 2022). Market research from Germany shows that *Netflix* is more prestigious then *Amazon Prime Video*, while both are considered convenient and trustworthy sources of favorable video content (Rahe et al., 2021). These results bear little use for a communication perspective on media choice. Most

importantly, no research distinguishes the beliefs of non-users from the users' experienced beliefs. If non-user's beliefs are based on advertising and social media, one would at least expect some change during the transition from non-use to use.

2.5. Research questions

The perceived advantages of SVoD over traditional television and social influence have been subject to uses-and-gratifications research (Tefertiller, 2018, 2020). These advantages could explain the competition between SVoD and traditional television, but there is a blind spot in uses-and-gratifications research regarding adoption. To apply the behavioral models to adoption, we need to focus on the non-users' perception of SVoD, which is mostly founded upon social stereotypes and advertising instead of primary experience.

RQ 1: How do the beliefs (expectations) of people not using streaming television differ from the beliefs (experiences) of those using streaming television?

By employing the beliefs concept, instead of gratifications or advantages, we are able to include disadvantages and risks that may affect choices as much as advantages. Striving to keep the results compatible with present research, we focus on beliefs that literature found relevant for media choice, that is, gratifications and risks addressed by literature. We argue that the mechanics of the expectancy-value model apply not only to usage, but also to adoption. Therefore, we ask how well non-users' beliefs can explain adoption willingness.

RQ 2: Which beliefs predict the intention to adopt (subscribe to) SVoD?

The answer to this question allows us to directly contrast the relevance of positive and negative outcomes. Observing effects of beliefs on adoption willingness would also support the notion that the same mechanisms that explain usage in uses-and-gratifications research also explain adoption. Comparing these effects directly, however, allows for a much more detailed interpretation. We understand cancelling a SVoD subscription, which is no rare behavior, as the counterpart to subscribing to SVoD. Consequently, we ask whether beliefs also explain (dis-)continuing SVoD.

RQ 3: Which beliefs predict the intention to (dis-)continue the usage of a streaming television service?

This research question has another reason beyond providing a reference for the adoption mechanism. The two-factor theory of motivation (Herzberg et al., 1959) tells that different aspects may be responsible for motivation and frustration. Factors predicting adoption may not necessarily predict continued use, and vice versa.

3. Method

To answer the research questions, we surveyed the non-users' and user' beliefs with an online questionnaire. Data was collected over three weeks in January/February 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic limited social life and television content produc-

tion during that period. So, we have to assume an increased interest in SVoD and a reduced amount of upcoming program content.

3.1. Design

The research questions seek differences between non-users and users. Therefore, we recruited subsamples from both groups, SVoD users and non-users, aiming for a matching demographic structure. Both groups completed a standardized questionnaire that covered how respondents perceived a specific SVoD service (*Netflix*, *Amazon Prime Video*, or *Disney+*), and whether they considered subscribing to the service (non-users) or cancelling their present subscription (users).

3.2. Participants

All respondents were German market consumers. In Germany, the SVoD market is dominated by *Netflix*, *Amazon Prime Video*, and *Disney+*, other providers occupy niches, such as sports (Beisch et al., 2021). We recruited the participants for the online survey from two populations: Students' families and peers not studying communications cover a younger target group. Participants from the *SoSci Panel* (Leiner, 2016) cover consumers aged 45 years and older.

In order to give a valid answer to the first research question, it was essential to compare users and non-users that were otherwise similar. Users were required to have access to one of the major streaming services during the recent 12 months. Non-users must not have had experience from a previous SVoD subscription or trial subscription to any of the major streaming services. This definition excludes earlier-users from the study, that is, people who had previously used or tested an SVoD service but not recently.

The prevalence of not using SVoD service is small in the younger target group, so we employed a sampling plan with the five demographic criteria employment, income, formal education, age, and gender to strive for comparable groups (Leiner & Neuendorf, 2022).

3.3. Data cleaning and weighting

Above we argued that the zenith of SVoD diffusion has passed. Therefore, people who have never used streaming television before are increasingly hard to reach. Despite the sampling plan and after excluding 58 earlier-users, about twice as many users (n = 544) as non-users (n = 247) started the questionnaire. After removing incomplete and invalid data,[3] 682 records remained (476 users, 206 non-users). Preliminary analysis made us aware of an important segmentation within the group of users. In 2022, account sharing was widespread among *Netflix* users (Ahn, 2022). Respondents using SVoD without personal payment (34%, n = 161) answered

3 Data quality criteria were: completion of the questionnaire, answering two instructed response items correctly, reasonable completion speed (RSI < 2), and a limited amount of non-answered questions (weighted, max. 10%).

differently than paying or co-paying users, showing a substantially higher tendency to discontinue streaming. After excluding these records, we weighted cases for structural equality between paying users and non-users.[4] The weighting procedure results in 302 statistical cases for the analyses (151 paying users and 151 non-users, all subsequent statistics are based on weighted data).

The respondents were aged between 19 and 85 years (M = 51 years). 83 percent had a college degree or comparable, 87 percent were working, and the average disposable income, excluding tax, rent, and insurance, was 1,870 €. 31 percent lived together with their young or grown-up children in the household, and 23 percent lived alone. Among the users, 74 percent had access to *Netflix*, 84 percent to *Amazon Prime Video*, and 27 percent to *Disney+*.

3.4. Measures

Asking about an abstract concept such as SVoD "in general" requires a lot of interpretation from the respondents and goes along with severe reliability issues. We, therefore, asked for the characteristics of a specific SVoD product. Based on which subscriptions were available to the users, the questionnaire was about *Netflix* (48%, n = 72, weighted), *Amazon Prime Video* (46%, n = 69), or *Disney+* (7%, n = 10). Based on these margins, non-users were systematically assigned to the services.

If not stated otherwise, the questionnaire employed multi-item measures with five fully labeled response options per scale item. The literature provides items for some measures, but often does not report the item wording, or the wording does not properly fit current SVoD services. We, therefore, had to develop the majority of items ad-hoc. Where sensible, we used an equal number of positive and negative statements (reversed items) to avoid faux-correlations caused by the acquiescence bias. We discussed the composition of each measure carefully before and after data collection, employing factor analyses to remove items not understood as intended (indicated by not loading sufficiently on the respective factor). The appendix includes the original items, their descriptives, and scale consistency. The questionnaire comprised the following measures:

(A) *Beliefs about the SVoD service*. From the literature, we derived 11 beliefs that people consider about streaming television services. The questionnaire represented each with a short scale, using three to seven items per measure. Appendix 1 lists the wording of the items and the references for the scale items.

The beliefs about the SVoD services included the service affordability (e.g., "I must think carefully about whether I can afford and want the streaming subscription") which was measured following the assumptions of users' subjective price scale of Monroe (1973). Absolute and relative price perception was also assessed by visual analog rating items for the prices of all three SVoD services. The items

4 The weighting criteria were the chosen SVoD service (3 levels), age (5 levels), employment status (2 levels), income (2 levels), gender (2 levels) and formal education (3 levels). We assigned different weights to respondents in each demographic cell, with a reduced weight for the larger group per cell. This approach excluded cells with only users or non-users (n = 112) from the analysis, allowing to use 409 records for analyses. Our conservative weighting procedure deviates from traditional quota/probability weighting to prevent.

for relationship between quality (e.g., "Price and service are well balanced for me") adapted items from Zeithaml (1988) and Matzler (2006). The scale for interface usability (e.g., "When navigating through [Service], I am assisted by hints.") was based on suggestions for "browsing/variety-seeking" and "scaffolding/navigation aids" proposed by Sundar and Limperos (2013, p. 520). Beliefs about personal privacy (e.g., "I have no concerns about [Service] collecting too much personal information.") were based on Smith et al. (1996). General responsibility (e.g., "[Service] supports good causes.") was measured by scales from Brunk (2012) and Iglesias et al. (2020).

Literature found several gratifications important for television. Being open for the dimensions (see below), we included items for entertainment, pastime, escape, information, and learning (e.g., "[Service] is suitable for expanding my knowledge.") as gratifications scale. Using relatively few items for the traditional gratifications accounts for our goal to broaden the scope of beliefs. A scale on content variety (e.g., "When selecting [Service], one can expect to find something suitable for every mood and situation.") was designed ad-hoc, like a scale for exclusive content (e.g., "[Service] offers movies and series that are not available from other providers."). Continuous content quality (e.g., "With [Service], you can be sure that you won't get bored, because there are always enough new series and movies.") is another belief specifically added for SVoD, similar to the flexible availability of SVoD (e.g., "I can access [Service] regardless of location.") based on Steiner and Xu (2018).

(B) S*treaming usage in the peer group*. We assessed the anticipated usage of the specific SVoD service in the peer group with a fully labeled 5-point single-item measure (Appendix A.2.2). It is not a characteristic of the service how many peers use it, but an indicator for social influence. The response categories were designed to allow for a nearly linear measure (target share in backets), ranging from "nobody or very few" (~10%), "significantly less than half" (~30%), "about half" (50%), "significantly more than half" (~70%) to "most or nearly everybody" (~90%).

(C) *Willingness to start or cancel a subscription*. The otherwise uniform questionnaire used different measures for users' and non-users' intentions. We developed two separate ad-hoc scales with 15 items to measure the non-users' willingness to try or buy a subscription and the users' willingness to cancel theirs (Appendix 3). Items for the willingness to subscribe scale were borrows from the "Smartphone Addiction Scale" (Kwon et al., 2013) and from Satchell and Dourish (2009). Items like "I would be willing to pay money for [Service]" represented users' willingness to subscribe to a SVoD service, while the item "I couldn't imagine my life without [Service] (reversed)" was used to ask for users' intention to unsubscribe from such a SVoD service. Based on exploratory factor analyses, we selected 10 items for a *willingness to subscribe* index. The items about canceling the subscription fell into two meaningful dimensions, which we subjected to oblique rotation. One dimension describes *emotional ties to SVoD* that keep one from canceling the subscription (6 items). The other dimension includes cognitive aspects of costs and termination, and we label it *practical canceling considerations* (5 items). These dimensions correlate moderately ($r_{raw} = -0.40$, $r_{weighted} = -0.42$).

(D) *Information sources*. In addition to the closed-ended question, we asked respondents an open-ended question about where they had learned what they know or think about streaming television (Appendix 8).

(E) *Weighting variables*. We employed open-ended questions for age and income (Appendix 2), while using closed questions for gender, employment, formal education, and the living situation.

4. Results

With respect to the concept "beliefs about the SVoD service" (A), the questionnaire asked for eleven different aspects that literature considered relevant for television and/or SVoD. Literature discusses various determinants of SVoD use, for example Mulla (2022) or Nagaraj et al. (2021), each representing different qualities of content that are not always clearly distinct. In addition to the overlap of the aspects, we also doubted that non-researchers would clearly differentiate a dozen dimensions when considering a streaming television service like *Netflix* with moderate involvement in a low-cost situation (Leiner et al., 2018). We rely on correlation structure to better fit our measures to the user's perception, expecting the personal perception to follow common patterns, such as social stereotypes. First, we checked for collinearity between the measures as designed, finding six distinct measures: *price/service costs*, *service affordable*, *flexible availability*, *interface usability*, *general responsibility*, and *privacy*. The other six measures correlated with each other, so their 20 items went into an exploratory oblique factor analysis. Based on the factor structure, we categorized the items into four aspects.

The general *entertainment value* is a factor that covers several measures (10 items, see Appendix A.1.8), including the entertainment *gratification* items, but also items from the *content availability*, *exclusive content*, and *content variety* measures. From the entertainment value, respondents distinguished the *information value* (3 *gratification* items, A.4.2). We use the label *content depletion* (3 *content availability* items, A.4.3) for the perception that new content cannot, metaphorically speaking, keep up with *Game of Thrones*.

One measure, *value for money,* is sufficiently distinct from other measures. Yet, one may expect, the measure is based on *price* and some performance measure. Exploratory data analysis revealed that a regression model with *price* and the *entertainment value* explained most of the measure's variance ($R^2 = 55\%$). We include *value for money* in the descriptives but exclude the measure from subsequent regression analyses to avoid artifacts. We shall note, that our primary aim was to identify respondents' perceptions reflected in the items, not describe actual usage patterns or support theoretical gratification concepts. The number of factors therefore does not correspond to all the factors that can be derived from the theoretical models used or suggested by them.

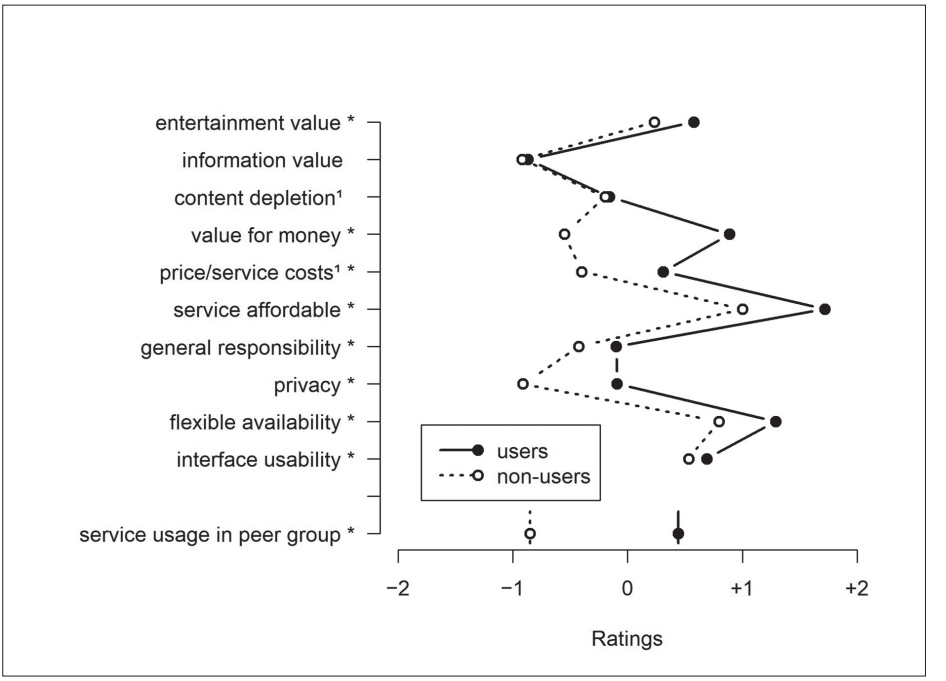
In addition to listing the belief aspects distinguished by our respondents, we would also like to briefly sketch the sources of these beliefs (information sources, E). We applied a qualitative analysis to these answers, using induction to build a category system, and then coding the answers (Appendix 8). The most important source for the non-users' expectations is their peers (family, friends, and colleagues), followed by advertising and news coverage. The users' beliefs are based chiefly on

their own use experience, followed by peers and news coverage. Other sources were rarely named. Our first research question is about the differences between the non-users' expectations and the users' experienced beliefs.

4.1. What users and non-users see in streaming television (RQ 1)

The most apparent systematic difference between the non-users' expectations and the users' experience-based ratings is: Users rate SVoD better than non-users in nearly every aspect (Figure 1). This difference is most apparent in the perceived *value for money*. The differences are generally statistically significant ($p < 0.05$, two-sided, weighted t-test, $N = 302$) except for the *information value* and *content depletion*. Notably, the ratings of the different SVoD products (*Netflix*, *Amazon Prime Video*, and *Disney+*) show little variation, compared to the differences observed between users and non-users (Appendix 4).

Figure 1. Beliefs about SVoD, ratings separated for users and non-users



Notes. The table shows the average ratings for all beliefs (weighted sample). Statistically significant differences between users and non-users ($p < 0.05$) are marked with an asterisk (*). ¹ Measures have been reversed to fit the scale −2 (poor) to +2 (good).

We argued that the perception that peers use a specific SVoD service is not a belief about the service in the narrow sense. Yet, literature highlights possible network effects, peers are an important source of information and opinion, and further social effects such as peer pressure may also affect adoption. Consequently, we

included the presumed streaming usage of the peers (namely using the specific SVoD service brand) into analysis (see Measures B: streaming usage in the peer group). As obvious from Figure 1, users perceived substantially more usage of the streaming service among their peers than non-users ($p < .001$, $t = 10.8$, $df = 342$, $d = 1.1$), though causation may be the other way around.

Table 1. Explanation of adoption willingness by non-users' beliefs about SVoD

Variables	Zero-order correlations (*r*)	Model 1 beta (*b*)	Model 2 beta (*b*)	Model 3 beta (*b*)	Model 4 beta (*b*)
(Intercept) [1]	–	(–1.933)	(–0.992)	(–0.881)	(–0.842)
Peers' usage	0.403***	+0.403*** (+0.225)	–	+0.309*** (+0.173)	+0.308*** (+0.172)
Entertainment value	0.362***	–	+0.235* (+0.227)	+0.214* (+0.207)	+0.204* (+0.197)
Information value	0.203*	–	–0.003 (–0.002)	–0.021 (–0.017)	–
Content depletion [2]	0.185	–	+0.009 (+0.008)	+0.036 (+0.030)	–
Value for money [3]	0.514***	–	– [3]	– [3]	– [3]
Price/service costs [2]	0.315***	–	+0.152 (+0.116)	+0.107 (+0.082)	+0.123 (+0.094)
Service affordable	0.130	–	+0.082 (+0.049)	+0.068 (+0.041)	–
General responsibility	0.368***	–	+0.218* (+0.233)	+0.187 (+0.200)	+0.192* (+0.206)
Privacy	0.234**	–	+0.009 (+0.014)	+0.001 (+0.001)	–
Flexible availability	0.106	–	–0.022 (–0.020)	–0.021 (–0.018)	–
Interface usability	0.049	–	–0.127 (–0.123)	–0.120 (–0.116)	–0.107 (–0.104)
Model R^2 (adjusted)	–	0.156***	0.168***	0.257***	0.280***
Change in R^2 compared to Model 3	–	–0.101**	–0.089***	–	+0.023
Model AIC	–	288	295	280	270

Notes. The table lists standardized and (in brackets) unstandardized regression coefficients for different regression models. The estimates are based on $N = 134$ of 151 cases (weighted) due to missing values. [1] All variables were scaled –2 to +2 with the neutral middle position 0 to allow for an easier interpretation of the intercept. The willingness to adopt the SVoD service is right-skewed, most non-users were reluctant to subscribe to the streaming product. [2] Measures have been reversed to fit the scale –2 (poor) to +2 (good). [3] The *value for money* measure is strongly related to *entertainment value* and *costs*, and therefore excluded from the regression models.

4.2. Reasons for adopting streaming television (RQ 2)

The non-users had never before tested or subscribed to any major streaming service. Their willingness to subscribe to *Netflix*, *Amazon Prime Video*, or *Disney+* is a proxy for adoption likelihood. We ran several linear regressions (Table 1) to adequately describe the relationship between the beliefs and the willingness to subscribe. We ran models with only, with, and without controlling for the peers' usage, which sufficiently reflects the cohort and group affiliations (Appendix 5). Additionally, we created a parsimonious model by removing aspects with a standardized regression coefficient smaller than 0.1.

Even when controlling for the peers' usage, the beliefs explain 10 percent of adoption willingness (Table 1, ΔR^2 between models 1 and 3). Without, the beliefs account for 17 percent of the variance (R^2 model 2). The most important aspect for non-users is the anticipated *entertainment value,* followed by the *general responsibility* attributed to the provider. *Costs*, *privacy,* and the *information value* show significant zero-order correlations with adoption willingness, but are not significant anymore when controlling for other aspects in the regression models. Further beliefs are unrelated to adoption willingness.

4.3. Reasons to quit streaming television (RQ 3)

The mechanism behind quitting a streaming subscription are more complex than its adoption. As stated above, data indicates two motivational dimensions behind our 15-items scale measuring the willingness cancel a subscription (C): *emotional ties to the service* that keep someone from canceling the subscription and *practical canceling considerations* that represent a cognitive component. In the analyses we reverse the *emotional ties* dimension so that a larger coefficient consistently indicates a larger willingness to quit the streaming subscription. We created the same regression models for canceling as for adoption (above), separately for both dimensions of the willingness to cancel the subscription (Table 2 and Appendix 6).

An experienced users' beliefs, based in primary experience, explain the willingness to cancel a subscription much better ($R^2 = 0.30$ and 0.39 without peers' usage, Appendix A.6.1) than expectations explained the non-users' adoption willingness ($R^2 = 0.17$, Table 1, Model 2). The willingness to quit with streaming television also depends less on demography and the peer's usage ($R^2 < 0.08$, Appendix A.5.2) than adoption willingness ($R^2 = 0.16$, Table 1, Model 1). The service brand has similarly little relevance for quitting like for adoption (Appendix A.5.1 and A.5.2).

The aspect most important for emotional ties is the entertainment value, followed by how responsible a respondent considers the service provider, and costs. The practical cancelation considerations are mostly driven by cost perception.

Table 2. Explaining of willingness to cancel the SVoD subscription by users' beliefs

	Zero-order correlations (*r*)		Regression model beta (*b*)	
Dependent variable	emotional (ties [1])	cognitive (practical)	emotional (ties [1])	cognitive (practical)
(Intercept) [2]	–	–	(+1.206)	(–0.751)
Peers' usage	–0.281***	–0.194**	–0.171** (–0.120)	–0.034 (–0.017)
Entertainment value	–0.466***	–0.406***	–0.398*** (–0.583)	–0.254*** (–0.267)
Information value	– 0 .085****	–0.078	+0.133 (+0.139)	+0.015 (+0.011)
Content depletion [1/3]	–0.266***	–0.378***	+0.032 (+0.031)	+0.080 (+0.056)
Value for money [4]	–0.430***	–0.607***	– [4]	– [4]
Price/service costs [1/3]	–0.240***	–0.393***	–0.199** (–0.199)	–0.285*** (–0.214)
Service affordable [5]	–0.047	–0.303***	+0.040 (+0.055)	–0.191** (–0.186)
General responsibility	–0.343***	–0.323***	–0.262** (–0.368)	–0.178* (–0.179)
Privacy	–0.327***	–0.287***	–0.033 (–0.029)	–0.023 (–0.015)
Flexible availability	–0.120	–0.259***	+0.000 (+0.000)	–0.126 (–0.127)
Interface usability	–0.205**	–0.264***	+0.054 (+0.067)	–0.026 (–0.023)
Model R^2 (adjusted)	–	–	0.311***	0.380***
Change in R^2 above peer's usage [6]	–	–	+0.237***	+0.347***

Notes. The estimates are based on $N = 121$ of 151 cases (weighted) due to missing values. [1] Reversed [2] All variables were scaled –2 to +2. [3] Measures scaled to fit the scale -2 = poor to +2 = good. [4] The *value for money* measure is strongly related to *entertainment value* and *costs*, and therefore excluded from the regression models. [5] Zero-order correlations coefficients different for emotional and cognitive effect ($p < 0.05$, Steiger test, calculated with *R* package psych::r.test). [6] The R^2 for a model with only peers' usage (Appendix 6) based on 121 cases (weighted) is 0.074 and 0.033.

5. Conclusion

This paper focuses on beliefs about SVoD: How do people perceive SVoD in general, and what image do they hold of particular streaming television brands? Based on literature and factor analyses of our data, we identified ten dimensions in the people's concept of SVoD: Entertainment value and its depletion over time (*having seen all series that used to attract the person*), information value, value-for-money, absolute and relative costs (*can one effortlessly pay the monthly fees*), the distributor's ethics/responsibility, privacy, flexible availability, and interface usability. Importantly, these are positive and negative aspects that people consider when thinking of streaming television.

5.1. Interpretation

Our first research question (RQ1) was how non-users' expectations differ from the users' experiences. Users generally rate SVoD better than non-users. The first substantial difference between users and non-users is how much *entertainment value* they attribute to SVoD. One interpretation is that all the advertising efforts did not bring the non-users' expectations on a level with what the users' experience. Another interpretation is that people who are generally more enthusiastic about new technology and who enjoy television better, have already adopted SVoD, while the others have not. Our design of comparing non-users and users allows for insights into primary experience, but it does not allow for explaining causation.

The second substantial difference is *costs*. The non-users consider SVoD as more expensive than users. In resonance with the perception of *entertainment value*, users feel that SVoD gets them much more *value for money*. This is no surprise, given that users had already decided to pay their monthly subscription fee. In terms of content-related qualities of the SVoD services, our measures do not provide detailed information what encompasses the entertainment value. Nabi et al. (2006) suggest that cognitive and emotional predictors of enjoyment may vary for different TV program genres.

Another substantial but less expected difference is found for the perception of *privacy*. Concerns and fears regarding privacy threats have commonly been observed for internet usage (Fuchs, 2010; Kuckertz & Funk, 2015). We offer two plausible explanations why non-users have much more privacy concerns than users: One explanation is that fears are quickly forgotten when one does not experience negative effects in everyday usage. The other explanation is based on cognitive dissonance theory (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). Users have already thrown their moral concepts overboard, while those who are still undecided can follow the socially desired view of paying attention to privacy.

Our second and third research questions ask how the beliefs are related to the non-users' adoption willingness (RQ2) and the users' willingness to cancel a streaming service subscription (RQ3). We found not only one dimension of quitting but an emotional component (*I do not want to miss streaming*) and a cognitive component (*streaming costs money and my valuable time, and I don't need it*).

As a preparation to answer these questions, we had to clarify the role of demographic variables and social influence. While literature observed distinct age or cohort differences in adoption, we found demographics to play a surprisingly weak role for adoption by the late majority and laggards (Appendix 5). The peers' usage of a streaming service – or at least the anticipated peers' usage – covers most demographic variance when explaining adoption willingness. And above that, the peers' usage also includes social influences such as social pressure (*You really need Disney+!*), network effects of socializing (*Will you watch the Rings of Power tonight?*), and word-of-mouth influence on diffusion (*Netflix is still so cool*). Looking deeper into how much variance is explained by demographics and the peers' usage, we conclude that social forces affect adoption much more than quitting (continued usage). This makes sense, considering that practical aspects of quitting, such as costs and time, are individual problems.

While social influences are more critical for adoption, the beliefs predict continued use better than adoption. Our interpretation is that first-hand experience causes more effective attitudes (Krosnick & Petty, 1995) than vague expectations drawn from other sources. The belief aspects most important for SVoD adoption willingness (RQ2) are the anticipated *entertainment value* and a provider's *general responsibility*. These two aspects also predict the willingness to cancel a SVoD subscription (RQ3), accompanied by *costs*. Except for costs, we find no systematically different drivers for buying and canceling a SVoD subscription.

5.2. Limitations

We measured the willingness to discontinue a SVoD subscription as the counterpart of adoption. Terminating a subscription may be the natural end of the adoption cycle, but the concept leaves questions unanswered: Will those who cancel their streaming subscription only leave the specific service provider, or will they quit streaming television at all? Will they eventually come back to SVoD? From open-ended interviews not reported in the paper, we know it is not uncommon to cancel a *Netflix* subscription and wait for the next blockbuster series before subscribing to *Netflix*, again. The concept of adoption is easier to define: the first subscription to a SVoD provider separates non-users from users, unless we consider that some subscriptions will be cancelled after a few days. More importantly, however, what a person wants to adopt is often unclear. In the case of SVoD, this could encompass television streaming in general, the adoption of *Netflix* as a product, or the *Netflix* subscription may be a by-product of embracing a particular TV series, such as *Stranger Things*. While the theories employed in our study allow application for each of these cases, our measures do not. The measures explicitly ask for *Netflix* or another service. In the survey, asking for what aspects respondents actually think about, when asked for *Netflix*, might improve both, explanation and understanding of individual beliefs.

This scope of beliefs was derived from literature on television and SVoD, and amended by negative consequences discussed in literature and news coverage. There is a good chance that our measures covered the most important beliefs to explain usage frequency, but there is no guarantee that further beliefs, down to the belief

that one must see a particular series, explain (non-)adoption or (dis-)continued use. While this limitation does not affect our research questions, it may be important for other perspectives. The same is true for the abstraction level we chose for beliefs. Entertainment value and content depletion, for example, rely on the respondents' ability to provide a rating for a multifaceted, disperse collection of films and series. These will be different titles for different users, especially regarding different SVoD providers that advertise their exclusive content. It is beyond our study's scope to research the qualitative differences that users and non-users experience or assume, based on their individual taste and the SVoD provider. Our study instead leaves several questions unanswered about what beliefs are salient to the thinking of SVoD users and non-users, and what defines the concept of entertainment from a qualitative perspective.

Our non-representative sample tells little about the interesting group of deniers: people who will not adopt an innovation. One-tenth of the non-users were very clear on their willingness never to adopt SVoD. Deniers were not in our study's focus, so we leave the question unanswered, why these people did not consider streaming television a relevant media option. Their reasons may be outside the scope of beliefs that our study measures.

Our sample is not representative and the effective weighted sample is small. Therefore, the regression coefficients that indicate the relevance of different beliefs contain substantial error margins and should be understood with caution. Above that, studying the beliefs of non-users always carries the risk of asking for pseudo-opinions (Bishop et al., 1980). Some attitudes reported in surveys may simply be artifacts of asking for things that people had never thought about before (*non-attitudes*, for an overview see Krosnick et al., 2001). We theorize that people, although they lack real experience with a SVoD, can build on their own beliefs about characteristics of the streaming service. This assumption is supported by low rates of missing item-response (0,5% or less, the questionnaire probed for missing responses). Yet, beliefs like interface usability or flexible availability are especially susceptible to invalid responses.

The limitations regarding causation have already been mentioned above. Our theoretical and empirical model has a very sharp focus on selected beliefs and behavior intention, scraping only on the surface of social factors by integrating the perceived peers' usage. Future studies might opt to integrate psychological, social, and/or cultural contexts that are known to affect the usage of technological innovations.

A specific challenge lies in the design that we employed to compare users and non-users: Non-users that at least consider adoption are increasingly hard to find, given how quickly SVoD has spread. This limits the application of the methodological approach and reproducibility to a short period. The time frame has already closed regarding young adults, for example. A final limitation of this study, which can also be seen as an outlook for future studies, is the constant and dynamic development of streaming services, which also affects any motivations to and gratifications from SVoD use. During the survey period of this study, account sharing was still possible with the provider *Netflix* and was also a reason for many respondents to use *Netflix* free of charge or at a low price. This function was

discontinued by the operator during the revision period of this paper, which may have had an impact on the motivation to use the service and may have changed the stereotypes about *Netflix*. The findings about new media services, and that includes television by now, are fluid in their informative value as they are bound to the context of the survey period.

5.3 Discussion

With the study presented in this paper, we applied the basic idea of the uses-and-gratifications approach to *Subscription Video-on-Demand*, also known as streaming television or *Over-the-Top*. Striving to contribute to the uses-and-gratifications theory, we went beyond its traditional boundaries in two aspects. Thus, this paper contributes to recent efforts in bringing the uses-and-gratifications approach up to date with the current media environment (also see Rathnayake & Winter, 2018; Ruggiero, 2000; Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

First, the uses-and-gratifications approach has usually been applied to the behavior of experienced users. Beliefs are at the core of Palmgreen's (1984) model, later known as *expected gratifications* (Scherer & Schlütz, 2004), and the uses-and-gratifications approach mostly conceptualized beliefs as first-hand experience. Taking a look at the beliefs about the new medium through the lens of uses-and-gratifications theory improves understanding of the *relative advantage* component which has been theorized by the diffusion of innovation tradition, but had received little practical attention regarding measures. Taking secondary information sources into account, provides a theoretical foundation for applying beliefs not based on first-hand-experience into the uses-and-gratifications model.

Second, the focus of the uses-and-gratifications approach has been on (positive) gratifications received from media consumption. Sundar (2008) had argued that digital media in the 21st century has more facets than traditional gratifications. *Privacy* and a *provider's responsibility*, for example, are well-known in marketing research but have mostly been ignored by communication scholars. While some well-known gratifications are valid for most new media, others are highly specific: *Content depletion*, for example, describes the state of having seen everything that was personally interesting. We argue that the mental image of SVoD is much broader than traditional gratifications, and that negative consequences merit more attention. Taking a broader set of beliefs into consideration is still highly compatible with the uses-and-gratifications literature.

We did not, however, find negative consequences being particularly important for the adoption decision or continued use. Privacy seems more important to discuss than to consider in actual decisions. Further non-content benefits also were of little relevance for adoption and continued use. At the core, SVoD is about the traditional gratification entertainment (Fudurić et al., 2020; Leiner & Neuendorf, 2022) and whether people consider that worthy of the monthly costs.

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Appendix

The appendix is available online at https://osf.io/t9nke/wiki/