Imaginaries of Success About Netflix Original Series:
The Case of *Cidade Invisível*

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Over the past decade, Netflix has commissioned productions from different global markets. However, given the scarcity of viewership data, it is difficult to evaluate the performance of each title. Concurrently, fans of Netflix series resort to the company's official profiles on social media, demanding greater publicity for their favorite shows. This article, then, investigates how users perceive success in subscription video-on-demand services. Particularly, we explore what imaginaries fans create about the performance of the Brazilian Netflix drama *Cidade Invisível*, analyzing tweets in which users plead for the show to be better publicized. These messages urge Netflix to (1) amplify the show's awareness among subscribers, (2) assure the show's future, and (3) appreciate the local audiovisual market. In this sense, they constantly question Netflix's marketing strategies, highlighting an understanding that, for a Netflix production to become successful, it needs a strong presence on social media.

Keywords: Netflix originals, streaming platforms, Brazil, success metrics, fans

In October 2021, Netflix announced that the South Korean drama *Squid Game* (Hwang, 2021) had established itself as the most sampled series in the service's history. According to Bela Bajaria, Netflix's global TV head, the company's strategy to publicize the production initially focused chiefly on South Korea and other Asian countries (Adalian, 2021). However, after the huge online buzz around the show, Netflix increased the *Squid Game's* promotion in other regional markets through its social media profiles, fueling word-of-mouth (Paris, 2021).

Over the past decade, Netflix has focused on expanding its global reach (Jenner, 2018; Lobato, 2019). Throughout this process, the company invested in commissioning series from different countries (García Leiva, Albornoz, & Gómez, 2021; Iordache, 2021). Each year, Netflix releases several new shows, constantly updating its libraries around the world with projects completely or partially funded by the subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) service (Lotz, 2021; Penner & Straubhaar, 2020). Yet, given the

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Date submitted: 2021-12-30

scarcity of information available concerning the platform's viewership data, fans of Netflix Original[1] series find themselves at a loss regarding how to measure the performance of these shows. Since 2018, the company began sharing information regarding a few Netflix titles, but until now, it has only provided data about its successful productions (Wayne, 2021).

In this context, scholars indicate the intense use of social media platforms by both SVOD services and fans (Marinelli & Andò, 2014; Zhao, 2021). In Brazil, for example, Twitter is one of the main platforms used by Netflix to promote productions and build its brand; at the same time, Brazilian fans have adopted it as an official channel to make demands toward the company and inquire about the future of their beloved shows (Nascimento, 2020; Valiatti, 2018). Bucher (2018) contends that even though most users do not have the access or the skill set to understand the mechanics of digital platforms, they create imaginaries about these infrastructures based on their own experiences. In Netflix's case, people often make certain assumptions about the service and its business model. Nonetheless, these speculations are usually rooted in norms established by linear television (Lotz, 2022).

This article investigates what imaginaries fans create about the performance of Netflix Original series. Leading from the discussions on streaming industry discourse (Jenner, 2018; Tryon, 2015; Wayne, 2021), platform studies (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2010; van Dijck, Poell, & De Waal, 2018), and audience practices (Bourdaa & Lozano Delmar, 2016; Chin & Morimoto, 2013; Maris, 2021), we analyze comments on Twitter concerning the first season of the Brazilian drama *Cidade Invisível* (Invisible City; Saldanha, 2021–present) in which fans demanded Netflix better publicize the show. The series premiered on February 5, 2021, and is part of the company's long-term investment in developing productions aimed at local markets. In terms of methods, we collected tweets posted on Netflix's Brazilian profile on Twitter (@NetflixBrasil), specifically those that mentioned *Cidade Invisível*, between January 5 and March 5, 2021. Next, we evaluated fans' statements, focusing on those that demanded more publicity for the show. Our findings highlight three main discourses used by fans. These messages urge Netflix to (1) amplify the show's awareness among subscribers, (2) assure the show's future, and (3) appreciate the local audiovisual market.

Ultimately, they imply an understanding that, for a production to become a hit, Netflix must talk about it on its social media profiles. Even though only a fraction of a show's audience engages in social media chatter, these fan comments indicate ways to examine the imaginaries of success and failure on SVOD platforms. Considering Netflix's personalized recommendation system (Hallinan & Striphas, 2016), there is no practical way to know which titles are presented on each user's interface. In addition, the parameters sought by Netflix to measure its productions' performance are vague and often restricted from public knowledge (Wayne, 2021). Therefore, fans perceive the cry for more publicity as a concrete measure to get more people to watch their favorite show and save it from cancelation.

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[1] Netflix tags its "Original" label in productions fully commissioned by the company, productions made in partnership with other studios, and licensed titles in which the company has exclusive distribution rights (Lotz, 2021).

"Blackboxing" the Audience

The proliferation of digital platforms in the last two decades has brought profound changes to everyday life, affecting economic, political, and social relations (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). Digital platforms quantify the most mundane interactions (e.g., commenting about a TV show) and, later, compute, interpret, and manage these pieces of information (van Dijck, 2014). Within this framework, data seem to have taken the lead role. Netflix is one of the major platforms in this scenario, operating in an environment that mixes both new agents and old media conglomerates (Johnson, 2018).

Since it became a digital service, Netflix has strived to control the discursive battle over its performance. On some occasions, it positions itself as a digital revolution in the TV world. In others, it approaches consolidated television models (Bishop, 2013; Tryon, 2015). Netflix's technological affordances, such as nonlinear viewership and taste management mediated by algorithms, contribute to grounding this discourse. Hence, Netflix describes itself as a service that allows subscribers greater autonomy over what they watch and that organizes, filters, and recommends titles based on users' habits (Hallinan & Striphas, 2016). Moreover, Netflix also commissions new shows. In this scenario, the company seeks to distinguish itself from linear television while, at the same time, creating series that reproduce established TV norms (Jenner, 2018).

Platforms like Netflix raise serious questions about audience data. In the ad-supported television model, information about spectatorship is a valuable commodity (Napoli, 2003, 2011; Smythe, 2006). Throughout the medium's history, companies have developed several methods, technologies, and conventions designed to measure and classify viewers (Lotz, 2007). However, television has undergone profound transformations since the mid-1980s. According to van Es (2016), the emergence of time-shifting technologies (e.g., VCRs, DVDs, etc.) and audience fragmentation "cast doubts on the reliability of traditional ratings as a currency to work with in the industry" (p. 110).

The lack of transparency in SVOD platforms is another feature that further complicates the current media landscape. In platform studies, it is common to use the black box metaphor (Pasquale, 2015) to refer to the restricted aspect of these services, in which the functioning of the technology and the data generated from its use "become private, hidden, and often unknown" (Beer, 2016, p. 107). SVOD platforms intensify this issue not only because of the scarcity of publicized information but mainly because each platform develops its own methods to define what it considers a view.

According to Michael Wayne (2021),

> Whatever shared sense of collective audience-hood was discursively produced by widely accepted albeit thoroughly flawed ratings systems like Nielsen is being replaced by the industrial discourses associated with black-box audience data within which claims of popularity and cultural significance cannot be substantively challenged. (p. 2)

Therefore, the very notion of audience in SVOD services like Netflix has been locked away in their platforms' black box. For Lotz (2022), it is a mistake to compare measures of success from ad-supported

television with those from subscriber-supported services, since "the differences in these models produce different constraints and opportunities" (p. 67). Nonetheless, even if Netflix does not evaluate its contents in the same way as ad-supported linear television, it still uses audience data to foster the rhetoric about its titles' performance (Wayne, 2021), at least regarding its successful ones. In 2018,[2] the company started disclosing viewing numbers of specific titles, usually using a four-week time frame after its debut. In 2021, it released the Global Top 10 website (Netflix, 2021b), which publicizes weekly information on the 10 most-viewed titles, sorted by format (TV or film), language (English or non-English), and country. Each piece of information published by Netflix contributes to the maintenance of the company's institutional narrative (Crawford, 2021), positioning it as a successful player in the streaming market. This way, the platform's opacity allows the company to define the parameters used to quantify and present viewership data without having to discuss them further.

Building Imaginaries: The Role of @NetflixBrasil

Taina Bucher (2018) argues that rather than trying to understand how platforms work, it would be more effective to pay attention to the places and situations in which there is a spotlight on them. Thus, it is also necessary to comprehend how subjects interpret these technologies. The concept of algorithmic imaginary refers to "ways of thinking about what algorithms are, what they should be, how they function, and what these imaginations, in turn, make possible" (Bucher, 2018, p. 113). Imaginary is a broad term, scrutinized by many scholars (Anderson, 1983; Gomes, 2016; Maris, 2021). Bucher's theory is similar but slightly different from Charles Taylor's (2004) definition of "the social imaginary" (pp. 23–30), which correlates to how people perceive their own existence and the world around them. The algorithmic imaginary not only derives from the moments where a user and a platform meet but also encompasses how these encounters affect how these technologies are used. Given platforms' opacity, these imaginaries are mostly speculations. Nonetheless, these perceptions should not be disregarded since they guide users' thoughts and actions regarding platforms (Bucher, 2018).

While people "decode" algorithms and develop imaginaries based on their experiences with platforms, there is also an effort by the latter to construct imaginaries, directing how these technologies work and what purposes they serve. Ultimately, platformization and algorithmic culture are interwoven processes (Grohmann, 2019). In other words, platforms attempt to delineate how people perceive them. This process does not lead from a deterministic point of view, much less a linear one. Just like any other type of media, there are constant disputes and negotiations among the agents involved (Hall, 2003). Although algorithmic imaginaries mainly develop from user expectations and experiences in dealing with a platform, one cannot overlook the impact generated by other communication channels established by the company that controls the service. These are present, for example, in official statements led by executives, which quickly circulate on traditional media outlets.

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[2] Before 2018, the information about the performance of specific titles was vague or imprecise. For example, Netflix announced in 2014 that the second season of House of Cards (Willimon, 2013–2018) "attracted a huge audience that would make any cable or broadcast network happy" (Netflix, 2014, p. 2).

In Netflix's case, it is also on social media platforms that the company cultivates what we have been calling "imaginary," in its direct relationship with users every day. Since 2013, the SVOD service started to release fully funded Original series, promising to deliver content created especially for subscribers to establish its brand (Jenner, 2018; Tryon, 2015). Available today in more than 190 countries, the company adapts its strategies in these territories (Aranzubia & Gallego, 2021; Lobato, 2018; Rios & Scarlata, 2018; Tse, 2020), often producing "local" titles (Afilipoaie, Iordache, & Raats, 2021; García Leiva et al., 2021; Kim, 2022). Moreover, Jenner (2018) states that when it comes to marketing campaigns, "Netflix has made true efforts of regionalisation and nationalization" (p. 213), shaping its communication to reach national audiences.

In Brazil, Netflix uses social media platforms to encourage the perception that it listens to its audience and is able to deliver exactly what they want. On Twitter, specifically, the company's official profile, @NetflixBrasil, employs a specific type of language, foregrounding an affective bond with users (Valiatti, 2018). @NetflixBrasil bases its communication on the use of encyclopedic knowledge about popular titles in its Brazilian library and intensive use of humorous Internet memes[3] featuring these productions (Nascimento, 2020). Therefore, Netflix capitalizes on TV fans' emotional engagement and tries to turn them into Netflix fans (Castellano, Pinho, & Noronha, 2021). For instance, in January 2016, the company's profiles on social media platforms posted a "wedding invitation" between the platform itself and its users (individuals could add their names in the designated space). In total, the publication had about 35,000 likes and more than 3,000 comments, many of them with passionate statements from users playing along with the joke.

It is curious, in this regard, that the company has invested heavily in the global distribution of *The Social Dilemma* (Orlowski-Yang, 2020), a documentary that discusses the impact that digital platforms have on our lives and the extensive use they make of the data generated by its users. But Netflix's own practices are part of a similar process. The perception around SVOD services is that their algorithms would only serve to make the recommendation system more accurate. This would differ from social media platforms, which recurrently are associated with political issues, filter bubbles, fake news, and targeted advertising (Bucher, 2018). In other words, Netflix users would only gain by willingly offering their own standards of taste and preferences.

If, on the one hand, @NetflixBrasil uses Twitter to build imaginaries about its service and productions, users also appropriate social media to make complaints. This dynamic relates to what Elena Maris (2021) calls imagined industry. While media industries implement new ways to define and exploit audiences, audiences also create imaginaries about media companies. These imaginaries shape "people's expectations and practices related to those industries and industrially created/mediated content" (Maris, 2021, p. 4820). In this sense, the algorithmic imaginary and the imagined industry are similar concepts: While the former concerns users' perceptions of digital platforms, the latter refers to audiences' perceptions regarding industry practices. In the case of SVOD services, these terms overlap. And it is

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[3] Internet memes are digital items whose form, content, and/or stance are shared by a group of individuals and circulated through cultural processes of imitation or variation (Shifman, 2014). @NetflixBrasil uses memes recognized by the Brazilian audience, frequently associating them with Netflix Original productions.

precisely when Netflix and its audiences' goals do not align that the commercial aspect of this "affectionate" relationship is exposed.

The Case of *Cidade Invisível*

Given that the expansion of the video-streaming market happens on a global scale, Lotz (2021) argues that it is a mistake to guide discussions on these platforms leading solely from the U.S. perspective. This would reveal a short-sighted view of the circulation of cultural objects in today's media ecosystem. Currently, more and more services like Netflix have been investing in transnational expansion projects. Meanwhile, national industries have also made efforts to develop strategies to deal with this new scenario, through direct confrontation or cooperation (Baladron & Rivero, 2019; Meimaridis, 2022; Tse, 2020).

According to Tomaz Penner and Joseph Straubhaar (2020), "In today's streaming and distribution market, one of the most powerful aspects is exclusivity" (p. 133). Commissioning new productions, then, becomes one of the safest bets. It allows for greater control of the creative process and reduces disparities in the volume of titles made available by the service in each country. This strategy also safeguards Netflix since it allows the platform to maintain a robust and attractive catalog in the long term (Jenner, 2018; Lotz, 2021). The SVOD company seeks to consolidate its Netflix Originals label, a category used to build the company's brand identity and reinforce the exclusivity of its content library (Tryon, 2015). Since *House of Cards* (Willimon, 2013–2018), the first series fully financed by the company, there has been a clear interest in investing in serialized fiction, with numerous productions released each year.

Netflix has also invested in financing series outside the United States. In this process, the company positions itself not only as a facilitator, shortening the distribution circuit and intensifying the transnational flow of series from different territories but also as a creator of stories commercialized as global narratives (Meimaridis, Mazur, & Rios, 2021). When it arrived in Brazil in 2011, company executives stated that the country was one of Netflix's main markets (Pennafort, 2018). More than 10 years after, Netflix has invested in the Brazilian market with the development of several local productions, such as *3%* (Mello, 2016–2020).

The drama *Cidade Invisível* (Saldanha, 2021–present) is in accordance with the company's investment trends in Brazil. Created by Carlos Saldanha, the series debuted in February 2021 featuring two established Brazilian *telenovela* actors, Marco Pigossi and Alessandra Negrini. In the series, which mixes elements of police drama and fantasy, Eric (Pigossi) is an environmental police chief shaken after the mysterious death of his wife in a forest fire. After finding a pink dolphin on a beach in Rio de Janeiro, the detective "engages in a secret murder investigation and finds himself in the middle of a battle between two worlds—ours, as we know it, and another inhabited by mythical entities, invisible to humans" (Netflix, 2019, p. 2). The show is strongly inspired by deities and myths from the Brazilian indigenous culture. Yet, it received harsh criticism for the lack of indigenous professionals interpreting these characters (Nogueira, 2021). Despite this, *Cidade Invisível* gained public interest since the announcement of its production, especially because of the caliber of its lead protagonists.

Methods

Previous research has shown that Netflix invests in its communication on social media platforms, with specific profiles aimed at the countries or regions where it operates (Fernández-Gómez & Martín-Quevedo, 2018; Wohlgemuth & Parmeggiani, 2017). In Brazil, Twitter functions as one of the main environments used both by TV fans to comment about Netflix series (Valiatti, 2018) and by the company itself, to encourage the engagement of these users and turn them into fans of the Netflix brand (Castellano et al., 2021). However, there is a gap in the literature concerning the tensions in this dynamic. A notable exception is the work proposed by Del Olmo and Díaz (2020). Given that the goal is to analyze the imaginaries about the performance of a Netflix Original series, Twitter allows us to identify what rhetorics emerge and how users employ them.

Initially, we retrieved tweets that mentioned the @NetflixBrasil account and that contained keywords related to the series (N = 27,509 tweets). These tweets were collected through RStudio (RStudio Team, 2021), an open-source software that allows data extraction and analysis via R programming language. We only queried for tweets written in Portuguese that contained one of the words from our keywords list, including the show's title, *Cidade Invisivel*, and related terms such as "folclore" [folklore], "série brasileira" [Brazilian series], "Marcos Pigossi," and "Alessandra Negrini." Leading from a previous analysis of the terms used by users to refer to the production, we created the list. Due to the size of the material, we analyzed a randomized sample of 395 tweets. The sample size was based on the simplified formula to calculate proportions (Singh & Masuku, 2014)[4] and considered a 95% confidence level and a 5% significance criterion.

Next, we implemented a content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004; Sampaio & Lycarião, 2021) to identify discursive patterns expressed in the sample's texts, emphasizing only those related to success imaginaries. This qualitative step was done manually and highlighted different rhetoric employed by users. We divided the themes raised into three main categories: (1) demands to amplify the show's awareness among subscribers, (2) demands to assure the show's future, and (3) demands to appreciate the local audiovisual market. Table 1 presents these categories, the numbers of inferences, and examples of tweets. In addition, we also found tweets that expressed comments about the narrative (e.g., "@NetflixBrasil I'm watching *Cidade invisível* now . . . I'm in love with this series ☺☺♥"; personal communication, February 2, 2021)[5] or about industrial issues related to the production (e.g., "@NetflixBrasil debuts '*Cidade Invisível*'—An adventure and mystery story"; personal communication, February 9, 2021). Given that such tweets do not fit the central objective of this research, they were disregarded in the final analysis.

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[4] The formula is expressed by the equation $n = N / [1 + N (e)^2]$, where n is the required sample size, N is the population size, and e is the level of precision (5%).

[5] The tweets have been translated into English and anonymized.

Table 1. Fans' Discourses Regarding Cidade Invisível.

	Total (%)	Total (*n*)	Example
Demands to amplify the show's awareness among subscribers	10.9	43	"@NetflixBrasil Where is the promotion *of Cidade Invisível*????? Are you going to let the show flop?!" (personal communication, February 6, 2021)
Demands to assure the show's future	55.4	219	"@NetflixBrasil when is the second season of *Cidade Invisível* coming out? for the love of God, don't cancel this series!" (personal communication, February 14, 2021)
Demands to appreciate the local audiovisual market	4.6	18	"@NetflixBrasil publicize Brazilian series properly, *Cidade Invisível* is perfect" (personal communication, February 11, 2021)

Note. Personal communications on Twitter between January 5 and March 5, 2021.

From this evaluation, we were able to see how users perceive the platform's business model. Lastly, we examined each of the three categories listed and discussed our findings.

Demands to Amplify the Show's Awareness Among Subscribers

The first salient feature is the demand for more publicity to broaden the awareness of the series and its storyline among other Netflix subscribers. This type of comment appeared mostly during the first week of *Cidade Invisível*'s (Saldanha, 2021–present) release (e.g., "@NetflixBrasil promote cidade invisivel gurl"; personal communication, February 6, 2021). Here, this desire lends itself to more than one interpretation, which occasionally becomes conflated. On the one hand, it indicates that more people need to know about the existence of this show due to its production quality. In general, fans use the production's technical aspects as the basis of these comments, such as special effects and the cast's performance (e.g., "*Cidade Invisível* Very good, a series with high quality Brazilian actors"; personal communication, February 9, 2021). On the other hand, fans point out that the Brazilian show "deserves" to be appreciated because it raises important social issues, especially by portraying elements and characters from Brazilian culture (e.g., "@NetflixBrasil a folklore-themed series LET'S MAKE *CIDADE INVISÍVEL* A HIT!"; personal communication, February 6, 2021).

Demands for awareness of media productions are part of a noticeable process of fans' mobilization (Amaral, Souza, & Monteiro, 2021). According to Maris (2021), audiences look for "ways to make their identities and demands visible to the producers of culture" (p. 4819). Related to that, fan engagement on social media platforms has become an important analysis metric for media companies (Zhao, 2021). Media companies often use audience practices to bring awareness to their products (Pearson, 2010). For example, some companies appropriate content and activities made by fans to create advertising materials, a process that Lozano Delmar, Hernández-Santaolalla, and Ramos-Serrano (2013) call "fanadvertising." According to a study conducted by Bourdaa and Lozano Delmar (2016), many fans produce content and engage in activities to bring "awareness to the show and the paratexts surrounding it" (p. 7). They often consider themselves as advertisers who act on their own, like an "involuntary publicist" (Bourdaa & Lozano Delmar,

2016, p. 8). This is not necessarily because they want more people to watch their favorite show but because they believe it needs a solid audience to continue.

Bucher (2018) argues that "algorithmic imaginary emerges in the public's beliefs, experiences, and expectations of what an algorithm is and should be" (p. 114). In this case study, it is noticeable that fans also question the company's business strategies based on their experience with the platform. The tweets analyzed reveal that the users' imaginaries about the SVOD platform and its business model directly permeate the tactics used by the company on its social media profile. For fans, environments like Twitter become a necessary tool to ensure the success of the series they like. In this sense, this audience constantly pressures Netflix Brasil, given that each text, image, or video published by the company's official profile is a way to reach more people and, supposedly, make the series gain more views. However, our findings suggest that fans of *Cidade Invisível* (Saldanha, 2021–present) do not trust Netflix's strategies completely and, usually, end up taking on the role of publicizing the show themselves.

Requests to publicize the series also pervade the very structure of the platform. Social media platforms like Twitter have "unique affordances, or packages of potentials and constraints, for communication" (Baym, 2010, p. 17). In many cases, users (both regular people and institutional profiles) try to take advantage of these technologies (van Dijck et al., 2018, pp. 43–44). Regarding *Cidade Invisível* (Saldanha, 2021–present), fans demanded that the company use Twitter tools as a form of promotion. For example, there are several pleas for the series to be chosen as the header of @NetflixBrasil's profile (e.g., "Take off that bullshit Winx from the Twiter [sic] cover and put *Cidade Invisível*"; personal communication, February 8, 2021). Hence, the production would be highlighted to everyone who accessed the company's profile on the social media platform.

It is worth mentioning that @NetflixBrasil already employs these tools: In addition to the company's tweets, the profile's header, icon, and bio also serve as a showcase for Netflix Original productions. Therefore, all the artifacts used by Netflix to create its Twitter profile aim to build its brand and foster fan engagement. Users who interact with the company are only a fraction of Netflix's total audience. Nonetheless, among some of them lies a particular perception: Twitter is one of the major spaces for promoting titles in a video-streaming services' library, at least in Brazil. However, while the company can publish several tweets about the different titles in its library, regarding the header, icon, and bio it can only focus on one production (or a limited number of productions) at a time. As expressed in the comment above, *Cidade Invisível* (Saldanha, 2021–present) debuted in a time frame close to the drama *Fate: The Winx Saga* (Young, 2021–2022), and @NetflixBrasil updated its profile to promote the U.S. series. In this sense, the company contributes to an imaginary in which fans understand that this is an important space for the company to publicize its productions and, more significantly, it denotes a hierarchy of which titles receive more attention from Netflix.

Demands to Assure the Show's Future

Another demand identified in the research relates to *Cidade Invisível*'s (Saldanha, 2021–present) future. This is the category that appears more often within the sample (*n* = 219) and incorporates two strategies. In the first, users request the show's renewal. Soon after the premiere of the Brazilian series,

users began to demand an official statement from the company, and the number of messages with this content intensified during the following weeks. For example, tweets with this rhetoric demand that Netflix should confirm the renewal (e.g., "@NetflixBrasil Fine, but when will you announce the renewal of *Cidade Invisível*?"; personal communication, February 21, 2021), ask for the rapid production of the show's second season (e.g., "@NetflixBrasil can you expedite the second season of *Cidade Invisível*, ok? No pressure"; personal communication, February 22, 2021), or stress that the series needs to continue due to its open ending (e.g., "@NetflixBrasil for the love of God renew *Cidade Invisível* I don't accept this ending, I need more urgently!!!"; personal communication, February 24, 2021).

In the second strategy, fans express fear that Netflix will cancel *Cidade Invisível* (Saldanha, 2021–present). These comments evidence the heated relationship between the company and these users (e.g., "@NetflixBrasil if you cancel *cidade invisível* I'll sue you"; personal communication, February 12, 2021) or mention a possible low performance of the series' viewing metrics (e.g., "@NetflixBrasil please promote *Cidade Invisível* so that afterward you won't complain about poor ratings and cancel it"; personal communication, February 5, 2021). Added to this, many times the tweets include threats of boycotting the streaming service (e.g., "Look here @NetflixBrasil if you drag your feet to renew or cancel *cidade invisível* I'll cancel my subscription"; personal communication, February 8, 2021).

In linear television, especially in ad-supported networks, a show's poor ratings could mean a possible cancelation (Adams, 1993; Gitlin, 1983). Even though Netflix has a different business model and rarely discloses its viewing numbers, fans translate this imaginary to the SVOD company. This is emphasized in light of Netflix's recent history. Over the last few years, the number of canceled Netflix series has increased. Many of these productions did not have more than one season or left viewers with unresolved storylines. When questioned about the abrupt cancelation of its productions, Netflix also uses similar arguments to those employed by linear television networks, particularly attributing this decision to a program's lackluster viewership. In an official statement, the company argues,

> Sometimes those shows don't attract as many viewers as we had hoped, compared to our other content. As much as we dislike ending a series early, it consoles us that it frees up investment for another new show, or two. (Netflix, 2017, p. 3)

Some creative professionals responsible for Netflix productions also reinforce this imaginary. For example, in 2018, Gloria Calderón Kellett, showrunner of the sitcom *One Day at a Time* (Kellett & Royce, 2017–2020), took to Twitter to make a plea to the series' audience. A few weeks after the second season of the Netflix Original premiered, Kellet asked fans to comment with friends about the comedy, fostering word-of-mouth about the production, and to watch at least four episodes of the comedy in the coming days. This tactic, in itself, is not uncommon in the TV industry. But what's worth noting is that, according to her, "Netflix decides what gets picked up based on views" (Kellett, 2018). *One Day at a Time* ended up being renewed, but the SVOD company canceled the sitcom five weeks after its third season premiered.[6] In June

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[6] Later, Pop TV picked up One Day at a Time (Kellett & Royce, 2017–2020). In 2020, the network aired the sitcom's fourth and final season.

2019, Netflix's executive Cindy Holland stated that the show did not reach the audience the company expected, not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of reach (Recode, 2019).

Our research indicates that fans often associate publicity and online buzz with the renewal of a certain show. In Brazil, specifically, this process has been going on for quite some time.[7] In this sense, fans speculate that, if Netflix devotes attention to ensuring a strong presence on its social media platforms, then it would be more likely that the series would reach a broader audience. Hence, it would be renewed. Besides that, it is also worth mentioning where these demands occur. In many cases, fans "hijacked" Netflix's tweets regarding other productions, with replies that demanded the Brazilian show's renewal. At the same time, users also replied to posts about *Cidade Invisível* (Saldanha, 2021–present) on the company's Twitter profile, asking for the current status of other Netflix productions. For example, during the research, fans requested the renewal of another Brazilian drama, *Boca-a-Boca* (Kissing Game; Filho, 2020).

Demands to Appreciate the Local Audiovisual Market

The third category discovered involves a demand from users that Netflix Brasil make a greater commitment to publicizing its Brazilian series. Despite the low inference when compared with the total sample (n = 18), this category also reveals the tensions of a U.S.-based company that aims to produce content in different parts of the world. This rhetoric calls for a better appreciation of the national audiovisual industry and productions that highlight elements of Brazilian culture (e.g., "publicize *cidade invisível* properly where is the appreciation for a national product[?]"; personal communication, February 6, 2021).

Netflix tries to position itself as a creator and mediator of global productions (Meimaridis et al., 2021), which is highlighted in executives' statements concerning hit shows (Adalian, 2021). As Netflix intensified its transnational endeavor, the company's discourse of success changed (Wayne & Uribe Sandoval, 2021). In the past few years, the SVOD service started to emphasize the global reach of its Original titles, mentioning terms such as high production value and, in the case of non-English shows, local authenticity. In this process, the company erases viewers' specific cultural aspects and treats them as a global audience.

When the U.S.-based company started financing local productions, one of its hopes was that these would help "to cement the popularity and relevance of Netflix in the territories where they originate" (Netflix, 2016, p. 4). After five years developing titles, Elisabetta Zenatti, Netflix Brazil's vice president of content, reinforces the company's promise to make more productions in the country stating that its "our ambition will be to make more and more stories by us for us" (Zenatti, as cited in Pancini, 2022, p. 2). However, many of the analyzed tweets question this discourse (e.g., "How about promoting national series, Netflix! Later, you complain about 'flops'"; personal communication, February 6, 2021). The comments made by Brazilian fans not only bring up *Cidade Invisível* (Saldanha, 2021–present) but also relate to Netflix's investments in Brazil as a whole.

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[7] For example, the research conducted by Nascimento (2020) on the sci-fi drama Sense8 (Straczynski, Wachowski, & Wachowski, 2015–2018) pointed out that Brazilian fans blamed Netflix for the show's cancelation, arguing that the company promoted the show poorly, which led to poor viewing numbers.

Yet, this is not just an issue concerning what cultural works Netflix produces or makes available on its platform. In large algorithmically personalized libraries, we also have to inquire if these productions "are accessible in a way that compensates their presumed lack of visibility" (De Marchi & Ladeira, 2018, p. 80). Thus, this imaginary suggests that even though Brazilian fans cheer for SVOD's investments to finance shows in Brazil, they also denote that Netflix has a duty to promote its local productions in their country of origin. Otherwise, the show could get lost in a sea of countless other titles.

In this sense, fans complained that @NetflixBrasil was neglecting *Cidade Invisível* (Saldanha, 2021–present). According to these comments, the company preferred foreign works, especially those coming from the United States (e.g., "Why does @netflix only publicize North American series? What the heck tell her to promote *Cidade Invisível*"; personal communication, February 19, 2021). Fans argue that the latter deserved the same visibility on the company's social media profile, at least in Brazil. This directly relates to discussions on transnational fandoms. In the context of cultural globalization, the proliferation of highly engaged Brazilian fan communities centered on U.S. cultural objects is remarkable (Sá, 2014; Silva, 2014). Some fan studies scholars, such as Harrington and Bielby (2007), even advocate abandoning the conception of foreign cultural artifacts as "imported," preferring to treat them as "global." Thus, presenting audiences as internationally dispersed. Chin and Morimoto (2013), on the other hand, approach fandom in a transcultural way, highlighting that fan communities created around border-crossing texts do not necessarily need to be nation-centered.

Being a Brazilian series financed by an SVOD company that has worldwide ambitions, *Cidade Invisível* (Saldanha, 2021–present) finds itself in a peculiar position. Yet, these tweets demonstrated that on many occasions, Brazilian fans reproduce a protectionist discourse. In other words, they antagonize foreign Netflix shows in favor of its Brazilian Originals. Therefore, while the company tries to homogenize its audiences and productions as "global" (Wayne & Uribe Sandoval, 2021), this dynamic emphasizes that the relationship between Netflix and its users is filled with localized disputes. In this regard, the comments relate not only to *Cidade Invisível* in particular but also to Netflix's whole endeavor in Brazil.

Conclusion

Evaluating the circulation of cultural objects in transnational SVOD platforms is not an easy task. That is precisely why we need to consider other contact points between the service and its users. Companies like Netflix make the current media landscape increasingly complex since they not only distribute content to and from various countries around the globe but also fund their own titles. In light of this, Netflix Original series are in a particular position. On one hand, it is difficult to measure and compare the performance of individual productions. At the same time, fans of these shows invest time and effort in developing strategies to justify the production's value. In this sense, scholars need to further investigate the possibilities and vulnerabilities of using Twitter and other social media platforms as an arena for the discussion between an SVOD service and its audience.

As shown, many fans questioned @NetflixBrasil's marketing strategies for *Cidade Invisível* (Saldanha, 2021–present). The scarce access to Netflix's official data directly influences their distrust. This mainly appears when they speculate about a series' viewing data and associate it with the company's

investment in promoting it. Despite discussions on audience measurement being part of a long process characterized by transformations in the production, distribution, and consumption of television programs (van Es, 2016), we emphasize that in the case of SVOD companies, platforms' opacity allows them to define the parameters used to account for views without providing further discussions. Netflix reveals information on a few titles while it systematically omits data on several other Original productions in its library. In this sense, the company seeks to stand out in the industry "while maintaining the ability to eschew any traditional industry norms deemed inconvenient" (Wayne, 2021, p. 11). Without traditional audience parameters, users are deprived of their favorite series' viewership data. Then, official profiles on social media platforms are perceived as an indication of the company's interests.

In the end, much to the delight of eager fans, *Cidade Invisível* (Saldanha, 2021–present) seems to have been a successful title for Netflix. On March 2, 2021, the company announced the renewal of the series and gave the green light for the development of a second season. Nonetheless, as usual, Netflix did not release specific numbers about the drama's viewership. Interestingly, confirmation of the new season took place through a promotional video published on @NetflixBrasil's profile (Netflix, 2021a). In the video, lead actor Marco Pigossi appears reading tweets praising the series and asking for its renewal. Pigossi even receives a call from "the Netflix," asking the actor to share the news with fans of *Cidade Invisível*. Following the aforementioned concept of fanadvertising (Bourdaa & Lozano Delmar, 2016; Lozano Delmar et al., 2013), Netflix reshapes fan engagement to create a paratext that could "spin" the narrative around the Brazilian series. In this vein, while subscribers use social media platforms to demand that the company take action, Netflix also uses these comments to build its brand. By using tweets from fans, Netflix reframes these complaint messages as proof of the success of both the drama and the company.

More than isolated cases, the analyzed tweets indicate a broader scenario. After the honeymoon period between fans and Netflix (Castellano et al., 2021), imaginaries about the success and failure of original titles seem to have strained this relationship. By demanding better promotion for a specific title, users demonstrate the belief that online buzz is an important feature to ensure a show's good performance. Indeed, more advertising does not necessarily equate to a larger viewership. However, comments asking for more audience awareness of the show, its renewal, and more appreciation of Brazilian stories reveal that fans try to build on the technological affordances of the digital platform to, at least, gain more visibility for the show they like. The more people access that content during the first weeks after its release, the higher the chances of a series' renewal. Nevertheless, access to information about most productions' performances will likely continue to be a one-way street. Without transparency regarding viewing data, fans are left in the dark playing this game with Netflix.

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