

Framing Issues in Netflix Documentaries and Audience Attitudes toward Them

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Abstract

Netflix, as a leading subscription video-on-demand service (SVOD), has redefined the documentary genre through its high production quality and audience-engaging multimodal framing strategies. This study investigates how the multimodal framing strategies employed in Netflix documentaries influence audience attitudes, perceived realism and watching motivations. The study employs framing theory and multimodality as its primary theoretical framework to examine the impact of key framing dimensions—framing types (episodic, thematic, and hybrid), multimodal framing techniques (visual, audio, textual, and modal salience), and modes of representations (observational, participatory, expository, performative, reflexive, and docudrama) on Netflix audience.

A quantitative questionnaire (N = 250) was administered to test six hypotheses and answer four questions, utilising both descriptive and inferential statistics. Results revealed statistically significant relationships across all variables. Visual Framing had the strongest correlation with positive audience attitudes, while episodic framing was associated with the highest perceived realism and motivational effect on documentary viewing. It was also found that participatory and observational documentary modes of representation enhanced credibility and authenticity, whereas docudrama and performative modes showed comparatively lower levels of perceived realism. Netflix's staple true crime emerged as the most preferred issue type among the Netflix audience.

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on digital media framing, offering insights into how Netflix documentary practices are aligned with and shape the expectations of the digital audience in the streaming era.

Keywords: Framing, Multimodality, Digital Audience Attitudes, Documentaries, Netflix

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قضايا التأطير في الوثائقيات على نتفليكس ومواقف الجمهور تجاهها

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ملخص الدراسة :

أعادت "نتفليكس"، باعتبارها منصة رائدة في خدمات البث الرقمي حسب الطلب (SVOD)، تشكيل نوعية الأفلام الوثائقية من خلال جودة الإنتاج العالية والاستراتيجيات القائمة على التأطير متعدد الوسائط. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف كيفية التي تؤثر بها استراتيجيات التأطير متعدد الوسائط المستخدمة في أفلام نتفليكس الوثائقية على اتجاهات الجمهور، وإدراكه للواقعية، ودوافعه لمشاهدتها.

وتستند الدراسة إلى نظرية التأطير (Framing Theory) والتعددية الوسائطية (Multimodality) بوصفهما الإطارين النظريين الرئيسيين، لتحليل أثر ثلاثة أبعاد رئيسية: أنواع التأطير (التأطير الحدثي، التأطير الموضوعي، والتمثيل الهجين)، طرق التأطير متعددة الوسائط (بصري، صوتي، نصي، وبروزهما)، وأنماط التمثيل الوثائقي (الرصدي، التشاركي، التفسيري، الأدائي، الانعكاسي، والدرامي الوثائقي).

وقد تم إجراء استبيان كمي (N=250) لاختبار ست فرضيات والإجابة عن أربعة أسئلة بحثية باستخدام الأساليب الإحصائية الوصفية والاستدلالية. أظهرت النتائج وجود علاقات ذات دلالة إحصائية بين جميع المتغيرات. وكان للتأطير البصري أقوى ارتباط إيجابي باتجاهات الجمهور، في حين ارتبط التأطير الحدثي بأعلى مستويات إدراك الواقعية والدافع للمشاهدة. كما عززت أنماط التمثيل التشاركي والرصدي مصداقية الفيلم الوثائقي، مقارنة بالأنماط الأدائية والدرامية الوثائقية التي سجلت مستويات أقل من الواقعية المتصورة. كما تبين أن قضايا الجرائم الحقيقية تمثل النوع الأكثر تفضيلاً لدى جمهور نتفليكس.

تُسهم هذه الدراسة في إثراء الأدبيات المتنامية حول تأطير المحتوى في الوسائط الرقمية، من خلال تقديم رؤى حول كيفية توافق ممارسات نتفليكس الوثائقية مع توقعات الجمهور الرقمي في عصر البث المباشر.

الكلمات الدالة: التأطير، التعددية الوسائطية، اتجاهات الجمهور الرقمي، الأفلام الوثائقية، نتفليكس

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Introduction

In the evolving media landscape, subscription-based video-on-demand services (SVODs) like Netflix have been transforming the production, distribution, and audience reception of documentary content. No longer constrained by traditional broadcast norms, Netflix audiences pay and actively select the documentary content they want to watch and when to watch it, reinforcing their agency in shaping documentary consumption trends. This profoundly influences Netflix's documentary content production strategies because of the sophisticated AI-driven recommendation algorithms used by the platform to aggregate user data. These algorithmic systems aggregate huge amounts of user engagement data, not only to provide a personalised viewing experience to the user, but also to offer Netflix insights into audience preferences, which inform its investment decisions. This allows Netflix to produce documentaries that are more likely to resonate with its users (Hallinan & Striphas, 2016; Lobato, 2019; Frey, 2021).

Netflix has cultivated a global subscriber base with millions of documentary views, as reflected in its engagement report (Netflix, 2023)¹. To sustain user retention and platform growth, Netflix is heavily investing in producing its original documentaries, with cinematic aesthetics and high production values (Nash et al., 2014; Moore, 2021; Iordache et al., 2023; Henderson, 2024; Goldson, 2025). Within this ecosystem, Netflix documentary content transcends traditional informational or journalistic formats, instead functioning as multimodal artefacts that represent a variety of issue types, influencing the attitudes and perceptions of its users, who are the digital audience, in nuanced ways.

Pivotal to this transformation is the concept of media framing articulated by Entman (1993) as the selection and salience of specific elements to promote particular interpretations, evaluations, and responses toward media messages. In this context, Netflix documentaries achieve this by strategically utilising audience-captivating multimodal framing elements and techniques—visual,

¹ In 2023, Netflix issued an [engagement report](#) detailing the number of global views of its original productions across different genres, including documentaries.

auditory, and textual—that collectively frame the documentary’s represented issue, to influence the audience’s perception and emotional engagement (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Bateman & Wildfeuer, 2014).

This study investigates the interplay between Netflix’s documentary framing strategies and audience attitudinal responses, focusing only on youth audiences who form the dominant segment of Netflix’s user base (Ofcom, 2021)². Framing is conceptualised through a multimodal lens—encompassing visual, audio, and textual elements, techniques, their interaction (modal congruence/ divergence), modal salience, and broader framing types (episodic vs thematic), as well as considering six modes of representations (observational, participatory, expository, reflective, performative, and docudrama). Audience attitudes are examined across three core dimensions: cognitive and emotional engagement, perceived realism, and viewing motivations.

1. Research problem

The rise of SVOD platforms, particularly Netflix, has significantly transformed the production and consumption of documentary content. The shift from traditional broadcast models to algorithm-driven, user-curated platforms has redefined how documentaries are framed, delivered, and perceived by the digital audience. Although existing research has thoroughly investigated framing in traditional news and broadcast media, there is a need for more scholarly research that investigates how digital streaming platforms employ multimodal framing strategies in documentary productions to construct narratives and shape audience perceptions and attitudes. Therefore, this research addresses the following main research question: How do the different framing strategies employed by Netflix in its documentaries influence audience attitudes toward documentaries and their framed issues?

² Ofcom report 2021:

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/consultations/category-2-6-weeks/222191-how-ofcom-regulates-the-bbc/associated-documents/2-exploration-into-audience-expectations-of-the-bbc-in-the-current-media-environment.pdf?v=328094>

2. Research Objectives

This research aims to:

1. Investigate audiences' engagement with Netflix documentaries, exploring how framing strategies influence their attitudes and perceived realism.
2. Find out why audiences actively seek Netflix documentary films.
3. Determine the relation between the audience's level of exposure to digital documentaries and the strength of their attitudes toward them.

3. Research Significance

A. Academic significance:

Given the audience's shift from passive television viewing to active SVOD consumption, this study contributes to theoretical discussions on digital media consumption and audience engagement by providing insights into audience framing preferences and why they choose to pay for and watch specific documentaries.

B. Industry Significance:

The findings could be beneficial to documentary filmmakers and producers in the creative market, allowing them to create documentaries that are aligned with the expectations of the digital audience in the streaming age. Pinning down what the sophisticated audiences of SVOD platforms are looking for in a documentary could ultimately positively impact the future of digital documentaries and broaden the audience of the genre, which is much needed, particularly in the MENA region.

4. Research Questions

1. What are the audience's exposure rates to Netflix documentaries?
2. What are the audience's attitudes toward the types of issues framed in Netflix documentaries, including the most preferred issue type?
3. What are the attitudes of the audiences toward Netflix framing strategies (framing elements, framing types, and modes of representation) employed in Netflix documentaries?
4. What motivates the audience to watch Netflix documentaries?

5. Research Hypotheses

1. There is a statistically significant relationship between the documentary's multimodal framing elements—including their salience—and the audience's attitudes towards the documentary's represented issue.
2. There is a statistically significant relationship between the documentary's framing type and the audience's perceived realism.
3. There is a statistically significant relationship between the documentary's mode of representation and the audience's perceived realism.
4. There is a statistically significant relationship between the documentary's framing type and the audience's motivation to watch Netflix documentaries.
5. There is a statistically significant relationship between the documentary's issue category and the audience's motivation to watch Netflix documentaries.
6. There is a statistically significant relationship between the audience's level of exposure to Netflix documentaries and the strength of their attitudes toward framed issues.

6. Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory

This research employs framing theory as its core framework, which asserts that media content is a constructed representation of reality that shapes audience perception through selection and salience (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993). Key concepts in framing theory include selection and salience; problem definition; impact on audience perception, and the presentation of the content that influences audience attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours.

In the context of documentaries, framing becomes multimodal, incorporating visual, auditory, and textual elements. These modes work together to co-construct meaning and shape audience engagement, emotional response, and perceived realism (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Framing here is not limited to the content of the message but extends to how it is presented to the audience. This research adopts Iyengar's (1991) framing model (episodic and thematic frames), Rodriguez and Dimitrova's visual framing model

(2011), and Nichol's (2010) documentary modes of representation, but with excluding the poetic mode and adding the docudrama mode, to investigate how the multimodal framing strategies in Netflix documentaries influence audience attitudes toward the documentaries and their represented issues.

7. Methodology and Procedures

7.1. Study Type

This is a descriptive study that describes audiences' attitudes toward Netflix documentaries, their issues and their framing strategies. Descriptive studies aim to provide a detailed description of the characteristics and attitudes of the study's phenomenon and/or population (Shaymaa, Z. Zoghaib, 2009).

7.2. Population

The population comprises all Egyptian audiences who watch documentaries on Netflix.

7.3. Sample

The study's sample will be a convenience sample consisting of 250 Egyptian youth audience who are Netflix users and who watch its documentaries, aged between 18-35 years old. The focus is on the youth as they are the age category most concerned with technology and internet use. Also, according to Ofcom's report³ Netflix is the leading SVOD platform for the youth.

7.4. Data Collection Method

An online questionnaire survey was designed to study the attitudes of the Egyptian youth audience who watch documentaries on Netflix. The questionnaire included questions that served the study's objectives. It was created using Google Forms and distributed online to reach the desired sample.

7.5. Measures

The questionnaire included several statements related to the research topic, and participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on several items (Table 1).

³ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0031/239179/2-Exploration-into-audience-expectations-of-the-BBC-in-the-current-media-environment.pdf

Table 1 Constructs Statements

1.Statements for Audience Attitudes toward Types of Represented Issues
1.1.I prefer watching True Crime documentaries.
1.2.I prefer watching Social & Cultural documentaries.
1.3.I prefer watching Historical documentaries.
1.4.I prefer watching Biographical documentaries.
1.5.I prefer watching Science & Nature documentaries.
1.6.I prefer watching Political documentaries.
1.7.I prefer watching Music documentaries.
2.Statements for Audience Attitudes (cognitive & emotional) toward Multimodal Framing Elements and Techniques
2.1.Framing Element
2.1.1.The use of visual framing elements engages me with the documentary's represented issue.
2.1.2.The use of audio framing elements engages me with the documentary's represented issue.
2.1.3.The use of textual framing elements engages me with the documentary's represented issue.
2.2.Visual Framing (Documentary Conventions)
2.2.1.The use of Live Action engages me with the documentary's issue.
2.2.2.The use of Archival Material engages me with the documentary's issue.
2.2.3.The use of Interviews engages me with the documentary's issue.
2.2.4.The use of Reenactments engages me with the documentary's issue.
2.2.5.The use of Data engages me with the documentary's issue.
2.2.6.The use of Animation engages me with the documentary's issue.
2.3.Audio Framing
2.3.1.Listening to First-person Narration engages me with the documentary.
2.3.2.Listening to Third-person Narration (external narrator) engages me with the documentary.
2.3.3.Listening to the natural sound (ambient sound) of the shot engages me with the documentary.
2.3.4.Listening to added sounds (music and sound effects) engages me with the documentary.
2.4.Textual Framing
2.4.1.The titles of people and/or locations shown on screen engage me with the documentary.
2.4.2.Text on screen providing extra information engages me with the documentary.
2.4.3.Text repeating what was already shown or said engages me with the documentary.
2.5.Modal Salience
2.5.1.I feel more emotionally impacted by the documentary when the message is delivered mainly via visuals.
2.5.2.I feel more emotionally impacted by the documentary when the message is delivered mainly via audio.
2.5.3.I feel more emotionally impacted by the documentary when the message is delivered mainly via text.

3.Statements for Audience Attitudes (cognitive & emotional) toward Framing Type
3.1.1.The framing type of a documentary plays a key role in forming my opinion toward the represented issue.
3.1.2.Documentaries that use personal or emotional stories help me connect emotionally with the represented issue.
3.1.3.I find documentaries that use personal or emotional stories convincing in shaping my opinion about the represented issue.
3.1.4.Documentaries that use statistics or expert opinions help me connect emotionally with the represented issue.
3.1.5.I find documentaries that use statistics or expert opinions convincing in shaping my opinion about the represented issue.
4.Audience Attitudes toward Documentary Style (Mode of Representation)
4.1.1.I prefer documentaries that capture real-life events as they happen, without narration or interviews (Observational Mode).
4.1.2.I prefer documentaries that rely on interviews and conversations with people involved in the issue (Participatory Mode),
4.1.3.I prefer documentaries that rely on a narrator to explain facts and provide background information (Expository Mode).
4.1.4.I prefer documentaries that rely on acted scenes to recreate real events (Docudrama style).
4.1.5.I prefer documentaries that rely on the filmmaker's personal story and emotional experience (Performative Mode).
4.1.6.I prefer documentaries that rely on showing the filmmaking process itself, such as cameras or behind-the-scenes moments (Reflexive Mode).
5.Statements of Perceived Reality through Framing Type and Mode of Representation
5.1.Perceived Reality through Framing Type
5.1.1.When a documentary tells the story through one person's experience or personal journey, it feels more real to me.
5.1.2.When a documentary covers a broader context, like a social issue or political event, it feels more real to me.
5.2.Perceived Reality through Mode of Representation
5.2.1.I find documentaries more realistic when they rely on interviews and direct conversations with people involved in the topic. (Participatory Mode)
5.2.2.I find documentaries more realistic when they rely on real-life footage without narration or interviews. (Observational Mode)
5.2.3.I find documentaries more realistic when they rely on a narrator to explain facts and provide background information. (Expository Mode)
5.2.4.I find documentaries more realistic when they rely on showing the filmmaking process itself, such as cameras, crews, or behind-the-scenes moments. (Reflexive Mode)
5.2.5.I find documentaries more realistic when they rely on the filmmaker's personal story and emotional experience. (Performative Mode)
5.2.6.I find documentaries more realistic when they rely on acted scenes to recreate real events from the past. (Docudrama Mode)
6.Motives and Reasons for Watching Netflix Documentaries
6.1.I watch Netflix documentaries because they use cinematic visuals and high production quality.

6.2.I watch Netflix documentaries because they are available on demand (no fixed broadcast schedule).
6.3.I watch Netflix documentaries because they cover a wide range of issue types and topics.
6.4.I watch Netflix documentaries for entertainment.
6.5.I watch Netflix documentaries to learn about new topics or gain knowledge.
6.6.I watch Netflix documentaries because they feature engaging characters and personal stories.
6.7.I watch Netflix documentaries out of curiosity for specific cases/events.
6.8.I watch Netflix documentaries because they create a strong emotional impact.
6.9.I watch documentaries recommended by Netflix's algorithm, as they usually match my interests.

Five-point Likert Scale Interpretation Method

The score for each item was calculated using a five-point Likert Scale, with responses ranging from Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), to Strongly Agree (5). This scoring system enables the quantification of audience attitudes, allowing for the interpretation of both the direction (positive, negative, or neutral) and the strength of participants' attitudes toward Netflix documentaries.

7.6.Data Analysis Techniques

Data were statistically analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The constructs were derived from the literature to test the proposed hypotheses. Internal consistency and reliability were assessed by Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with expected values between 0 and 1. The questionnaire was considered stable when the values exceeded 0.6. (Griethuijsen et al., 2015). Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the direction and strength of relationships between selected variables, and the chi-square value was calculated to test for independence across construct variables.

7.7. Validity and Reliability

7.7.1. Validity

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire underwent expert panel review by academic scholars. Based on their feedback, modifications were made to enhance item clarity and construct coverage. Following revisions, construct validity was tested through Pearson's Correlation coefficients. All item-to-construct

correlations were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), ranging from 0.575 to 0.923, confirming strong alignment between each item and its corresponding construct.

7.7.2. Reliability

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, tested on a pilot sample of 25 respondents, who were excluded from the final analysis. The results showed a high level of internal consistency (Table 2). A Cronbach's alpha of 0.971, for all items, indicates the questionnaire exhibits a high degree of reliability, making it a statistically sound data collection tool.

Table 2 Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient

N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	Cronbach's Alpha
62	0.969	0.971

8.Characteristics of the field study sample

Table 3 Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	78	31.2%
Female	172	68.8%
Total	250	100%

The sample consisted of 250 young Egyptian current Netflix users aged between 18 and 35 years. As shown in Table 3, the majority were females, 68.8% ($n=172$), while males constituted 31.2% ($n=78$).

Table 4 Age Distribution of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 24 years	160	64.0%
25 – 30 years	25	10.0%
31 – 35 years	65	26.0%
Total	250	100%

Table 4 indicates that the largest age group was 18-24 years, comprising 64% ($n=160$) of the total sample. Respondents aged 31-35 years followed at 26% ($n=65$), while the 25-30 age group represented just 10% ($n=25$).

Table 5 Level of Education Distribution

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BSc, or equivalent)	170	68.0%
Postgraduate degree (e.g., Master's, PhD, or equivalent)	43	17.2%
Completed secondary education (e.g., high school or equivalent)	33	13.2%
Vocational/ Technical diploma	4	1.6%
Total	250	100%

Table 5 indicates that most respondents, 68% (n=170), held a bachelor's degree. Postgraduates constituted 17.2% (n=43), while 13.2% (n=33) completed secondary education. Only 1.6% (n=4) held a vocational or technical diploma.

Table 6 Employment Status Distribution

Employment Status	Frequency	Percentage
Student at a private university or institute	97	38.8%
Employed in a private or investment sector job	68	27.2%
Currently not employed	48	19.2%
Employed in a government/public sector job	17	6.8%
Self-employed	12	4.8%
Student at a public university or institute	8	3.2%
Total	250	100%

Table 6 shows that the largest proportion of respondents, 38.8% (n=79), were students at private institutions. This was followed by private sector employees, 27.2% (n=68), then unemployed participants, 19.2% (n=48). Fewer respondents were in public employment, 6.8% (n=17) and only 3.2% (n=8) were students at public universities.

9. Results

RQ1- What are the audiences' exposure rates to Netflix documentaries?

Exposure to Netflix Documentaries

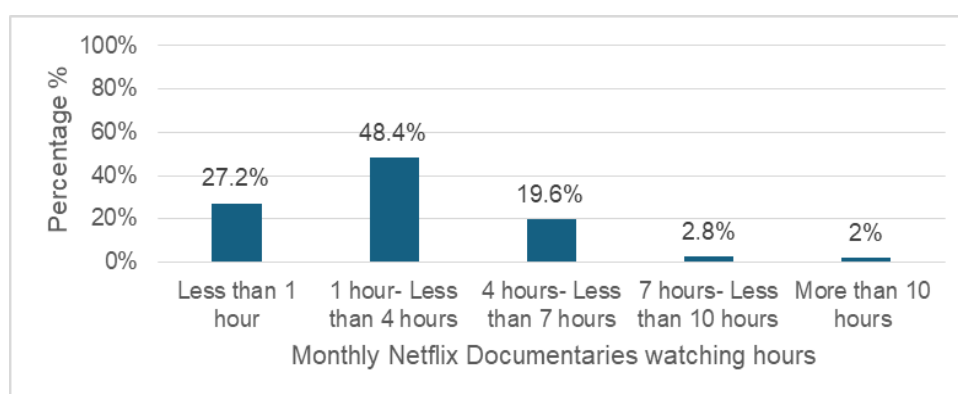


Figure 1 Monthly Netflix Documentaries Viewing Hours

The data presented in Figure 1 illustrates the sample's (N=250) monthly Netflix documentary viewing hours. The largest proportion of

respondents, 48.4% reported watching Netflix documentaries for 1 to less than 4 hours per month. 27.2% of the respondents indicated minimal exposure of less than 1 hour, while moderate viewing, 4 to less than 7 hours, was reported by 19.6% of the respondents. Only 2.8% of the respondents reported 7 to less than 10 watching hours, and 2% reported more than 10 hours.

These low to medium exposure rates to Netflix documentaries contradict Iordache et al.'s (2023) findings that confirmed the growing popularity of documentaries as a genre, receiving increasing investment from Netflix. Moreover, their findings state that based on the company's investment strategy and market analysis, this growth is likely to continue because it has proved financially profitable. Jones (2020) researched documentary film audiences in Europe and found that VODs were the most popular platforms for viewing documentaries.

The results in Figure 1 are aligned with Salama (2023), who studied the attitudes of young Egyptian media professionals toward biographical documentaries presented on Netflix. His findings confirmed the low exposure rates of Egyptians to Netflix documentaries, as the biggest proportion of his study sample, 39.3 %, watched Netflix documentaries for 1 hour to less than 2 hours per week. Additionally, Nayera (2020) studied the engagement factors in TV documentaries and found that only 16.8% of her sample watched documentaries on online platforms. These low documentary exposure rates among the Egyptian youth could be justified because global documentary viewership differs across countries. The existing dynamics of the documentary market, in Egypt and across the MENA region, are impacting its popularity and how it is perceived by the Egyptian audience.

RQ2- What are the audience's attitudes toward the types of issues framed in Netflix documentaries, including the most preferred issue type?

Table 7 Audience Attitudes toward Represented Issue Types in Netflix Documentaries

N	Types of Issues	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Frequency	%	Mean	Std. Deviation	Overall Attitude
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%					
1	True Crime	68	27.2	104	41.6	42	16.8	26	10.4	10	4.0	250	100	3.78	1.082	Agree
2	Social & Cultural	68	27.2	94	37.6	26	10.4	39	15.6	23	9.2	250	100	3.58	1.288	Agree
3	Historical	39	15.6	94	38.6	94	37.6	13	5.2	10	4.0	250	100	3.56	0.952	Agree
4	Biographical	55	22.0	65	26.0	81	32.4	39	15.6	10	4.0	250	100	3.46	1.116	Agree
5	Science & Nature	26	10.4	68	27.2	107	42.8	26	10.4	23	9.2	250	100	3.19	1.062	Neutral
6	Political	13	5.2	75	30.0	94	37.6	68	27.2	0	0.0	250	100	3.13	0.875	Neutral
7	Music	52	20.8	65	26.0	29	11.6	65	26.0	39	15.6	250	100	3.10	1.405	Neutral
Total mean and standard deviation														3.40	0.841	Agree

Table 7 presents the audience attitudes toward the issue types represented in Netflix documentaries. The results show an overall positive attitude toward true crime documentaries ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.08$), social & cultural ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.288$), historical ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.952$), and biographical ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.116$). In contrast, the following issue types showed an overall neutral attitude: science & nature ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.062$), political ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.875$), and music documentaries ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.405$). This suggests that **Netflix audiences most favour true crime documentaries, while music documentaries are least favoured.**

The above findings are aligned with the results of various scholars who confirmed that young audiences across the globe (particularly digital natives) favour Netflix's original true crime documentaries, highlighting that not only are they a Netflix staple but also their significant role in the evolution of the genre (Bruzzi, 2016; Walters, 2021; Iordache et al., 2023). However, Nayera's (2020) findings

showed that true crime documentaries were the second preference for the Egyptian audience, but this could be justified as her study focused on TV documentaries with different framing strategies than those created for SVODs like Netflix.

McCabe's (2021) study concluded that the audience's engagement with true crime documentaries could be attributed to their emotional intensity, rich stylistic and aesthetic choices, which foster deep cognitive and affective involvement. For instance, true crime documentaries often embed the audience into the story by utilising episodic frames and a docudrama mode. Iordache et al. (2023) in their study concluded that most of the true crime documentaries make use of archival footage, reconstructions and cliff-hangers, building up to a serial narrative that lends itself to binge-watching. They also highlight that a significant share of Netflix's investment targets formatted true crime series, signalling its profitable success.

RQ3- What are the attitudes of the audiences towards the different framing elements, framing types, and modes of representation used in Netflix original documentaries?

Framing Elements

Table 8 Audience Attitudes toward Multimodal Framing Elements (Visual, Audio, and Textual) in Netflix Documentaries

N	Framing Element	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Frequency	%	Mean	Std. Deviation	Overall Attitude
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%					
1	The use of Visual framing elements engages me with the documentary's issue.	109	43.6	72	28.8	41	16.4	12	4.8	16	6.4	250	100	3.98	1.172	Agree
2	The use of Audio framing elements engages me with the documentary's issue.	113	45.2	64	25.6	41	16.4	12	4.8	20	8.0	250	100	3.95	1.238	Agree
3	The use of Textual framing elements engages me with the documentary's issue.	60	24.0	65	26.0	77	30.8	24	9.6	24	9.6	250	100	3.45	1.225	Agree
Total mean and standard deviation														3.79	1.076	Agree

Table 8 illustrates audience attitudes toward multimodal framing elements (visual, audio, and textual) employed in Netflix documentaries. The data reveal an overall positive attitude, reflected in an overall mean of ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.076$), suggesting consistent audience engagement with these framing elements. Visual framing shows the highest influence in engaging audience with the documentary and its issue, with a mean score of ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.172$), followed by audio framing in second place ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.238$), and textual framing shows a comparatively lower mean score of ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.225$). This aligns with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) assertion that visual framing is primary in shaping the audience's interpretation and affective resonance. Choin (2019) highlights the storytelling power of sound in creating an immersive emotional environment. The results also support Bateman and Wildfeuer's (2014) argument that, whenever meaning is constructed through the interaction of visual, auditory, and textual signs, visuals and sounds tend to dominate the interpretive frame.

The above findings suggest that visual and auditory framing elements, with a slight difference in their means, play a key role in the process of the audience's meaning-making, influencing their cognitive and emotional engagement. The comparatively lower mean of textual framing suggests that it plays a supportive role to both visuals and audio. These findings are aligned with Netflix's documentary framing practices, justifying why Netflix heavily invests in the use of audio-visual cinematic techniques and new narrative trends in its original documentaries. This is confirmed in the findings of Katerynych et al. (2023), who analysed 150 Netflix original productions (between 2016 and 2021) and found a strategic employment of cinematic visuals and complex sound design to engage the digital audience.

Table 9 Audience Attitudes toward Visual Framing Conventions in Netflix Documentaries

N	Visual Conventions	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Frequency	%	Mean	Std. Deviation	Overall Attitude
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%					
1	The use of 'Live action footage' in the documentary engages me with the documentary's issue.	125	50.0	48	19.2	45	18.0	12	4.8	20	8.0	250	100	3.98	1.264	Agree
2	The use of 'Archival materials' engages me with the documentary's issue.	97	38.8	72	28.8	45	18.0	20	8.0	16	6.4	250	100	3.86	1.204	Agree
3	The use of 'Interviews' engages me with the documentary's issue.	52	20.8	101	40.4	57	22.8	24	9.6	16	6.4	250	100	3.60	1.113	Agree
4	The use of 'Reenactments' engages me with the documentary's issue.	32	12.8	68	27.2	81	32.4	49	1.6	20	8.0	250	100	3.17	1.129	Neutral
5	The use of 'Data' engages me with the documentary's issue.	44	17.6	64	25.6	57	22.8	53	21.2	32	12.8	250	100	3.14	1.293	Neutral
6	The use of 'Animation' engages me with the documentary's issue.	28	11.2	77	30.8	69	27.6	48	19.2	28	11.2	250	100	3.12	1.178	Neutral
Total mean and standard deviation														3.47	0.886	Agree

Table 9 illustrates audience attitudes toward the visual conventions used to represent issues in Netflix documentaries, with an overall mean of ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.886$). The results reveal positive responses toward the use of live action footage, with the highest mean score of ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.264$), followed by the use of archival materials ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.204$), then the use of interviews ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.113$). In contrast, the audience showed an overall neutral attitude toward the rest of the conventions, reflecting the following comparatively lower engagement levels: reenactments ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.129$), data ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.293$), and animation ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.178$).

The above results suggest that audiences are strongly engaged with Live footage (actualities), which reinforces indexical authenticity by covering real-time events unobtrusively as they are unfolding (Nichols, 1991). This finding is aligned with Ellis's study (2021) that adopted a genre-based approach to examine what distinguishes documentaries from their fictional counterparts, confirming that live

footage (actualities) is a key documentary marker that is perceived by the audience as a cue for the genre's identity. He also highlighted that actualities heighten the audience's engagement by connecting them to the world of the documentary. Also, Bäckman & Nieminen's (2021) study explored personal interpretation, emotional engagement, and perceived value in the use of environmental documentaries among millennials. Their findings included that the use of actualities not only engages the audience but also triggers stronger emotional responses, which could lead to changes in behaviour.

The above results affirm the centrality of realism-oriented visual documentary conventions in cultivating audience engagement. It also implies that conventions like reenactments and animation may be considered supplementary, meaning that although they contribute to the narrative, they are most effective when utilised in support of live footage, archive material, and interviews. This is confirmed in Bradbury & Guadagno's (2020) experimental study, which evaluated the audience preferences for documentary visual narrative features, finding that the audience tends to prefer the use of traditional documentary conventions such as interviews, archive material, and actualities, as these features enhance the perceived credibility and engagement level with the story. These findings justify why Netflix, in its original documentaries, rely heavily on the use of archival materials, live footage, and interviews as the main conventions to frame the documentary's issues, proving that audiences' preferences are behind Netflix's editorial decisions.

Table 10 Audience Attitudes toward Audio Framing Techniques in Netflix Documentaries

N	Audio Framing	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Frequency	%	Mean	Std. Deviation	Overall Attitude
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%					
1	Listening to First-person Narration engages me with the documentary.	96	38.4	73	29.2	53	21.2	8	3.2	20	8.0	250	100	3.87	1.197	Agree
2	Listening to the natural sound (ambient sound) of the shot engages me with the documentary.	109	43.6	69	27.6	20	8.0	20	8.0	32	12.8	250	100	3.81	1.400	Agree
3	Listening to added sounds (music and sound effects) engages me with the documentary.	60	24.0	102	40.8	36	14.4	40	16.0	12	4.8	250	100	3.63	1.151	Agree
4	Listening to Third-person Narration (external narrator) engages me with the documentary.	32	12.8	86	34.4	56	22.4	48	19.2	28	11.2	250	100	3.18	1.212	Neutral
Total mean and standard deviation														3.62	0.989	Agree

Table 10 illustrates the audience's attitudes toward the audio framing techniques used to frame issues in Netflix documentaries. The findings indicate that first-person narration had the highest engagement effect with the highest mean ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.197$).

This reveals that audiences are affected by, and favour narrations delivered by the documentary's characters (individuals involved in the documentary narrative). This could be justified as this narration style is more personal and authentic, allowing the audience to connect more deeply with the documentary and its represented issue. Natural or ambient sound (diegetic sound) ranked second, with an overall positive engagement effect ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.400$), which indicates audiences are also engaged by listening to the natural sound of the visuals that preserves the documentary's realism and immerses them in the story. Added sounds (non-diegetic) like music and sound effects ranked third with an overall positive engagement effect ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.151$), although still engaging, in most cases, they function as supportive enhancers rather than primary audio framing techniques. Third-person narration ranked last with an overall neutral attitude,

showing a lower mean ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.212$) when compared to the other audio framing techniques. This indicates a shift in audience preferences from traditional documentaries with authoritative narration (voice of God) to more intimate and immersive narration styles.

Contrary to the above results, Bradbury & Guadagno (2020) concluded, in their experimental study, that the audience preferred an authoritative narration style (the voice of God). However, this could be justified as their test included subjecting the participants to two videos: one without narration at all and the other with a voice of God narration (authoritative). So, the comparison did not include a first-person narration. According to the results presented in Table 13, audiences favour and better interpret the message when it is delivered via video and audio modal congruence. Confirming the above results, Nayera (2020) found that diegetic sound (natural sounds) played an important role in engaging the audience with the documentary.

The results in the above table, with an overall mean score of 3.62 ($SD = 0.989$), assert the significant effect of audio framing techniques and their pivotal role in shaping the audience's attitudes toward the documentary. Audiences lean toward a naturalistic and first-person audio experience to build a cognitive and emotional connection with the documentary's represented issue. Not surprisingly, Netflix's audio framing strategy is aligned with these results, as its audio framing practices adopt immersive audio design in its original documentary productions (Iordache et al, 2023).

Table 11 Audience Attitudes toward Textual Framing Techniques in Netflix Documentaries

N	Textual Framing	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Frequency	%	Mean	Std. Deviation	Overall Attitude
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%					
1	The titles of people and/or locations shown on screen engage me with the documentary.	85	34.0	72	28.8	45	18.0	20	8.0	28	11.2	250	100	3.66	1.320	Agree
2	Text on screen providing extra information engages me with the documentary.	52	20.8	77	30.8	57	22.8	36	14.4	28	11.2	250	100	3.36	1.270	Neutral
3	Text repeating what was already shown or said engages me with the documentary.	52	20.8	77	30.8	57	22.8	36	14.4	28	11.2	250	100	3.12	1.205	Neutral
Total mean and standard deviation														3.37	1.075	Neutral

Table 11 presents audience attitudes toward textual framing in Netflix documentaries. It shows that the only textual technique with an overall positive audience attitude is on-screen display of titles and locations ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.320$). Conversely, text providing supplementary information and repetitive text restating spoken or visual content received neutral audience responses with mean scores ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.270$) and ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.205$), respectively. These results suggest that on-screen text identifying people and location is an essential cognitive anchor which aids the audience's understanding of the documentary's message. Conversely, text that provides redundant information, already mentioned in visual or verbal content, or text that adds new information may cause information overload or distraction for the audience. The overall neutral audience attitude toward textual framing ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.075$), when compared to the overall mean scores of visual framing in table 9 ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.886$) and audio framing in table 10 ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.989$), suggests its supporting role and the need to strategically integrate it with the audio and visual framing elements to maximise its efficacy.

This aligns with Netflix's framing strategies in its original documentaries, where textual framing is minimal, and primarily used to identify people, places and sometimes for narrative cohesion to link different story segments together. This is aligned with Aytaş & Yavuz's (2024) study, which examined how digital platforms have revolutionised the documentary genre by transforming its narrative structures and audience interaction. Their findings affirmed that Netflix documentaries are visually driven.

Table 12 Audience Attitudes toward Modal Salience in Netflix Documentaries

N	Dominant Framing Mode	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Frequency	%	Mean	Std. Deviation	Overall Attitude
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%					
1	I feel more emotionally impacted by the documentary when its message is delivered mainly via visuals.	92	36.8	72	28.8	37	14.8	25	10.0	24	9.6	250	100	3.73	1.310	Agree
2	I feel more emotionally impacted by the documentary when its message is delivered mainly via audio.	40	16.0	68	27.2	77	30.8	45	18.0	20	8.0	250	100	3.25	1.164	Neutral
3	I feel more emotionally impacted by the documentary when its message is delivered mainly via text.	12	4.8	36	14.4	69	27.6	73	29.2	60	24.0	250	100	2.47	1.145	Disagree
Total mean and standard deviation														3.15	0.960	Neutral

Table 12 shows audiences' attitudes toward the modal salience (predominant framing mode, be it visual, audio, or textual) in Netflix documentaries. The results confirm that the visual framing mode had the strongest positive emotional impact on the audience, with a mean

score of ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.310$). This means that when the visual mode dominates, audiences report higher emotional impact for the documentary's issue. The strong positive emotional impact generated by visual framing is not surprising, as this is aligned with the previous scholarly work affirming that visuals create an immersive and affective audience experience (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001), making it the most impactful and emotionally engaging framing mode (Rodrigues & Dimitrova, 2011).

Audio Framing mode shows an overall neutral attitude with a mean score ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.164$), which may suggest that audiences experience audio in complementarity with the visuals, rather than a standalone mode. Textual framing, when used as the primary framing mode, showed an overall negative attitude ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.145$). This suggests that text will negatively affect the emotional impact of the documentary's issue on the audience if used as the primary documentary framing mode.

Unsurprisingly, these data collectively align with Netflix's documentary framing strategy, which is visually driven, with audio playing a supporting role and text kept to a minimum and functioning as an auxiliary aid. These all confirm the findings of Aytaş & Yavuz's (2024), who affirmed that Netflix documentaries are visually driven and are shifting away from the documentary's traditional nature. So, if the textual mode was predominant in classical documentaries, this has faded away.

Table 13 Audience Attitudes toward Modal Congruence and Divergence in Netflix Documentaries

N	Modal Congruence and Divergence	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Frequency	%	Mean	Std. Deviation	Overall Attitude
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%					
1	I understand that when the visuals, audio, and text in a documentary support each other, this is deliberate to reinforce the message.	125	50.0	52	20.8	37	14.8	20	8.0	16	6.4	250	100	4.00	1.245	Agree
2	I understand that when visuals, audio, or text in a documentary contradict each other, this is deliberate to deliver a deeper message.	76	30.4	81	32.4	53	21.2	12	4.8	28	11.2	250	100	3.66	1.268	Agree
Total mean and standard deviation														3.83	1.149	Agree

Table 13 explores audience attitudes toward modal congruence and divergence in Netflix documentaries, meaning how audiences interpret the interplay between visuals, audio, and text, when they are cohesively aligned (congruent) or unaligned (divergent). The overall mean score ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.149$) reflects an overall positive attitude, which suggests a high level of audience interpretive awareness (sophistication). The results suggest that audiences recognise that mode congruence is a deliberate strategy used by Netflix to construct and reinforce the documentary's message ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.245$). The audience also indicated an overall agreement, though slightly lower than the first item, in recognising modal divergence as a deliberate act by Netflix to complicate the documentary's narrative, present layered meanings, and induce critical reflections.

These results in the table above also highlight that Netflix audiences are not passive receivers of the message but active participants in the process of meaning-making, who can decode the documentary's explicit and implicit multimodal messages. Netflix's strategic deployment of mode congruence or divergence, such as juxtaposing distressing visuals with upbeat audio bites appears to be correctly interpreted by the audience as an intentional framing technique that delivers a layered narrative. Burroughs (2018) confirms this in his research that explored how Netflix shapes its audience as sophisticated, niche-oriented, who are engaged through algorithms, high-quality content, and binge-watching.

However, Lovric et al.'s study (2018) suggested that although modal divergence is being recognised by the audience as deliberate, it may negatively influence their behaviour. They investigated this by conducting an experimental study involving a post-test where participants viewed a health-related documentary with contradicting visuals and audio (appealing visuals of unhealthy food were juxtaposed with sound bites stressing the importance of staying healthy). They found out that this mode incongruence negatively influenced the participants' behavioural outcomes, promoting tendency toward eating unhealthy food. This suggests that mode congruence plays a pivotal role in mediating the impact of the documentary's message.

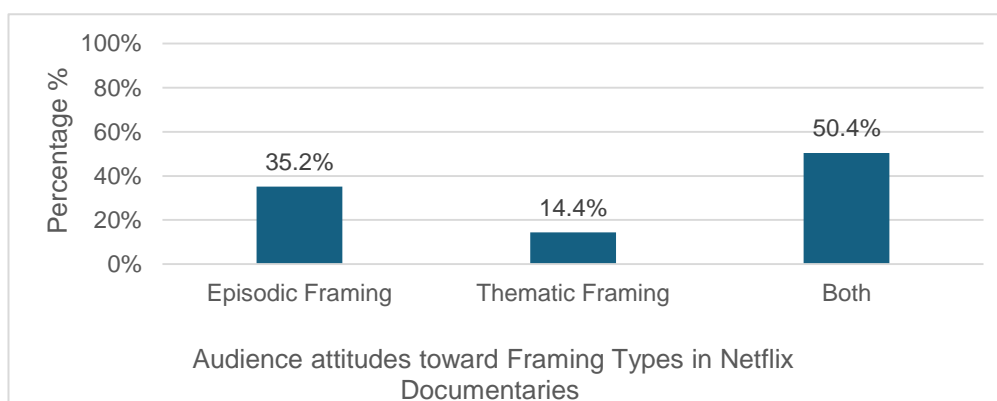


Figure 2 Distribution of Audience Attitudes toward Framing Types in Netflix Documentaries

Figure 2 shows the audience's directions towards the different framing types utilised in Netflix documentaries. Audience favoured the presence of both farming types in Netflix documentaries (50.4%), suggesting that documentaries that include individual experiences (characters) but at the same time provide a broader and contextual theme ranked first. Episodic framing ranked second (35.2%), in which the documentary's issue is predominantly framed via individual stories. Thematic framing ranked third with only 14.4%, in which documentaries represent broader issues and contexts without focusing on individual experiences. The above results suggest that audiences prefer a balance between an appealing story (generally involving characters), while at the same time sticking to one of the core goals of the documentary genre, which is gaining knowledge and information about a specific issue.

Table 14 Audience Attitudes toward Netflix Documentary Framing Type (Thematic and Episodic)

N	Framing Type	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Frequency	%	Mean	Std. Deviation	Overall Attitude
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%					
1	The framing type of a documentary plays a key role in forming my opinion toward the represented issue.	125	50.5	60	24.0	33	13.2	12	4.8	20	8.0	250	100	4.03	1.245	Agree
2	Documentaries that use personal or emotional stories help me connect emotionally with the represented issue.	117	46.8	52	20.8	45	18.0	16	6.4	20	8.0	250	100	3.92	1.274	Agree
3	I find documentaries that use personal or emotional stories convincing in shaping my opinion about the represented issue.	80	32.0	85	34.0	45	18.0	24	9.6	16	6.4	250	100	3.76	1.186	Agree
4	Documentaries that use statistics or expert opinions help me connect emotionally with the represented issue.	28	11.2	96	38.4	70	28.0	32	12.8	24	9.6	250	100	3.29	1.125	Neutral
5	I find documentaries that use statistics or expert opinions convincing in shaping my opinion about the represented issue.	36	14.4	80	32.0	70	28.0	32	12.8	32	12.8	250	100	3.22	1.221	Neutral
Total mean and standard deviation														3.64	0.987	Agree

Table 14 illustrates the audience's attitudes toward two framing types (episodic and thematic) used in Netflix documentaries to represent issues. The results in the above table indicate a strong consensus that framing types are pivotal in shaping the audience's opinions and emotions toward documentaries represented issues ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.245$). Episodic framing (represented in items 2 and 3 in the above table), which humanises issues by focusing on personal stories (individual cases), ranked first with higher levels of agreement. The audience strongly agreed that episodic framing fosters stronger emotional engagement with the documentary ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.274$) and is also more persuasive in shaping their attitudes regarding the represented issue ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.186$). Thematic framing (represented in items 4 and 5 in the above table), which provides broader contextual representations, received a comparatively lower engagement both emotionally ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.125$) and cognitively ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.221$), reflecting an overall neutral audience attitude.

The above results suggest that while thematic framing provides more structural understanding, its affective appeal is limited. However, episodic framing is more emotionally impactful and persuasive. This is aligned with Aarøe's (2011) study, which investigated the relative strength of episodic and thematic frames, finding that thematic frames have weak to no emotional effects on the audience; conversely, episodic frames have intense emotional reactions on the audience. Similarly, Springer & Harwood (2015) in their study found that the key distinction between the framing types is in their cognitive and emotional impact, highlighting that episodic frames (individual stories) significantly influence audience attitudes and lead to increased endorsement of the message. They also indicated that episodic framing shapes audience attitudes by affecting personal responsibility perceptions. Also, Gross (2008) investigated framing persuasive appeals and found that episodic frames were more emotionally engaging, while thematic frames were more persuasive.

The above results in the table could justify Netflix's framing logic, which invests heavily in episodic framing to amplify the emotional impact of the represented issues on the audience, as confirmed by Iordache et al. (2022). Also, Binns (2018) analysed a sample of

Netflix documentaries, identifying their heavy reliance on character-driven personal stories (episodic framing).

Table 15 Audience Attitudes toward Netflix Documentary Styles (Modes of Representation)

N	Documentary Style	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Frequency	%	Mean	Std. Deviation	Overall Attitude
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%					
1	I prefer Documentaries that rely on real-life events as they happen, without narration or interviews (Observational Mode)	91	36.4	61	24.4	47	18.8	31	12.4	20	8.0	250	100	3.69	1.295	Agree
2	I prefer documentaries that rely on interviews and conversations with people involved in the issue (Participatory Mode).	64	25.6	92	36.8	48	19.2	26	10.4	20	8.0	250	100	3.62	1.201	Agree
3	I prefer documentaries that rely on a narrator to explain facts and provide background information (Expository Mode).	58	23.2	86	34.4	56	22.4	31	12.4	19	7.6	250	100	3.53	1.193	Agree
4	I prefer documentaries that rely on acted scenes to recreate real events (Docudrama style).	66	26.4	70	28.0	59	23.6	28	11.2	27	10.8	250	100	3.48	1.287	Agree
5	I prefer documentaries that rely on the filmmaker's personal story and emotional experience (Performative Mode).	44	17.6	70	28.0	81	32.4	32	12.8	23	9.2	250	100	3.32	1.176	Neutral
6	I prefer documentaries that rely on showing the filmmaking process itself, such as cameras or behind-the-scenes moments (Reflexive Mode).	45	18.0	72	28.8	60	24.0	41	16.4	32	12.8	250	100	3.23	1.280	Neutral
Total mean and standard deviation														3.47	0.914	Agree

Table 15 presents the audience's attitudes toward Netflix documentary styles (modes of representation). The observational mode, where real-life events unfold unobtrusively without narration, reflected the highest positive attitude ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.295$). The participatory mode, which involves interviews with those involved in the represented issue closely followed ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.201$). The expository mode, which utilises authoritative narration and archive materials, ranked third ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.193$). Then, comparatively lower but still positive attitudes were expressed toward the docudrama

mode ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.287$). The performative and reflexive modes, with mean scores ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.176$) and ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.280$) respectively, received neutral responses.

Since the use of live actions (actualities) is a core characteristic of the observational documentary mode of representation, the use of interviews is a core characteristic of the participatory mode, and archive material is a core characteristic of the expository mode (Nichols, 2010), the above findings are aligned with Table 9 findings, where live actions, archive materials, and interviews had the highest means.

The above findings are partially aligned with Bradbury & Guadagno (2020), who explored how the different documentary modes of representation affected audience engagement. They found that audiences preferred the features of expository and participatory modes. Unlike the above results, their results had no audience preference for live actions (observational mode). However, this could be justified as the audience sample differs in both studies. In their research, the audiences are adults aged 36 and above, while for this research young audience aged 18- 35 comprises the sample. This could suggest that audiences' documentary preferences vary according to their demographics (e.g. age).

Notably, those documentary modes of representation are not mutually exclusive, as they overlap, meaning that although there could be a dominant mode in a documentary, features from the other documentary modes may still be present (Nichols, 2010). This is widely reflected in Netflix documentaries that mix and match between the features of the different modes of representation (Bruzzi, 2016; Iordache et al., 2022).

Framing Type, Modes of Representation & Perception of Realism Table 16
Audiences Perceived Realism Through Framing Type

N	Perceived Realism through Framing Type	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Frequency	%	Mean	Std. Deviation	Overall Trend
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%					
1	When a documentary tells the story through one person's experience or personal journey, it feels more real to me.	100	40.0	65	26.0	49	19.6	20	8.0	16	6.4	250	100	3.85	1.215	Agree
2	When a documentary covers a broader context, like a social issue or political event, it feels more real to me.	48	19.2	85	34.0	77	30.8	28	11.2	12	4.8	250	100	3.52	1.073	Agree
Total mean and standard deviation														3.68	0.971	Agree

Table 16 illustrates audiences' perceived realism of Netflix documentaries and their represented issues through the employed framing type (Episodic vs Thematic). The findings indicate higher levels of perceived realism in Netflix documentaries employing episodic framing ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.215$). Thematic framing reflected comparatively lower perceived realism level ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.073$). The results suggest that audiences are more likely to perceive the documentary's represented issue as real when it is framed through personal experiences and emotional narratives. These results could explain and justify the results of Table 14, inferring that the higher levels of audience emotional engagement with episodic framing could be correlated to perceived realism (audience believing that what they are seeing is real). It also complements hypothesis two, which confirmed the relationship between framing types and perceived realism (Table 20), offering statistical data.

Table 17 Audiences Perceived Realism Through Documentary Style (Mode of Representation)

N	Perceived Realism through Documentary Style (Mode of Representation)	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Frequency	%	Mean	Std. Deviation	Overall Trend
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%					
1	I find documentaries more realistic when they rely on interviews and direct conversations with people involved in the topic. (Participatory style)	64	25.6	93	37.2	56	22.4	21	8.4	16	6.4	250	100	3.67	1.136	Agree
2	I find documentaries more realistic when they rely on real-life footage without narration or interviews. (Observational style)	77	30.8	68	27.2	57	22.8	28	11.2	20	8.0	250	100	3.62	1.250	Agree
3	I find documentaries more realistic when they rely on a narrator to explain facts and provide background information. (Expository style)	28	11.2	84	33.6	78	31.2	40	16.0	20	8.0	250	100	3.24	1.101	Neutral
4	I find documentaries more realistic when they rely on showing the filmmaking process itself, such as cameras, crews, or behind-the-scenes moments. (Reflexive style)	36	14.4	85	34.0	65	26.0	24	9.6	40	16.0	250	100	3.21	1.270	Neutral
5	I find documentaries more realistic when they rely on the filmmaker's personal story and emotional experience. (Performative style)	36	14.4	65	26.0	8	3.56	32	12.8	28	11.2	250	100	3.20	1.174	Neutral
6	I find documentaries more realistic when they rely on acted scenes to recreate real events from the past. (Docudrama style)	32	12.8	52	20.8	64	25.6	70	28.0	32	12.8	250	100	2.93	1.230	Neutral
Total mean and standard deviation														3.31	0.866	Neutral

Table 17 illustrates audience perceptions of realism in Netflix documentaries through the mode of representation (documentary style). The results reveal that the participatory mode of representation ranked highest ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.136$), associating the strongest perception of realism with documentaries that mainly rely on interviews and direct engagement with people involved in the story. This was followed by the observational mode ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.250$), where realism is mediated through real-life footage without narration or interviews. Then, expository mode ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.101$), where perceived realism is mainly achieved via narration and archival materials. In contrast, stylised modes of representations showed comparatively lower realism, with overall neutral responses, as follows: reflexive documentaries ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.270$),

performative ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.174$), and finally docudrama ($M 2.93$, $SD = 1.230$).

The above results suggest that audiences perceive the issues represented by observational, participatory, and expository modes of representation as more real and authentic, supporting Bradbury & Guadagno's (2020) findings. In contrast, audiences perceive performative, reflexive, and docudrama modes of representations as stylised approaches with lower perceived realism. This justifies and explains why Netflix mixes and matches the features of the documentary modes of representation in its documentaries, which is a common and widely accepted documentary practice (Nichols, 2010). For instance, to amplify the realism of their documentaries, they privilege participatory and observational features, particularly in documentaries that include some reconstructions of events such as true crime.

RQ4- What motivates the audience to watch Netflix documentaries?

Motives for watching Netflix documentaries

Table 18 Audience Motives for Watching Netflix Documentaries

N	Watching Motives and Reasons	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Frequency	%	Mean	Std. Deviation	Overall Trend
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%					
1	I watch Netflix documentaries because they use cinematic visuals and high production quality.	100	40.0	65	26.0	49	19.6	16	6.4	20	8.0	250	100	3.84	1.246	Agree
2	I watch Netflix documentaries because they are available on demand (no fixed broadcast schedule).	104	41.6	58	23.2	48	19.2	20	8.0	20	8.0	250	100	3.82	1.274	Agree
3	I watch Netflix documentaries because they cover a wide range of issue types and topics.	68	27.2	97	38.8	49	19.6	16	6.4	20	8.0	250	100	3.71	1.168	Neutral
4	I watch Netflix documentaries for entertainment.	80	32.0	78	31.2	44	17.6	28	11.2	20	8.0	250	100	3.68	1.252	Neutral
5	I watch Netflix documentaries to learn about new topics or gain knowledge.	64	25.6	94	37.6	52	20.8	28	11.2	12	4.8	250	100	3.68	1.117	Neutral
6	I watch Netflix documentaries because they feature engaging characters and personal stories.	64	25.6	88	35.2	58	23.2	20	8.0	20	8.0	250	100	3.62	1.180	Neutral
7	I watch Netflix documentaries out of curiosity for specific cases/events.	72	28.8	72	28.8	61	24.4	17	6.8	28	11.2	250	100	3.57	1.279	Neutral
8	I watch Netflix documentaries because they create a strong emotional impact.	44	17.6	72	28.8	82	32.8	28	11.2	24	9.6	250	100	3.34	1.175	Neutral
9	I watch documentaries recommended by Netflix's algorithm, as they usually match my interests.	52	20.8	73	29.2	60	24.0	33	13.2	32	12.8	250	100	3.32	1.293	Neutral
Total mean and standard deviation														3.62	0.938	Neutral

Table 18 presents the audience's motives and reasons for watching Netflix documentaries. The highest rated reason was the cinematic visuals and high production quality of Netflix documentaries ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.246$). This was followed by the convenience of on-demand access ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.274$), then the diversity of issue types and topics covered in Netflix documentaries (3.71 , $SD = 1.168$), featuring engaging characters and personal stories ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.180$), and with a notable comparatively lower mean, Netflix's algorithmic recommendations ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.293$). These findings reflect Netflix's convenience as a platform and its content richness. Motivation items came next, such as watching to learn or gain new knowledge ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.117$), for entertainment (3.68 , $SD = 1.252$), curiosity for specific cases ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.279$), and for the emotional impact ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.175$).

These findings are partially aligned with Nayera's (2020) study, which found that 91.8% of her study's sample watched documentaries to expand their knowledge about the world around them (item 5 in the above table). The above results are also aligned with Özgür (2018), who investigated the Turkish audiences' motivations for watching Internet television (including Netflix), which requires a monthly subscription fee. He concluded that there are new motivations that resulted from the specific features of internet TV, mainly the audience's need to watch the high-quality content offered on such platforms (item 1 in the above table); the convenience and scheduling freedom (item 2 in the above table), and personal recommendations (item 9 in the above table).

Testing Hypotheses

H1- There is a statistically significant relationship between the documentary's multimodal framing elements—including their salience—and the audience's attitudes toward the documentary's represented issue.

Table 19 Relationship between the documentary's multimodal framing elements—including their salience—and the audience's attitudes toward the documentary's represented issue.

Variables	N	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Audience attitudes toward the documentary's represented issue	250		
Visual Framing Elements	250	0.429**	0.01
Audio Framing Elements	250	0.400**	0.01
Textual Framing Elements	250	0.322**	0.01
Modal Salience	250	0.335**	0.01

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The results indicate a statistically significant positive relationship between multimodal framing elements—including modal salience—and audience attitudes toward the documentary's represented issue. All Pearson correlation coefficients are ($r > 0.3$) and are all significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Specifically:

- There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the documentary's visual framing elements and the audience's attitudes toward the documentary's represented issue ($r = 0.429$, $p < 0.01$). This was the strongest observed correlation, and it suggests that the use of visual framing is associated with increasing positive audience attitudes toward the documentary's represented issue.
- There is a statistically significant correlation between the documentary's audio framing elements and the audience's attitudes toward the documentary's represented issue ($r = 0.400$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that audio framing contributes to shaping more positive audience attitudes toward the documentary's represented issue.
- There is a statistically significant correlation between the documentary's textual framing elements and the audience's attitudes toward the documentary's represented issue ($r = 0.322$, $p < 0.01$). Although comparatively weaker, it suggests that textual framing plays a supporting role but is still meaningful in shaping audience attitudes toward the documentary's represented issue.
- There is a statistically significant correlation between the documentary's modal salience and the audience's attitudes toward

the documentary's represented issue ($r = 0.335$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that modal salience, the degree to which one framing mode dominates, plays a role in shaping audience attitudes toward the documentary's represented issue.

The above findings demonstrate that multimodal framing elements and techniques—including their relative salience—are positively correlated with how audiences form attitudes about the documentary's represented issue. The strongest correlation is for visual framing, followed by audio framing, then textual framing, respectively. This relative strength of visual framing aligns with the existing literature on the dominance of the visual mode in documentary interpretation (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; Rodrigues & Dimitrova, 2011; Katerynych et al., 2023).

Therefore, the first hypothesis was met.

H2- There is a statistically significant relationship between the documentary's framing type and the audience's perceived realism.

Table 20 Relationship between the documentary's framing type and the audience's perceived realism

			Audience's Perceived Realism			Total
			Low	Medium	High	
The documentary's Framing Type	Episodic	Count	8	32	48	88
		%	9.1%	36.4%	54.5%	100.0%
	Thematic	Count	16	12	8	36
		%	44.5%	33.3%	22.2%	100.0%
	Both	Count	4	41	81	126
		%	3.2%	32.5%	64.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	28	85	137	250
		%	11.2%	34.0%	54.8%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square $\chi^2 = 52.390$ $df = 4$ Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) = 0.000

The use of the Chi-square test for independence in the above table reveals a statistically significant relationship between the documentary's framing and the audience's perceived realism ($\chi^2 = 52.390$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that the documentary framing type has a significant influence on the audience's perceived reality.

The results reveal that episodic framing type is associated with the highest levels of perceived realism, followed by hybrid framing (episodic + thematic), and then thematic framing type elicited the lowest level of perceived realism. This pattern suggests that documentaries centred around character-driven and personal experiences are more authentic to the audience, which could be attributed to the stronger emotional and cognitive engagement. This is aligned with existing literature (Gross, 2008; Aarøe, 2011; Springer & Harwood, 2015; Iordache et al., 2022; Binns 2018)

Therefore, the second hypothesis was met.

H3- There is a statistically significant relationship between the documentary's mode of representation and the audience's perceived realism.

Table 21 Relationship between the documentary's mode of representation and the audience's perceived realism

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Documentary's mode of representation	3.47	0.914	250		
Audience's perceived realism	3.62	0.938	250	0.860**	0.01

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2tailed).

The results show that there is a strong statistically significant positive correlation between the documentary's mode of representation and the audience's perceived realism ($r = 0.860$, $p < 0.01$). The correlation coefficient surpasses the established threshold for a strong association ($r > 0.7$). The results suggest that audiences perceive the documentary and its represented issue as more realistic when the mode of representation aligns with their expectations of authenticity and credibility, which is supported by the descriptive statistical analysis in earlier results shown in Table 17. So, it could be inferred that when documentarists' issues are represented using participatory mode ($M = 3.67$) and observational mode ($M = 3.62$) audience will perceive them as more real than the expository mode of representation ($M = 3.24$), reflexive mode ($M = 3.21$), performative ($M = 3.20$), and docudrama ($M = 2.93$). This is aligned with existing literature (Landesman, 2008; Nichol, 2010; Moon, 2017; Guadagno, 2020)

The strength of this correlation emphasises the significant role of the documentary's mode of representation in shaping the audience's perceived realism.

Therefore, hypothesis three was met.

H4- There is a statistically significant relationship between the documentary's framing type and the audience's motivation to watch Netflix documentaries.

Table 22 Relationship between the documentary's framing type and the audience's motivation to watch Netflix documentaries

			Audience's Motivation			Total
			Low	Medium	High	
The Documentary's Framing Type	Episodic	Count	8	4	76	88
		%	9.1%	4.5%	86.4%	100%
	Thematic	Count	20	12	4	36
		%	55.6%	33.3%	11.1%	100%
	Both	Count	4	50	72	126
		%	3.2%	39.7%	57.1%	100%
Total		Count	32	66	152	250
		%	12.8%	26.4%	60.8%	100%

Pearson Chi-Square $\chi^2 = 110.83$ df= 4 Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) = 0.000

The use of the Chi-square test for independence in the above table reveals a statistically significant relationship between the documentary's framing and the audience's motivation to watch Netflix documentaries ($\chi^2 = 110.83$, df = 4, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that the documentary's framing type strongly influences the audience's motivation to watch Netflix documentaries. In other words, audience motivation levels differ meaningfully depending on the framing type used. Episodic framing strongly emerged with a high audience motivation level to watch Netflix documentaries, followed by hybrid framing, then thematic framing. This pattern highlights that character-driven and personalised experiences (episodic framing) are more motivating for the audience than abstract general framing (thematic).

The above results provide support for the hypothesis and prove that there is a strong relationship between the documentary's framing type and the audience's motivation to watch.

Therefore, hypothesis four was met.

H5- There is a statistically significant relation between the documentary's issue type and the audience's motivation to watch Netflix documentaries.

Table 23 Relationship between the documentary's issue type and the audience's motivation to watch Netflix documentaries

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
The Documentary's Issue Type	3.40	0.841	250		
Audience's Motivation	3.62	0.938	250	0.403**	0.01

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a statistically significant correlation between the documentary's issue type and the audience's motivation to watch Netflix documentaries ($r = 0.403$, $p < 0.01$), which surpasses the conventional threshold for a moderate correlation ($r > 0.3$). This suggests that certain issue types may motivate the audience to watch Netflix documentaries more than others. As presented in the descriptive statistics Table 7, true Crime and social & cultural issue types may motivate the audience to watch Netflix documentaries more than political and science & nature issues. This is aligned with existing research suggesting that audience interest in watching documentaries is heightened by the type of content offered (Amira 2020; Binns, 2018; Iordache et al., 2023).

The above results affirm that the type of represented issue significantly affects the audience's motivation to watch Netflix documentaries.

Therefore, hypothesis five was met.

H6- There is a statistically significant relation between audiences' level of exposure to Netflix documentaries and the strength of their attitudes towards framed issues.

Table 24 Relationship between audiences' level of exposure to Netflix documentaries and the strength of their attitudes towards framed issues

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Audiences' level of exposure	2.04	0.873	250		
The strength of their attitudes	3.40	0.841	250	0.127*	0.05

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

There is a statistically significant positive correlation between audiences' level of exposure to Netflix documentaries and the strength of their attitudes toward framed issues ($r = 0.127$, $p < 0.05$). Although the correlation is weak, as it is below the conventional threshold for a moderate relationship ($r < 0.3$), it remains statistically meaningful. This suggests that the increase in audience's exposure to Netflix documentaries corresponds to a weak increase in their attitudinal intensity toward the documentary's represented issue. This weak correlation could reflect the effect of other intervening variables, which were not explored in this study.

Therefore, hypothesis six was met. However, future research could expand upon these findings by studying additional moderating variables.

Conclusion

This study investigated the interplay between Netflix's documentary framing strategies and the youth audience's attitudinal responses toward the represented issues. Framing was conceptualised through a multimodal lens, and audience attitudes were examined across three dimensions: cognitive and emotional engagement, perceived realism, and viewing motivations.

The findings demonstrated that multimodal framing elements and techniques significantly shape the audience's attitudes toward documentaries and their represented issues. Results also revealed statistically significant relationships across all variables. Visual Framing had the strongest correlation with positive audience attitudes, while episodic framing was associated with the highest perceived realism and motivational effect on documentary viewing. Thematic

framing, in contrast, elicited comparatively lower realism and emotional resonance. It was also found that participatory and observational documentary modes of representation enhanced credibility and authenticity, whereas docudrama and performative modes showed comparatively lower levels of perceived realism. Moreover, data revealed that the represented issue type and mode of representation had a notable influence on audience perception and viewing motivation. Netflix's staple true crime emerged as the most preferred issue type among the Netflix audience, which was followed by social and cultural issues, and then historical issues, respectively.

This study contributes to ongoing scholarly debates on documentary reception by reinforcing how Netflix, as a leading SVOD, utilises a multimodal framing strategy not only to construct impactful and engaging documentary messages but also to actively shape how audiences interpret and emotionally connect with the different represented issues. It also highlights the role of digital youth audiences as active meaning-makers who select, interpret, and engage with documentary content based on its stylistic and framing techniques.

Future research could explore mediating variables in moderating the relationship between framing strategies and audience attitudes. Expand the sample beyond youth or include cross-platform comparisons (such as watch it and Shahid) to enrich the understanding of how framing strategies differ and function across different streaming platforms.

Finally, Netflix documentaries are strategically framed multimodal texts that significantly influence the audience's attitudes—cognitive and emotional, holding implications for public discourse and the future of documentary production in the digital age.

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