THE POSITION OF NETFLIX IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC BEFORE AND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

This article is focused on the differences in the brand equity of the streaming service Netflix before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Czech Republic. Brand equity is measured by a specially modified conceptual model. Based on a two-wave questionnaire survey, the possible impact of the pandemic on the dimension of the conceptual model was examined. The results showed that there was no statistically significant change in the level of brand equity but there was a change in its structure. It was also found that although the number of people who tried Netflix's services increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, they did not become long-term users.

KEY WORDS

COVID-19, Netflix, brand equity, perceived marketing mix

JEL CODES

M310, L820

1 INTRODUCTION

Streaming services are fast becoming an essential part of everyday life. Streaming services are mainly used for the storage of audiovisual content, which can be watched by a customer in real time with no need to download it beforehand. This makes streaming services a really comfortable solution, because the only requirement is a connection to the Internet. Streaming services may be considered as a modern alternative to cable or satellite TV.

Also, unlike the cable or satellite TV, streaming services are very simple to start with. There is no need for professional installation. The customer just signs up to the desired streaming service via their website and is immediately able to stream their content. These streaming services include Netflix, HBO MAX, YouTube, Disney+ and many more.

This article is focused on Netflix, more specifically on its brand equity and the impact of the

COVID-19 pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic it is well known that people were significantly more active on streaming services like Netflix (Netflix, 2020), which is also supported by the fact that Netflix and other streaming services had to cut down on video quality due to overloading (Cuthbertson, 2020; Alashhab et al., 2020). Dunton et al. (2020) and Robinson et al. (2021) proved that people during lockdown are less physically active and more engaged in sedentary behavior. Furthermore, according to Pandita et al. (2021) or Porubčinová et al. (2020) it has been found that many students turned towards digital recreational activities like watching Netflix, YouTube, and TikTok. In the case of Netflix, this also led to an increase in share price (Levitsky, 2020). Generally, streaming services developed a lot during this time because of lockdown and other contact restrictions. Sheth (2020) says that people started replacing their normal activities (like going to theatres for example) with those that could be done at home (streaming services included). During the pandemic, people were forced to use alternative ways to communicate instead of personal contact. Streaming (in this case live-streaming) was used for example for school lectures, work meetings, and also for interest group courses. These days, people are more and more used to streaming and during COVID-19, streaming proved itself to be a very comfortable solution for times when many contact restrictions are needed. Unlike other companies, it is safe to say that streaming services may have benefited from the pandemic. The question remains whether this growth was also in terms of brand equity.

1.1 Brand Equity and Its Dimensions

Aaker (2016) points out that brand equity is often misinterpreted as brand value. There is a difference between these two terms. While brand value means the financial value of the company, brand equity is a more complex term. Brand equity is the answer to questions about a customer's preference. The stronger and better the brand equity is, the more a customer is likely to prefer that company compared to others.

Brand equity is a dimension that is furthermore determined by partial dimensions. These partial dimensions are brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand awareness with associations. Therefore, there are four dimensions in total – brand equity as the main dimension and three partial dimensions.

The first partial dimension is brand loyalty. Brand loyalty simply means customer's trust in products or services. It is proved that once the customer gains enough confidence in a specific brand then he or she is more likely to buy its products or use its services more often. Kotler and Armstrong (2017) say that in the case of insurance companies, this may be up to 50% more often than before.

Probably the most important partial dimension is that of perceived quality. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2017) perceived quality significantly stimulates a customer's satisfaction, which leads to a higher profit. Aaker (2009) says that it is crucial to be aware of the fact that a high-quality product does not mean high perceived quality. Most people are not able to objectively assess quality because of a lack of knowledge. Aaker (2009) points out that people are able to perceive high quality, which means that it is firstly important to convince them about high quality. That is what perceived quality does.

The last partial dimension is brand awareness with associations, which means general knowledge of a specific brand. According to Aaker (2009), strong brand awareness with associations does not necessarily mean a positive influence on brand equity. It depends on whether that awareness is connected to a positive or negative experience. Measuring this dimension is further divided into recall and recognition. Recall is active knowledge, which may be for example the first brand that comes into a customer's mind when thinking of a specific class of products. On the other hand, recognition is passive knowledge. Recognition was largely used in the case of Intel microprocessors when its logo was placed in advertisements for personal computers. During
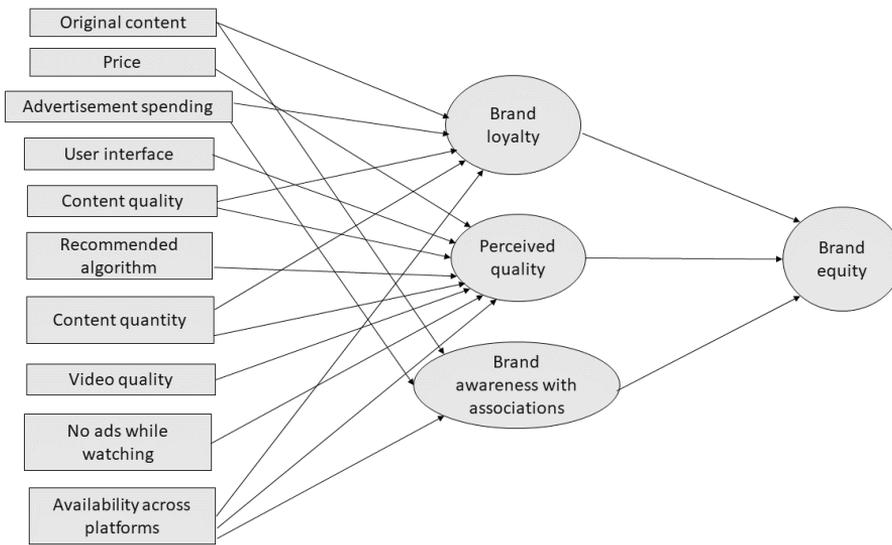
Fig. 1: Conceptual model originally developed to measure Netflix's brand equity

that time, worldwide sales of Intel products increased by up to 63%.

1.2 Proposed Conceptual Model

Brand equity is measured by means of a conceptual model. The conceptual or derived types of models are widely used in management, see, for example, Porubčinová and Fidlerová (2020). The conceptual model used in this article was developed based on the model by Yoo et al. (2000) and customized to better fit its application on Netflix. Yoo et al. (2000) designed their model mainly for application on products. Since Netflix does not provide a product but a service, it was necessary to replace certain elements of the marketing mix with those that relate to Netflix.

Each partial dimension is thought to be stimulated by specific elements of the marketing mix. The first dimension, brand loyalty, is considered to be stimulated by original content, advertisement spending, content quality, content quantity, and service availability across platforms. The second dimension, perceived quality, is stimulated by price, user interface, content quality, recommended algorithm, content quantity, video quality, no ads while watching, and service availability across plat-

forms. The last dimension, brand awareness with associations, is stimulated by original content, advertisement spending, and service availability across platforms. A scheme of our proposed conceptual model is given in Fig. 1.

1.3 Netflix and Its Current Situation

Netflix was established in 1997 as an online DVD rental store. Ten years later, Netflix started its own streaming service. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Netflix was dealing with serious deceleration in gain of subscribers. According to Netflix (2020), in Q2 2019 they predicted a gain of about 300 thousand new subscribers in America and about 5 million new subscribers worldwide. The reality was notably below both predictions – the actual worldwide gain was only about 2.7 million and in America there was no gain at all but a loss of about 130 thousand subscribers compared to Q1 2019. Despite the decline in the first half of 2019, for the rest of the year the predictions matched reality.

The prediction for Q1 2020 was a gain of about 7 million worldwide subscribers. The reality was 15.7 million new worldwide subscribers, which is more than twice the predicted gain (Netflix, 2020). For the rest of 2020, the ac-

tual gains were above the predictions (except for Q3 2020, which was very slightly below the prediction). Based on this, it is possible to assume that the pandemic supported a worldwide membership growth. However, membership growth does not necessary mean growth in terms of brand equity and also there is no straightforward proof of whether the Czech Republic corresponds with the worldwide tendency.

The main aim of this article is to evaluate Netflix's brand equity in the period before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Czech Republic. This is an attempt to find out whether, after a year of living in a pandemic, there has been a significant change not only in the popularity of Netflix, but also whether the pandemic has affected the perception of the brand itself.

2   METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The required data were determined by means of a questionnaire survey, where a random sample of respondents was chosen. The questionnaire survey was conducted in two waves, which were exactly one year apart. More precisely, the collection of answers took place in January 2020 (i.e., the period when there was no problem regarding COVID-19 in the Czech Republic, hereinafter referred to as the first period) and January 2021 (i.e., the period when the inhabitants of the Czech Republic had been living for several months with strict measures due to the pandemic, hereinafter referred to as the second period).

The questionnaire was distributed to Czech respondents online via social networks (such as Facebook), as it is possible to assume that most Netflix customers are on these networks. The questionnaire contained filter questions to ensure the suitability of the respondent, see Tab. 1. However, the main part of the questionnaire consisted of scaling questions (range 1 to 5). The questionnaire also contained several identification questions that made it possible to derive basic information about the respondents.

During the first period, 209 responses were received and during the second period 250 responses. The most common reasons for people deciding to cancel their Netflix subscription were the price, lack of free time, and unwillingness to pay for streaming services in general.

Most of the respondents in both periods were people from 17 to 30 years old, which corresponds to the target group of Netflix. The overriding majority of the respondents were students working part-time, followed by students but unemployed. In terms of income, the most common answer was from 5001 to 10,000 CZK (more than 35% of all answers).

Tab. 1: Results of the filter questions

Filter question	1st period (% of positive answers)	2nd period (% of positive answers)
Do you use streaming services in general?	94.8	92.8
Are you aware of the streaming service Netflix?	93.5	96.1
Have you ever used Netflix?	81.8	92.8
Are you currently an active user of Netflix?	88.9	91.3

The questionnaire was compiled so that it was possible to identify any statistically significant links between the various components of brand equity. To determine the possible dependence, we used a chi-square test based on contingency tables and the strength of the relationship between the observed quantities was expressed using the Cramer coefficient (Cramer's V). This coefficient takes values between 0 and 1. The closer it is to 1, the closer the relationship between the variables. This approach is widely used questionnaire surveys; see Stojanová et al. (2018), Skýpalová et al. (2016), Stojanová et al. (2015), Stojanová and Tomšík (2014) and Zámková and Blašková (2012).

During the testing, it was checked whether the assumptions of the use of the test regarding the theoretical frequency were violated. The null hypothesis of chi-square test assumes that there is no dependence between the two

quantities. When rejecting this null hypothesis, it is possible to argue that there is a statistically significant dependence between the observed quantities. The hypotheses were divided into four blocks, see Tab. 2. The first block examined the relationship between brand loyalty and five other variables – for example, the first block of hypotheses verified the relationship between brand loyalty and original content and was assigned the code H1a. The second block of hypotheses verified the relationship between perceived quality and eight other variables (hypotheses H2a to H2h). The third block and the fourth block (i.e., brand awareness with associations and brand equity) each contained three hypotheses. All of these sets of hypotheses followed the conceptual model (Fig. 1), which points to four sets of hypotheses, with each set representing one dimension of brand equity. The number of hypotheses in each set was given by the number of elements of the perceived marketing mix that are considered to have an impact on the dimension of brand equality in question.

Similarly to Zámková and Blašková (2013) and Qiu et al. (2021), a two-sample test of relative frequencies was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in the use of Netflix before and during the pandemic. Part of the use of this test was to check that the variance of the alternative distribution is greater than the generally required value of nine.

Like Swain et al. (2019), a non-parametric Mann-Whitney test was used to determine the possible change in the level of the brand value before and during the pandemic, as the mon-itored values cannot be expected to meet the assumption regarding the normal distribution.

Tab. 2: Hypotheses codes for the relation between the perceived marketing mix and dimension of brand equity

Brand loyalty	
H1a:	Original content
H1b:	Advertisement spending
H1c:	Content quality
H1d:	Content quantity
H1e:	Availability across platforms
Perceived quality	
H2a:	Price
H2b:	User interface
H2c:	Content quality
H2d:	Recommended algorithm
H2e:	Content quantity
H2f:	Video quality
H2g:	No ads while watching
H2h:	Availability across platforms
Brand awareness with associations	
H3a:	Original content
H3b:	Advertisement spending
H3c:	Availability across platforms
Brand equity	
H4a:	Brand awareness with associations
H4b:	Brand loyalty
H4c:	Perceived quality

Last but not least, it was necessary to verify the reliability of the data. Cronbach's alpha was used for this purpose as in Warrens (2015). Cronbach's alpha ranges from zero to one, and its values should not fall below 0.5 to maintain consistency and reliability.

3 RESULTS

The reliability of the data used for both of the periods under review was verified based on Cronbach's alpha, see Tab. 3. The results of Tab. 3 show that the reliability of the data differs from concept to concept. Typically, the Cronbach's alpha is higher than 0.5 (in some cases higher than 0.8, which points to good or even excellent data). The only exception is in the case of perceived price in the second period, which had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.46. As this is the only exception that is not significantly far from the recommended value of 0.5 (which is the limit for general acceptability of data), the data for this research may still be considered suitable for further analysis.

Tab. 3: Results of the reliability analysis

Concept/Period	Cronbach's alpha		Number of items	
	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
Brand loyalty	0.54	0.53	3	3
Brand awareness with associations	0.67	0.62	3	3
Perceived product	0.74	0.76	7	7
Perceived price	0.58	0.46	2	2
Perceived advertisement spending	0.67	0.78	3	3
Perceived intensity of distribution	0.82	0.91	2	2
Perceived quality	0.83	0.92	2	2
Brand equity	0.84	0.82	3	3

3.1 Netflix's Brand Equity

The significance of each element of the marketing mix was analyzed with contingency tables. The results of analysis of brand loyalty are shown in Tab. 4, where the resulting values of the Cramer coefficient and the *p*-value determining the statistical significance of the relationship are included. In the first period, only two elements were statistically significant – original content and content quality. In the second period, the situation is different, as four out of five elements are now statistically significant. The only insignificant element in both periods was content quantity (a *p*-value higher than the significance level of 0.05, which points to insignificant Cramer's *V*).

This leads to the conclusion that before the pandemic the only elements related to brand loyalty were original content and content quality. Today, there are four relating elements, which means that brand loyalty has the potential of becoming stronger. This also means that there was a change in the structure of brand loyalty. Before the pandemic, people were not noticing Netflix's advertisement enough. But one year after, this marketing element became statistically significant, which is relevant considering the fact that people were forced to

stay inside and find different types of activities than they usually did. This also corresponds to the significance of the element "availability across platforms". This may be explained by the presumption that people were probably looking for alternative ways of using Netflix since not every household has a TV, so they noticed that Netflix may be used on different platforms, which made them more loyal to Netflix, because it is easily accessible. A summary of the chi-square test analysis is included in Tab. 5.

Tab. 6 and 7 show the results of the analysis of the perceived quality dimension. This dimension analysis also proved that more elements became significant since the beginning of pandemic. Before the pandemic, two of the elements were insignificant (price and recommended algorithm). Now, based on the p-values for the Cramer coefficient, all of the considered elements are significant, which means that people perceive the quality of Netflix and that their perception is based on more elements than it used to be. In the case of price, the significance means that people now consider the price of subscription as a reasonable cost for the streaming service. Price is an element that many people consider as a quality measurement and since they perceive Netflix as a high-quality service, they are willing to pay a higher amount of money for this service. The significance of recommended algorithm may be simply explained by the fact that people had more time to spend with the service, which gives enough space for these algorithms to learn more about viewer preferences and give better and more accurate recommendations. Subscribers probably subconsciously noticed that the recommendations are now very close to their preferences and consider this element as high quality, which as a result now stimulates this dimension of the perceived quality of Netflix.

The results for the dimension of brand awareness with associations are included in Tab. 8 and 9. Before the pandemic, the only significant element for the dimension of brand awareness with associations was original content. During the pandemic, availability across platforms also had a significant relationship with awareness with associations. This change may be con-

Tab. 4: Results of the dependence analysis of the brand loyalty dimension

Period	Original content		Advertising spending		Content quality		Content quantity		Availability across platforms	
	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
Cramer's V	0.282	0.238	0.091	0.237	0.231	0.247	0.197	0.155	0.198	0.207
P-value	0.001	0.002	0.897	0.006	0.025	0.001	0.104	0.139	0.255	0.044

Tab. 5: Summary of rejection/non-rejection of the null hypotheses for the brand loyalty block of hypothesis

Hypothesis	Item of marketing mix	Result (1st period)	Result (2nd period)
H1a	Original content	H_0 rejected	H_0 rejected
H1b	Advertisement spending	H_0 not rejected	H_0 rejected
H1c	Content quality	H_0 rejected	H_0 rejected
H1d	Content quantity	H_0 not rejected	H_0 not rejected
H1e	Availability across platforms	H_0 not rejected	H_0 rejected

nected to the changes in brand loyalty. People now associate Netflix with smartphones, notebooks etc. The element advertisement spending remained insignificant for both periods, which points to the conclusion that Netflix's advertising still does not draw enough attention.

In the case of the separate dimension of brand equity, the results did not change over time, see Tab. 10 and 11. Before the pandemic, every partial dimension was significant, which remained during the pandemic. Simply said, in the main dimension there was neither an improvement nor change in structure.

3.2 Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on Brand Equity

Fig. 2 shows the box plots for each dimension in both periods. There was almost no change between the plotted descriptive characteristics of the dimensions for both the time periods.

Based on the median values, it is possible to state that regardless of the time, half of the respondents assigned a value greater than or equal to 4, which means that Netflix's brand equity and its dimensions may be considered as strong variables. In other words, subscribers are loyal to Netflix, perceive Netflix as a high-quality service and are strongly aware of this brand, which leads to its strong brand equity.

Brand awareness with associations now has a higher interquartile range, which means that during the second period, the responses in this case were more variable. On the other hand, the interquartile range decreased in the case of the individual dimensions of brand equity.

The data from both periods were compared to each other based on the Mann-Whitney test and the results are listed in Tab. 12. Generally, it is possible to say that there was no significant difference between these two periods. This result corresponds with the results of the descriptive characteristics mentioned above.

Last but not least, changes in the answers to the filter questions (presented in Tab. 1) were examined. The final test to be performed was the two-sample test of relative frequencies to investigate whether a relevant difference in use of Netflix and in use of streaming services in general occurred between periods, see Tab. 13. There was a statistically significant difference in the case of the third question (*Have you ever used Netflix?*) but no difference in the other questions between the monitored periods. It may be assumed that during the pandemic more people in the Czech Republic signed up to Netflix but did not continue using this service regarding the result of the fourth question (*Are you currently an active user of Netflix?*). The difference in the first question remained insignificant, which suggests that there was no change in the use of streaming services in general.

Tab. 6: Results of the dependence analysis of the perceived quality dimension

	Price		User interface		Content quality		Recommended algorithm	
Period	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
Cramer's V	0.161	0.215	0.237	0.439	0.456	0.311	0.191	0.249
P-value	0.171	0.013	0.004	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	0.292	0.001
	Content quantity		Video quality		No ads while watching		Availability across platforms	
Period	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
Cramer's V	0.339	0.233	0.286	0.335	0.359	0.301	0.365	0.303
P-value	0.001	<0.001	0.004	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

Tab. 7: Summary of rejection/non-rejection of the null hypotheses for the perceived quality block of hypotheses

Hypothesis	Item of marketing mix	Result (1st period)	Result (2nd period)
H2a	Price	H_0 not rejected	H_0 rejected
H2b	User interface	H_0 rejected	H_0 rejected
H2c	Content quality	H_0 rejected	H_0 rejected
H2d	Recommended algorithm	H_0 not rejected	H_0 rejected
H2e	Content quantity	H_0 rejected	H_0 rejected
H2f	Video quality	H_0 rejected	H_0 rejected
H2g	No ads while watching	H_0 rejected	H_0 rejected
H2h	Availability across platforms	H_0 rejected	H_0 rejected

Tab. 8: Results of the dependence analysis of the brand awareness with associations dimension

	Original content		Advertisement spending		Availability across platforms	
Period	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
Cramer's V	0.419	0.297	0.163	0.158	0.253	0.271
P-value	<0.001	<0.001	0.123	0.150	0.130	0.003

Tab. 9: Summary of rejection/non-rejection of the null hypotheses for the brand awareness with associations block of hypotheses

Hypothesis	Item of marketing mix	Result (1st period)	Result (2nd period)
H3a	Original content	H_0 rejected	H_0 rejected
H3b	Advertisement spending	H_0 not rejected	H_0 not rejected
H3c	Availability across platforms	H_0 not rejected	H_0 rejected

Tab. 10: Results of the dependence analysis of the brand equity dimension

	Brand awareness with associations		Brand loyalty		Perceived quality	
Period	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
Cramer's V	0.253	0.219	0.352	0.268	0.526	0.312
P-value	0.002	0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

Tab. 11: Summary of rejection/non-rejection of the null hypotheses for the brand equity block of hypotheses

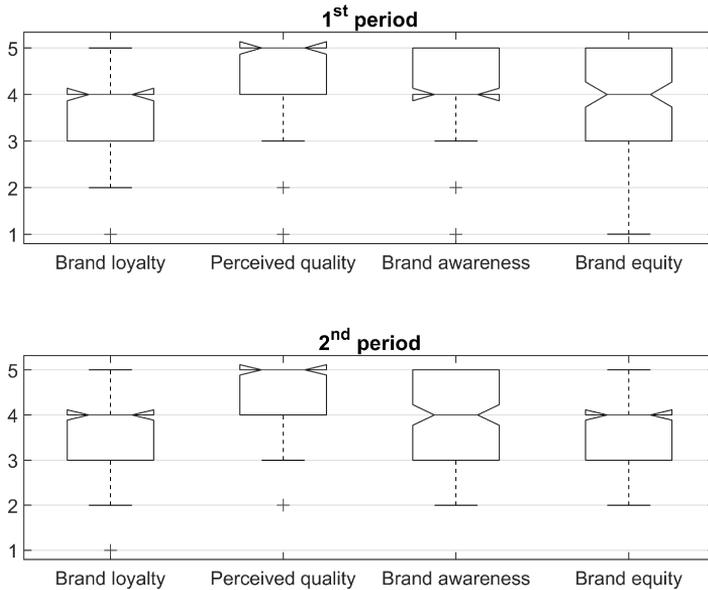| Hypothesis	Item of marketing mix	Result (1st period)	Result (2nd period)
H4a	Brand awareness with associations	H_0 rejected	H_0 rejected
H4b	Brand loyalty	H_0 rejected	H_0 rejected
H4c	Perceived quality	H_0 rejected	H_0 rejected

Fig. 2: Box plots for the individual dimensions of brand equity in both periods

Tab. 12: Results of the Mann-Whitney test

Dimension	P-value	Dimension	P-value
Brand loyalty	0.266	Content quantity	0.749
Perceived quality	0.585	Availability across platforms	0.312
Brand awareness with associations	0.247	Price	0.424
Brand equity	0.519	User interface	0.277
Original content	0.786	Recommended algorithm	0.491
Advertisement spending	0.128	Video quality	0.204
Content quality	0.192	No ads while watching	0.132

Tab. 13: Results of the two-sample test of relative frequencies

Question	1 Do you use streaming services in general?	2 Are you aware of the streaming service Netflix?	3 Have you ever used Netflix?	4 Are you currently an active user of Netflix?
P-value	0.396	0.208	<0.001	0.420

4   DISCUSSION

Based on the results of this research it is possible to state that the COVID-19 pandemic positively affected the position of Netflix in the Czech Republic in terms of usage, as the share of respondents who tried Netflix during the pandemic increased. This difference was identified as statistically significant. Therefore, it may be stated that in this respect the Czech Republic corresponds to the worldwide tendency. The result in terms of usage also goes hand-in-hand with other research, that proved that people during the pandemic were physically less active (Robinson et al., 2021) and started replacing physical activities with sedentary behavior (Dunton et al. 2020) and in-home activities (Sheth, 2020), and furthermore

turned toward digital recreational activities like watching Netflix, YouTube, and TikTok (Pandita et al., 2021).

However, the change in terms of usage was probably only short-term since the only statistically significant difference was in the case of the question *"Have you ever used Netflix?"* but not in the question *"Are you currently an active user of Netflix?"*. This result may be interpreted as in the short run the pandemic definitely supported and improved the situation of Netflix but not in the long run. People probably only using Netflix during restrictions like quarantine but once those restrictions were lifted (during the summer in the Czech Republic), they cancelled their subscriptions, which meant that Netflix was not able to retain these new viewers. This also corresponds with no change in the level of brand equity, because if there actually was a change, there would probably also be an improvement in the long run.

As mentioned earlier, no change in the level of brand equity does not mean no change at all, the results proved a statistically significant change in its structure. Subscribers of Netflix now perceive more elements of the marketing mix, which now has the potential to stimulate brand equity. Netflix should now focus on these new significant elements and use them to its advantage to improve its brand equity, which may also help retain new subscribers.

It would not be appropriate to generalize the results of this article for the whole population, because the study focused primarily on Netflix's target customers, which are generations Y and Z, and the research methodology was adapted accordingly. Unfortunately, there are currently no similar studies in the Czech Republic or other countries, so it is not possible to compare the results.

The pandemic undoubtedly had an impact on the behavior of individuals and on the functioning of all market players. Only future research will reveal how the situation regarding Netflix and its brand equity will develop. It may be possible to conduct a questionnaire survey in the next wave (i.e., in January 2022) and find out whether the results remain unchanged. It would certainly be very beneficial to extend the analysis to other countries.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study show that the COVID-19 pandemic in the Czech Republic did not affect brand equity in terms of its level but affected its structure. Before the COVID-19 pandemic many elements of the perceived marketing mix were statistically insignificant but during lockdown and other contact restrictions these elements became statistically significant. The newly significant elements were for example advertisement spending and availability across platforms in the case of brand loyalty, and price and recommended algorithm in the case of the dimension of perceived quality. Every dimension of brand equity was significant before the pandemic and remained significant during the pandemic. These conclusions mean to Netflix that the brand itself has now more space and a greater potential to improve its brand equity.

It was also found that although the number of people who tried Netflix increased during the pandemic, they did not become long-term users. This may point to the conclusion that brand equity in general is strong, but it is not strong enough to retain those new subscribers that joined Netflix during the pandemic.

6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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