Amazon Prime Video Yesterday, Netflix Today: Explaining Subscribers' Switching Behavior from a Retrospective

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AMAZON PRIME VIDEO YESTERDAY, NETFLIX TODAY: EXPLAINING SUBSCRIBERS’ SWITCHING BEHAVIOR FROM A RETROSPECTIVE

Research Paper

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Abstract

Video-on-demand (VoD) services attract millions of subscribers around the globe. Despite their popularity, practice shows the interesting behavior of subscribers of VoD services switching regularly between different providers, such as Netflix or Amazon Prime Video. To sustain their revenues due to subscriptions, providers need to understand the reasons why subscribers switched to other VoD services. While existing research with a prospective point of view explains that users develop switching intentions between different services because of, for instance, dissatisfaction, there is scant research on their actual switching behavior from a retrospective. By analyzing interviews with 23 subscribers that switched VoD services, findings reveal five switching causes and three switching barriers that together explain switching behavior between VoD services. With that, the findings contribute to switching research by identifying switching causes and switching barriers, zooming in on causes of subscribers’ dissatisfaction with VoD services, and studying switching behavior from a retrospective.

Keywords: Switching behavior, Retrospective, Qualitative study, Video-on-Demand service.

1 Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is, among other things, seen as one reason for a large number of individuals watching and paying for Video-on-Demand (VoD) services such as Amazon Prime Video, Netflix, and Disney+ (Goetzen, 2020). This growth is a lucky chance for the mentioned VoD service providers as they make a profit due to subscriptions that ensure their vitality in the long run. When focusing on VoD services, practical data show an interesting behavior of subscribers switching between different VoD services (Babu, 2019). For example, an individual might have had an Amazon Prime Video account last month, close that account, and start a Netflix subscription this month, while having in mind using Amazon Prime Video and Disney+ in the next months. Such behavior can pose a risk for VoD service providers, as their revenues depend directly on the number of subscriptions and the loss of subscribers to other VoD services effectively reduces their income (Reiff, 2020). A better understanding of factors that actually influenced subscribers’ switching behavior to competing VoD services from a retrospective, in the following referred to as switching causes, and of switching barriers that hindered switching behavior, can help providers to prevent subscribers from switching, which helps them to sustain their revenues.

To examine subscribers’ switching behavior to other VoD services, we have to deal with three obstacles. First, while previous research studies a range of usage behaviors including adoption, usage,
discontinuation, and resumption (Maier et al., 2021), switching behavior that implies stopping the use of a service in favor of another alternative remains an under-researched behavior (Chang et al., 2014). Existant research has reached the consensus that switching intentions, which are associated with their switching behavior, are increased by switching causes and hindered by switching barriers (Beduè et al., 2018). There exists some research explaining switching causes that influence users’ switching intentions to a cloud computing service (Bhattacherjee and Park, 2014), mobile advertisement blockers (Müller et al., 2017), social networking sites (SNS) (Liu and Xiao, 2014), or mobile payment (Wirth and Maier, 2017). All of these studies have in common that they identify context-specific switching causes and barriers contributing to users’ switching intention, such as the expected omnipresence of cloud computing in this respective context (Bhattacherjee and Park, 2014). Therefore, we propose that context-specific switching causes and barriers, relevant to the VoD context, are needed to understand VoD switching behavior.

Second, previous research agrees that dissatisfaction is one of the main switching causes influencing switching intention. While these findings emphasize that dissatisfied users are more likely to switch, they offer no detailed insights into the underlying causes of users’ dissatisfaction. Such knowledge is necessary to gain a better understanding of why subscribers are dissatisfied, which helps VoD service providers to prevent subscribers’ switching behavior.

Third, previous research takes a prospective point of view to investigate users’ switching intentions before the users actually switched to an alternative information system (IS). Though this is valuable to explain switching intentions, we know that intentions do not always result in actual behavior (Bhattacherjee and Sanford, 2009; Maier et al., 2012). It remains unclear, which switching causes actually influenced a subscriber’s switching behavior from a retrospective. Investigating switching causes from a retrospective has the power to reveal what actually influenced subscribers’ switching behavior to another VoD service and shed light on switching barriers that initially hindered their switching behavior.

Overall, this study aims at investigating subscribers’ actual switching behavior to other VoD services by identifying relevant context-specific switching causes and switching barriers from a retrospective. We aim to provide a better understanding of subscribers’ switching behavior that helps VoD service providers to prevent subscribers’ switching behavior. We ask the following research question:

**Which causes influence subscribers’ switching behavior to an alternative Video-on-Demand service and which barriers initially hinder their switching behavior from a retrospective?**

To respond to the research question, we interview 23 subscribers that switched VoD services and conduct a qualitative analysis. The results show that five switching causes and three switching barriers together explain subscribers’ switching behavior. We outline that some switching causes from previous research that influence users’ switching intentions also influence subscribers’ switching behavior in the context of VoD services. Further, we identify additional switching causes and switching barriers relevant to the context of VoD services. While previous research examines dissatisfaction as a switching cause that influences users’ switching intention, we zoom in and reveal why subscribers are dissatisfied. We extend switching research that mainly focuses on switching intentions by taking a retrospective point of view and uncovering switching causes and barriers that actually influenced switching behavior.

In the next section, we summarize previous research on VoD services and switching. We then present our methodological approach using semi-structured interviews and a qualitative analysis. Afterward, we present our results, in which we identify switching causes and switching barriers. We discuss our findings, their theoretical and practical implications, and their limitations.

## 2 Theoretical Background

In this section, we first provide the current insights into knowledge related to video-on-demand services and then present the status quo of switching research. Building on our review of literature, we then present the identified gaps in research we aim to close with this study.
2.1 Video-on-Demand Services

Previous research defines VoD as the possibility of retrieving media content of any kind at any given time (Lotz, 2009) by using Internet Protocol technology (Lotz, 2016). Thereby, VoD services offer subscribers a flexible way of watching media content with a selection from an algorithmically provided content database (Lobato, 2018). There exist four different models of VoD services: Subscription VoD gives subscribers access to all media contents of a streaming database for a periodic fee (Lindstädt-Dreusicke and Budzinski, 2020). The content is available to subscribers for online streaming and partly also for download. Netflix and, to a certain extent, Amazon use this model for their VoD services. Advertising-supported VoD describes services financed by advertisements, for instance, YouTube. Transaction VoD is a model in which users electronically rent content for a certain amount of time. Within this predefined timeframe, they can consume the content as often as desired. Finally, for electronic sell-through VoD, users pay a fee to the provider to purchase the content and use it permanently. Amazon, for instance, combines the models of subscription-, transaction- and electronic sell-through VoD in its service Amazon Prime Video.

Within this study, we focus on subscription VoD services, which offer on-demand access to media content for periodic payment (Lindstädt-Dreusicke and Budzinski, 2020). Related previous research on subscription VoD services states that subscribers’ satisfaction with the service depends on content quality, system quality, and security of personal information (Riekkinen, 2018). In turn, satisfied subscribers show a lower attitude toward piracy and tend to not consume illegal content (Riekkinen, 2018). Studies show that besides price and quality, also the time of availability of feature films influences subscribers’ perceived utility of the VoD service and, subsequently, their willingness to pay (Mann et al., 2008). The possibility to consume media content with VoD services at any given time showed that some subscribers tend to binge-watch, which refers to intensive consumption of media content over a short period of time (Schweidel and Moe, 2016). Research on this phenomenon finds that binge behavior has an influence on the intention to continuously use a specific VoD service, as subscribers deplete available content faster (Godinho de Matos and Ferreira, 2017). To better understand users’ switching behavior of IS, we next outline the status quo of switching research in the IS discipline.

2.2 Status Quo of Switching Research

From a general IS perspective, the life cycle of IS usage can be divided into four stages: adoption, continued use, discontinuance, and resumption (Maier et al., 2021). In addition to that, there is switching behavior that is defined as the substitution of a previously used IS with another primarily used IS (Chang et al., 2014). Switching behavior is a special form of IS discontinuation where the individual starts to use another IS instead. That said, switching behavior implies the substitution of a former service with or without the cutoff of existing services (Chang et al., 2014). In the context of VoD services, we focus on subscribers’ switching behavior, so their migration from one VoD service to another, whereby the subscription of the existing VoD service is terminated. The current consensus is that switching causes increase, and switching barriers hinder users’ switching intention from the former IS to another IS. Studies show that switching causes such as dissatisfaction about a used IS (Xu et al., 2014) or the expected relative usefulness of an alternative IS (Bhattacherjee and Park, 2014) increase a user’s switching intention. Contrary, switching barriers, for instance, switching costs (Liu and Xiao, 2014), stress (Maier et al., 2015), or the habit related to using the previous IS (Matt et al., 2015) hinder users’ switching intention. While we provide an overview of previous research in Table 1, we see that users’ switching intentions are studied in seven different IS contexts, so far. As switching causes and barriers are typically similar in and sensitive to each context, we next focus on each context separately and thereby introduce the studied switching causes first followed by switching barriers.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Switching causes</th>
<th>Switching barriers</th>
<th>Research perspective</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cloud computing services</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction with the used IS, relative usefulness of the alternative IS, expected omnipresence of cloud computing</td>
<td>Switching costs, security concerns</td>
<td>Prospective (switching intention)</td>
<td>Bhattacharjee and Park, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloud storage services</td>
<td>Quality of alternatives, security of alternatives</td>
<td>Satisfaction, investment size</td>
<td>Prospective (switching intention)</td>
<td>Wilms et al., 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile advertisement blockers</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction with mobile ads, relative user experience, increased performance, improved privacy protection, improved security with an ad blocker, mobile self-efficacy</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>Prospective (switching intention)</td>
<td>Müller et al., 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile self-service technologies</td>
<td>Independence of location and time, time savings, personalization, compatibility, image, multifunctionality, enjoyment</td>
<td>Privacy risk, performance risk, complexity, routine seeking</td>
<td>Prospective (switching intention)</td>
<td>Beduè et al., 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNS</td>
<td>Regret, dissatisfaction with the used IS, alternative attractiveness</td>
<td>Switching costs</td>
<td>Prospective (switching intention)</td>
<td>Chang et al., 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dissatisfaction with the used IS, relative attractiveness</td>
<td>Switching costs</td>
<td>Prospective (switching intention)</td>
<td>Liu and Xiao, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dissatisfaction with the used IS, alternative attractiveness, peer influence</td>
<td>Switching costs</td>
<td>Prospective (switching intention)</td>
<td>Xu et al., 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dissatisfaction with the used IS, alternative attractiveness, peer influence</td>
<td>Switching costs</td>
<td>Prospective (switching intention)</td>
<td>Zengyan et al., 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software ecosystems</td>
<td>Low satisfaction, low quality, low trust, high price of the used IS, alternative attractiveness</td>
<td>Subjective norm, switching costs, habit</td>
<td>Prospective (switching intention)</td>
<td>Matt et al., 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web blogs</td>
<td>Alternative attractiveness</td>
<td>Switching costs, satisfaction</td>
<td>Prospective (switching intention)</td>
<td>Zhang et al., 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Switching research in the AIS senior scholars’ basket, ICIS, ECIS, and HICSS

The seven contexts studying users’ switching intentions are research on cloud computing services, cloud storage services, mobile advertisement blockers, mobile self-service technologies, SNS, software ecosystems, and web blogs, which we explain in more detail in the following. Research on cloud computing services highlights that dissatisfaction with client-centric computing as well as the relative usefulness and expected omnipresence of cloud computing increase users’ switching intention (Bhattacharjee and Park, 2014). Contrary, switching costs and security concerns hinder users’ switching intentions. In the context of cloud storage services, existing research shows that the quality and security of alternatives increase users’ switching intention, while satisfaction with and the time and effort invested in the cloud storage service in use hinders their switching intention (Wilms et al., 2018). Researcher around mobile advertisement blocker show that the dissatisfaction with mobile advertisements and the relative user experience, increased performance, improved privacy protection, and improved security when using a mobile advertisement blocker as well as mobile self-efficacy increase users’ switching intention to using a mobile advertisement blocker (Müller et al., 2017). In the context of mobile self-service technologies existing research finds that the switching causes independence of location and time, time savings, personalization, compatibility, image, multifunctionality, and enjoyment increase the switching intention (Beduè et al., 2018). In contrast, privacy risk, performance risk, complexity, and routine seeking depict switching barriers that hinder users’ switching intention. Studies investigating SNS show that regret (Chang et al., 2014) and dissatisfaction with the used SNS (Xu et al., 2014), as well as the attractiveness of an alternative SNS (Zengyan et al., 2009), or peer influence (Xu et al., 2014) increase users’ switching intention. Contrary, switching costs hinder their switching intention (Liu and Xiao, 2014). Previous research on software
ecosystems finds that on the one hand, the low satisfaction, low quality, low trust, and high price of the used software ecosystem and the attractiveness of an alternative software ecosystem increase users’ switching intention (Matt et al., 2015). On the other hand, subjective norm, switching costs, and habit hinder their switching intention (Matt et al., 2015). In the context of web blogs, research shows that the attractiveness of an alternative web blog increases users’ switching intention. Contrary, switching costs and satisfaction with the used web blog hinder users’ switching intention (Zhang et al., 2008).

In general, previous switching research in different contexts mainly focuses on switching causes that increase users’ switching intention and switching barriers that hinder their switching intention (see Table 1). Therefore, all of these studies take a prospective point of view, which means that they investigate switching causes before the actual switching behavior to an alternative IS takes place and focus on investigating users’ switching intention (see Table 1).

2.3 Research gaps

Our review of existing switching literature shows several gaps in research. First, there is scant research on switching behavior in the context of VoD services. While extant research in other contexts offers insights into switching causes that influence the switching intention, our review of the literature indicates that there are differences across contexts. For instance, the switching cause of improved privacy protection is relevant in the context of mobile advertisement blockers (Müller et al., 2017), but there is no indication that it also influences users’ switching intention in the context of SNS (Xu et al., 2014) or web blogs (Zhang et al., 2008). These contextualized findings from previous research on switching only apply to a limited extent to the context of VoD services. Thus, it is necessary to investigate context-specific switching causes and switching barriers that influence subscribers’ switching behavior to an alternative VoD service.

Second, our review highlights that multiple studies consider predominantly dissatisfaction with the used IS as the main switching cause influencing users’ switching intention (Bhattacherjee and Park, 2014). While this shows that dissatisfied users have switching intentions, it offers no detailed insights into the underlying causes of the dissatisfaction, which finally influence user’s switching behavior. We know from previous research that, for instance, content quality influences subscribers’ satisfaction with VoD services (Riekkinen, 2018), but, so far, research in the context of VoD services does not investigate dissatisfaction or the reasons why subscribers are dissatisfied. Since switching research highlights the influence of dissatisfaction on users’ switching intention, we propose that dissatisfaction also influences switching behavior in the context of VoD services. To gain a better understanding of switching behavior in the context of VoD services, we zoom in on the underlying switching causes of subscribers’ dissatisfaction with the used VoD service that influence their switching behavior.

Third, switching research mainly investigates switching causes that increase the switching intention, and switching barriers that hinder the switching intention from a prospective point of view (Bhattacherjee and Park, 2014; Chang et al., 2014). This means that these studies investigate the influence of switching causes and switching barriers on users’ switching intention before users actually switch to an alternative IS. While this research offers many insights into switching causes and barriers that explain switching intention, we know that intentions are seldom translated into behavior (Bhattacherjee and Sanford, 2009), because individuals tend to stick with their status quo (Samuelson and Zeckhauser, 1988; Laumer et al., 2016). This means that subscribers with switching intentions to an alternative VoD service might not actually perform their intended switch. Therefore, investigating switching behavior from a retrospective helps to gain a better understanding of switching causes, because then subscribers already performed their switching behavior and are aware of what actually influenced their switching behavior. Further, our retrospective approach offers insights into switching barriers that initially hindered switching behavior.
3 Methodology

In this section, we outline our data collection and analysis process. Thereby, we explain how we collect the interviews and deduce switching causes and switching barriers.

3.1 Data Collection

With the objective to understand the switching causes and switching barriers of subscribers of VoD services from the retrospective, we follow the sampling strategy to interview subscribers that switched from a previously used VoD service to an alternative VoD service. These subscribers already made their first experiences with the new VoD service, and, thus, can give us insights into the switching causes that influenced their switching behavior to an alternative VoD service and switching barriers that initially hindered their switching behavior from a retrospective. We reached out for possible interviewees who match these criteria on multiple social media groups about VoD services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. Therefore, we interview 23 subscribers that switched VoD services in the course of this study, which is a sufficient sample size for a qualitative study (Collins et al., 2006). After 23 interviews no new information emerged, which shows that we reach a sufficient level of saturation (Salo et al., 2020). The interviewees’ age ranges between 18 and 55, their biological sex is equally divided, and one-third of the interviewees have kids. The interviews are conducted as semi-structured qualitative interviews respecting the established guidelines (Myers and Newman, 2007; Schultze and Avital, 2011). All the interviews are recorded with the permission of the interviewees and transcribed for the qualitative analysis. Each interview is about ten to 20 minutes long.

3.2 Data Analysis

Following the suggestion of recent IS studies (Reis et al., 2020), we create our interview guideline based on the recommendations of Myers and Newman (2007). The interview guideline consists of four sections: Opening, introduction, key questions, and closing (see Appendix Table 2). In the first section, we introduce ourselves as the interviewers and ask for permission to record the interview. The second section has the purpose to explain the interview procedure to the interviewees and determine details about the previously used VoD service. Additionally, we ask questions about the VoD service that the interviewees have switched to and gather further information about the interviewees’ usage behavior. In the third section, we ask the interviewees to compare the previous VoD service with the service that they have switched to and about their dissatisfaction with the previous service in order to grasp the underlying causes of their dissatisfaction. Subsequently, we ask in detail how the switching between VoD services has taken place, which causes have been decisive for the interviewees switching behavior to an alternative VoD service, and which barriers initially hindered their switching behavior. Further, we ask for the interviewees’ future usage intentions, for instance, if the interviewee has a switching intention back to the previous VoD service or quit the usage of VoD services completely. The fourth section offers the interviewees the possibility to add further information regarding the topic.

In line with previous qualitative research (Stein et al., 2015), we follow the coding scheme presented by Myers (2019). In the first step, we identify statements that describe subscribers’ switching behavior to an alternative VoD service. Thereby, we focus on statements that are mentioned directly related to the subscriber’s switching behavior. Further, we identify statements describing what initially hindered subscribers’ switching behavior, and, likewise, focus on statements that directly describe how the switching behavior was hindered. In the second step, we use descriptive coding. For instance, we code the following statement with the descriptive code additional payment for specific content: “[...] because they [new VoD service] always bring out a lot of new stuff, so every month there are new series, and at Amazon [old VoD service], it was always the same somehow”. Next, we use interpretive coding to group similar statements together (Myers, 2019), so that we code the descriptive code from the example with the interpretive code perceived over-expensiveness. In the third step, we categorize the coded statements to switching causes and switching barriers. We code statements that describe what influenced subscribers’ switching behavior to an alternative VoD service as switching causes, for instance, perceived over-expensiveness, and consequently statements that initially hindered subscriber’s
switching behavior as switching barriers. To ensure objectivity, two members of the research team coded the items independently. A coding example is included in the appendix (see Appendix Table 3).

4 Results

In this section, we synthesize the findings from the interviews and describe the switching causes and switching barriers related to the previously used VoD service in detail. We identify five switching causes that actually influenced subscribers’ switching behavior from the previously used VoD service to an alternative VoD service. These five switching causes reflect the underlying causes for subscribers’ dissatisfaction with the previous VoD service, which finally influenced their switching behavior to an alternative VoD service. We then identify three switching barriers related to the previously used VoD service that initially hindered subscribers’ switching behavior to an alternative VoD service (see Figure 1).

![Diagram of switching causes and barriers](image)

**Figure 1. Summary of findings classified to switching causes and switching barriers**

4.1 Switching Causes

We identify the five switching causes perceived content depletion, perceived difficulty of use, perceived incompatibility, perceived over-expensiveness, and social influence. All five switching causes, which describe the underlying causes for subscribers’ dissatisfaction with the previously used VoD services, are mentioned by the interviewees directly related to switching behavior. We propose that these switching causes influence subscribers’ switching behavior to an alternative VoD service (see Figure 1). We next present the five switching causes identified by the described coding procedure.

**Perceived content depletion.** The perception that a VoD service’s content is depleted describes subscribers’ impression that it lacks attracting content in terms of, for instance, TV shows or series, or that all of the content appealing to the subscriber is already depleted. This perception influenced subscribers’ switching behavior to an alternative VoD service, which from their perception offers more or better content.

**Perceived difficulty of use.** This perception describes subscribers’ feeling that a VoD service is complicated to use, or the handling of the VoD service is not intuitive. It also includes the impression of subscribers that recommended TV shows and series do not meet their taste and influences their switching behavior to another VoD service that is easier to use or has better recommendations.
Switching Behavior from a Retrospective

Perceived incompatibility. This switching cause reflects the perception of subscribers that they cannot use the VoD service on some of their preferred devices, such as the used Smart TV. Therefore, subscribers perceive the VoD services as incompatible, which influences switching to an alternative VoD service that is more compatible and supports the subscriber’s devices.

Perceived over-expensiveness. This switching cause describes subscribers’ perception that a VoD service is too expensive for the value it offers. It includes the perception that the fee of a VoD service, in general, is too expensive, or that appealing content needs to be paid extra. This influences the switching behavior to an alternative VoD service that is cheaper or offers all available content for a flat fee.

Social influence. This switching cause refers to the influence that important others such as a subscriber’s family members and acquaintances have on their switching behavior. The interviewees state that they switched to another VoD service because their friends or colleagues were talking about that service or exclusive content they were not able to watch. Therefore, they switched to this VoD service to be able to take part in conversations about it.

4.2 Switching barriers

We identify the three switching barriers habit, perceived content exclusiveness, and perceived social obligations. All of the switching barriers are mentioned by the interviewees in such a way that they initially hindered their switching behavior. Therefore, we propose that the switching barriers hinder subscribers’ switching behavior (see Figure 1). We next describe the three switching barriers in detail.

Habit. This switching barrier describes that subscribers get used to watching a specific VoD service, and therefore wait for new content to be available at this VoD service instead of switching to another. This habit hinders their switching behavior to an alternative VoD service.

Perceived content exclusiveness. This perception describes that available exclusive content hinders subscribers’ switching behavior to another VoD service. Subscribers want to finish watching exclusive content before switching to another VoD service and, therefore, the perceived exclusiveness of content hinders their switching behavior.

Perceived social obligations. This switching barrier describes the social obligations that come along with sharing a VoD service subscription. Subscribers that share their accounts with members of their family, friends, or colleagues might feel pressured to not cancel this joint subscription to switch to another VoD service. Therefore, this switching barrier hinders subscribers’ switching behavior to an alternative VoD service.

5 Discussion

VoD service providers, such as Amazon Prime Video or Netflix, attract millions of subscribers around the globe, especially in times shaped by the outbreak of COVID-19 (Goetz, 2020). Since VoD service providers are dependent on their subscriber numbers to make a profit, it is of practical relevance for them to gain insights into switching causes and switching barriers and, thereby, enable a better understanding of why subscribers switch to alternative VoD services. By conducting a qualitative analysis based on interviews with 23 subscribers that switched VoD services, we provide insights into switching causes and barriers relevant to the context of VoD services, zoom in on switching causes that influence switching behavior instead of focusing on dissatisfaction in general, and take a retrospective point of view to get to the bottom of switching causes that actually influence switching behavior, and switching barriers that initially hinder switching behavior.

5.1 Research implications

With this study, we contribute to literature tackling switching research in the following three ways: First, we contribute by identifying context-specific switching causes and barriers that together influence subscribers’ switching behavior in the context of VoD services. Second, we contribute by zooming in
Switching Behavior from a Retrospective

on causes of subscribers’ dissatisfaction that influence subscribers’ switching behavior. Related to that and third, we contribute with a retrospective point of view on subscribers’ switching behavior. We present these contributions in more detail below.

So far, switching research studies different contexts such as software ecosystems (Matt et al., 2015) or cloud storage services (Wilms et al., 2018). Thereby, research does a great job in providing reasons that are relevant to each of the contexts and it is postulated that context-specific switching causes and barriers influence switching behavior. As there is no research so far explaining switching behavior in the context of VoD services, we interview 23 subscribers that switched VoD service, analyze the results and contribute with five switching causes that influence subscribers’ switching behavior to an alternative VoD service and three switching barriers that hinder subscribers’ switching behavior. Our results show that there are switching causes and barriers that are well-known from previous research that also hold to other contexts, and that there are context-specific ones. First, we see that perceived over-expensiveness, habit (Matt et al., 2015), and social influence (Zengyan et al., 2009; Xu et al., 2014) are also relevant to other contexts. Second, perceived content depletion, perceived difficulty of use, perceived incompatibility, perceived content exclusiveness, and perceived social obligations are not investigated in previous switching research. With that, we identify context-specific switching causes and switching barriers, and show that switching research, so far, is not sufficient to comprehensively explain subscribers’ switching behavior in the context of VoD services. In sum, we contribute with these results to literature on VoD services that VoD switching behavior is influenced by switching causes and barriers that are known from previous research but there are also context-specific switching causes and barriers.

Related to that, previous switching research concludes that dissatisfaction with a used IS is one of the main switching causes influencing users’ switching intention (Bhattacherjee and Park, 2014; Xu et al., 2014). While these findings help to understand that dissatisfied users have switching intentions to an alternative IS, there is still room to examine why users are dissatisfied. By taking an exploratory approach, we zoom in on the subscribers’ dissatisfaction and pin down the specific underlying switching causes. While general dissatisfaction with a VoD service as a switching cause is hard to grasp for VoD service providers, the identified switching causes can be targeted more easily. We offer insights into underlying switching causes, for instance, perceived incompatibility, which influence subscribers’ switching behavior. With that, we contribute to switching research by offering detailed switching causes that influence switching behavior instead of focusing on the broad and general concept of dissatisfaction with VoD services.

Switching research, so far, exclusively uses a prospective point of view. This means that research provides insights into why individuals have switching intentions by talking to or surveying individuals who think about switching to an alternative IS in the nearer future (Chang et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2014). Due to knowledge saying that only a limited number of individuals with high intentions do translate this into actual behavior (Bhattacherjee and Sanford, 2009) and that beliefs change after having used an IS (Bhattacherjee and Premkumar, 2004), we complement previous research by taking a retrospective point of view on switching behavior. Thereby, we analyze switching causes that actually influenced subscribers’ switching behavior to an alternative VoD service and switching barriers that initially hindered their switching behavior. On the one hand, we identify the switching causes perceived over-expensiveness and social influence, and the switching barrier habit, which are also relevant to users’ switching intentions in other contexts from a prospective point of view (see Table 1). On the other hand, we identify additional switching causes and barriers, which together explain subscribers’ switching behavior from a retrospective. With these results, we contribute to switching research two-folded by taking a retrospective point of view. First, we show that some switching causes and barriers that influence the switching intention in other contexts also influence subscribers’ switching behavior to an alternative VoD service from a retrospective. Second, we identify additional switching causes and barriers that influence switching behavior from a retrospective point of view, which are, so far, not considered in switching research investigating switching intentions from a prospective point of view.
5.2 Practical Implications

From a practical point of view, the results offer insights for VoD service providers into how to maintain subscriber numbers and avoid subscribers from switching to competitors, which helps them to sustain their revenues. Based on the identified switching causes and barriers, we derive suggestions for practice in the following.

VoD service providers should be aware of switching causes that influence subscribers’ switching behavior to an alternative VoD service. With the regular provision of new attractive content, VoD service providers can in advance avoid subscribers from switching to competitors due to perceived content depletion. In addition to that, it is important to ensure the ease of use and intuitive design of VoD services, since the perceived difficulty of use can also influence subscribers’ switching behavior to an alternative VoD service. To counteract perceived incompatibility, VoD service providers should ensure that the most common streaming devices, for instance, popular smart TVs, are supported by their VoD service. Making pricing models transparent, such that subscribers can conceive the content included in the monthly fee and which content needs to be paid extra, can avoid losing subscribers to competitors because of perceived over-expensiveness. By targeting and avoiding these switching causes, VoD service providers can prevent their subscribers from switching to alternative VoD services, and, thus, sustain their subscribers and consequently their revenues.

The awareness of switching barriers can help VoD service providers to initially hinder subscribers’ switching behavior. Building up exclusive content can help them to retain subscribers, for instance, if the subscribers cannot watch their favorite TV show at an alternative VoD service they would like to switch to. Offering the possibility to share accounts across family and friends also helps to build up perceived social obligations and, thus, hinders subscribers’ switching behavior. Especially in times shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying restrictions, VoD service providers could think about adding new features to enforce perceived social obligations, for instance, by enabling virtually shared streaming sessions among family and friends that use the same VoD service as a replacement of personal meetups and cinema visits. Switching barriers help subscribers to sustain revenues in the short term by hindering subscribers’ switching behavior, while they can target the switching causes to prevent subscribers’ switching behavior in the long run.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

This research is limited in some ways. First, we conduct interviews with 23 subscribers that switched their subscription VoD service. Since we focus on the subscription VoD services Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, we investigate one of the four existing models of VoD services. For other models, for instance, advertising-supported VoD services such as YouTube, different switching causes and switching barriers might be relevant. Second, we use an exploratory qualitative approach in this study, as it is suited to identify the switching causes and barriers that together explain subscribers’ switching behavior. Still, by taking a qualitative approach we cannot explain if the switching barriers, in addition to the influence on switching behavior we investigate in this study, also influence the relationship between switching causes and switching behavior. Third, we focus on switching behavior in terms of terminating the usage of one VoD service and starting to use an alternative VoD service instead. Contrary to this study, previous research also considers switching intentions to an alternative IS without cutting of the previously used IS (Chang et al., 2014), which implies the parallel usage of multiple equivalent IS. The identified switching causes influence subscribers’ switching behavior away from a used VoD service and, therefore, might not apply in the same way to subscribers switching to an alternative VoD service while keeping up the previously used subscription.

Future research taking quantitative approaches could validate and approve our model to contribute to a better understanding of how the identified switching causes and barriers together influence subscribers’ switching behavior. With this, future studies should investigate whether switching barriers also influence the relationship between switching causes and switching behavior and show if the identified switching causes and barriers differ in their influence on switching behavior. Therefore, future research
Switching Behavior from a Retrospective

should collect data from subscribers who recently switched from one to another VoD and analyze these data by either studying correlations between switching barriers, switching causes, and switching behavior, e.g. by using structural equation modeling (Hair et al., 2017) or by studying configurations of how switching barriers and switching causes together form switching behavior, e.g. by using qualitative comparative analysis (Mattke et al., 2020). Since practical data indicate that some subscribers tend to have multiple subscriptions of VoD services at the same time (Statista, 2020), future research in the context of VoD services might investigate subscribers’ parallel usage behavior. Thereby, the results from this study depict a suited entry point for research on parallel usage in the context of VoD services. The identified switching barriers, for instance, might influence subscribers to stick to a VoD service, while switching causes make them subscribe to an alternative VoD service in the meantime. In addition to that, there is also room for future research studying whether specific events, such as a VoD service provider publishing controversial content (Shaw, 2020), also influence switching behavior to an alternative VoD service. Building a bridge between prospective switching research and this retrospective study, future research could apply longitudinal studies to investigate if prospective expectations about a new VoD service are actually confirmed after switching to the new VoD service. Since recent research emphasizes that users often resume to a previously used IS after a while (Maier et al., 2021), future studies could also examine resumption behavior in the context of VoD services, and investigate, for instance, why subscribers who switched from Amazon Prime Video to Netflix, switch back to Amazon Prime.

6 Conclusion

Practical data show that subscribers often switch between different VoD services. To sustain their revenues by avoiding subscribers from switching to alternative VoD services, providers need to understand which switching causes influence subscribers’ switching behavior, and which switching barriers hinder subscribers’ switching behavior. By analyzing interviews with 23 subscribers that switched their VoD service, we identify five switching causes and three switching barriers. With these results, we contribute threefold to research on VoD services and switching behavior. First, we show that there are switching causes and switching barriers from previous research that apply to the context of VoD services, and context-specific switching causes and barriers. Second, we zoom in on the general concept of dissatisfaction and shed light on underlying switching causes of subscribers’ dissatisfaction with a used VoD service that influence switching behavior. Third, we supplement previous studies that take a prospective point of view and examine users’ switching intentions by investigating switching behavior from a retrospective. Thereby, we show that some switching causes and barriers that explain users’ switching intention, also apply to actual switching behavior, and identify, so far, not considered switching causes and switching barriers.

7 References


Switching Behavior from a Retrospective


## 8 Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>- Introduction of interviewer and study background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>- Explanation of the interview procedure and the reason for the interview&lt;br&gt;VoD service&lt;br&gt;Which VoD service are you using at the moment?&lt;br&gt;Which VoD service did you use before?&lt;br&gt;How regularly do you use the VoD service?&lt;br&gt;Do you share your VoD service account? Why or why not?&lt;br&gt;What is the pricing model of the currently used VoD service?&lt;br&gt;What are the main reasons for you to use VoD services?&lt;br&gt;How important is it for you which VoD service your friends and acquaintances use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key questions</td>
<td>- Previous VoD service vs. new VoD service&lt;br&gt;What was your experience with the previous VoD service and how would you rate it? (satisfied/dissatisfied)&lt;br&gt;What are the differences in comparison to the new VoD service?&lt;br&gt;What about the previous VoD service did you like or dislike?&lt;br&gt;Does the new provider have similar or different features? Which ones?&lt;br&gt;Switching of VoD service&lt;br&gt;Can you please explain the process of switching from the previous VoD service to the new one? (starting with the first thought about switching to the actual switch)&lt;br&gt;What were the main reasons for you switching VoD service?&lt;br&gt;What was the cause for you to stop using the previous VoD service?&lt;br&gt;What convinced you to switch to the new VoD service?&lt;br&gt;What initially hindered your switching behavior?&lt;br&gt;How would you describe the effort to switch VoD service?&lt;br&gt;Future usage intentions&lt;br&gt;How satisfied are you with switching VoD services?&lt;br&gt;Have you thought about switching back or quitting the usage of VoD services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>- Would you like to add something that was not considered enough in the interview or do you have further information that you would like to share?&lt;br&gt;- Thank you for the interview</td>
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</table>

*Table 2. Interview guideline*
Switching Behavior from a Retrospective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data examples</th>
<th>Descriptive coding</th>
<th>Interpretive coding</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“So, what I didn't like about Prime was that too many things that were good had to be paid for, that you had to pay in addition to the normal content. That simply disturbed and annoyed me”.</td>
<td>Additional payment for specific content</td>
<td>Perceived over-expensiveness</td>
<td>Switching cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“And that's why I decided that Netflix is more suitable for me and I see more entertainment for me there, because they always bring out a lot of new stuff, so every month there are new series, and at Amazon, it was always the same somehow”</td>
<td>No attractive content available</td>
<td>Perceived content depletion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The kids have their series and sometimes we can't stop it [a subscription] because of the kids. So we can never stop [a subscription] as fast as I'd like to”.</td>
<td>Shared account cannot be quitsed</td>
<td>Perceived social obligations</td>
<td>Switching barrier</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3. Coding scheme example*