

Netflix Content Popularity
June 23, 2022
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Summary

Understanding the cultural zeitgeist and knowing what people will click on, view, and share is the lifeblood of many streaming services. Over the years Netflix has increased the number of titles it's adding to its library, especially when it comes to films. In 2019 alone, Netflix added 1,424 films to its library. Meanwhile that same year they added only 592 TV shows. So other than just adding more content, how does Netflix ensure they will have an audience that will want to watch what they have?

When looking at the type of genres Netflix features in its library, one of the more notable trends in recent years is that Netflix is focusing on International, Drama, and Comedic content. These three genres make up the largest share of content added within the last three years. A potential reason behind this strategy is that this is what Netflix has found to be most popular amongst its audience. It's worth noting that these three genres are also amongst Netflix's top 10 most popular TV shows and films. Another strategy that Netflix has keyed in on is the timing of their releases. There is a relation between when people view content on Netflix and when the company releases the majority of its content. It seems as though Netflix favors releasing content towards the end of the year and this is also when there is the highest number of average hours viewed per week. While there are specific tactics Netflix can take to increase viewership there are also outside factors that often influence a title's popularity, word of mouth being one of those. Often times it helps build awareness so that over time viewership continues to grow which then helps contribute to the growth experienced in subsequent releases. Netflix will need to continue to monitor how these factors evolve over time and find ways to differentiate themselves from the competition if they wish to continue to attract new viewers.

Netflix Genres

In 2020, International Movies, Dramas, and Comedies made up 54% of film content being added to Netflix's library.

Figure 1.

Top Film Genres Added to Netflix in 2020

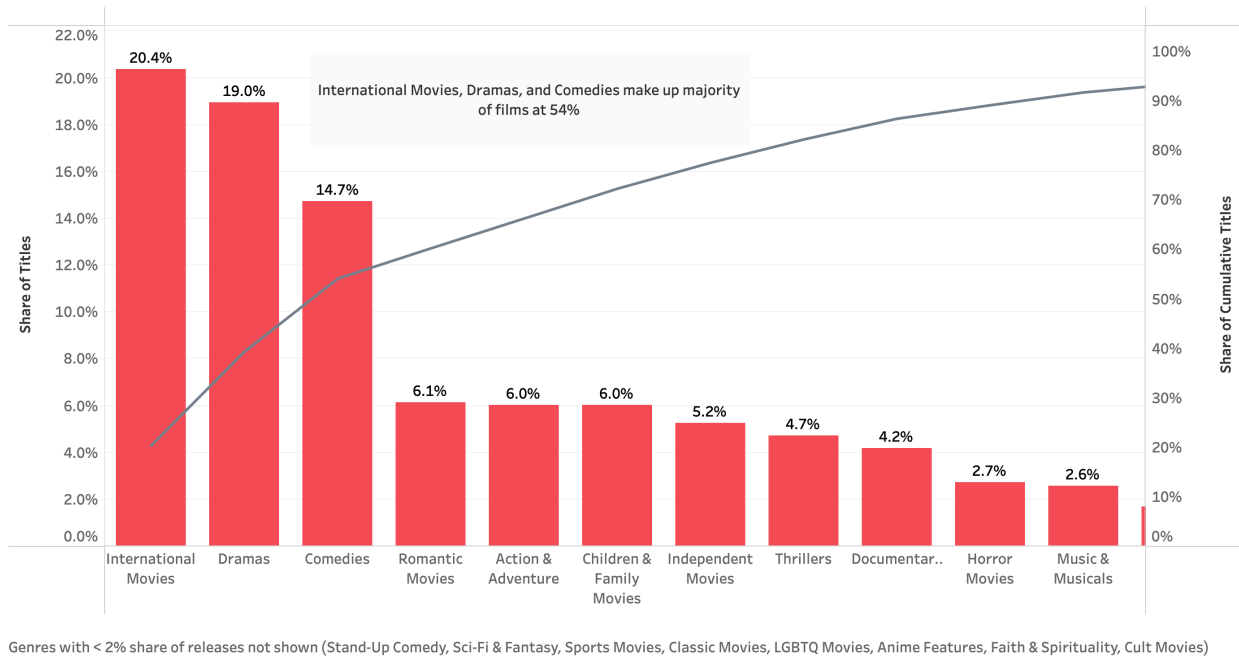


Figure 1 shows the share of films added to Netflix in 2020 by genre. To see full list of genres, see Appendix Table 1.

This hasn't always been the case. It wasn't until the last three years from 2018 through 2020 that these three genres made up the majority of new titles being added to Netflix. Before that there were other genres such as Stand-Up Comedies, Documentaries, and Children & Family Movies that made up a larger share of titles being added. Back in 2013, International Movies and Dramas were not even available film categories that Netflix was adding to its library. Instead, it was Stand-Up Comedies that made up the largest share, representing 40% of films added in 2013. This is a 95% decrease when compared to its makeup in 2020 where they represent only 2% of films added.

Figure 2.

The Decline of Stand Up Comedies, Documentaries, and Children and Family Films

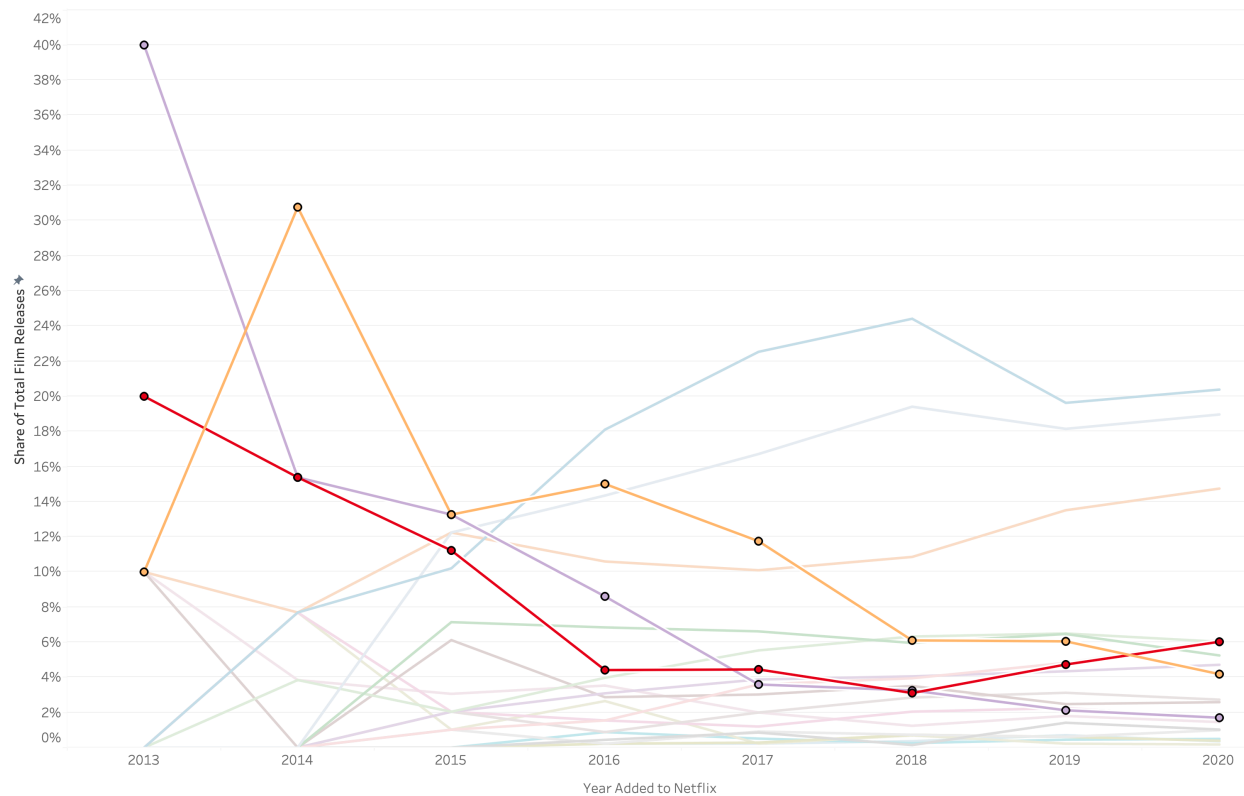


Figure 2 shows the share of total film genres per year added to Netflix between 2013 and 2020

When it comes to TV show genres being added to Netflix, there is slightly more variety of genres being added. In 2020 there were 4 different genres that made up over half of all content:

- International TV Shows: 20.7%
- TV Dramas: 12.3%
- TV Comedies: 9.4%
- Kids' TV: 8.1%

For the top four genres you don't see as big of a drop off in share of TV show genres like you do with the top three film genres. Instead after Kids' TV, it is followed closely by Crime TV Shows, Docuseries and Reality TV at 7.6% and 6.0% respectively. So, what is the reasoning behind these specific genres being added to Netflix? When it comes to what's popular in Netflix, International Movies, Dramas, and Action & Adventure make up 50% of top 10 films.

Figure 3.

Top 10 Film Genres

Based on share of genres that showed up in Netflix Top 10 list

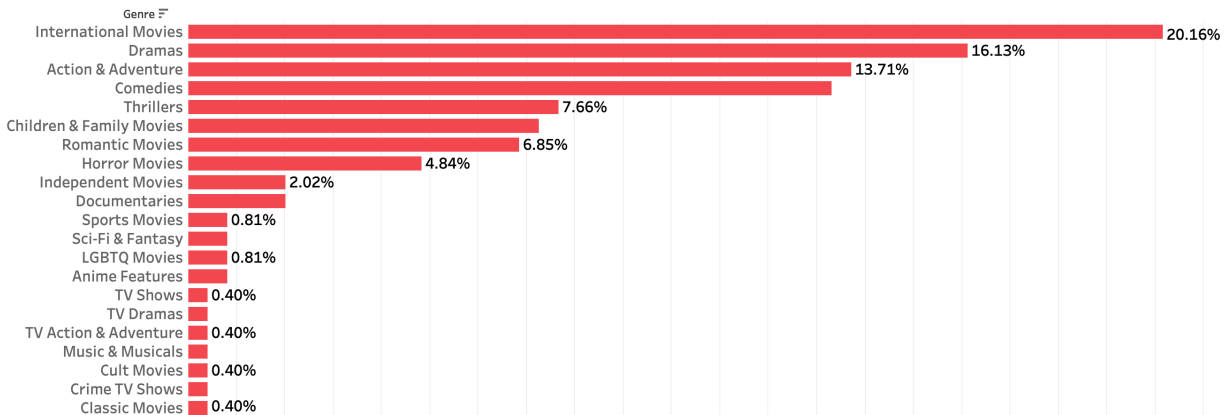


Figure 3 shows film genres ranked in descending order by the share of number of times they showed up in Netflix top 10 list between 7/4/2021 through 4/17/2022

Meanwhile, Dramas, International TV Shows, Crime TV, and Action & Adventure make up 56% of the top 10 TV shows. This means that Netflix may likely be adjusting the content it adds to its library so that it better aligns with what its audience is more likely to watch.

Seasonality of Viewership

When trying to understand why content becomes popular on Netflix, it's important to take into consideration how the audience consumes content, with seasonality being one of those important factors. There's a term known as "Summer Blockbuster" which is used to describe the films that large film studios release during the summer. The expectation is that these particular films will draw in a large audience. They choose to release these films during the summer as they hope to capitalize on more people going to the movie theaters. The weather is nicer in the summer so more people are doing things outside their home as well as the fact that with children being out of school parents are looking for activities to occupy their time with. When viewing the total number of average weekly hours viewed per month for titles in the top 10 list there seems to be a similar type of phenomenon except it's not in the summer but later in the year, particularly in the month of October, during which more content is being viewed on Netflix. If we take a closer look at this trend, we can identify what may be helping contribute to this pattern.

In Figure 4, we look at the average number of releases Netflix added per month between 2017 and 2020. When compared against the average number of weekly hours viewed per month, we see that there is a spike in both viewership and content being added in October. What is also evident is that during the middle of the year between April through July there is consistently a smaller number of average titles being added. There isn't top 10 data available for the months of May and June, but if we follow the trend of declining viewership starting in February, it is likely the month of May and June also have low viewership.

Figure 4.

Monthly Trends - Content Quantity vs. Viewership

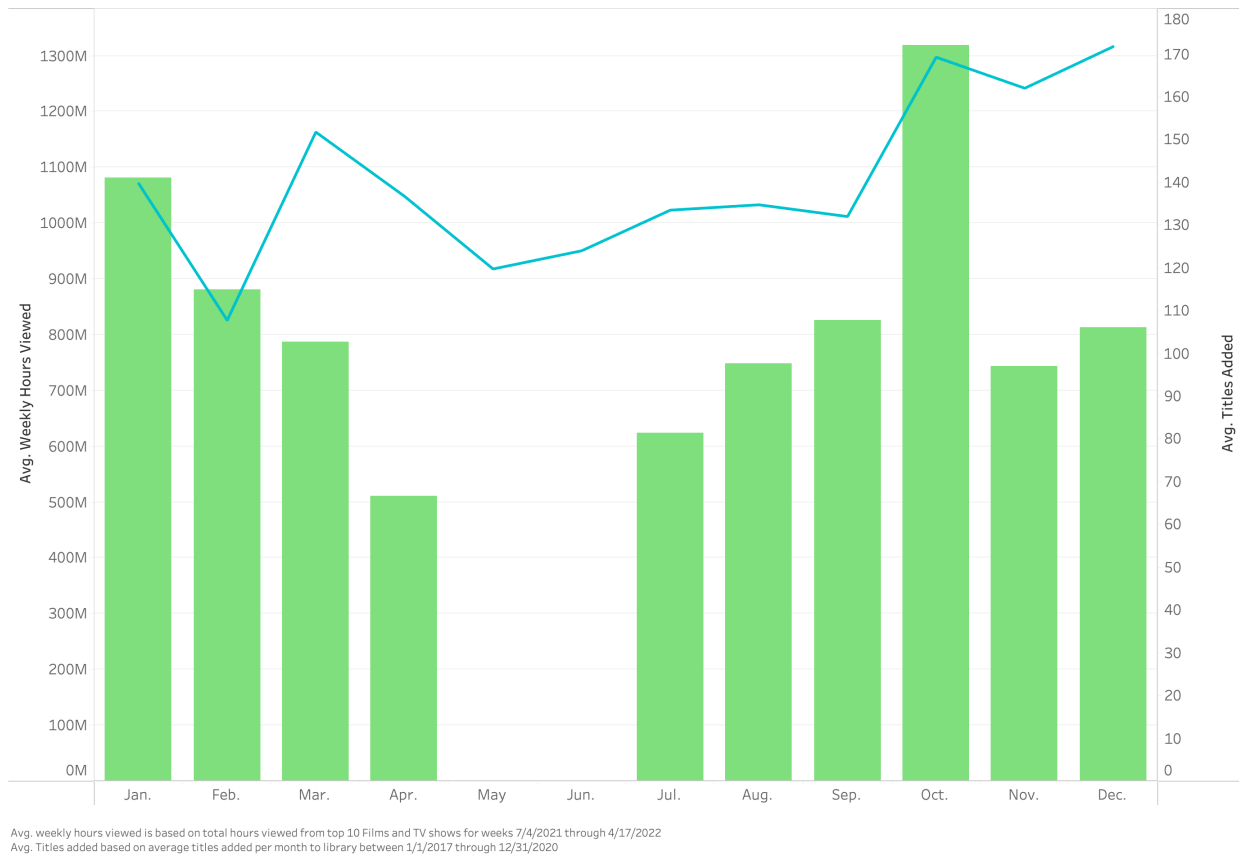


Figure 4 shows the average number of titles Netflix added per month between 2017 and 2020 trended against the average number of weekly hours viewed per month in the top 10 film and TV show titles

The Power of Word of Mouth

Now just because people may expect there to be new content during a particular time of the year it doesn't guarantee that they will automatically sign into Netflix and choose to start watching something. Often times knowing about a new show or film beforehand will help increase the likelihood of them watching it. Previously the way in which we learned about new content is through official publications when reading reviews or even in person when discussing with family or in "watercooler" chats with coworkers. With the introduction of social media, this type of recommendation process has become much more collaborative and accessible. As people watch shows or films, they will often share their thoughts, feelings, and theories online on social media. Specific TV shows will often be seen as trending topics on Twitter or you'll often see videos uploaded on YouTube showing "reaction videos", where people film their reaction as they watch a show or film. This is free publicity for a show or film and helps increase overall awareness and potential audience size. Social media has become a megaphone for word-of-mouth marketing and is helping make content more accessible and popular. When

looking at the top 10 TV shows with multiple seasons, 45% of them have had multiple seasons trending at the same time within a nine-month period. As time goes on and new seasons are released its not only the original audience from the prior seasons that continue to watch but also new viewers. As a result, you'll have a subgroup of individuals who only just started watching a TV show for the first time (and will likely be starting from the first seasons) as well as the original audience that began watching the TV show when it was first released thus creating this scenario of multiple seasons trending at once.

Figure 5.

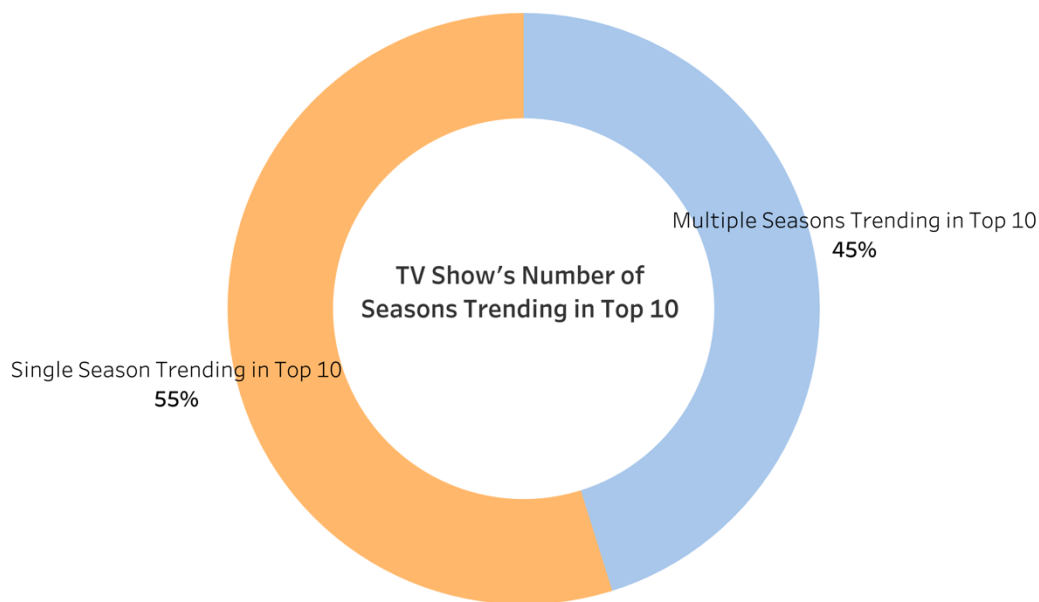


Figure 5 shows the breakout of TV shows (with multiple seasons) in the top 10 list broken up by those that have more than one season trending vs. those that only had one season trending between 7/4/2021 through 4/17/2022

Conclusion

There are multiple factors that can help influence a title's popularity. With the ever-increasing number of streaming services available that are in direct competition with Netflix, such as Prime Video, Apple TV, and Hulu, Netflix will need to continue to focus in on the type of content their audience enjoys viewing and when they are most likely to view. And while there are other factors that will help influence viewership, they should also take into consideration the power of social media and word of mouth and how they can use that to their advantage. Their focus on these areas have helped drive viewership but they will need to continue monitor how these areas change and how they can differentiate them from the competition.

Appendix

In this analysis we define “popular” as films or TV shows that are in Netflix’s top 10 list. This list contains the titles that have had the highest number of hours viewed per week; contains data for the timeframe of 7/4/2021 through 4/17/2022.

Information about a title’s genre, number of seasons, or when it was added to Netflix is based on Netflix title data. This data contains information for the timeframe of 1/1/2008 through 9/25/2021 (partial 2021 data was excluded from yearly/monthly trend analyses). Records with missing “date added” data were excluded from “date added” analyses (10 records total). Netflix titles can have up to 3 genres, when analyzing genres all values were counted individually.

To determine how many shows had multiple seasons trending, the Netflix top 10 data was joined to the Netflix title data. It was assumed that any shows in the top 10 that did not exist in the Netflix title data were newer and likely didn’t have more than one season since the top 10 list starts in July of 2021 and the Netflix historical title data has releases through September of 2021. Of the 113 TV shows remaining in the top 10 list, a total of 62 TV shows were confirmed to have multiple seasons. This information was determined based on if they existed within the Netflix title data and had an indication of the season’s duration being greater than one or if they had multiple seasons in the top 10 list.

Table 1. (Full List Share of Genres Added to Netflix in 2020)

Genre	Share of Total Films
International Movies	20.38%
Dramas	18.96%
Comedies	14.75%
Romantic Movies	6.13%
Children & Family Movies	6.03%
Action & Adventure	6.03%
Independent Movies	5.25%
Thrillers	4.71%
Documentaries	4.18%
Horror Movies	2.73%
Music & Musicals	2.59%
Stand-Up Comedy	1.70%
Sci-Fi & Fantasy	1.67%
Sports Movies	1.45%
Classic Movies	1.03%
LGBTQ Movies	0.99%
Anime Features	0.50%

Faith & Spirituality	0.39%
Cult Movies	0.35%
Movies	0.18%

Limitations

Due to the limited timeframe of the top 10 list, the months of May and June are not included. Also, due to the top 10 data only containing data for the most recent year only a 3-month period between 7/4/2021 through 9/25/2021 coincides with the Netflix title data. As a result, those in the top 10 list that were recently added to Netflix and fall outside of the window that coincides between both datasets are unable to have additional information appended. Out of the 630 titles in the top 10 list, 274 (43%) have an entry in the Netflix title data. TV shows have a higher number of titles in the Netflix title data than films, this is likely due to the fact that the shows in the top 10 are not completely new and have had prior seasons whereas the films are completely new to Netflix and as a result wouldn't exist in the historical data.

Table 2.

Category	Total Titles in Top 10	Total Titles in Top 10 & Netflix title data	Share of Titles in Top 10 & Netflix title data
Films (English)	199	70	35%
Films (Non-English)	177	49	28%
TV (English)	144	99	68%
TV (Non-English)	110	56	51%

Figure 6.

Another factor that can influence a title's popularity is the number of films or TV shows its competing against. Over the last 5 years Netflix has been adding more than twice as many film titles as TV show titles. While films do have a greater likelihood to be in the top 10 for only one week (39% of films), in comparison to TV shows (33% of TV shows), it's not clear whether the volume of content is contributing to this.

Titles Added to Netflix by Year

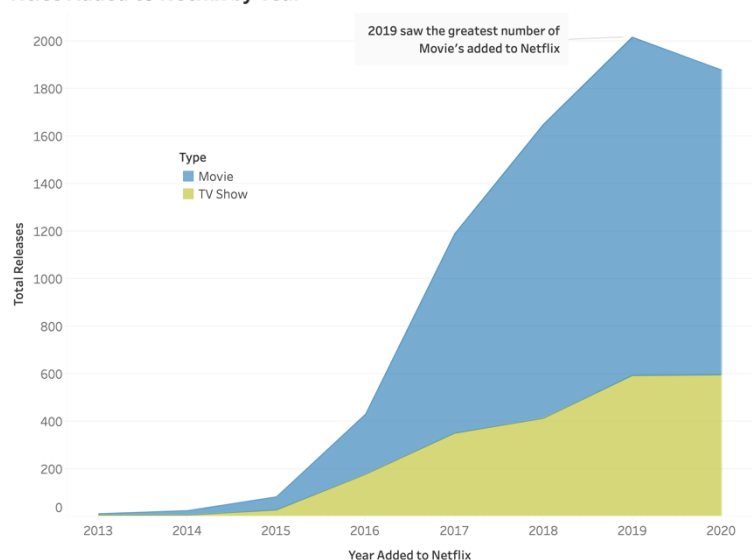
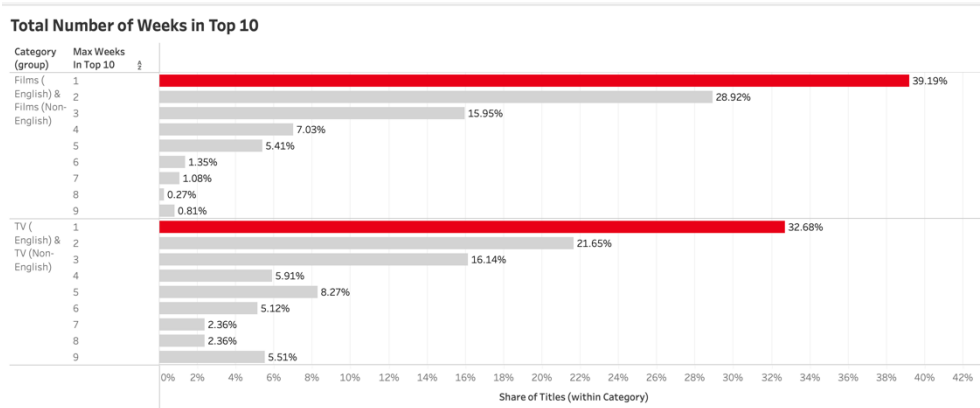


Figure 7.



One of the limitations of the company's top 10 list is that it ranks titles based on total hours viewed. This methodology will result in TV shows being in the top 10 for longer periods of time as a season can have more content to view than a film. It will also favor TV shows with longer seasons. What would be a useful addition to the analysis is to compare how the top 10 list by hours viewed compares against a list based on unique viewers or households. This would allow for a more balanced metric that can compare not only films against TV shows but also titles within the film or TV show category.