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APAN 5480: Market Research
28 October 2025

Final Assignment Part I: Qualitative Research Instrument

Part A:

Introduction: The Shifting Streaming Landscape

In May 2025, Nielsen reported that streaming services account for “44.8% of TV viewership,” surpassing both “broadcast (20.1%) and cable (24.1%)”, confirming streaming as the dominant viewing method (Nielsen, June 2025). BroadbandTVNews noted that churn rates rose 5.5% per month in Q1 2025, signaling intensifying competition in the U.S. streaming market.

Disney+, a major industry player, relies heavily on families as its core subscriber base. Recent data from *The Verge* revealed 46% of all U.S. streaming services now offer ad-supported tiers, with 71% of new subscriptions belonging to those plans (*The Verge*, May 2025). For Disney+, the ad-tier presents a growth opportunity to attract money-conscious consumers, but also introduces new risks. Parents may view advertisements as intrusive or inappropriate in family content.

While subscriber acquisition drives short-term growth, retention remains the key success factor in a saturated market. This creates a clear research gap: how do parents perceive the trade-offs between cost savings and ad-exposure when it comes to Disney+’s ad-supported plan?

Research Question

How do U.S. parents of children ages 3–12 evaluate the value and viewing experience of Disney+’s ad-supported plan, and how do these evaluations influence their intention to keep or cancel the service?

This question focuses on a single measurable outcome, subscription intention, and explores the emotional and practical factors shaping retention decisions among parents.

Rationale for In-depth Interview

A qualitative approach is essential for uncovering the emotional, contextual, and family dynamics behind subscription decisions. Retention involves financial trade-offs, children's streaming preferences, and parental values around screen time and ad exposure.

In-depth interviews (IDIs) allow participants to engage in honest talks regarding sensitive topics such as guilt, frustration, or pressure from children to maintain access to Disney+ content. The one-on-one setting enables interviewers to probe specific experiences, for example, asking about what their child were watching when an ad appeared to capture true behavioral context.

This method is also realistic within the project timeline as it involves small, focused samples of 10-12 interviews, which can yield thematic insights to guide the quantitative phase. The finding will inform survey question design, ad tolerance KPIs, and future messaging tests.

Comparison of Alternative Methods

- Focus Groups: Would not be a suitable method due to social desirability bias, parents may hesitate in critiquing their own parenting or media choices in front of other. Group dynamics could cause inherent peer pressure to hide honest feedback; logically, recruitment could be challenging.
- Observation / Ethnography: Raises ethical and privacy concerns around observing children's media usage. It would also be extremely time-consuming and requires significant resource, making it infeasible within the course's timeline.
- Netnography / Social Listening: Public online discussions are often skewed by extreme opinions dominating online conversations and raises the concern of verifiable demographic data (e.g., actual parents vs general users). The data also lacks a direct link to the ad-tier experience.

Given the limitations of these alternative methods, IDIs are the most appropriate and ethically sound method for exploring the true parental perceptions of the Disney+ ad-supported plan.

Sampling, Recruitment, & Feasibility

The study will consist of U.S. parents aged 25-50 years old with children aged 3-13, who are currently subscribed to the Disney+ ad-supported tier.

Recruitment will occur through:

- Facebook parenting groups
- Peers and family connections
- Local School and Parenting Networks

We aim to conduct 10-12 Zoom interviews, allowing for participant convenience and geographical flexibility. A small incentive (e.g., a \$15-20 e-gift card) will be offered to encourage participation. The inclusion criteria is set to ensure unity in ad-tier users but also

diversity in household income, number of children, and co-viewing habits. This approach offers a balance between representation and feasibility.

Analytical Lens

Data will be analyzed using thematic coding of recorded interviews to identify patterns and emotional drivers. Key codes will include:

- Value Perception (e.g., “Is it worth the ads for the price?”)
- Ad Disruption Tolerance (e.g., “Do ads ruin the immersion?”)
- Trust in Disney's brand Promise
- Triggers for Churn (e.g., “Too many ads,” “not enough control over content”)

We will connect emerging themes into retention drivers and churn triggers to help isolate what makes the ad tier acceptable or intolerable for families.

Expected Contributions & Conclusion

Parents' expectations are central to Disney's core brand promise of safe, high-quality family entertainment. This research aims to:

- Identify the minimum ad standard families are willing to tolerate
- Highlight pricing beliefs justify staying vs. canceling plans.
- Reveal emotional trade-offs behind retention decisions.
- Guide messaging strategies like “Smart Value for Families” or “Ads that Respect Kids”

Overall, this study will provide Disney+ with actionable qualitative insights into how families perceive its ad-supported model, which is essential for data-driven retention strategies in a saturated streaming market.

Part B: Research Instrument: In-Depth Interview Guide

Interview Overview and Objectives

The purpose of conducting these qualitative interviews is to explore how U.S. parents of children ages 3 to 12 perceive and evaluate the Disney+ ad-tier plan. The goal of the discussion is to uncover how parents balance the cost savings with the perceived intrusive ads, and how these perceptions shape their intention to retain or cancel their subscription. Each interview will be estimated to last 30 to 40 minutes and will be conducted via Zoom for convenience. Conversations will be recorded with participant consent, for note taking and thematic analysis.

Interview Introduction Script

"Hi, thank you for joining us and taking the time to speak with us today. I am conducting a research study that aims to understand how parents think and feel about the ad-supported version of Disney+. We would like to disclose that we are not affiliated with Disney; this is purely for academic research purposes to help us better understand how families experience streaming services that include ads.

Before we begin, I have a few disclaimers I would like to note:

- There is no right or wrong answers to any of these questions; we are interested in your honest experiences and opinions.
- Everything shared today will remain confidential and will only be used for analysis.
- The interview will take about 30 - 40 minutes of your time.
- With your permission, I'd like to record this session so I can focus on the conversation rather than note-taking.

Do I have your consent to proceed with recording?" (*If yes, begin recording; if not, proceed with detailed note-taking.*)

Interviewer Notes

- Encourage elaboration of thoughts by participants by asking, "Can you tell me more about that?", "What made you feel this way?", or "Can you give me an example?"
- Allow time for pauses; parents may need time to think through experiences.
- Remain neutral and avoid confirming or disconfirming their opinions.
- Keep the tone conversational and empathetic
- Keep in mind the main goal of the study is to understand motivations, emotions, and trade-offs, not to evaluate Disney+'s performance.

Core Interview Questions & Prompts

Each interview question includes optional follow-up questions to ensure depth and consistency.

1. Streaming and Household Context

- a. Can you share a little about how your family uses streaming services at home?
- b. Prompts:
 - i. Which streaming platforms are used in your household?
 - ii. Who decided what to subscribe to or cancel?
 - iii. How much TV or streaming of media do your kids usually watch in a typical week?

2. Decision to subscribe to Disney+

- a. What originally motivated your family to subscribe to Disney+?
- b. Prompts:
 - i. Was it the content, for examples, Disney movies, Marvel, Pixar ?
 - ii. Did your children ask to get the subscription, or did you make the decision yourself?
 - iii. How long have you been subscribed to Disney+?

3. Awareness of the Ad-Supported Tier

- a. How did you first hear about Disney+'s ad-supported plan?
- b. Prompts:
 - i. Did you switch from the ad-free plan or begin your subscription directly with the ad-tier?
 - ii. What factors influenced your decision (price, curiosity, bundling)?
 - iii. Was the decision mainly financial or content-driven?

4. Experience Watching with Ads

- a. How would you describe your family's experience watching Disney+ with ads?
- b. Prompts:
 - i. Do you or your kids find the ads disruptive or acceptable?
 - ii. Are the ads relevant or repetitive?
 - iii. How do they affect your enjoyment or viewing flow?

5. Parental Perceptions of Ads and Appropriateness

- a. When it comes to ads in children's content, what feels appropriate or not to you?
- b. Prompts:
 - i. How you ever seen an ad that felt out of place during a kids' show?
 - ii. What makes an ad feel "safe" or "family friendly"?
 - iii. How do you feel about your kids being exposed to ads in general?

6. Value Perceptions and Cost Trade-offs

- a. When thinking about the ad supported plan, how do you feel about the value you are getting for the price?
- b. Prompts:
 - i. Do the lower costs outweigh the inconvenience of ads?
 - ii. Would you be willing to pay more to remove ads entirely?
 - iii. Have you compared this to other streaming services with or without ads?

7. Emotional Reactions and Family Dynamics

- a. How has having ads impacted family viewing moments, such as movie nights of co-viewing with your children?
- b. Prompts:
 - i. Does it cause frustration or breaks in engagements?
 - ii. Have your kids ever commented or reacted to the ads?
 - iii. How do you usually respond when they ask questions about what they see?

8. Retention and Cancellation Considerations

- a. What factors would make you consider canceling or switching from your current plan?
- b. Prompts:
 - i. Would too many ads, inappropriate ads, or pricing changes influence this decision?
 - ii. Are there particular frustrations that may push you to cancel?
 - iii. What would make you likely to stay longer?

9. Trust in Disney's Brand and Expectations

- a. How much do you trust Disney to maintain a family-friendly experience with ads?
- b. Prompts:
 - i. Does Disney's reputation make you more forgoing of ad content?
 - ii. Do you think Disney handles ads better or worse than competitors?
 - iii. Have your expectations changed since the introduction of the ad-tier?

10. Final Thoughts and Recommendations

- a. If Disney asked for your advice, what would you advise them on how to improve the ad-tier plan for families?
- b. Prompts:
 - i. How could an ad be designed to respect parents' concerns?
 - ii. What would make it feel like "smart value for families"?
 - iii. Anything else you would like to share about your family's streaming habits or values?

Wrap Up Script

“Thank you so much for your time today and thoughtful responses. Before we wrap up our conversation, is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experience with Disney+ or streaming in general?

Your feedback today has been extremely valuable and will help us better understand what families value most in streaming platforms today. As mentioned, we will send you a small e-gift card as a thank you for your participation.”