

Netflix commits to local productions to continue leading the streaming platform market

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The various methods that Netflix employs when premiering its content favor the international success of original local productions and, at the same time, act as a safety net for these films in an audiovisual industry in constant evolution.

A study conducted by Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) researchers Antoni Roig, Judith Clares and Jordi Sánchez, published in the open access journal *Communication & Society*, has analyzed the various systems and schedules implemented by the American entertainment [platform](#) in recent years in relation to its original feature [films](#), which have allowed it to become the leader in the distribution of on-demand audiovisual content.

According to the authors, the approaches adopted by Netflix form part of a global expansion plan to consolidate its position as the standard-bearer in the video-on-demand platform market. "Netflix has prepared a much more diverse and global strategy than its initial original productions suggested," explained Antoni Roig, a member of the Mediaccions research group of the UOC's Faculty of Information and Communication Sciences and lead author of this study.

Specifically, its original films strategy is built on the convergence of various methods: premieres at cinemas, participation in film festivals, small experiments based on trial and error, and local production in countries where the streaming service is available. "In-house production is essential to be able to offer innovative, original content to subscribers in the fight to continue leading the sector and differentiate itself from the rest of the on-demand and streaming platforms," said Judith Clares, a researcher from the GAME group of the UOC's Faculty of Information and Communication Sciences and one of the authors of this research study.

One of the main objectives of Netflix's strategy was to achieve film industry recognition in order to legitimize its audiovisual productions as high culture and not just disposable entertainment. Accordingly, one of the strategies adopted by the platform was to commit to participating in international film festivals and producing films by prestigious directors.

In fact, this strategy reaped its first rewards with the film *Roma*, which was produced by Netflix and directed by the Mexican filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón. This feature won three Oscars in 2019, including the awards for Best International Feature Film and Best Director. "Roma, for example, forms part of Netflix's long-term efforts to support the film industry. At first glance the platform may seem to focus on commercial films, but it has also invested in specialized products like this, which have more cultural significance," said Roig.

Furthermore, Netflix has increased its investment in in-house production and distribution to offer original films to its subscribers and differentiate itself from rival platforms. It has also committed to premiering films online before releasing them at cinemas. "These companies are looking for ways to reinvent themselves and have new content so their users can enjoy it even before it is available at cinemas," explained Clares.

Production increase

One of the outcomes of this strategy is an increase in the number of Netflix's original audiovisual productions, going from premiering two films with English as their main language in 2015 to launching more than 70 feature films in ten languages in 2018. "Netflix has not acted in one direction, but looks very carefully at how to produce in places of interest to it," said Roig.

In this sense, this platform has managed to increase the number of films it produces in French and Spanish, moving from no original Netflix productions in 2015 to six and seven movies in these languages, respectively. "Films in languages other than English, although still the minority, are becoming increasingly significant, and in 2018 accounted for as much as 35% of the total. This shows how important it is to act locally in the various countries. The spotlight is not only on the biggest blockbusters on the global scale, but also on local productions that help

Netflix to present itself as a global-local brand, or as a transnational brand," stated the authors.

International repercussions

Following their premiere, Netflix's in-house productions have a high number of potential viewers, as borne out by the international success enjoyed by the Spanish films *The Platform* and *Below Zero*. "Video-on-demand platforms allow such films to be offered at virtually the same time all around the world, making their media impact higher, which is also enhanced by social media," said Clares.

It should also be taken into account that thanks to the distribution offered by platforms like Netflix, risk is minimized for local productions, which is a great advantage in a sector as volatile and permanently evolving as the film industry. "Platforms like this act as a safety net for productions in different genres and languages made for different audiences and geographical markets, which could encounter difficulties in a potentially hostile environment affected by a major crisis," concluded the researchers.

In this aspect, Netflix's premiere strategy is based on a combination of major productions, such as blockbusters aimed at the mainstream audience, and productions for niche audiences, such as cult movies, indie films and horror movies. This UOC research supports Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth, and 9, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.

More information: Antoni Roig et al, Netflix fictional feature film originals: an analysis of release strategies, *Communication & Society* (2021). [DOI: 10.15581/003.34.2.125-139](https://doi.org/10.15581/003.34.2.125-139)

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