Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+ and Hulu are streaming favorites as Americans subscribe to more services amid COVID

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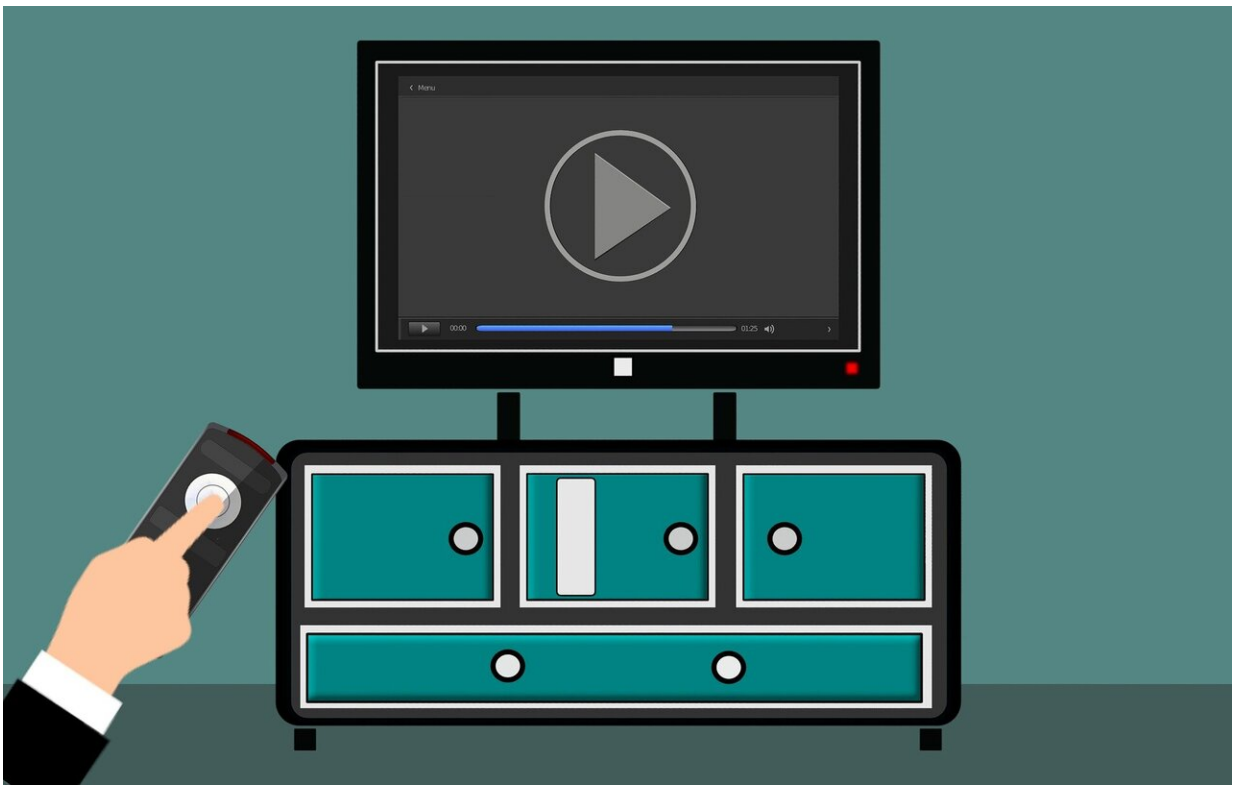

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We used to complain there were too many streaming services battling for our money. Now we can't binge enough.

Of course, the coronavirus pandemic has changed our entertainment behaviors. Instead of going to a movie, concert or sports event, we're more likely to stream something at home. As a result nearly all Americans subscribe to a streaming service, with most of us paying for perhaps five or more.

The appetite for streaming has grown globally. Worldwide viewing time grew 44% in the last three months of 2020, compared to the same period a year ago, according to Conviva, a Foster City, California research firm that tracks more than 500 million unique viewers and 180 billion streams annually on more than 3.3 billion applications.

In the U.S., viewing was up 27% over a year ago. But throughout most of 2020, viewing was up more than 40% over the previous year, Conviva says.

"It will likely be remembered a pivotal year for streaming," notes Conviva's Q4 2020 State of Streaming report. "The industry delivered with flourishing new services, astronomical peaks of growth, blockbusters released direct to streaming, and the rising profile of social media platforms."

HBO parent AT&T made a splash by making "Wonder Woman 1984" available free to view on HBO Max the same date (Dec. 25, 2020) it landed in theaters and announced similar plans for all of its 2021 films. Similarly, Disney made "Soul" available on Disney+ on Christmas Day.

Behind those two, the new movie with the third-biggest opening weekend of streaming from October-December 2020, according to streaming guide Reelgood, was "Borat Subsequent Moviefilm," which was available for Amazon Prime subscribers in October.

If you build it, we will binge

Similar trends are borne out in other recent surveys and research.

Consumers who subscribe to a paid streaming service now pay for an average of five subscriptions, up from three just before the pandemic, consulting firm Deloitte found in its Digital Media Trends survey of 1,100 US consumers, released last month.

A recent similar finding comes Hub Entertainment Research's survey of 1,907 U.S. consumers: The number of streaming sources used rose more than 50% to about five services in 2020 from 3 in 2018. That also includes free ad-supported video services, a growing segment in the streaming ecosystem.

The most used streaming services, according to a survey of 1,000 consumers by HighSpeedInternet.com, an internet service provider comparison site:

Netflix at 80%, followed by Amazon Prime (67%), Hulu (57%), Disney+ (52%), HBO Max (35%) and Peacock (22%).

If you subscribe to the top five streaming services you would pay about $57 monthly.

Recent numbers from the streaming services: Netflix has more than 200 million subscribers globally; 74 million in the U.S. and Canada; Amazon Prime has more than 150 million worldwide; Disney+ (94.9 million); Hulu, 35.4 million (another 4 million subscribe to Hulu's live TV service); HBO Max, (37.7 million); and Peacock (33 million in the U.S.).

In another report, released Tuesday, nearly all (86%) of online video subscribers say they anticipate keeping or increasing their number of subscriptions in 2021. More than one-third (36%) in the survey of 1,088 online subscribers said they subscribed to services since the onset of the

pandemic that they would not have otherwise, according to the State of the Industry report, released by Brightback, a San Francisco-based customer retention company.

More than 80% of consumers would be more likely to pay for or try a subscription service if they could pause or cancel that service online, the survey found. The gold standard? Netflix, which was rated to have a streaming cancelation experience more than two times better than Amazon.

Streaming now accounts for 25% of time spent watching TV, according to Nielsen. Streaming video share of time spent watching TV amounted to 142.5 minutes on average per week in the second quarter of 2020, up from 81.7 minutes a year ago. "What's more is that streaming has also taken hold among consumers 55 and older, often a technological sign of ubiquity and resolve," the research firm said in a report from August.

Will Americans stick with subscriptions?

Subscribing has become a trend in itself, the Brightback survey suggests, with nearly 40% subscribing to other services including online news, food, fitness, or curated box services.

Streaming media subscriptions may be ubiquitous—Brightback's survey found that 98% of respondents have a streaming subscription—but "we're seeing new categories grow quickly," said Brightback CEO Guy Marion. That includes food (31% of respondents subscribed to a service), fitness (34%), and retail/boxes (37%).

These services "are filling the gaps left behind by closed restaurants, gyms, and shopping malls in the U.S.," he said. "And even as the world opens back up, consumers are saying they plan to hold on to their newfound subscriptions," with 86% surveyed saying they plan to keep

current subscriptions or add new ones, Marion said.

To keep subscribers happy and on board, he suggests that should not only make it easier to cancel, but tout this ability.

Consumers like to know they can cancel or pause a service, he says. But about one-third (32%) of those surveyed by Brightback said that they've changed their minds about canceling a service in the last year after being offered an incentive to stay. The top three examples were discounts (49%), account credits (28%), and temporarily pausing their plan (26%), respondents said.

This could be good news for subscribers. "We see many creative ways that subscription merchants are testing different types of discounts, credits, pauses and more to further incentivize subscribers to stay," Marion said.

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