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# Netflix is trialling a pre-programmed 'channel' of content in France to capture an older demographic. Could Australia be next?

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PROGRAMMED TO CAPTURE AN OLDER DEMOGRAPHIC IN FRANCE  
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- Netflix are piloting a pre-programmed channel of their content to French AUSTRALIA:

users, which plays in a linear way like free-to-air TV.

- As Netflix attempts to capture the lucrative 65+ market, questions arise as to whether a similar feature might work here.
- Live broadcast television is still dominant across many markets, including Australia where the average person watches 1.9 hours of live television each day.
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Sick of endlessly scrolling for content to stream on Netflix? Do you spend more time choosing what to watch than actually watching it? If you live in France, you need not worry.





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In December 2020, Netflix launched Direct, a real-time pre-programmed channel available only to French users via a web browser. “In France, watching traditional TV remains hugely popular with people who just want a ‘lean back’ experience where they don’t have to choose shows,” the streaming giant announced (<https://about.netflix.com/fr/news/direct-new-feature-tested-in-france>).

‘Linear television’ is also still popular in other global markets including the US, the UK and Australia. “Live is the key point of difference free-to-air still holds over streaming, which lends itself to news, sport and reality TV,” David Knox, television commentator and editor of the popular website TV Tonight, told Business Insider Australia.

On average, Australians watch 1.9 hours of live broadcast television each day, according to a recent report by researchers at ThinkTV (<https://thinktv.com.au/facts-and-stats/fact-pack-jul-to-dec-2020/>). This figure increases in older demographics,

with Australians aged 65 years and over watching 4.4 hours of live television each day.

Netflix has its sights set on exactly this lucrative 65+ audience.

“[There is an] older demographic that have grown up with television where you turn it on and you flick around, switching between channels. You find something you want to watch and that’s it,” Marc C. Scott, a senior lecturer of screen media at Victoria University, told Business Insider Australia.

“That’s also a generation that’s probably not as tech-savvy to scan through menus.”

Tech literacy and a lifetime of habits are not the only access barriers to streaming content. All audiences, no matter the demographic, can be prone to internet connectivity issues. “In some regional markets, broadband can still be a hindrance,” Knox said. As a result, live broadcast television consumption is marginally higher in regional areas, according to ThinkTV’s report.

An overwhelming amount of content is another access issue. Vast libraries and countless lists provide too much choice

for many users. “We have access to far more media than what we ever have in our lifetime and the biggest issue is always what are you going to watch,” said Scott.

Julie Williams, a 67-year-old retired secondary school teacher from Melbourne’s eastern suburbs, is familiar with this problem. ‘There’s so much to choose from, I don’t know where to begin. I can spend more time trying to find something to watch than actually watching it.’

Barry Schwartz’s paradox of choice theory provides a frame for user issues with on-demand streaming services. “With so many options to choose from, many people find it difficult to choose at all. Paralysis is the consequence of having too many choices,” Schwartz said in his popular 2005 TED talk (<https://youtu.be/VO6XEQIsCoM>).

Even if you’re able to make a choice, all the alternatives can distract from the satisfaction of your original choice. “The more options there are, the easier it is to regret anything at all that is disappointing about the option that you chose,” Schwartz said.

Netflix addresses these barriers, habits and motivations of the non-active user in their announcement of the Direct feature. “Maybe you’re not in the mood to decide, or you’re new and finding your way around, or just want to be surprised by something new and different.”

It is widely known that streaming services use algorithms based on user behaviour to showcase suitable content to users, but other traditional tactics can often prove more effective.

“Word of mouth remains [Netflix’s] best motivator, [like] that hot tip from a friend about a cool new show that you may be missing out on,” said Knox.

Reliable scheduling is another strong incentive for viewers of linear television. ‘You can follow a weekly schedule and don’t have to pause for cooking or bathroom breaks as you know [when] commercials [are coming]’, Lemone Karipidis notes, a digital customer support specialist in her mid-twenties and avid Home and Away and Married at First Sight fan. ‘I love to chat [online] with people about the shows we are watching at the same time, especially when left on a cliff-hanger’, Karipidis continues.

Enabling viewer discussion, as well as addressing paralysis analysis, led Netflix to launch most-watched lists on its platform. Initially rolled out in the UK and Mexico, Netflix expanded the top 10 feature across all global markets in February 2020.

Similar testing tactics have been used in the past. 'Australia was very much a testing ground...to receive Netflix outside of the US...[they're] strategic in terms of the way they test things in specific markets', says Scott.

Much commentary has been written about the top 10 most-watched feature, including the popular piece from Kyle Chayka (<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-comment/emily-in-paris-and-the-rise-of-ambient-tv>) in the New Yorker. Chayka writes that the top 10 lists reframe 'the uncanny feeling, often inspired by algorithmic feeds, that no one else is seeing quite the same thing that you are.'

Both the top 10 lists and Direct are an attempt to appeal to users who struggle to find content.

“It sort of feels like it’s a step backwards,” Scott notes. “But it also allows that opportunity for [Netflix] to present content to an audience that may not have received it.”

Netflix is not the only streaming service to speak to this trend. “Fetch TV has “virtual channels” which are [pre-programmed] web-based additional channels. Horror streamer Shudder has Shudder TV with non-stop horror and supernatural [content],” Knox said

Ultimately, the threat of a pre-programmed streaming channel is limited. “This feature won’t kill traditional television...linear is not dead.” Scott said.

Despite some lukewarm predictions, piloting Direct is still an interesting move from the streaming behemoth and one move to keep eyes on. “Anything that Netflix does [causes] everyone to sit and watch the outcome,” Scott said.

“This linear experiment by Netflix will be one that’s watched by many.

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