



BY EMMA SCOTT
Variety Editor

Video streaming services allow viewers to explore specialized interests in entertainment, but will consequently result in becoming stuck in an echo chamber that reinforces their points of view.

Streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime appeal to niche audiences, promoting individuality, but also forming media bubbles that cause cultural fragmentation.

Television once provided blanket content that could entertain broad audiences, with options such as sit-coms, broadcast sports and news. General programming was the norm between the emergence of television in the 1940s until the popularization of Cable in the 1980s.

Since most people watched the same television series, they heard the same stories, jokes and morals. This kind of uniformity may seem harmless, but it may have contributed to unintentional cultural leveling that dulls diversity of thought.

In 2007, Netflix, originally a DVD rental website and now a mainstream entertainment platform, was the first to provide on-demand, streamable video content, creating more space for specialized content. More recently, the pandemic has led to increased viewership on these platforms. In the U.S., streaming service subscribers increased by 50% in 2020, according to The Wall Street Journal.

Video streaming services are usually subscription-based, with optional add-ons for further personalization of content (on Hulu, Spanish and Sports packages available at an additional cost.) Suggestions for entertainment are tailored to each profile, feeding viewers more of what they want.

increases over time.

This viewer stratification is not turning out more critical thinkers -- instead, these studies show lower IQ scores as television consumption becomes more common.

There is now more ease in staying in one's

niche. Viewers can find entertainment that resonates with them and explore their identity through the characters they meet without being confronted with conflicting ideals. Streaming services even use algorithms to tailor suggestions to a viewer's preferences.

This system locks viewers in an echo chamber of viewpoints that

only confirm their beliefs, creating greater cultural fragmentation.

Economically, streaming services benefit from viewers choosing to remain in their respective bubbles. Some services even offer only one type of content across their platform, such as Disney Plus or the Hallmark Channel, further confining their consumers to their niches. For more diverse platforms such as Netflix and Hulu, viewers are still only recommended personalized content. According to The Washington Post, Netflix has amassed a total of 208 million users as of April, and at a much faster rate in just a year and a half, Disney Plus accumulated 100 million subscribers, according to The Verge.

With both new and established streaming services growing exponentially, viewers should be aware of the extreme personalization of their queues, step back and actively seek out a wider variety of entertainment. ◊

This system locks viewers in an echo chamber of viewpoints that only confirm their beliefs, creating greater cultural fragmentation.

It seems like video streaming services were the perfect solution to the cultural leveling problem, but they have actually pushed audiences to the other extreme.

When one's comfort zone is made readily and infinitely available, there is never a reason to leave.

In "You are what you watch? The social effects of TV," The New York Times cites Norwegian, Italian and American studies that show decreased engagement with other points of view as television viewing



Left: TOO COMFORTABLE:
An illustration shows television consumers stuck in bubbles of entertainment that keep them in their comfort zones. Viewers should be aware of how streaming services create cultural fragmentation between audiences. Illustration by Lillian Sams