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In today's streaming landscape, two of the largest and most significant competitors are Netflix and Disney+. Both companies have completely transformed the way we access entertainment. For both Netflix and Disney+, the key to their success rests entirely in people, and in skills and diversity playing a massive part in their ability to innovate and take a leading market position within the industry.

Netflix has quickly become a global standard-bearer of diversification and more recently inclusion, packaging these two important qualities as one – it is unacceptable for a company to tolerate one without the other. The company has placed this across all levels of the company, from its internal workforce to its policies, work environment and right to the content it wants to commission and produce. The company in a way has become a role model on how to make these two concepts visible and 'literal'. In the workforce arena, Netflix has adopted the practice of tracking and reporting gender while focusing on improving ethnic and racial representation. In 2021, it reported that 47 per cent of its whole global workforce were women, with 46.8 per cent of staff in the US identified as being a racial or ethnic minority (Netflix, 2021). Creating an inclusive environment helps Netflix make this type of reporting possible in the first place, creating a working climate in which diverse groups can feel part of the 'family' and have an opportunity to be creative and strive for excellence.

Supporting diversity internally, Netflix pursued initiatives such as internal Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), which are formed to provide a support network for employees grouped together based on common characteristics and lived experiences (eg, women, people of colour or LGBTQ+), as well as leadership training for underrepresented groups, to make sure future company leaders are also more reflective of its employee composition in the long run.

Netflix's global content strategy also reflects its commitment to promoting (and championing) diversity. Targeting global audiences includes producing and promoting content featuring both 'diverse cultures and language, and experiences': French *Lupin*, Money Heist from Spain, Britain's *The Crown*, and several other series that Netflix produces, promotes, and broadcasts to its global audiences. Netflix continues to expand its reach and audience engagement by collaborating with 'creators [and production teams who are] diverse in terms of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds.' Banaji & Buckingham (2021).

Within the context of tech companies, embracing such an approach to diversity has benefitted Netflix. Its diversity-infused content library has contributed to the company's continued position as the market leader in streaming (it has the most LGBTQ+ characters and characters of colour of the major streaming platforms in the US; GLAAD, 2020), and Netflix's focus on diversity has also made the company an attractive employer for top talent across diverse backgrounds, another benefit to the company in the form of a competitive edge in the marketplace.

Disney+, launched in late 2019, is one of the latest established streaming services – but its service is built on the legacy of The Walt Disney Company while also moving forward in its commitment to diversity and inclusion. A long-time target of accusations of homophobia and lack of diversity, both in terms of its executive leadership and of the characters it has created and marketed, The Walt Disney Company has steadily shifted and changed in the past decade to meet shifting tastes for acceptance and inclusion.

At the most elite level, too, Disney made real commitments toward gender and racial parity. For instance, in 2020, the company committed to doubling the percentage of Black executives by 2025 and to reach 50 per cent gender parity in all senior leadership roles (Disney, 2020). These are heady goals, part of a larger strategy by Disney to adopt inclusive, equitable hiring and career development to create a culture of leadership that reflects diversity. Disney's deep commitment to race and gender equity is reflected in all divisions, including those that are home to the creative departments producing the good stuff.

Other diversity-focused projects speak to its progress in terms of inclusion: most famously, the casting of Star Wars movies has become significantly more diverse in recent years, with movies such as *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* (2019) featuring the hybrid alien-human Finn (played by the English actor John Boyega); the African-British actor Naomi Ackie as the human Jannah, a leader of a group of female soldiers; Yoda's advertised return in the same film; and extended animated stories starring new alien characters developed as part of the Star Wars franchise. Such casting has grown such that it led to an aggressive casting call in 2021 for 'non-white, non-Caucasian, non-European minority actors' for future projects. It's not just in Star Wars, but other animated Disney productions, such as *Encanto* or *Raya and the Last Dragon*, tell stories about characters belonging to underrepresented ethnic groups and feature non-Western cultures.

In addition, Disney also has multiple internal systems of equality, such as leadership development programmes that target greater opportunities for women and minority groups. Rather than hiring or promoting people solely to check a box, there is also a wide range of mentorship programmes where leadership positions aimed at the future are provided for a more diverse range of people over greater periods of time. That, in turn, ensures a more sustainable form of equality in the long run (Smith Sorenson, 2021).

Nevertheless, Disney's transformation from a legacy company to a company that values modern diversity standards has not been easy. Some critics point out that, even though Disney's content has become more diverse, its systemic problems, such as pay gaps between men and women and the lack of representation for women and minorities in senior positions, remain obstacles (Chavez, 2023). As long as Disney maintains its efforts to become more diverse, its evolution into becoming a company that is more diverse and inclusive will persist.

The differences in Netflix and Disney+ diversity strategies reflect how both companies grew up in different times and under different conditions. As a disruptive entertainment company, Netflix moved quickly to get diversity and inclusion in its corporate DNA. Because of the culture driven by founder and chief content officer Reed Hastings – who is motivated by freedom – the company has moved rapidly and decisively to embrace inclusive policies. To offer global content, Netflix can help ensure diversity of talent for both internal employees and characters on screen that represents diverse subcultures of viewers all around the world. To remain at the cutting edge of entertainment, they must be forever diversifying their talent pool and content. This commitment to diversity and inclusion has allowed Netflix to build a reputational capital that attracts modern viewers and provides a competitive advantage in global streaming.

The other extreme is Disney+, a tech juggernaut that has a long way to go from a legacy, family-first company to a progressive, egalitarian firm. It's also the unfortunate recipient of much of the scrutiny, despite some notable improvements in diversity at the leadership level and in content. That said, it's undoubtedly been a little slower out of the gate than rivals such as Apple TV+, in part because of Disney's legacy corporate structure. That's not to say the company isn't headed in the right direction – its recent equality program and its attempt to diversify some of the company's age-superseding. This legacy, though, means that Disney faces the challenge of being equally well-known for its progressive stories and stars as it does for riding on the back of decades of goodwill.

Netflix's diversity efforts also appear more elegant at a competitive level, because diversity is placed at the centre of its overall strategy. Diversity has helped the company bridge a huge cultural gap when it comes to appealing to audiences in different countries and when it comes to understanding endlessly innovative creative approaches. For Disney+, which has been slow to respond on this issue, the advantage may be embedded in its trademark loyalty and the content library built over decades that will ultimately allow it to leverage diversity in ways that both respect its brand and also help it communicate to modern audiences.

In the end however, both firms have concluded that diversity and inclusion are essential for their long-term success, but because Netflix's approach was more disruptive and allowed it to make changes more quickly than Disney+, which adapted more gradually, the payoff for Netflix will be much sooner. One can assume that both companies, going forward, must continue to evolve their diversity strategies or face losing their footing in an ever-more global market and a growing wave of new competitors.

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