



# AI-enabled Data: Key to Video Service Optimization



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The adoption and consumption of streaming video services are taking place within a highly competitive business environment where consumers have a multitude of choices and can hop from one service to another with relative ease. The need for intelligent data with which service and content providers can optimize revenue, streamline operational efficiency, improve customer experience, and reduce subscriber churn is as high as ever.

This whitepaper examines the drivers and use cases for artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML)-enabled data in the video services market. It explores strategies to implement these solutions, identifying best practices and real-world examples, and lists the benefits to both viewers and providers in aggregating large data sets to deliver highly targeted and engaging services.

## The Streaming Video Landscape

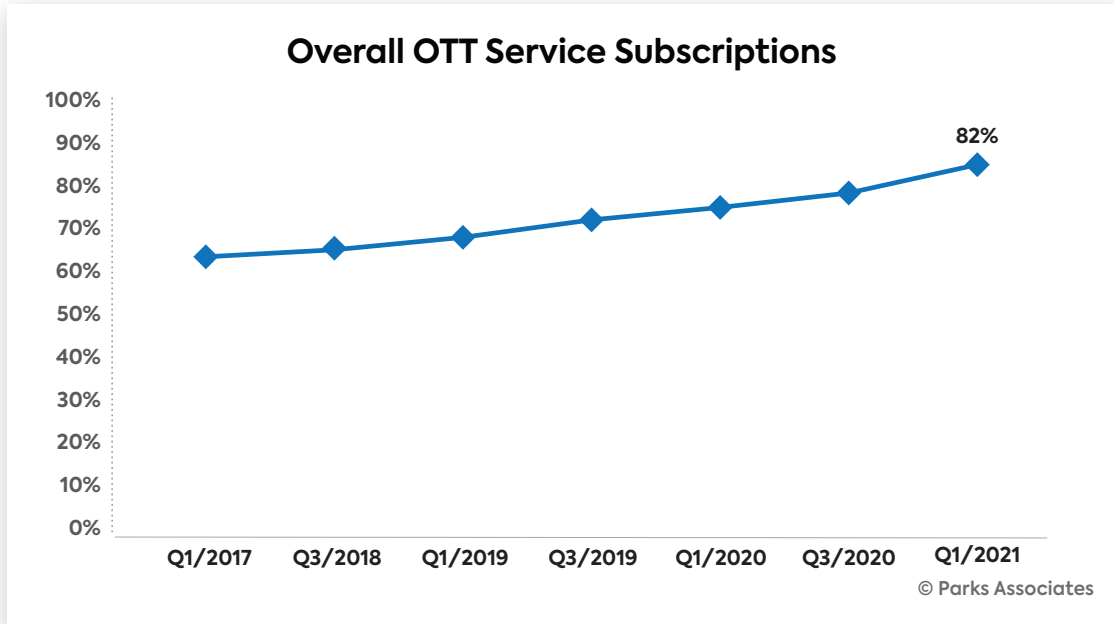
In Q1 2021, **82%** of US broadband households had at least one OTT video subscription, up from **71%** in Q3 2019.

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The over-the-top (OTT) streaming video service market is at an all-time high, with consumers benefiting from an abundance of choice from a multitude of service providers offering a variety of content and subscription models. For streaming video service providers, the environment is fraught with challenges. It is a crowded competitive landscape, but opportunity continues to be plentiful, as consumer uptake of OTT services continues to grow.

## Service uptake, consumption, and stacking

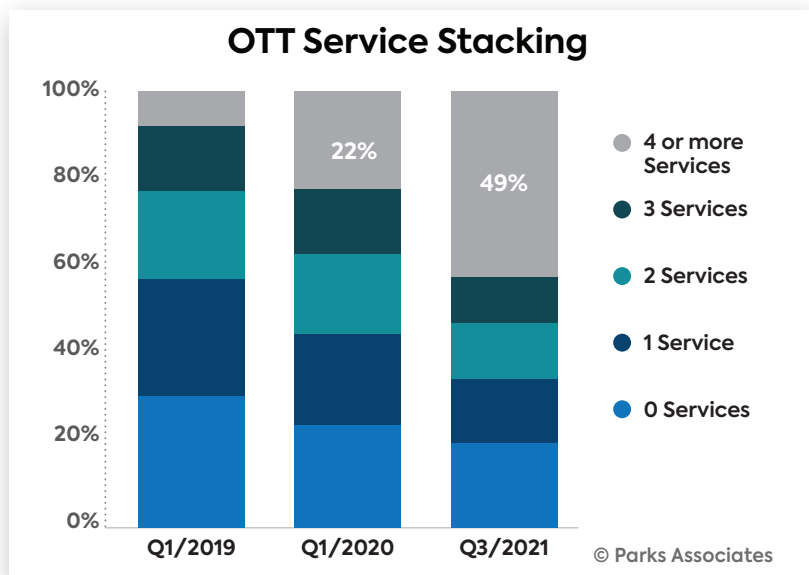
The consumption of streaming video services among US households was already accelerating prior to COVID-19, and service adoption has continued. In the US, the percentage of people with an OTT video subscription has surpassed the percentage who subscribe to traditional pay TV. As of Q3 2021, US broadband households now subscribe to an average of 5.6 OTT video services each. OTT video is now the primary way that US consumers access video, and their appetite for content continues to grow.



Eventually, consumers will experience subscription fatigue and start to limit the number of services they adopt. People have only so many hours and so much attention they can devote to video. The more services competing for pieces of that whole, the harder it is for individual services to be sticky, engaging, and secure in the long term within the service stack.

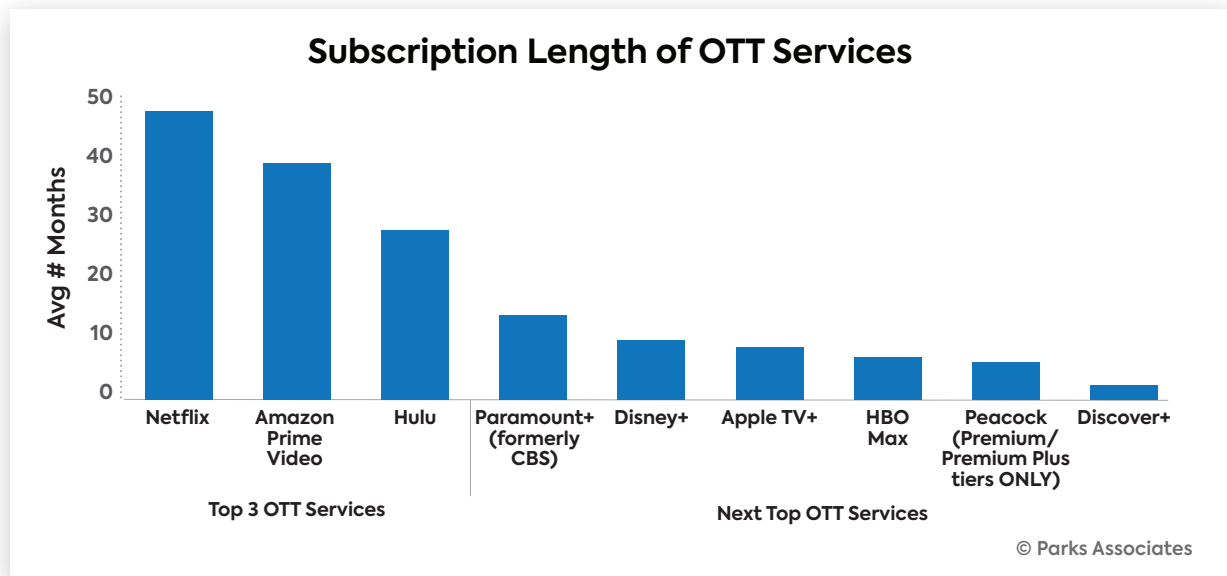
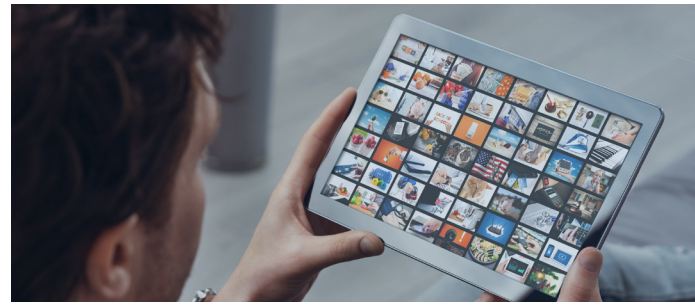
As of Q3 2021, **49%** of US broadband households have 4+ OTT video subscriptions versus **22%** in Q1 2020.

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## Subscription lengths and service hopping

The “no-contract model” for OTT services makes it as easy for consumers to cancel as it is to subscribe. Parks Associates data shows that Netflix dominates the market with an average subscription length of 48 months, but subscription lengths for other video services fall off sharply outside of the top three: Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Hulu.



The OTT marketplace is more crowded with the launch of high-profile new services from major studios and conglomerates such as Disney+, HBO Max, and Peacock, and this has made building subscriber loyalty and retention both more difficult and more invaluable.

Video service providers must also contend with subscribers who are especially challenging to retain. Parks Associates research has found that one-quarter of OTT video subscribers are “hoppers” who generally stay with their services for less time, switch services more frequently, have more subscriptions, and cancel more services over a 12-month period compared to other subscribers.

**Service hoppers are the most demanding subscribers and disproportionately contribute to churn, making them an important retention challenge for today’s video services.**

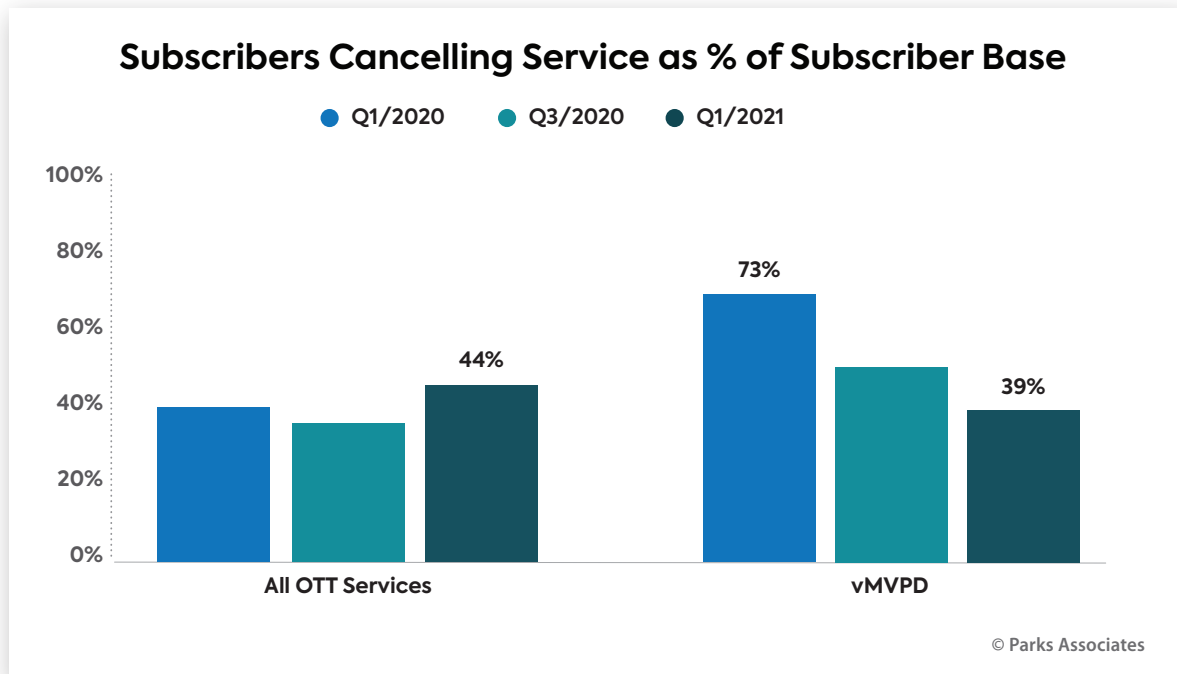


## Retention and churn

Retaining subscribers and minimizing subscriber churn are of crucial importance for streaming video services. Parks Associates research shows that OTT services inherently face a higher level of subscriber churn than traditional pay TV services. According to Parks Associates data, the OTT subscriber churn rate in the US as of 2021 is 44%.

Content is a primary factor in churn. For services to retain users beyond their initial interaction, regular, relevant, and engaging content is a necessity.

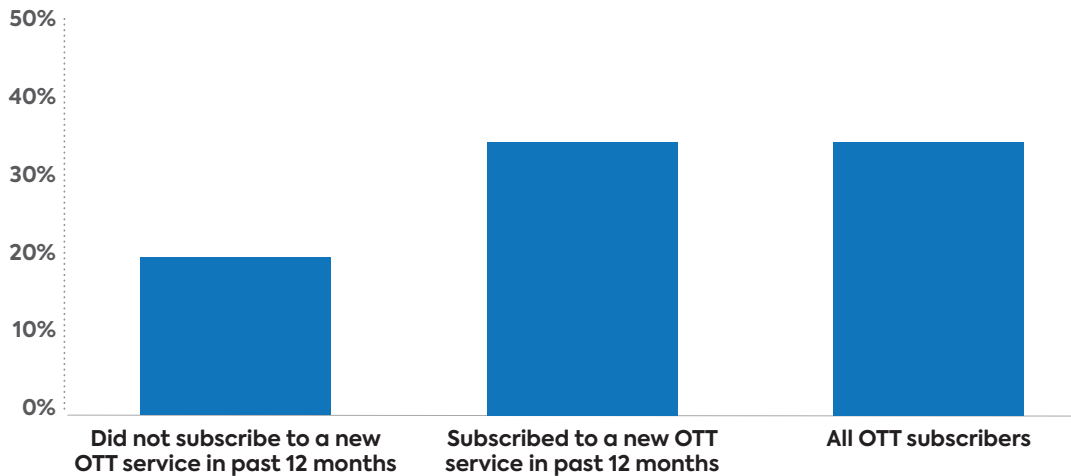
The rise in consumers' OTT service stacking is indicative of their willingness to intentionally seek out and subscribe to services that provide the content they desire. Stacking is thus also a reflection of consumer willingness to churn away from a service, if there is a lack of personally relevant content.



**37%** of subscribers to a new OTT service in the last year indicated that they were **planning to terminate** their subscription because of a lack of new content.

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## Likelihood of Cancelling OTT Service Due to Lack of Content by New OTT Service Subscribers



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Video services have options available to entice their users. Parks Associates research found that when presented with a list of standard retention options, 21% of users referenced the ability to pause a subscription and 21% also cited the availability of a lower priced tier. Given the variety of methods available, and with no single one dominant, the correct selection of retention options to offer an individual subscriber is of high importance in driving successful retention efforts.



### OTT Service Retention Options

The ability to put my subscription on hold until I want to use it again

A lower price for a service with fewer programs

A guarantee to hold my original subscription price

A free upgrade to a higher service tier

Better customer support

With no logistical barrier to consumer churn, services must forge an emotional connection to their subscribers, which is done through a positive combination of content and user experience that drive perceived value.

Video services are seeking ways to optimize the performance of their businesses in as many dimensions as possible. Data, insights, and actions enabled by the application of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) can maximize their abilities to compete and thrive in the current high-pressure streaming video landscape.

# Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning Overview and Use Cases

AI and ML-enabled data equip video services with relevant, actionable, and prescriptive insight to guide their decision-making processes. To understand how AI and ML can augment companies' capabilities in the OTT video market, it is important to define the two concepts in relevant context and examine examples of relevant use cases.

## Defining AI and ML

Within a business context, artificial intelligence (AI) is the capability of computer systems to simulate human intelligence processes on a large scale. AI algorithms are trained to employ human-like intelligence in analyzing and solving complex business problems in a fast, efficient, and automated way. Machine learning (ML) is the ability of an AI system to autonomously learn from its data and improve its own algorithms.

There are two main machine learning techniques:

**Supervised ML:** The AI system learns from human input by being trained on existing data. The AI develops its model based on its ability to accurately match correlations, predictions, and other analytical functions within sample data sets.

**Unsupervised ML:** The AI is not limited to the factors currently known by humans. The AI instead learns autonomously and detects anomalies and correlations that have yet to be identified, even across large, heterogeneous, messy data sets.

In essence, supervised ML can correctly answer business questions; unsupervised ML can correctly ask and answer business questions. Optimally, both supervised and unsupervised techniques are used in combination — allowing the AI system to be trained to operate based on known insights and factors, and also autonomously discover new and previously unidentified factors that affect business efficiency and profitability.

## Types of inputs

The ability of AI and ML to deliver high-quality insights and uncover previously undiscovered connections is dependent on the strength of the algorithms and the amount and variety of the data the system is given. The more information about a business and its customers available to an AI system, the better the quality of insights delivered by the system for decision-making. There is a wide variety of data within OTT video services and other businesses, but it is often in different silos or formats:

- **Subscriber information:** demographics, geographic location, types of viewing devices
- **Subscriber behaviors:** session information, searches, and advertising interactions
- **Content activity:** searches, viewing, favorites, and ratings
- **Quality of service:** connection quality, bitrate, rebuffering, resolution
- **Payment:** subscriptions, transactions, pricing
- **Third party:** ratings, market research, social, consumer trends

There are numerous other possibilities for data inputs that can be used, particularly in relation to video distribution. All of these data sets are typically not in the same format or structure, nor do they adhere to common industry standards. However, best practice demands these disparate sets of business and subscriber data be normalized. Additionally, many organizations have disparate teams working in an isolated manner to manage the aforementioned data. Data aggregation and normalization have the potential to mitigate this as well. To deliver value to OTT video service providers, AI solutions need to be able to ingest and process a variety of heterogeneous data.

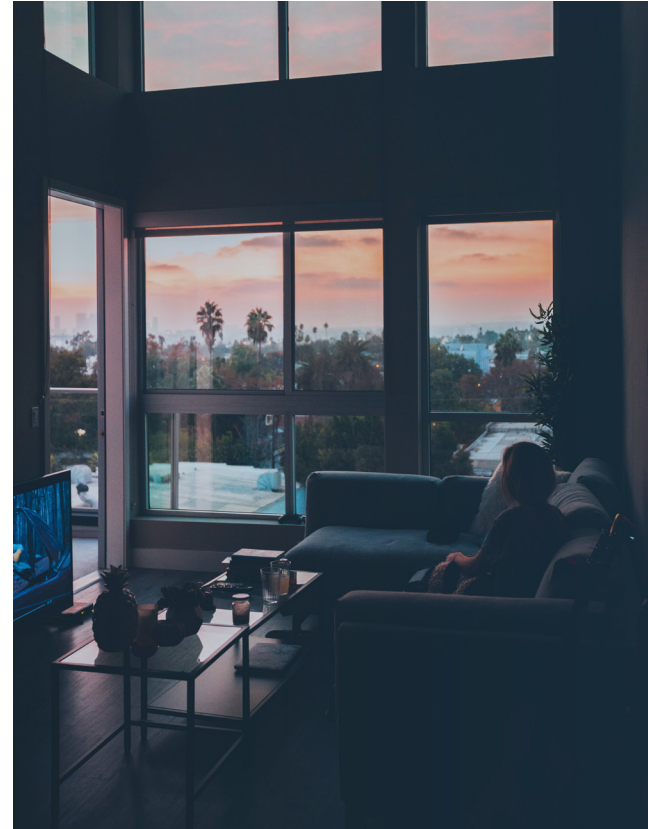


## Defining and implementing algorithms for large data sets

OTT video service providers, content owners, distributors, and other companies in the media and entertainment sector frequently face challenges in managing and leveraging complex sets of data. This is an endeavor particularly fitting for an AI-enabled solution to handle, although it requires several steps to get to that point. To develop an AI algorithm that delivers high-quality results, the following steps are required:

- Understand what needs to be achieved, define business questions, and design algorithms specifically around this purpose
- Normalize heterogeneously formatted data sets for comprehensive, accurate, and continuous analysis
- Train algorithms with high-quality sample data that has been cleaned and tested multiple times (supervised ML) or tested against a control data set (unsupervised ML) to ensure the algorithm performs properly and accurately
- Implement live data, once all vetting, validation, and testing are complete

Developing and implementing high-quality AI algorithms cannot be accomplished quickly or easily in-house without considerable time and expertise. Enlisting an experienced solution provider capable of delivering off-the-shelf or semi-custom solutions trained on industry data may be preferable given the potential gains in implementation speed, fewer complications, and faster time to market.





# Applying AI and ML-enabled Data for Video Services

## Revenue optimization

For companies in the OTT video services market, the concept of optimizing revenue can be a daunting task, especially given the effort needed to analyze and derive insights from multiple sources of big data. AI solutions can automate the process of driving optimal revenue through several business aspects of video distribution and/or service provision.

- For service providers, AI can aid in driving smarter recommendations, reducing churn, creating more advanced subscriber segmentation, optimizing content, increasing trial conversions, and reducing customer acquisition cost.
- For content distributors, AI can speed and ease the processes of tracking, analyzing, reporting, and auditing license-based revenue.
- From either business perspective, solutions utilizing AI-enhanced data can maximize revenue generation, reduce the speed and overhead costs of data analysis, and minimize revenue loss.

## Customer experience optimization

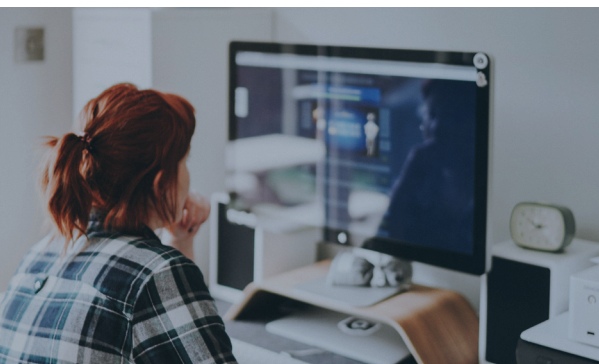
In today's competitive landscape, video service providers need to be attuned to the wants, needs, and preferences of their subscribers. Often, subscriber goodwill is lost via the customer experience (CX), which can be a conglomeration of multiple facets of the customer journey. Content personalization is perhaps the most common example of applying AI to improving the customer experience.

Beyond content personalization, there are numerous use cases for which AI-enabled insights can improve different aspects of the customer experience. AI can ingest and analyze any number of sources of subscriber data to gain a more broadly informed, in-depth understanding of a subscriber's wants, needs, and behavior. This more in-depth understanding of the subscriber can then more precisely drive effective personalization of content offerings, advertising, dynamic pricing, product and service offers, and more.

## Content optimization

Subscriber satisfaction is key to retention; having a fresh and constant supply of individually relevant content is a vital factor in maintaining satisfaction. AI and ML can aid in the identification of content most relevant to both individual subscribers and segments of the larger subscriber base.

AI can also aid in predicting and driving the content suggestions that are likely to generate maximal revenue for individuals and customer segments. It can personalize recommendations to fit with each individual user, across multiple segments, and improve recommendations over time as it acquires and digests more data. A portfolio that puts highly relevant content within easy access of each subscriber will be "stickier" with its consumers than one with a more self-service content search engine.



**26%** of those canceling an OTT service report doing so because they had finished watching the shows they liked — relevant content is an inherent retention mechanism.

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## Content creation and licensing

OTT video services' increasing investment in high-quality original content has made valuation of that content increasingly important in order to assess ROI. Content providers are under pressure to maximize return with timely and efficient monitoring of content's real-time value. AI-enhanced content valuation solutions can deliver the level of data insights needed for content owners to maximize return on investment.

AI-based solutions can deliver content valuation and revenue performance throughout the content value chain, from pre-production to ongoing distribution. AI can enable financing, marketing budget, and creative decision-making to be conducted in accordance with predictive projections of audience demand and potential revenue. Distribution can similarly be optimized by utilizing both historic revenue and forecasted demand by audience, release date, platform, and other variables to drive pricing, promotions, releases, and licensing terms.

Understanding the value of each asset in a portfolio puts content owners in a position to fully monetize content libraries.

## Churn detection and prediction

AI solutions can detect behaviors indicative of churn and predict churn in advance.

Many current churn mitigation efforts are hampered by limited analysis of limited sets of data, inconsistent speed and cadence of analysis, and an unclear strategy as to the appropriate actions based on the data. AI can automate the process of churn detection and prediction, and ML can learn, adapt, and improve detection and prediction algorithms as churn behavior evolves. An AI-based solution can also automate the application of specific prescriptive retention campaigns to high-churn-risk subscribers.

OTT video service providers can utilize AI-generated churn analysis and predictive capabilities to improve audience engagement throughout the customer lifecycle. Identifying characteristics common to high, medium, and low churn risk subscriber segments enables organizations to adjust acquisition and retention strategies, pricing, marketing outreach, user experience, and other customer interactions for maximum customer lifetime value.



## Subscriber retention

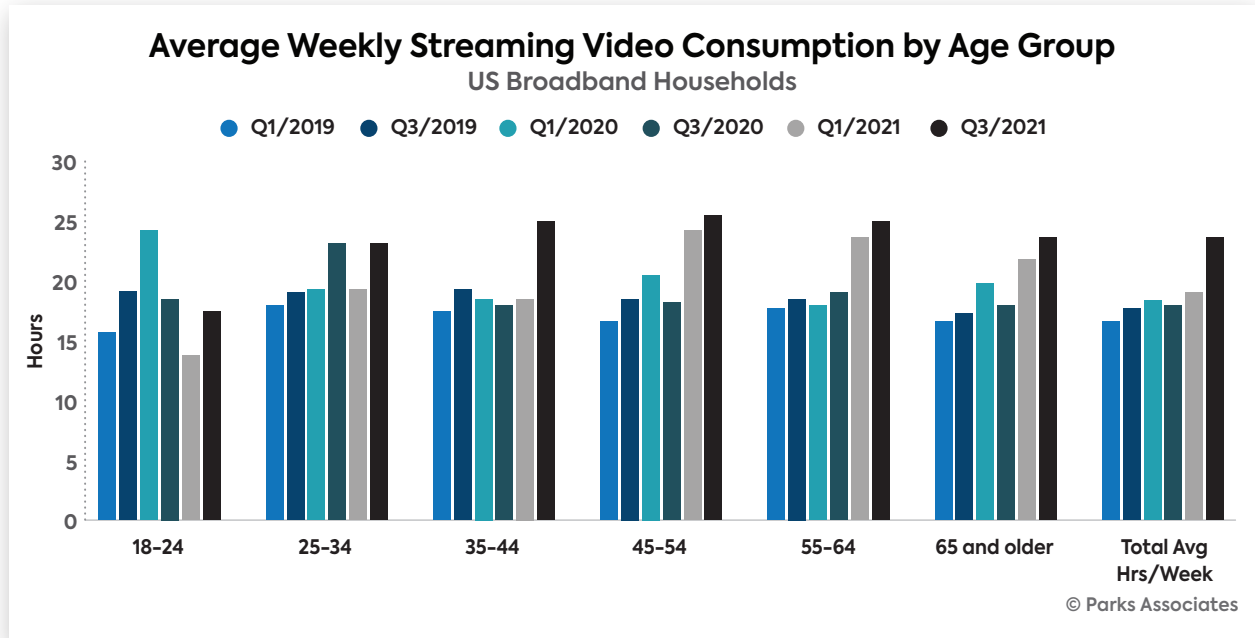
OTT services need to retain at-risk subscribers with methods attuned to the appropriate level of risk a subscriber presents. AI-based solutions can evaluate churn risk and identify the appropriate retention measures through a lens that incorporates theoretically unlimited data volume, analysis, variables, and depth.

Compared to unassisted retention methods, AI-assisted retention enables service providers to instantaneously calculate the statistical probability of success for various retention tactics and automatically recommend or execute actions based on those calculations.

An AI-enabled retention process is multidimensional, capable of prescribing the promotional offers, pricing, messaging, and personalized content most likely to retain each individual subscriber at risk and at the most optimal time. AI also better enables services to combat the significant retention challenges posed by service hoppers, who require a more multifaceted retention strategy. Smarter, more insightful retention practices are key to maximizing an OTT service's chances of a stable spot in the stack of services that consumers subscribe to each month.

## Audience analysis

With the variability of the current OTT video landscape, including evolving streaming video consumption behaviors among different age groups, potential changes between pre- and post-pandemic video consumption and subscription behavior, and ever-escalating competition, services must be able to analyze their audience and detect patterns and anomalies in order to correct potential problems or capitalize on new opportunities quickly.



Parks Associates data uncovered interesting trends when pre- and post-pandemic video consumption was examined by age group. Video consumption levels since 2019 have trended very differently for the 18-24 and 45-54 age groups in the US, and these distinct shifts represent opportunities that may or may not have been fully capitalized upon by OTT service providers. The ability to be alerted to, and understand, the interrelated causes and effects of these trends as they are occurring would be invaluable to companies' decision-making processes.

AI solutions can identify patterns and relationships in data and, when augmented with unsupervised ML capabilities, uncover "hidden" opportunities to optimize a service's strategies.



# Implications and Benefits for Service Providers and Content Providers

## Improve customer acquisition, retention, and reduce churn

Video services are inherently concerned with subscribership and seek to maximize their performance at each stage of the customer journey, from acquisition to consumption to long-term retention.

AI-based analysis of subscriber behavior and activity can better inform subscriber acquisition decisions by identifying factors that drive signup and motivate trial conversions. This can also reduce customer acquisition costs by identifying which offerings and viewers translate into long-term subscription revenues, such as ad-supported video on demand (AVOD).

AI-based solutions are a force multiplier for video services, allowing them to address today's pressing problems of subscriber acquisition, churn, and retention with automation, speed, and insight-driven personalization.

## Optimize content portfolio and increase engagement

Content is key to subscriber engagement. AI-enabled content portfolio optimization automates the process of discovering the mix of content that will generate maximum revenue based on analysis of the subscriber base as well as each subscriber. AI also helps ensure content metadata is consistently structured and highly searchable, which improves the ability to identify the right piece of content and the right time to promote it to a subscriber.

Video services employing AI-based solutions can increase the revenue generation potential of their content portfolio and maximize engagement with that content. AI can also aid in predicting content demand and help guide future plans and investment in the themes, genres, formats, and distribution platforms that are most likely to generate ROI.



## Improve customer experience, personalization, and targeting

Deep understanding of the customer is key to delivering the viewer experiences that ensure their satisfaction and retention. AI enables video services to utilize multiple data sources to gain deeper insight into viewers and to automate the process of delivering a better, more tailored customer experience. These insights can ensure subscriber satisfaction by identifying issues and opportunities for improvement in the customer experience and drive improved outcomes.

From the viewing experience perspective, understanding subscriber preferences and habits is essential to delivering content that keeps the subscriber engaged. By enabling OTT video services to automate the ingest and analysis of many different, heterogeneous sets of big data, AI solutions can drive tighter, more accurate content personalization to maximize engagement and content revenue generation. This smarter, more insightful understanding of the subscriber can also ensure that they are targeted for only the promotional and campaign content that has the best chance of success.

Personalization is key to aligning with subscriber needs, delivering customer empowerment, maintaining high engagement, delivering satisfaction, and increasing customer loyalty. AI is essential to delivering deeper, more insightful personalization, using greater amounts of data than has been possible with traditional methods.

## Improved content ROI

With rising content costs, competition-driven pricing, and increased pressure to maximize return on investment, it is crucial for services to ensure their expenditures yield content that generates as high a level of consumption and engagement as possible. The greater the level of relevance and interest that the content portfolio has for the subscriber base, the greater the resulting level of subscriber consumption, engagement, and retention.

AI and ML allow services to understand what content is best suited to their subscribers and plan their content production and acquisition strategies accordingly. In addition, AI-driven insights can inform a deeper and more personalized flow of both new and existing content to each individual subscriber.

## Best Practices in the Use of AI- and ML-enhanced Data

For media and entertainment organizations utilizing AI and machine learning, a number of best practices will allow them to achieve maximum value and best results.

### Data normalization

For AI to best perform in delivering timely intelligence, and for ML to have the most potential to drive efficiency and discover new insights, being able to access as substantial and diverse a pool of data as possible is ideal. However, the ingestion and aggregation of multiple heterogeneous sources of big data bring their own challenges, as the data can be inconsistent and in different structures and formats. Organizations implementing AI solutions are well-advised to implement multiplatform integration and automated data normalization features to maximize the speed and quality of the insights and intelligence that are delivered.

### Training the algorithm

A necessity of AI is the proper training of ML algorithms, which directly affects the quality of insights produced. Many enterprise AI solutions today are generalized and not specific enough in focus for the needs of video services and similar companies in the media and entertainment sector. Video services implementing an AI-enabled strategy will benefit from utilizing industry knowledge and domain expertise to develop and train their ML algorithms. These algorithms must be trained and refined using representative sample data to ensure accuracy and best performance. Intentional design and training of AI solutions for the specialized needs of the media and entertainment industry's unique data sets will yield better results.



### Uncover opportunities within various distribution models

Content owners and distributors often have to collect, manage, and analyze data from a variety of sources in order to calculate distribution revenue and ensure contractual obligations are met. This effort can be further hampered by self-reporting models among different distributors. AI solutions are able to ingest and normalize unstructured and heterogeneous data from a variety of non-standard reports and agreement documentation; analyze and compare partnership terms and distributor revenue; and discover anomalies and discrepancies in self-reported distributor data.

Moreover, AI solutions can deliver forward-looking insights into the revenue generation potential of various distribution and monetization models. Content owners that utilize AI-enhanced solutions are best able to quickly and accurately identify opportunities to optimize contract terms and revenue-sharing agreements and rates for each distribution channel. They are also able to aggregate data from multiple revenue streams for a comprehensive view of the historic, current, and potential value of various distribution models to determine the optimal mix of strategies.

## Accessibility

To ensure that the insights yielded by an enterprise AI solution are employed to maximum benefit, the solution must be accessible to and operable by a variety of business users and stakeholders. If AI solutions are operable only by a small team with specialized expertise, it inhibits decision-makers' ability to quickly access, understand, and integrate intelligence in decision-making processes.

**Democratization of AI insight** — its ability to be utilized by technical and non-technical individuals alike — is key to its adoption, usage, and ultimate value in driving faster and more informed decision making by a video service.

## New opportunities for AI-empowered service and content providers

AI solutions, especially when able to accommodate large and often heterogeneous data sets and apply machine learning, can make connections and identify patterns in the data that were previously unknown, detect anomalies earlier than was possible before, and identify new opportunities in real time to maximize business performance across a variety of functions. Video service and content providers incorporating AI-based solutions will be best equipped to uncover these new opportunities to optimize their business in areas such as revenue management, refinement of distribution models, consumer engagement, and service provisioning.



The following are examples of how AI-enhanced data analysis has benefited companies in the media and entertainment sector leveraging enterprise technology, provided by Symphony Media AI.

**Churn prediction:** A machine learning algorithm was able to predict subscriber churn risk for a leading OTT service with 95% accuracy by analyzing and comparing historical data sets.

**Anomaly detection:** Within 24 hours of implementation, an AI platform identified a previously unknown error that resulted in 15,000 free trialists with no trial period expiration date, totaling \$1 million in revenue leakage.

**Data normalization:** A content provider applied AI-enabled automation to normalize data for 100,000 titles in its library, eliminating multiple content IDs per asset and standardizing diverse metadata formats.

## CONCLUSION

In the competitive streaming-dominated video services arena, timely and insightful data is crucial to making faster and more effective business decisions than one's competitors. AI and ML can significantly enhance the quality, relevance, and impact of the data collected and the resulting insight. AI-enhanced data empowers video services and content owners to efficiently optimize their businesses and more quickly formulate effective strategies to serve their customers.

AI and ML are an increasingly important part of the decision-making toolkit of media and entertainment companies seeking to acquire, engage, and retain customers — particularly retention-challenging service hoppers. The integration of AI-enhanced data is becoming a necessity to compete in a crowded, fiercely competitive video service environment, with numerous competitors all vying to capture and retain an increasingly elusive streaming video consumer.

## About Parks Associates

Parks Associates, a woman-founded and certified business, is an internationally recognized market research and consulting company specializing in emerging consumer technology products and services. Founded in 1986, Parks Associates creates research capital for companies ranging from Fortune 500 to small start-ups through market reports, primary studies, consumer research, custom research, workshops, executive conferences, and annual service subscriptions.

The company's expertise includes new media, digital entertainment and gaming, home networks, Internet and television services, digital health, mobile applications and services, consumer apps, advanced advertising, consumer electronics, energy management, and home control systems and security.  
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## About Symphony MediaAI



Symphony MediaAI is the preferred revenue optimization partner for over 90% of the media and entertainment industry. Its AI-powered solutions deliver content, subscriber, and revenue insights to help content providers navigate today's complex, multi-platform environment.

Today, Symphony MediaAI analyzes over \$36 billion in revenue and 100 million subscribers' worth of data annually for the world's largest media and entertainment providers and emerging innovators.

For more information, visit [www.symphonymedia.com](http://www.symphonymedia.com).

## About the Author



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With more than 20 years of technology industry experience and over 15 as an analyst, Paul Erickson's coverage has spanned connected consumer electronics, pay & broadcast TV, digital & physical media, streaming devices and services, home and pro AV, smart home, user interface technologies, and digital rights management.

Prior to joining Parks Associates, Paul was an analyst for Omdia, IHS Markit, and NPD DisplaySearch. He has regularly attended, spoken, and/or moderated at industry events and tradeshows across the consumer, service provider, and pro AV technology landscape, such as CES, IFA, IBC, MWC, NAB, InfoComm, NAMM, and Integrated Systems Europe. Paul is also a several-time AVIXA Emerging Trends Fellow honoree.

Paul holds a BS in International Business from Georgetown University, an MBA in Marketing from the University of Texas at Austin, and can converse in English, Spanish, German, Mandarin Chinese, and Taiwanese.

#### ATTRIBUTION

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## Unlock Insight with the Power of AI

In the competitive OTT market, audience insight is a decisive advantage. With an average SVOD churn rate of 44% and demand for ad-supported services on the rise, OTT providers need the ability to understand, predict, and capitalize on audience behavior at every moment.

But top-performing organizations don't stop there. In an industry that spends more than \$100 billion per year on original OTT content, tracking and forecasting audience demand for the assets in your library is crucial to fully monetizing content investments.

## Your Unfair Advantage

Symphony MediaAI's data intelligence platform delivers the superior audience insight you need to fuel growth. Combining proven artificial intelligence and machine learning technology with decades of industry know-how, our software is made to put you on the fast track to customer engagement. Capabilities include:

- Predictive subscriber churn detection
- Prescriptive recommendations
- Content analysis and demand forecasting
- Behavior-based customer analysis
- Reports, dashboards, and data visualizations
- An intuitive, user-friendly interface

## Leverage the Data You Already Have

Data is your most powerful asset – and a major obstacle on the path to customer intelligence. Disparate sources, non-standardized formats, and time-consuming processes undermine an organization's ability to leverage real-time audience insight.

Rather than build data warehouses from scratch, clients leverage our automated data normalization capabilities to quickly begin processing the data that's available today.

## A Perfect Fit for M&E

Traditional AI and machine learning solutions require extensive coding, customization, and training. The Symphony MediaAI platform is pre-trained to process and analyze video service provider data, so you can unlock value faster than ever.

There's never been a greater need to acquire, retain, and grow your audience. And there's never been a smarter way to do it. Discover how Symphony MediaAI can help you transform your data into actionable insight at [symphonymedia.com/demo](https://symphonymedia.com/demo).





# RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

for Emerging Consumer Technologies

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Digital Media and Platforms



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Digital Health



Support Services



Entertainment & Video Services



Consumer Electronics



Energy Management



Home Control Systems



Home Security