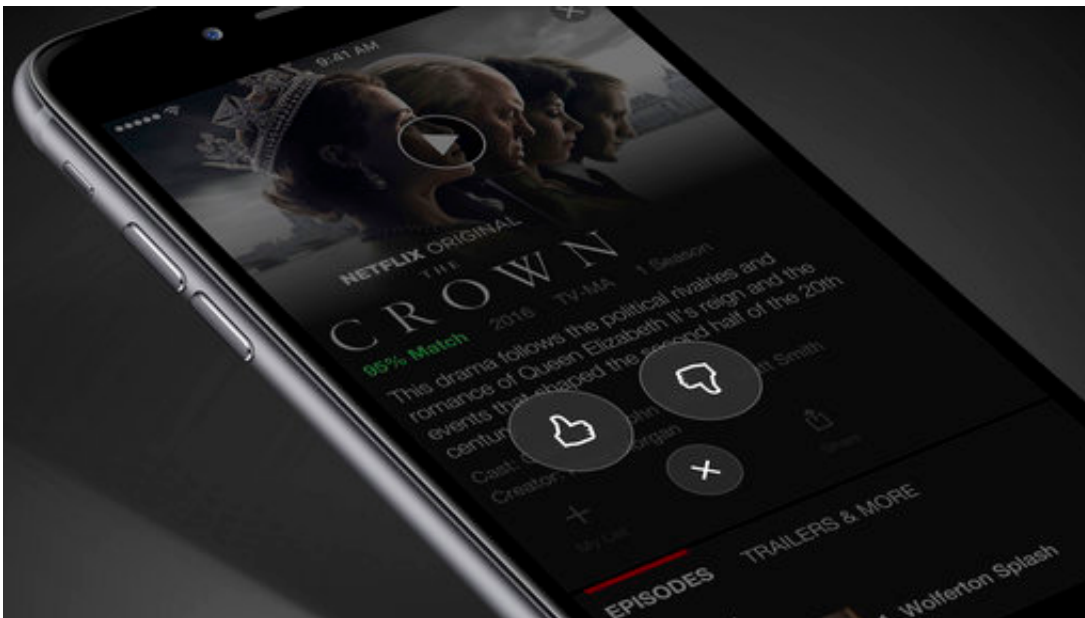# Netflix is looking for a thumbs-up as star ratings fade away (Update)

April 5 2017, by Michael Liedtke

This photo provided by Netflix shows a demonstration of the service's new thumbs-up and thumbs-down rating system. Netflix's video-streaming service is scrapping its familiar star-rating system and hoping to get a thumbs-up, the new way that its 94 million subscribers will be asked to signal whether they liked a movie or TV show. The change, unveiled Wednesday, April 5, 2017, is being driven by Netflix's dissatisfaction with the amount of viewer feedback its computers have been getting to help customize recommendations about what else to watch on the service. (Netflix via AP)

Netflix's video-streaming service is officially scrapping its familiar star-rating system, hoping to make it easier for its 94 million subscribers to

signal whether they liked a movie or TV show.

The service is compressing its familiar one-to-five star system into a simpler choice of thumbs-up or thumbs-down. The change, first discussed by a Netflix official last month and officially unveiled on Wednesday, is aimed at soliciting more viewer feedback and helping the service make better program recommendations.

Netflix believes its star system has been confusing to many people. The five stars allowed subscribers to tell Netflix whether they "hated," "didn't like," "liked," "really liked" or "loved" a particular video.

That was straightforward enough. But the company found that too many subscribers thought the star ratings Netflix posted for videos they hadn't rated reflected the average of all user responses. In actuality, those ratings were personalized predictions based on Netflix analysis of a user's viewing history and past ratings.

Instead, Netflix will now display a percentage designed to predict how much each subscriber will enjoy a given show or movie. The number, similar to compatibility predictions on online dating services, will also be drawn from viewing patterns and past ratings, including those previously entered into the star system.

Although change invariably irks some people, Netflix thinks relatively few of its subscribers will give the streaming service a thumbs-down for abandoning the star system. That's because the all-thumbs format generated three times more viewer ratings than the star system during tests conducted with millions of subscribers over the past year, according to Cameron Johnson, Netflix's director of product innovation.

"It's easy to see why," Johnson said. "They perceive it as a way to get better suggestions on Netflix, which is something they care about

because it helps them find something great to watch really quickly."

Recommending videos is important to Netflix because it wants to limit the odds that subscribers become bored and cancel. The Los Gatos, California, company needs to keep its subscriber numbers growing to keep investors happy and support its stock price, which has been hovering near its record highs.

Netflix also need rising subscriber revenue to help pay its bills. It plans to spend about $6 billion on original programming this year.

The stars are fading away after a decade on Netflix's streaming service, although they'll remain on the company's DVD-by-mail program, where they have been around for 17 years. But Netflix's DVD business has dwindled to 4 million subscribers , and the company no longer spends money promoting that side of its business.

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