



# Case Study

## 2018 SILVER NORTH AMERICAN EFFIE AWARD WINNER

### “HER STORY IS OUR STORY: THE LAWS OF GILEAD”

The Handmaid’s Tale had a confronting and timely storyline, and Hulu needed to leverage topics, touch points, and influential voices that would prompt discussion with the target audience while ensuring sensitivity as a brand. Not only did we need the right message, we needed to deliver it with empathy and authenticity.

By leading with true female perspectives and emotive touch points, Hulu’s The Handmaid’s Tale not only became the most discussed new streaming original during the campaign, but also achieved their highest daily subscription increase by an original content premiere.

Competition:  
North American Effie Awards

Ran in:  
USA

Category:  
Entertainment & Sports

Brand/Client:  
Hulu

Lead Agency:  
Universal McCann LA

Contributing Companies:  
ArsenalCreative  
Civic Entertainment Group  
Social Code  
Suite Spot

Product/Service:  
Subscription Video-on-Demand  
(SVOD)

Classification:  
National

Dates Effort Ran:  
February 27, 2017 – July 25,  
2017

Category Situation:  
Growing

Credits:  
Kevin Blanchette  
Callie Child  
Linnea Hemenz  
Brittany Hoffman  
Amber Lam  
Ashley Rappoport  
Kacie Sage  
Kristine Swanepoel  
Kendra Upham  
Lauren Vu



## Executive Summary

### The Challenge

Catapult Hulu into the original content realm by making *The Handmaid's Tale* "the most talked about show of the year", driving awareness and new subscribers.

### The Insight

Amidst the 2017 Women's Marches, many activists felt today's socio-political climate was eerily in line with the laws of Gilead (the fictional dystopian society).

### The Idea

Her Story is Our Story - The Laws of Gilead

### Bringing the Idea to Life

Working with female-focused partners we created over 20 custom content pieces and experiences, driving conversation about THE LAWS OF GILEAD in the context of today.

### The Results

In its first week, *The Handmaid's Tale* became the most-viewed premiere of any series – original or acquired – on Hulu.

## Effie Awards Category Context

In entertainment, dominating cultural conversation is the holy grail.

*The Handmaid's Tale* had a confronting and timely storyline, and Hulu needed to leverage topics, touch points, and influential voices that would prompt discussion with the target audience while ensuring sensitivity as a brand. Not only did we need the right message, we needed to deliver it with empathy and authenticity.

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## State of the Marketplace & Brand’s Business

When Hulu launched in 2007, they dramatically disrupted the TV landscape with a “new and better way to watch TV”. The subscription video on demand (SVOD) company quickly became the beacon of innovation in entertainment.

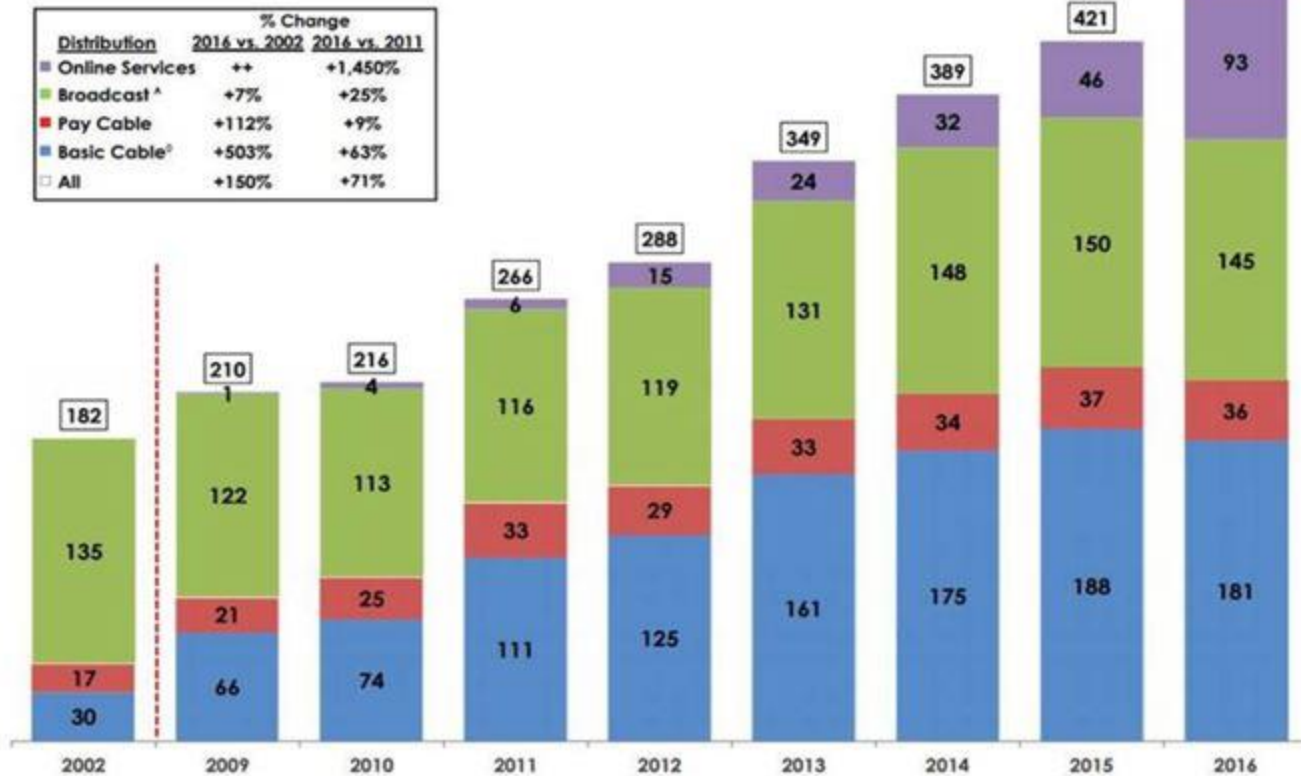
Over the next 10 years consumer behavior shifted toward online streaming and competitors flooded the SVOD market.

There are more than 200 subscription video services now, according to Parks Associates OTT Video Market Tracker, with 60 new services introduced in 2016 and so far in 2017. One-third of U.S. broadband households subscribe to two or more of these services, up from 23% in 2015.<sup>1</sup>

Our competitors had proven that the new formula for success was original content – forcing the whole category to shift from being content distributors to premium producers.

Suddenly, Hulu found themselves competing not only with SVOD companies, but all of Hollywood. With a 71% increase in total scripted television shows released yearly - from 266 in 2011 to a record 455 shows in 2016<sup>2</sup> – viewers have too many options with too little time to watch. The critical mission is now getting to the top of the family’s content queue, which is largely driven by word of mouth.

**Estimated Number of Scripted Original Series\***  
Broadcast, Cable, and Online Services



In short, awareness wouldn’t be enough, we needed to be the show America was talking about.

Hulu strategically green lit an original series that they hoped would create cultural conversation and drive subscriptions.

With uncanny cultural timing, an exceptional production, and a strong cast, *The Handmaid’s Tale* was in prime position to be a

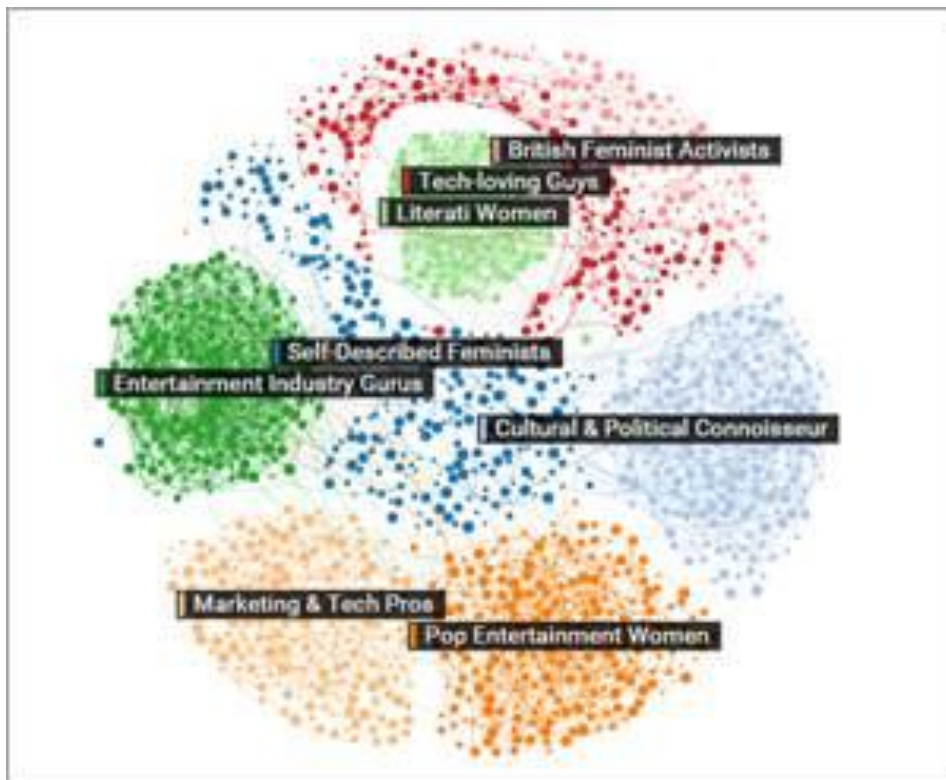


breakout and brand defining hit.

## Audience

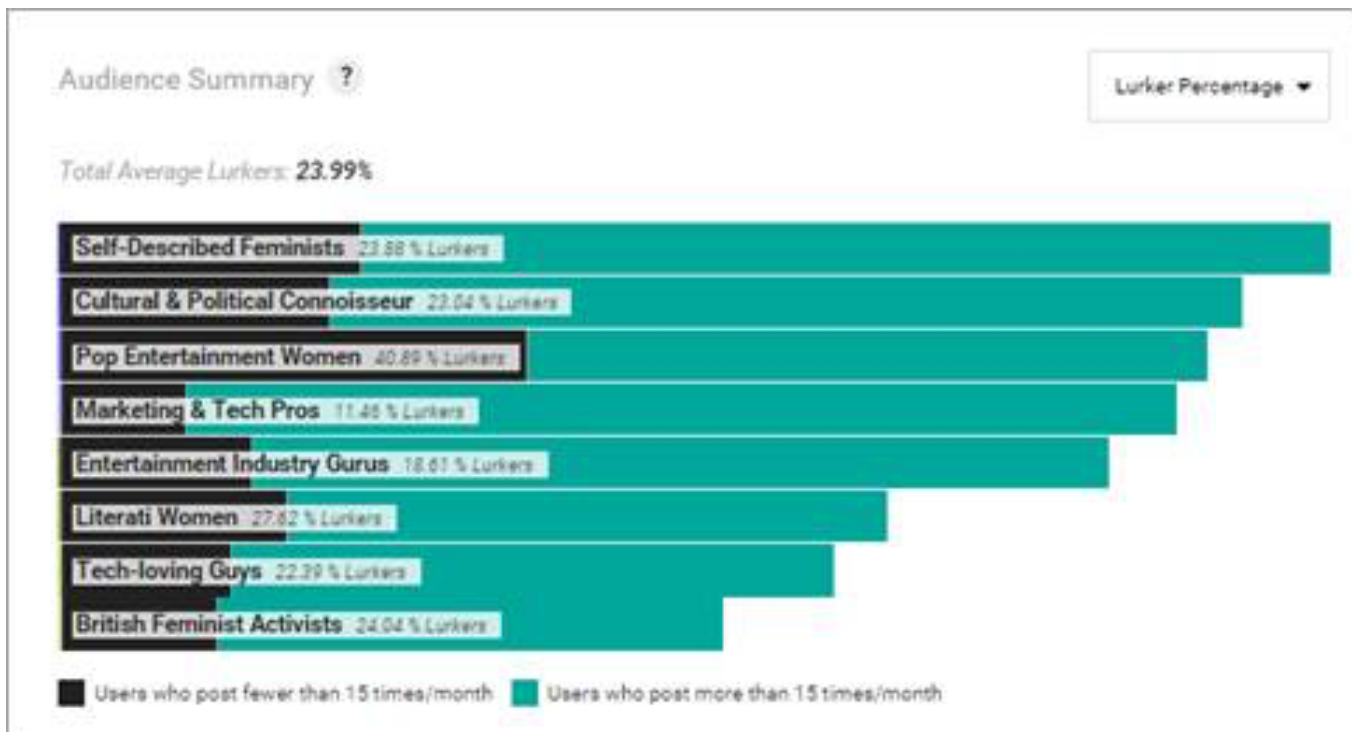
Based on Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, the narrative is set in a dystopian near-future United States where a religious fundamentalist group has taken control. The fictional world of Gilead is plagued by infertility, and fertile women, called "Handmaids", are used as breeding stock for society's elite male commanders. Clothing defines their caste, reading is forbidden and reproduction is their only hope for survival.

The Women's Marches in January 2017 had created a wave of related and relevant socio-political conversation, with many activists referencing Atwood's novel. Affinio's Twitter data revealed that those who had tweeted about *The Handmaid's Tale* during the protests expanded beyond fans of the book<sup>3</sup>. This was a storyline that would matter to the mainstream.



In order to drive cultural conversation, we needed to focus efforts on audiences that would be the most vocal about the show.

Using Affinio, we looked at people who had tweeted about *The Handmaid's Tale*. Millennial women who were self-described feminists and people interested in socio-political issues rose to the top. They were also highly active on social media, with about 75% posting over 15 times per month<sup>4</sup>.



Millennial women, particularly those interested in socio-political issues, became our campaign focus.

## Objectives & KPI's

The marketing challenge was to make *The Handmaid's Tale* "the most talked about show of the year". To support this effort, the media campaign had four specific KPIs:

1. Cultural conversation: The most important KPI was to become the most discussed new streaming original during launch.  
As a new series, there were no prior year benchmarks, so we defined a competitive set of shows with political and feminist themes. Social listening tool, Netbase, was used to monitor conversation volumes against this competitive set.
2. Awareness of the series – Due to confidentiality, we cannot share the specific KPI metric, but the results include the percentage of our goal that was achieved according to Hulu's Brand Tracker.
3. Viewership – Series viewership is critical as it creates a conversation loop following each weekly episode and correlates to customer retention.
4. Subscriptions – Hulu's ultimate business goal is driving new subscribers. We are not able to provide the specific metric, but the goal was to surpass the number of new subscriptions driven by the previous top performing original series, 11.22.63.

### Sourcing:

1 – Parks Associates OTT Video Market Tracker, 2017

2 – FX Networks Research: estimated count by FX Networks Research, culled from Nielsen Online Services, Futon Critic, Wikipedia, Epguides, et al.

Date range all services in market as of 12/14/16

3 – Affinio: audience cluster analysis based on the Twitter social universe. Analyzed clusters of people who had tweeted about *The Handmaid's Tale* during the Women's Marches. Date range 12/24/16 – 01/23/17

4 – Affinio: audience cluster analysis based on the Twitter social universe. Analyzed clusters of people who had tweeted about *The Handmaid's*

*Tale during the Women's Marches. The graph explains the percentage of each cluster that posts more or fewer than 15 times per month. Users under 15 times per month are defined as "Lurkers". Date range 12/24/16 - 01/23/17.*

## Insight

INSIGHT: Amidst the 2017 Women's Marches, many female activists felt today's socio-political climate was eerily in line with the laws of Gilead.

Through social discovery, we found that the restrictive laws in The Handmaid's Tale novel were being referenced throughout the Women's Marches in January 2017. Pictures posted online revealed quotes from the book were being used on protester signs and even as hashtags on social media.

The women's' rights movement was eerily in-line with The Handmaid's Tale but Hulu proceeded with care.

Major brands had jumped at the chance to leverage the groundswell of feminism and female empowerment; but many brands were seen as lacking authenticity and empathy, and the negative backlash from consumers took a toll on their bottom line.

Although Hulu had a true role in the conversation, they risked being seen as another brand exploiting socio-political issues for profit.

We decided to fuel the conversation about the laws of Gilead, but to stay authentic and empathetic, the discussion had to be led by women, not Hulu.

## The Big Idea

**Working with female-focused partners we created over 20 custom content pieces and experiences, driving conversation about THE LAWS OF GILEAD in the context of today.**

## Bringing the Idea to Life

We juxtaposed the restrictive laws of the dystopian world while also leaning into the hope and perseverance of the main character, Offred.

To ensure authenticity, we chose partners most relevant to each law and asked them to illustrate the impact for their audiences.

### **Law #1 - Women do not have a voice in society**

We looked for partners and platforms that actively give women a voice in culture.

At SXSW, an army of handmaids wearing long red cloaks (street teams) quietly roamed the festival, creating a stark visual of a culture where women are powerless. Festival-goers called it "creepy" and "disturbing", which is the reaction we expected (WOM).

We wanted to close the festival with Offred's spirit of hope and perseverance. Partnering with pop-culture powerhouse, NYLON Magazine, we hosted an empowerment party (event) and lifted women's voices through a tweet wall featuring festival goers most memorable feminist moments. The celebration continued into the night with female performers known for their strong 'girl power' brands.

NYLON custom editorial (digital branded content) followed up with actionable ways to fight for women's rights.

**Law #2 - Women are not allowed to read**

For this law we wanted to provoke literati and fans of Atwood's novel.

Thought leadership partners created discussion around the power of banned books (The Handmaid's Tale was banned in some libraries).

Ozy explored the world's most infamous banned books and nearly murdered authors, and projected what America would be like if women weren't allowed to read (digital branded content).

On social, Thought Catalog posted the most controversial quotes from The Handmaid's Tale (social media), and our target audience took part by commenting and sharing their reactions. Through a Reddit AMA we even gave people the chance to question the author, Margaret Atwood, about her once-banned book (social media).

To get Atwood's book into the hands of as many readers as possible, an art installation composed of thousands of copies of the novel was created on the High Line in New York City (ambient). Through geo-targeted social (social media) and local DJ promotion of the stunt (radio program/content), visitors were encouraged to take a book for free, slowly revealing an empowering mural behind the books.

**Law #3 - Women must wear the color of their caste**

In Gilead, fashion is forbidden and color can be a death sentence. We knew this would rub today's style-setters the wrong way.

We went straight to fashion frontrunner, Vogue, to host an immersive costume exhibit (event). Industry bloggers were invited to take a closer look at the show's evocative costumes, followed by a discussion with costume designer, Ane Crabtree, about the chilling symbolism tied to each color (social media).

Channeling Offred's hope, we engaged Vanity Fair to create custom editorial celebrating color as a form of individuality and exploring color as a political statement throughout history (digital branded content).

## Communication Touch Points

### Branded Content

### Consumer Involvement/User Generated

👤 WOM

### Events

### Guerilla

👤 Ambient Media

👤 Street Teams

### Interactive/Online

👤 Contests

👤 Digital Video

👤 Display Ads

### OOH

👤 Billboard

👤 Transit

### Print

👤 Magazine-Digital

👤 Magazine/Print

### Radio

## Paid Media Expenditures

### Current Year: September 2016 – August 2017

👤 \$10-20 million

### Year Prior: September 2015 – August 2016

👤 Not Applicable

### Budget

👤 More than other competitors.

Budgets promoting the Hulu brand were about the same year on year, but The Handmaid's Tale was a new series launch and thus had no spend the prior year to compare.

## Owned Media & Sponsorship

Not Applicable

Program/Content

Social Media

Radio

TV

## Results

Cultural conversation: The most important KPI was to become the most discussed new streaming original during launch, because in the entertainment category WOM is a key driver of success.

We tracked social conversation volumes for competitive shows with female-skewing audiences and/or socio-political themes in the months prior and during our campaign period. The Handmaid’s Tale achieved over 1.8B earned social impressions during launch week (April 26, 2017), compared with Netflix’s 13 Reasons Why (one of the most discussed new original series of 2017) coming in second at 790M during its respective launch week<sup>1</sup>.

Halfway through the campaign, The Handmaid’s Tale was still building buzz and audience demand topping the charts according to third party research by ListenFirst.<sup>2</sup>

Rank	Series (Programmer)	TVI <sup>TM</sup> Rating
1	The Handmaid's Tale [Hulu]	1.12
2	Castalevania [Netflix]	0.93
3	Stranger Things [Netflix]	0.78
4	13 Reasons Why [Netflix]	0.71
5	Orange Is the New Black [Netflix]	0.62
6	Sense8 [Netflix]	0.56
7	House of Cards [Netflix]	0.55
8	Narcos [Netflix]	0.51
9	Friends from College [Netflix]	0.50
10	The Ranch [Netflix]	0.26

Awareness of the series – this objective directly correlates to viewership and was measured by Hulu’s brand tracker study.

The Handmaid’s Tale reached the highest awareness levels ever seen for a new Hulu Original series. Awareness among non-subscribers reached 158% of their goal, and surpassed the stretch goal by 14%. Awareness among existing subscribers also surpassed goals by 20%.<sup>3</sup>

Viewership – Series viewership is critical as it creates a conversation loop following each episode and correlates to customer retention over the campaign period.

In its first week alone, The Handmaid’s Tale became the most-viewed premiere of any series – original or acquired – on Hulu. This was attributed to the extraordinary cultural buzz created during the lead up to launch.<sup>4</sup>



Subscriptions – Hulu’s ultimate business goal is driving new subscribers to the service, outpacing the previous top performing original series, 11.22.63. Due to confidentiality we are not able to provide the specific subscription numbers, but the day of premiere saw the single highest daily subscriptions driven by original content in Hulu’s history.<sup>5</sup>

## Other Contributing Factors

- 👏 Other marketing for the brand, running at the same time as this effort
- 👏 Pricing Changes

Pricing changes / trial offers - The \$7.99 subscription ad supported Hulu and 30 day free trials were in market in during the campaign period, but those were not new CTAs. There were no other pricing changes or offers that weren’t already in market prior to Handmaid’s premiere.

Other marketing for the brand, running at the same time as this effort – Hulu’s new Live TV product launched in May, which had significant ad spend during the backend of this campaign, but this was after the Handmaid’s premiere.

### Sourcing:

1 – Netbase Social Conversation Analysis: Competitive Set for Social Conversation Tracking – Streaming Originals launching during campaign period: Big Little Lies, Santa Clarita Diet, Girlboss, House of Cards, 13 Reasons Why, Handmaid’s Tale, Date range January – May 2017

2 – ListenFirst: The **ListenFirst Television Interest (TVI) Rating (TM)** is a standardized measurement of the most buzzed-about TV programs on linear TV and streaming services. The metrics included in the rating capture organic actions that are largely unaffected by paid media. Programs that surface on the TVI leaderboards are the most hashtagged on **Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and Tumblr**, as well as most searched for on **Wikipedia** (used as a proxy for organic search volume), **Date range 7/10/17 - 7/16/17.**

3 – Hulu Brand Tracker: April 2017

4 – Hulu Content Benchmark Report

5 – Hulu Daily Conversions Tracker



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