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Australians can expect the cost of their Netflix subscriptions to rise as a consequence of the US streaming giant taking expensive bets in original content to maintain its dominant position, industry watchers say.

Netflix said on Friday that earnings and subscriber growth had exceeded expectations in the fourth quarter of 2018. The company reached 139 million paying members worldwide, up 29 million from the beginning of 2018, and accounted for 10 per cent of the total time that people in the US watched television.

But the blemish on the company's results was that its revenue of \$US4.19

Netflix is continuing an expensive push into original content to fight off rivals.

billion (\$5.82 billion) fell short of consensus estimates. Netflix shares fell 4 per cent to \$US353.19 in aftermarket trading.

As Netflix continues its expensive push into original content, it has begun to pass on some of the costs to the customer through price hikes in the US and Canada. Though the company has said there are no immediate plans for a price change in Australia, some say that it is likely to transpire.

"It all comes back to how much you believe Netflix could charge in a month," said Lachlan Hughes, portfolio manager at Swell Asset Management. "To justify its current valuation, the price of subscription has to keep rising."

Netflix subscriptions start at \$9.99 a month in Australia, tied with \$10 a month for its local competitor Stan, which is owned by Nine, publisher of AFR Weekend. A basic Foxtel subscription costs \$26 a month.

Scott Lorson, chief executive of pay television provider Fetch TV, said Netflix's "clear and consistent growth" on the Fetch platform, and the extent of its usage, signalled that a price change would not destabilise Netflix's dominant position.

"They're providing sufficient utility to survive multiple price increases," he said. "Netflix is high-use and lowchurn. It's analogous to a mortgage."

Netflix also took the rare step on Friday of unveiling viewership numbers for some of its key titles. Horror film Bird Box was said to have reached 80 million member households in the first four weeks after its release.

There are mixed predictions on Netflix's push into original content.

Mr Hughes said of the "enormously expensive" investments, "the market is happy for them to do it for now, but we don't know what the industry will look like in five to 10 years".

Mr Lorson sounded a more optimistic note. "Without owning your own content, it's easy to build subscribers but hard to build long-term value," he said.

In 2019, Netflix will face heightened competition from the likes of Apple, Amazon and Disney, who are expected to push further into digital entertainment.

Netflix chief executive Reed Hastings wrapped up an investor call on Friday with fighting words. "All ships rising is a little Pollyanna optimistic. I think about it really as us winning time away from other activities," he said.