

MasterChef Australia: An analysis of the fans appetite for the new judges

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MasterChef Australia is an international success especially with fans coming from not just Australia but also New Zealand, Singapore and India. Originally from the UK, it is the world's most successful and travelled food format. The iconic cooking program rewrote the recipe for must-see reality television.¹ To date, 60 territories have launched their own version of the program and over 300 million viewers have tuned in to watch contestants showcase their passion for food and love for cooking. MasterChef Australia is broadcast in more than 120 countries.²

The recent announcement of the MasterChef Australia judge trio leaving the show and new 'unknown' judges to be their replacements created a lot of chatter. This included uncertainty of the show's continued success.

In this whitepaper we explore the sentiment around the announcement of the new judges, the perception gap that has been created and the common themes seen in the media about the reality TV show.

¹ <https://www.masterchef.com/>

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<https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/6448526/maitlands-masterchef-winner-andy-allen-is-now-one-of-the-shows-three-new-judges/?cs=757>

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The Australian format differs greatly from the UK version, and the reception of the two can be seen when looking at their audience ratings. MasterChef Australia's one-hour series attracts an average of 1.42 million viewers, making it the most watched television show in its time slot. Comparatively, The UK version has suffered from low ratings and its time slot has been shuffled several times in order to boost ratings.

Since launching in Australia in 2009, its success motivated many countries around the world (60 total) to follow suit and form their own series in their respective countries. From an international's perspective, it's a testament to the popularity of MasterChef Australia in comparison to the UK version.

According to Network 10's Chief Content Officer, it is still one of the most iconic and loved shows in Australia.³ Over the years, numerous spin offs of the show were released however their success was not as well received. In 2014, the show's producers announced they wanted to solely focus on the original MasterChef. That way the integrity of the show was maintained, and the brand was not diluted. The spin off shows were discontinued.

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According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, one in four Australians are born overseas and one in five of speak a language other than English at home.⁴ Contestants on the show come from a range of cultural backgrounds, an appealing factor to a multicultural Australia.

Over the past two decades, interest in reality television has rapidly increased, and from the show's success, it's evident there's an interest in Australian's to watch people cook as a form of entertainment. Viewers of MasterChef Australia watch to laugh, cry and salivate the people, their lives and their food.

As the contestants aren't qualified chefs, they're instantly relatable and prove that a person with a passion for food and cooking need not be a professional to create an awe-inspiring

³ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-7439373/Channel-Ten-executive-reveals-believes-Rove-McManus-new-flopped.html>

⁴ <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/Media%20Release3>

dish. It could be said MasterChef Australia's popularity comes from the contestants as the show employs all types of people from all professions, cultures and nationalities.

The cooking show has inspired people to get involved in cooking. Also known as the 'MasterChef Effect', the show has inspired people to become chefs or work in a kitchen to follow their passion of cooking and interest in food, not because they have a desire for a modest pay and like the idea of standing up in a hot busy kitchen for hours.

Internationally, MasterChef Australia is a raging success among urban Indians and the show connects to viewers across all age groups. From amateur foodies to viewers who love food to food critics,⁵ its popularity in India can be put down to "great stories from a diverse and truly multicultural cast and contestants who all have a genuine love for cooking and food."⁶ MasterChef has ticked many nations, many cultures over the years and is among India's highest-rating English language shows. In Singapore, audiences peaked in 2018 when Singaporean born Sashi Cheliah was crowned the champion of MasterChef Australia.

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In July 2019, MasterChef Australia announced three judges Matt Preston, Gary Mehigan and George Calombaris, had left the show after a successful 11 years.

The trio's chemistry and camaraderie had been an integral part of the show's success and their departure created chatter about the survival of the show. Will new judges rejuvenate the show, or will it be detrimental to its ongoing success? Time will tell.

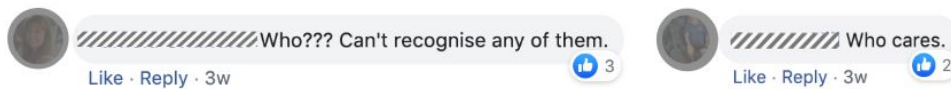
After their departure, there was speculation household names within the food industry would be cast as the new judges, instead a trio of relative unknowns were chosen - Andy Allen, Melissa Leong and Jock Zonfrillo.

The sentiment around the announcement of the new judges has been split. With mainstream media showing predominantly neutral sentiment about new MasterChef judges yet comparatively on social media, the sentiment is either neutral or negative with minimal positive sentiment. 54 per cent had negative comments on social media and 46 per cent of

⁵ <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/tv-and-radio/masterchef-the-toast-of-india-20130131-2dms2.html>

⁶ <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/tv-and-radio/masterchef-the-toast-of-india-20130131-2dms2.html>

mentions were neutral. This could be because the average MasterChef viewer is unfamiliar with the new judges.



Delving further into social media, there were notable common themes. These themes included the judges leaving the show and MasterChef Australia not being the same with Matt, Gary and George. Fans also disapproved of the TV network not renewing their contracts and suggested the network has gambled with the future success of the show.

Negative chatter in the media about George Calombaris underpaying his restaurant employees had a negative impact on his personal brand as well as the MasterChef brand. Although this incident was not directly related to the show, brand mentions were captured in this chatter, resulting in a tarnished reputation for MasterChef Australia. Speculation around underpayment arose after the trio's departure with chatter suggesting the TV network were not budging on their proposed remuneration, hence an ironic departure.

Once the new judges were announced on 10 October, the common themes on social media included the new judges ~~not~~ being revealed and it unlikely the general public would recognise them. There was chatter about lost opportunities to have more female judges and celebrating the amazing women in the food industry. Popular Twitter handles included #WhoAreThey and #TheNobodies. Similar chatter was seen on Facebook across 150 conversations. We saw common chatter themes suggesting the 2020 season will be the last and the show should no longer be aired.

On 23 October social conversations spiked as former judges Matt Preston and Gary Mehigan announced their move to Channel 7 to host a new cooking show with Manu Feidel. Facebook showed 70 conversations across this news article. Again, we saw mixed sentiment on their come back to the small screen, comments included 'Not another cooking show', 'Yes! Awesome, MasterChef is going to be a goner without them'. Interestingly, there was little mention of George Calombaris and him not joining the show.

The below word cloud depicts the volume of key terms across the period 5 – 28 October 2019 on social platforms. 'Absolute, Gary Mehigan and Matt Preston' received a significant number of mentions (70) with 'Season' and 'Contestants' with 48 and 28 respectively. This signifies the interest of the duo even though they have left the MasterChef show.



Word cloud of key terms by volume from 5 - 28 October 2019

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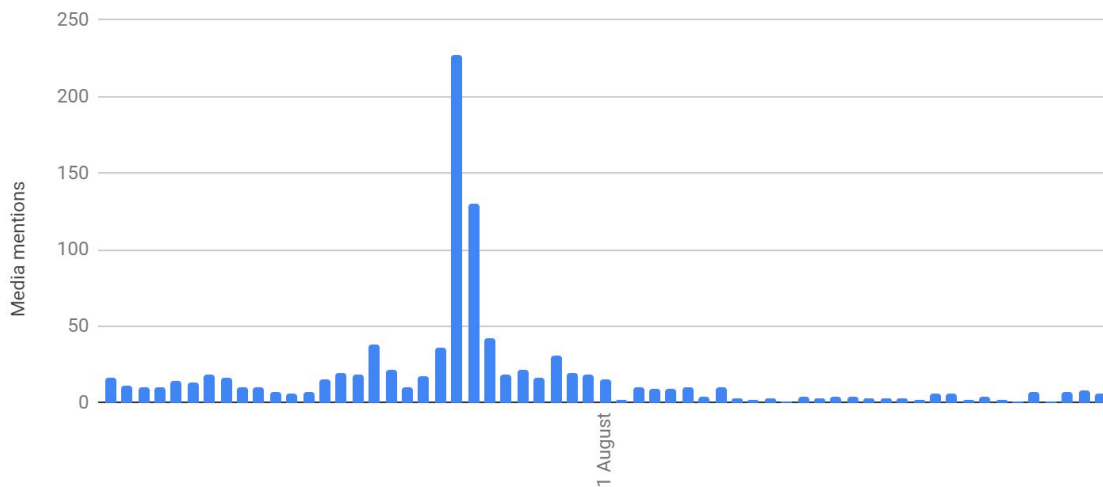
Across mainstream media, conversations are being had around the new judges leaving fans hungry for more. MasterChef's original intention was to create excitement about bringing on new judges, yet it has created a perception gap. The media suggests the new judges have not been as well received as expected.

It's a topic that is being spoken about across social and mainstream media, yet there's a difference in sentiments across the two - resulting in a perception gap. Mainstream media is struggling to get traction with the excitement around the new judges, the sentiment is predominantly neutral. Yet across social, we see the sentiment is predominantly negative.

In Australia, media buzz around 'MasterChef Australia' peaked on 23 July 2019 when the MasterChef finale was being aired. This day also marked the announcement of the judge trio

leaving the show. We saw 227 brand mentions on this day and 130 the following day. From the time period 1st July – 29 October 2019, a total of 2,974 brand mentions occurred.

MasterChef Australia media mentions

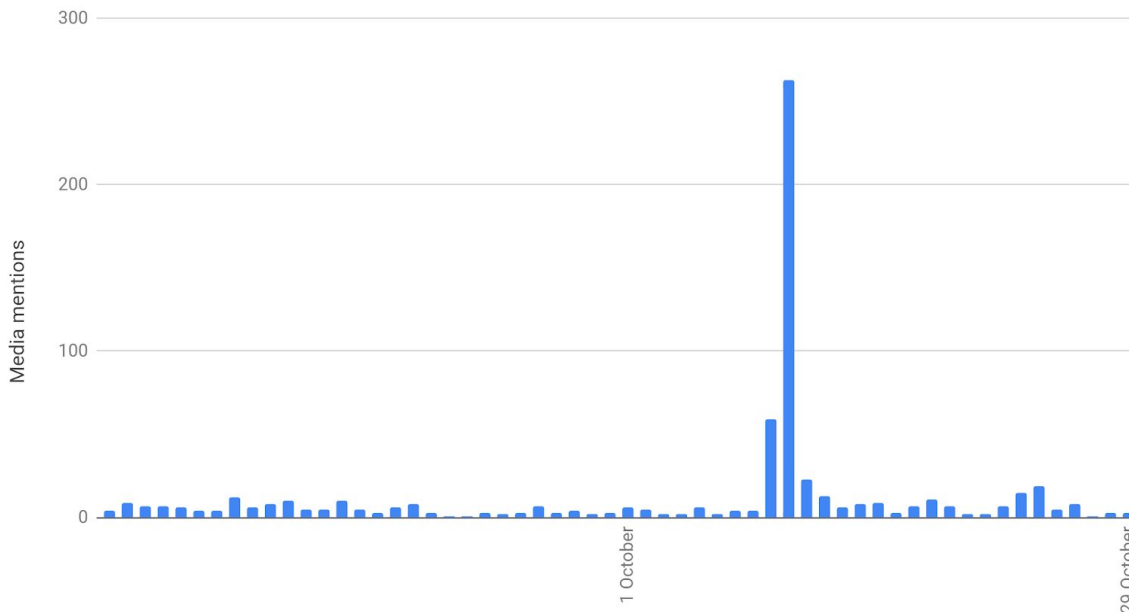


Media mentions during period 1 July – 31 August 2019 using keyword 'MasterChef Australia'

On 9 and 10 October, we saw another spike with 59 and 263 brand mentions respectively using the keyword “MasterChef Australia”. These spikes in mentions depict the announcement of the new judges and the conversations being had around the brand.



MasterChef Australia media mentions



Media mentions during period 1 September – 29 October 2019 using keyword 'MasterChef Australia'

Much of MasterChef Australia's brand mentions were driven by traction from the farewell of the original judges and the announcement of the new judges for 2020. Out of the number of mentions, news headlines portrayed negative, neutral and positive themes. Negative headlines looked like:

1. Surprise new judges - do you know who they are?
2. New MasterChef judge defends herself over negative tweets about show
3. MasterChef Australia: New judges will leave fans hungry for more

Neutral headlines looked like:

1. Melissa Leong: MasterChef's first female judge
2. Dishing up new judges
3. What the new MasterChef judges will bring to the table

Positive headlines looked like

1. Previous winner, Andy Allen to judge MasterChef Australia
2. The new MasterChef Australia judges have just been announced

Analysis of Audience Sentiment

Although the original intent was to promote positive change with the announcement of new judges, majority of the audience processed the message as one that was either neutral or negative with concern MasterChef Australia wouldn't be the same without the original trio.

Perception gaps help to measure the effectiveness of brand and the sentiment surrounding it. The audience landscape has evolved and with the internet and social media, it has given fans more freedom and power to voice their opinions today as compared to before. This environment has produced viewers to be more opinionated and willing to take a stand for something. As a result, brands such as MasterChef Australia can suffer backlash which can create a perception or message gap. By analysing perception gaps, it helps to screen comments and the sentiment tagged to them. Brands can learn from negative comments, strive on positive ones and work on neutral sentiments to convert them to positive.

Who are the new judges?

So, who are the judges that will be gracing our televisions in the new year? Here's some background information.

Andy Allen

He's the epitome of a MasterChef success story. Andy was a former contestant in season 4 and also the winner. Since his victory, he has extensively travelled around Australia, the world and has become a co-owner of a restaurant in Sydney. He took on the role of head chef, which was later awarded a prestigious chef's hat. Years later, he has been asked back into the MasterChef kitchen as a judge.

Melissa Leong

An Australian/Singaporean freelance food critic and travel writer who claims she will eat anything once. She has co-authored six cookbooks, co-host many cooking shows and as well-made regular guest appearances on various cooking shows. If it has anything to do with

the Australian food industry, chances are Melissa Leong has written or broadcast about it, collaborated with or has them on speed dial.⁷

Jock Zonfrillo

The Scottish born chef, has worked with a number of internationally renowned chefs across the UK. He is also the owner and chef at Bistro Blackwood and Orana restaurants.

Restaurant Orana is recognised globally as Zonfrillo's masterpiece, one that celebrates indigenous Australian culinary history and has earned the prestigious accolades of three Chef's hats.

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It will be interesting to see how the new judges are received when MasterChef Australia returns to our television screens in 2020. The perception gaps may remain the same across mainstream and social media or the gap may close. MasterChef Australia will be able to evaluate the success of the show through its viewer ratings and also assessing the alignment of the messages sent to their audience.

Understanding perception or message gaps allows brands such as MasterChef to determine the sentiment about their brand and what is being said on both mainstream and social media. Having a good understanding can also assist with maintaining a strong brand reputation. If there is a gap between the intended message and perceived message, brands might need to intervene promptly with strategic actions.

Hence, perception gap analysis is essential for a successful brand and strong reputation.

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⁷ <http://www.fooderati.com.au/about>



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