

Routes to Content: How people decide what TV to watch

Prof. Catherine Johnson

University of
HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring global professionals

About the research

How can we ensure that people are able to find and access high quality and relevant content on television?

The rise of on-demand and internet-connected television in the UK has increased choice, but also made it harder for people to discover and access quality information, knowledge and entertainment. Where public service broadcasters used to benefit from prominence regulations which gave them the top spots in the electronic programme guide (EPG), people are increasingly accessing television through on-demand services and smart TV sets that bypass the EPG.

Our qualitative research asked and observed how 30 participants discover and make choices about the television that they watch in an on-demand landscape. The research offers insights and recommendations concerning prominence regulation and UK public service broadcasting, as well as issues related to data, privacy and the accessibility of on-demand TV services.

Policy Implications

Prominence and Public Service Broadcasting:

1. To ensure the accessibility of PSB, prominence legislation needs to be extended to cover the homepages, recommendations and search results of connected devices (smart TVs, set-top boxes and streaming sticks) and subscription video-on-demand services, which have become the primary default route to television.
2. Public service broadcasters need to be incentivised to invest in the usability of their on-demand services.
3. Public service broadcasters need a funding system that ensures their independence from government in order to maintain public trust.

Data, Privacy and Accessibility:

1. Greater transparency in the use of algorithms in on-demand services is needed to address concerns about data, privacy and surveillance. People should be able to turn algorithmic recommendations on and off.
2. For some participants (especially older women) technology was a significant barrier in accessing television, particularly the technologies of smart TVs and set-top boxes. Device manufacturers should be encouraged to improve the accessibility of their TV technologies and users would benefit from media and technological literacy initiatives.

'BBC is run by, like, licence fees [...] and also the government funding, so they don't wanna risk things. [...] Netflix is more progressive.'
(Jarred, 19, M, White, C1)

'You don't get taught how to do these things [...] I've never really realised what it is, BBC iPlayer. What is that? And what's ITV Hub? You see, I don't even know what they are.'
(Natalie, 54, F, White, C1)

Routes to Content: How people decide what TV to watch

Prof. Catherine Johnson

University of
HUDDERSFIELD
Inspiring global professionals

Key Findings

1. Default TV

Defaults are the habitual ways that people access television. The more established defaults based on the EPG are being replaced by a new '1 world' default in which discovery takes place within the 'worlds' of devices, pay-TV services and/or subscription video-on-demand services.

2. Accessing Public Service TV

Public service TV is easy to find on the EPG, but harder to find within the '1-worlds' of connected devices, smart TVs, pay-TV and VOD services. Some participants find the on-demand services of the PSBs difficult to use, particularly in comparison to Netflix.

3. Misunderstandings About PSB

Most participants value PSB, but not all understand how PSB operates in the UK. Some questioned the BBC's independence from government. For some younger participants, values that should be associated with PSB were allocated instead to Netflix.

4. Recommendation Algorithms and Data

Recommendation algorithms are valued as a way of finding content, but for some participants were seen as inaccurate, limiting or worrying.

5. Technological and Media Literacy

A number of older female participants rely on their partners to access TV. Juggling multiple remotes, turning on TV sets and/or using VOD services prevent these participants from accessing entire routes to content.

Further Information

This research was conducted in consultation with Ofcom, but the design and analysis of the research was conducted independently by a team of researchers at the Centre for Participatory Culture, University of Huddersfield.

The full report can be accessed at:

<https://www.hud.ac.uk/cpc/ourprojects/routes>

Contact the Researchers

The research was conducted by:

Professor Catherine Johnson, Professor Matt Hills,
Ms Laurie Dempsey

For more information or to discuss the research findings contact:

Professor Catherine Johnson

C.Johnson2@hud.ac.uk

01484 478466

'I: How easy is it to find public service TV?

R: I think it's fairly tricky if you are not looking for a specific thing, like if you're browsing. I think it can be quite, quite difficult.'

(Linda, 31, F, White, C1)

'BBC is, kind of, I think it's probably geared less towards the younger generation.'

(Jaisal, 25, M, Asian, B)

'Are they [on-demand services] watching what you are watching so that they can suggest these things, or they know your interests? It is a little bit unnerving.'

(Nigel, 56, M, White, C2)