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The Psychology of Video on Demand (VoD) Consumption and Binge-Watching Typologies: How Platforms May be Designed to Optimise User Autonomy

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, May 2025.

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Date 23 / 05 / 2025

Abstract

‘Binge-watching’ has been in the vernacular for 20 plus years and, according to Forbes [1], has been included in the Oxford English Dictionary since 2018. Here, it is defined as "*watching multiple episodes of a television show consecutively or in rapid succession*".

The facility for a consumer to watch what they want, when they want to, has allowed them to avoid interruption and fully immerse themselves in a narrative, but it’s not without its downsides, which are worthy of consideration, not least for the sheer volume of consumers worldwide. For example, Netflix, the largest paid-for Video on Demand (VoD) broadcaster globally (according to a number of sources [2][3][4][5]), has a consumer base of more than 230 million [6] who at the height of the pandemic in 2020, were watching an average of 3.2 hours per day [2].

For some, there exists a gap between TV (terrestrial broadcast & VoD) consumption intentions and behaviour which may be explained by several psychological drivers such as social pressure; VoD interface design; content narrative and neutralisation effect. This research adopted a mixed methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative data to investigate this gap, following an exploratory sequential design of semi-structured depth interviews, surveys, analysis of viewing data and industry dialogue.

The research addressed how platforms might be designed to optimise user autonomy in VoD consumption, examining what constitutes binge-watching, its associated positive and negative aspects, how digital media interfaces influence viewer autonomy, and what features might better serve consumers.

This paper aims to address the following research question: How might platforms be designed to optimise user autonomy in VoD consumption? To do this, the researcher has sought to first address the following:

- **Research Question 1.** What constitutes binge-watching, how might it be defined?
- **Research Question 2.** What positive and or negative aspects may be associated with binge-watching?
- **Research Question 3.** What aspects of Digital Media interfaces (if any) reduce consumer autonomy in their viewing behaviours?
- **Research Question 4.** What inter-personalisation features of the interface might better serve the consumer?

In order to address these questions, the research approach adopted four interconnected studies:

1. A qualitative exploration of consumer experiences through in-depth interviews, providing rich, contextual data on binge-watching behaviours and perceptions.
2. A quantitative survey on viewing habits and attitudes that allowed for statistical analysis and generalisation of findings to a broader population.
3. An unobtrusive measures study involving the analysis of BBC iPlayer viewing data and related Twitter discourse, that offered insights into real-world viewing patterns and social media engagement around binge-watching.

4. Industry dialogues with key decision-makers and designers, bridging the gap between academic research and practical application in VoD interface design.

This comprehensive approach provided a holistic understanding of binge-watching, connecting empirical findings with real-world applications.

A key contribution is the development of a novel framework for understanding binge-watching through viewing typologies mapped along dimensions of duration, frequency, and compulsion. This framework intentionally avoids defining specific thresholds, allowing for flexible application across different research contexts and methodologies. The research identified five distinct viewing typologies: Routine Episodic Streaming, Compulsive Streaming, Non-Consequential Recreational Streaming, Periodic Streaming Strategist, and Passive Streaming.

Key findings revealed that binge-watching cannot be understood through simple time-based measures. The research demonstrated that while auto-play features significantly influence viewing behaviour (reported by 85% of survey respondents), viewers express strong interest in features supporting more intentional viewing patterns. Analysis of actual viewing data from BBC iPlayer showed how release strategies can impact viewing patterns, with some viewers consuming up to ten episodes (approximately 7.9 hours) on the first day of release.

The framework shows promise beyond media consumption, offering potential applications for understanding engagement patterns across various domains of human behaviour. The research has significant implications for both academia and industry, contributing to theoretical understanding while providing practical guidance for developing more user-centric streaming interfaces. By integrating perspectives from viewers, data analysis, and industry professionals, this research aims to influence industry practices in ways that better serve viewer needs and wellbeing, while contributing to ongoing dialogue about corporate responsibility in the digital age.

Keywords/Terms:

- **Core Research Themes:** Content Narrative, Digital Wellbeing, Interface Optimisation, Media Consumption, Platform Design, Social Pressure in Media Consumption, Viewer Autonomy, Viewing Behaviour
- **Industry and Ethical Considerations:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Digital Media Ethics, Public Service Broadcasting
- **Methodological Approaches:** Content Analysis, Elite/In-Depth Interviews, Mixed Methods Research, Qualitative Research, Quantitative Research, Social Media Discourse Analysis, Surveys, Thematic Analysis, Unobtrusive Measures, Viewing Patterns Analysis
- **Psychological and Health Aspects:** Health and Wellbeing, Neutralisation Effect
- **Subject Matter:** Binge-watching, Linear Television, Screen Time, Streaming Platforms, Terrestrial Television, Video on Demand (VoD)
- **Theoretical Frameworks:** Behavioural Psychology, Consumer Behaviour, Media Psychology, Motivational Drivers, Nudge Theory, Uses and Gratification Theory, Viewing Typologies
- **User Experience and Design:** Inter-personalisation, Responsible Design, User Experience (UX), User Interface Design

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisors, Professor Andrew Smith and Professor Steve Benford. Your support, patience, understanding, and humour throughout this process have been invaluable. Thank you for guiding me through the labyrinth of academia with unwavering enthusiasm.

I'm equally indebted to my industry partners at BBC Research and Development, especially Dr. Michael Evans, who has been with me from the initial interview to the final edit. Your insights and encouragement have gone above and beyond what I could have hoped to anticipate at the outset.

A special thank you goes to Professor Sarah Martindale for helping me establish an excellent supervision team and asking the hard questions in my first-year review. Your challenging queries made me critically re-evaluate my research, leading me to pivot towards an area I remained passionate about for the following three years.

To my peers, particularly the friends I made in the 'cursed' 2020 cohort - despite meeting face-to-face only once in our first year, you've proven that strong connections can be forged even in a world of social distancing. A special shout-out to my deskmate, Dr. Lizzie Dolan, whose sage advice helped me focus and whose deadline-induced profanities kept me smiling throughout the tough times.

I'm grateful to all at the University of Nottingham N/Lab for creating such a friendly, collaborative, and enveloping environment. Your enthusiasm for each other's work and willingness to help have made this a truly enriching experience.

A huge thank you to BBC iPlayer for granting me access to their viewer database. This enabled me to critically review real-world behaviours, providing invaluable insights for my research.

To my family, your unwavering support has been the backbone of this endeavour. To my parents and my sister, thank you for your words of encouragement, even if some of those words were "Do you seriously want to do this to yourself?" when I first mentioned starting a PhD.

A special thank you to my husband, Shaun. You've made me feel safe taking the financial hit that this career 'break' has entailed, literally waited on me when peak stress left me bedridden, been a diligent sounding board for my new ideas, and played along when I insisted that binge-watching whatever I happened to be engrossed in at the time was legitimate research. Your support has been the cornerstone of this endeavour.

I'd also like to acknowledge the two rugby teams I was involved with during this time. You helped me blow off steam several times a week, proving that there's more than one way to tackle a problem. A special thanks to the coaching team at the University of Nottingham who encouraged me to continue playing despite my first degree being older than most of my teammates. You've shown me that in both rugby and academia, it's never too late for a comeback.

To the friends and colleagues who always encouraged me and perfected the art of looking interested during my enthusiastic verbal data dumps about the latest findings, your support has not gone unnoticed. Especially to my dear friend, Rebecca Grice, who embodies a full-on cheer squad encapsulated in 5 foot 2 of shockingly bright running gear, your boundless energy and bright spirit have been a near-constant source of motivation.

Thanks, too, to Laura Brian for all your admin support, especially for keeping me on top of my expenses and graciously accepting that 'beige' is a legitimate dietary requirement.

Finally, a heartfelt thank you to all my interviewees, both consumers and industry professionals. Your candour and thoughtful responses have provided the compelling content that forms the heart of this thesis.

In closing, thank you to everyone who has contributed to this journey. You've all made this PhD experience truly remarkable and worthwhile.

This work was partly supported by BBC Research & Development and the Horizon Centre for Doctoral Training at the University of Nottingham EPSRC grant (EP/V51973X/1).

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

For decades, we have been motivated to watch television for reasons ranging from the habitual or passing of time through to seeking of information or forms of companionship. The ‘why’ we engage with television may be similar but the ‘how’ we engage with it has changed considerably since its inception.

Television has been a central part of our lives, shaping our entertainment habits, informing our worldviews, and influencing our social interactions [7]. The advent of Video on Demand (VoD) services in the early aughts marked a significant shift in how we consume media, unlocking viewers from imposed schedules and drip-fed storylines, allowing for unprecedented control over what, when, and how we watch [8][9]. This isn’t entirely new; Digital Video Recording introduced in the nineties afforded some planned flexibility, and Video Home Systems (VHS) or Betamax were available before that. However, VoD, particularly with whole series releases, has made back-to-back (or binge) watching episodes more convenient than ever before.

The study of binge-watching and platform design is not merely an academic exercise but addresses pressing concerns at the intersection of technology ethics, digital wellbeing, and media industry evolution. As streaming becomes the dominant mode of television consumption, understanding how platform design influences viewing behaviour has significant implications for both individual wellbeing and industry practice. With millions of viewers worldwide engaging with these platforms daily, even small interface adjustments could have substantial collective impact on sleep patterns, productivity, and social interactions. Furthermore, as regulatory bodies increasingly scrutinise digital platforms' responsibilities towards users, evidence-based insights into how design choices affect user autonomy may inform future policy development. This research therefore addresses a crucial gap between rapidly evolving viewing technologies and our understanding of their psychological and social impacts.

1.2 The Rise of Binge-Watching

The transition from traditional broadcast television to on-demand streaming has fundamentally altered the landscape of media consumption [10],[11]. This shift has given rise to the phenomenon known as 'binge-watching', a term that entered the vernacular in the late 1990s and is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as a transitive verb meaning "*to watch multiple episodes of (a television programme) consecutively or in rapid succession, typically on DVD or through a digital streaming service; to watch (episodes, a season, etc., of a programme) in intensive or extended bursts*" [12]. However, in the academic literature, the scientific definition is highly varied.

Binge-watching has become a common practice, particularly with the rise of streaming platforms [13],[14]. Netflix, the largest paid-for VoD broadcaster globally, boasts over 230 million subscribers worldwide as of 2023. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Netflix users were watching an average of 3.2 hours per day [6], highlighting the increasing prominence of this viewing behaviour.

Binge-watching is now a household term but a clear and widespread definition of what specifically constitutes binge has yet to be set [15] and current definitions based solely on episode counts or time thresholds fail to capture the complex psychological, social, and contextual dimensions of this viewing behaviour, limiting our understanding of its varied impacts and the role of platform design in shaping it.

When applied to some other activities (eating, drinking, gambling), binge is considered undesirable but, in this context, it may be classed as a not-so-guilty pleasure. Some VoD platforms advertise ‘Binge-worthy TV’ in a way which might come across as crass when applied elsewhere; it’s difficult to imagine that "*portion control is for suckers*", a tagline used by Netflix [16] for some of its content, would be so acceptable as an advertising slogan on a bottle of scotch for example.

1.3 The Double-Edged Sword of VoD

The ability to watch content on-demand has allowed for greater immersion in narratives and flexibility in viewing schedules. Viewers can and do consume entire seasons of shows in a single sitting, free from the constraints of weekly episode releases. This has changed not only how we watch television but also how content is produced and distributed, with many streaming platforms now releasing entire seasons simultaneously to cater to binge-watching preferences.

While the freedom and convenience of VoD services have been widely embraced, they have also raised questions about the potential downsides of excessive viewing. Concerns have been voiced about the impact of binge-watching on sleep quality, personal development, physical health, and mental wellbeing as well as productivity. A number of studies have shown a relationship between viewing time and negative outcomes (e.g. sleep quality, physical health, mental health, displacement of other activities such as study or exercise [17][18][19][20][21][8]). However, the direction of that relationship is less clear which may be why there is little guidance on potential risks associated with excessive viewing time. Moreover, the design of streaming platforms, with features like auto-play and personalised recommendations, should be scrutinised for potentially encouraging excessive viewing at the expense of user autonomy.

However, research also suggests potential benefits of extended viewing, including enhanced narrative comprehension, stress reduction, emotional regulation, and social connection through shared cultural experiences [14][22][13][23][24]. This complex balance of positive and negative outcomes necessitates a nuanced approach to understanding and potentially influencing binge-watching behaviours.

A number of factors will be at play behind every decision we make: convenience, habit, cost or reward, to name but a few. A parallel could be drawn between media consumption choices and food consumption choices: we might know what is good for us and better aligned to our goals (be they rooted in ethical or health considerations), but ultimately, this isn't necessarily reflected in our behaviours. As such, realistically, the areas of the study carried out in this research will be aimed at helping consumers to make informed, conscious choices which are born out by the desired behaviours.

1.4 Research Aims and Questions

This research aimed to identify the circumstances in which consumers may find themselves viewing more than intended, establish if and how much that matters, and if so, how it might be addressed. To this end, this thesis addressed the following primary research question: How might platforms be designed to optimise user autonomy of VoD consumption?

To answer this overarching question, the following were first explored:

1. **What constitutes binge-watching, and how might it be defined?**

This question sought to establish a clear, evidence-based definition of binge-watching, considering both quantitative measures (e.g., number of episodes or hours watched) and qualitative aspects (e.g., viewer intent and experience). A more nuanced definition is essential for meaningful research, informed policy development, and responsible platform design.

2. **What positive and or negative aspects may be associated with binge-watching?**

This inquiry aimed to provide a balanced view of binge-watching, exploring both potential benefits (e.g., increased engagement with content, stress relief) and drawbacks (e.g., sleep disruption, social isolation).

3. **What aspects of Digital Media interfaces (if any) reduce consumer autonomy in their viewing behaviours?**

This question examined the role of interface design elements such as auto-play features, personalised recommendations, and content presentation in influencing viewer behaviour and potentially limiting conscious decision-making.

4. **What inter-personalisation features of the interface might better serve the consumer?**

Building on the findings from the previous questions, this inquiry sought to identify potential design solutions that could enhance user control and promote more intentional viewing habits.

Note, Inter-personalisation refers to the customisation of interface features that enable users to align their viewing experiences with their personal preferences, intentions, and wellbeing goals. Unlike standard personalisation that focuses primarily on content recommendations in this context, inter-personalisation emphasises user control over how the interface itself functions.

These research questions are driven by several concerns in contemporary media consumption. First, the potential impact of extended viewing on physical and mental wellbeing necessitates a nuanced understanding of what constitutes potentially problematic viewing. Second, the growing influence of algorithmic systems and interface design on viewing decisions raises important questions about user agency in digital environments. Third, as streaming platforms compete for viewer attention, there is a risk that engagement metrics may be prioritised over viewer wellbeing without evidence-based guidance on balancing these concerns. By addressing these questions, this research aims not only to advance academic understanding but also to provide practical insights that could inform more viewer-centric platform design approaches.

1.5 Methodology

This research adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. The study followed an exploratory sequential design, allowing findings from each phase to inform subsequent stages of the research. The methodology consisted of:

1. **Semi-structured depth interviews:** To gain rich, contextual insights into individual viewing habits, motivations, and experiences with binge-watching.
2. **Large-scale survey:** To collect quantitative data on viewing behaviours, attitudes, and preferences from a diverse sample of VoD users.

3. **Analysis of viewing data from BBC iPlayer:** To examine real-world viewing patterns and behaviours on a major VoD platform.
4. **Analysis of related social media discourse on X (Twitter as was):** To understand public sentiment and discussions around binge-watching and VoD consumption.
5. **Industry dialogues (elite interviews) with key decision-makers and designers:** To explore current practices, challenges, and opportunities in VoD interface design from an industry perspective.

This mixed-methods approach was chosen to address different aspects of the research questions while overcoming the limitations of any single method. Qualitative methods enabled exploration of individual experiences and motivations that might not be captured through quantitative methods alone. Survey research allowed for testing whether themes identified in interviews were representative of broader populations.

The analysis of actual viewing data provided objective validation of self-reported behaviours, while social media analysis captured real-time viewer reactions uninfluenced by research conditions. Industry dialogues ensured findings could inform practical platform design. Together, these methods provided multiple perspectives on the phenomenon, allowing for triangulation of findings and a more comprehensive understanding of binge-watching behaviour.

1.6 Research Approach and Context

This research responds to the explosive growth in streaming consumption, with global streaming platform revenues projected to exceed \$140 billion by 2026 [25]. In January 2024, Nielsen reported a growth of 21% in viewing hours from 2022 to 2023 among Americans who watched a total of "*21 million years' worth of video*" on top of any live television broadcasts [26]. This growth highlights the need to understand how these platforms may be shaping viewing behaviours.

The research builds upon previous studies in the field while addressing several notable gaps. While earlier research often focused on quantifying binge-watching through time spent or episodes watched, this study aimed to develop a more nuanced understanding of viewing patterns and their contexts. Previous studies have typically examined binge-watching through single methodological approaches - either qualitative explorations of viewer experiences or quantitative analyses of viewing patterns. This research has combined multiple approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

The mixed-methods approach was carefully chosen to address different aspects of the research questions. In-depth interviews enabled exploration of individual experiences and motivations that might not be captured through quantitative methods alone. Survey research allowed for testing whether themes identified in interviews were representative of broader populations. Unobtrusive measurement and analysis of actual viewing data provided objective validation of self-reported behaviours, while social media analysis captured real-time viewer reactions and discourse. Industry dialogues ensured findings could inform practical platform design.

The research also leverages what the UK Research and Innovation framework terms ‘smart data’ - actual digital behavioural traces that provide unfiltered insights into real-world user behaviour. UKRI has identified such data-driven research as crucial for understanding digital behaviours, allocating significant funding to develop methodologies that combine behavioural analytics with contextual understanding [27].

The UK context was specifically chosen for this study due to several important factors. First, the research partnership with BBC Research & Development provided unique access to iPlayer viewing data and industry expertise, creating an opportunity to examine real-world viewing patterns within the UK public service broadcasting ecosystem. Second, the UK offers a rich media landscape with high streaming service penetration across demographic groups and a distinctive combination of public service and commercial platforms, allowing for potential comparison across different service models.

From a methodological standpoint, focusing on a single country enabled more efficient use of limited research resources while still achieving a nationally representative sample. This approach allowed for deeper analysis within one cultural context rather than sacrificing depth for broader but shallower cross-cultural comparisons. The UK’s regulatory framework, which balances innovation with public interest considerations, also provided a valuable lens through which to examine questions of viewer autonomy and platform responsibility.

While the findings are grounded in UK viewing experiences, they establish a solid foundation for future comparative research. The methodological approach and viewing typology framework developed here are designed to be adaptable to other cultural contexts, potentially revealing important similarities and differences in viewing patterns and platform interactions across different regions and regulatory environments.

Several challenges were anticipated in undertaking this research. The rapid evolution of streaming platforms and viewing habits during the research period presented one significant challenge. Potential differences between self-reported and actual viewing behaviours needed to be addressed, as did commercial sensitivity around platform data and design decisions. The research also faced the challenge of capturing diverse viewer experiences and perspectives while balancing academic rigour with practical industry application. These anticipated challenges informed the research design, leading to methodological choices that would provide multiple perspectives on the phenomenon and allow for triangulation of findings.

1.7 Significance of the Study and Potential Implications

The timing of this investigation is particularly apposite as viewing habits established during recent global events may persist long-term, while streaming platforms continue to evolve their engagement strategies. As the boundaries between work, leisure, and rest become increasingly blurred in digital environments, understanding how to support intentional media consumption may become not just beneficial but essential. This research responds to these developments by providing both theoretical frameworks for understanding contemporary viewing behaviours and practical recommendations for platform design that respects viewer autonomy while maintaining engagement.

Potentially, this research holds importance and has far-reaching implications for various stakeholders in the digital media ecosystem:

Academic Contributions: The research makes contributions across multiple domains. In academic terms, it contributes to the growing body of literature on digital media consumption, offering a comprehensive examination of binge-watching behaviours and their psychological underpinnings. By combining insights from media studies, psychology, and human-computer interaction, this research provides a multidisciplinary perspective on a contemporary media phenomenon. The development of a flexible, three-dimensional framework for understanding engagement patterns offers applications beyond media consumption to various domains of human behaviour.

Health and Social Implications: The research offers implications for health and social considerations in digital media consumption. By exploring the potential health and social impacts of excessive VoD consumption, this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue about digital wellbeing and technology's role in our lives. The findings help equip viewers to make more informed decisions about their viewing habits, potentially leading to improved sleep patterns, physical health, and social interactions. These insights could inform public health policies and guidelines related to digital media consumption, while being incorporated into media literacy programs to help educate the public about healthy digital consumption habits.

Interface Design and User Autonomy: The investigation into interface design's role in influencing viewing behaviours offers valuable insights for developing more user-centric and ethical design practices in digital media platforms. These findings could drive a shift towards design practices that prioritise viewer autonomy and wellbeing alongside engagement metrics. Such insights could spark innovation in platform features, including customisation of viewing limits, mindful watching modes, and novel recommendation algorithms. The research encourages platforms to be more transparent about how their algorithms and design features influence viewing behaviour.

Content Creation and Storytelling: Insights into binge-watching behaviours could significantly influence how stories are structured and paced, potentially leading to new forms of storytelling optimised for various viewing patterns. Understanding viewer preferences and behaviours might impact decisions on episode length and season structure. These findings on viewing patterns could encourage the creation of more diverse content, including both binge-worthy series and content designed for more measured consumption.

Industry-Academic Bridge: By incorporating industry perspectives and aiming to produce actionable design recommendations, this research bridges the gap between academic research and industry practice in VoD platform design. The research contributes to developing best practices and industry standards for ethical design in streaming platforms. Platforms implementing user autonomy features could differentiate themselves in a crowded market, potentially appealing to increasingly health-conscious consumers

Policy Implications: The findings from this study could inform policy discussions around digital media regulation, particularly concerning user protection and platform responsibilities. As digital wellbeing becomes a more prominent issue, platforms that proactively address these concerns may be better positioned to adapt to potential future regulations. This work contributes to developing evidence-based policies that balance innovation with user protection.

Viewer Experience and Digital Literacy: Recommendations for interperson-alisation features could result in more tailored viewing experiences that align with individual preferences and wellbeing goals. The research contributes to increased awareness and understanding of how platform design influences behaviour, potentially leading to more digitally literate and discerning viewers. This enhanced understanding enables viewers to make more informed choices about their media consumption.

Ethical Considerations and Societal Impact: The study prompts content creators and platform designers to consider the potential impact of their work on viewer wellbeing, potentially leading to more responsible content creation and platform design practices. By addressing the balance between engagement and wellbeing in digital media consumption, this research contributes to a healthier relationship between technology and society at large. The findings help shape a future where technology serves human needs more effectively, fostering a more balanced approach to digital content consumption.

Theoretical Framework Development: The research developed a novel framework for understanding binge-watching through viewing typologies mapped along dimensions of duration, frequency, and compulsion. Its intentional flexibility in defining thresholds allows for adaptation across different research contexts and methodologies. Beyond media consumption, it shows promise for understanding engagement patterns across various domains of human behaviour, offering a versatile tool for analysing different types of repeated engagement activities.

This framework provides value to the research domain by offering a structured approach to categorising and understanding diverse viewing behaviours that goes beyond simple metrics. Such theoretical frameworks can contribute to advancing the field as they provide a common language for researchers, enable systematic comparison across studies, and facilitate the development of targeted interventions or design approaches for different viewing patterns.

To summarise, this research has the potential to influence not only how we design and interact with digital media platforms but also how we conceptualise and manage our relationship with on-demand content in the digital age. By providing insights that can benefit viewers, content creators, platform designers, policymakers, and researchers alike, this study aims to contribute to a more balanced and health-conscious digital media landscape, where the benefits of on-demand viewing can be enjoyed without compromising user wellbeing or autonomy.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis unfolds across eight chapters, including this. The literature review in Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical foundations and current understanding of binge-watching behaviours. Chapter 3 details the methodological approach, explaining the rationale for and implementation of the mixed-methods design.

The subsequent four chapters present the primary research studies: Chapter 4 explores qualitative insights gained through in-depth interviews; Chapter 5 examines broader patterns through quantitative survey data; Chapter 6 investigates unobtrusive measures through analysis of iPlayer data and contemporaneous Twitter discourse; and Chapter 7 presents industry perspectives gathered through a dialogue with key decision-makers. Finally, Chapter 8 synthesises findings across all studies and discusses their implications for both theory and practice.

The thesis explores binge-watching from multiple angles - viewer experiences, behavioural data, social discourse, and industry perspectives - to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in designing VoD platforms that balance user engagement with ethical considerations and viewer wellbeing. The insights gained have the potential to influence how we design and interact with digital media platforms and how we conceptualise and manage our relationship with on-demand content in the digital age.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The Phenomenon of Binge-Watching in the Digital Age

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2.1 Introduction

The advent of Video on Demand (VOD) services has fundamentally transformed how audiences engage with television content. According to Forbes (Suh, 2018), ‘binge-watching’ was officially added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2018, defined as watching multiple episodes of a television programme consecutively or in rapid succession [1][12]. This evolution in viewing behaviour has coincided with significant growth in streaming platforms, with Netflix alone reaching over 230 million subscribers globally by 2023 (Statistica, 2023) [16].

This review examines the evolution of television consumption in the streaming era, exploring the psychological drivers behind binge-watching behaviour, the impact of platform design on viewing habits, and implications for viewer wellbeing and autonomy. Through analysis of existing literature, it seeks to identify potential interface solutions that might better serve viewers while maintaining engagement.

2.2 Historical Context and Definition of Binge-Watching

The journey to current viewing patterns can be traced through several technological milestones. Matrix (2014) describes how the introduction of VCRs in the 1980s first enabled viewers to control their consumption patterns, followed by the advent of DVD box sets in the late 1990s [8] which Jenner (2016) identifies as a crucial stepping stone toward modern binge-watching behaviour [11]. Pittman & Sheehan, (2015) state that the subsequent development of DVR technology in the early 2000s further enhanced viewer control [13], culminating in the current streaming era, that Wayne (2018) argues has fundamentally restructured the television industry [10].

However, defining binge-watching proves more complex than might initially be assumed, with researchers approaching the concept from various quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Traditional definitions focus primarily on quantity. Steins-Loeber et al. (2020) proposed a threshold of more than two episodes in one sitting [28], while Aghababian et al. (2021) suggested a mean of 4.55 episodes (SD 2.53) based on observed behaviour patterns [29]. Time-based definitions have also varied, with de Feijter et al. (2016) suggesting three or more hours consecutively constitutes binge-watching [30], while Vaterlaus et al. (2019) found average session lengths of 4.6 hours [31].

More recent research has begun to challenge these purely quantitative definitions. Merikivi et al. (2020) emphasise the importance of viewer autonomy and intentionality in their definition, suggesting that binge-watching should be understood as a voluntary choice to watch multiple episodes, rather than simply a measure of time spent viewing [32]. This perspective is supported by Steiner and Xu (2020), who found that viewers' own perceptions of whether they were binge-watching often differed from researcher-imposed definitions based solely on episode counts or duration [14].

The emergence of new viewing technologies has further complicated traditional definitions. Trouleau et al. (2016) propose a data-driven, content-aware approach to defining binge-watching, acknowledging that episode length and content type might influence what constitutes a 'binge' [33]. Their research suggests that binge-watching patterns vary significantly across genres and platforms, challenging the notion of a one-size-fits-all definition.

2.2.1 Cultural Variations in Definition and Practice

The cross-cultural understanding of binge-watching adds another layer of complexity to its definition. Flayelle et al.'s (2020) comprehensive study across nine languages revealed significant variations in how different cultures conceptualise and experience binge-watching [34]. Their research demonstrated that while the basic behaviour might be universal, its interpretation and social acceptance vary considerably across cultural contexts. This finding is further supported by Pittman and Steiner (2021), who identified distinct cultural patterns in binge-watching motivation and behaviour across different regions [13].

In Asian contexts, Susanno et al. (2019) noted that individual entertainment and escape motivations tend to predominate. They also found that Indonesian viewers' binge-watching habits were significantly influenced by social factors and price sensitivity, suggesting that economic and cultural factors play crucial roles in shaping viewing behaviours across different societies [35].

Park and Kim (2024) examined how Korean Generation Z uses summary videos as a means to stay updated with cultural trends and maintain social connections. Their research found that this demographic exhibits strong social anxiety around missing content that others might be discussing, a phenomenon known as Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). Additionally, they identified Fear of Best Options (FoBO) as another psychological factor driving consumption of summary videos, where users worry about making less than optimal content choices. Park and Kim noted that Korean Generation Z specifically '*watch videos over the Internet rather than on TV and share information with each other through social networks.*', highlighting distinct cultural patterns in how young viewers engage with streamed content [36].

This research provides further evidence that cultural context significantly influences viewer behaviour and motivations in different regions and that these cultural variations suggest that any comprehensive definition of binge-watching must acknowledge its cultural dimensions.

The behavioural aspects of binge-watching add further nuance to its definition. Flayelle et al. (2019) emphasise elements of loss of control in their conceptualisation [37], while Anghelcev et al. (2021) broaden the definition to include accelerated viewing of a season over several days, recognising that binge-watching patterns may extend beyond single session viewing marathons [38]. This evolution in understanding reflects the growing sophistication of research in this field and the recognition that binge-watching represents a complex interaction of behavioural, technological, and cultural factors.

2.2.2 Content Release Strategies and Viewing Patterns

The evolution in content release strategies has notably influenced viewing patterns and behaviours. Jenner (2018) examines how Netflix’s strategy of releasing entire seasons simultaneously marked a significant departure from traditional weekly episode releases, fundamentally altering how viewers engage with serial content [9]. This shift has prompted other platforms to experiment with different release models. Wayne (2018) discusses how some services have adopted hybrid approaches, noting that Amazon Prime initially followed Netflix’s all-at-once model before experimenting with weekly releases for certain shows.

Matrix’s (2014) research specifically focused on teen viewing habits, revealing distinct generational patterns in how different age groups approach binge-watching. The study found that younger viewers often demonstrate more comfort with extended viewing sessions and show greater facility in managing multiple screens simultaneously [8]. These findings are complemented by Vaterlaus et al.’s (2019) examination of college student television binge-watching, which identified unique patterns in how young adults conceptualise and justify their viewing behaviours [31].

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

The complex nature of contemporary viewing behaviours necessitates examination through multiple theoretical lenses. Three key frameworks have emerged as particularly relevant for understanding modern viewing patterns: Uses and Gratifications Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Flow Theory. These frameworks, while developed in different contexts, provide complementary perspectives on why and how people engage with streaming content.

2.3.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G), first applied to traditional media consumption, has proven remarkably adaptable to understanding streaming behaviour. Ruggiero (2000) established the theory’s continued relevance in the digital age, emphasising how new media characteristics like interactivity and asynchronicity create novel gratification opportunities [39].

In the context of streaming platforms, Rubenking and Bracken (2018) identified specific gratifications sought through binge-watching, including anticipation management, mood regulation, and social connection [22][40]. Their research particularly resonates with the mobile viewing patterns documented by Wang and Bai (2021), suggesting that viewers actively seek different gratifications across various viewing contexts and devices [41].

The application of U&G to streaming media has revealed increasingly nuanced patterns of gratification seeking. Pittman and Sheehan (2015) found that engagement emerged as the strongest predictor of binge-watching behaviour across all viewing contexts [13].

The impact of content release strategies on viewing behaviour can be understood through the lens of Uses and Gratifications Theory. Jenner (2018) examines how different release patterns satisfy distinct viewer needs and gratifications [9]. All-at-once releases, she argues, fulfil immediate gratification needs and support stronger narrative immersion, aligning with what Rubenking and Bracken (2018) identify as core motivations for binge-watching [22][40]. However, weekly releases serve different gratifications, particularly social, by creating shared viewing experiences and extended engagement with content. This understanding helps explain why some platforms have begun experimenting with hybrid release strategies, as documented by Wayne (2018) in his analysis of streaming platform evolution [10].

Shim and Kim (2018) identified five key motivations for binge-watching through principal component analysis: enjoyment, efficiency, recommendation of others, perceived control, and fandom. Their research with 785 binge-watchers demonstrates how Uses and Gratifications Theory can explain viewer patterns, particularly as viewers ‘perceive binge-watching as a means to satisfy their desires’ through multiple complementary rather than mutually exclusive motivations [42].

Park and Kim (2024) further develop this theoretical framework by examining how FoMO and FoBO function as specific gratifications sought by younger viewers, particularly those in Generation Z. Their research shows how these psychological phenomena influence media choice and consumption patterns, especially in East Asian cultural contexts where social belonging is particularly valued [36].

2.3.2 Self-Determination Theory and Viewer Autonomy

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a crucial framework for understanding viewer autonomy in the streaming era. Steiner and Xu (2020) applied SDT principles to analyse how streaming platforms either support or undermine viewers' sense of autonomous choice. Their research revealed that features intended to enhance engagement, such as autoplay, often conflict with viewers' desire for autonomous control over their viewing experience [14].

The concept of autonomy support in SDT aligns closely with emerging trends in platform design. Flayelle et al. (2020) found that viewers who felt more autonomous in their viewing choices reported higher satisfaction and lower levels of problematic viewing behaviour [43]. This finding has significant implications for platform design, particularly in mobile contexts where viewing sessions often occur in shorter, more frequent bursts. The research suggests that platforms supporting viewer autonomy through flexible viewing options and clear user controls may foster healthier viewing patterns while maintaining engagement.

The relationship between these theoretical frameworks and viewer autonomy emerges as particularly significant in the streaming era. Steiner and Xu (2020) demonstrate how Self-Determination Theory illuminates the complex balance between platform engagement and viewer control [14]. Their research reveals that viewers who feel more autonomous in their viewing choices not only report higher satisfaction but also demonstrate more sustainable viewing patterns.

This finding gains additional significance when considered alongside Flayelle et al.'s (2020) research showing that reduced autonomy often correlates with problematic viewing behaviours [43][34].

2.3.3 Flow Theory and Engagement

Flow Theory provides crucial insight into how content immersion affects viewing patterns and user behaviour. Merikivi et al. (2020) showed that binge-watching often creates conditions conducive to flow states, where viewers become deeply absorbed in content [32]. This understanding becomes particularly relevant when examining how platforms attempt to maintain viewer immersion while supporting healthy viewing habits. Their research suggests that successful platform design must balance engagement with viewer autonomy, a challenge that becomes increasingly complex as viewing patterns evolve across multiple devices and contexts.

2.3.4 Social and Cultural Frameworks

The social aspects of binge-watching require additional theoretical consideration. Uses and Gratifications Theory helps explain what Schirra et al. (2014) identified as 'together alone' viewing behaviours, where viewers engage in simultaneous but physically separate viewing experiences, often connected through social media [24]. This phenomenon gains additional significance when viewed through Self-Determination Theory's concept of relatedness. Sung et al. (2018) found that social motivations for binge-watching often centre around cultural participation and the desire to avoid feeling left out of conversations, suggesting that social factors significantly influence viewing autonomy [23].

2.4 Impacts and Outcomes of Binge-Watching

The impact of binge-watching behaviour manifests across multiple dimensions of viewers' lives, with research revealing both positive and negative outcomes. Understanding these impacts has become increasingly crucial as streaming platforms continue to shape viewing habits and influence viewer wellbeing.

2.4.1 Positive Outcomes

Research has identified several beneficial aspects of binge-watching when viewers maintain autonomy over their viewing choices. Steiner and Xu (2020) found that controlled binge-watching can enhance narrative comprehension and viewer satisfaction, particularly when viewers actively choose to engage with content aligned with their interests and emotional needs [14]. This finding supports earlier research by Pittman and Sheehan (2015), who identified enhanced engagement with complex narratives as a positive outcome of concentrated viewing sessions [13].

The social benefits of binge-watching emerge as particularly significant. Sung et al. (2018) documented how shared viewing experiences, even when physically separate, can strengthen social connections and provide common ground for meaningful interactions [23]. Their research revealed that viewers who engage in cultural conversations about 'binged' content often report stronger feelings of social inclusion and community belonging.

From a cognitive perspective, Rubenking and Bracken (2018) found that binge-watching can facilitate deeper engagement with complex narratives, allowing viewers to better track intricate plot developments and character arcs [22][40]. This increased comprehension may explain why some viewers report greater satisfaction when consuming content in concentrated sessions rather than spread over extended periods.

2.4.2 Negative Impacts

However, research has also identified significant concerns about excessive viewing behaviour. According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine survey cited by Exelmans and Van den Bulck (2017), 95% of young adults report losing sleep due to binge-watching. Their research specifically examined the relationship between binge-watching and sleep quality, finding that viewers who engaged in frequent binge-watching reported poorer sleep quality and greater fatigue [17].

Physical health impacts extend beyond sleep disruption. Hu et al.'s (2003) longitudinal study found concerning correlations between extended viewing time and increased health risks, including a 23% increase in obesity risk and 14% increase in diabetes risk for every two hours of daily television viewing [18]. While this study preceded the streaming era, Starosta et al. (2019) found similar patterns among streaming viewers, particularly those who reported regular binge-watching behaviour [19].

Mental health considerations have emerged as another significant concern. Starosta et al. (2021) documented connections between excessive binge-watching and increased anxiety and depressive symptoms, particularly during periods of social isolation [20]. Their research suggests that while binge-watching might temporarily alleviate negative emotions, it can potentially exacerbate underlying mental health issues when used as a primary coping mechanism.

The displacement of other activities presents additional challenges. Matrix's (2014) research with younger viewers revealed that excessive binge-watching often leads to academic procrastination and reduced physical activity. These findings align with more recent work by Merikivi et al. (2020), who found that viewers often underestimate the cumulative time spent streaming content, leading to the unintended displacement of other important activities [32].

2.4.3 Relationship Between Viewing Patterns and Impacts

The relationship between specific viewing patterns and their outcomes reveals nuanced interactions that go beyond simple viewing duration. Flayelle et al. (2020) found that the impact of binge-watching varies significantly based on viewing intentionality and control [43]. Their research indicates that planned viewing sessions, even when extended, tend to have fewer negative consequences than unplanned viewing that spirals beyond intended limits. This finding aligns with Merikivi et al.'s (2020) observation that viewer awareness and conscious choice play crucial roles in determining whether binge-watching leads to positive or negative outcomes [32].

The relationship between specific viewing patterns and viewer outcomes extends beyond enjoyment to potential mental health impacts. Umesh and Bose (2019) documented connections between excessive binge-watching and '*features such as fatigability, poor quality of sleep, insomnia, and some mood disturbance.*'. Their research suggests possible associations with depression, loneliness, and deficient self-regulation. Particularly significant is their finding that binge-watching before bedtime can cause 'presleep arousal,' which disrupts normal sleep patterns [21].

This research aligns with Exelmans and Van den Bulck's (2017) findings about the negative impact of evening viewing on sleep quality, supporting the idea that timing of binge-watching sessions may be as important as duration in determining its effects. They found that time-of-day patterns significantly influence impact severity, documenting that evening binge-watching has particularly strong effects on sleep quality, with viewers reporting increased cognitive arousal that persists well after viewing ends [17]. Their research found that viewers who engaged in binge-watching within two hours of bedtime experienced a 48% increase in sleep onset latency compared to those who maintained greater temporal distance between viewing and sleep attempts.

The frequency and duration patterns of viewing sessions also show distinct relationships with outcomes. Steins-Loeber et al. (2020) identified that regular, shorter binge-watching sessions (2-3 episodes) generally correlate with more positive experiences, whereas irregular but extended sessions (5+ episodes) more frequently associate with negative consequences [28]. This pattern suggests that the development of regular viewing routines might help mitigate some of binge-watching's potential negative effects.

2.4.4 Content Type Influence on Outcomes

Different content types generate varying patterns of engagement and impact. Trouleau et al.'s (2016) analysis of viewing data revealed that narrative complexity significantly influences viewing patterns and their subsequent effects [33]. Their research showed that complex dramas often lead to longer viewing sessions but also higher levels of viewer satisfaction and narrative comprehension, suggesting that content type mediates the relationship between viewing duration and outcomes.

Genre-specific effects emerged as particularly significant. Rubenking and Bracken (2018) found that certain genres, particularly those with strong narrative continuity, more frequently lead to extended viewing sessions. However, they also noted that these same genres often produce higher levels of viewer satisfaction and perceived value, complicating straightforward assessments of impact. Their research indicated that viewers watching complex dramas reported greater narrative engagement and satisfaction compared to those watching procedural or episodic content, even when viewing duration remained constant [22][40].

2.5 Platform Design Considerations

The documented impacts of binge-watching highlight the crucial role of platform design in shaping viewing behaviour. Contemporary streaming platforms must navigate complex challenges in balancing user engagement with viewer wellbeing, particularly as viewing patterns evolve across multiple devices and contexts.

The design of streaming platforms significantly influences viewing behaviour and its subsequent impacts. Research reveals how specific interface elements, personalisation systems, and design approaches shape user engagement while either supporting or potentially undermining viewer autonomy.

2.5.1 Interface Design and User Experience

Platform design has evolved considerably since the early days of streaming services. Cox (2018) documents how features like autoplay, originally implemented to reduce friction and enhance engagement, have become increasingly sophisticated but also more controversial [44]. His research reveals that while these features effectively maintain viewer engagement, they may inadvertently contribute to the negative impacts identified in viewing pattern studies. This finding aligns with Merikivi et al.'s (2020) observation that design elements intended to optimise engagement often conflict with viewers' expressed desires for greater control over their viewing experience [32].

The interface's role in shaping viewing behaviour extends beyond individual features. Evans et al. (2022) found that the cumulative effect of multiple design elements significantly influences how viewers interact with content. Their research demonstrates that seemingly minor design choices, such as the presentation of remaining episode counts or the timing of end-credit interruptions, can substantially impact viewing session duration and viewer autonomy [45].

2.5.2 Mobile and Cross-Device Viewing

The rise of mobile viewing has introduced new dimensions to binge-watching behaviour. Mowlabocus (2016) explores how smartphones have created opportunities for ‘interstitial viewing’ - watching content in the gaps between other activities [46]. This has led to what they term ‘mobile binge-watching’, where viewers accumulate significant viewing hours through multiple shorter sessions rather than extended single sittings. The implications of this shift are significant; de Feijter et al. (2016) found that mobile viewing often leads to different consumption patterns compared to traditional television viewing, with shorter but more frequent viewing sessions becoming increasingly common [30].

2.5.3 Technical Considerations and Personalisation

Recommendation systems present particular challenges in balancing engagement with autonomy. Wayne (2018) examines how Netflix’s recommendation algorithm evolved to consider not just content preferences but also viewing patterns and habits [10]. This sophisticated approach to personalisation, while effective at maintaining engagement, raises questions about agency and content discovery that Jenner (2018) explores in her analysis of platform power dynamics [9]. These power dynamics include the asymmetrical relationship between streaming platforms and their users, where platforms exercise significant control over content presentation, availability, and viewing options while users have limited ability to influence these fundamental aspects of their viewing experience. This imbalance enables platforms to shape viewing behaviours in ways that may prioritise business metrics over user autonomy.

2.5.4 Design for Viewer Autonomy

The challenge of designing for viewer autonomy while maintaining engagement has emerged as a concern. Platform responses to these challenges vary significantly. Acosta-Vargas et al. (2019) analyse how different services approach the balance between engagement optimisation and user control. Their comparative study reveals that platforms implementing more flexible control features often achieve higher user satisfaction scores, even though traditional engagement metrics might suggest otherwise [47].

2.5.5 Accessibility and Inclusive Design

Ellis and Kent (2015) examined how television’s transition to internet platforms creates both opportunities and challenges for viewers with disabilities. They document how accessibility features that were mandated for broadcast television, such as captioning and audio description, are often absent when the same content migrates to streaming platforms. Their research highlights activism by viewers with disabilities who have used online platforms to advocate for improved accessibility, particularly in cases like Netflix’s initial reluctance to provide audio description.

Ellis and Kent note that while digital television offers the technological potential for improved accessibility through features like customisable interfaces, this potential is often unrealised without regulatory pressure or consumer advocacy [48]. Their research demonstrates the importance of considering both representation and accessibility in platform design, particularly as television content increasingly becomes available through various digital devices and interfaces.

Acosta-Vargas, et al. (2019) conducted research specifically on users with low vision, evaluating accessibility using a modified ‘Barrier Walkthrough’ method. Their heuristic approach, which evaluated 40 websites, found that high ranking did not correlate with accessibility and inclusiveness. They identified crucial barriers that prevented effective use, particularly for those with visual impairments, including insufficient visual contrast, poorly positioned images, and issues with navigation. Their research emphasises that accessible design requires intentional consideration of diverse user needs rather than assuming technological advancement automatically improves accessibility. This supports the argument that platform design must purposefully incorporate accessibility features to ensure viewer autonomy across diverse populations [47].

2.6 Methodology Approaches

The complex interplay between platform design and viewer behaviour necessitates diverse methodological approaches to understand binge-watching comprehensively. The evolution of viewing technology and the increasing sophistication of platforms require research methods that can capture both quantitative patterns and qualitative experiences.

2.6.1 Quantitative Approaches

Large-scale viewing data analysis has provided crucial insights into actual viewing patterns. Trouleau et al. (2016) demonstrated the value of analysing platform usage data, revealing patterns that might not be apparent through self-reporting alone. Their methodology enabled the identification of specific viewing patterns and their relationship to content types, though they acknowledge the limitation of not capturing viewer intent or context [33].

Survey-based research has played a central role in understanding viewer motivations and experiences. Flayelle et al. (2019, 2020) developed and validated comprehensive questionnaires specifically designed to assess binge-watching behaviours and motivations across cultural contexts. Their work with the ‘Watching TV Series Motives’ and ‘Binge-Watching Engagement and Symptoms’ questionnaires has provided standardised tools for measuring various aspects of viewing behaviour [37][34].

2.6.2 Qualitative Approaches

In-depth interviews have proven particularly valuable for understanding the nuanced aspects of viewing behaviour. Matrix (2014) employed semi-structured interviews to explore how young viewers conceptualise and experience binge-watching, revealing insights that might have been missed in purely quantitative approaches [8]. Similarly, Steiner and Xu (2020) used qualitative interviews to uncover the complex motivations and rationalisations behind viewing decisions [14].

Content analysis of social media discourse has emerged as another valuable methodology. Highfield et al. (2013) demonstrated how analysis of viewer discussions on platforms like Twitter can reveal patterns in how audiences engage with content and how viewing habits spread through social networks [49]. This approach has proven particularly useful for understanding the social aspects of binge-watching behaviour.

2.6.3 Mixed Methods Research

The complexity of binge-watching behaviour has led many researchers to adopt mixed methods approaches. De Feijter et al. (2016) combined quantitative viewing data with qualitative interviews to develop a more complete understanding of viewing patterns and their contexts. This approach allowed them to not only identify what viewers were watching but also understand the circumstances and motivations behind their choices [30].

Longitudinal studies have provided valuable insights into how viewing behaviours evolve over time. Mowlabocus (2016) used a combination of tracking data and periodic interviews to examine how mobile viewing patterns develop and change, demonstrating the value of sustained observation in understanding viewing behaviour evolution [46].

2.6.4 Methodological Challenges

Research in this field faces several significant challenges. Self-reporting bias presents a particular concern, as noted by Merikivi et al. (2020), who found that viewers often underestimate their viewing time [32]. Privacy considerations also limit access to comprehensive viewing data, requiring researchers to develop creative approaches to understanding viewing patterns.

The rapid evolution of viewing technology and platforms presents another methodological challenge. As Jenner (2018) observes, research methods must continually adapt to address new viewing contexts and behaviours, particularly as platforms introduce new features and viewing options [9]. These methodological challenges directly inform the identification of research gaps and future directions in the field.

2.7 Research Gaps and Future Directions

Current research in binge-watching behaviour, while extensive, reveals several significant gaps that warrant further investigation. These gaps become particularly apparent when considering the rapidly evolving nature of streaming technology and viewing behaviours, and the methodological challenges encountered in current research approaches.

2.7.1 Definitional and Measurement Challenges

The lack of a standardised definition of binge-watching continues to challenge researchers in the field. While Flayelle et al. (2020) have made significant progress in developing standardised measurement tools, their work also highlights the ongoing difficulty in establishing consistent criteria across different viewing contexts and cultures [43][34]. This definitional ambiguity, as noted by Merikivi et al. (2020), complicates efforts to compare findings across studies and build a coherent body of knowledge about viewing behaviours [32].

2.7.2 Platform Design and User Autonomy

The relationship between platform design and viewer autonomy remains incompletely understood. Evans et al. (2022) identify this as a crucial area for future research, particularly as platforms continue to implement increasingly sophisticated engagement mechanisms. Their work suggests that understanding how specific design elements influence viewer decision-making could be crucial for developing more user-centric platforms [45].

2.7.3 Long-term Impact Studies

Long-term impact studies present another gap in current research. While studies like Hu et al. (2003) have documented correlations between extended viewing and health outcomes [18], contemporary research has yet to fully examine the long-term effects of streaming-era viewing patterns. Steins-Loeber et al. (2020) particularly note the need for longitudinal studies that can track how viewing habits evolve over time and their sustained impact on viewer wellbeing [28].

Questions of causality in the relationship between viewing patterns and various outcomes remain largely unanswered. While correlations between binge-watching and various impacts have been documented, Starosta et al. (2021) note that determining directional relationships has proven challenging [20][50]. This gap is particularly significant when considering mental health impacts and the potential role of streaming behaviour as either a cause or symptom of psychological distress.

2.7.4 Cross-cultural Research Needs

Cross-cultural variations in binge-watching behaviour represent another underexplored area. Although Flayelle et al.'s (2020) work spans multiple languages and cultures [34], Pittman and Steiner (2021) argue that more detailed examination of cultural differences in viewing motivations and patterns is needed [51]. This gap is particularly significant as streaming platforms continue to expand globally.

This research gap suggests several promising directions for future investigation. The development of more sophisticated research methodologies, particularly those capable of tracking cross-platform behaviour while respecting privacy concerns, could help address current limitations. Additionally, increased focus on longitudinal studies could provide much-needed insight into the long-term implications of contemporary viewing patterns.

Future research may benefit from greater integration of theoretical frameworks. While current studies often draw on individual theories, Merikivi et al. (2020) suggest that more comprehensive theoretical approaches combining multiple perspectives could better capture the complexity of modern viewing behaviour [32].

The role of artificial intelligence and machine learning in shaping viewing behaviour represents another emerging area requiring investigation. As platforms increasingly employ these technologies for inter-personalisation, understanding their impact on viewer autonomy and wellbeing becomes crucial.

2.8 Conclusion

This review of literature reveals the complex nature of binge-watching behaviour and its relationship to platform design, viewer autonomy, and wellbeing. The evolution of viewing patterns from traditional scheduled broadcasting to on-demand streaming has fundamentally altered how audiences engage with content, creating opportunities and challenges that directly inform this study's research questions.

2.8.1 Research Question Alignment

Regarding RQ1 (What constitutes binge-watching, how might it be defined?), the literature reveals significant variation in how researchers conceptualise and measure binge-watching behaviour. While quantitative definitions range from Steins-Loeber et al.'s (2020) threshold of more than two episodes [28] to Aghababian et al.'s (2021) mean of 4.55 episodes [29], more recent research suggests the need for definitions that incorporate viewer intent and autonomy. The work of Merikivi et al. (2020) particularly highlights how viewing patterns vary across platforms and contexts, suggesting that any comprehensive definition must account for these variations [32].

The literature’s examination of positive and negative impacts (RQ2) demonstrates the complex nature of binge-watching outcomes. While studies like Steiner and Xu (2020) document benefits such as enhanced narrative comprehension and social connection [14], research by Exelmans and Van den Bulck (2017) and Starosta et al. (2021) reveals significant concerns about impacts on sleep, physical health, and mental wellbeing [17][20][50]. This tension between potential benefits and risks underscores the importance of understanding how platform design might better support healthy viewing patterns.

The review of platform design elements (RQ3) reveals how specific interface features can influence viewer autonomy. Cox’s (2018) analysis of autoplay features [44] and Evans et al.’s (2022) examination of interface elements demonstrate how design choices can either support or undermine viewer control [45]. The integration of mobile viewing patterns and cross-device behaviour adds further complexity to these design considerations, suggesting the need for more nuanced approaches to platform development.

Finally, regarding inter-personalisation features (RQ4), the literature indicates promising directions for platform development. There exists an opportunity for further development of platforms that can maintain engagement while better serving viewer needs through more flexible, personalised interfaces.

2.8.2 Research Implications

The identified gaps in current research particularly justify this study’s mixed-methods approach to understanding viewer autonomy and platform design. While previous studies have examined either viewing patterns (Trouleau et al., 2016) or platform features (Cox, 2018) in isolation [33][44], this research uniquely combines analysis of actual viewing data with in-depth user experience investigation.

The integration of BBC iPlayer viewing data with user interviews and surveys offers unprecedented opportunities to examine how specific platform features influence viewing behaviour in real-world contexts.

This study's focus on practical platform design solutions addresses a crucial gap identified by Evans et al. (2022), who note the relative scarcity of research translating theoretical understanding into actionable design recommendations [45]. By combining empirical viewing data analysis with industry insights, this research creates a bridge between academic understanding and practical application.

2.8.3 Practical Applications

The practical implications of this research extend beyond theoretical contribution. As streaming platforms continue to face increasing scrutiny regarding their impact on user wellbeing, this study's focus on design solutions that enhance viewer autonomy offers timely guidance for platform development. The findings from the industry dialogues component (Study 4) provide particularly valuable insights for platforms seeking to balance engagement metrics with user wellbeing.

The research's examination of inter-personalisation features directly addresses a growing need for more flexible, user-centric platform designs. By investigating specific interface elements that support viewer autonomy while maintaining engagement, this study offers practical solutions that platforms can implement to better serve their users.

2.8.4 Unique Contribution

This research makes several distinctive contributions to the field. First, unlike previous studies that have primarily relied on self-reported data or limited platform metrics, this study's integration of actual viewing data from BBC iPlayer provides insights into real-world viewing patterns and their relationship to platform design. This approach addresses what Merikivi et al. (2020) identify as a crucial need for more comprehensive data on actual viewing behaviours [32].

Second, the research's focus on viewer autonomy through platform design represents a novel approach to addressing concerns about problematic viewing behaviour. While previous research has often focused on viewer behaviour modification or content restrictions, this study uniquely examines how thoughtful interface design can support healthier viewing patterns while preserving user engagement.

Finally, the integration of industry perspectives through professional dialogues offers insights that pure academic research has often missed. This practical grounding ensures that the study's recommendations are not only theoretically sound but also implementable within current platform development frameworks.

2.8.5 Industry Impact

The potential industry impact of this research extends across multiple dimensions of streaming platform operation. As Wayne (2018) documents, streaming platforms are increasingly seeking ways to differentiate themselves in a crowded market [10]. This research's focus on viewer autonomy through interface design offers platforms a meaningful way to distinguish their services while addressing growing concerns about digital wellbeing.

The economic implications for platforms are particularly significant. While platforms have traditionally focused on maximising engagement metrics, users may increasingly value platforms that offer greater control over their viewing experience. This study’s findings about specific interface features that support viewer autonomy while maintaining engagement could help platforms adapt to these user preferences without sacrificing commercial viability.

Furthermore, as regulatory scrutiny of digital platforms increases, this research’s focus on responsible design practices positions platforms to proactively address potential concerns. Ongoing work on accessibility and inclusive design suggests that platforms implementing more user-centric features may be better positioned to meet future regulatory requirements while building stronger user trust.

The research also has implications for content creation and distribution strategies. As Jenner (2018) notes, platform design choices influence not only viewing patterns but also content development decisions [9]. This study’s findings about the relationship between interface design and viewer behaviour could inform how platforms approach content commissioning, release scheduling, and presentation strategies.

Chapter 3

Methodology

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3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the comprehensive methodological approach adopted in this thesis to investigate the multifaceted phenomenon of binge-watching and its implications for Video on Demand (VoD) interface design. The complexities of this topic, which span psychological, social and technological domains, necessitate a nuanced and multidimensional research strategy.

The rapid evolution of viewing habits, particularly the rise of binge-watching, has presented both opportunities and challenges for content providers. While previous researchers have explored viewer behaviours and preferences through various methodologies, this research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding by also incorporating industry perspectives. This multi-faceted approach not only examines viewer experiences and behaviours but also investigates how research findings resonate with and potentially influence industry professionals.

By including an industry-focused component, this research provides a reality check on the practical applicability of academic insights in the fast-paced, competitive, consumer-driven market of VoD services. This holistic methodology offers insights into the decision-making processes that shape the very platforms influencing consumer behaviour, bridging the gap between theoretical understanding and practical implementation. It allows for a nuanced exploration of the binge-watching phenomenon, connecting empirical findings with real-world applications and aligning consumer experiences with industry intentions. In doing so, it aims to contribute meaningfully to both academic discourse and industry practices, potentially influencing the development of VoD interfaces in ways that better serve the needs and wellbeing of viewers.

This research is grounded in a critical realist perspective, which acknowledges the existence of an objective reality while recognising that our understanding of it is socially constructed and, therefore, fallible. This philosophical stance informs the mixed-methods approach, allowing for a deep exploration of both observable behaviours and underlying mechanisms driving binge-watching. By adopting this perspective, it is possible to investigate not only the visible patterns of binge-watching behaviour but also the complex social, psychological, and technological factors that shape these behaviours.

The research employs a mixed-methods approach, strategically combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques across multiple studies. This integration of methods allows for a more holistic understanding of binge-watching behaviours, viewer motivations and the potential role of interface design in shaping these experiences. By triangulating data from various sources, we aim to capture both the depth of individual experiences and broader patterns that emerge across larger populations.

The methodological framework of this thesis is built upon four interconnected studies:

1. A qualitative exploration through in-depth interviews, providing rich, contextual data on binge-watching behaviours and perceptions.
2. A quantitative survey on viewing habits and attitudes, allowing for statistical analysis and generalisation of findings to a broader population.
3. Analysis of BBC iPlayer viewing data and related Twitter discourse, offering insights into real-world viewing patterns and social media engagement around binge-watching.
4. Industry dialogues with key decision-makers and designers, bridging the gap between academic research and practical application in VoD interface design.

This comprehensive methodological approach addresses several key gaps identified in the literature review. First, combining qualitative and quantitative methods provides a more nuanced understanding of binge-watching behaviours than previous studies that relied primarily on self-reported data. Second, the inclusion of real-world viewing data from iPlayer partially addresses the lack of studies based on actual viewing patterns. Third, the analysis of social media discourse offers insights into the social aspects of binge-watching, an area that has been under-explored. Finally, by incorporating industry perspectives, this research bridges the gap between academic insights and practical application, addressing the limited research on how streaming platforms can also promote more mindful viewing habits.

This chapter will present the philosophical underpinnings of the research, provide a detailed overview of the research plans, and discuss the rationale behind the chosen methods. It will also address overarching ethical considerations and limitations of the approach.

It's important to note that while this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the methodological approach, specific details of data collection procedures, participant recruitment, and analysis techniques for each study are presented in their respective chapters. This structure is intended to allow for a clear presentation of the overall research strategy while avoiding unnecessary repetition.

By adopting this mixed-methods, multi-study approach, this research aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on digital media consumption while also providing practical insights that can inform the design of more user-centric and ethically-conscious VoD platforms. The following sections will explore further the philosophical and practical considerations that shape this methodological framework, beginning with an in-depth examination of how critical realism shapes this approach to understanding the complex phenomenon of binge-watching.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Before exploring the specific methodological approaches employed in this research, it is useful to establish the philosophical foundations that underpin the study. This section outlines the critical realist perspective adopted in this research and explains how this philosophical stance informs the overall research design and interpretation of findings.

The philosophical stance underpinning this research is crucial as it shapes the approach to knowledge generation and interpretation throughout the study. This research is grounded in critical realism, a philosophical position that bridges the gap between positivist and interpretivist paradigms.

As a researcher adopting a critical realist perspective, I am acutely aware that the investigation of binge-watching is theory-dependent but not theory-determined. This aligns with critical realism's view that while an objective reality exists, our understanding of it is mediated through our conceptual frameworks. The interpretation of benefits and 'harms' associated with binge-watching is inherently subjective, reflecting the epistemic relativism of critical realism. This acknowledgement of the role of interpretation in research aligns with a subjectivist epistemological stance, a key aspect of our critical realist approach.

However, I also acknowledge the existence of observable social structures and systems, which are made real through mass conformity to societal norms. Crucially, social structures and individual agency exist together, which means that when it comes to human behaviour, we can only talk about tendencies rather than universal laws. This dual recognition of both individual agency and social structures places this research within a critical realist ontological framework, and identifies me as a 'realist' researcher.

Critical realism, as articulated by Roy Bhaskar, posits that an ‘actual’ reality exists independently of our ‘empirical’ reality [52]. Bhaskar argues that "*we cannot know the world except through our interpretive experience*" [53]. However, critical realism maintains that we can seek to uncover the underlying factors that shape social phenomena.

This philosophical position informs my approach to understanding the binge-watching phenomenon and guides the mixed-methods design of this research. It aligns with my underlying beliefs as a subjectivist realist and shapes my approach to making sense of the world.

Key aspects of critical realism that inform this study include:

1. **Stratified Ontology:** Critical realism distinguishes between three domains of reality - the ‘real’, the ‘actual’, and the ‘empirical’ [52]. This stratified view allows for a nuanced exploration of binge-watching, considering not just observable behaviours but also underlying psychological and social mechanisms. As Bhaskar explains, the ‘real’ domain consists of underlying structures and mechanisms, the ‘actual’ includes events that occur whether we experience them or not, and the ‘empirical’ is what we can observe and measure.
2. **Causal Mechanisms:** Critical realism emphasises the importance of identifying causal mechanisms rather than just empirical regularities [54]. In the context of this study, this means looking beyond surface-level correlations to understand the deeper reasons why people engage in binge-watching behaviours. This aligns with the work of Pawson and Tilley [55], who argue for the importance of understanding "*what works for whom in what circumstances?*"

3. **Epistemic Relativism:** While critical realism acknowledges an objective reality, it recognises that our knowledge of this reality is socially produced and fallible [56]. This perspective informs the mixed-methods approach, acknowledging that different methods may provide different, yet equally valid, insights into the phenomenon of binge-watching. As Sayer notes, this allows us to be both realist about ontology and relativist about epistemology [57].
4. **Emancipatory Axiology:** Critical realism often adopts an emancipatory axiology, aiming to produce knowledge that can lead to positive social change [58]. This aligns with the study’s goal of informing more ethical and user-centric VoD interface design.

Importantly, as Benton and Craib state, current beliefs are open to correction as more is discovered through observations, experiments, interpretations etc [54]. This aligns with my underlying beliefs as a subjectivist realist and shapes my approach to making sense of the world. It underscores the importance of remaining open to new evidence and being willing to revise any established understanding of binge-watching as more data becomes available.

The critical realist approach allows for the integration of both quantitative and qualitative methods, recognising that each can provide valuable insights into different aspects of reality. It also acknowledges the role of the researcher in the knowledge production process, aligning with potential subjectivist influences on the research. As inferred by Danermark et al., this integration of methods enables greater understanding of more complex social phenomena.

By adopting this philosophical stance, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of binge-watching that goes beyond the surface-level descriptions to uncover underlying mechanisms and structures. This approach informs the mixed-methods design, the interpretation of results, and ultimately, any recommendations for VoD interface design that emerge from this study.

The critical realist framework is particularly suited to this research on binge-watching and VoD interface design because it allows for the exploration of interplay between individual viewer choices, technological capabilities, and broader social structures. It acknowledges that while viewers make conscious decisions about their viewing habits, these decisions are shared by both the design of streaming platforms and wider cultural norms around media consumption. This nuanced approach can help uncover complex factors influencing binge-watching behaviour and inform more responsible design practices.

The critical realist approach adopted in this research is also appropriate given the study's motivations. As we seek to understand how technological systems influence human behaviour while acknowledging both individual agency and structural constraints, critical realism provides a framework that avoids both technological determinism and purely subjective interpretations. This philosophical stance supports the research's aim to produce actionable insights that recognise the complex interplay between platform design, viewer psychology, and broader social contexts. By acknowledging both the reality of interface influence and the diverse ways viewers experience and respond to these influences, this research can inform practical design approaches that respect viewer diversity while addressing common patterns of behaviour.

While critical realism provides the overarching philosophical framework for this research, it is equally important to acknowledge the role of the researcher in shaping the study. The following section on Research Reflexivity explores how my personal background and preconceptions may influence the research process and outlines the steps taken to mitigate potential biases.

3.3 Researcher Reflexivity

As a researcher, it is crucial to acknowledge and reflect upon my own background, experiences, and potential biases that may influence this study. My personal history with binge-watching, professional background in media, and preconceptions about the phenomenon all play a role in shaping my approach to this research.

My relationship with binge-watching dates back to the 1990s, when I would rent entire TV series on video. This evolved into more extreme viewing patterns, such as watching the first season of ‘24’ in a single 24-hour session. As someone with a background in media production and experience working in cinema, TV, and radio, I have a deep appreciation for storytelling and often find it challenging to disengage from a narrative before its conclusion, even if I’m not really enjoying it.

Prior to beginning this research, I held certain assumptions about binge-watching. I anticipated a simpler definition based primarily on viewing duration and continuity of content. I also believed that the tendency to binge-watch was largely an internalised trait, with some individuals being more predisposed to this behaviour than others. Importantly, I had not considered the potential positive aspects of binge-watching, which highlighted the need for a more neutral and comprehensive approach to the topic.

Recognising these preconceptions, I have taken several steps to mitigate their potential influence on the research:

- Initiating the study with in-depth interviews to expand my perspective before designing the quantitative survey, aligning with critical realism’s emphasis on understanding underlying mechanisms.
- Piloting the initial survey with individuals unfamiliar with my research but with experience in survey creation to identify any potential bias in question framing.

- Adopting a sequential design, where each research stage was informed by the findings of the previous stage, rather than pre-determining the entire research process.
- Incorporating both consumer and industry perspectives to achieve a more holistic view of the phenomenon.
- Employing mixed methods to examine binge-watching from various angles, reducing the risk of a single methodological bias and reflecting critical realism’s stratified ontology.
- Actively seeking participants with diverse backgrounds to ensure a range of perspectives beyond my own experiences.
- Regularly reflecting on my own reactions and interpretations throughout the research process.

Throughout the research process, I have remained cognisant of the need to approach interviews, survey design, and data interpretation with as neutral a stance as possible. This included being mindful of how I phrased questions, ensuring survey items were not limited by my personal worldview, and avoiding the interpretation of data through a lens of preconceived expectations. This approach aligns with critical realism’s recognition of the fallibility of knowledge and the importance of seeking multiple perspectives to understand complex social phenomena.

Having established the philosophical underpinnings of this research and acknowledged the potential influences of my personal background, we now turn to the specific methodological approaches employed in this study. The following sections detail the research design and provide a high level overview of the data collection methods, and analytical techniques used to investigate the phenomenon of binge-watching and its implications for VoD interface design.

3.4 Research Plan

This section outlines the comprehensive research plan developed to address the study's objectives. It provides an overview of the mixed-methods approach, detailing each component study and their integration. The research plan was designed to leverage the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, ensuring a robust and nuanced exploration of binge-watching behaviours. We begin with an outline of the overall research strategy, followed by a description of each study, the rationale behind our methodological choices, and the practical considerations for implementation.

3.4.1 Outline

This research adopts an exploratory sequential mixed methods design, allowing findings from each phase to inform subsequent stages, see figure 3.1. This approach enabled a comprehensive exploration of the binge-watching phenomenon, from individual experiences to broader patterns and industry perspectives. The research plan consisted of four interconnected studies: qualitative exploration through in-depth interviews, a large-scale quantitative survey, analysis of BBC iPlayer viewing histories and related Twitter discourse, and industry dialogues with key decision-makers and designers. Each study was designed to address specific aspects of the research questions while building upon insights from previous stages.

This sequential approach was deliberately chosen to build a progressively more comprehensive understanding of binge-watching. Beginning with qualitative interviews allowed for an exploratory, inductive approach to identify key themes and viewer experiences without imposing predefined ideas. The survey then tested these insights across a broader population, validating patterns while revealing their prevalence.

The analysis of actual viewing data and social media discourse provided real-world validation of self-reported behaviours, addressing potential limitations of relying solely on participant recall. Finally, industry dialogues situated these findings within practical contexts, exploring feasibility and implementation considerations. This carefully structured sequence ensured that each study built upon previous findings while addressing different facets of the research questions:

- **Question 1:** What constitutes binge-watching, and how might it be defined?
- **Question 2:** What positive and or negative aspects may be associated with binge-watching?
- **Question 3:** What aspects of Digital Media interfaces (if any) reduce consumer autonomy in their viewing behaviours?
- **Question 4:** What inter-personalisation features of the interface might better serve the consumer?

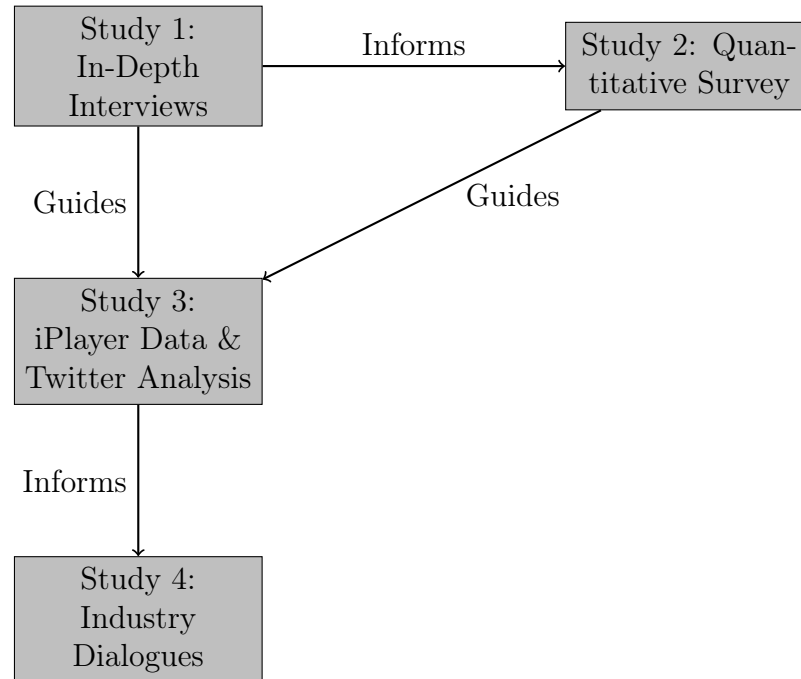


Figure 3.1: Interconnection and progression of research studies

3.4.2 Study Details

Study 1: In-Depth Interviews: This qualitative exploration used semi-structured interviews with 13 UK based adults who regularly engage in extended VoD content viewing in order to gain rich, contextual insights into individual viewing habits. The data was analysed using thematic and content analysis methods, providing a foundation for understanding binge-watching behaviours and perceptions. This study primarily addresses research questions 1 and 2 while also informing questions 3 and 4.

Study 2: Quantitative Survey: Building on insights from Study 1, this large-scale survey collected data on viewing behaviours, attitudes, and preferences from a diverse sample of 400 UK-based adults. The sample was designed to be representative of the UK population in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity. Analysis includes descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as factor analysis. This study contributes to all four research questions by providing a broader, generalisable perspective on binge-watching patterns and attitudes.

Study 3: iPlayer Data and Twitter Analysis: This study examined real-world viewing patterns and social media engagement around a specific binge-watching event, analysing iPlayer viewing data for ‘The Traitors US’ alongside related Twitter posts. It combined quantitative viewing pattern analysis with qualitative thematic analysis of social media content, offering insights into actual binge-watching behaviours and public discourse. This study addresses all research questions from a real-world data perspective.

Study 4: Elite Interviews through Industry Dialogues: The final study explores current practices, challenges, and opportunities in VoD platform design from an industry perspective through elite interviews with 2 key decision-makers and designers. Elite interviews differ from standard qualitative interviews in that they specifically target individuals in positions of significant influence or specialised expertise in an area relevant to the research context [59][60]. This methodology recognises the specialised knowledge and authority held by these professionals, whose insights carry particular weight due to their positions within the BBC and their direct influence over iPlayer interface design decisions, qualifying them as ‘elites’ due to their decision-making authority, specialised expertise, and institutional positions [61]. Following initial analysis of these industry dialogues, the study particularly addresses research question 4, bridging the gap between academic research and practical application in VoD interface design.

3.4.3 Rationale for a Mixed Methods Approach

This research adopted a mixed methods approach, aligning with Onwuegbuzie et al.’s (2007) definition of mixed methods research as an intellectual and practical synthesis based on qualitative and quantitative research [62]. The decision to employ this approach is grounded in several considerations.

Firstly, the complexity of the binge-watching phenomenon necessitates exploration through multiple lenses. Binge-watching involves psychological, social, and technical factors that a single methodological approach cannot fully capture. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) argue, mixed methods research is particularly useful when more than a single data source is required to address the research problem [63]. In this case, combining qualitative insights into viewer experiences with quantitative data on viewing patterns provides a more comprehensive understanding of binge-watching behaviours.

Secondly, the use of mixed methods allows for triangulation, enhancing the validity and reliability of the research. By combining qualitative and quantitative data, we can corroborate findings across different methodological approaches, enhancing the validity and reliability of the research. This aligns with Denzin's (2017) concept of methodological triangulation [64], which suggests that using multiple methods can help overcome the weaknesses and biases that come from single-method studies.

Thirdly, different methods can address different aspects of the research questions, providing a more complete picture of the binge-watching phenomenon. This follows Greene et al.'s (1989) argument that mixed methods can provide complementarity and expansion [65], allowing for a deeper and broader understanding of complex social phenomena.

Fourthly, the exploratory sequential design of this research allows findings from earlier qualitative phases to inform the design of later quantitative stages. This approach, recommended by Morse (1991) for research in new or under-explored areas [66], is particularly suited to studying binge-watching, a relatively recent phenomenon that is still evolving.

Fifthly, the combination of academic research methods with industry dialogues facilitates the translation of findings into practical recommendations. This bridges the gap between theory and practice, addressing the call for more applied research in media studies and ensuring that the research outcomes have real-world relevance and applicability.

The novelty of binge-watching as a media consumption behaviour further justifies the use of mixed methods. As a relatively recent phenomenon, binge-watching requires both exploratory and confirmatory approaches. Qualitative methods allow for an open-ended exploration of this new behaviour, while quantitative methods help confirm patterns and prevalence.

In other words, the approach allows researchers to capture both the nuanced, individual experiences of users through qualitative methods and the broader patterns and trends through quantitative analysis. This is particularly important given the rapidly evolving technological context of binge-watching. Streaming platforms and user interfaces play a crucial role in shaping viewing behaviours, necessitating qualitative user experience data and quantitative usage statistics to fully understand the phenomenon.

To summarise, this mixed methods approach directly addresses the research questions. Qualitative methods, particularly the in-depth interviews (Study 1) and industry dialogues (Study 4), are crucial for defining binge-watching (RQ1) and exploring its positive and negative aspects (RQ2). Quantitative methods, including the survey (Study 2) and viewing data analysis (Study 3), help measure the prevalence of these aspects and identify patterns in viewing behaviour. The technological aspects of Digital Media interfaces (RQ3) and potential inter-personalisation features (RQ4) are addressed through the combination of qualitative user experience data and quantitative usage statistics, as well as the industry perspectives gathered in Study 4. This integrated approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of binge-watching that can inform both academic discourse and industry practice.

3.4.4 Integration of Methods

The integration of methods in this research occurs at multiple levels throughout the research process, following an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. This approach allows for a systematic integration of qualitative and quantitative data, ensuring a cohesive and comprehensive exploration of the binge-watching phenomenon.

At the design level, the sequential nature of the study allows each phase to inform the next, creating a cohesive research narrative. Findings from the qualitative phase (in-depth interviews) directly informed the development of the quantitative survey, ensuring that the survey questions were grounded in the lived experiences of binge-watchers. Similarly, insights from both the interviews and survey guide the focus and interpretation of the unobtrusive measures in the iPlayer and Twitter data analysis.

The findings from these first three studies provide a comprehensive framework that structured the dialogues with industry professionals in the final study. This approach allowed for the industry experts to reflect on a holistic view of the consumer experience that they might not otherwise encounter while also contributing their own perspectives on the themes discussed. This integration ensures that the industry dialogues were both informed by and responsive to the multi-faceted understanding of binge-watching behaviours gleaned from the earlier studies, creating a feedback loop between consumer experiences, empirical data, and industry insights.

At the methods level, qualitative findings from the interviews were used to develop and refine quantitative measures for the survey. This ensured that the quantitative tools are culturally relevant and captured the nuances of binge-watching behaviours as understood by viewers themselves. The survey results, in turn, informed the specific aspects of viewing behaviour to focus on in the analysis of iPlayer data, allowing for a targeted examination of real-world viewing patterns.

Data integration primarily followed Creswell's (2017) 'building' approach [63], where qualitative data is used to expand upon and contextualise quantitative findings. This occurred during the analysis and discussion phases, providing a more comprehensive understanding of binge-watching behaviours. Qualitative data offers depth and context to quantitative patterns, while quantitative data helps establish the prevalence and generalisability of qualitative insights.

At the interpretation level, findings from all studies were synthesised to comprehensively address the research questions. This integration allowed for a nuanced understanding that captured both individual experiences and broader societal trends in binge-watching behaviour.

Triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple data sources, including interviews, surveys, viewing histories, and social media content. This methodological triangulation, combining qualitative, quantitative, and unobtrusive measures, enhanced the validity and reliability of the research findings.

This integrated approach, following Fetters et al.'s (2013) framework for mixed methods integration [67], ensures that the strengths of each method are leveraged to provide a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of binge-watching phenomena. The exploratory sequential design allowed for iterative refinement of research questions and methods as the project progressed, ensuring that each phase built upon and enhanced the insights gained from previous stages.

The integration of methods not only enhances the validity and reliability of the findings but also allows for a more holistic exploration of the complex, multifaceted nature of binge-watching behaviours and their implications for VoD interface design.

3.4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout this research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in the interviews and surveys, with clear explanations of the study's purpose, potential risks, and data usage. The potential risks to participants, such as discomfort discussing personal viewing habits, were minimised through careful question framing and the option to skip questions or withdraw from the study.

For the unobtrusive measures studies, particular care was taken to ensure data privacy and anonymity. All data from iPlayer and Twitter was handled in compliance with data protection regulations and platform-specific guidelines.

Confidentiality was maintained for all participants, with particular attention given to interview participants due to the personal nature of their responses. Data anonymisation procedures were implemented across all studies to protect particular identities. For the interview participant whose transcript is included in the appendix of the thesis, additional steps were taken to ensure informed consent and protect privacy. This participant was provided with a copy of their transcript to review and was asked to confirm if they were comfortable with its full inclusion in the thesis. The participant signed off on this, giving explicit permission for the transcript's use. To further protect the participant's anonymity, certain identifying elements within the transcript, such as first names of family members and specific locations, were replaced with generalised descriptors. This process ensured that the rich, contextual data from the interview could be shared while still maintaining the participant's confidentiality. For all other participants, only anonymised excerpts or aggregated data are presented in the thesis, further safeguarding individual privacy.

Ethical approval (Nottingham University Business School Research Ethics Committee reference numbers: 202223016, 202223038) was obtained from the University of Nottingham's Institutional Review Board before commencing any primary data collection. Special considerations for online research, including data security in digital environments, were addressed in the research design. For industry partnerships, confidentiality agreements were established to protect sensitive information while allowing for meaningful research outcomes. As with the Study 1 interview participant who agreed to have their transcript included in this thesis, the complete transcript was provided to the participants in the Study 4 industry dialogue along with option to withdraw from participation.

All data is stored securely on encrypted, password-protected devices and will be retained in compliance with data protection regulations, after which it will be securely destroyed.

With the research plan fully articulated, we now turn our attention to the measures taken to ensure the quality and rigour of this study. The following section critically examines the methodological approach, addressing issues of reliability, validity and potential limitations.

3.5 Quality Assurance and Critical Reflection

This section provides a critical evaluation of the methodological approach employed in this study. It addresses key aspects of research quality, including reliability and validity, with particular attention to the challenges and opportunities presented by mixed-methods research. We also examine the limitations of our chosen methods and consider alternative approaches that were contemplated during the research design phase. This critical reflection aims to provide transparency about the strengths and potential weaknesses of the study, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

3.5.1 Reliability & Validity

Ensuring the reliability and validity of research findings is crucial in mixed methods research. This study employs several strategies to enhance both the reliability (consistency of measurements) and validity (accuracy of measurements and inferences) of the research process and outcomes.

Reliability

Ensuring reliability across the different components of the study involved several interconnected strategies. For the qualitative phases (studies 1 and 4), semi-structured interview guides were created to standardise the core set of questions. This approach maintained consistency across interviews while allowing the flexibility to explore emerging themes in greater depth as appropriate.

The use of thematic analysis throughout the interviewing process further enhanced reliability by enabling ongoing assessment of data saturation. This iterative approach allowed for a dynamic evaluation of the qualitative findings' consistency and completeness.

In the quantitative phase (study 2), reliability was addressed through measures of internal consistency. Specifically, Cronbach's alpha (α) was employed to evaluate the degree to which multi-item scales produced similar scores for items intended to measure the same construct. This statistical approach ensured that the quantitative instruments reliably captured the intended aspects of binge-watching behaviour and attitudes.

By integrating these reliability measures across both qualitative and quantitative components, the research design aimed to produce consistent and dependable results while maintaining the methodological flexibility necessary to explore the complex phenomenon of binge-watching.

Validity

The research design incorporated various strategies to enhance validity across different aspects of the study. Content validity was ensured by grounding the survey items in themes that emerged from both the literature review and the in-depth interviews. This approach helped to ensure that the quantitative measures accurately reflected the breadth of the binge-watching phenomenon as understood by both researchers and participants.

Construct validity was addressed through factor analysis in study 2, which assessed whether survey items clustered together as expected. This statistical technique provided evidence that the measures were effectively capturing the intended constructs related to binge-watching behaviours and attitudes.

To enhance external validity, the research employed a representative sample in study 2 and analysed real-world viewing data in study 3. This approach improved the generalisability of the findings to the broader population. Additionally, thick descriptions throughout the process allow readers to assess the transferability of findings to other contexts, such as different cultural settings or time periods.

Ecological validity was prioritised through the examination of actual viewing behaviours in study 3, using iPlayer data. This focus on real-world behaviours, rather than solely relying on self-reported or laboratory-based measures, strengthened the applicability of the findings to natural viewing contexts.

The sequential nature of the study, conducted over 24 months, allowed for prolonged engagement with the research topic. This extended interaction enhanced the credibility of the findings by providing opportunities for in-depth exploration and refinement of emerging insights.

According to Decuir-Gunby et al. (2016) triangulation of findings from the literature review combined with outcomes from the interviews and survey give weight to the credibility of the conclusions reached [68]. As such, multiple forms of triangulation were employed to further bolster validity. Methodological triangulation was achieved through the combination of qualitative, quantitative, and unobtrusive measures. Data triangulation involved collecting information from diverse sources, including interviews, surveys, viewing histories, and social media. Investigator triangulation was incorporated through consultation with multiple peers during the data analysis process, challenging and refining the interpretations drawn from the data.

This multifaceted approach to validity, encompassing content, construct, external, ecological, and other forms of validity, aimed to ensure that the research findings accurately represented the complex phenomenon of binge-watching across various dimensions and contexts.

3.5.2 Integration Legitimation

In addition to the above strategies for ensuring reliability and validity, this research paid specific attention to what Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2007) term ‘integration legitimation’ in mixed methods research [62]. This concept focuses on ensuring the credibility of inferences made from integrating qualitative and quantitative strands of research.

A key aspect of integration legitimation in this study was the emphasis on sequential validity. The design of each study was carefully informed by the findings of the previous studies, ensuring a logical progression and integration of insights throughout the research process. This sequential approach allowed for the refinement of research questions and methodologies as new understandings emerged, enhancing the overall coherence and validity of the research findings.

The research also strived to achieve inside-outside legitimization by considering both emic (inside) viewpoints from participants and etic (outside) perspectives from researchers in the interpretation of findings. This was particularly evident in study 4, where preliminary findings were shared with industry representatives, and their reactions were captured and incorporated into the analysis. This approach helped to balance the subjective experiences of binge-watchers with more objective, analytical perspectives, enriching the overall understanding of the phenomenon.

Weakness minimisation was another crucial aspect of integration legitimization in this study. The research design deliberately offset the weaknesses of individual methods with the strengths of others. For instance, the lack of generalisability in the qualitative interviews was counterbalanced by the large sample size in the quantitative survey. Similarly, the potential for recall bias in self-reported data was mitigated by the inclusion of actual viewing data from iPlayer. This strategic combination of methods allowed for a more robust and comprehensive exploration of binge-watching behaviours than any single method could provide.

Furthermore, the research paid attention to paradigmatic mixing, ensuring that the philosophical assumptions underlying both qualitative and quantitative approaches were acknowledged and reconciled within the critical realist framework. This involved recognising the value of both subjective experiences and objective measurements in understanding the complex reality of binge-watching.

By carefully addressing these aspects of integration legitimization, the research aimed to produce findings that not only drew on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches but also created a synergistic understanding that transcended what could be achieved by either approach alone. This integrated perspective provides a more nuanced and comprehensive view of binge-watching, enhancing the overall validity and applicability of the research outcomes.

3.5.3 Methodological Limitations

The research design, while comprehensive, is not without limitations. These limitations are inherent to the chosen methodologies and were carefully considered throughout the research process. Strategies were implemented to mitigate their impact where possible, ensuring the robustness of the findings despite these constraints.

Limitations in the Qualitative Interview Method

In the qualitative phase, particularly the in-depth interviews, time and resource constraints presented a significant challenge. The labour-intensive nature of conducting and analysing these interviews limited the number of participants, potentially restricting the diversity of perspectives captured. To partially address this, participants were provided with flexible scheduling options, including evenings and weekends, to accommodate various lifestyles. Thematic analysis was conducted iteratively throughout the interviewing process, allowing for the identification of saturation points and ensuring efficient use of resources. Notably, thematic saturation was reached after the 11th interview, with two additional interviews conducted with participants having significantly more leisure time than typical to ensure comprehensive coverage. These final interviews did not generate new themes or add substantial nuance to existing ones, confirming that theoretical saturation had been achieved with further interviews likely resulting in diminished returns.

The potential for response bias in interviews was a significant concern. Despite efforts to create a comfortable environment, the artificial nature of the interview settings could still influence participants to provide what they perceived to be socially desirable answers, particularly given the personal nature of viewing habits. Additionally, the use of video conferencing technology, while convenient, may have impacted the rapport-building process and non-verbal communication cues.

To mitigate these concerns, several strategies were employed. Participants were offered the option to turn off their cameras during video interviews. While this would remove visual elements of communication, it might aid more self-conscious participants to feel relaxed without seeing themselves or the interviewer on screen. Participants were assured of confidentiality, with only the researcher accessing the recordings and conducting transcription. Pseudonyms were used to protect anonymity, and the researcher maintained a non-judgmental, open stance throughout the interviews, including candid disclosure of their own viewing behaviours.

Interviewer bias posed another potential limitation. The researcher's personal interests in binge-watching, including their perspectives, opinions, and attitudes, could unconsciously influence the phrasing of questions or emphasis placed on certain themes during both the interview and analysis stages. Moreover, cultural or generational differences between the interviewer and participants could lead to misinterpretation of responses, potentially affecting how participants interpreted questions and formulated their answers.

Several strategies were implemented to address this interviewer bias. A standardised script of prompt questions was used, ensuring consistency across interviews while maintaining flexibility to explore emerging themes. The researcher employed paraphrasing techniques, summarising participants' responses to demonstrate active listening, encourage further meaningful dialogue, and ensure a shared understanding of the content. Regular reflection and peer debriefing were utilised to highlight potential biases in interpretation. Additionally, the researcher's decade-long interview experience aided in maintaining neutrality and encouraging thoughtful responses throughout the process.

The insights from the IDIs, while rich in detail, are not generalisable to broader populations. While diverse, given the very small sample size, these participants can never fully represent all demographic groups, particularly those of marginalised or hard-to-reach populations. To address this, interview findings informed the design of the large-scale quantitative survey, allowing for both depth (from interviews) and breadth (from the survey) in understanding the phenomenon.

While interviews provide rich qualitative data, they lack easily quantifiable metrics, which is a notable limitation of this method. To address this shortcoming, the research design incorporated complementary strategies. Primarily, the interview data was supplemented with the quantitative survey in the subsequent phase of the study, allowing for the collection of measurable data points. Furthermore, the findings from the interviews were instrumental in informing the development of quantitative measures used in later stages of the research. This approach ensured that the quantitative tools were not only relevant but also valid, as they were grounded in the real experiences and perspectives gathered during the qualitative phase. By bridging qualitative insights with quantitative metrics, the study aimed to provide a more comprehensive and measurable understanding of binge-watching behaviours.

The retrospective nature of interviews presents another limitation, as participants are asked to recall past experiences, which may be subject to memory biases or distortions. Additionally, reliance on self-reported behaviours may not accurately reflect actual viewing habits, with participants potentially under or over-estimating their consumption patterns. To partially address these issues, the study incorporated questions about recent viewing experiences to capture more immediate recollections. Furthermore, triangulation was applied by incorporating unobtrusive measures data from study 3, which included real-time data from iPlayer, along with contemporaneous opinions shared via Twitter.

While not part of this research, it's worth noting that a well-designed diary study, combining a participant's digital footprint with contemporary thoughts and feelings during interstitial moments (such as advert breaks or episode transitions), could potentially add significant insight in this area in future research.

The evolving technological landscape presents a significant challenge to the research. Participants' experiences and behaviours are likely influenced by the specific platforms and interfaces they use, which can vary widely and change rapidly over time. This dynamic nature of streaming platforms and technologies means that findings may become outdated quickly, necessitating ongoing research to stay current. To partially address this issue, the study included questions about specific platforms and features in both the interviews and subsequent survey, helping to contextualise responses within the current technological environment. Furthermore, insights from industry dialogues held in study 4 were incorporated to provide up-to-date perspectives on platform development.

While not forming part of this research, future studies could benefit from examining associations between the evolution of certain streaming platforms and consumer behaviour. For instance, comparing viewing patterns before and after the introduction of an advert-supported subscription plan could offer valuable insights into how adjustments to services drive behavioural changes.

Depth interviews rely on participants' conscious awareness of their behaviours and motivations. However, some aspects of binge-watching behaviours may be habitual or automatic, making them challenging for participants to articulate in an interview setting.

Limitations in the Quantitative Methods

The quantitative survey, while offering a broader reach, faced its own set of limitations. Sampling bias was a primary concern, as the use of an online platform for recruitment might have skewed the sample towards more tech-savvy individuals. Although a representative sampling approach was used, stratifying participants based on age, gender and (simplified) ethnicity to align with UK Office for National Statistics 2011 census data, it's acknowledged that this may not fully mitigate the inherent bias in online recruitment, particularly as participants were drawn from a specific membership pool.

Even when anonymous, response bias may still be present in survey submissions. Participants may attempt to answer questions in what they consider to be a socially desirable way, particularly those related to problematic viewing behaviours. They may also be influenced in how they answer later questions by the earlier questions in the survey. To address these, the survey was carefully designed with consideration given to question order, i.e. asking about viewing behaviours before discussing what constitutes binge. A 3rd party survey supplier was used for distribution to reassure participants of their anonymity. Fair compensation was provided to encourage thoughtful participation, and reverse-coded items were included to check for consistency in responses.

A potential limitation in this research design is the challenge of distinguishing between individual and group viewing behaviours. While we can explore social viewing contexts through the in-depth interviews by asking participants about their typical viewing companions, the quantitative survey and unobtrusive measures (iPlayer data and Twitter analysis) may not adequately capture whether viewing occurs alone or with others.

This distinction could be significant, as viewing motivations, durations, and decision-making processes might differ substantially in social versus solitary contexts. For example, negotiations between co-viewers might create natural interruptions or influence continuation decisions in ways that don't occur during solo viewing. Without systematically capturing this contextual information, we may miss important nuances in how interface design affects viewing autonomy across different social settings.

Respondent fatigue may also be an issue, particularly in longer surveys. This can result in participants providing increasingly less thoughtful responses as they progress through the questions. This has been mitigated by limiting the overall length of the survey, piloting it to establish a typical completion time, and capturing item and section-level response times to identify and potentially exclude rushed responses. Although not utilised in this research, attention-check questions could have also been incorporated to identify and exclude inattentive respondents.

While the survey covers a range of areas, its standardised format does not allow for any explanation of answers or follow-up questions. Closed-ended questions may have forced respondents into predetermined categories that don't fully capture their experiences, and there is the potential that complex behaviours or attitudes relating to binge-watching become oversimplified. The mixed-methods approach partly mitigated this, complementing survey data with insights from in-depth interviews and unobtrusive studies. Budget constraints impacted the sample size and survey sophistication, but careful calculations ensured a statistically adequate sample size for the overall population, if not for all subgroup analyses.

To ensure research does not exceed budget, completion rates become limited, particularly if fair recompense for time is factored in. Budget constraints may also result in use of less sophisticated and engaging survey features with a knock on contribution to fatigue bias or response options. Insufficient participant completion rates impact confidence levels/margin of error.

Further, while the sample size may be statistically adequate at the sum total level, there may be limited ability to conduct robust subgroup analysis. Careful calculation of the required sample size based on population statistics. According to the Office for National Statistics, the UK population at mid-year 2021 was estimated to be 67.0 million. Based on this, a sample size of 385 would produce a confidence level of 95% that any real values would fall within plus or minus 5% of the measured survey values. Rounding up to 400 participants allowed for a handful of spurious completions to be removed if necessary.

Self-reporting accuracy in the survey was a concern, addressed by including questions utilising timeline or calendar-based recall techniques and complementing this data with actual viewing data from subsequent studies, albeit for differing subject pools. The cross-sectional nature of the survey, providing only a snapshot of behaviours and attitudes, was partly offset by the mixed-methods approach capturing different aspects of viewing behaviour over the course of the project.

A one-time survey provides a snapshot of behaviours and attitudes but may not capture changes over time or seasonal variations in viewing habits. This is mitigated to an extent by use of the mixed-methods approach that captured different aspects of viewing behaviour over the course of the research project.

The unobtrusive measures studies, while offering valuable insights into real-world behaviours, were limited by the lack of context surrounding the observed actions. Further, the data gathered may not have captured all the relevant behaviours. To address this, findings from these studies were interpreted in light of insights gained from the qualitative and quantitative phases. Integrating data from multiple sources, such as iPlayer viewing data and contemporaneous Twitter posts, helped provide a more comprehensive picture.

Ethical considerations were paramount in the unobtrusive studies, particularly regarding the use of data that participants might not be aware was being collected or analysed. Strict adherence to ethical guidelines and data protection regulations was maintained. Aggregated data was used to protect individual privacy, and in the case of social media posts, paraphrasing and synonyms were used in place of direct quotes in order to make it highly challenging to identify the original post and, therefore, the originator.

The focus on a single show in the iPlayer study introduces potential limitations to the generalisability of findings. The lack of detailed demographic information typical of unobtrusive data, makes it challenging to establish whether the dataset is truly representative of the broader population of interest. These limitations are transparently acknowledged in the report, with findings interpreted cautiously and their limited generalisability clearly stated. While not pursued within the scope of this research, there are opportunities for future studies to address these limitations. For instance, comparisons with broader viewing trends or replication of the study with different shows could provide additional context and enhance the generalisability of the findings.

While these limitations are significant, the mixed-methods approach of this research allows for triangulation of findings across different data sources and methodologies. This approach helps offset any single method's weakness, providing a more comprehensive and robust understanding of binge-watching behaviours. By acknowledging these limitations transparently and implementing strategies to mitigate their impact, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the phenomenon of binge-watching while maintaining methodological rigour and ethical integrity.

3.5.4 Alternative Methodologies

Several alternative methodologies were considered during the research design phase. A diary study was initially contemplated as a means to capture detailed, real-time data on viewing habits. This approach, combined with a custom app development for tracking viewing content, could have provided rich, longitudinal data. However, concerns about participant accuracy, the potential discomfort with sharing extensive personal data, and the limited generalisability due to small sample sizes led to its exclusion. The resource-intensive nature of such a study, both for the researcher and participants, coupled with privacy considerations, outweighed the potential benefits when compared to the chosen mixed-methods approach. Nevertheless, a diary study remains a viable consideration for future research, particularly in assessing the impact of interventions designed to help viewers control their consumption habits.

Access to Netflix’s proprietary data, especially comparing viewing habits between different subscription tiers (ad-supported vs. ad-free), was another avenue explored but ultimately not pursued due to accessibility challenges. This data could have provided valuable insights into the impact of advertising on binge-watching behaviours.

Other methodologies that could have been considered include experimental designs to test specific interface features, ethnographic studies to observe viewing behaviours in natural settings or large-scale data mining of public social media posts about binge-watching. Each of these approaches offers unique strengths but also comes with limitations regarding ecological validity, generalisability, or depth of insight.

The chosen mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative in-depth interviews, a large-scale survey, analysis of viewing data, and industry perspectives, was ultimately selected as it offers a balance between depth and breadth of insights, practical feasibility, and alignment with the research questions. This approach allows for triangulation of data from multiple sources, enhancing the validity and comprehensiveness of the findings while mitigating the limitations of any single method.

3.6 Summary

This chapter has outlined the comprehensive methodological approach adopted in this thesis to investigate the complex phenomenon of binge-watching and its implications for Video on Demand (VoD) interface design. The research philosophy, Grounded in critical realist perspective, the research employs a mixed-methods approach, strategically combining qualitative and quantitative techniques across five interconnected studies:

1. Qualitative exploration through in-depth interviews
2. Large-scale quantitative survey
3. Analysis of BBC iPlayer viewing data and related Twitter discourse
4. Industry dialogues with key decision-makers and designers

This integrated methodology allows for a nuanced understanding of individual experiences, broader patterns across populations, and industry perspectives. By employing an exploratory sequential design, each study builds upon the insights gained from the previous ones, creating a cohesive research narrative.

The careful consideration of reliability, validity, and methodological limitations demonstrates a commitment to rigorous research practices. By acknowledging and addressing potential biases and constraints, this study aims to produce findings that are both credible and meaningful in the context of contemporary media consumption.

As we move forward, the subsequent chapters will present specific details of each study:

- **Chapter 4** explores study 1, the qualitative in-depth interviews, providing rich, contextual insights into individual binge-watching experiences.
- **Chapter 5** presents study 2, the quantitative survey, offering a broader perspective on viewing habits and attitudes.
- **Chapter 6** introduces study 3, analysing real-world viewing data from BBC iPlayer, along with related social media discourse.
- **Chapter 7** discusses study 4, the industry dialogues which bridge academic findings with practical applications in VoD interface design.

Each of these chapters will provide a more detailed account of the specific methodologies employed, participant recruitment processes, data collection procedures, and analysis techniques. This structure allows for an in-depth examination of each study while maintaining the overarching methodological framework presented in this chapter.

Chapter 4

Study 1

The Binge-Watching Phenomenon

A Qualitative Exploration of Consumer Experiences by way of In Depth Interviews

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4.1 Introduction:

The thematic analysis of 13 in-depth interviews presented in this chapter explores individuals' experiences and perceptions of binge-watching. Building on the methodological framework outlined in Chapter 3, these interviews serve as the foundational step in this mixed-methods approach. This analysis identifies key themes related to the definition of binge-watching, its positive and negative aspects, the role of digital media interfaces in enabling binge-watching, and potential strategies for regulating this behaviour.

The phenomenon of binge-watching is explored through the lens of individual experiences and perceptions. Diverse participants were interviewed to uncover how people engage with and understand binge-watching in the current media landscape. This approach allows for capturing the nuances and complexities of binge-watching behaviour, informing both the understanding of contemporary media consumption and the design of streaming platforms.

Depth interviews, or in-depth interviews (IDIs), are a qualitative research method that enables the researcher to gain insight into the participants' experiences, attitudes, and beliefs. They involve conducting individual interviews with a few respondents to explore their perspectives on an idea, concept, or situation. IDIs are particularly well-suited to exploring complex phenomena like binge-watching, where individual experiences and motivations can vary widely.

As Brinkmann and Kvale note, qualitative interviews allow researchers to "*understand themes of the lived everyday world from the subjects' own perspectives*" [69]. This approach aligns with the critical realist framework adopted in this study, acknowledging that while binge-watching is a real phenomenon, its meaning and impact are socially constructed and can differ between individuals.

Several benefits to this qualitative approach are recognised. Firstly, semi-structured IDIs provide **flexibility**, ensuring that the discussion remains focused on the area of interest while allowing for exploring topics in more detail as they arise. This flexibility gives participants greater freedom to share their perspectives and more input into the topics covered.

Secondly, in-depth interviews enable the **gathering of rich, detailed data**. Open-ended questions combined with the opportunity to probe and clarify responses have the potential to uncover depths that cannot be obtained through structured questionnaires. This depth of information is crucial for understanding the nuanced experiences of binge-watchers.

Furthermore, the one-to-one setting of in-depth interviews aids **participants' comfort** level, particularly when discussing sensitive or personal topics that they might be more reluctant to address in a group setting. This aspect is especially relevant when exploring potentially problematic viewing habits or the emotional impacts of binge-watching.

The interviews also allow the researcher **establishment of context** for the participants' experiences and perspectives. Follow-up questions help the interviewer understand the factors shaping or contributing to the participants' preferences, attitudes, or behaviours related to binge-watching.

The exploratory nature of in-depth interviews allows for the **generation of new ideas and hypotheses** that may not have occurred to the researcher otherwise. By allowing participants to express themselves in their own words, new concepts or points of view that might otherwise be overlooked may be revealed. This is particularly valuable in a rapidly evolving field like streaming media consumption, where viewer behaviours and motivations may change faster than existing literature can capture.

Additionally, in-depth interviews allow the researcher to **give voice to minority participants** who may sometimes find themselves ‘othered’ in quantitative surveys. This approach provides an equitable opportunity for all participants to express their perspectives and ideas regardless of their background, status, or demographic. This equity of voice aids a more comprehensive understanding of binge-watching behaviours across diverse populations.

However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this method. The time-intensive nature of in-depth interviews, including conducting them, transcribing them, and analysing the outcomes, has financial implications and **limits the practical sample size**. As such, it is seldom feasible to interview a large enough sample to be statistically representative of a broader population, which, in turn, limits the **generalisability of any results**.

The interviewer’s ability also plays a crucial role in the quality of data collected. Poor interview technique could result in an **unconscious influence upon the respondent**, with the tone or phrasing of questions potentially leading participants to respond in what they deem to be socially desirable ways.

Furthermore, while a one-to-one interview may afford more privacy than a focus group setting, **participants may feel more exposed** than they would if completing an anonymous questionnaire. This lack of anonymity and the greater ‘intimacy’ of the one-to-one setting may make some participants less comfortable sharing certain information.

Lastly, the large volume of unstructured data generated by in-depth interviews can be **challenging to analyse and interpret**. Even with a systematic approach, the results, though richer in detail, may be more subjective than those obtained through quantitative methods.

Despite these limitations, in-depth interviews remain a valuable approach in qualitative research. When used appropriately and augmented with other research methods, in-depth interviews can provide rich insights upon which to build. In the context of this study, they offer a crucial foundation for understanding the complex phenomenon of binge-watching, informing subsequent quantitative research, and ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary viewing habits.

In the following sections, the specific methodology employed in conducting these interviews will be detailed, key interview themes will be presented, and their implications for the broader research questions will be discussed. By grounding this investigation in viewers' lived experiences, a foundation is provided for the quantitative study that follows in Chapter 5. The insights gained will directly inform the development of the quantitative survey instrument, ensuring that the broader investigation captures the full spectrum of binge-watching behaviours and motivations. Through this approach, it is hoped that meaningful insights will be contributed to both the academic discourse on media consumption and the practical considerations of streaming platform design.

4.2 Method

Participants were interviewed individually using a semi-structured format. Interviews were conducted and recorded via Microsoft Teams with one interviewer present. The interview transcript was automatically generated using Teams' built-in transcription feature and subsequently manually corrected by the interviewer. After transcript corrections were completed, the original recordings were deleted to ensure participant privacy. The interviewer was experienced in interview facilitation prior to the study, and interviews varied in length from approximately 30 to 80 minutes.

Prior to conducting the main interviews, careful preparation was undertaken to ensure methodological rigour. The interview guide was developed through an iterative process, drawing on collective qualitative research experience. Additionally, earlier depth interview studies conducted by BBC Research & Development were shadowed and two specialised courses on effective depth interviewing methodologies, covering everything from interview guide creation to analysis techniques completed. This helped to ensure that the interviews were conducted with appropriate probing techniques, minimal leading questions, and effective rapport-building approaches. While formal pre-testing was not conducted, the initial guide was peer reviewed before use and minor refinements were made to improve narrative flow and question clarity for subsequent participants after the first two interviews.

4.2.1 Interview Structure

To ensure reliability and validity, semi-structured IDI guides were created with the intention of standardising the core set of questions and prompts while allowing for deeper exploration as and when appropriate (see Table 4.1). These prompts were used to ensure all agenda areas were covered, but the interviewer adapted, added to, or reordered the questioning as directed by the natural flow of the conversation. This approach typifies the depth interview method of using "*knowledge of the research objectives, previous experience of the field of enquiry and the nature of the social interaction taking place*"[70] to guide the dialogue with the respondent.

To encourage participants to speak freely, no third-party observation of the interviews occurred, and interviewees were informed that transcription would be completed by the interviewer, who would then delete the recordings. Interviewees were also invited to keep their cameras on or off according to their preference for the duration of the interview and could decide if the interviewer had their camera on or off as well. To protect their identity, interviewees were requested to provide pseudonyms used in transcripts and for any interview quotes.

A description of the study was provided ahead of time by way of an information sheet incorporating informed consent. Consent was ascertained verbally at the commencement of each interview, and participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

The tried and tested IDI method effectively encouraged and enabled participants to actively engage in the process. This methodology lends itself to repetition or extension, ideally to establish a more representative sample, employing probes which effectively garnered thoughtful and relevant responses to jog memories and foster discussion.

4.2.2 Participants

Adult participants were sought from the general population in the UK via social media platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn, Horizon CDT Blog). To be eligible for the study, participants had to regularly (at least once a week) watch at least 2 hours of television or at least 3 episodes from the same television series as their main activity/focus of attention for the duration. As an example, it was specified that having the television on in the background while carrying out household chores would not count towards this criteria.

Interview slots were made available throughout the week, including evenings and weekends, to reduce the risk of excluding any particular demographic. Interviews were conducted between 30th November 2022 and 30th January 2023. Participant ages ranged from 26 to 70 years old, with 6 identifying as Female and 7 as Male. Two of the respondents reported having a disability that affected them on a daily basis. A summary of the participant profiles can be found in Table 4.2.

Table 4.1: Top-level prompt questions used to guide Depth Interviewers

DEMOGRAPHICS

Are you happy to share with me your age please?
 How do you define your gender?
 Do you consider yourself to have a disability that impacts you daily?
 - Are you happy to share the nature of this disability?
 Are you in full/part time employment and or education?
 - What's the nature of your work?
 - What sort of hours do you work?
 What is your highest level of education?
 - are you in the first generation of your family to go to university?
 How many are in your household?
 - overview of relationships.
 What name would you like for me to use for you?

GENERAL VIEWING HABITS

How regularly do you watch tv?
 How long for?
 Does this differ at weekends to weekdays?
 What would you estimate is the approximate balance between live TV and streaming services?
 Which streaming services do you use? (which most often?)
 What is the approximate balance between viewing being main and secondary activity?
 Is this something you tend to do with others in your household?
 - who tends to make the viewing choices?

PERCEPTIONS OF BINGE

Would you describe yourself as a binge-watcher?
 What do you think makes someone a binge-watcher?
 - is it based on hours?
 - does it have to be back-to-back viewing of episodes from one series?
 - do streaks (e.g. watching one episode for a number of days in a row) count?
 How might you describe a typical binge-watcher (if there is such a thing)?
 How might this differ from someone who reads* for a similar length of time?
 What sort of things come to mind when you hear the term binge-watching?
 What other sorts of binge can you name?
 What are your first thoughts about these types of binge?
 Back to binge-watching specifically, what are the impacts?
 - Positive / negative
 - During event / Short-term post event / Long-term post event
 How does it impact you personally?
 - what about others?
 Is there a type of person you think watches more or less?
 - do you think this affects certain age groups more or less?

VIEWING INTENTIONS & BEHAVIOURS

Do you ever find yourself watching more than you intend to?

- How often?

When is it most likely do you think? Driven by:

- Programme / Company / Viewing Time?

How do you feel when you find this has happened?

Has it got in the way of other things? (such as):

- Sleep / Exercise / Work?

What sort of things do you think about when you are deciding what to watch?

What do you think most influences your programme choice?

- Time of day?

- Level of attention required?

- Series / 1 offs vs serial?

- Current mood / what you fancy?

- Recommendations from others?

- Catching up with what friends / colleagues are watching?...

VIDEO ON DEMAND PLATFORM

When you get to the end of an episode you're watching through an on-demand service...

Can you recall what would happen if you didn't take any action?

- Would the next episode play automatically?

- How much of the credits might run before the next episode starts playing?

- Do you need to start the next episode playing?

What sort of thought processes do you go through when you're viewing on your own

(specifically in relation to deciding whether or not to watch the next episode?)

- When is it that you decide to keep watching (probe for internal and external drivers)

- When is it that you decide to stop

- When you do stop, do you typically switch programmes or activities?

How does this differ when you are watching with someone else?

Thinking about the way that VoD interfaces works...

if you could choose for anything to happen at the end of the episode by default, what would that be?

LOCUS OF CONTROL

Can you think of any features that might could help people to stop watching when they intend to?

- Turn off auto play?

- Extend time before auto play kicks in?

- Binge-ability ratings?

- Showing time programme would finish?

*The comparison to reading was specifically included as reading represents another common leisure activity involving narrative engagement but is typically framed more positively in cultural discourse despite potentially involving similar time commitments. This comparison helped explore whether different perceptions exist between these two forms of media consumption and why television viewing might be judged differently than literary engagement.

Initial approval was sought to conduct up to 15 semi-structured depth interviews with the intention of reviewing after each interview to see if saturation had been reached. The saturation point was potentially achieved within the first 10 interviews, however, the researcher had yet to speak to anyone who felt they had an excess of free time as compared to the general population. As such, participants with no family, work or education-related commitments were actively sought out to determine if any new themes would arise. This did not occur, so it was concluded that sufficient saturation was achieved after the 13th interview, with further sessions likely resulting in vastly diminished returns.

It is important to note that despite efforts taken to enable participation from a wide variety of backgrounds, the study still had some limitations in terms of accessibility. Participants were required to have access to a laptop/desktop with a microphone and webcam and a stable internet connection capable of handling video conferencing. Additionally, there was a requirement based on hours of video-on-demand consumption based on reasonable levels of familiarity with Video on Demand Platforms and user behaviours.

The participants' demographic details, including age, gender, education level, employment status, and household composition, were collected to provide context for the analysis and to ensure a diverse range of perspectives was captured. While efforts were made to include a variety of participants, it is acknowledged that the sample is not representative of the entire UK population.

Table 4.2: Semi-Structured In-Depth Interview Participant Profiles

Date	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Disability	Work Hours	Study Hours	Highest Level Education	1st Gen. @ Uni	House size
30.11.22	Edith	27	Female	No	10 hr/wk	Full Time	Masters	Yes	2
30.11.22	Sidique	59	Male	Yes	office hours	Part Time	Masters	Yes	2
01.12.22	Loretta	48	Female	No	seasonal	-	First Degree	Yes	4
05.12.22	Michaelson	28	Male	No	casual	-	First Degree	No	1
05.12.22	Sherrie	27	Male	No	Part-Time	Part Time	First Degree	No	3
07.12.22	Yellow	28	Female	No	-	Full Time	Masters	No	3
07.12.22	Cookie	54	Female	No	29 hr/w M-Th	-	First Degree	Yes	5
08.12.22	Jane	39	Female	No	-	Full Time	Masters	Yes	4
19.12.22	Godzilla	27	Male	No	Full-Time shifts	-	First Degree	No	3
19.12.22	Ghenkhis	26	Male	No	office hours	-	A-Levels	-	3
20.12.22	Odin	31	Male	No	casual	-	First Degree	Yes	1
13.01.23	Garnish	43	Male	Yes	office hours	-	A-Levels	-	2
30.01.23	Arabra	70	Female	No	-	-	O-Levels	-	2

4.2.3 Analysis Methods

Several common qualitative analysis approaches were applied to the interview data. These included thematic analysis, content analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, and framework analysis. Particular attention was paid to data that addressed the four main research questions:

The first research question sought to **define binge-watching**. To address this, close attention was paid to how participants understood and described binge-watching, noting any common criteria, thresholds, or characteristics they used to define this behaviour. Any divergences or disagreements in how binge-watching was conceptualised were also highlighted.

For the second research question, which focused on the **positive and negative aspects of binge-watching**, the data was carefully coded for any mentions of benefits, drawbacks, or consequences associated with binge-watching. This included effects on personal wellbeing, relationships, work or study, as well as any broader social or cultural implications noted by participants.

The third research question examined the role of **digital media interfaces and consumer autonomy**. To explore this, participants' accounts of how they interact with digital media platforms were examined, looking for any features or design elements that seemed to influence their viewing behaviours. Mentions of feeling compelled, manipulated, or lacking control were noted, as well as instances where interfaces were perceived to support or enhance user agency.

For the fourth research question, which concerned **inter-personalisation features**, any suggestions or desires expressed by participants for interface features that could help them better manage their viewing habits were sought. This could include tools for setting limits, personalising recommendations, or fostering healthier engagement with content.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is an iterative method employed to analyse qualitative data. Through thematic analysis, the content of the interviews was reclassified into broad themes, somewhat driven by the structure of the interview questions, which in turn were based on findings from the literature review. These themes were refined as the interviews were conducted, enabling the researcher to identify the point at which saturation of relevant opinions appeared to occur.

Thematic analysis is a solid, common foundational approach. Here, the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) [71] was followed. This entailed:

1. **(Re)familiarisation with the data:** As the researcher and interviewer were one and the same, there was already a baseline of familiarisation with the transcripts. Further immersion in the content was achieved by reading and rereading the transcripts. Due to the imprecise nature of the automatically captured transcriptions generated via Teams, listening to the recordings was essential so that transcripts could be corrected. Although time-consuming, this approach contributed to a deeper understanding of the data.
2. **Generation of initial codes:** All interview sections were coded, with new codes created when suitable existing codes did not exist. During the first pass through the surveys, the coding process was systematic yet flexible, allowing for the introduction of new concepts from each transcript. If in doubt about the suitability of an existing code, a new one was created, as this could always be revised if later considered redundant. This was accomplished by parsing the participants' responses in the transcripts using an Excel document with one interview to one column and codes organised by row.

3. **Establishment of themes:** Upon completion of the coding exercise, the codes were collated into potential themes. The Excel format, with transcripts parsed into relevant sections, facilitated the agile reorganisation of the coded elements into higher-order themes.
4. **Review of themes:** A thematic map of the established themes was created, and the coherence of the transcript extracts within each code and theme was assessed. This process allowed for further refinement of the final themes, ensuring the relationship between extracts within each code and the broader theme could be more clearly discerned.
5. **Naming and definition of themes:** The final themes were named based on their specific nature and clearly defined to ensure a shared understanding between the researcher and the reader.
6. **Report production:** To support the reporting of the results, compelling examples that would help illustrate the nature of the themes were identified and selected for inclusion in this write-up.

Note that a lighter touch version of this progress began while interviews were taking place to aid in the identification of reaching the point of saturation. Each transcript was carefully read with notes taken on key topics, recurring ideas and patterns as they emerged across the interviews. As more interviews were conducted, notes were reviewed to identify roughly, the themes common across interactions.

Content Analysis

The content of the interviews was systematically categorised and quantified. This involved counting the frequency with which certain words, phrases, or topics occurred to identify patterns or trends across the interviews, focusing on the key themes related to the definition of binge-watching, its positive and negative aspects, the role of digital media interfaces in enabling binge-watching, and potential strategies for regulating this behaviour, i.e. the primary research questions of this thesis.

A deductive approach was followed using a pre-defined coding scheme based on the research questions and the themes identified in the thematic analysis. The coding scheme included the following main categories:

- Definition of binge-watching
- Positive aspects of binge-watching
- Negative aspects of binge-watching
- Role of digital media interfaces
- Strategies for regulating binge-watching

Each main category had several sub-categories, which were used to code specific aspects of the participants' responses. The researcher manually coded the interviews, and the frequency of each code was recorded.

Discourse and Narrative Analysis

Discourse analysis is concerned with how language is used to construct social reality, identities, and power relations. It looks at language patterns across texts, including the social and cultural contexts in which language is used. It often involves examining how language creates and maintains social structures, institutions, and ideologies. Discourse analysis can study a wide range of language use, including conversations, media texts, and institutional practices. The focus is on how language is used to create meaning and to shape social interactions and understandings.

Following a social constructionist approach (viewing language as constitutive of social reality rather than reflective of it), this research focused on identifying key discursive patterns, themes and rhetorical strategies used by participants to construct their experiences and understandings of binge-watching. Particular attention was paid to how participants positioned themselves and others in relation to binge-watching and how they drew upon broader cultural discourses to make sense of their experiences.

Narrative analysis is concerned with the stories that people tell and how these stories are structured and conveyed. It looks at the content, structure, and performance of stories, including the ways in which stories are used to make sense of experiences and to communicate with others. Narrative analysis often involves examining how stories are constructed, the roles that characters play, and the meanings that are conveyed through the telling of the story. It may be used to study a wide range of narratives, including personal stories, cultural narratives, and organisational narratives. The focus is on how stories are used to create and convey meaning and to understand and make sense of human experiences.

Here, narrative analysis was applied to examine participants' stories about their binge-watching experiences. Particular attention was paid to the sequence of events in their narratives, the turning points they identified in their viewing habits, and how they positioned themselves within these stories. This analysis helped to reveal how participants made sense of their binge-watching behaviours within the context of their broader life narratives and how they used storytelling to convey the meaning and impact of their viewing experiences.

while both discourse analysis and narrative analysis involve analysing language, discourse analysis is more focused on the ways in which language is used to construct social reality and power relations. In contrast, narrative analysis is more focused on the structure and content of stories and how stories are used to make sense of experiences and communicate with others.

Framework Analysis

This structured approach, well-suited for applied policy research, was also considered as a potential analytical method for the study. It involves creating a matrix of cases and themes to systematically compare and contrast data across participants. It could have been particularly relevant as a potential research outcome might be best practice policy or guidelines relating to VoD user interfaces.

The use of framework analysis could have provided several benefits to this research. It would have allowed for a more systematic comparison of participants' responses across different themes, potentially highlighting patterns or discrepancies that might not be as apparent in other forms of analysis. Furthermore, its structured nature could have facilitated the development of actionable policy or interface design recommendations.

However, framework analysis was ultimately not employed in this study for several reasons. Firstly, the primary focus at this research stage was on exploring individual experiences and perceptions of binge-watching rather than directly informing policy. The more flexible approaches of thematic and content analysis were deemed more appropriate for capturing participants' nuanced and varied experiences. Secondly, the time-intensive nature of framework analysis, which requires the development of a detailed analytical framework and the systematic charting of data, was not feasible within the constraints of this study. The chosen analytical methods allowed for a more immediate engagement with the data and were better suited to the exploratory nature of this research. Lastly, while framework analysis excels at providing a clear audit trail and enhancing the transparency of the analytical process, it was felt that the combination of thematic, content, and discourse analyses already provided a robust and transparent analytical approach.

It is acknowledged that framework analysis could potentially add value in future stages of this research, particularly if the focus shifts towards developing specific policy recommendations or design guidelines for VoD interfaces. As such, it remains a consideration for future extensions of this study.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Thematic Analysis

Through thematic analysis, the content from the 13 interviews was reclassified into broad themes. These themes were initially informed by the structure of the interview questions, which in turn were based on findings from the literature review. As the interviews were conducted and analysed, these themes were refined, allowing the researcher to identify the point at which saturation of relevant opinions appeared to occur. The analysis revealed five broad themes:

1. **Binge-watching definition:** Varied perspectives, Common threads
2. **Binge-watching appeal:** Escapism, Immersion, Social connection
3. **Binge-watching drawbacks:** Sleep disruption, Neglected Responsibilities, Guilt
4. **Binge-watching self-regulation:** Strategies to reduce the intentions-behaviour gap
5. **Binge-watching enablement/encouragement:** The role of digital media interfaces

Defining Binge-Watching

Regarding the definition of binge-watching, participants offered diverse perspectives, reflecting the subjective nature of this phenomenon. Nevertheless, several common elements emerged across interviews, revealing shared understandings of what constitutes binge-watching behaviour.

Most participants characterised binge-watching as consuming multiple episodes of the same programme in one sitting. Cookie articulated this focus clearly: "*To me, bingeing is one subject matter and... and consuming that as much as possible, not... it's not a smorgasbord!*". Godzilla offered a similar definition, describing a binge-watcher as "*someone who can sit down and watch about, you know, at least 4 episodes of a particular show.*". Edith emphasised the completionist aspect, suggesting binge-watching occurs when someone watches "*a lot of the same thing, so they can't help themselves but to watch the whole of the series if it's available.*".

Extended viewing periods emerged as another defining characteristic, with participants describing sessions that typically spanned several hours. Garnish recounted a personal experience: "*There are sometimes where I've actually said... I start watching something at 9:00 o'clock at night and I've said right 9:00 to 11:00. I'm gonna watch this and then I've literally at 10:50... 'I need to know happens next'... I've been so wired that I've then watched something on and we've gone till midnight.*". Sherrie described even more intensive viewing, suggesting that a typical binge-watcher might "*sacrifice work time for just watching this series*" or even "*spend from 10 to 20 hours a day*" watching content.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature in participants' definitions was the element of compulsion or lost control. Garnish explained this feeling: "*If I didn't watch the next episode, I'd be reflecting back on what happened more than focusing on what I'm doing so I'm easy, we'll watch the episode and then get some clarity so that I can then move on.*". Cookie explicitly defined binge-watching in terms of this compulsion: "*I think it's if somebody can't help themselves but to watch the whole of the series if it's available.*"

Some participants associated binge-watching with particular demographic groups or lifestyle circumstances. Edith suggested that habitual binge-watchers might be "*older people that's retired and got a lot of time on their hands, or people that are jobless and haven't got anything better to do.*", indicating a perception that binge-watching often occurs when other responsibilities are absent.

Across these varied perspectives, three key elements consistently defined binge-watching: consuming multiple episodes of the same programme, extended viewing periods, and a sense of compulsion or reduced control. While participants differed in their value judgments about this behaviour, these core aspects of binge-watching appeared widely recognised, suggesting a shared cultural understanding of this increasingly common viewing pattern.

The Appeal of Binge-Watching

The appeal of binge-watching emerged as multi-faceted from our interviews, with participants describing it as a highly enjoyable and immersive experience. Key motivations surfaced repeatedly across conversations, painting a picture of why viewers find extended viewing sessions so compelling.

Escapism and relaxation were frequently cited motivations. Cookie explained this appeal by comparing it to literature: *"It's a story, isn't it? It's a book, and instead of just giving me a chapter, I get to find out a big chunk of the story of the book."* For Cookie, binge-watching also served a practical purpose, making household tasks more bearable: *"I use it as company to do my chores so... it makes my chores... because they're they're just thoughtless chores... mindless chores, I should say, it makes them doable."* Sherrie echoed this sentiment, noting that binge-watching *"helps you to relax and you know, rest very well, keeps you in the stationary position for a long time so your body's able to rest well and relax so well. It's more a form of relaxation and also, could help you unwind."*

A deep investment in characters and storylines emerged as another powerful driver. Arabra captured this emotional connection perfectly: *"Well, you're involved in the storyline. For a start, if you can connect with the characters, you do feel for them and you want them to be OK, and you want to get to the end of it so you know they are OK."* This investment appears to be heightened by the continuous nature of binge-watching, as Arabra further explained: *"The thing is, if you left it and you watched it every week, by next week you've forgotten that emotional attachment, that's gone and you've gotta build it up again."* Garnish similarly observed that when binge-watching, *"You invest in it more emotionally, and, and you kind of... you invest in the characters more."*

The satisfaction of completing narrative arcs in a compressed timeframe, coupled with an almost compulsive need to continue watching was highlighted by several participants. Cookie described this drive candidly: *"I can't get enough of it, so I consume as much as I can... consuming and not being... almost not being able to stop just consuming as much as possible."* Cliffhangers particularly intensified this urge, as Arabra explained: *"If there is a cliffhanger, we really wanna know what's going to happen and the thought of not knowing is no! But I see I'll do the next one, do the next one."* Edith confirmed this, stating: *"It's 100% the cliffhanger. Yeah, definitely. Like, I wouldn't think we'd do it with reality TV because I just think it is more dramas and crimes and you think, oh God, I really need to know."*

Interestingly, the social dimension of binge-watching emerged as significant even when viewing occurred in isolation. Edith described how shared viewing experiences facilitated social connections: *"If I go out for meals with friends or things will often be like 'ohh do you watch? Such as it's like... my guilty pleasure is Love Island, love it and will often go for meals with friends that I know are watching Love Island and we will talk about it."* This social aspect extended beyond immediate circles, with Edith explaining her motivation for joining online fan communities: *"I quite like seeing who else is watching it <'Shetland'> 'cause I don't know that many people that watch it. Um, I've talked to people about it and they just don't watch."*

These diverse motivations; escapism, character investment, narrative completion, and social connection, reveal why binge-watching has become such a compelling form of media consumption for many viewers, offering both personal satisfaction and shared cultural experiences.

The Drawbacks of Binge-Watching

Despite its enjoyable aspects, participants readily acknowledged several potential drawbacks to binge-watching. Their reflections revealed a nuanced understanding of how extended viewing sessions could negatively impact their wellbeing and daily functioning.

Sleep disruption emerged as a significant concern, with participants describing how binge-watching often led to late nights and subsequent fatigue. Garnish explained that binge-watching *"can alter your mood or state the next day cause you be... you can become quite tired and it could also prevent you from doing things that need to get done."* Cookie vividly described the physical sensation that accompanies these late-night sessions: *"When you're getting drained mentally and physically at the same time, you feel a certain way when you stay up too late physically... it's as if you're pulling an all nighter."* Sherrie described a relatable pattern for many viewers: *"I don't really get tired because I... once I lay on my bed I don't really get tired, just most times, I sleep off and the series keeps playing."*

Neglecting responsibilities was another frequently cited concern. Michaelson simply but pointedly noted that the main drawback was *"the fact that I should be doing other things with my time."* This sentiment was echoed by Edith, who described the careful calculations viewers make when deciding whether to continue watching: *"I've been like, ohh, should we just watch the next one and like look at the clock and think, okay, so it's 10... If we can fit it in before then we might put on another one... But there is a limit."* Cookie articulated the aftermath of overindulgence, describing *"the disappointment when it's finished, because you've just over-consumed and now you're left hungry for more because you didn't take control and you didn't do things in moderation."*

Reduced social interaction was identified as another negative consequence. Edith reflected on how television had replaced meaningful conversation with her husband: *"Even actually at lunchtime, literally just an hour ago, we was watching TV whilst having lunch and I did think like we haven't actually really spoken that much, even though he comes home for lunch. It was kind of like a very brief conversation about what you've been doing today, and then we was watching game show on TV."* Sherrie warned about more severe social consequences, suggesting that excessive viewing could lead to *"a social disability... which you might not really recognise until someone points it out to you."*

Perhaps most telling was the guilt and regret expressed by several participants. Edith described feeling guilty about morning viewing habits: *"In a morning it would affect me more... I think I probably shouldn't have been watching that, I probably should have been doing some work and then it made me feel a bit guilty."* Sherrie revealed a desire to moderate her viewing after learning about potential addiction: *"I read couple of articles before now, before this research come up, that people actually become addicted to this stuff, you know?! So I actually want to curtail that on a low ball."*

These testimonies reveal that while binge-watching offers considerable enjoyment, viewers maintain an awareness of its potential costs, to their sleep, responsibilities, social connections, and sense of wellbeing, suggesting a complex relationship with this increasingly common viewing behaviour.

Self-Regulation and Interface Design

Participants identified several features of digital media interfaces that potentially encourage binge-watching, often making it challenging to maintain viewer autonomy. Their accounts revealed how platform design elements can influence viewing behaviour, sometimes undermining conscious intentions to limit screen time.

Auto-play functions emerged as a particularly powerful driver of extended viewing sessions. Arabra explained how easy it is to continue watching when next episodes automatically begin: "*When it goes on, it says 'Next episode in 10 seconds'... if I was on my own... I've sat down to watch telly, I've done all my chores, I've done everything so I've got the time, so I think I may as well watch the next one.*". Cookie recognised the potential negative impact of this, noting: "*It's a bad thing if it went to the next episode on its own, I think because that's just supporting of the bingeing.*". This automatic progression creates a viewing environment where continuing requires no effort, while stopping demands active intervention.

The narrative structure of contemporary television, particularly the strategic use of cliffhangers, was frequently cited as encouraging continued viewing. Sherrie observed: "*Most of them usually finish in this kind of ending that wants you to watch the next one, and then the next one finishes in this kind of ending that I want to watch the next one and the most times you just need to look at your time and then all time is gone.*" Garnish articulated how platform design consciously fosters this engagement: "*The concept of it is to put it on to relax too before going to bed, but the reality of it is that by watching, depend on what you're watching, but it's not there to make you feel sleepy and tired and it's there to get you hooked, it's there to get you, you know, to be invested.*".

Interface elements that facilitate rapid transitions between episodes further encourage continuous viewing. Cookie described how platforms have optimised this transition: "*I could click on next episode before even the credits finished on the last episode, I could just jump to the next.*". The absence of natural stopping points that existed in traditional broadcast television, such as ad breaks or weekly release schedules, was implicitly noted in several accounts. Cookie reflected on the passive continuation pattern that often develops: "*I think we intend just to watch the bit that we want but... I probably... then we'll just let the episode like pan out or just like, well... I'll get to the end, then I'll switch it off.*".

The availability of entire seasons at once fundamentally changes the viewing experience, as Garnish explained: *"Because I can't wait, I can't wait for the next... I can't wait like a week like we used to have to do. Now, we've got it on-demand on stream. When you come to an end of an episode, you're so invested in the character that you wanna move on to the next one to see what happens."* While some participants, like Edith, expressed preference for weekly releases: *"I prefer it to be things that are once a week."*, most acknowledged the appeal of immediate gratification. Cookie succinctly captured this desire for immersion: *"When I find something, I just want to get the most out of it."*

These testimonies reveal how streaming platform design can subtly encourage extended viewing sessions through auto-play features, content recommendations, elimination of natural breaks, and complete season availability. Participants demonstrated awareness of these influences even as they sometimes struggled to resist them, suggesting that interface design plays a significant role in shaping contemporary viewing habits.

Enablement and Encouragement of Viewing Management

While many participants enjoyed binge-watching, they also expressed a desire for ways to better manage their viewing habits. Their accounts revealed various strategies and tools they either employed or wished were available to help maintain control over their viewing sessions.

Setting personal viewing limits emerged as a common self-regulation strategy, though participants acknowledged the challenge of adhering to these boundaries. Edith described establishing clear time constraints: *"I mean there is a limit. We do have a limit that like, if it's going to go on be way beyond 11:00, then I'll be like 'now that is going to be too late', we'll just watch it another time."*

These limits often involved compromises, as Sherrie explained: *"I normally sacrifice my sleep like at night... I wanna watch it. I will complete the series, you know, but once I'm like so tired, I will just watch couple of... two, three episodes and then I'm done."*

Several participants expressed interest in features that would track and limit viewing time, providing greater awareness of consumption patterns. Cookie was particularly enthusiastic about this possibility: *"That is a great idea... It would be full stop. 'You've watched 5 episodes back-to-back' or 'you've been on this show for three hours...' because then I would realise how long I've been there."* Sherrie advocated for a more holistic approach to viewing management: *"I think you need to have so many other things doing. You need to have friends around you which you share so many social activities together... talk to more people, enjoy real life rather than focusing on a movie."* Some participants, like Cookie, found subscription management to be an external control mechanism: *"I try and do it <complete watching a series> within the month so that then I can cancel and not have to pay again."*

The traditional weekly release schedule was identified by some as inherently supportive of moderate viewing habits. Edith appreciated how this format created natural pauses and social engagement: *"I suppose with like dramas, there's more suspense... because you've got to wait the week and then like on the 'Shetland' fan group, there'll be all this discussion about stuff on there, so it kind of gives you that opportunity to talk about it and to speculate what might happen next."* Odin expressed a preference for interfaces that required active engagement rather than passive consumption: *"I think it should not jump to the next episode... you should give me the option because otherwise it's just feeding on the addiction, it's just giving me more without me even asking."*

Social viewing emerged as another strategy for moderating excessive consumption. Edith described how watching with others created a mutual accountability system: "*Together we have a role especially like that it's TV time... if he's on his phone, I'll be like 'are you watching this then?' or he'll do it back to me, so we kind of police each other's phone use during TV time.*". This social element could provide structure and boundaries that might be absent when viewing alone.

These testimonies reveal that viewers are actively seeking ways to maintain a healthy relationship with their viewing habits, whether through personal discipline, technological assistance, traditional viewing structures, or social accountability. While binge-watching was widely enjoyed, participants demonstrated awareness of its potential to become excessive and expressed interest in tools and strategies that would support more intentional media consumption.

These themes provide a rich foundation for understanding the complex phenomenon of binge-watching, highlighting both its appeal and potential pitfalls, as well as the role of technology in shaping viewing behaviours. They also point to potential areas for intervention or design considerations in streaming platforms to support more intentional viewing habits.

4.3.2 Comparison of Individual Responses

Whilst the thematic analysis revealed overarching patterns in the interview data, a closer examination of individual responses unveiled a nuanced landscape of attitudes and behaviours surrounding binge-watching. This comparative analysis illuminates the commonalities and divergences amongst participants, offering a more granular understanding of the binge-watching phenomenon.

A striking similarity amongst interviewees was their familiarity with the concept of binge-watching, with most having described themselves as engaging in the practice to varying degrees. The majority associated binge-watching with the consumption of multiple episodes of a series in a single sitting, often facilitated by streaming services such as Netflix. Many participants articulated the addictive nature of this viewing pattern, employing terms such as ‘hooked’ or describing an inability to cease watching. Notably, most interviewees demonstrated an awareness of both the positive and negative ramifications of binge-watching, citing enjoyment and relaxation as benefits whilst acknowledging potential drawbacks such as sleep disruption and feelings of guilt.

However, significant variations emerged in the frequency and intensity of binge-watching behaviours reported. Whilst some participants, such as Sideeky, self-identified as habitual binge-watchers, others like Odin reported only occasional engagement in such practices. Definitions of binge-watching also diverged, with some interviewees focusing on the number of episodes consumed, whilst others emphasised the perceived loss of control or time invested in viewing.

Attitudes towards binge-watching spanned a spectrum from positive to negative. Some participants framed it as a form of relaxation or entertainment, whilst others viewed it as potentially time-wasting or addictive behaviour. The reported impact on daily life varied considerably, with some interviewees noting interference with sleep patterns or productivity, whilst others perceived minimal to no disruption to their routines.

Strategies for managing binge-watching behaviours differed amongst participants. Some employed self-imposed limitations or alarms, whilst others relied on external factors such as work schedules to curtail their viewing. The types of content binged also varied, with preferences ranging from series to films or specific genres.

Several interviewees offered unique perspectives. Sherrie, for instance, highlighted the educational potential of binge-watching certain content. Yellow emphasised the emotional impact, noting how it could influence mood even after viewing had ceased. Godzilla uniquely framed binge-watching as a means of maximising subscription value, whilst Loretta suggested a generational aspect, positing that older individuals might be more prone to binge-watching due to greater time availability. Cookie's perspective was distinctive in describing binge-watching as a method of enhancing mundane tasks.

Despite these individual differences, common threads emerged across the interviews. Most participants recognised binge-watching as a contemporary phenomenon intrinsically linked to streaming services. There was a general acknowledgement of its potential to be both enjoyable and problematic. Many interviewees noted the role of narrative techniques such as cliffhangers in driving continued viewing. The concept of binge-watching as a form of escapism was frequently mentioned, and most participants expressed some degree of self-awareness regarding their viewing habits and the need for moderation.

This comparative analysis underscores the complex and multifaceted nature of binge-watching experiences and perceptions among the interviewees. It reflects the diverse ways individuals engage with and conceptualise this modern viewing phenomenon, highlighting the need for nuanced approaches in future research and potential interventions.

Building upon these insights into individual experiences and attitudes, a more structured content analysis was conducted to quantify the prevalence of key themes and concepts across the interview data. This approach allows for a systematic examination of the frequency with which participants expressed specific ideas and experiences.

4.3.3 Content Analysis

The content analysis provided a quantitative overview of the key themes and issues related to binge-watching that were identified in the interviews. It's important to note that not every aspect of the interviews was exhaustively coded; therefore, additional themes or sub-themes that may have provided further insights into the binge-watching phenomenon could have been overlooked. Nevertheless, the content analysis conducted highlighted the prevalence of certain defining features of binge-watching, as well as the most commonly mentioned positive and negative aspects of this behaviour. The analysis also underscored the significant role that digital media interfaces play in facilitating binge-watching and the range of strategies that individuals employ or desire to regulate their viewing habits.

Defining Binge-Watching

Regarding the definition of binge-watching, the content analysis revealed that the majority of participants define binge-watching as watching multiple episodes in one sitting (85%). Spending an extended time watching was another common element, which was mentioned by 69% of participants. The feeling of being compelled to continue watching was cited by 62% of interviewees, while 46% associated binge-watching with prioritising watching over other activities.

- Watching multiple episodes in one sitting: mentioned by 11 (85%)
- Spending an extended period watching: mentioned by 9 (69%)
- Feeling compelled to continue watching: mentioned by 8 (62%)
- Prioritising watching over other activities: mentioned by 6 (46%)

The Appeal of Binge-Watching

When discussing the positive aspects of binge-watching, enjoyment and entertainment were frequently mentioned, with 92% of participants citing these factors. Relaxation and escapism were also common themes, brought up by 77% of interviewees. Immersion in characters and storylines was mentioned by 62% of participants, while social bonding over shared viewing experiences was cited by 46%.

- Enjoyment and entertainment: mentioned by 12 (92%)
- Relaxation and escapism: mentioned by 10 (77%)
- Immersion in characters and storylines: mentioned by 8 (62%)
- Social bonding over shared viewing experiences: mentioned by 6 (46%)

The Drawbacks of Binge-Watching

On the negative side, sleep disruption and fatigue were the most commonly mentioned consequences of binge-watching, with 69% of participants bringing up this issue. Neglecting responsibilities (work, studies, chores) was cited by 62% of interviewees. Feelings of guilt or regret were mentioned by 54% of participants, while reduced social interaction and physical activity were brought up by 46%.

- Sleep disruption and fatigue: mentioned by 9 (69%)
- Neglecting responsibilities (work, studies, chores): mentioned by 8 (62%)
- Reduced social interaction and physical activity: mentioned by 6 (46%)
- Feelings of guilt or regret: mentioned by 7 (54%)

Self-Regulation and Interface Design

The role of digital media interfaces in enabling binge-watching was evident in the analysis. Auto-play functions were mentioned by 85% of participants as a factor in their binge-watching behaviour. The availability of an entire series at once was cited by 77% of interviewees, while personalised recommendations were mentioned by 69%. The absence of ad breaks or natural stopping points was noted by 54% of participants as a factor contributing to extended viewing sessions.

- Auto-play functions: mentioned by 11 (85%)
- Personalised recommendations: mentioned by 9 (69%)
- Absence of ad breaks or natural stopping points: mentioned by 7 (54%)
- Availability of entire series at once: mentioned by 10 (77%)

Enablement and Encouragement of Viewing Management

Strategies for regulating binge-watching were varied among participants. Setting personal viewing limits or schedules was mentioned by 62% of interviewees as a potential strategy. Using apps or features to track viewing time was cited by 46% of participants. Watching with others to create natural breaks was mentioned by 38% of interviewees while choosing to watch shows as they are released weekly was cited by 31% as a potential strategy to moderate binge-watching behaviour.

- Setting personal viewing limits or schedules: mentioned by 8 (62%)
- Using apps or features to track viewing time: mentioned by 6 (46%)
- Watching with others to create natural breaks: mentioned by 5 (38%)
- Choosing to watch shows as they are released weekly: mentioned by 4 (31%)

It's important to note that due to the relatively small sample size of 13 interviews, these findings should not be considered generalisable to a larger population. The content analysis also relies on the frequency of mentions as a measure of importance or prevalence and is not reflective of the depth of the participants' experiences or feelings. Despite these limitations, the content analysis provides some insight into the most salient aspects of binge-watching as perceived by the study participants, offering a foundation for further exploration in subsequent phases of the research.

4.3.4 Discourse Analysis

The discourse analysis examines how the language used by the respondents constructs social realities and meanings around binge-watching. This analysis focuses on how participants have talked about the phenomenon and what this might reveal about broader social and cultural discourses. Through careful examination of the interview transcripts, three primary discourses emerged:

The discourse of addiction and lack of control: Participants frequently used language associated with addiction and lack of control when describing their binge-watching experiences. Metaphors such as being 'hooked', 'sucked in', or 'unable to stop' were common, suggesting that binge-watching is constructed as a compulsive and potentially problematic behaviour. Cookie remarked, "*I can't get enough of it, so I consume as much as I can... So yeah, so consuming and not being... almost not being able to stop, just consuming as much as possible.*" Garnish described the experience of exceeding planned viewing limits: "*I've actually said... I start watching something at 9:00 o'clock at night and I've said right 9:00 to 11:00, I'm gonna watch this and then I've literally at 10:50... I need to know happens next... I... I've been so wired that I've then watched something on and we've gone till midnight.*" This discourse of addiction positions the individual as somewhat powerless in the face of the lure of binge-watching, and draws upon broader cultural narratives of addiction as a loss of control and a threat to personal and wellbeing.

The discourse of productivity and guilt: Participants often framed binge-watching as a guilty pleasure or an unproductive use of time, drawing upon cultural discourses of productivity and responsibility. They frequently contrasted binge-watching with more ‘productive’ or ‘worthwhile’ activities, such as work, study, or exercise. As Edith expressed, *"I think I probably shouldn't have been watching that, I probably should have been doing some work and then it made me feel a bit guilty."* Cookie reflected on the aftermath of excessive viewing: *"The negative things are the disappointment when it's finished, because you've just over-consumed and now you're left like hungry, hungry for more because... you didn't take control and you didn't do things in moderation."* Michaelson simply stated, *"I think it's mainly the fact that I should be doing other things with my time."* This discourse positions binge-watching as a deviation from cultural norms of productivity and self-discipline and constructs the individual as responsible for managing their time and attention in a socially acceptable way. It reflects broader societal values that prioritise productivity and view leisure activities as less valuable or wasteful.

The discourse of social connection and shared experience: Despite the somewhat negative discourses of addiction and unproductivity, participants also frequently constructed binge-watching as a source of social connection and shared experience. They described bonding with friends and family over shared viewing experiences and used language of community and belonging when discussing their binge-watching habits. Edith noted, *"If I go out for meals with friends, things will often be like 'ohh... do you watch...?', It's like my guilty pleasure is Love Island, love it and will often go for meals with friends that I know are watching Love Island and we will talk about it."* As previously noted, Edith also described joining online fan communities: *"I quite like seeing who else is watching it cause I don't know that many people that watch it... <Shetland> there was all this conversation about it and speculation I quite, quite enjoy."*

Garnish described catching up on shows to avoid feeling socially excluded: "*Part of the motivation was I was feeling quite left out of some of the conversations because people were talking about about '24' and I had no knowledge of what they were talking about.*" This discourse positions binge-watching as a way of participating in shared cultural narratives and building social connections, drawing upon broader discourses of media consumption as a form of social currency and collective meaning-making.

These discourses reveal the complex and often contradictory ways in which participants understand and experience binge-watching. On one hand, it is constructed as a problematic behaviour associated with addiction and wasted time. On the other, it is seen as a source of enjoyment, relaxation, and social connection. This tension reflects broader societal debates about the role of media consumption in contemporary life and the balance between productivity and leisure.

The language used by participants also reveals how binge-watching is situated within larger cultural narratives about self-control, time management, and the value of different activities. The frequent use of terms related to addiction and guilt suggests that many participants have internalised societal messages about the importance of self-discipline and productive use of time. However, the discourse of social connection indicates that binge-watching is also seen as a valuable form of cultural participation and a way of building and maintaining social relationships.

It is worth noting that these discourses are not mutually exclusive, and individual participants often drew upon several when discussing their experiences. This highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of binge-watching as a cultural phenomenon and the varied ways in which individuals negotiate and make sense of their own viewing habits within broader social and cultural contexts.

The discourse analysis reveals that binge-watching is a richly meaningful cultural practice that intersects with important ideas about addiction, productivity, social connection, and the role of media in contemporary life. The language used by participants reflects and reproduces broader societal discourses while also revealing the personal and often conflicted ways in which individuals experience and make sense of their binge-watching habits.

In conclusion, the analysis of the IDIs has yielded rich insights into the phenomenon of binge-watching. The thematic analysis revealed key themes related to the definition of binge-watching, its positive and negative aspects, the role of digital media interfaces, and potential strategies for regulating this behaviour. The content analysis provided a quantitative overview of these themes, highlighting their prevalence across the interviews. Finally, the discourse analysis uncovered the complex ways participants construct and make sense of their binge-watching experiences, revealing tensions between societal expectations of productivity and the enjoyment derived from this form of media consumption.

These findings paint a nuanced picture of binge-watching as a multifaceted phenomenon deeply embedded in contemporary media culture. Participants' responses suggest that binge-watching is not simply a matter of time spent viewing but rather a complex interplay of personal choices, technological affordances, and broader social and cultural factors.

As we move into the discussion section, we will explore the implications of these findings in greater depth. We will consider how they relate to existing literature on binge-watching and media consumption and what they might tell us about changing television viewing patterns in the digital age. Moreover, we will examine the potential consequences of binge-watching for individual wellbeing and social relationships and the broader cultural significance of this phenomenon.

The discussion will also address the role of streaming platforms and their interfaces in shaping binge-watching behaviours and consider potential strategies for promoting more mindful and intentional viewing practices. By synthesising the insights gained from this qualitative study with existing research and theoretical frameworks, we aim to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of binge-watching and its place in contemporary media culture.

4.4 Discussion

4.4.1 Defining and Conceptualising Binge-Watching

The interviews revealed a range of perspectives on what constitutes binge-watching, highlighting the complexity of defining this phenomenon. While some participants focused on the quantity of content consumed, others emphasised the compulsive nature of the viewing behaviour. This variability in definitions aligns with the inconsistencies found in existing literature [43][9].

A common thread among participants was the notion of watching multiple episodes of a series in succession, often driven by a compelling need to continue the narrative. This aligns with Merikivi et al.'s (2020) definition of binge-watching as consuming multiple episodes of the same television show in one sitting [32]. However, our findings suggest that the definition extends beyond just the number of episodes watched, incorporating elements of intention, control, and emotional investment.

The lack of a universally accepted definition presents challenges for researchers and policymakers. It complicates comparisons across studies and makes establishing clear guidelines or interventions difficult. Our findings suggest that a comprehensive definition of binge-watching should consider not only the quantity of content consumed but also the viewer's intentions, the level of control they exercise, and the impact on other aspects of their life.

This multifaceted understanding of binge-watching addresses Research Question 1 by proposing that binge-watching is not merely defined by hours spent viewing but by a complex interplay of behavioural, intentional, and emotional factors. Future research could benefit from adopting this more nuanced conceptualisation to better capture the full spectrum of binge-watching experiences.

4.4.2 The Duality of Binge-Watching: Pleasure and Guilt

A striking theme that emerged from the interviews was the duality of emotions associated with binge-watching. Participants often described their viewing experiences as highly enjoyable and immersive yet simultaneously expressed guilt or regret, particularly when it interfered with other activities or responsibilities.

However, the pleasure derived from binge-watching shouldn't be overlooked. Participants described it as a form of escapism, a way to relax, and a means of engaging deeply with narratives and characters. This aligns with uses and gratifications theory [72], which posits that media consumption is driven by the fulfilment of specific needs, such as entertainment, relaxation, and emotional engagement.

The coexistence of pleasure and guilt in binge-watching experiences highlights the complex relationship between media consumption and wellbeing in the digital age. It suggests that while binge-watching can provide immediate gratification and enjoyment, it may also contribute to feelings of guilt and reduced self-esteem when it conflicts with internalised notions of productive time use.

These findings address Research Question 2 by illuminating both positive and negative aspects associated with binge-watching. The positive aspects include enjoyment, relaxation, and deep engagement with content, while the negative aspects encompass feelings of guilt, potential interference with other activities, and concerns about productivity.

4.4.3 Social Aspects of Binge-Watching

The social dimensions of binge-watching emerged as a significant theme in our interviews. Participants frequently mentioned how shared viewing experiences, even when not physically watching together, created opportunities for social bonding and cultural conversations. This finding aligns with Jenkins' (2006) concept of 'participatory culture' [73], where media consumption becomes a collective experience that extends beyond the act of viewing itself.

Binge-watching appears to serve as a form of social currency, providing common ground for discussions and shared experiences. Participants described how being up-to-date with popular series allowed them to engage in conversations with friends, colleagues, and even strangers. This supports Raney & Ji's (2017) position that media consumption in the digital age is not exclusively a solitary activity but increasingly a socially embedded practice [74].

However, the interviews also revealed the potential negative social impacts of binge-watching. Some participants reported that excessive viewing could lead to social isolation or neglect of face-to-face interactions. This tension between the social connectivity enabled by shared viewing experiences and the potential for social disconnection through excessive individual viewing highlights the complex role of binge-watching in contemporary social life.

The social aspects of binge-watching contribute to addressing Research Question 2, revealing both positive and negative social implications. While binge-watching can facilitate social connections and shared experiences, it may also, in some cases, lead to social isolation or neglect of in-person interactions.

4.4.4 The Role of Technology in Facilitating Binge-Watching

Our findings highlight the significant role that streaming platforms and their interfaces play in shaping binge-watching behaviours. Participants frequently mentioned features such as autoplay and personalised recommendations as factors that encouraged continued viewing. This aligns with research by Pittman and Sheehan (2015), who found that technological affordances of streaming platforms contribute to binge-watching behaviours [13].

The autoplay feature, in particular, was identified by many participants as a factor that made it easy to continue watching without conscious decision-making. This raises questions about user autonomy and the extent to which viewing behaviours are shaped by platform design.

Personalised recommendations were also cited as a factor in prolonging viewing sessions. While participants generally appreciated these recommendations, some expressed concern about being led down a ‘rabbit hole’ of content. This reflects the tension between the convenience of personalisation and the potential for algorithmic systems to override user agency explored by Evans et al. (2022) [45].

These findings directly address Research Question 3, indicating that features such as autoplay and personalised recommendations can indeed reduce consumer autonomy in viewing behaviours. They suggest a need for greater transparency in how these features operate and more user control over their implementation.

4.4.5 Psychological and Health Implications

The interviews revealed several potential psychological and health implications of binge-watching. Sleep disruption was frequently mentioned, with many participants reporting staying up late to continue watching, resulting in fatigue the next day. This aligns with research by Exelmans and Van den Bulck (2017), who found associations between binge-watching and poor sleep quality [17].

Some participants also reported feelings of anxiety or restlessness when unable to continue watching a series, suggesting a potential for psychological dependence. This supports findings by Flayelle et al. (2019) on the addictive potential of binge-watching [37].

However, it's important to note that many participants also described positive psychological effects, such as stress relief and mood enhancement. This supports the idea explored by Rubenking & Bracken (2018) that binge-watching can serve as a coping mechanism or form of self-care [40].

The potential for both positive and negative health impacts underscores the complexity of binge-watching as a phenomenon. These findings contribute to addressing Research Question 2, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of the health implications of binge-watching that considers both risks and potential benefits.

4.4.6 Strategies for Mindful Viewing

Participants suggested various strategies for promoting more intentional viewing habits. These ranged from personal strategies, such as setting viewing time limits or using external timers, to suggestions for platform-level interventions.

One recurring suggestion was for platforms to provide more information about total viewing time and to offer customisable viewing limits. This indicates an opportunity for more ethical design in digital platforms that empower users to make informed decisions about their media consumption.

Some participants also suggested features that would make it easier to pause between episodes, such as longer intervals before autoplay or reminders about time spent viewing. These suggestions highlight a desire for greater user control over the viewing experience.

These findings address Research Question 4 by proposing several inter-personalisation features that could better serve consumers. They suggest that platforms could enhance user autonomy by providing more information, customisable controls, and features that encourage periodic breaks in viewing.

4.4.7 Binge-Watching in the Context of Media Evolution

Our findings suggest that binge-watching represents a significant shift in television viewing habits, reflecting broader changes in media consumption patterns. The ability to watch entire seasons at once has altered viewers' relationships with narrative structure and pacing, as noted by several participants who expressed a preference for having control over their viewing schedule.

This shift aligns with what Lotz (2014) terms the 'post-network era', characterised by increased viewer control and the erosion of traditional TV scheduling [7]. Binge-watching can be seen as both a product of and a contributing factor to these changes in the media landscape.

However, our findings also suggest that binge-watching isn't simply replacing traditional viewing patterns but coexisting with them. Some participants reported enjoying both binge-watching and the anticipation of weekly episode releases, suggesting a complex media ecology where different viewing modes serve different needs and preferences.

4.4.8 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into binge-watching behaviours and experiences, it has several limitations. The sample size, while appropriate for a qualitative study, limits the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, the self-reported nature of the data may be subject to recall bias or social desirability effects.

Future research could benefit from larger-scale quantitative studies to test the themes' prevalence. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into how binge-watching behaviours and their impacts evolve over time. Additionally, experimental studies could help establish causal relationships between platform features and viewing behaviours.

There's also an opportunity for more research on the long-term psychological and social impacts of binge-watching and studies exploring how different demographic groups engage with this form of media consumption.

In conclusion, this qualitative exploration of binge-watching has provided rich insights into how viewers define, experience, and navigate this increasingly prevalent form of media consumption. It has highlighted the complex interplay between individual choices, technological affordances, and broader social and cultural factors that shape binge-watching behaviours.

The findings from this study have significant implications for our understanding of contemporary media consumption patterns and for the design of streaming platforms. They suggest a need for a more nuanced approach to binge-watching that recognises both its potential benefits and risks, and that empowers users to engage with content in ways that align with their personal goals and wellbeing.

As we move forward to the next chapter, which presents a quantitative survey informed by these qualitative findings, we aim to further explore and validate the themes identified here. This mixed-methods approach will allow us to build a more comprehensive understanding of binge-watching, its impacts, and potential strategies for promoting more mindful and intentional viewing practices in the digital age.

Chapter 5

Study 2

Mapping the Binge

A Multifaceted Survey on Viewing Habits and Attitudes

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5.1 Introduction

The qualitative insights gained through the in-depth interviews in Study 1 provided some depth of contextual understanding of individual binge-watching experiences and perceptions. However, to assess the prevalence of identified viewing patterns and attitudes across a broader population, a large-scale quantitative investigation is required. This chapter presents the findings from a comprehensive survey of 400 UK residents, examining viewing habits, attitudes toward binge-watching, and preferences regarding potential streaming service interface interventions.

Questionnaires are a widely utilised and effective tool for collecting research data in various fields, including social sciences, psychology, consumer research, and healthcare. Although the interviews in Study 1 revealed valuable information about individual experiences, motivations, and concerns about binge-watching, the approach taken in this study enabled the collection of data from a representative sample in the United Kingdom within a relatively short time period. It would not be viable to consult with such a wide cross-section of the population or meaningfully analyse hundreds of detailed responses to the questions asked in the depth interviews.

The survey design was directly informed by themes emerging from Study 1, particularly around definitions of binge-watching, perceived impacts, and the role of platform interfaces in shaping viewing behaviour. By quantifying these aspects across a representative sample, this study aims to validate and extend the qualitative findings while identifying potential relationships between demographic factors, viewing patterns, and attitudes towards binge-watching.

Moreover, questionnaires ensure standardisation. Although structured interviews allow flexibility to explore avenues of inquiry suggested by the interviewee, the questionnaire presents participants with a consistent approach and minimises rater bias. This standardisation enhances reliability and comparability of the collected data, enabling robust statistical analysis of patterns identified in Study 1.

Additionally, questionnaires administered through a third party provide anonymity to participants. The third-party approach reassures respondents of their anonymity, which in turn encourages them to provide honest and candid responses, reducing the likelihood of socially desirable responses that may occur in face-to-face interactions. This was particularly important given the sometimes judgmental attitudes towards excessive viewing that emerged in Study 1.

Furthermore, questionnaires primarily generate quantifiable data, which lends itself well to analysis via statistical methods. Despite its limitations, quantitative data enables the identification of patterns, trends, and relationships within the dataset, providing useful insights into the research questions at hand. This quantitative approach complements the rich qualitative data from Study 1, allowing for both depth and breadth in understanding binge-watching behaviours.

Lastly, questionnaires offer flexibility in question types. While the questionnaire in this study was designed to be mainly quantitative in nature, it still incorporated a mix of question types, including multiple-choice, multiple-answer, Likert scales, dichotomous, and open-ended questions. This flexibility allows for further qualitative data exploration if deemed necessary to support the research objectives.

This quantitative phase of research specifically addresses gaps in the current understanding of:

- The prevalence of different viewing patterns identified in Study 1
- Demographic variations in binge-watching behaviours and attitudes
- Relationships between platform preferences and viewing habits
- Reception of potential interface interventions identified through interviews

The following sections will discuss the methodology employed in developing and administering the questionnaire, as well as the data analysis techniques used to interpret the data. The results of the questionnaire will be presented and discussed in light of the research questions and the existing literature in the field.

5.2 Method

A self-administered questionnaire was developed to investigate the themes emerging from the Literature Review and Depth interviews. This allowed for the collection of data from a larger and more diverse sample, enhancing the generalisability of the findings to the UK population.

To ensure consistency and minimise potential bias, all participants were presented with the same questions in the same order. However, certain questions were only displayed based on respondents' previous answers. For instance, respondents who indicated that they did not watch broadcast television or VoD automatically bypassed the subsequent questions designed to investigate their typical viewing habits. This adaptive questioning technique aimed to save participants' time, prevent potential frustration and reduce the likelihood of resultant random responses.

5.2.1 Pilot Study

Prior to the main study, the questionnaire was built in Qualtrics and piloted with colleagues who were familiar with the topic but had not been directly involved in the research. The selection of survey platform required careful consideration of multiple factors. While functionality parameters such as question skip logic and display options, alongside data security needs including GDPR compliance, were paramount, the platform also needed to facilitate a positive participant experience. Qualtrics emerged as the optimal choice, meeting all essential requirements while providing additional beneficial features.

The pilot study yielded valuable feedback that led to several significant modifications. A key change involved the reordering of items, particularly the self-identification question about binge-watching frequency. This question was moved earlier in the survey, before participants encountered questions about hypothetical characters' viewing habits, to prevent potential influence on responses. Additionally, this binge-watching frequency question was repeated later in the survey, enabling assessment of whether active reflection on viewing habits had an influence on self-perception.

Another important addition following pilot feedback was the incorporation of isolation measures. The 4-item 'Measure of loneliness for adults' recommended by the Office for National Statistics [75] was included to explore potential relationships between viewing habits and sense of isolation. The pilot phase also led to various minor refinements involving spelling, grammar, and rephrasing to enhance clarity and coherence.

5.2.2 Questionnaire items

The final questionnaire comprised of seven distinct but interconnected sections, each designed to capture specific aspects of viewing behaviour and attitudes. The survey opened with a comprehensive consent section, ensuring participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and their rights before proceeding. This was followed by a demographic section collecting basic information including gender, age, ethnicity and highest level of completed education.

The lifestyle section gathered detailed information about participants' daily routines and wellbeing, including average weekly hours worked, current participation in formal education, household size and composition, long-term disability status, level of physical activity, sleep quality and perceptions of isolation. This contextual information was crucial for understanding how viewing habits might relate to broader life patterns and circumstances.

The core section on typical viewing behaviour examined multiple aspects of TV consumption habits. This included frequency and duration of viewing, the balance between broadcast and VoD, and the proportion of time spent watching TV as a primary versus secondary activity. Participants also provided information about their streaming service usage, experiences of viewer 'regret', and instances where TV viewing displaced other activities.

A novel aspect of the survey was the binge identification section, which presented participants with eight character profiles describing different viewing habits. For each profile, participants rated how likely they considered that character's behaviour to constitute binge-watching. This approach enabled exploration of how people conceptualise binge-watching without directly asking for definitions, potentially reducing social desirability bias in responses.

The attitude section employed Likert-scaled statements to assess participants' views on various aspects of TV viewing. These statements explored the perceived benefits of different viewing patterns, particularly comparing spaced viewing (traditional weekly episode releases) with stacked viewing (multiple episodes in succession). The final section investigated potential VoD interface interventions, examining both perceived effectiveness and personal interest in features that could help viewers manage their viewing time more mindfully.

5.2.3 Participants

The determination of appropriate sample size required careful consideration of both statistical rigour and practical constraints. While larger samples typically reduce sampling errors and enhance population representation, research budget and time limitations necessitated pragmatic decisions. Given the research aims to gain a broad overview of attitudes towards binge-watching, participation was limited to a UK-based population.

Cochran's formula provided the statistical foundation for determining minimum sample size requirements. This approach is particularly suitable for large or unknown population sizes, as it assumes the sample size required for a desired level of accuracy becomes independent of the population size once it reaches a certain threshold. The formula employs several key parameters: an estimated proportion of the population (p), margin of error (e), and z -value for the desired confidence level.

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 p(1-p)}{e^2}$$

where

n_0 : the necessary sample size,

p : estimated proportion of the population (50%),

e : the margin of error (5%) and

Z : 95% of the z-value (1.96), extracted from a z-table

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2(0.5)(1-(0.5))}{(0.05)^2} = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025} = 384.16$$

In Cochran's formula, 'p' represents the estimated proportion of the population with the characteristic or attribute of interest. In this instance, the characteristic would be the percentage of the UK population having insights or opinions about binge-watching. When no prior information is available about this, the conventional practice is to estimate 50%. Using this conservative estimate of 50% maximises the variability in the sample, ensuring that the calculated sample size will be sufficient to capture the true variability in the population regardless of whether the actual proportion is more or less than this.

The margin of error, 'e' is the amount of error deemed acceptable in the results of the questionnaire. It represents the range with which the true population parameter is expected to lie. A smaller margin of error requires a larger sample. A 5% margin of error strikes a balance between the precision of results and feasibility of obtaining the sample while aligning with conventional practices in social science research.

The Z-value or Z-score represents the number of standard deviations a given value is from the mean of the distribution. Z-values can be looked up in a z-table, a statistical tool that provides the probability of a value occurring within a standard normal distribution. A standard normal distribution will return approximately 95% of the values within a Z-score range of ± 1.96 . By using a Z-value of 1.96, it is possible to be 95% confident that the sample estimate will fall within the margin of error of the true population parameter, assuming normal distribution.

To summarise, by using the given p, e and Z values in Cochran's formula, we can be 95% confident that the sample estimate will fall within the $\pm 5\%$ margin of error of the true population parameter, assuming a normal distribution if there are at least 384 valid responses after data cleaning.

When the total population size is known and relatively small compared to the calculated sample size, a finite population correction factor can be applied to Cochran's formula. This factor adjusts the sample size to account for the portion of the population being sampled. As will be seen here, when the population size is very large relative to the sample size, this correction factor has minimal impact on the calculated sample size:

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{(n_0-1)}{N_0}}$$

where

n: the necessary sample size,

N_0 : the population size (67.6 Million adults based on ONS Population estimate [76])

$$n = \frac{384.16}{1 + \frac{(384.16-1)}{67,600,000}} = \frac{384.16}{1.000005668} = 384.1578226$$

Applying the finite population correction factor to Cochran's formula does not change the suggested minimum sample size of 384 after rounding. As the population size (N_0) increases, the impact of the finite population correction factor ($1 + ((n_0 - 1)/N_0)$) on the calculated sample size decreases exponentially meaning that the sample size becomes less sensitive to changes in the population size as N_0 increases.

By rearranging the finite population correction factor formula, it is possible to determine the threshold or boundary condition for the applicability of Cochran's finite population correction factor formula given the chosen values for p, e and Z. In this study, the true population size becomes irrelevant once it reaches 222,639, this being the point at which n (the necessary sample size) equates to exactly 383.5:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{(n_0-1)}{N}} \\ \downarrow \\ N &= \frac{n_0 - 1}{\frac{n_0}{n} - 1} \\ \downarrow \\ N &= \frac{384.16 - 1}{\frac{384.16}{383.5} - 1} = \frac{383.16}{0.001720991} = 222,639.1818 \end{aligned}$$

where

N: boundary condition for the applicability of Cochran's finite population correction factor given p of 0.5, e of 0.05 and Z of 1.96.

To summarise, by using a conservative estimate of the population proportion, a 5% margin of error, and a 95% confidence level, a minimum sample size of 384 participants would be needed. 400 was sought to enable contingency should any participants provide invalid data necessitating their removal from the study.

Prolific, an online survey platform, was employed to recruit participants as a representative sample of the UK population. This platform was selected for several compelling reasons:

1. **Forced representative sampling:** With a large enough sample size, Prolific allows researchers to target specific demographics, ensuring that the sample is representative of the desired population. In this case, the sample was selected to match the UK population in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity based on the 2011 census data. This representativeness enhances the generalisability of the findings to the broader UK population.
2. **Data Quality:** Prolific claims to employ stringent measures to ensure data quality, such as participant screening and regular review and maintenance of its participant pool. Further, the extra degree of separation between the respondent and researcher has the potential to reduce any motivation to respond in what they consider to be a socially desirable way. These measures help to minimise the risk of low-quality responses, thereby improving the reliability and validity of the collected data.
3. **Efficiency:** The platform's large participant pool allows for quick distribution and response collection. In this study, the survey was launched on the evening of Friday, April 28th, 2023, and all 400 participants completed it within the same evening, demonstrating the efficiency of using Prolific for data collection.

4. Ethical Considerations: Prolific states that they "*endorse the principle of 'ethical rewards'*" [77]. They make 'fair-pay' recommendations and monitor average response times to ensure this is adhered to. The platform also facilitates the protection of participant anonymity by acting as a conduit through which participants may respond to the questionnaire and be paid for their time without providing any personally identifiable data (PID) to the researcher. This 'reward' is also automatically paid 2 weeks after completion if not already actioned by the researcher. The onus is also placed on the researcher to justify why the participant should be rejected (for example, failing to pass 'attention checker' questions. For this study, it was anticipated that questionnaire completion would take up to 20 minutes. This was informed by the estimate provided by Qualtrix (based on the number and nature of questions) and feedback from the Pilot group). Based on the national living wage of £9.50 for the financial year of 2022-2023, it was determined fair to compensate at a rate of £3.50 per participant. The Median completion time was 12 minutes 13 seconds, resulting in an hourly pay equivalent of £17.19.

Participants completed the questionnaire independently without seeking assistance. One participant emailed upon completion to clarify that they tended to record programs to watch at their own pace rather than use VoD. After confirming with the participant that they treated this as a form of VoD for the purpose of the questionnaire, their responses were retained in the dataset, as they still provided valuable insights into their viewing habits and preferences.

By leveraging the advantages of Prolific, this study efficiently recruited a representative sample of the UK population and collected high-quality data while adhering to ethical standards. The platform pool made it a viable choice for conducting this research and obtaining reliable and generalisable results.

5.2.4 Analysis Methods

The quantitative survey data analysis began with thorough data cleaning and preparation using Microsoft Excel and SPSS. Initial data cleaning involved the removal of four participants: two who withdrew consent and two whose response patterns showed questionable timing that suggested insufficient engagement with the questions. Response patterns were then reviewed for signs of repetition or randomness, resulting in a final valid sample of 398 participants.

Data preparation encompassed several crucial steps to ensure robust analysis. This included verifying correct formatting, recoding string responses to numerical values, and reverse coding negatively loaded variables. Variables were reordered for analytical clarity, and the isolation index scale was created based on the 4-item measure included in the questionnaire. All measures were appropriately classified as scale, nominal, or ordinal to enable correct statistical treatments.

The analysis employed multiple complementary approaches to fully explore the data:

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics provided a foundational understanding of the basic features of the dataset, including frequency and percentage of responses for each question to understand the distribution of opinions, and measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) and dispersion (standard deviation, range) to provide an overview of the data.

Correlation Analysis

Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient ρ (Spearman's rho) were used to assess the strengths and directions of relationships between various factors, such as typical (banded) hours of television viewing and measures related to sleep, social isolation, or activity.

Responses to the factors being compared were generally ordinal in nature (mainly Likert scales where respondents were asked how much they agree or disagree with a given statement or frequency scales where respondents were asked how frequently they experienced/did something from 'never' to 'several times a day').

For this reason alone, Spearman's rho was used to measure correlations as Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson's r) would require continuous, interval or ratio data where the variables were measured on a scale with equal intervals (or quasi-intervals).

Spearman's rho is suitable for ordinal data because it does not assume a linear relationship between variables, does not require normally distributed data, and is less sensitive to outliers and skewed distributions compared to Pearson's r .

It is worth noting that while Pearson's r can be effectively employed with Likert scale data, given a sufficiently large sample size and a Likert scale with an adequate number of points (i.e., as the number of points on the Likert scale increases, the sample size required to generate quasi-interval data decreases), there are additional assumptions that must be satisfied, such as the assumption of normally distributed data. Consequently, considering that Spearman's rho has been specifically developed to handle ordinal data, it has been consistently applied to ensure the robustness and validity of the results, given the nature of the data collected.

Factor Analysis

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted to allow testing of hypothesised scales within the survey, with scale validity assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α). This analysis included an examination of Eigenvalues to identify potential multicollinearity, with variables showing high correlation potentially requiring consolidation or removal. Regression analysis explored relationships between variables, particularly focusing on predicting binge-watching frequency using demographic and lifestyle variables as predictors.

Regression Analysis

Linear regression analysis was applied to examine the relationships between variables and predict outcomes based on predictor variables. For example, setting demographics and lifestyle items as predictor variables to determine which (if any) contributed significantly to binge-watching frequency as an outcome.

Cluster Analysis

Cluster analysis was conducted to establish groups based on respondents' answering approaches rather than demographic characteristics. By clustering respondents based on their similarity in responses across multiple items (e.g., how they view the hypothetical characters or respond to the 'attitude towards binge' questions), it may have been possible to identify distinct segments or subgroups within the sample that share common opinions or behaviours.

Comparison of Means

Finally, comparison of means through ANOVA and t-tests enabled examination of group differences, particularly in viewing hours across demographic factors and differences between identified cluster groups. This comprehensive analytical approach ensured thorough exploration of viewing patterns, attitudes, and relationships while maintaining methodological rigour.

5.3 Results

5.3.1 Descriptive Statistics

Demographics

A forced representative sample for Age, Gender and Ethnicity was gathered via Prolific (based on the 2011 census). The final sample of 398 participants included 207 females and 191 males, with demographic composition closely matching UK population proportions. Age distribution showed balanced representation across groups: 109 participants aged 18-34, 143 aged 35-54, and 147 aged 55 or above. Ethnicity broadly reflected UK demographics with 342 White, 28 Asian, 14 Black-/African/Caribbean, 9 Mixed ethnicity, and 7 Other/Declined to respond participants.

Lifestyle

The majority of respondents (63%) reported having had some university education, with 66% of these being in the first generation of their family to attend university. Just over half of the respondents (53%) were in full-time employment (30+ hours per week), with some indicating they also studied on a Full-Time basis.

Most respondents (77%) lived with one or more family members while 13% lived alone. Among those reporting Long Term Health Conditions, the majority considered themselves to be impacted by it on a daily basis.

When asked how active respondents saw themselves in relation to their peers, responses (though not on a continuous scale) somewhat approximate a normal distribution (mean = 3.12, median and mode = 3, SD = 1.078). A little over half of the respondents exercised for 3 or more days and 43% of the respondents who provided an answer indicated that they exercised for 4+ hours per week. It's worth noting that this question had one of the highest rates of none responses (62).

Most respondents slept for 7-8 hours per night and 46% claimed to have trouble sleeping as frequently as on a weekly basis. Around 1/4 of the respondents 'never' or 'hardly ever' felt isolated.

Note, full demographic breakdown is available in the appendices.

Typical Viewing Behaviour

The most popular VoD platforms among respondents were BBC iPlayer (319 users), Netflix (305), Prime (235), All4 (191), ITV2 (186) and Disney (163), see Figure 5.1.

This alignment somewhat matches Statistica data which lists (in order) Netflix, Prime, iPlayer, YouTube, All 4 and Disney+ as the top 5 VoD platforms as of 2021 [4].

Sleep, followed by completion of household chores were the activities most often put off by respondents in favour of continued viewing (See Figure 5.2).

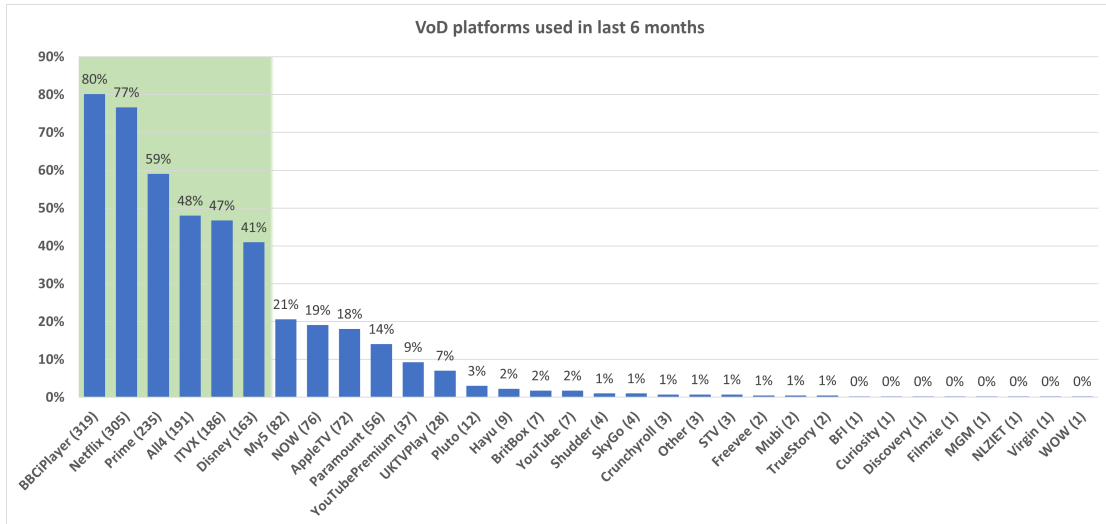


Figure 5.1: Self Reported Viewing Platform Usage - note respondents could select all platforms they had used in the last 6 months

While some also put off ‘paid work’ to keep watching something, those who were also undertaking study were less likely to delay education-related activities (See Figure 5.3). Given the relatively small subset of student respondents, caution should be exercised when interpreting differences between the student population and the respondent population as a whole.

Binge Identification

In the ‘perception of ‘binge-watching’ behaviour’ section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked "*Do you think that the following people are binge-watchers?*" and instructed to "*Read about their viewing habits and select the rating that’s most like them*". They were then provided with descriptions of 8 hypothetical characters. These were named Character A through to Character H, and nothing was used to differentiate between them other than the assigned letter and description of their viewing habits. This way, it is expected that responses were based only on viewing habits rather than any subconscious bias the respondent might have had about the demographic profile of a ‘binge-watcher’. Clear patterns emerged in respondents’ perceptions. See Figure 5.4.

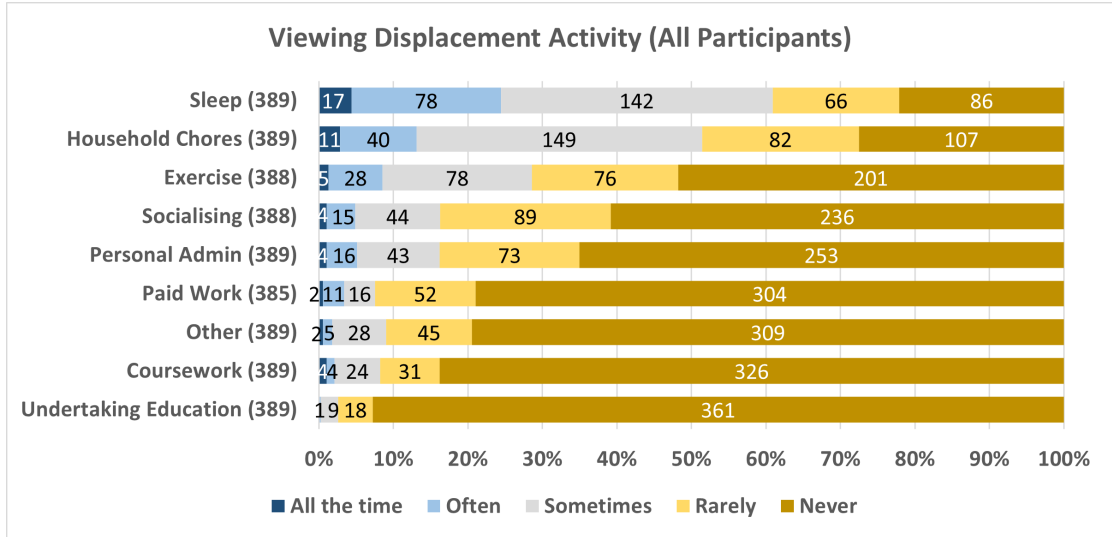


Figure 5.2: Self-reported frequency with which respondents put off various activities in order to continue watching (all participants)

Likely Binge-Watchers:

Of the 8 hypothetical characters put to the respondents, the one most frequently identified as a Binge-Watcher was Character F who *"can't wait to find out what happens next and often loses track of the time while watching 3 or 4 episodes back-to-back"*. 87% of the respondents selected that they were 'Probably' or 'Definitely' a binge-watcher vs 3% who selected that they were 'Probably' or 'Definitely Not'.

The other 2 characters the respondents tended to see as more likely to be binge-watchers were Character C, who *"waits until the whole series is available"* because *"they hate not being able to watch episodes back-to-back"* and Character E who *"doesn't watch much TV in the week but looks forward to a relaxing 'movie marathon' and may allocate 6 or 7 hours for this"*. Character C was identified as 'Probably' or 'Definitely' a binge-watcher by 70% vs 14% who selected 'Probably' or 'Definitely not'. 58% of respondents identified Character E as 'Probably' or 'Definitely' a binge-watcher vs 18% selecting 'Probably' or 'Definitely not'.

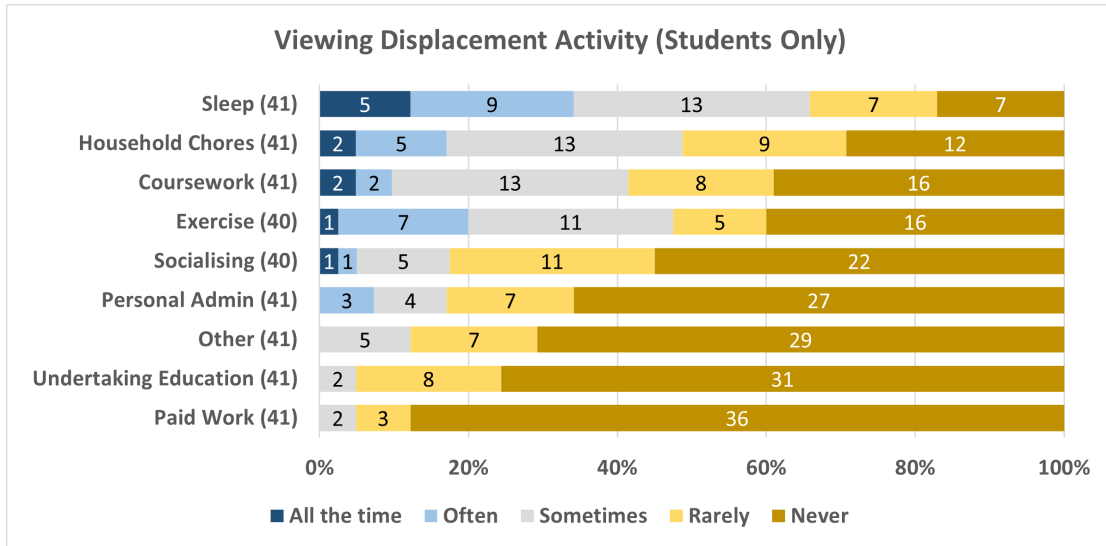


Figure 5.3: Self-reported frequency with which respondents put off various activities in order to continue watching (student participants - full and part-time)

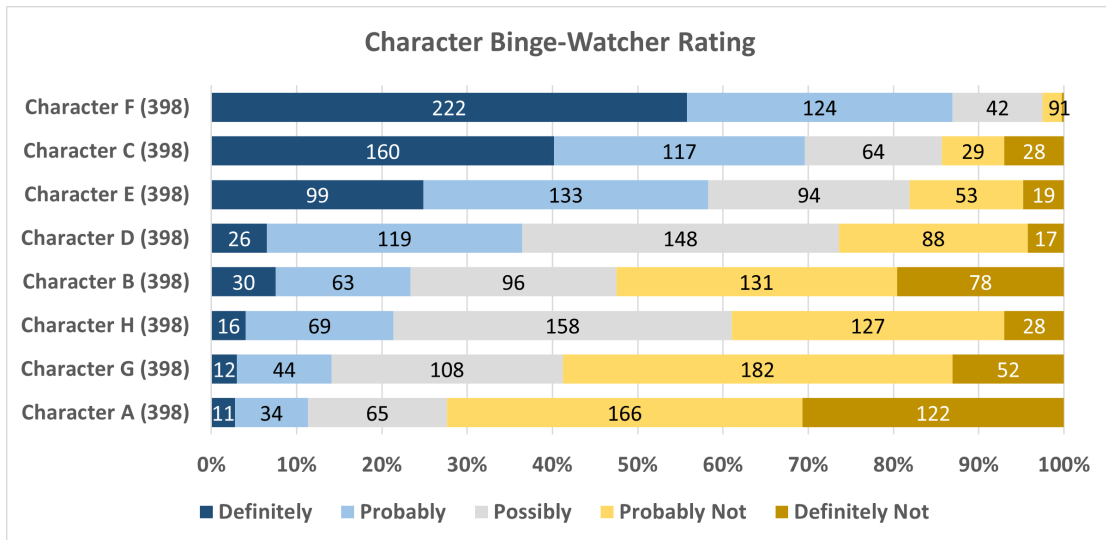


Figure 5.4: Levels of Agreement with the likelihood of described characters being 'binge-watchers'

Possibly Binge-Watchers:

Characters D who "*frequently watches 3 or more episodes of the same series to fill their evening but doesn't hesitate to turn the TV off when it's bedtime*" and H who "*has been dealing with a long-term health condition which has resulted in them spending a lot more time watching TV than they used to*" are more ambiguous according to the respondents with Character D's profile showing signs of normal distribution (mean = 3.12, median and mode = 3) and Character H's profile returning the greatest number of 'Possibly' responses (40%).

Unlikely Binge-Watchers:

Character A, who *"enjoys a good viewing streak"* and *"waits for a new series to be released"* to *"watch 1 episode each day until the series is finished"* was not seen as likely to be a binge-watcher by most respondents, with 72% selecting ‘Definitely not’ or ‘Probably not’ vs 11% selecting ‘Definitely’ or ‘Probably’. Character G who *"often has the television on in the background while they are completing their chores and may get through 3 or 4 episodes this way"* and Character B who *"tends to watch around 4 to 6 hours of TV most nights, hopping between different channels until they find something that grabs their interest"* were also less often identified as binge-watchers with 59% selecting ‘Definitely not’ or ‘Probably not’ vs 14% selecting ‘Definitely’ or ‘Probably’ for G and 53% vs 23% for B.

Character Description	LoA
Character F just can't wait to find out what happens next and often loses track of the time while watching 3 or 4 episodes back to back.	87%
Character C waits until the whole series is available when it's released 1 episode each week. This is because they hate not being able to watch episodes back to back.	70%
Character E doesn't watch much TV in the week but looks forward to a relaxing ‘movie marathon’ at the weekend and may allocate 6 or 7 hours for this.	58%
Character D frequently watches 3 or more episodes of the same series to fill their evening but doesn't hesitate to turn the TV off when it's bed time.	36%
Character B tends to watch around 4 to 6 hours of TV most nights, hopping between different channels until they find something that grabs their interest.	23%
Character H has been dealing with a long term health condition which has resulted in them spending a lot more time watching TV than they used to.	21%
Character G often has the television on in the background while they are completing their chores and may get through 3 or 4 episodes this way.	14%
Character A enjoys a good viewing streak. They wait for a new series to be released and watch 1 episode each day until the series is finished.	11%

Table 5.1: Character behaviour descriptions and percentage of respondents who selected ‘Definitely’ or ‘Probably’ (Level of Agreement (LoA)) when asked if this was binge-watching behaviour

Initial Observations:

Note that although Characters B, D and G are watching a similar amount of content to Character F, they are identified as ‘binge-watchers’ by significantly fewer respondents. The differentiating element included in Character F’s profile is the suggested lack of patience or possibly impulse control, i.e. they "*just can’t wait to find out what happens next*". This, too, could be inferred by the description of Character C, who is also considered a Binge-Watcher more often than not.

Character C avoids the frustration of being drip-fed the storyline by waiting until they are able to have complete control of the pace at which they consume the series. It can be inferred by the behavioural descriptions of Characters B, D and G, on the other hand, that their viewing, although similar in time spent, is primarily motivated by a desire to be entertained in their free time (Characters B & D) or passively while partaking in another activity (Character G) and, in the case of Character D, concluded with ease regardless of the point reached in the narrative. This further supports that an element of compulsion or impatience should be perceived to be considered a binge-watcher.

One exception to the compulsion/impulse control factor indicating Binge-Watching status is Character E who is deliberate with their intentions to view 6+ hours at the weekend. Perceptions that this Character is also a binge-watcher aligns with the literature which defines binge-watching based on the length of any one viewing session (regardless of content consumed or how frequently the activity is participated in).

While no specific viewing time has been alluded to in the case of Character H, the indication that the increased viewing is a result of their circumstances rather than the content again supports the suggestion that a prime factor in determining binge-watching status is attributable to the motivating factor rather than the observable behaviour.

Although some of the research summarised in the literature review chapter suggested that returning to the same series on consecutive nights to watch **one** episode at a time could be classified as binge-watching, most respondents to this questionnaire did not see Character A's behaviour in this light.

Response Time Analysis

Response times for rating each character profile were analysed to explore engagement patterns (see Table 5.2). Character A, being the first character rated, showed the longest mean response time (21.83 seconds, $SD = 15.74$), potentially due to participants familiarising themselves with the task. For subsequent characters, mean response times generally ranged between 9 and 16 seconds, with notable variations in standard deviations.

Character H has a particularly high standard deviation (46.34), indicating much more variability in response times compared to other characters while Character G (the penultimate character behaviour to be rated) has the fastest average response time at 9.28 seconds.

Character	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Character A	2.16	141.87	21.83	15.74
Character B	1.20	56.11	10.92	7.41
Character C	0.74	228.01	15.47	16.33
Character D	0.69	54.81	10.40	6.68
Character E	0.71	86.41	10.25	7.84
Character F	0.38	407.67	13.40	25.73
Character G	0.37	150.60	9.28	10.84
Character H	0.88	895.49	12.81	46.34

Table 5.2: Participant response times by character (in seconds)

Counter to initial hypotheses, characters with more normally distributed responses (like Character D) did not show longer deliberation times. There appears to be little discernible relationship between response distribution patterns and the time taken to make these assessments. See Figure 5.5.

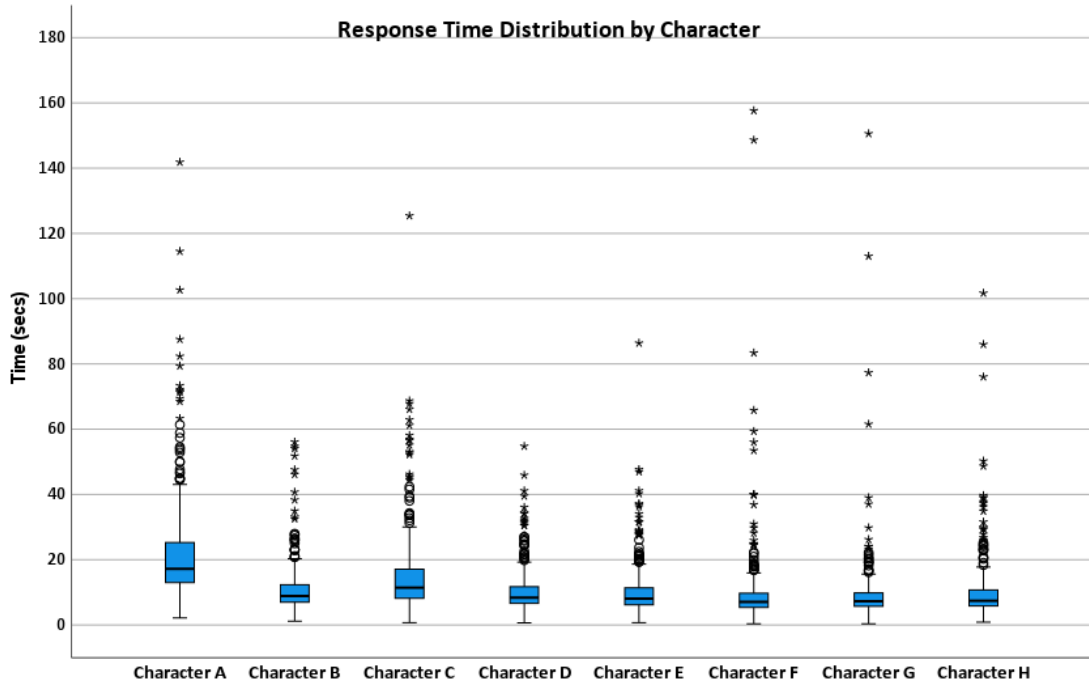


Figure 5.5: Box plot of response time distribution by Character (in seconds). Note, Characters C, F and H each have 1 or 2 outliers that exceed 180 seconds that are excluded from this plot

Attitude and Interface Preferences

Switching off auto-play emerged as the intervention most respondents perceived as likely to aid autonomy, while ‘Bingeability’ ratings were seen as least likely to help. See Table 5.3 for full list ranked in order of functionality perceived as most likely to aid autonomy to least likely to aid it.

Function Description	LoA
Option to switch off autoplay of next episode.	77%
Auto switch-off at a time of the viewers choosing.	68%
Option to set ‘bed-time’ to receive 15 minute warning.	64%
Displaying time the episode will finish when it is selected.	62%
Option to automatically return to main menu at the end of each episode.	57%
Chapter or scene markers (as found on DVDs) to help viewers identify good places to pause watching.	52%
Option to sync with calendar to receive onscreen reminders of upcoming commitments.	46%
Next episode to only autoplay once full credits have run on current episode.	45%
‘Are you still watching?’ notifications with intervals that may be set by the viewer.	38%
‘Bingeability’ rating to warn viewers which shows tend to be watched in bulk.	33%

Table 5.3: Existing and potential VoD interface features and percentage of respondents who selected ‘Extremely likely’ or ‘Likely’ (Level of Agreement (LoA)) when asked if these would help people who struggle to control the amount they watch

More than half of the respondents indicated they would consider opting to see the time an episode would end at time of selection along with having the option to disable autoplay. Of less interest were options such as syncing to calendars, seeing ‘bingeability’ ratings or customising periodic notifications to disrupt viewing sessions. See Figure 5.6.

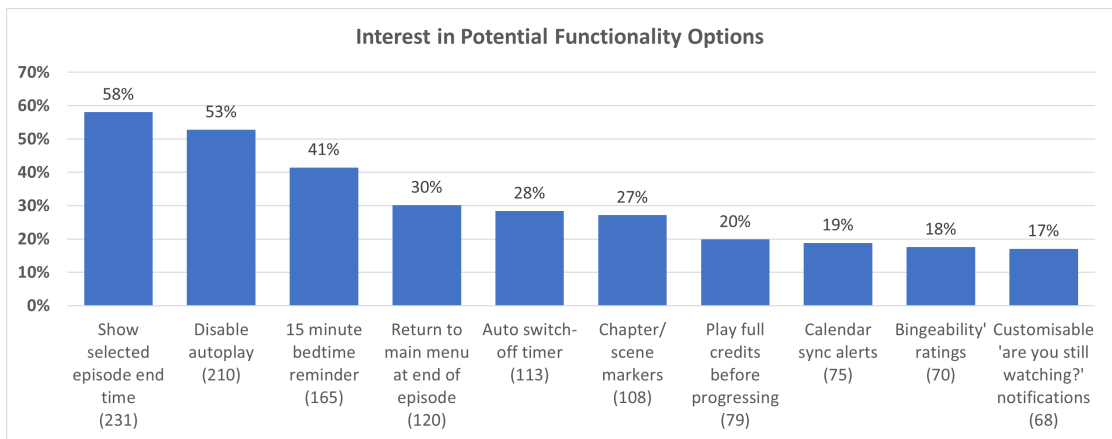


Figure 5.6: Bar chart showing percentage of respondents who would consider using each functionality option

Note, that participants were invited to make their own feature suggestions that might aid viewer autonomy. This resulted in the following three suggestions:

- "*Total time remaining for season*"
- "*Indication of how long I've been watching*"
- "*Long pause / adverts between episodes*"

5.3.2 Cross Tabulation

Analysis of viewing hours appeared to have little relationship to hours worked. Perceptions of activity levels in relation to peers was normally distributed (this was seen across age groups) with around half (54%) of the respondents claiming to exercise on 3 or more days per week and 43% exercising for 4 or more hours per week.

Correlation Analysis

Given that correlations alone do not imply causation, responses to questions asking about the displacement of other activities were examined alongside the correlation analysis. The isolation index items showed particularly high internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.9$), suggesting reliable measurement of this construct.

5.3.3 Factor Analysis

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was employed to test the researcher's hypotheses regarding potential scales within the survey. Initial examination of the correlation matrix revealed several variables that were relatively highly correlated with each other, suggesting underlying constructs. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity confirmed the data's suitability for factor analysis. The null hypothesis that the correlation matrix was an identity matrix was rejected, indicating meaningful relationships existed between variables.

The Communalities table showed the proportion of each variable's variance that could be explained by the extracted factors, helping to assess how well variables fit the factor solution. Variables with extraction values above 0.6 were considered to have high communality, while those between 0.4 and 0.6 showed moderate fit. Any variables with values below 0.4 were carefully examined for potential removal, as they might not fit well within the factor solution.

The number of factors to retain was determined through multiple complementary approaches. With Principal Component Analysis, the amount of variance explained decreased substantially with each subsequent component reduction from 25. Using Kaiser's criterion of Eigenvalues greater than 1, combined with examination of the scree plot's 'elbow' and the goal of explaining at least 60% of total variance, six higher-order factors were identified as optimal.

These six factors demonstrated varying levels of internal consistency as measured by Cronbach's Alpha (α). The 'Binge-Benefits' factor showed the strongest reliability ($\alpha = 0.721$), encompassing items related to perceived advantages of back-to-back viewing such as greater connection to characters and enhanced engagement with content. The 'Impulse Control' factor ($\alpha = 0.673$) grouped items reflecting difficulty in stopping viewing, particularly in response to cliffhangers or when episodes were shorter in duration.

The ‘Wellbeing’ factor ($\alpha = 0.571$) captured items related to mood regulation and quality of life, while Use of Time ($\alpha = 0.529$) encompassed judgments about viewing as a worthwhile activity. The ‘Interface Nudge’ factor ($\alpha = 0.482$) grouped items related to platform features’ influence on viewing behaviour, and ‘Anticipation Benefits’ ($\alpha = 0.448$) captured perceived advantages of spaced viewing.

The ‘Binge-Benefits’ factor ($\alpha = 0.721$) showed strong loadings from these items:

- "I feel a greater connection to the characters when I can watch episodes back-to-back"
- "I find that I am more engaged in the content when I can watch episodes back-to-back"
- "I sometimes watch multiple episodes to catch up, specifically so I don't have to worry about spoilers"

Notably, this factor captures both emotional engagement and social motivations.

The ‘Impulse Control’ factor ($\alpha = 0.673$) revealed interesting relationships between immediate gratification and viewing decisions:

- "If an episode ends on a cliff-hanger, I have to find out what happens next as soon as possible"
- "I get frustrated when I have to wait for the next episode"
- "When one episode finishes, I'm more likely to watch another if it's quite short"
- "I am likely to keep watching episodes even if I've promised to wait for a friend to catch up"
- "There's no such thing as watching 'too much' television / Video on Demand"

Particularly interesting here is how shorter episode length appears to reduce viewing resistance, suggesting that content structure influences control perceptions.

The ‘Wellbeing’ factor ($\alpha = 0.571$) grouped items suggesting therapeutic uses of viewing:

- "Watching television / Video on Demand has cheered me up when I've felt down"
- "If I am feeling unwell, watching television / Video on Demand helps me to pass the time"
- "The mood I am in is likely to influence the amount of television / Video on Demand I watch"
- "I think that access to television / Video on Demand is really important to some people's quality of life"

The ‘Use of Time’ factor ($\alpha = 0.529$) revealed somewhat judgmental attitudes:

- "I think that people who watch ‘too much’ television / Video on Demand are missing out in some way"
- "Many people need to exercise more discipline in their viewing behaviour"
- "Reading for hours is a better use of time than watching television / Video on Demand"
- "I only watch television / Video on Demand when I've nothing better to do with my time"

The ‘Interface Nudge’ factor ($\alpha = 0.482$) grouped items related to platform influence:

- "As soon as the next episode starts to play, I am very likely to watch it until the end, even if I hadn't intended to"
- "How an episode ends has a great deal of influence on how likely I am to watch the next one"
- "I find I'm far more likely to stop watching at the end of an episode if the next one doesn't automatically play"
- "Video on Demand interfaces are designed to make you keep watching"
- "I find it much easier to step away from a programme when there are advert breaks"
- "I need to exercise more discipline in my viewing behaviour"

The ‘Anticipation Benefits’ factor ($\alpha = 0.448$) revealed interesting contrasts to binge benefits:

- "I find it easier to remember all the plot lines when there is time between episodes to process them"
- "I lose track of who's who in a programme if I watch too much of it at once"
- "I enjoy anticipating what is going to happen next when I have no choice but to wait for it"

5.3.4 Regression Analysis

A series of multiple regression analyses were conducted to identify key predictors of self-identified binge-watching behaviour. The initial model used the six identified factors from the factor analysis as predictors, while controlling for demographic variables (age, gender, education level) and lifestyle factors (working hours, exercise frequency, sleep patterns).

The ‘Binge-Benefits’ and ‘Impulse Control’ factors emerged as the strongest predictors of self-identified binge-watching ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$ and $\beta = .42$, $p < .001$ respectively). This suggests that individuals who perceive more benefits from continuous viewing and those who report difficulty controlling their viewing are more likely to identify themselves as binge-watchers.

Interestingly, the ‘Interface Nudge’ factor showed moderate predictive power ($\beta = .29$, $p < .01$), indicating that awareness of platform design influence doesn’t necessarily reduce binge-watching behaviour. The ‘Wellbeing’ factor showed significant but weaker association ($\beta = .21$, $p < .05$), while ‘Use of Time’ and ‘Anticipation Benefits’ factors did not reach statistical significance as predictors.

Among demographic variables, age showed a weak negative association with self-identified binge-watching ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .05$), suggesting younger viewers are somewhat more likely to identify as binge-watchers. Education level and gender did not emerge as significant predictors.

5.3.5 Cluster Analysis

Two hierarchical cluster analyses were conducted using Ward’s method, with ratings standardised by variables. The first clustered respondents based on their ratings of the 8 hypothetical characters, while the second examined groupings based on responses to the ‘Attitude towards binge-watching’ questions.

For each analysis, dendrograms were generated to visually identify optimal cluster numbers. The suggested number of clusters was then validated through K-means cluster analysis, with final cluster numbers determined by examining the relevant ANOVA tables (F values $p < .001$). This rigorous approach ensured statistically robust grouping while maintaining practical interpretability.

Character-Based Clusters

Three distinct viewer groups emerged from the character ratings:

1. ‘Control-Focused’ viewers (42% of sample) - Defined binge-watching primarily through lack of viewing control rather than hours watched ($F = 24.63$, $p < .001$). These participants rated Character F (who "loses track of time") as significantly more likely to be a binge-watcher than Character E (who plans extended viewing sessions), despite similar viewing durations.
2. ‘Duration-Focused’ viewers (35% of sample) - Identified binge-watching based primarily on hours spent viewing ($F = 19.87$, $p < .001$), regardless of viewer intent or control. This group showed the strongest correlation between viewing duration and binge-watcher classification ($\rho = .67$, $p < .001$).
3. ‘Context-Sensitive’ viewers (23% of sample) - Considered both duration and circumstance in their classifications ($F = 17.92$, $p < .001$). This group showed significantly different ratings for Character H (viewing increased due to health condition) compared to other characters with similar viewing patterns (mean difference = 1.42, $p < .001$).

The practical implications of these clusters are significant for platform design. While duration-focused viewers might benefit from time-tracking features, control-focused viewers may respond better to features emphasising active choice in viewing decisions. Context-sensitive viewers' patterns suggest the need for adaptable interfaces that consider viewing circumstances.

Attitude-Based Clusters

Analysis of responses to the 'Attitude towards binge-watching' questions revealed four distinct clusters:

1. 'Conscious Bingers' (31% of sample) - This group acknowledged high awareness of their viewing habits ($F = 28.34$, $p < .001$) and platform influence ($F = 22.91$, $p < .001$), yet continued to engage in extended viewing. They showed the strongest agreement with statements about both benefits (mean = 4.2/5) and drawbacks (mean = 3.8/5) of binge-watching, suggesting informed decision-making despite potential consequences.
2. 'Resistant Viewers' (28% of sample) - Characterised by active resistance to platform nudges ($F = 26.77$, $p < .001$) and strong preference for scheduled viewing ($F = 23.45$, $p < .001$). This group showed significantly higher agreement with statements about benefits of spaced viewing (mean = 4.1/5) compared to other clusters (mean difference = 0.89, $p < .001$).
3. 'Neutral Consumers' (24% of sample) - Demonstrated moderate responses across most attitude measures with notably lower standard deviations ($SD = 0.68$ compared to cluster average $SD = 1.12$). They showed no strong preferences for viewing patterns but reported the lowest awareness of platform influence (mean = 2.4/5).

4. ‘Immersed Viewers’ (17% of sample) - Showed strongest agreement with statements about narrative engagement ($F = 31.22$, $p < .001$) and character connection ($F = 29.87$, $p < .001$). This group reported significantly less viewing regret (mean = 2.1/5) compared to other clusters (mean = 3.4/5, $p < .001$), despite reporting similar viewing durations.

Cross-analysis between character-based and attitude-based clusters revealed interesting overlaps. For example, 67% of ‘Control-Focused’ viewers from the character-based clusters fell into either ‘Conscious Bingers’ or ‘Resistant Viewers’ categories, suggesting strong alignment between theoretical perceptions and personal attitudes towards viewing control.

5.3.6 Comparison of Means

ANOVAs were conducted to identify significant differences between groups based on demographics, clusters, and other key variables identified in the previous analyses. These tests aimed to understand how viewing behaviours and attitudes vary across different population segments.

Hours of TV consumed appeared to have remarkably little relationship to hours worked, contrary to what might be expected. Perceptions of activity levels in relation to peers showed a normal distribution (mean = 3.12, median and mode = 3, $SD = 1.078$), and this pattern held consistent across age groups.

Response times to the character profiles showed interesting variations. While Character A (the first profile presented) had the longest mean response time (21.83 seconds, $SD = 15.74$), likely due to task familiarisation, subsequent character ratings showed varying patterns. Notably, Character D, despite having more normally distributed responses, did not demonstrate longer deliberation times as initially hypothesised.

Character H showed the highest standard deviation in response time ($SD = 46.34$), suggesting greater variability in how participants processed this profile's health-related context.

5.4 Discussion

5.4.1 Defining Binge

The cluster analysis revealed that people conceptualise binge-watching in distinctly different ways. While some focus purely on duration ('Duration-Focused' viewers - 35%), others emphasize the loss of control ('Control-Focused' viewers - 42%) or consider contextual factors ('Context-Sensitive' viewers - 23%). This multifaceted understanding extends beyond simple time-based definitions found in early literature and supports the more nuanced perspectives that emerged from Study 1's interviews.

Particularly notable was how Character F, who "loses track of time while watching 3 or 4 episodes back-to-back," was more frequently identified as a binge-watcher (87% agreement) than Character B who watches similar amounts but maintains conscious control. This suggests that loss of autonomy, rather than just viewing duration, plays a crucial role in how people define binge-watching.

The emergence of 'Context-Sensitive' viewers (23%) who consider circumstances like health conditions in their classification of binge-watching suggests a more sophisticated understanding than previously captured in academic literature. This aligns with Study 1's findings where interviewees often qualified their judgments based on viewers' circumstances and motivations.

5.4.2 Platform Influence

The ‘Interface Nudge’ factor’s moderate predictive power ($\beta = .29$, $p < .01$) in regression analysis suggests that awareness of platform influence doesn’t necessarily prevent binge-watching behaviour. This finding has important implications for interface design, indicating that merely making users aware of persuasive design elements may not be sufficient to support viewing autonomy.

Survey responses regarding potential interface interventions showed strong support for features providing greater viewer control. The option to disable autoplay emerged as the most positively received intervention, with more novel approaches like ‘bingeability ratings’ receiving less support. This suggests that viewers prefer direct control mechanisms over informational nudges.

Interface preferences showed some variation across clusters, with ‘Resistant Viewers’ showing particular interest in features that support planned viewing. This suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach to interface design may not effectively serve all viewer types.

5.4.3 Problems and Perks

Factor analysis revealed distinct constructs around both benefits ($\alpha = 0.721$) and drawbacks of binge-watching. The ‘Wellbeing’ factor ($\alpha = 0.571$) captured therapeutic uses of viewing, while concerns about time displacement emerged in the ‘Use of Time’ factor ($\alpha = 0.529$). The existence of ‘Conscious Bingers’ (31% of sample) who maintain high awareness of both benefits and drawbacks while choosing to engage in extended viewing suggests a more complex relationship with binge-watching than simple problematic usage.

The displacement of activities showed interesting patterns, with sleep and household chores most commonly affected. However, the relationship between viewing hours and work hours was notably weak, suggesting viewers may be protecting certain priorities while allowing others to be displaced.

5.4.4 Implications for Industry Practice

The findings from this study suggest several significant implications for platform designers and the broader streaming industry. The distinct viewer clusters identified point towards a need for more personalised control features, allowing users to adjust their viewing environment based on individual preferences and goals. This moves beyond simple parental controls or viewing restrictions towards more sophisticated, user-centric design approaches.

The importance of viewing context emerged strongly in the data, suggesting that platforms could benefit from more adaptive interfaces. Such interfaces might recognise and respond to different viewing circumstances, perhaps offering different features or interventions based on time of day, viewing pattern history, or user-specified preferences. This contextual awareness could help platforms better serve their diverse user base while maintaining engagement.

Perhaps most significantly, while awareness of platform influence doesn't necessarily prevent binge-watching, users showed a strong preference for direct control features over subtle nudges. This suggests that platforms should prioritise transparent user control mechanisms, potentially challenging current industry approaches that favour engagement-driven design.

5.4.5 Limitations of the Study

This study, while comprehensive in its approach, carries several important limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. The reliance on self-reported behaviour and attitudes introduces potential social desirability bias, particularly given the sometimes judgmental attitudes expressed towards excessive viewing. Participants may have under-reported their viewing hours or over-reported their level of control over viewing habits.

The cross-sectional nature of the study provides only a snapshot of viewing behaviours at a particular moment in time. This limitation means we cannot capture how viewing patterns might evolve over time or vary seasonally. Furthermore, while participants reported using multiple platforms, the study couldn't control for differences in platform interfaces that might influence viewing behaviours. These platform-specific variations could significantly impact how users engage with content.

5.4.6 Future Research Directions

The findings from this study suggest several promising avenues for future research in the field of VoD consumption. There is a clear opportunity to validate self-reported viewing patterns against actual viewing data, particularly given the potential for reporting bias identified in this study. This validation would provide valuable insights into the accuracy of self-reported viewing behaviours and help establish more reliable measures of viewing patterns.

Understanding temporal patterns presents another crucial area for investigation. Longitudinal studies could reveal how viewing patterns evolve over time and across different contexts, providing insights into the development and maintenance of viewing habits.

Similarly, more detailed examination of how different platform interfaces influence viewing behaviour could offer valuable insights for design recommendations.

The strong preferences expressed for certain interface features suggest the potential for experimental studies testing their effectiveness in real-world settings. Such research could help validate user preferences and inform evidence-based design decisions for streaming platforms.

Future research could also benefit from machine learning approaches to unpack the drivers of positive versus problematic binge-watching experiences. For example, classification models could be trained to identify patterns in viewing data, platform interactions, and viewer characteristics that predict different outcomes, similar to how Kosinski et al. (2013) used machine learning to predict psychological traits from digital footprints [78]. Such approaches could provide more nuanced insights into the complex interactions between content types, viewing patterns, and individual differences that influence viewing experiences.

5.4.7 Conclusion

The self-reported behaviours and attitudes explored in this survey provide further insights into how viewers perceive and experience binge-watching. However, the limitations of self-reporting and the snapshot nature of survey data highlight the value of using additional approaches to understanding viewing behaviour.

The next chapter addresses this through unobtrusive measures, examining actual viewing data from BBC iPlayer alongside social media discourse. This complementary approach allows us to observe binge-watching ‘in the wild’, providing a crucial reality check on the patterns identified through self-reporting while offering insights into how viewers engage with content in natural settings.

Chapter 6

Study 3

Beyond Self-Report

Behavioural Insights from Digital Footprints across iPlayer and Twitter

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6.1 Introduction

The case study in this chapter (Study 3) primarily employs unobtrusive measures, research methods that collect data without directly interfering with or influencing participant behaviour. According to Reis & Judd (2000), these techniques observe and gather information about subjects' behaviours in their natural settings, enhancing the ecological validity of the study and increasing generalisability to real-world situations [79].

By gathering data without subject awareness, Monahan & Fisher (2010) indicate that these methods minimise or potentially eradicate the 'observer' or 'Hawthorne effect', where participants might alter their behaviour, possibly becoming performative due to the knowledge of being studied [80]. Moreover, capturing real-time or archived data of actual occurrences eliminates reliance on potentially flawed participant recall or self-awareness. Consequently, the behavioural data gathered can be considered reflective of naturally occurring behaviour in the real world rather than that of a simulated environment.

This study addresses a research gap by utilising what the UK Research and Innovation framework terms "smart data" - actual digital behavioural traces that provide unfiltered insights into real-world user behaviour. While much of the previous research on binge-watching has relied on self-reported data, which can be subject to recall bias and social desirability effects, the analysis of viewing patterns captured through iPlayer's analytics systems offers a more objective picture of how viewers actually engage with content. This approach aligns with emerging priorities in digital behaviour research that emphasise the value of combining behavioural data with contextual qualitative insights.

The analysis of digital footprints, particularly smart data sources, opens up innovative avenues for exploring long-standing research questions. Unobtrusive measurement is especially suited to this area due to the abundance of data across various sources, with consumers generating vast amounts of data relating to their digital interactions. However, Kosinski et al. (2013) caution that digital footprints may reveal more than intended, presenting a challenge to balance innovation with individual control and privacy [78].

Study 3 utilised iPlayer viewing data and Twitter posts originating in the first 24 hours of ‘The Traitors US’ release. These analyses of iPlayer viewing data and Twitter posts, exemplify unobtrusive measurement, providing insights into viewing behaviour without direct researcher influence. As binge-watching becomes increasingly prevalent worldwide, the analysis of big data from real-world sources offers valuable insights into viewers’ motivations and the broader implications of the binge-watching phenomenon.

The unobtrusive measures employed in Study 3 serve to complement and extend the valuable insights gained from the first two studies of this thesis. While the earlier studies provided crucial foundational understanding through in-depth interviews and questionnaires, these new approaches offer additional benefits including access to significantly larger sample sizes, enabling insights into population-level trends and patterns.

The combination of iPlayer data and X (formerly Twitter) posts allows for a more holistic examination of media consumption behaviour. This mixed-method approach bridges the gap between self-reported data and actual viewing patterns, providing a more nuanced and comprehensive picture of binge-watching behaviours. By building upon the findings of the earlier studies and incorporating large-scale, real-world data, we can validate, refine, and expand our understanding of the binge-watching phenomenon, its motivations, and its broader implications in the contemporary media landscape.

6.1.1 Background

De Verraders (The Traitors) debuted in the Netherlands in March 2021, quickly becoming a ratings sensation. It's success prompted the announcement of the first international spin-off within just five weeks. According to K7 Media, the format emerged as the fastest growing of 2022, with seven new iterations launching across the globe that year [81].

The UK series, in particular, garnered substantial viewership, with approximately 3.2 million viewers tuning in for the finale via terrestrial television or iPlayer. This represented a significant 20% share of UK TV viewers at that time according to Barb (Broadcasters' audience research board) data provided by overnights.tv [82]. By January 12th, 2023, the show had been streamed more than 28 million times [83], further underscoring its popularity.

On Friday, January 13th 2023, less than a month after the UK version concluded, the BBC made the complete series of the US version available through iPlayer as 'The Traitors US'. As one of the UK's major broadcasters, operating both terrestrial/over-the-air (OTA) and internet/over-the-top (OTT) services, the BBC's release strategy presented a unique opportunity for research.

Given the recent success and widespread appeal of the UK series, it was hypothesised that there would be high anticipation among pre-invested fans for the launch of 'The Traitors US'. This enthusiasm was expected to drive strong initial binge-watching behaviours, facilitated by the instantaneous release of the entire season.

"The Traitors US" was strategically selected as the focus for this analysis due to several factors that make it particularly suitable for studying binge-watching behaviour. First, its release on iPlayer shortly after the highly successful UK version created a unique natural experiment, with an audience already familiar with the format but encountering new content.

Second, the complete series was released simultaneously, a couple of weeks prior to its broadcast on terrestrial television, enabling observation of different viewing patterns from the same starting point.

Third, as a reality competition show with high-stakes elimination moments and cliff-hangers, it represents a genre known to encourage continued viewing.

Finally, the show generated substantial social media discussion, allowing for complementary analysis of viewer reactions alongside actual viewing data. This combination of factors created an ideal case study for examining both viewing patterns and the social dimensions of binge-watching in a naturalistic setting.

The availability of iPlayer viewing data and X (formerly Twitter) posts provided a valuable opportunity to study the binge-watching phenomenon through real-world behaviours, uninfluenced by experimental settings.

This study aims to build upon the insights gained from previous research by examining actual viewing patterns and social media engagement in relation to ‘The Traitors US’. By analysing this data, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of binge-watching behaviours, viewer motivations, and the impact of release strategies on audience engagement.

6.2 Methodology

This study consists of two parts: viewing data analysis and social media discourse thematic & content analysis.

6.2.1 iPlayer Data Collection and Analysis

The BBC iPlayer data utilised in this study was rigorously anonymised by the broadcaster before analysis, in full compliance with the UK's strict confidentiality and privacy requirements¹.

Working with this secondary data presented several challenges, primarily due to the anonymisation process which, while crucial for viewer privacy, significantly impacted the granularity of data analysis. As a result, certain assumptions were necessary, and some facts could not be ascertained:

- Assumptions:
 - viewers of later episodes likely watched all preceding episodes,
 - viewers were actively watching (not engaged in other activities while the episode played without maintaining their attention),
- Limitations:
 - Episodes may not have been counted if less than 90% were played out either side of midnight,
 - Uncertainty regarding whether 90% of the episode content needed to be viewed or if reaching the 90% point in the episode was sufficient for counting,
 - Inability to identify the number of viewers per counted instance, i.e. number of people watching one screen,
 - Lack of data on the precise time viewers commenced watching an episode.

¹With analysis taking place under the lawful basis of GDPR 6(1)(e), 'the performance of a task in the public interest' and GDPR 9(2)(j) 'processing necessary for scientific research purposes', and all data was strictly aggregated to privacy-preserving levels of total viewership.

These disparities/limitations introduce some noise into the analysis. However, given the high number of viewings recorded, the data still provides valuable insight into the Binge-watching phenomenon.

It's important to note that these episodes were not available on terrestrial television until January 25th, making iPlayer the sole UK-based source for the programme on January 13th. However, the show was released on Peacock TV, a US-based streaming service, on January 12th. This timing discrepancy should be taken into consideration when reviewing the Tweets as these were not filtered for geographical origin, and even if they were, it's still possible that UK-based consumers could have had access to the show for slightly longer (for example, through VPN use).

SQL was used to interrogate the BBC iPlayer database to gather viewing figures per episode from the first day of the series release. For a viewing instance to be counted, at least 90% of the episode must have been played. It is known from the following Twitter Analysis that some viewers skipped elements of some of the shows (seemingly most often the 'challenges') so it is already strongly indicated that viewing figures returned would not be an accurate reflection if this happened during some episodes and not others, i.e. their viewing of later episodes may have been counted but not earlier episodes dependant upon what was skipped and when.

Viewing figures for each episode were broken down by visit start time (when the viewer signed into iPlayer rather than when they started to play the episode). Note, it was not possible to retrieve data by the start time of the specific episode. It was also the time of the current visit that was captured rather than that of the first visit had there been an earlier login that day. For simplicity, times have been rounded down, i.e., every viewer who signed into iPlayer between 04:00:00 and 04:59:59 was logged at 4am. (as such, there is no data for midnight and a large drop is seen at 11pm too).

Given the requirement to watch at least 90% of the episode to be counted, the latest anyone could sign in to iPlayer and achieve this before midnight would have been 11:20pm. This is because at least 40 minutes of the shortest episodes (1 or 9) would have to have been seen.

Further, instances of episode consumption in the early hours of Saturday, January 14th, have not been captured, i.e. where viewers had continued watching episodes through the night from the previous day. It is known from the Twitter Analysis that this has certainly occurred, but due to the lack of access to viewing of the episode start time, it was not possible to ascertain the number of viewers who had carried on from the day before without a break vs the number who started watching on day 2 or returned after taking a break.

While imperfect, this methodology provides a reasonable framework for analysing real-world binge-watching behaviours, contributing to the growing body of research on streaming consumption patterns.

6.2.2 Twitter Data Collection and Analysis

A qualitative analysis of tweets related to ‘The Traitors US’ was conducted to complement the quantitative iPlayer data on viewing patterns and gain insight into the viewer experience. This approach aligns with previous studies using social media data to analyse audience engagement with television content [49].

While tweets are publicly available, ethical considerations remain paramount. To address potential concerns:

- Protected accounts have been excluded so that only public tweets have been analysed
- Personal identifiers have been removed, with usernames replaced by numeric IDs

Further, to ensure anonymity and make tweets unsearchable, any ‘quotes’ included in this chapter are, in fact, paraphrased tweets. Core messages have been maintained with synonyms used for keywords or terms, sentence structure and/or word order have been adjusted.

Data Collection

Public tweets containing both ‘Traitors’ and ‘US’ were collected from January 13th to 14th, 2023, using X’s (formerly Twitter) publicly available interface tool. The search criteria initially sought to return every tweet including ‘Traitors’ made on January 13th, 2023. However, due to the political landscape in the United States at the time, this returned a high percentage of immaterial posts.

While the first trial relating to the ‘6 January 2021 Capitol Riots’ ended with a guilty verdict on March 8, 2022 [84], criminal proceedings were still carrying on throughout January 2023 and would continue to do so for some time to come. By this point, approximately 1,000 people had been charged [85]. And so it was, just over 2 years on but still very much in the public consciousness with people on all sides of the debate accusing others of treachery, the result of which was that such a broad search for ‘Traitors’ on this date yielded an unwieldy number of irrelevant tweets.

Efforts were made to refine the search by applying filters to exclude Tweets containing terms relating to the capitol events (e.g., ‘democracy’, ‘GOP’, ‘sedition’, ‘trump’, ‘republican’, ‘democrat’, ‘biden’, ‘election’, ‘corrupt’, ‘government’, ‘constitution’, ‘subpoena’, ‘country’, ‘USA’, ‘political’, ‘america’, ‘insurrection’, ‘capitol’, ‘riots’, etc) but the filtered approach still returned 1,000s of tweets which would require a very manual and time consuming sift.

As such, although searching for ‘Traitors’ **and** ‘US’ would limit the number of relevant tweets returned, after removing all posts made prior to 06:00 on the 13th and all originating posts made post 06:00 on the 14th of January, 868 qualifying tweets were identified. It should be noted that while originating tweets (217) had to be made within the first 24 hours of the series release via BBC iPlayer, all responses to these tweets have been included in the analysis. When removing all responses that occurred after the first 24 hours passed reduces the total number of tweets to 548. It was decided to analyse this initial return and assess if a suitable saturation point could be achieved based on this dataset.

Data curation

Tweets were sorted by date order within the platform ‘X’. screen grabs were placed onto a timeline set up in miro according to the time stamp of the original tweet in any thread. This helped to provide an initial ‘feel’ for the peaks of interaction and progression of discussion.

For the thematic analysis, they were copied across to an Excel file along with username, date and time. Each tweet was allocated a unique alphanumeric I.D., which would enable a reader to determine if the tweet was a thread originator, a reply to that initial tweet, a reply to a reply and so on. This established a clear hierarchy which would aid in later analysis. Tweets were then sorted by username within Excel and these usernames were replaced with a unique I.D. number in order to anonymise the data but still make it possible to identify if specific posters contributed multiple times. While almost all tweets returned were written in English, a small number appeared in other languages; these were translated using Google Translate and included in the analysis.

Qualitative analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted using a data-driven inductive approach as described by Braun & Clarke (2006) [71]. Each tweet was individually read and analysed, always in the context of the preceding tweets if it was in the form of a response. Each tweet was assigned to one or more thematic categories, with new themes or sub-themes being added as they emerged. During the analysis, key themes and their relationships were mapped to visualise the connections between different aspects of viewer engagement and discussion. Upon completion of the initial coding, the tweets were filtered by theme and re-read to assess for need to further split or refine the thematic categorisation.

Quantitative analysis

Content analysis percentages were determined by dividing the number of tweets allocated to a theme by the total number of tweets. As tweets likely touched on more than one theme, the percentages total well in excess of 100%. A scatter graph was used to plot the timestamps of tweets, allowing for the visualisation of patterns in posting times and the identification of peak engagement periods.

Establishing saturation

As already acknowledged, the data collection method utilised would not capture all relevant tweets and so Saunders et al.s (2018) analysis process [86] into likely saturation was conducted. The following observations were made:

- The major themes identified (cast composition, comparisons between formats, anticipation and reactions, cultural observations, game strategy, binge-watching and spoilers) appear consistently throughout the dataset. As progress was made through the tweets, a recurrence of themes was observed without significant new additions.
- Within each major theme, there are a variety of sub-themes and nuanced discussions. This suggests that the data collection has been thorough enough to capture not just surface-level reactions but also more complex and varied viewpoints.
- The dataset includes a wide range of opinions and experiences, from highly positive to highly critical, and from casual viewers to more analytical observers. This diversity indicates that the sample is representative of a broad audience.
- The tweets spanned from initial reactions upon the show’s release to discussions about later episodes and the finale. This temporal spread suggests that the full arc of audience engagement has been captured.
- As the analysis progressed, later tweets tended to reinforce existing themes rather than introduce entirely new concepts. This pattern is a clear indicator that the content is approaching the limit of theoretical saturation.
- All major aspects of the show, from casting to production, viewing experience to game strategy, are well-represented in the themes. It’s unlikely that analysis of additional tweets would introduce completely new, major themes.

Given these factors, it’s reasonable to conclude that collecting more tweets within this initial 24-hour time frame would likely yield diminishing returns in terms of new themes or significant insights. The current dataset appears to provide a comprehensive and saturated view of the audience’s response to ‘The Traitors US’.

Note, it has been determined that thematic saturation is likely reached approximately 60-70% through the collected tweets. This estimation is based on observing the point at which new tweets not only consistently reinforce existing themes rather than introduce novel concepts but also offer nothing new by way of opinion about those themes. After this point, while individual tweets continued to provide interesting examples or specific reactions, they generally fit into the established thematic framework and span of sentiments without necessitating new categories or significantly altering the overall analysis.

It's worth noting that reaching saturation doesn't mean the later tweets won't hold value, they could provide additional depth and nuance to existing themes, reinforcing the validity of the identified patterns.

6.3 Results

6.3.1 iPlayer Viewing Patterns

Using the iPlayer data, it was possible to analyse some aspects of binge-watching behaviour outside of an experimental setting and, therefore, uninfluenced by any study approach.

Figure 6.1 depicts the number of unique instances of each episode that was watched throughout the day as a bar graph. The scatter graph plots above each bar indicate what percentage of the viewers of the preceding episode watched the current episode. The table contains the minimum duration of each episode that could be watched to be included in the count (90% of the complete episode duration), the minimum cumulative time a viewer could be watching as they progress through the series and the number of viewers of an episode, expressed as a percentage of those who watched the first episode.

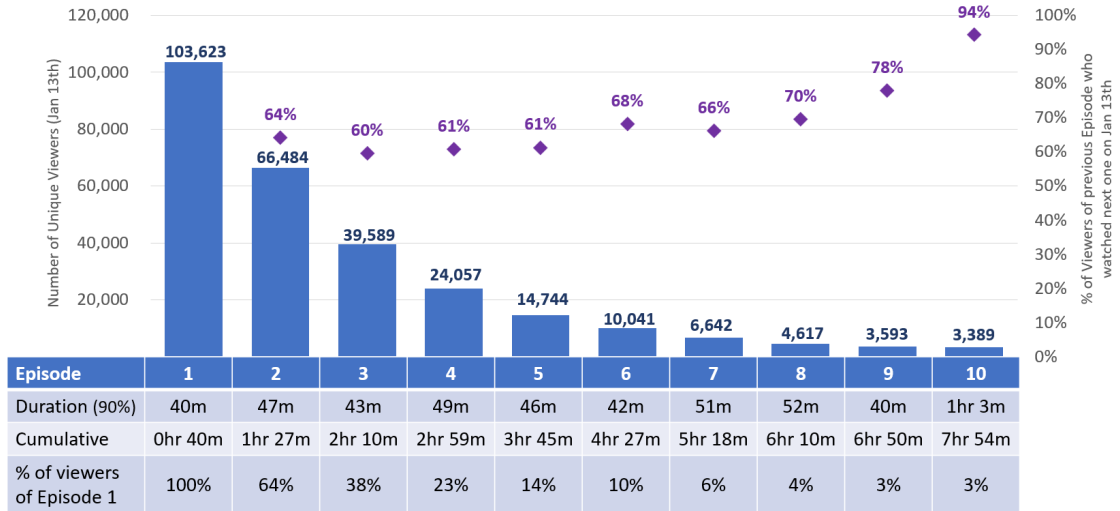


Figure 6.1: iPlayer viewing data by episode for ‘The Traitors US’ on January 13th 2023

To summarise:

1. **Initial Engagement:** 103,623 viewers watched Episode 1 via iPlayer on day 1, with 64% of those proceeding to Episode 2.
2. **Consistent Retention:** A steady retention rate of 60 to 61% may be observed from one episode to the next, up to Episode 5 (14,744 viewers).
3. **Mid-Series Spike:** A notable increase in viewer retention occurred at the halfway point, with 68% of Episode 5 viewers continuing to Episode 6.
4. **Increased Engagement:** From Episode 7 onwards, the percentage of viewers progressing to subsequent episodes steadily rose, suggesting increased engagement or a desire to complete the series as the finale approached.
5. **Completion Rate:** 3% of those who started the series (and 94% of those watching Episode 9) completed all ten episodes on the first day of release. From this, we may reasonably infer that as more time is invested, more of a hook is established or that as the finale approaches, there is more motivation to conclude the narrative.

6. **Time Investment:** Viewers who completed the series on January 13th likely consumed at least 7.9 hours of television, given that at least 90% of each episode had to be watched to be counted.

The data suggests a compelling narrative arc that maintains viewer interest throughout the series. The mid-series spike in retention at Episode 6 could indicate a pivotal plot point or heightened dramatic tension that re-engages viewers. The increasing progression rates in later episodes align with Green's (2021) theories of narrative transportation [87] and goal-oriented media consumption, where viewers become more invested in reaching the conclusion as they near the finale.

The completion rate of 3% for the entire series on the first day represents a significant instance of binge-watching behaviour. This aligns with Steiner & Xu's (2020) research on binge-watching motivations, which include narrative engagement, escapism, and the desire for immediate gratification [14].

It's important to note that these viewing patterns may be influenced by factors such as episode content, cliffhangers, or the overall structure of the reality competition format. Further qualitative analysis of episode content and viewer feedback could provide additional context for these quantitative findings.

Figure 6.2 illustrates the distribution of iPlayer visit start times across episodes. This visualisation provides several key insights into viewer behaviour and binge-watching patterns:

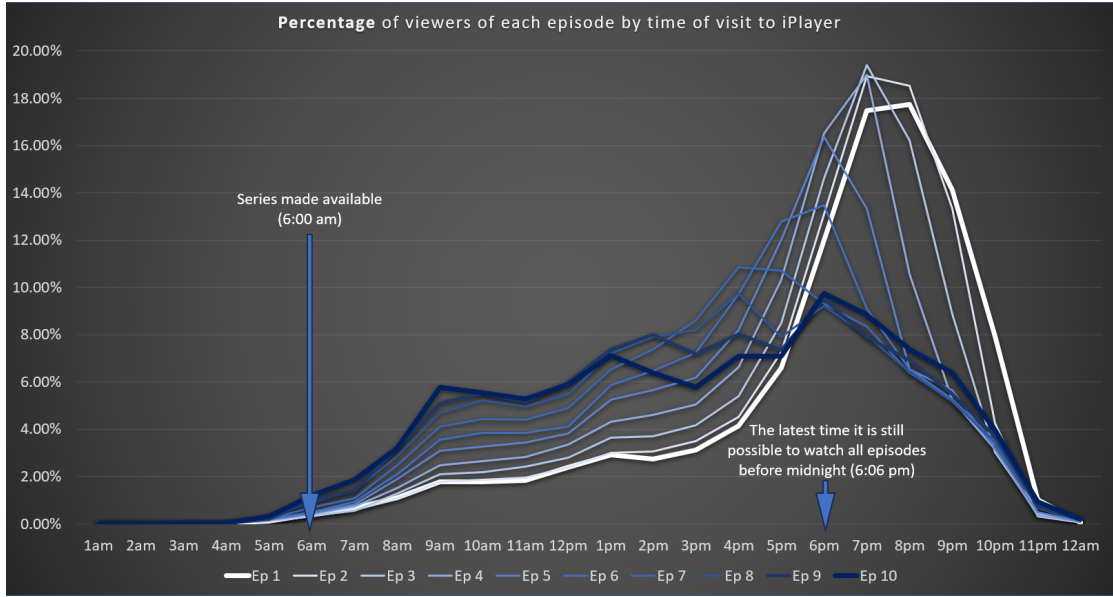


Figure 6.2: This graph charts the visit time of each viewer to iPlayer on January 13th 2023 by episode viewed

1. **Peak Viewing Times:** The data shows a consistent peak in iPlayer visits across all episodes during late afternoon and early evening. This pattern aligns with typical media consumption habits, especially considering that Friday, January 13th, was a standard working day in the UK. The timing suggests that many viewers engaged with the content after their working day, during their evening leisure time.
2. **Episode 1 vs. Episode 10 Distribution:** A notable difference is observed in the distribution patterns between the first and last episodes:
 - Episode 1 exhibits a more pronounced negative skew and higher kurtosis, indicating a concentrated surge of early viewers.
 - Episode 10's distribution is more dispersed, reflecting the varied pace at which viewers progressed through the series.

3. **Binge-Watching Behaviour:** The data provides evidence of intense binge-watching activity:

- To complete the entire series by midnight, viewers would need to have started by 18:06 UTC at the latest.
- Any Episode 10 views initiated after this time likely represent viewers returning for at least a second viewing session or those who didn't watch all prior episodes in full.
- The presence of Episode 10 views starting before 04:00 UTC (when the series wasn't available until 06:00 UTC) indicates that some households engaged in at least 9.9 hours of streaming on January 13th via iPlayer alone.

These patterns align with research on binge-watching motivations and behaviours. For instance, Steiner and Xu (2020) found that binge-watchers often prioritise immediate gratification and narrative immersion, which could explain the concentrated viewing patterns observed here [14].

The data also suggests varying viewer engagement levels. While some viewers exhibited classic binge-watching behaviour by consuming the entire series in one sitting, others paced their viewing. This diversity in viewing patterns supports findings by Merikivi et al. (2020) on the heterogeneity of binge-watching practices [32].

While these findings provide valuable insights, it's important to keep in mind that the data doesn't capture the exact start times of individual episodes or account for potential multi-device viewing. Further research could benefit from more granular, individual-level data to significantly enhance analysis of binge-watching patterns, for example:

1. **Precise Episode Start Times:** This would allow for the calculation of the length of interstitial moments between episodes, revealing whether viewers immediately started the next episode or took breaks.
2. **User Interaction Data:** Information on whether viewers actively clicked ‘next episode’ or relied on autoplay features could provide insights into the level of active engagement versus passive consumption.
3. **Pause and Resume Data:** Tracking when and for how long viewers pause episodes could illuminate patterns of interruption and resumption in binge-watching sessions, and potentially identify natural transitions (new chapters) in the narrative.
4. **Scene Skipping and Playback Speed:** Data on whether viewers skipped scenes or adjusted playback speed could indicate levels of impatience or selective viewing behaviours.
5. **Multi-device Tracking:** Information on whether viewers switched devices during their viewing session could provide a more complete picture of modern viewing habits.
6. **Demographic Information:** Viewer demographics could help identify how binge-watching patterns vary across different age groups, genders, or other relevant categories.

These additional data points would allow for a more nuanced analysis of binge-watching behaviours, potentially revealing patterns in how viewers navigate and consume content during extended viewing sessions. Such insights could have significant implications for content creators, streaming platforms, and researchers studying media consumption habits in the digital age.

As Horeck et al. (2021) note, the complexities of contemporary viewing practices require increasingly sophisticated methods of data collection and analysis [88]. Future research in this area could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological, social, and technological factors that shape binge-watching behaviours.

6.3.2 Twitter Thematic Analysis

The analysis of tweets relating to ‘The Traitors US’ revealed 9 primary themes, providing insights into viewer reactions, behaviours, and the show’s reception. These consisted of; casting choices including merits of issues with their celebrity status (35.9% of tweets); comparison to Traitors UK and other formats (27.2%); reactions from those who had seen the show (21.3%) along with the anticipation of those intending to watch it (8.8%); the various production elements (13.2%); gameplay (7.1%); how the show could be accessed (10.8%); evidence of the binge-watching phenomena (11.5%) and spoilers (4.0%):

A significant portion of tweets focus on the **Casting Choice**. This was the most prevalent theme with 312 (35.9%) of the reviewed tweets mapping to this area. These included positive and negative reactions to casting of celebrities/reality stars as contestants, discussions about specific contestants (Cirie and Kate, in particular, were frequently mentioned which suggests that they made particularly strong impressions), comparisons to the UK version’s casting which included cultural observations and discussion about the host (Alan Cumming as host receives substantial attention, with varied reactions to his style) and (mainly lack of) diversity amongst the cast members.

Comparison between formats was the second most apparent theme, touched upon by 236 (27.2%) of the reviewed tweets. Included here were tweets mentioning other formats, more commonly indicating a preference for other formats over the US version, often describing it as more dramatic or over the top, comparisons between hosts, and similarities between the formats.

185 (21.3%) tweets indicated **Reactions to the show**. Initial reactions appear to be mixed, with some viewers making expressions of excitement and enjoyment while others voiced disappointment or criticism, in some cases framing these within their initial expectations. There's a noticeable trend of viewers changing their opinions as they progress through the series, often to be 'won over' or become more positive. As well as reactions to the content, seeking endorsements to watch, and recommendations to watch have been included in this theme. The latter includes suggestions to persevere to those who had expressed disappointment with a number of posters stating that the programme gets better and '*has a great ending*'.

Production Elements account for 115 (13.2%) of the tweets and entail comments on challenges and game structure, observations about the setting and production design, degrees of drama and the overall editing style.

A fair number of comments about **Binge-watching** suggest that many viewers consumed or intended to consume multiple episodes in quick succession. Binge-watching is indicated in 100 (11.5%) tweets, making it the 5th most prevalent theme. This includes tweets from which it could be inferred that binge-watching had likely taken place even though it might not have been explicitly mentioned. 45 (5.2%) specifically mentioned that binge-watching had or would take place.

It could be inferred from a further 38 (4.4%) that the poster had watched at least 3 episodes in any 1 of the first few days based on content, e.g. “*finished it*” combined with the time and date of posting (i.e. getting to at least the 4th episode by end of day 1 (tweeting about this by the end of January 13th) or finishing the series (10 episodes) by the end of day 3 (tweeting about this by the end of January 15th)), this was treated as an indicator of binge-watching behaviour. This is based on definitions found during the literature review, suggestions made in the interviews (study 1) and character classification within the questionnaire (study 2).

17 (2.0%) tweets brought into question the wisdom of the broadcaster in releasing the whole series in one hit. There was also some overlap with the theme of spoilers, i.e., the increased challenge of avoiding them when access to the complete series was granted in one go. Some tweets highlighted a perceived benefit of individual episodes over a complete series release, with one poster stating that “*A significant part of what made the other series so good was the time and chat between each episode*”. The Twitter thread on the following page encapsulates the elements discussed here.

Some viewers reported skipping scenes, particularly challenges they found boring or repetitive, having seen them recently in the UK version. This behaviour highlights a significant limitation in the quantitative iPlayer data analysis. It’s unclear whether these viewings would still meet the 90% threshold for counting if viewers reached the timestamp 90% of the way through the programme. This observation underscores the importance of qualitative data in understanding nuanced viewing behaviours that may not have been captured by quantitative metrics alone.

Twitter Thread relating to Traitors US. Note that each tweet has been paraphrased to maintain the anonymity of the poster.

ORIGINATING POSTS:

Unique Poster ID #118:

Finally watched The Traitors US. What a mad enjoyable show, holy crap (05:02 UTC - 14 Jan 2023)

I just wish it had been released in parts so I could chat with others about it <swearing face emoji> but very happy I could binge it #TheTraitorsUS (05:03 UTC - 14 Jan 2023)

DIRECT RESPONSES:

Unique Poster ID #126: *In total agreement. I'm on Rob's podcast² and will see the last episode soon. Spoilers really do ruin this kind of program. But I do <heart emoji> #TheTraitorsUS (05:13 UTC - 14 Jan 2023)*

Unique Poster ID #145: *Yeah, releasing shows like this in one go just makes no sense to me. (05:37 UTC - 14 Jan 2023)*

Unique Poster ID #080: *I'm hearing this a lot. A downside to living here is it is more difficult to see. (05:55 UTC - 14 Jan 2023)*

Unique Poster ID #497: *Batches would have been much better because then it would make it possible to catch up and then talk about it and anticipate what might happen next (05:57 UTC - 14 Jan 2023)*

Unique Poster ID #511: *YES, THIS. (07:41 UTC - 14 Jan 2023)*

Unique Poster ID #366: *I know right?! I didn't consider Rob's podcast until done. Wish I'd watched each episode then the recap each time (16:15 UTC - 14 Jan 2023)*

Unique Poster ID #201: *we are doing the last 3 eps tonight, trying really hard to avoid the spoilers (00:10 UTC - 15 Jan 2023)*

²'Rob Has A Podcast'[89] is a TV-focused Podcast which produced 3 'The Traitors US Recap' episodes (released 12 to 16 Jan 2023).

Accessibility was touched upon in 94 (10.8%) tweets. 82 tweets (9.4%) asked or stated where the programme could be accessed. Notably, 11 tweets (1.3%) mentioned issues with missing subtitles/closed captions after episode 2 which made the programme inaccessible for some. This finding highlights the importance of comprehensive accessibility features in streaming content and the potential impact on viewer experience when these features are lacking. Arguably, it would be even more frustrating to be accommodated and potentially become invested in the first 2 episodes but not be able to continue watching past this point due to the oversight.

Anticipation accounts for 76 (8.8%) of the tweets. This is made up mainly of comments expressing excitement about the show and intention to watch (55 (6.3%)) but it also includes 10 (1.2%) expressions of disinterest in the format. The disparity between expressions of excitement and disinterest suggests a generally positive anticipation for the show, at least among those motivated enough to tweet about it.

Discussions about **Gameplay** and strategy appear less frequently than other themes. There are 62 (7.1%) comments map-able to this area. This mainly consists of discussions about strategies deployed (50 tweets (5.8%)) and alliances formed (6 tweets (0.7%)). The relatively low percentage of gameplay discussion compared to other themes might indicate that viewers were more engaged with other aspects of the show, such as casting and the production elements.

35 (4.0%) posts referenced the concept of **spoilers**. This included appeals for others not to release any spoilers, steps taken to avoid both coming across (muting certain hashtags or avoiding social media until the series is finished) or giving them (putting spoiler warnings in posts) and expressions of anger where spoiling had occurred. The presence of spoiler-related discussions highlights the challenges of social viewing in the age of binge-watching and all-at-once releases.

Other comments (44 (5.1%)) mainly brought up humorous observations about the questionable spelling of fellow contestants’ names in banishment votes and comparisons to other reality show formats.

The content reflects a highly engaged audience with strong and often polarised opinions. The frequent comparisons to the UK version suggest it served as a benchmark for many. This suggests, too, that many of the tweeters were UK-based and, therefore, more likely to have watched via the BBC iPlayer platform.

6.3.3 Twitter Time Stamp Analysis

The analysis of tweet timestamps revealed notable patterns in viewer engagement and behaviour. A notable concentration of tweets occurred during the evening and late-night hours, see figure 6.3. If it is assumed that tweets are made contemporaneously with the viewing experience, this would suggest that many viewers engaged with ‘The Traitors US’ during prime time or later in the night. This pattern aligns with traditional television viewing habits but also indicates the flexibility offered by on-demand streaming.

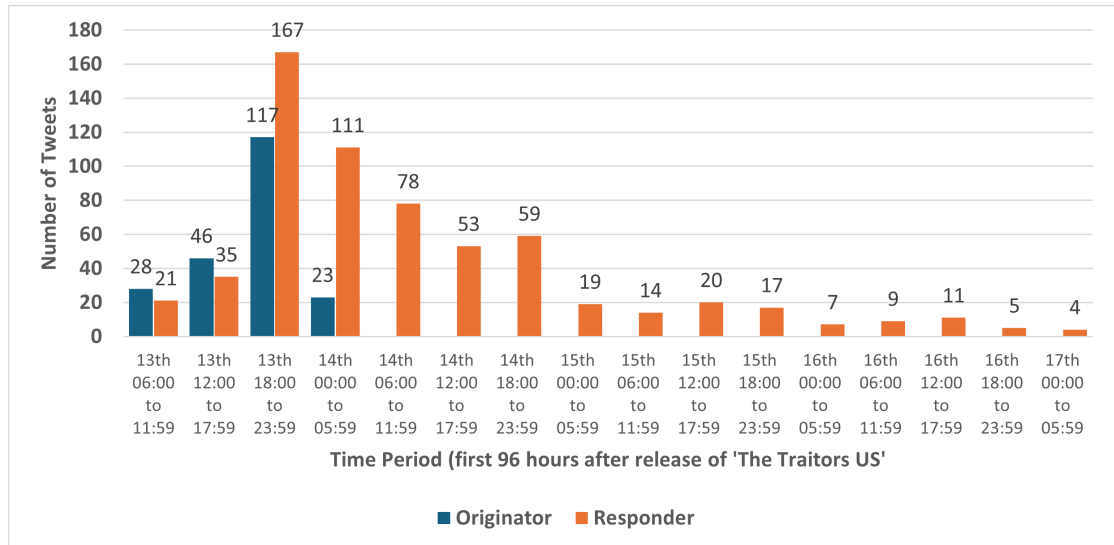


Figure 6.3: Twitter Time Period. Graph of distribution of posts per 6-hour block over the first 96 hours after the release of ‘The Traitors US’ on BBC iPlayer at 06:00 UTC, January 13th, 2023

The assumption of contemporaneous tweeting and viewing for some is supported by a series of tweets appearing in quick succession for some of the same users, this indicates real-time reactions as episodes were watched and indicates that binge-watching has occurred as progress through multiple episodes is indicated within a few hours of each other.

Of interest is the number of tweets appearing in the early morning hours of January 14th, between midnight and 06:00 UTC that relate to themes of Binge-watching or spoilers (see figure 6.4. While overall tweets drop off from the previous time period, the frequency of comments relating to binge-watching (and spoilers) remain stable. Although the numbers involved are low, this further supports the potential for late-night binge-watching sessions.

The sudden availability of all episodes at once seems to have enabled and potentially encouraged this behaviour. However, as well as the low numbers, it's important to note that some of these tweets likely came from viewers outside the UK, particularly North America. For these international viewers, tweets that appear in the early hours of January 14th for the UK may actually correspond to the evening of January 13th in their local time zones. This international viewership adds complexity to the temporal analysis, as what might seem like late-night/early-morning engagement from a UK perspective could be prime-time viewing for audiences in different parts of the world.

The timestamp data and mainly UK English spelling of the content strongly suggest that most viewers were in the same time zone, likely the UK, given the BBC iPlayer release. However, there are clear indicators that some commentary came from outside the UK, with some users explicitly referencing their countries of residence. This international engagement highlights the show's global appeal and the complexities of managing a worldwide audience in the streaming era.

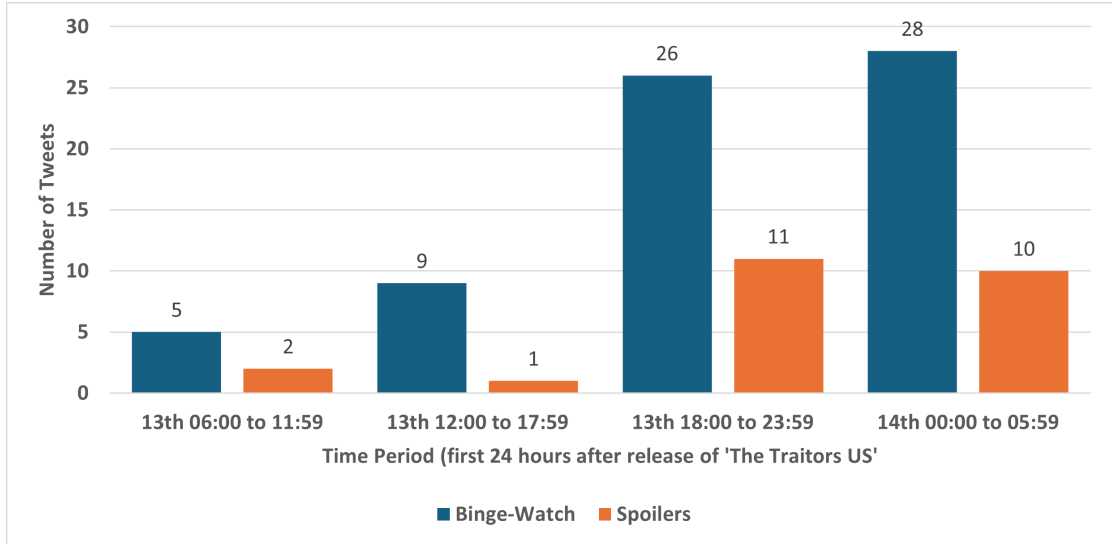


Figure 6.4: Twitter Time Period. Graph of distribution of posts relating to themes of Binge-watching or Spoilers per 6-hour block over the first 24 hours after the release of ‘The Traitors US’ on BBC iPlayer at 06:00 UTC, January 13th, 2023

As could be reasonably anticipated, the content of tweets evolved over time. initial comments were more heavily concentrated on anticipation and reactions to earlier episodes. This trend shifted as time progressed, with discussions relating to later episodes and the finale in particular becoming more prevalent in the subsequent days. This temporal spread of content reflects the varied pace at which viewers consumed the series, from rapid binge-watchers to more measured viewers.

Although the study limited originating posts to the first 24 hours of release via BBC iPlayer, the spread of dates in the ensuing threads indicated sustained engagement with the topic well beyond this initial period. This prolonged discussion suggests that the show maintained viewer interest over time, sparking ongoing conversations and debates.

To summarise, the temporal analysis also revealed that the all-at-once release strategy impacted viewing behaviour. It encouraged binge-watching and seemed to keep viewers engaged late into the night, as evidenced by the timestamps of tweets discussing multiple episodes in quick succession. This observation provides valuable insights into how release strategies can influence viewer behaviour and social media engagement patterns.

6.3.4 Twitter Originating Posts versus Responder Posts

Analysis of originating posts versus responses to them produces some notable differences, see Table 6.1. This presents a summary of the main themes identified in the Twitter analysis. These types are defined as ‘Originator’ posts vs ‘Responder’ posts and posts only occurring in the first 24 hours vs all posts gathered. The latter includes responses to the originating posts occurring in the first 24 hours regardless of when those responses were made.

tweet type (count)	casting choice	comp. between formats	reaction to show	production elements	binge- watch	access- ibility	antici- pation	game- play	spoilers
originator (216)	68 (31.5%)	59 (27.3%)	51 (23.6%)	20 (9.3%)	26 (12.0%)	37* (17.1%)	33* (15.3%)	5 (2.3%)	12 (5.6%)
responder (652)	244 (37.4%)	177 (27.1%)	134 (20.6%)	95* (14.6%)	74 (11.3%)	57 (8.7%)	43 (6.6%)	57* (8.7%)	23 (3.5%)
1st 24 hours (548)	171 (31.2%)	145 (26.5%)	113 (20.6%)	66 (12.0%)	68 (12.4%)	69 (12.6%)	67 (12.2%)	20 (3.6%)	24 (4.4%)
all (868)	312 (35.9%)	236 (27.2%)	185 (21.3%)	115 (13.2%)	100 (11.5%)	94 (10.8%)	76 (8.8%)	62 (7.1%)	35 (4.0%)

Table 6.1: Twitter main themes content analysis. * indicates that this difference is significant.

Bold text indicates whether a theme is proportionately more prevalent among originating posts or response posts. An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant association between the two categorical variables (1. the type of post: originator vs. responder, 2. presence or absence of a particular theme). It is appropriate to use Pearson Chi-Square (χ^2) values <0.05 to check for any associations given that the variables are binary and categorical and the sample sizes are sufficiently large enough with cell frequencies exceeding 5. The Phi Coefficient (φ) is used to measure effect size; it’s a commonly used measure for the effect size of binary data and was calculated directly from the Chi-square statistic.

The theme of ‘**gameplay**’ is more prevalent in responder tweets compared to originator tweets. While 2.3% (n=5) of the originator posts address production elements, this theme is present in 8.7% (n=57) of the responder tweets. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between tweet type (originator vs. responder) and the presence of the ‘gameplay’ theme. The relation between these variables is statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N=868)=10.106$, $p=.001$. However, the effect size for this finding, $\varphi = 0.108$, is small to medium according to Cohen’s (1988) criteria [90]. This suggests that there is both a statistically significant and practically meaningful difference in the prevalence of ‘gameplay’ discussions between originator and responder tweets. Responders appear to have been more likely than originators to discuss aspects of gameplay, which may include strategies deployed by contestants and alliances formed.

The higher prevalence of gameplay discussions in responder tweets suggests that these topics tended to emerge as viewers engage more deeply with the show’s content. This pattern could indicate that gameplay became a more prominent topic of conversation as viewers watched more episodes and had more material to analyse and discuss. The lower prevalence in originator posts might suggest that viewers were less likely to initiate conversations about gameplay but more inclined to contribute to existing discussions on this topic.

The theme of ‘**production elements**’ was also more prevalent in responder tweets compared to originator tweets. While 9.3% (n=20) of the originator posts addressed production elements, it was present in 14.6% (n=95) of the responder tweets. Again, the chi-square test of independence indicates that the relation between these variables is statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N=868)=3.982$, $p=.046$. However, the effect size for this finding, $\varphi = 0.068$, is small according to Cohen’s criteria. This suggests that while there is a statistically significant difference in the prevalence of ‘production elements’ discussions between originator and responder tweets, the magnitude of difference is relatively small in practical terms.

The theme of ‘**accessibility**’ is more prevalent in originator tweets compared to responder tweets. This theme is present in 17.1% (n=37) of the originator posts, while only 8.7% (n=57) of the responder tweets addressed accessibility issues. According to the chi-square test of independence, the relationship between these variables is statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N=868)=11.819$, $p<.001$ and the effect size for this finding, $\varphi = -0.117$, can be considered small to medium according to Cohen’s criteria.

This result suggests that there are both statistically significant and practically meaningful differences in the prevalence of ‘accessibility’ discussions between originator and responder tweets. Originator tweeters were more likely to address accessibility issues than responders, which may include topics such as where to watch the show or concerns about subtitles. The lower prevalence in responder tweets could indicate that once these initial concerns were addressed, the conversation tended to shift to other aspects of the show.

According to the chi-square test of independence, the theme of ‘**anticipation**’ was significantly more prevalent in the originator tweets compared to responder tweets. This theme is present in 15.3% (n=33) of originator posts, while only 6.6% (n=43) of responder tweets express some form of anticipation, $\chi^2(1, N=868)=15.311$, $p<.001$. The effect size for this finding, $\varphi = -0.133$, can be considered small to medium according to Cohen’s criteria, indicating that there is both a statistically significant and practically meaningful difference in the prevalence of ‘anticipation’ discussions between originators and responders.

Originator tweeters were more likely to express anticipation for the show, which may include excitement about the upcoming release or intentions to watch. From this, it can be inferred that excitement and expectations are expressed before or at the beginning of a show’s release, and as the discussions progress, conversations tend to shift from anticipation to actual viewing experiences and reactions to the content.

This pattern could be of interest to content creators and marketers in understanding how audience engagement evolves from pre-release anticipation to post-viewing discussion. It also highlights the importance of building and maintaining anticipation leading up to a show's release, which may drive initial social media engagement.

The theme of '**binge-watching**' shows similar prevalence in both originator and responder tweets. This theme appeared in 12.0% (n=26) of originator posts and 11.3% (n=74) of responder tweets. The chi-square test of independence indicates that the relationship between these variables is not statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N=868)=0.075$, $p=0.784$, and the effect size, $\phi = -0.009$ is negligible. The similar proportions and lack of statistical significance suggest that binge-watching was a consistent topic of interest across both initial posts and subsequent responses. This could indicate that the all-at-once release strategy of 'The Traitors US' prompted ongoing discussions about binge-watching behaviour throughout the viewing period rather than being concentrated on only the initial reactions or later reflections.

A similar observation may be made of the '**spoilers**' discussion. This shows a slight but not statistically significant, difference between originator and responder tweets, $\chi^2(1, N=868)=1.724$, $p=0.189$. This theme appears in 5.6% (n=12) of originator posts and 3.5% (n=23) of responder tweets. The effect size for this finding, $\phi = -0.045$, is small. The lack of significant difference in spoiler discussion between originator and responder tweets might indicate that concerns about spoilers were relatively consistent throughout the viewing period and could reflect an ongoing awareness of the need to avoid spoilers, given the all-at-once release format, which allowed viewers to progress through the series at different rates.

To summarise, originating posts exhibit a significantly higher concentration of anticipation and initial reactions, reflecting viewers' immediate responses to the show's release along with more focus on the logistical aspects of viewing (accessibility). In contrast, detailed discussions about gameplay and dramatic elements were less prevalent amongst the originating posts than the responses.

As conversations developed in the overall tweet collection, there was a clear progression towards a more nuanced and in-depth analysis of the show's content. This evolution from initial reactions to deeper engagement illustrates how viewer discourse matures over time, moving from surface-level observations to more complete interpretations of character dynamics, plot developments, and strategic gameplay. This pseudo-shared viewing experience

Overall, the temporal analysis of tweets offers a window into the rhythms of viewer engagement, the impact of release strategies on viewing patterns, and the global nature of the audience for 'The Traitors US'. These findings contribute to our understanding of how audiences interact with streaming content in real-time and how social media discussions evolve alongside viewer progression through a series.

Evolution of binge-watching discourse

The analysis of binge-watching comments reveals a distinct pattern in how this viewing behaviour was discussed and evolved over time. Notably, references to binge-watching were more prevalent in the developed conversations rather than in the original posts, suggesting a progressive engagement with this viewing style as users advance through the series.

Original posts about binge-watching tended to cluster around the release time and shortly thereafter. These initial mentions were often straightforward declarations of intent to binge-watch or announcements that binge-watching had occurred. As conversations developed, the discussion around binge-watching became more nuanced and reflective. Users began to delve deeper into their experiences, exploring how this viewing method impacted their enjoyment and understanding of the show. This evolution suggests growing awareness among viewers about their consumption habits and its effects.

Binge-watching comments in developed conversations often sparked further dialogue, with users comparing their progress through the series. These comparisons may have created a sense of shared experience and often sparked further dialogue, with users comparing their progress or debating the merits of binge-watching versus spaced viewing and the ‘wisdom’ of the broadcasters making the series available in its entirety from day 1. Some viewers questioned the wisdom of this strategy, considering its implications for viewer engagement and the overall viewing experience.

While there are certainly original posts about binge-watching, the theme became more nuanced in the developed conversations. This suggests that binge-watching was a significant aspect of the viewing experience for many, and it became a topic of shared experience and discussion as more people progressed rapidly through the series.

This analysis of binge-watching comments provides insights into how viewers of ‘The Traitors US’ discussed and perceived this viewing pattern. It highlights the evolution of discourse from simple declarations to more complex reflections on the impact of binge-watching on the viewing experience.

Evolution of spoilers discourse

The all-at-once release of the series created a unique dynamic which seemed more apparent given the recency of the UK version which followed a more traditional staggered release coinciding with the live broadcast. This resulted in heightened spoiler concerns during the first few days with posters outlining steps taken to avoid them. These gradually diminished as more viewers completed the series with some suggesting that there would be a suitable point by which it would be acceptable to discuss details of the show.

Although very rare within this data set, there were instances where posters inadvertently revealed minor spoilers in their discussion of the show. This led to negative reactions from others who had not progressed as far. As conversations developed, a kind of community etiquette emerged and users would preface their posts with spoiler warnings and post comments in the corresponding threads.

A trend emerges of users offering general, spoiler-free impressions of the show for those who haven't started watching yet. Another approach would be to post vague comments, hinting at events without revealing details. This did not tend to extend to discussion of challenges themselves, there seems to have been an unwritten acceptance that these were fair game to discuss (as long as cast members were not mentioned) given that the same challenges were used in the recent *Traitors* UK release.

The impact of spoiler concerns on the discussion could be summarised as early conversations tend to be more guarded and general, while later threads become more detailed as more viewers finish the series. Some users expressed frustration at not yet being able to discuss freely due to the consideration of not spoiling the show for others.

There exists an interesting line between speculation about future events (based on early episodes) and actual spoilers, with some discussions walking this line carefully and some conversations touching on the challenge of avoiding spoilers for international viewers who may not have had access to the show immediately.

Overall, the spoiler-related conversations demonstrate a community balancing their desire to discuss the show in-depth with respect for others' viewing experiences. The conversations tend to become more open and detailed over time, as more viewers complete the series, but there remains an ongoing awareness of potential spoilers throughout the discussion threads.

6.3.5 Twitter Individual Contributors' Analysis

Some user IDs appeared multiple times, indicating that they were particularly engaged and vocal about the show. A few users stood out for posting numerous times with their originating posts generating notably more responses.

The most engaging threads tend to touch on multiple themes, showing how interconnected various aspects of the show are in viewers' minds. The degree of response to some posters however, appears to be more related to their individual reach (e.g., where they are established influencers or minor celebrities) rather than the content of the post. The use of industry terminology in the posts could also be an indicator of some kind of connection to the entertainment industry.

Some posts have a more formal or promotional tone, these often include links and tend to employ hashtags more systematically. In many cases, it is clear that these are from commercial accounts or media outlets. They mainly consist of announcements of the show's release (including where available) and links to initial reviews/opinion pieces.

As already mentioned, certain users posted throughout the day about different episodes, suggesting some dedication to covering the show. A few have provided more in-depth analysis or comparisons with other versions of the show suggesting enthusiastic viewership and more than a passing interest in reality TV.

Some posts indicate that viewers were commenting from outside the UK. The patterns here suggest a mix of regular viewers, potential influencers, and minor celebrities, with some commercial or media-related accounts amongst the posters. The variety in posting frequency and content style indicates a diverse audience engaging with the show in different ways.

6.3.6 Limitations

This method, while thorough, is labour-intensive and subject to some degree of subjective interpretation. Additionally, although the dataset is substantial, it will not have captured all relevant tweets posted during the first 24-hour window due to the necessary filtering process. Further, while this analysis provides some rich insights, it's important to note that Twitter users may not be representative of the entire viewing audience. Additionally, the methodology for inferring binge-watching behaviour, while based on previous research and study findings, may not capture all instances of variations of this viewing pattern. However, the volume and diversity of the tweets analysed are likely to be indicative of the emerging themes, their relative importance, and peak posting times.

6.4 Discussion

6.4.1 Twitter & iPlayer Data Integration

Potential associations have been explored between the themes identified in the Twitter analysis and the viewing patterns observed in the iPlayer data. This integration aimed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of audience engagement and behaviour. The methodology used has allowed for the generation of valuable insights into viewer experiences and social media engagement, complementing quantitative analysis of viewing patterns while acknowledging the challenges and limitations of social media data collection and analysis. The combination of unobtrusive measures (viewing data) with social media analysis in study 3 and more traditional self-report methods in study 4 demonstrates the value of mixed-methods approaches in studying complex phenomena like binge-watching.

The combined insights demonstrate the value of using multiple data sources and methodologies to study contemporary viewing behaviours. They highlight the complex interplay between content, platform features, individual preferences, and social dynamics in shaping how people consume and engage with television series in the streaming era.

Binge-watching behaviour in real-world settings: Study 3 provides evidence of binge-watching occurring in natural, uncontrolled environments. Some viewers consumed up to 10 episodes (at least 7.9 hours based on watching a minimum of 90% of each) of ‘The Traitors US’ on the first day of its release in the U.K. This corroborates early findings relating to the binge-watching phenomenon outside of experimental settings.

The all-at-once release of ‘The Traitors US’ on iPlayer created a unique dynamic compared to the traditional scheduled release of the UK version of the series. This sparked discussions about the pros and cons of binge-watching versus spaced viewing. The Netflix data also enabled additional insights into how viewing patterns could differ between shows released all at once versus those with staggered releases.

Study 3’s Twitter analysis revealed real-time reactions and discussions as viewers progressed through the series. This demonstrates how social media platforms can serve as complementary data sources to understand audience engagement. While Study 4 didn’t examine social media, there is scope to explore this further by combining Netflix viewing data with online discussions to provide a more comprehensive picture of viewer experiences when suitable (eagerly anticipated) programmes have been released.

6.4.2 Revisiting the Research Questions

Research Question 1: What constitutes binge-watching, how might it be defined?

Findings from both studies provide insights into real-world watching behaviours. The quantifiable metrics in study 3 showed that some viewers consumed up to 10 episodes on the first day, supporting a definition of binge-watching based on the number of episodes or hours viewed in a single session. Both studies indicated that the ability to watch multiple episodes without interaction may be a key feature of binge-watching, with the all-at-once release strategy of ‘The Traitors US’ facilitating this behaviour. The Twitter analysis revealed that viewers often self-identified as watchers, even if their viewing patterns varied. This suggests that perceptions of binge-watching may be subjective and context-dependent, supporting the concept of binge-watching typologies rather than binge-watcher profiles.

The iPlayer viewing data and Twitter analysis provide valuable real-world insights into how binge-watching manifests in practice, moving beyond theoretical definitions. The considerable variability observed in viewing patterns supports the conceptualisation of binge-watching as a multifaceted phenomenon rather than a simple time-based metric. Some viewers displayed classic binge patterns, consuming up to ten episodes (approximately 7.9 hours) on the first day of release, while others adopted more measured approaches, watching a few episodes at a time over multiple days.

The Twitter discourse revealed diverse self-perceptions among viewers, with some proudly identifying as binge-watchers while others expressed ambivalence about extended viewing sessions. This variability aligns with the findings from Studies 1 and 2, suggesting that binge-watching encompasses a spectrum of behaviours influenced by both individual preferences and contextual factors such as content type, release strategy, and social dynamics. The data particularly highlights how definitions of binge-watching must account for both quantitative measures (episodes/hours watched) and qualitative dimensions such as viewing intent, sense of control, and social context.

Binge-watching typologies

In reference to the binge-watching typologies previously proposed, the following can be surmised:

Routine Episodic Streaming (Returns to the same programme each consecutive night to watch 1 or 2 episodes): The iPlayer data from study 3 doesn't lend itself to support this typology due to the all-at-once release and the time frame interrogated. This behaviour does align with viewers who expressed a preference for paced viewing in the Twitter analysis, valuing the anticipation and discussion between episodes.

Some comments suggested that there were viewers who wished for a phased release, which would enable them to establish a routine, watch with reduced risk of stumbling across spoilers and enjoy engaging and speculating with others about what might happen next in the interstitial moments.

Periodic/occasional streaming strategist (Makes plans, sets aside time to achieve specific objectives and sticks to it): Again, the viewing data from iPlayer alone cannot support this typology. Without knowing the viewer's intentions, it is not possible to determine if there is an intention-behaviour gap, this being the main differentiator between being a streaming strategist versus a compulsive streamer. The Twitter analysis in study 3 revealed viewers who planned their viewing sessions, often setting aside specific times to watch multiple episodes and referencing that they would not be available until a predetermined point. Specifically, comments about finding the series over the weekend or dedicating an evening to watching align with this typology. This type of viewer might be more likely to engage in social media discussions, planning their viewing to participate in online conversations without fears of spoilers.

Compulsive streaming (Is compelled to keep watching despite conflicting wants/needs, may 'stock up' on episodes to facilitate back-to-back viewing and avoid the frustration of having to wait): It could be argued that the iPlayer viewing data utilised in study 3 provided clear evidence of this typology, with some viewers watching up to 10 episodes (7.9 hours) on the first day of release. However, as stated in the previous paragraph that considered the streaming strategist, the viewer's intentions need to be considered to determine if the behaviour is planned or compulsive. The Twitter comments do support the existence of compulsive streaming taking place, as some posters revealed that they stayed up late or continued to watch despite other commitments, indicating an intentions-behaviour gap.

The all-at-once release strategy of ‘The Traitors US’ in iPlayer seems to have facilitated this type of viewing, with some users expressing a ‘need’ to finish quickly in order to avoid spoilers and others using language associated with addiction such as ‘hooked’.

Non-Consequential Recreational Streaming (Watches to pass time without the compulsion to keep watching at the expense of failing to follow through on other intentions): Some Twitter comments suggested casual viewing, with users dipping in and out of the series without a strong compulsion to finish immediately. This type of viewing might be associated with lower engagement in online discussions, as these viewers may be less concerned about spoilers or keeping up with others.

Passive streaming (Streaming is a secondary activity with the main focus being elsewhere): While not directly observable in iPlayer data, some Twitter comments hinted at this behaviour, with viewers mentioning having the show on while doing other activities. Some Twitter users mentioned the challenges in ‘The Traitors US’ as sections they would skip or pay less attention to, potentially indicating moments of more passive viewing within otherwise engaged sessions.

Typology fluidity: The Twitter analysis suggests that viewers might shift between typologies depending on factors like content type, time availability, and social pressures (e.g., avoiding spoilers) which further supports the concept of binge-watching rather than the binge-watcher typologies. Some Twitter comments showed viewers were self-aware of their viewing patterns and how they might be perceived, sometimes expressing surprise or guilt at falling into compulsive streaming behaviours. This self-awareness could be an important factor in understanding and potentially moderating these behaviours. The data revealed tensions between desired viewing patterns and actual behaviours. For example, some viewers expressed a preference for routine episodic streaming but found themselves engaged in compulsive streaming due to spoiler concerns or narrative engagement.

Social dynamics could have influenced the subjects. The Twitter discussion revealed how social factors might influence typology adoption. For instance, the desire to participate in online discussions might shift a routine episodic streamer towards more compulsive streaming behaviours so that they can fully engage in a shared viewing experience.

The nature of ‘The Traitors US’ as a reality competition show with high stakes and plot twists may have encouraged more compulsive streaming than other genres. Analysis of individual viewing data could provide further insights into how the genre relates to viewing typologies. Further, establishing the nature of a programme by its ending (e.g., cliffhanger versus self-contained) could be a useful source of information, too.

The typologies can provide a valuable framework for understanding the diverse ways in which viewers engage with the streaming content. The findings from studies 3 and 4 support the existence of these different viewing patterns and highlight how factors such as release strategies, social dynamics and content type can influence which typology/typologies a viewer adopts in a given situation. The nuanced understanding of viewing behaviours could inform both future research and the development of more personalised streaming interfaces.

Research Question 2: What positive and or negative aspects may be associated with binge-watching?

Study 3, the Twitter analysis in particular, revealed several positive and negative aspects of binge-watching.

On the positive side, the Twitter analysis showed high levels of excitement and engagement among viewers who binge-watched ‘The Traitors US’. Binge-watching created a shared experience for viewers, as evidenced by active discussions on Twitter, including pleas to others to ‘*hurry up and watch*’ so it would be safe to talk about. Some viewers expressed appreciation for being able to follow the story without ‘irritating’ week-long gaps between episodes. However, ‘Engagement’ and ‘Community Experience’ are also seen in more traditional scheduled releases. Highly anticipated finales can result in a similar shared experience, as can be seen through a quick search for Tweets relating to the final of the UK version of ‘The Traitors’, which aired in the previous month.

The downside of this all-at-once release includes the creation of tensions around spoilers, with some viewers feeling pressure to watch quickly and avoid plot revelations. Twitter data indicated that some viewers stayed up late to continue watching, potentially impacting sleep patterns too. Further, while it was possible for some to engage in the online community which formed around this shared viewing experience, some tweets suggested that the ability to binge-watch would reduce opportunities for week-to-week discussions and build of anticipation, others went further to suggest (albeit perhaps jokingly) that the all-at-once release would result in reduced social interactions while they would be ‘*shut away*’ to watch the show.

Research Question 3: What aspects of Digital Media interfaces (if any) reduce consumer autonomy in their viewing behaviours?

While the studies didn’t directly examine interface design, some insights might still be inferred:

- **Auto-play features:** The ability to watch multiple episodes in quick succession, as seen in both studies, suggests that auto-play functions may reduce active decision-making between episodes.
- **Accessibility of the full season:** The immediate availability of all episodes of ‘The Traitors US’ on iPlayer facilitated binge-watching, potentially reducing viewer autonomy in pacing consumption rates.
- **Lack of natural break points:** Some Twitter users mentioned skipping challenges or feeling compelled to continue watching, which indicated a lack of clear stopping points in the narrative structure.
- **Cliffhangers:** Inspection of the episodes reveals that they tended to end on a cliffhanger with viewers ‘needing’ to watch the next episode to find out who would be ‘banished’ or ‘murdered’.
- **Platform influence:** The all-at-once release on iPlayer seemed to push more viewers towards compulsive streaming or periodic/occasional streaming strategist behaviours. This highlights how platform decisions can influence viewing typologies. (Twitter references having access straight away, how hard it will be to watch without coming across spoilers, having to watch fast to avoid this, and changing activity on social media to accommodate.

Research Question 4: What inter-personalisation features of the interface might better serve the consumer?

While this study primarily focuses on binge-watching behaviours, the analysis of Twitter discourse surrounding ‘The Traitors US’ reveals a complex interplay between individual viewing habits and the desire for a shared viewing experience. This tension illuminates broader implications for content release strategies and audience engagement in the streaming era.

The all-at-once release of ‘The Traitors US’ has created a unique viewing ecosystem where audience members progressed through the series at varying paces. This led to a nuanced form of social media engagement, characterised by:

- **Anticipation and Caution:** Users expressed excitement about the show while carefully navigating discussions to avoid spoilers. This created a tentative interaction space where viewers at different stages of the series could participate.
- **Evolving Discourse:** The shift in themes from originator to responder tweets naturally progressed from initial reactions and accessibility concerns to more in-depth discussions of gameplay and production elements.
- **Temporally Dispersed Shared Experience:** Unlike traditional weekly releases, the shared viewing experience was spread out over a longer period, allowing for both immediate binge-watchers and more gradual viewers to engage in discussions.

This pseudo-shared viewing experience challenges the dichotomy between binge-watching and traditional scheduled releases. It suggests that all-at-once releases can foster a form of communal viewing that adapts to individual viewing preferences but the consistent presence of binge-watching and spoiler-related discussions across the viewing period indicates an ongoing negotiation between personal viewing habits and the desire for collective engagement.

Moreover, the varied thematic focus in discussions demonstrates that all-at-once releases can cater to diverse viewer interests. From initial anticipation to in-depth analysis of gameplay, the release strategy appears to support multiple modes of engagement, potentially broadening the show’s appeal.

However, this approach is not without challenge. The need for spoiler management and potential for disconnected viewing experiences may impact the cohesiveness of audience engagement. Additionally, the lack of shared viewing schedules might dilute the intensity of real-time reactions that often characterise event television.

Based on the findings, several potential interface features could enhance the viewing experience:

- **Customisable episode release:** Platforms could offer users the choice to ‘unlock’ episodes daily, weekly or all-at-once. The group watch dynamic could still be achieved through 2 parallel audiences, those who could watch as much as they want when then went from the broadcast of the first episode on terrestrial with all others being instantly available on iPlayer. Note, *Traitors US* was atypical in the release in that it was broadcast **after** the iPlayer release. While other series have been released all-at-once upon the broadcast of the first episode (with adverts letting viewers know they can continue watching as the end of the episode plays out on terrestrial), it’s uncommon for something to be made available on iPlayer before it is broadcast terrestrially.
- **Spoiler protection & Social viewing options:** As it becomes more common to link profiles between platforms, it could be possible to implement features that allow viewers to control the level of information they see about a series on their social media platforms or home pages, helping them avoid spoilers if they’re not binge-watching. Integration of social media discussions or commentator features that align with different viewing paces could allow both binge-watchers and weekly viewers to engage in spoiler-free discussions. Alternately, bridging between VoD platforms and social media that recognises if a consumer has not viewed something could enable curated posts so that they only see those of a generic nature, containing no spoilers relating to a specific episode (unless manually overridden by the consumer).

- **Customisable auto-play settings:** These might allow viewers to set limits on the number of episodes that auto-play without further intervention or set the duration of an auto-play window. It may also be beneficial to be able to opt into setting break lengths between episodes, which gives the consumer the time to stop or actively decide that they wish to continue.
- **Customisable playback settings:** Viewers may enjoy catching up on the elements they're interested in with auto skip of programmes that may not hold interest. Based on the Twitter discourse relating to 'The Traitors US', it would seem that an option to skip challenges or just play the roundtable discussions would appeal to some.

The findings demonstrate the complex nature of binge-watching behaviours and the potential for digital interfaces to both influence and adapt to viewer preferences. The studies highlight the need for a nuanced approach to understanding and designing for contemporary viewing habits, balancing the benefits of engagement and immersion with potential drawbacks relating to autonomy and wellbeing.

In conclusion, while binge-watching remains a central focus of this study, the Twitter analysis reveals that all-at-once releases can foster a unique form of shared viewing experience. This hybrid model enables individual viewing flexibility while maintaining elements of communal engagement. As streaming platforms continue to evolve, understanding this balance between personal viewing preferences and shared experiences will be crucial for content creators and distributors alike.

This analysis contributes to the ongoing debate about optimal release strategies in the streaming era, suggesting that the dichotomy between binge-watching and traditional scheduled releases may be oversimplified. Instead, a more nuanced understanding of how viewers engage with content and each other in this new landscape is necessary for developing effective content distribution and audience engagement strategies.

6.4.3 Potential Areas of Further Research

The iPlayer platform may have platform-specific features that can potentially impact viewing behaviour. As the likes of Netflix now offers a freemium subscription service, there is scope to compare and contrast the viewing behaviours of those with and those without advert-enabled subscriptions in the future. Further, it may be possible to establish an evolution of viewing behaviour change by those who have moved from advert-free to advert-enabled subscriptions.

Cultural comparisons and format preferences - Study 3s Twitter analysis revealed frequent comparisons between the US version of ‘The Traitors’ and other formats. In future, viewing data from global broadcasters could potentially be integrated to establish how viewing preferences differ across various international versions of shows in different cultural contexts.

6.4.4 Methodological Reflections

While this unobtrusive measures approach provided valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. The iPlayer data, while revealing actual viewing patterns, lacked demographic information that might have enabled more nuanced analysis of viewing behaviours across different population segments. Similarly, the Twitter analysis, while illuminating, represents only those viewers motivated to share their experiences publicly.

Despite these limitations, the complementary nature of these data sources provides a more comprehensive picture of binge-watching behaviour than either source alone could offer. The combination of platform analytics with social media discourse creates a fuller understanding of not just what viewers watched, but how they experienced and interpreted their viewing.

6.4.5 Transitioning to a more Comprehensive Understanding

The findings from this study of actual viewing behaviour and discourse add a crucial dimension to our understanding of binge-watching, complementing the qualitative depth of Study 1’s interviews and the quantitative breadth of Study 2’s survey. Having examined the phenomenon through multiple methodological lenses—from individual experiences to broader patterns to observable behaviours—we can now synthesise these diverse perspectives to develop a more comprehensive understanding of binge-watching and its implications.

The following chapter will integrate findings across all three studies, drawing connections between qualitative experiences, quantitative patterns, and observable behaviours. This synthesis will address our primary research questions while establishing the foundation for exploring how these insights might inform industry practice in Study 4.

Chapter 7

Discussion of Studies 1 through 3

Synthesis and Analysis: Integrating Perspectives on Binge-Watching and Viewer
Autonomy

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7.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have explored the phenomenon of binge-watching through multiple methodological lenses, building a layered understanding of this complex viewing behaviour. Study 1 provided rich qualitative insights into viewers' lived experiences, Study 2 examined broader patterns through quantitative survey methods, and Study 3 analysed actual viewing behaviours and social media discourse surrounding a specific binge-watching event. Each approach has yielded valuable insights, yet their full significance emerges when these findings are synthesised and examined collectively.

This chapter aims to integrate these diverse perspectives before proceeding to the industry dialogues in Study 4. By drawing connections between qualitative experiences, quantitative patterns, and observable behaviours, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of binge-watching and its implications for Video on Demand (VoD) interface design. This synthesis addresses our primary research questions while establishing the foundation for exploring how these insights might inform industry practice.

7.2 Binge-Watching: Beyond Simple Metrics

7.2.1 The Limitations of Time-Based Definitions

A significant finding emerging across all three studies is that binge-watching resists a simple episodic-count/time-based definition. While early literature often focused on quantitative metrics like the number of episodes or hours watched, our findings suggest the need for a more nuanced understanding that incorporates multiple dimensions of viewing behaviour.

Study 1 revealed considerable variation in how viewers conceptualise binge-watching, with some emphasising duration while others focused more on the compulsive nature of viewing or its impact on other activities. This variation was confirmed in Study 2, where survey respondents' classifications of hypothetical viewers demonstrated that perceived loss of control was often seen as more definitive of binge-watching than duration alone. This was strikingly evident in respondents' reactions to the hypothetical viewer profiles, where 87% identified Character F (who "loses track of time") as a binge-watcher compared to only 23% for Character B (who "channel hops"), despite the second profile describing likely longer viewing durations ("3 or 4 episodes" vs. "4 to 6 hours"). From this, it could be inferred that the perceived loss of autonomy in viewing decisions plays a more crucial role in how people conceptualise binge-watching than time spent in the activity.

Study 3's analysis of actual viewing patterns added further complexity, revealing viewers who consumed up to ten episodes (approximately 7.9 hours) on the first day of release, while Twitter discourse showed varying attitudes toward this consumption, from celebration to concern. The emergence of "context-sensitive" viewers in Study 2, representing 23% of survey respondents, further complicates traditional definitions. These viewers considered circumstances such as health conditions or life situations when classifying binge-watching behaviour, suggesting that definitions must account for the broader context in which viewing occurs. This finding aligns with and is further compounded by interview data where participants often qualified their judgements about binge-watching based on viewers' circumstances and motivations.

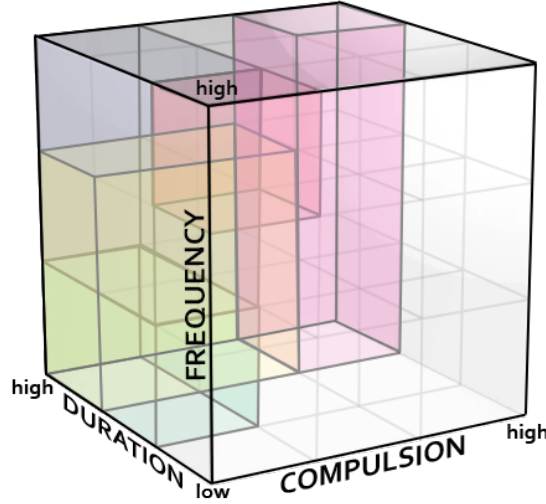


Figure 7.1: Model of Binge Archetypes

7.2.2 Towards a Multi-Dimensional Framework: Viewing Typologies

Drawing from our qualitative and quantitative data, we propose a framework of viewing typologies that represents viewing behaviours rather than fixed viewer personalities. These typologies - Routine Episodic Streaming, Compulsive Streaming, Non-Consequential Recreational Streaming, Periodic Streaming Strategist, and Passive Streaming - represent viewing behaviours rather than fixed viewer personalities. This framework aligns with and expands upon previous work on binge-watching motivations, such as that by Steiner and Xu (2020) [14], by providing a more nuanced representation of how these motivations manifest in different viewing patterns.

We posit that individuals may engage in different types of binge-watching behaviours depending on their circumstances, motivations, and the content being consumed. Our research suggests that binge-watching typologies can be mapped along three primary axes: duration of binge sessions, frequency of binge sessions, and level of compulsion (lack of control/autonomy) in binge-watching.

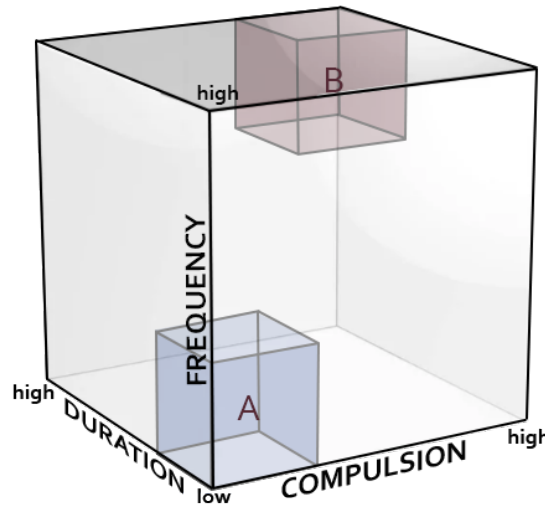


Figure 7.2: Illustrative Example of Conceptual Archetypes Framework

For illustrative purposes, Figure 7.2 represents a conceptual framework to visualise how different viewing typologies could be mapped in a three-dimensional space. This figure shows a transparent cube with three axes representing ‘duration’, ‘frequency’, and ‘compulsion’, each running from ‘low’ to ‘high’. This scale should be visualised as 3 equal increments, with the middle section being defined as ‘moderate’. Within this cube are two smaller cubes labelled ‘A’ and ‘B’. Cube A, at the low end of all axes, could represent a hypothetical viewing behaviour with low frequency, duration, and compulsion. Cube B, at the high end of all axes, represents the opposite extreme.

The following typologies emerged from our data analysis, reflecting the complex and often fluid nature of real-world viewing behaviours:

Routine Episodic Streaming is characterised by regular, controlled viewing of single episodes, often following a consistent schedule. This typology shows high frequency but low compulsion and duration, typically exemplified by viewers who watch one new episode each weekday evening until a series concludes. This aligns with Pierce-Grove’s (2016) observation of some viewers preferring a more measured approach to consumption [91].

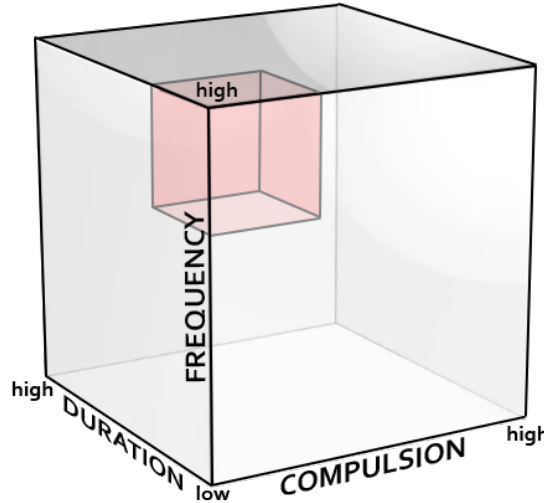


Figure 7.3: Routine Episodic Streaming

Note that while this pattern can be represented within the three-dimensional framework (see Figure 7.3) and some of the previous literature in this area described viewing single episodes across consecutive nights as a form of binge-watching, our interview participants and survey respondents generally did not classify this behaviour as an example of binge-watching.

The **Periodic Streaming Strategy** involves conscious intention and follow-through of extended viewing sessions. This typology suggests low compulsion but moderate to high viewing duration and low frequency (as seen in Figure 7.4. This type of behaviour could be exemplified by an individual who awaits the availability of the complete series of interest and sets aside a specific weekend to make engagement with the series an ‘event’.

This intentional planning ahead may include taking specific efforts to ensure that not only will the viewer manage the activity so that it does not encroach on other aspects of their lives but also taking steps to ensure that their viewing is not interrupted by outside factors during their planned engagement. This aligns with Steiner and Xu’s (2020) findings on planned binge-watching as a form of gratification [14].

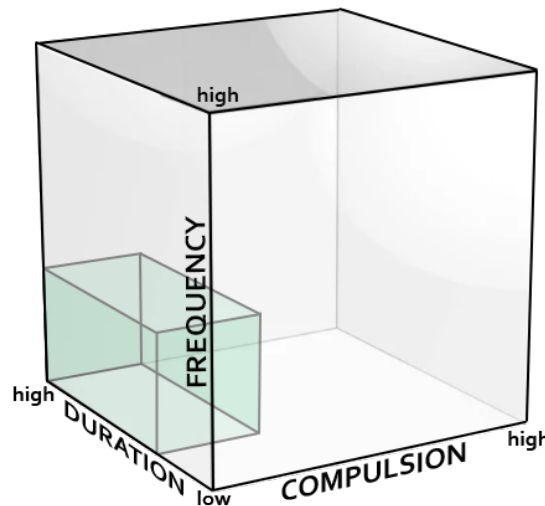


Figure 7.4: Periodic Streaming Strategist

Compulsive Streaming is characterised by high compulsion to keep watching and high time spent on individual viewing sessions, but there may be varying frequency of these events (as shown in Figure 7.5). The low to high frequency of engaging in this activity indicates that this type of behaviour doesn't have to occur very often for it to still be considered compulsive when it does - the frequency is irrelevant; it's the time spent combined with feeling highly compelled that typifies this archetype.

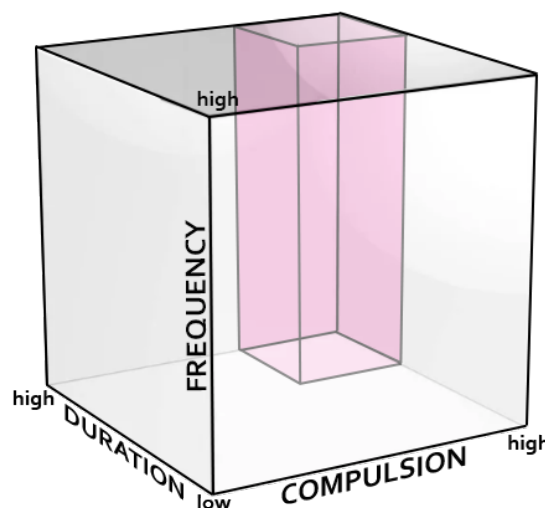


Figure 7.5: Compulsive Streaming

Aligning with Flayelle et al.’s (2019) description of problematic binge-watching symptoms [92], this typology may be characterised by unplanned, difficult-to-control, extended viewing, with viewers potentially intending to watch just one or two episodes at the outset but finding themselves reluctant to stop. An example of this could include someone who starts watching a series one evening with the intention of switching to another task, putting off that task to watch another episode followed by ‘just one more’ until finding that they’ve ‘lost’ all of the evening and continued to watch well past their intended bedtime. The displacement of both the task and sleep could, in some circumstances, be detrimental to health and wellbeing.

Non-Consequential Recreational Streaming is typified by extended viewing without any perceived negative impacts. It may involve low to moderate compulsion, low to moderate frequency, and high duration (as seen in Figure 7.6). Viewers may engage in long sessions during their free time without feeling or finding that it interferes with other aspects of their lives. This supports Jenner’s (2017) argument that not all extended viewing should be considered problematic [93].

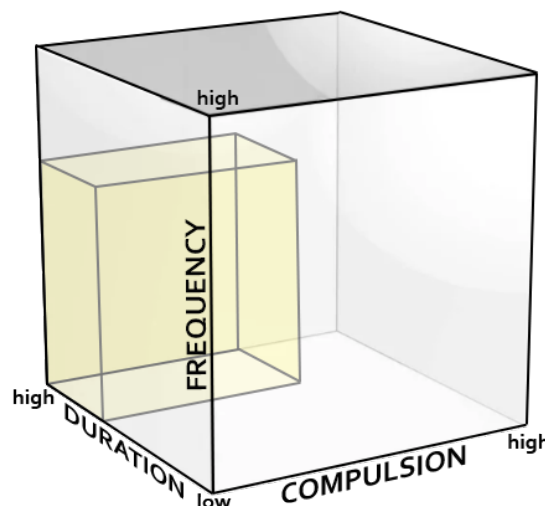


Figure 7.6: Non-Consequential Recreational Streaming

An example of this typology could be seen in someone with limited demands on their time, enabling them to partake in more extensive viewing sessions without it being at the expense of other activities. The motivations driving this individual to keep watching might be more tied up in using the viewing experience as a way to pass free time in an enjoyable way. One of the study 1 participants described how, due to illness, being able to access and watch a lot of content was really important to their mental health during their convalescence. In this instance, the activity did not just lack any negative consequences but actually positively contributed to wellbeing during what was otherwise described as quite a miserable period of time.

Passive Streaming may involve extended background viewing while primarily engaging in other activities; content plays continuously, but the viewer's attention is divided. This behaviour was reported by some Study 1 participants who often had content playing while doing chores or other tasks. As such, they were not fully engaged in the activity but still consumed content over extended periods. This is represented by low compulsion to keep watching, moderate to high duration, and moderate to high frequency of engaging in the activity (as seen in Figure 7.7).

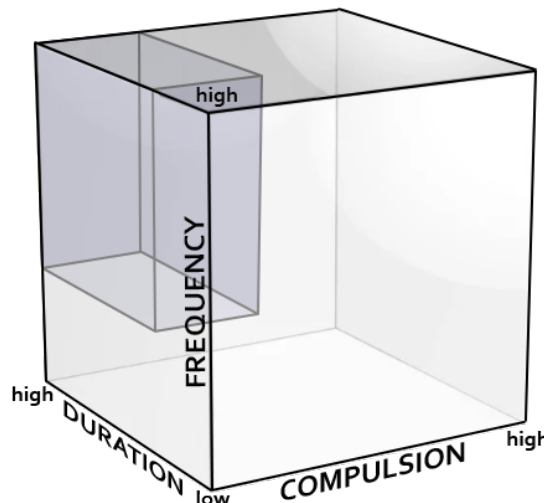


Figure 7.7: Passive Streaming

An example of this typology could include someone who has a programme running in the background while ironing. This could make a task they might otherwise find to be mundane somewhat more engaging (as described by more than one interview participant). Further, the affordance of features such as autoplay in this situation could be particularly desirable so that neither plenary viewing nor main activity is interrupted in order to move from one episode to the next.

It is crucial to note that these typologies are not mutually exclusive or static. An individual might engage in Routine Episodic Streaming for most of their viewing, occasionally plan a Periodic Streaming session for a highly anticipated series release, and sometimes find themselves in a Compulsive Streaming pattern when particularly engrossed in a narrative.

The framework builds upon and extends previous work on binge-watching motivations, such as that by Steiner and Xu (2020) [14]. While identifying immediate gratification and narrative immersion as key drivers, these archetypes provide a more nuanced representation of how these motivations may manifest in different viewing patterns.

The fluidity of the typologies aligns with Flayelle et al.'s (2019) emphasis on distinguishing between high but healthy engagement and problematic binge-watching [92]. Our framework allows for this distinction by considering not just the quantity of viewing but also the viewer's intent and sense of control. Future research could explore how viewers transition between these typologies and how these transitions might be influenced by factors such as content type, platform design, day of the week or life circumstances.

These findings collectively support moving beyond simple time-based definitions toward understanding binge-watching as a pattern of behaviour characterised by the complex interplay between viewing intentions and actual behaviour, the degree of viewer autonomy and control, the context and circumstances of viewing, and the social dimensions of consumption. This more nuanced approach better reflects the reality of contemporary viewing practices and provides a stronger foundation for understanding both the benefits and potential drawbacks of intensive viewing patterns.

7.3 The Duality of Binge-Watching

7.3.1 Positive Aspects of Extended Viewing

The research uncovered a complex duality in binge-watching impacts, revealing how the same viewing patterns can yield both beneficial and potentially problematic outcomes depending on context and viewer circumstances.

The positive aspects of binge-watching emerged across multiple studies. Survey data demonstrated that viewers may experience enhanced narrative engagement and immersion when watching episodes consecutively, with some respondents reporting stronger emotional connections to characters and better comprehension of complex storylines. This finding was reinforced through the Twitter analysis, where viewers frequently expressed deep engagement with content and satisfaction in being able to follow narrative arcs without week-long interruptions.

Emotional regulation and stress relief appeared as important benefits, particularly in Study 1 interviews where participants described using binge-watching as a form of self-care. The controlled escapism offered by on-demand viewing was valued by many participants as a way to temporarily disengage from daily stressors.

Social connection, perhaps counter-intuitively, emerged as another benefit. While often viewed as a solitary activity, Study 3's Twitter analysis revealed how binge-watching can contribute to shared cultural references and conversation topics. Study 1 participants similarly described maintaining social connections through discussions about shows, even when viewed individually.

7.3.2 Potential Drawbacks and Concerns

Sleep disruption emerged as a primary concern across all studies. In Study 2, 69% of survey respondents reported that their viewing habits had interfered with sleep patterns. Study 3's viewing data supported this concern, showing significant late-night viewing activity on iPlayer. Study 1 interviews provided context for this pattern, with participants describing the compelling nature of narrative cliffhangers making it difficult to stop watching at intended bedtimes.

Activity displacement represented another significant drawback. Study 2 revealed that household chores, exercise, and social activities were often postponed to accommodate extended viewing sessions. Study 1 interviews added nuance to this finding, suggesting that displacement was more problematic when unplanned or when it conflicted with viewers' own priorities and goals.

The intention-behaviour gap was particularly significant in Study 1, where participants frequently described instances of watching more than initially intended. This gap was validated in Study 2 survey responses and appeared to be most problematic when it led to regret or guilt. Study 3's Twitter analysis revealed mixed attitudes toward this gap, with some viewers celebrating marathon sessions while others expressed concern about "losing time" to extended viewing.

Social isolation presented a complex issue. While binge-watching could facilitate social connection through shared cultural references, Study 1 participants described instances where extended solo viewing led to temporary social withdrawal. Study 3's Twitter analysis revealed how the pressure to avoid spoilers sometimes accelerated viewing at the expense of more measured social engagement with content.

7.3.3 Contextual Factors Influencing Impacts

The research suggested that several contextual factors influence whether binge-watching leads to positive or negative outcomes:

1. **Viewer intention and control** - Planned extended viewing appeared less problematic than unintended viewing that exceeded initial plans.
2. **Content type** - Different genres and narrative structures influenced viewing patterns and their impacts.
3. **Viewing circumstances** - Life situation, available time, and competing priorities all affected how viewing was experienced.
4. **Social context** - Whether viewing was solitary or shared, and how it connected to broader social interactions.
5. **Platform features** - Interface design elements that either supported or undermined viewer autonomy in making viewing decisions.

This multifaceted understanding of binge-watching impacts suggests that simple characterisations of the behaviour as either beneficial or harmful are inadequate. Instead, the research points toward a more nuanced approach that considers how viewing context and patterns interact with individual circumstances and intentions.

7.4 Platform Design and Viewer Autonomy

7.4.1 How Interfaces Shape Viewing Behaviour

The research revealed several key ways in which digital media interfaces influence and potentially reduce viewer autonomy. Study 2 survey data indicated that 85% of respondents believed autoplay features influenced their viewing decisions, making it the most significant interface element affecting autonomy. Study 1 interviews provided rich context for this finding, with participants describing how autoplay capitalises on narrative immersion and the path of least resistance to encourage continued viewing.

Content presentation emerged as another influential factor. Study 3's analysis of viewing patterns for 'The Traitors US' demonstrated how release timing impacted consumption, with the all-at-once availability of episodes facilitating extended viewing sessions. Twitter discourse revealed both appreciation for this flexibility and concern about the pressure it created to avoid spoilers by watching quickly.

The temporal design of interfaces appeared particularly significant. Study 1 participants described the brief intervals between episodes as insufficient for making conscious viewing decisions, especially when immersed in compelling narratives. Study 2 survey responses indicated strong interest in features that would provide more control over these transitions, such as customisable autoplay settings or viewing limits.

Algorithmic recommendations represented a more subtle influence, particularly when combined with autoplay features. While not explicitly measured in our studies, some interview participants in Study 1 frequently mentioned how personalised recommendations guided their content selection and sometimes led to unplanned extended viewing sessions.

7.4.2 The Autonomy-Engagement Balance

A central tension emerged across all studies between maintaining viewer engagement and supporting viewer autonomy. Study 1 interviews revealed that while viewers valued features that facilitated easy content discovery and seamless viewing experiences, they sometimes resented how these same features could undermine their control over viewing decisions.

Study 2 survey data suggested that viewers would welcome more balanced approaches. While respondents generally enjoyed the convenience of streaming platforms, 77% expressed interest in having the option to disable autoplay, and 68% in setting viewing limits. This indicated a desire for interfaces that maintain engagement while allowing for more conscious viewing decisions.

Study 3's Twitter analysis provided real-world evidence of how release strategies affect viewing patterns and social dynamics. The all-at-once release of 'The Traitors US' created a particular viewing ecosystem where some viewers celebrated the freedom to consume content at their preferred pace, while others noted the pressure this created to watch quickly to avoid spoilers.

Together, these findings suggest that platforms could better serve viewers by offering more personalised control options without sacrificing the convenience and engagement that make streaming services appealing. This might include customisable autoplay settings, viewing limit options, and more thoughtful release strategies that consider diverse viewing preferences.

7.5 Potential Interface Optimisations

The research findings point toward several promising directions for interface features that could better support intentional viewing while maintaining engagement:

7.5.1 Customisable Control Features

Study 2 survey data revealed significant interest in features that would allow viewers to customise their experience. The most popular options included the ability to disable autoplay (77% expressed interest), set automatic viewing limits (68%), and establish viewing windows (64%). These preferences suggest that platforms could better serve viewers by offering more granular control over how interfaces behave, particularly at episode transitions.

Study 1 interviews provided context for these preferences, with participants describing varying needs for interface controls depending on viewing circumstances. Some desired strict limits during weeknights but more flexibility on weekends, suggesting that one-size-fits-all approaches to interface design might inadequately serve diverse viewing contexts.

7.5.2 Temporal Design Considerations

The research highlighted the importance of temporal aspects of interface design. Study 1 participants frequently mentioned that the brief intervals between episodes often felt insufficient for making conscious decisions about whether to continue watching. Study 2 survey responses indicated interest in features that would extend these intervals, such as having the next episode only autoplay after credits have completed (45% expressed interest) or returning to the main menu after episode completion (57%).

Study 3's viewing pattern analysis for 'The Traitors US' demonstrated how viewers often consumed multiple episodes in succession, suggesting that current temporal design approaches effectively maintain engagement. However, Twitter discourse revealed mixed feelings about this pattern, with some viewers celebrating marathon sessions while others expressed concern about unintended extended viewing.

7.5.3 Release Strategy Innovations

Study 3's Twitter analysis revealed interesting perspectives on content release strategies. While some viewers appreciated the freedom of all-at-once releases, others noted that this approach created pressure to watch quickly to avoid spoilers and reduced opportunities for shared discussion between episodes. This suggests that platforms might consider more varied release approaches that support different viewing preferences.

One approach might be hybrid release strategies, where portions of a series are released at intervals, supporting both those who prefer to binge multiple episodes and those who enjoy the anticipation and discussion between releases. Another might be viewer-controlled release schedules, where individuals could choose how content is made available to them.

7.5.4 Viewing Pattern Insights

Study 2 survey data indicated interest in features that would provide viewers with insights into their viewing patterns. These might include summaries of time spent viewing, visualisations of viewing habits over time, or gentle notifications about cumulative viewing duration. Unlike heavy-handed restrictions, such features could support greater awareness while respecting viewer autonomy.

Study 1 interviews suggested that many viewers struggle to maintain awareness of time passing while viewing, especially when deeply engaged with content. Features that enhanced time awareness without disrupting immersion might help bridge the gap between viewing intentions and actual behaviour.

7.6 Social Dimensions of Binge-Watching

The research revealed complex social dimensions to binge-watching that challenge simplistic characterisations of the behaviour as either isolating or connecting:

7.6.1 Shared Experiences in Asynchronous Viewing

Study 3's Twitter analysis demonstrated how viewers created what might be termed a "pseudo-shared viewing experience" despite consuming content at different paces. Viewers coordinated their discourse, used spoiler warnings, and engaged in collective analysis of content, creating community despite asynchronous viewing.

Study 1 interviews revealed similar patterns, with participants describing how binge-watching could paradoxically support social connection by providing shared cultural references and conversation topics. This held true even when viewing occurred in isolation, as long as others in their social circles had watched or were watching the same content.

7.6.2 Social Pressure and Viewing Decisions

Study 2 survey data indicated that social factors influenced viewing decisions, with some respondents reporting that they watched certain content primarily to participate in social or workplace conversations. Study 3's Twitter analysis further demonstrated how spoiler concerns created social pressure to accelerate viewing, particularly for highly anticipated content.

Study 1 interviews provided additional context, with some participants describing how they prioritised watching “popular” shows to maintain social connections, sometimes at the expense of content they might otherwise prefer. This suggests that viewing decisions are often made within a social context rather than purely based on individual preferences.

7.6.3 Implications for Platform Design

These social dimensions suggest several implications for platform design. Features that support coordination of viewing experiences among friend groups might enhance the social benefits of binge-watching while mitigating some drawbacks. Similarly, spoiler protection features might reduce the pressure to accelerate viewing beyond comfortable levels. More broadly, these findings suggest that platforms might better serve viewers by acknowledging and supporting the social contexts in which viewing decisions are made, rather than treating consumption as a purely individual activity.

7.7 Implications for Future Research and Practice

The integrated findings from Studies 1 through 3 suggest several promising directions for both future research and practical applications:

7.7.1 Theoretical Contributions

This research makes contributions to several distinct but interconnected bodies of literature. In media studies, it advances understanding of contemporary viewing practices, moving beyond traditional audience research to examine how technological affordances shape engagement with content.

Within human-computer interaction (HCI) literature, it provides empirical insights into how interface design influences user behaviour in entertainment contexts, extending existing work on digital nudging, persuasive technology, and user autonomy in technological systems. The contribution to HCI is particularly valuable as it bridges content-focused and interface-focused approaches to understanding media consumption technologies.

In consumer behaviour research, the viewing typologies framework offers a novel approach to understanding how consumers engage with digital subscription services, providing insights into the decision-making processes and contextual factors that influence consumption patterns beyond simple usage metrics. This extends existing consumer journey models by capturing the cyclical and situational nature of digital content consumption.

The research also contributes to digital wellbeing literature by examining how technology design affects user autonomy and potential impacts on physical and psychological wellbeing. Additionally, it extends uses and gratifications theory by providing a more nuanced framework for understanding different patterns of media engagement and their relationship to viewer motivations. These theoretical contributions collectively advance our understanding of the complex interplay between technological design, user behaviour, consumer choice, and wellbeing in the digital media landscape.

7.7.2 Research Opportunities

The viewing typologies framework provides a foundation for more nuanced research on binge-watching behaviours. Future studies might explore how individuals move between different typologies based on content type, viewing context, or platform features. Longitudinal research could examine how viewing patterns evolve over time and in response to interface changes.

Cross-platform research represents another valuable direction. While this research provided insights through BBC iPlayer data, comparing viewing patterns across platforms with different interface designs could further illuminate how specific features influence behaviour. This might include comparing platforms with and without advertisements, different autoplay implementations, or varied content recommendation approaches.

The relationship between viewing intentions and actual behaviour warrants deeper investigation. Future research might explore interventions designed to help viewers maintain better alignment between their viewing goals and actual consumption, and evaluate their effectiveness across different viewer segments.

7.7.3 Design Applications

The research findings suggest several practical applications for platform design:

1. **Adaptive Interfaces** - Platforms could develop interfaces that adapt to different viewing contexts and typologies, perhaps offering different features during weekday evenings versus weekend afternoons.
2. **Enhanced Viewer Controls** - Implementing more granular viewer controls, such as customisable autoplay settings, viewing limits, and content filters could better support diverse viewer preferences.
3. **Thoughtful Release Strategies** - Content providers might explore more varied release approaches that support different viewing preferences, from traditional weekly schedules to partial-series releases.
4. **Social Enhancement Features** - Tools that support coordination of viewing experiences among friends, protect against spoilers, and facilitate discussion could enhance the social benefits of on-demand viewing.

5. **Temporal Design Innovations** - More thoughtful approaches to the timing and presentation of interface elements could help viewers maintain better awareness and control over their viewing sessions.

7.7.4 Ethical Considerations

The research also raises important ethical considerations for platform designers. The identified tension between engagement maximisation and viewer autonomy suggests the need for more balanced approaches that respect viewer wellbeing while maintaining commercial viability.

Platforms might consider developing success metrics beyond simple engagement measures, incorporating indicators of viewer satisfaction, perceived autonomy, and alignment between viewing intentions and behaviour. Such approaches could potentially enhance long-term user retention while better serving viewer wellbeing.

7.8 Limitations and Considerations

While this integrated analysis provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged:

1. **Generalisability** - The research focused primarily on UK viewers and especially BBC iPlayer for the viewing data analysis. Patterns may differ in other cultural contexts or on platforms with different interface designs. The UK's unique combination of public service and commercial streaming services might create viewing patterns that don't fully translate to markets with different media ecosystems or regulatory frameworks.

2. **Self-Reporting Biases** - Studies 1 and 2 relied substantially on self-reported data, which may be subject to recall biases or social desirability effects. Participants may have underestimated their viewing time or over-reported their level of control over viewing decisions, particularly given cultural judgments sometimes associated with extensive television viewing.
3. **Platform Specificity** - Study 3's viewing data came from a single platform during a specific content release, potentially limiting broader applicability. The iPlayer interface, content curation approach, and public service ethos might generate different viewing patterns than commercial platforms prioritising engagement metrics or advertising revenue.
4. **Individual vs. Group Viewing** - A significant limitation across all studies is the challenge of differentiating between individual and group viewing behaviours. While some interview participants mentioned viewing with partners or family members, our quantitative data and iPlayer analysis could not reliably distinguish between solitary and social viewing sessions. This distinction is potentially important as viewing motivations, durations, and decision-making processes may differ substantially when watching alone versus with others. Social viewing contexts might introduce different dynamics around viewing control and continuation decisions that this research couldn't fully capture.
5. **Temporal Context** - The research occurred during a period of rapid evolution in streaming services. Viewing patterns and platform interfaces continue to evolve, potentially affecting the longevity of some findings. The introduction of ad-supported tiers by major platforms, shifts in content release strategies, and the emergence of new interface features may all influence how viewers engage with streaming content.

Despite these limitations, the multi-method approach provides a robust foundation for understanding binge-watching behaviours and their relationship to platform design. By triangulating findings across qualitative interviews, quantitative surveys, and unobtrusive measures, the research offers a more comprehensive picture than any single method could provide.

7.9 Conclusion

This chapter has synthesised findings from Studies 1 through 3, revealing binge-watching as a complex phenomenon that resists simple definition or characterisation. The proposed viewing typologies framework offers a more nuanced approach to understanding diverse viewing behaviours, while the identified interface influences highlight opportunities for more viewer-centric design approaches.

As we move to Study 4, these integrated insights provide a foundation for dialogue with industry professionals. By exploring how these academic findings resonate with the practical realities of platform design and commercial imperatives, we can bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application.

The industry dialogues presented in the next chapter will examine how platform designers at the BBC navigate the tensions identified in this research, balance engagement goals with viewer wellbeing considerations, and approach the challenge of creating interfaces that serve diverse viewer needs. This exchange between academic research and industry practice represents a crucial step in translating research insights into meaningful improvements in how platforms serve their viewers.

Chapter 8

Study 4

Bridging Research & Practice

Elite Interviews through Industry Dialogues:

User Needs & Responsible Interface Design

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8.1 Introduction

Having synthesised findings from the first three studies in the previous chapter, this final research stage examines how these empirical insights might influence and be received by industry practitioners. While our comprehensive analysis has established a nuanced understanding of binge-watching behaviours, viewing typologies, and potential interface optimisations, the practical application of these findings requires engagement with those who design and develop streaming platforms.

This chapter critically examines the intersection between academic research on binge-watching behaviours and the practical realities of Video on Demand interface design, representing the final stage in an iterative research process. Through elite interviews with key decision-makers and designers at the BBC, specifically those with knowledge of the iPlayer user interface, this research bridges the gap between theoretical insights and industry practice within a major U.K. public service broadcaster.

The rapid evolution of viewing habits, particularly the rise of binge-watching, has presented both opportunities and challenges for content providers. While previous chapters have systematically explored this phenomenon - beginning with individual viewer experiences through in-depth interviews, expanding to examine broader population patterns via survey methodology, and investigating real-world viewing behaviours through platform data and social media discourse - this chapter aims to understand how these findings resonate with and potentially influence the perspectives of industry professionals.

Elite interviews are particularly valuable when studying organisational decision-making and policy implementation, as they allow researchers to engage with individuals who have specialised knowledge and influence in their field.

These elite interviews or industry dialogues with suitable ‘elites’ can illuminate how organisations already balance user engagement with ethical considerations around viewer wellbeing, and how research insights might inform more viewer-centric design approaches in the future. Furthermore, these dialogues can review the complex factors, constraints, and considerations that shape platform design choices - insights that might not be apparent through other research methods.

The choice of elite interviews is particularly appropriate given the unique position of the BBC as a public service broadcaster navigating commercial pressures. This industry-focused approach provides a reality check on the practical applicability of academic research in the fast-paced, competitive, consumer-driven market. Through having these dialogues with BBC professionals, it offers insights into the decision-making processes that shape some of the very platforms influencing consumer behaviour, while allowing for the exploration of potential best practice policies in VoD interface design.

However, it’s important to acknowledge the limitations of these industry dialogues, including potential bias in the participants’ responses and the challenge of generalising from a small number of perspectives, especially in this instance where they are sourced from one organisation. As such, these insights should be considered alongside the other research methods employed here and elsewhere for a more complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

The following methodology section details the specific approaches taken to conduct these dialogues and analyse their findings, contributing to our understanding of how empirical research might influence future platform design decisions in ways that better serve the needs and wellbeing of viewers.

8.2 Methodology

Building upon the rationale outlined in the introduction, this study employed a carefully structured approach to elite interviews through industry dialogues to explore how academic research findings on binge-watching behaviours could be framed to inform practical interface design decisions within the BBC. According to Dexter (2006) and Harvey (2011), this methodological approach is particularly appropriate when studying organisational decision-making and implementation processes, as it allows researchers to engage with individuals who hold specialised knowledge and authority in their field [59],[60].

Elite interviews differ from standard qualitative interviews in that they specifically target individuals in positions of significant influence or specialised expertise, where their professional authority and decision-making power are central to the research questions [94]. In this case, participants' roles in directing iPlayer interface design make their perspectives particularly valuable for understanding how research insights might translate into practical design decisions.

These industry dialogues were designed to facilitate meaningful knowledge exchange between academic research and industry practice, acknowledging the valuable insights both sectors contribute: academia offering theoretical frameworks and systematic research findings, and industry professionals providing practical experience in implementing and testing interface designs at scale.

The research centred on structured dialogues with 2 BBC decision-makers and designers, with several interconnected objectives. Primary among these was understanding current industry perspectives and practices regarding iPlayer's interface design, while examining the fundamental principles guiding these design decisions. The research sought to investigate how user needs are identified and addressed within the organisation's design process.

A crucial component involved presenting findings from earlier studies to the industry professionals via shared papers prior to meeting with them, thus creating an opportunity for direct feedback and discussion about their practical implications.

Through these dialogues, the research aimed to explore opportunities for incorporating these academic insights into future design approaches, while identifying potential best practices in VoD interface design.

Additionally, the study investigated the organisation's approach to balancing user engagement with viewer wellbeing, recognising the unique position of the BBC as a public service broadcaster in an increasingly competitive streaming landscape.

8.2.1 Participant Selection and Profiles

The study secured participation from two senior members of the iPlayer team who would, according to Aberbach & Rockman (2002), qualify as 'elites' within this research context due to their decision-making authority, specialised expertise, and institutional positions [61].

Colin Greenwood and Simon Roberts jointly lead the BBC's Video iPlayer partnerships design team. Their roles involve managing interface development across multiple portfolios, working closely with marketing, editorial, and distribution teams across the BBC. With three and six years of experience respectively in iPlayer-focused roles, and substantial prior experience in digital and service design both within the BBC and at external agencies, they provide authoritative perspectives on the evolution of streaming interface design and the particular challenges faced by public service broadcasters in the contemporary media landscape.

8.2.2 Ethical Considerations and Commercial Sensitivity

To ensure ethical compliance and protect commercial interests, all content was reviewed by collaborators at BBC Research & Development prior to inclusion in this thesis. This review process, which participants were made aware of beforehand, helped encourage open dialogue whilst safeguarding against the inadvertent disclosure of sensitive information. This approach was particularly crucial given the competitive nature of the streaming industry and the BBC's unique position as a public service broadcaster.

8.2.3 Interview Structure and Implementation

A comprehensive interview guide was developed to explore key themes systematically while allowing for natural conversation to flow. The structure was designed to address all four research questions while building upon insights from previous studies.

The preliminaries section covered essential administrative elements including commercial sensitivity assurances and recording permissions. This was followed by background and role discussions to establish context and credibility of the participants.

The vision and design philosophy section aimed to explore the fundamental tensions between engagement and responsible design that emerged strongly in Study 1's in-depth interviews, where participants expressed conflicting feelings about platforms encouraging extended viewing. This section particularly addresses RQ3 regarding aspects of digital media interfaces that might reduce consumer autonomy, while also connecting to RQ2's examination of positive and negative aspects of binge-watching.

Questions about design process and user involvement were informed by the varied needs and preferences identified in Study 1 and the distinct viewer clusters revealed in Study 2. The analysis of actual viewing patterns in Study 3 had demonstrated diverse viewing behaviours, making it relevant to understand how these variations are considered in the design process. This understanding is useful in addressing RQ4 regarding inter-personalisation features that might better serve consumers.

The exploration of current design considerations was driven by specific interface elements that Study 1 participants felt reduced their viewing autonomy (RQ3), preferences quantified in Study 2, and the real-world impacts of features like autoplay observed through iPlayer viewing data in Study 3.

Perceptions of user needs and preferences were examined in light of the different viewing patterns identified across all previous studies, particularly the diverse viewer reactions and interactions captured in Study 3's Twitter analysis. This section contributes to understanding of RQ1's focus on defining binge-watching, while also informing RQ4's exploration of better serving viewer needs.

The research findings discussion presented key insights from previous studies for industry perspective, including the varied definitions of binge-watching from Study 1 (RQ1), viewing patterns identified in Studies 2 and 3, and interface preferences expressed in Study 2. This was followed by exploration of potential interface optimisations (RQ4), informed by specific features valued by survey respondents and the observed influence of interface elements on actual viewing behaviour.

The guide concluded with examination of best practices and future outlook, aiming to understand how platforms might evolve to better serve viewer needs while maintaining engagement. This final section particularly addresses RQ4's focus on identifying interface features that could better serve consumers.

The following guide outlines key themes and questions prepared to facilitate a meaningful knowledge exchange between academic research and industry practice:

BBC iPlayer Interface Design and User Experience

Introduction: Thank the participant for their time. Give brief overview of the research project and its goals. Explain the format of the dialogue and the expected duration. Provide assurance that BBC contact reviews any content before publication. Reminder of confidentiality. Ask permission to record.

Background and Role Can you briefly describe your role at BBC and your involvement with iPlayer? How long have you been working on iPlayer interface design?

Vision and Design Philosophy What is your vision of an ideal consumer experience on BBC iPlayer? How do you balance user engagement with responsible viewing promotion? What do you consider to be the key success metrics for iPlayer's interface?

Design Process and User Involvement Can you walk me through your approach to developing and enhancing iPlayer functionality? To what extent are consumers involved in the design process? How do you gather and incorporate user feedback?

Current Design Considerations What are the primary factors you consider when designing iPlayer's interface? How do you approach the challenge of content discovery on the platform? Are there any specific features aimed at managing viewing time or habits?

Perceptions of User Needs and Preferences Based on your experience, what do you think iPlayer users want most from the interface? Have you observed any trends in user behaviour or preferences over time? Do you consider different user needs (e.g., binge-watchers vs. casual viewers)?

Research Findings Discussion *(Provide brief summary of key findings from research on binge-watching behaviours, potential harms, and desire for autonomy.)*

What are your initial thoughts on these findings? Do any of these insights surprise you or challenge your current assumptions? How might these findings influence iPlayer's objectives or design approach?

Potential Interface Optimisations Based on the research findings we've discussed, do you see any potential areas for interface optimization? What challenges might you foresee in implementing such changes? How do you balance user autonomy with other business objectives?

Best Practices and Future Outlook In your opinion, what should be included in a best practice policy for VoD interface design? How do you see the future of VoD interfaces evolving, particularly in relation to user wellbeing? What role (if any) do you think platforms like iPlayer should play in promoting healthy viewing habits?

Closing Thoughts Is there anything else you'd like to add about iPlayer design or any of the topics we've discussed? Do you have any questions for me about the research?

Conclusion: Thank them again for their time and insights. Explain next steps (how their input will be used). Offer to answer any final questions they might have.

While this guide provided a framework for discussion, the interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing for organic exploration of emerging topics and insights. Not all questions were necessarily asked in the sequence presented, and additional lines of inquiry emerged naturally during the conversations based on participants' responses and expertise.

A full transcript of the actual discussion, including these emergent conversations and their natural progression, is provided in Appendix E, offering complete transparency regarding the topics explored and the dialogue’s evolution.

8.3 Results

This section presents a comprehensive summary of the insights gathered from the dialogue held with the BBC decision-makers and designers. The discussions have been structured according to the key themes outlined in the interview guide and provide a systematic overview of the industry perspectives on iPlayer interface design, user experience, and implications for the research findings.

Each of the following sections corresponds to a major area of inquiry from the discussion. The summaries aim to capture the essence of the conversation, highlighting areas of consensus, notable divergences in opinion, and particularly insightful observations.

8.3.1 Vision and Design Philosophy

The dialogue revealed a fundamental tension at the heart of the BBC’s design philosophy, particularly regarding its iPlayer interface. This tension manifests as a complex interplay between public service values and commercial pressures in the digital age. The organisation finds itself navigating between two potentially conflicting imperatives: maintaining its public service mandate while remaining competitive in an increasingly commercial streaming landscape.

One of the interviewees, Colin Greenwood, articulated this challenge by referencing academic work from Lowen and Martin: "*The BBC, like other organisations delivering public value, is often torn between evidencing market value, a concept strongly embedded in commercial logic where success depends on achieving sufficient popularity and embodying its mandate as a not-for-profit institution with values that are in principle, contraries that logic.*" [95]. This academic framing provides context for what Greenwood describes as a tension that has never been fully resolved in the BBC's century of existence.

Simon Roberts reinforced this perspective, suggesting that this tension, while challenging, serves a necessary purpose: "*I personally think that um, that tension is healthy and I think it's something that is impossible to resolve <...> I can't really see any other way um... that the BBC wouldn't have that tension because then you would slip into kind of like more of a... it wouldn't be objective.*" Roberts emphasised that this tension helps maintain the BBC's distinctive position in the media landscape.

The challenge has become particularly acute in the current digital environment. As Roberts explained: "*That tension is becoming more and more pronounced because what we're starting to do is the way people consume the media is that they're, they're, they're... it's becoming normalised to be addicted to the way that the content's served up.*" This observation points to growing concerns about how modern viewing patterns and interface design might affect viewer behaviour.

The organisational response to these challenges appears to be carefully balanced. While Greenwood noted that "*the overwhelming momentum and energy of the organisation is focused on driving growth,*" he also identified an important cultural counterweight: "*There is a kind of cultural break on that and I think it's a cultural thing where people get really uncomfortable if it feels like we're copying, you know, a Snapchat or a TikTok and you see a leadership sometimes talking about, you know, of course, we want to do things in the BBC way.*"

This tension has particular implications for the organisation's future direction, especially in relation to the upcoming charter renewal. Greenwood speculated about potential post-2027 scenarios: "*You can imagine the Tim Davey, post '27, post December 2027, when we got the new charter, whatever shape that takes, it says, 'right, you know, we're, we're, we're set for the next 10 years, now we're going to reinvent the relationship between, you know, a media company and its, and its, and its audiences, you know, to truly deliver public service value.'*".

8.3.2 Design Process and User Involvement

The BBC employs a multi-layered approach to user research and design development for its iPlayer interface. This process incorporates various methodologies for gathering user feedback and testing new features, with particular attention paid to ensuring diverse representation in their research panels.

Simon Roberts outlined their core testing methodologies: "*We do um remote testing, we do in lab testing, um... we do all sorts of diary studies over a period of time to gauge how people understand and interact with the things that we're proposing.*" This multi-method approach allows for both breadth and depth in understanding user interactions with the interface.

Colin Greenwood elaborated on their structured approach to innovation and development: "*Early in the sort of innovation cycle if you like, when it's like this thing is no longer working, we need to, we need to innovate and find some new source of value <...> we're pretty good at doing quite in depth all studies, ethnographic studies, we have a design research function, we have an audience research function, they work very closely together and you know we'll, we'll, we'll... have a strategy function and you put those three things together and we'll sort of go deep and try and work out where, where is the next big opportunity.*"

The organisation places significant emphasis on ensuring diverse representation in their user testing. As Greenwood explained: "*We're trying to kind of get much better at <...> bringing audience insight from a much more diverse range of our audience. So you know, when you when you're recruiting for these things, you tend to end up with a similar profile. But you know, if the BBC is going to grow like it needs to, we need to become a much more inclusive product.*" This extends beyond basic accessibility considerations to encompass broader inclusivity goals: "*So not just in terms of accessibility needs, but also just inclusive products that everybody can use, like my parents, who basically for whom the Internet is a ongoing source of rage and frustration.*"

The design process is driven by a risk-management approach to testing and implementation. Greenwood described how they evaluate the need for user testing: "*The conversation we have with our designers is about risk. You know, ultimately... bringing, you know, audiences to bear and getting their feedback on our designs is about, is about managing risk. If there's something that's low risk in terms of impact or something that we're super confident just needs to be done, then we'll do it <...> But oftentimes we're less certain there's more risk and then that's when we'll kind of bring more research to bear and more, more audience insight to bear on it.*"

Roberts noted a current organisational push for more agile research processes: "*There's quite an appetite at the moment um, for us to have more agility around our, uh... consultation with users and to try and have it much more frequently and have the feedback loops much, much, much quicker as well.*" This suggests an evolution in their approach to user research and design implementation.

8.3.3 Current Design Considerations

The dialogue revealed significant attention to the challenges and opportunities presented by modern streaming interfaces, particularly regarding influence on viewer behaviour. The BBC finds itself at a critical juncture, evaluating how to integrate contemporary interface features while maintaining its public service values.

A key consideration centres on the algorithmic nature of modern streaming platforms. Colin Greenwood highlighted historical concerns about such features: *"It's probably 15 years ago, there was like a really interesting thread of debate about should these algorithms be treated as controlled substances in the same way that alcohol and tobacco and narcotics are because <...> they work on the same, essentially work on the same principle as gambling, it's the uncertainty principle."* This comparison to controlled substances underscores the organisation's awareness of the ethical implications of certain interface design choices.

Simon Roberts expanded on these concerns, particularly regarding social media-style content delivery: *"TikTok comes up quite a bit as a, as a paradigm, as a way of kind of serving media <...> I'm trying to use the right words that aren't too hyperbolic, but it is potentially quite dangerous and it is something that is um, you know, needs to be kind of really kind of cautiously approached."* Roberts further elaborated that this creates a particular challenge for the BBC: *"It's challenging because if we want to have that reach, that retention that, that dialogue with the public and what they're used to and how their consumer stuff going to them, if we want to do all that stuff, we're kind of having to go through these, these really kind of, you know, ethically kind of questionable kind of means of doing it."*

The organisation is actively exploring ways to bridge traditional broadcasting strengths with modern streaming capabilities. Greenwood explained: "*We're starting to kick around ideas now as to how can we bring together <...> the power, the choice, the power of video on demand, combined with the kind of lean back curated ease of, of, of linear experiences.*" This approach acknowledges that while the Netflix model of content presentation has been influential, it may not be the ultimate solution: "*Everyone thought the back of Netflix is massive growth, that, that all the, you know, the future of long form video is basically like the, the library shelf of content, the rails and you pick something you'd watch it and why would you not like that you can choose whatever you want but people don't like it.*"

A particular focus has emerged around short-form video content and its role in the platform's future. As Greenwood noted: "*There's some planning work going on at the moment and the short form video has been discussed a lot. Like, you know, if we're trying to grow iPlayer as a platform, how deep do we want to go into short form video? Is it that we just treat it as complementary marketing content to sort of promote our long form content? Do we treat it as like a destination itself?*"

8.3.4 Perceptions of User Needs and Preferences

The dialogue revealed a sophisticated understanding of how user expectations and behaviours have evolved with the changing media landscape. The interviewees demonstrated particular awareness of how viewer preferences can shift over time, often in response to industry practices.

Simon Roberts highlighted how quickly viewer expectations can change: "*Back to that kind of point around shifting sands, it is really tricky because um, stuff that you know, felt questionable two years ago... becomes the norm, becomes accepted and then you know, we kind of have to embrace it.*" He illustrated this point with a specific example regarding pre-roll content: "*The idea of trailers before content was, you know, there was a lot of pushback from it. It was kind of like something that from a UX point of view we, we question the value of when we tested it, users pushed back on it as well. <...> Now looking at it now, it's such, it's such the norm.*"

8.3.5 Potential Interface Optimisations

The discussions revealed significant attention to interface design elements that could enhance viewer autonomy while maintaining engagement. One key area of focus was the management of automated content progression and viewer control.

The interviewees highlighted how different platforms approach these features, noting that some competitors like Disney+ take a more restrained approach to autoplay features, particularly at series endings. There was recognition that allowing full credits to play could serve multiple purposes - respecting content creators while also providing natural breaks in viewing sessions.

Detailed consideration was given to the timing and presentation of viewer controls, particularly around pre-roll content. The team wrestles with specific design decisions such as when to present skip options and how to introduce these controls - whether they should appear gradually through enabling previously greyed-out buttons or appear all at once. This granular attention to interface timing demonstrates awareness of how small design decisions can impact viewer autonomy.

The dialogue revealed particular attention to end-of-series experiences, where platforms must balance engagement with viewer agency. Discussions encompassed various autoplay scenarios, from trailers to next episodes and recommendations, with careful consideration of how these features affect the viewing experience.

Accessibility emerged as a crucial factor in interface design decisions. The interviewees noted that features like autoplay can create challenges for users with motor control impairments or those on the autistic spectrum, often making these accessibility considerations the "sharp end" of design decisions.

While current organisational metrics focus heavily on growth and engagement, there was openness to exploring more user-centric design approaches. The interviewees acknowledged the potential for promoting healthier viewing habits through interface design, though noting this would require a shift from current growth-focused metrics.

8.3.6 Corporate Social Responsibility

The discussion revealed significant consideration of the BBC's responsibility to its audience. Colin Greenwood articulated this through comparison with commercial competitors: *"When I first joined the BBC there was a lot of talk about kind of time well spent and, and that was a kind of concept where we were trying to kind of yes! hold our own against our commercial competitors but, but also um, you know not <...> of this extractive, <...> distraction based relationship with our audiences."*

Simon Roberts emphasised the unique position of the BBC in this regard: *"I think you know there is that, that inform, educate and entertain... you know, it's, it's, it's been around forever but it is quite a nice sound principle to kind of anchor your thinking really about what we're doing. And I do think we are different. We are different to a prime, we are different to a Netflix."*

8.3.7 Future Directions

The dialogue revealed considerable thought about future developments, particularly regarding charter renewal and organisational evolution. Colin Greenwood speculated about post-2027 possibilities, though acknowledged current constraints: *"The overwhelming pressure from leadership is to grow ahead of the charter renewal. You know, all these... you get into kind of questions of institutional survival and that drives a lot of what the organisation is doing."*

Simon Roberts noted their current growth trajectory while acknowledging future challenges: *"We're growing more than any any of the other uh VoD services in the UK. So we're, I think we're double growth Netflix this financial year <...> But, so we're growing, we, you know, it's, it's kind of, there's some really good progress there. How do we tap into that? How do we leverage it? and how do we go into new waters new, and a new paradigm?"*

8.4 Discussion

The industry dialogues provide valuable insights into how a major public service broadcaster approaches the challenges of designing and maintaining a VoD interface. These conversations, when considered alongside existing research on binge-watching behaviours and interface design, illuminate several key areas relevant to the optimisation of user autonomy in VoD consumption.

8.4.1 Public Service Values versus Commercial Imperatives

The fundamental tension between public service values and commercial pressures emerged as the most significant theme from these dialogues. As one interviewee referenced from Lowe and Martin's work, public service broadcasters are "*often torn between evidencing market value...and embodying its mandate as a not-for-profit institution.*" This aligns with Lotz's (2014) analysis of how streaming services have disrupted traditional broadcasting models, forcing public service broadcasters to compete in an increasingly commercial landscape [7].

The BBC's recognition of what interviewees termed an "*extractive, distraction-based relationship*" with audiences reflects growing industry awareness of ethical implications in platform design. This mirrors concerns raised by Flayelle et al. (2020) about potentially problematic engagement mechanisms in streaming services [43]. The interviews revealed that while growth metrics currently drive many design decisions, there exists an underlying organizational discomfort with copying features that might compromise viewer autonomy.

This tension has intensified as certain interface features become normalised. As viewers become habituated to potentially problematic design patterns, broadcasters face increasing pressure to adopt these practices to remain competitive. The interviewees' description of this as an "*impossible to resolve*" tension echoes Jenner's (2018) analysis of how streaming platforms must balance user engagement with ethical considerations [9].

8.4.2 Platform Design and User Behaviour

The evolution of interface design and its impact on viewing behaviour emerged as a complex interplay between technological capabilities, user expectations, and organisational values. The interview revealed consideration of how interface elements affect viewer behaviour and autonomy, from the timing of pre-roll content controls to the handling of end-credits.

The BBC's approach to risk management in design demonstrates a structured evaluation process where user testing corresponds to perceived risk. This careful approach to implementation aligns with what Evans et al. (2022) identified as crucial considerations in balancing engagement with viewer autonomy [45]. As explained, "*bringing audiences to bear and getting their feedback on our designs is about managing risk,*" reflecting an awareness that interface decisions can significantly impact viewing behaviour.

The discussion of short-form content integration revealed particular challenges for traditional broadcasters adapting to changing consumption patterns. Matrix's (2014) early observations about evolving viewing habits appear increasingly relevant as platforms consider how to integrate different content formats while maintaining platform identity [8]. The interviewees' strategic questioning of whether such content should serve as complementary material or become a destination feature reflects broader industry challenges in adapting to changing viewer preferences while maintaining platform identity.

Viewer expectations have evolved rapidly with changing platform features. As noted, features that face initial resistance, such as pre-roll content, quickly become normalised: "*stuff that felt questionable two years ago becomes the norm.*" This observation aligns with Merikivi et al.'s (2020) findings about how viewer expectations and behaviours adapt to platform features, often leading to reduced consciousness of how these features influence viewing decisions [32].

8.4.3 Ethical Design and Platform Responsibility

The interview revealed consideration of platform responsibility in interface design, particularly regarding automated features and algorithmic content delivery. One interviewee's comparison of algorithmic systems to "*controlled substances*" echoes concerns raised in the literature about potentially addictive design patterns (Flayelle et al., 2019). This metaphor is particularly relevant given the BBC's position as a public service broadcaster with a mandate to serve viewer interests beyond engagement metrics [37].

The conversation revealed a sophisticated understanding of how interface personalisation might better serve viewers while acknowledging commercial pressures. As one interviewee noted, there exists "*a real opportunity*" to promote healthier viewing habits, though this would require "*a slight pivot*" from current growth-focused metrics. This aligns with Rubenking & Braken's (2018) findings that viewers value platforms that offer greater control over their viewing experiences, suggesting competitive advantages for more ethical design approaches [40].

Accessibility emerged as an important factor driving more thoughtful interface design. The interviewees noted that features like autoplay can be "*confusing and overwhelming*" for users with motor control impairments or those "*on the autistic spectrum*." Notably, accessibility requirements can also serve as a catalyst for implementing more user-centric design features that could benefit all viewers.

The discussion highlighted how certain interface features, while effective at driving engagement, might conflict with the organisation's public service values. This was particularly evident in discussions about algorithmic content delivery, where interviewees acknowledged the tension between leveraging effective engagement techniques and maintaining responsible design practices. This reflects broader industry debates documented by Jenner (2018) about platform responsibilities in the streaming era [9].

8.4.4 Future Directions and Research Opportunities

The dialogue revealed several promising directions for platform development and research. The BBC's position as a public service broadcaster, combined with its recent growth in the VoD space, presents unique opportunities to pioneer more ethical approaches to interface design. As one of the interviewees suggested, there might be "*another paradigm that we can invent*" that better balances engagement with viewer wellbeing.

Several key opportunities for development emerged:

Interface Innovation: The interview revealed potential for new approaches combining "*the power of video on demand*" with "*the lean back curated ease of linear experiences*." This aligns with the recent research by Merikivi et al. (2020) suggesting that viewers increasingly seek more structured viewing experiences alongside on-demand flexibility [32].

Alternate Metrics: While current focus remains heavily on weekly active accounts, the discussion suggested possibilities for developing new success metrics that better reflect public service values.

Viewer Education: The interviewees suggested potential for platforms to play a more active role in promoting digital wellbeing, possibly through "*viewing experiences that explain some of this stuff*" or have "*healthy friction that is caveated and framed*." This approach could address concerns raised in the literature about viewers' awareness of how platform design influences their behaviour.

The timing of these potential developments appears particularly significant given the approaching BBC Charter renewal in 2027. As one interviewee noted, this could present an opportunity to "*reinvent the relationship between a media company and its audiences*." However, current institutional pressures for growth ahead of charter renewal may delay implementation of more experimental approaches.

Research opportunities identified through this discussion include:

- Examination of alternative success metrics that better capture public service value
- Investigation of how different viewer segments respond to more structured viewing experiences
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of viewer education initiatives in promoting healthier viewing habits.

8.4.5 Research Limitations and Conclusion

While these dialogues provide valuable insights into interface design considerations at a major public service broadcaster, several limitations should be acknowledged. The perspectives gathered represent two colleagues from a single organisation with a unique public service mandate. Further research incorporating views from commercial platforms would provide useful comparative data, particularly regarding how different organisational priorities influence interface design decisions.

The conversations focused primarily on current challenges and approaches, with less discussion of specific future initiatives or measurable outcomes of current strategies. While this reflects the reality of operating in a rapidly evolving media landscape, it limits our ability to evaluate the effectiveness of proposed solutions. As Matrix (2014) noted, the pace of change in digital media consumption often outstrips our ability to assess the impact of design interventions [8].

Despite these limitations, this industry dialogue contributes significantly to our understanding of how research insights might translate into platform design. It reveals how theoretical concepts of viewer autonomy and platform responsibility [43], as discussed by Flayelle et al. (2020), intersect with practical design considerations and commercial realities.

The findings suggest that while platforms might want to promote more mindful viewing habits, implementing such changes requires careful consideration of commercial pressures, user expectations, and organisational priorities. This aligns with Jenner’s (2018) observation that streaming platforms must constantly navigate between competing priorities of engagement and ethical design [9].

Looking ahead, the BBC’s experience could provide valuable insights for the broader streaming industry. As viewers become increasingly conscious of digital wellbeing, platforms that successfully balance engagement with viewer autonomy may find themselves better positioned to meet evolving user expectations. This suggests potential for future research examining how different approaches to interface design affect both viewer satisfaction and platform sustainability.

The insights gained from this industry dialogue, combined with findings from previous studies, indicate that while the path to more viewer-centric design may be challenging, there exists both opportunity and appetite for innovation in this space. As streaming platforms continue to evolve, the lessons learned from public service broadcasting could help shape more ethical approaches to interface design across the industry.

The following chapter draws together findings across all four studies to comprehensively address the research questions. By examining how qualitative insights from viewers, quantitative survey data, platform analytics, and industry perspectives complement one another, it develops recommendations for creating streaming experiences that better serve both viewer engagement and wellbeing. This synthesis aims to bridge theoretical understanding with practical application, ultimately contributing to the development of more ethical and user-focused approaches to VoD interface design.

Chapter 9

Conclusions

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9.1 Introduction

The evolution of television viewing from scheduled broadcasting to on-demand streaming has fundamentally altered how audiences engage with content. This thesis has examined this shift through four complementary studies: in-depth interviews exploring individual experiences, a large-scale survey investigating broader patterns, analysis of actual viewing data from BBC iPlayer alongside related, contemporaneous social media discourse, and dialogue with industry professionals. Together, these studies provide a multifaceted understanding of contemporary viewing behaviours and their implications for platform design.

The mixed-methods approach has revealed binge-watching to be a more nuanced phenomenon than previously documented in academic literature. While existing research has often referred to quantitative measures like hours watched or number of episodes viewed, this research demonstrates how viewing patterns are shaped by complex interactions between interface design, social dynamics, and individual psychology.

By synthesising findings across all four studies and examining how different data sources complement and occasionally challenge each other, we can build a more complete picture of binge-watching behaviour and its relationship to platform design. The discussion particularly focuses on how these insights might inform the development of more viewer-centric streaming interfaces that balance engagement with wellbeing.

The combination of qualitative insights, quantitative data, and real-world viewing patterns has enabled a more comprehensive understanding of how viewers engage with streaming content and how platforms might better serve their needs.

Through this comprehensive investigation, we have addressed four primary research questions that have guided this inquiry throughout.

9.2 Summary of Key Findings

9.2.1 RQ1: Defining Binge-Watching

What constitutes binge-watching, and how might it be defined? This question seeks to establish a clear, evidence-based definition of binge-watching, considering both quantitative measures and qualitative aspects like viewer intent and experience.

The most significant contribution to defining binge-watching is the development of a viewing typologies framework that moves beyond simple time-based measures to consider multiple dimensions of viewing behaviour. The research revealed that loss of control in viewing decisions is often perceived as more definitive of binge-watching than duration alone, challenging traditional episode-count or time-based definitions.

The five viewing typologies identified—Routine Episodic Streaming, Periodic Streaming Strategist, Compulsive Streaming, Non-Consequential Recreational Streaming, and Passive Streaming—represent viewing behaviours that can be mapped along three primary axes: duration, frequency, and compulsion (lack of control). This framework acknowledges that individuals may engage in different viewing behaviours depending on circumstances, content type, and personal motivations rather than being fixed "types" of viewers.

This nuanced approach better reflects the reality of contemporary viewing practices and provides a stronger foundation for understanding both the benefits and potential drawbacks of intensive viewing patterns.

9.2.2 RQ2: Positive and Negative Aspects

What positive and negative aspects may be associated with binge-watching? This inquiry aims to provide a balanced view of binge-watching, exploring both potential benefits (such as increased content engagement and stress relief) and drawbacks (including sleep disruption and social isolation).

The research uncovered a complex duality in binge-watching impacts, identifying how viewing outcomes are contextually determined rather than inherent to the behaviour itself. Positive aspects included enhanced narrative engagement and immersion, emotional regulation and stress relief, and, perhaps counterintuitively, social connection through shared cultural references and conversation topics.

Significant concerns emerged around sleep disruption, with 69% of survey respondents reporting that viewing had interfered with their sleep patterns—a finding supported by late-night viewing data from iPlayer. Activity displacement represented another drawback, particularly when unplanned or when it conflicted with viewers' own priorities.

The intention-behaviour gap emerged as particularly significant, with many viewers reporting watching more than initially intended. This gap appeared most problematic when it led to regret or guilt, though some viewers celebrated marathon sessions as deliberate, enjoyable experiences.

These findings suggest that simple characterisations of binge-watching as either beneficial or harmful are inadequate. Instead, outcomes depend on viewing context, individual circumstances, viewer intentions, and platform design elements that either support or undermine viewing autonomy.

9.2.3 RQ3: Digital Media and Consumer Autonomy

What aspects of Digital Media interfaces (if any) reduce consumer autonomy in their viewing behaviours? This question examines how interface design elements like auto-play features, personalised recommendations, and content presentation influence viewer behaviour and potentially limit conscious decision-making.

The research identified several key ways in which digital media interfaces influence and potentially reduce viewer autonomy. Autoplay features emerged as the most significant factor, with 85% of survey respondents identifying it as influencing their viewing decisions. Content presentation strategies, the temporal design of interfaces (particularly brief intervals between episodes), and algorithmic recommendations also proved influential in shaping viewing patterns.

Industry dialogues revealed important tensions between engagement metrics and user autonomy, with platform designers acknowledging the challenge of balancing commercial imperatives for sustained engagement with ethical considerations about viewer wellbeing. This tension was particularly evident in discussions about auto-play features, where industry professionals recognised both their effectiveness in maintaining viewer engagement and their potential to undermine viewer autonomy.

These findings suggest that current interface designs often prioritise engagement over autonomy, creating an environment where conscious viewing decisions can be subtly but persistently undermined. However, the research also indicated significant viewer interest in features that would support more intentional viewing patterns, suggesting an opportunity for more balanced design approaches.

9.2.4 RQ4: Inter-Personalisation Features

What inter-personalisation features of the interface might better serve the consumer? Building on findings from previous questions, this inquiry seeks to identify potential design solutions that could enhance user control and promote more intentional viewing habits.

Building upon our findings regarding platform influence on viewer autonomy, the research identified several promising directions for interface features that could better support intentional viewing while maintaining engagement. Customisable control features emerged as an area of significant interest, with survey respondents expressing strong preferences for options to modify how platforms behave at episode transitions.

Temporal design considerations appeared crucial, with many viewers finding the brief intervals between episodes insufficient for making conscious decisions about continued watching. The research suggested potential value in features that would extend these intervals or provide more meaningful points for viewing decisions.

Release strategy innovations emerged as another area for consideration, with Twitter analysis revealing diverse preferences regarding all-at-once versus episodic content availability. This suggests that platforms might better serve viewers by offering more varied or even personalised release approaches.

Viewing pattern insights represented another promising direction, with many viewers expressing interest in features that would enhance awareness of their viewing habits without imposing rigid restrictions.

The industry dialogues revealed practical considerations around implementing such features, with platform designers expressing interest in more user-centric approaches while noting challenges around technical implementation and the need to maintain platform simplicity.

9.3 Implications and Contributions

9.3.1 Theoretical Contributions

This research makes several significant theoretical contributions to the understanding of media consumption in the digital age. The viewing typologies framework extends beyond existing binge-watching literature by providing a more nuanced approach to classifying viewing behaviours along multiple dimensions rather than relying on simple episode counts or duration measures.

The research also advances our understanding of how platform design shapes viewing behaviour, building upon existing work in media psychology and human-computer interaction. By demonstrating how specific interface elements influence viewing decisions, the research contributes to theories of persuasive technology and digital nudging in the context of media consumption.

Additionally, the findings challenge simplistic conceptualisations of media consumption as either harmful or beneficial, providing evidence for a more contextual understanding that considers individual circumstances, intentions, and the specific features of viewing environments.

9.3.2 Methodological Contributions

The mixed-methods approach employed in this research demonstrates the value of methodological triangulation in studying complex media behaviours. By combining qualitative depth, quantitative breadth, and unobtrusive measures of actual behaviour, the research provides a more comprehensive understanding than any single method could offer.

The integration of social media analysis with platform viewing data represents a particularly innovative approach, allowing for examination of how viewers publicly articulate their experiences alongside their actual consumption patterns. This method could be valuable for future research on media reception and audience behaviour.

9.3.3 Practical Implications

For platform designers, this research offers evidence-based insights into how interfaces influence viewing behaviour and how they might be optimised to better support viewer autonomy. The identified tension between engagement maximisation and viewer wellbeing suggests opportunities for more balanced approaches that maintain commercial viability while respecting user agency.

For content creators, the findings suggest considerations around narrative structure, episode pacing, and release scheduling that might better align with diverse viewing preferences. Understanding how viewers engage with content in different ways could inform creative decisions from storytelling to episode length.

For viewers, the research provides a framework for understanding their own viewing patterns and how platform design might influence their behaviour. This awareness could support more intentional media consumption and better alignment between viewing intentions and actual behaviour.

9.3.4 Broader Societal Relevance

As digital media consumption continues to grow, understanding how platform design influences behaviour has broader implications for digital wellbeing and technology ethics. This research contributes to ongoing discussions about responsible design practices and the role of technology in supporting user agency.

The findings also have relevance for digital literacy initiatives, suggesting the importance of helping viewers understand how platform design might influence their behaviour and how they might maintain greater autonomy in their media consumption.

9.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this research provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. The focus on UK viewers and particularly BBC iPlayer for the viewing data analysis may limit generalisability to other cultural contexts or platforms with different interface designs. The reliance on self-reported data in Studies 1 and 2 introduces potential recall biases or social desirability effects. Additionally, the research occurred during a period of rapid evolution in streaming services, potentially affecting the longevity of some findings.

The viewing typologies framework provides a foundation for more nuanced research on binge-watching behaviours. Future studies might explore how individuals move between different typologies based on content type, viewing context, or platform features. Longitudinal research could examine how viewing patterns evolve over time and in response to interface changes, life circumstances, or content availability. This could help platforms develop more responsive interfaces that adapt to changing viewer needs and preferences while supporting healthier engagement patterns.

Beyond examining existing typologies, future research might explore uncharted areas within our three-dimensional model. As illustrated in Figure 9.1, there are spaces within the model that are not currently defined by our existing typologies, such as areas characterised by low compulsion, low to medium viewing duration, and varied frequency of activity. These spaces might represent distinct viewing behaviours that warrant further exploration.

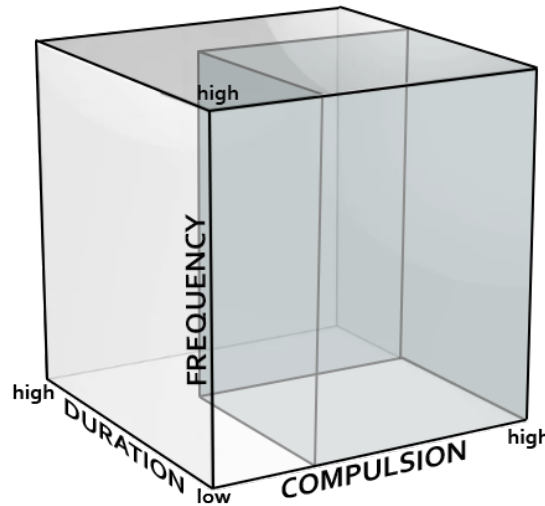


Figure 9.1: Potential Archetype ‘Real Estate’ for Mapping

An important feature of this framework is its deliberate avoidance of defining specific numerical thresholds for ‘low’, ‘moderate’, and ‘high’ values along each axis. This is not a limitation but rather a purposeful design choice to maintain the model’s flexibility and adaptability across different research contexts. The appropriate boundaries between these categories may vary depending on specific research goals, methodological approaches, and populations being studied. For instance, one researcher might use the normal distribution of their sample data to establish these thresholds statistically, while another might work with participants to define these boundaries through qualitative discussion. In clinical settings, these values might be determined by their relationship to wellbeing outcomes, while cultural studies might define them relative to societal norms.

Moreover, future research could explore whether there exists a conceptual plane within the model that separates ‘healthy’ from ‘problematic’ viewing behaviours. However, such a delineation may oversimplify the nuanced nature of viewing behaviours and their impacts. Feeling highly compelled to continue engagement in an activity may not be problematic to an individual if that activity is enjoyable and experienced at no perceived detriment to other areas of their life.

Alternatively, researchers might consider introducing a fourth dimension to the model, such as ‘impact on other life areas’ or ‘displacement of other activities’, to provide a more comprehensive view of how different viewing patterns affect overall wellbeing and daily functioning.

While developed for understanding binge-watching behaviours, the three-dimensional model of duration, frequency, and compulsion has potential applications far beyond television viewing patterns. The framework offers particularly valuable insights for understanding broader digital media consumption. In examining social media usage, the model could help distinguish between regular, intentional platform engagement and more compulsive checking behaviours. Similarly, it could illuminate patterns in gaming engagement, helping to differentiate between immersive but controlled gaming sessions and more problematic usage patterns.

The framework’s utility extends to understanding news consumption habits, where it could help examine the relationship between time spent consuming news, frequency of news checking, and compulsive information seeking—a particularly relevant application given growing concerns about digital news consumption and its impact on wellbeing.

Beyond digital media, the model shows promise for analysing various daily activities and behaviours. Reading patterns could be examined through this lens, helping to understand the difference between absorbed but controlled reading sessions and more compulsive content consumption. Exercise habits might be better understood by examining not just workout duration and frequency, but also the degree of compulsion driving these activities.

The model’s potential extends into organisational contexts as well. In workplace settings, it could provide insights into productivity patterns by examining the duration of focused work periods, frequency of work sessions, and the nature of motivation driving task completion.

Educational engagement could be better understood by analysing not just study duration and frequency, but also the quality of motivation behind learning behaviours.

Cross-platform comparisons represent another valuable research direction. While this research provided insights through BBC iPlayer data, comparing viewing patterns across platforms with different interface designs could further illuminate how specific features influence behaviour. This might include comparing platforms with and without advertisements, different autoplay implementations, or varied content recommendation approaches. The introduction of advertising-supported subscription tiers by services like Netflix presents a particularly interesting opportunity to study how commercial breaks might influence binge-watching behaviour, potentially serving as natural intervention points for more mindful viewing decisions.

Interface innovations represent another promising area for continued investigation. The research suggests that streaming interfaces could benefit from adaptive modes responding to different viewing typologies. For instance, a Routine Episodic Mode could implement clearer episode breaks and summaries to support intentional, paced viewing, while a Periodic Strategist Mode might offer tools for planning extended viewing sessions.

For those engaging in Compulsive Streaming, interfaces could introduce more frequent natural break points and mindful viewing prompts. Such customisable control features could include options for viewers to set different behaviours for different times of day, varying the length of pause between episodes, or establishing viewing windows aligned with their intended habits. Rather than generic ‘Are you still watching?’ messages, platforms could offer more intelligent interruptions that provide meaningful interventions helping viewers align their viewing with their intended behaviours and commitments.

Content structure and delivery warrant deeper examination. The findings suggest that factors like episode length, narrative complexity, and cliffhanger placement significantly influence viewing patterns. Future studies could explore how content creators might structure their work to support both engaged viewing and natural breaking points. This might involve creating clear ‘stopping points’ within episodes, offering optional extended cuts for dedicated viewers, or developing modular storytelling approaches that work effectively for both binge and episodic viewing. Such innovations could help align content design with diverse viewing typologies while maintaining narrative engagement.

Social integration features present another valuable direction for research. While our study revealed complex patterns of social coordination around viewing, particularly for highly anticipated content releases, further investigation could examine how platforms might better leverage social aspects to create natural breaks and enhance engagement. This could include watch party features, in-app discussion forums, or viewing progress synchronisation options that help viewers coordinate their experiences while protecting them from spoilers. These features could particularly support certain viewing typologies while creating more intentional viewing experiences across diverse social contexts.

User empowerment represents a crucial area for development. The findings indicate opportunities for more granular control over viewing experiences, including customisable auto-play settings and personalised viewing limits. Future research could explore how these features might be implemented in ways that are easily accessible but non-intrusive, respecting user agency while supporting intentional viewing. The industry dialogues revealed practical considerations around implementing such features, with platform designers expressing interest in more user-centric approaches while noting challenges around technical implementation and the need to maintain platform simplicity.

Findings also indicated the importance of thoughtful default settings; while customisation options were widely supported, many viewers would benefit from more autonomy-supporting default behaviours that could then be modified based on individual preferences. Experimental studies testing specific interface modifications could provide causal evidence for how design elements influence viewing decisions.

Cross-cultural studies investigating how viewing patterns and preferences vary across cultural contexts could enhance understanding of both universal and culturally specific aspects of binge-watching behaviour. This could inform more culturally sensitive design approaches and release strategies that better serve diverse global audiences.

9.5 Concluding Reflections

This research has provided a more nuanced understanding of binge-watching through four complementary studies that examined individual experiences, broader patterns, real-world behaviours, and industry perspectives. The development of viewing typologies offers a new framework for understanding this complex phenomenon, while the analysis of platform influences reveals both challenges and opportunities for more viewer-centric design approaches.

Our findings suggest that the future of streaming platforms lies not in maximising engagement metrics but in finding ways to balance viewer autonomy with platform sustainability. The identification of different viewing patterns and their contexts provides a foundation for more sophisticated interface design that could better serve diverse viewer needs while maintaining the aspects of streaming that make it compelling.

Perhaps most significantly, this research demonstrates that binge-watching cannot be understood through simple time-based measures or treated as uniformly problematic or beneficial. Instead, it represents a complex pattern of behaviours shaped by individual psychology, social dynamics, and technological affordances. As streaming continues to evolve as a primary mode of media consumption, understanding these nuances becomes increasingly important for creating experiences that enhance rather than diminish viewer wellbeing.

This work opens up numerous avenues for future research, from cross-platform comparisons to potential applications in other domains. However, its core contribution lies in demonstrating how academic research can inform practical platform design in ways that better serve both viewer and industry interests. As we continue to navigate the challenges of digital media consumption in the streaming era, such evidence-based approaches to platform design will become increasingly vital.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Study 1: Interview Sample Transcript

The following is a transcript from the interview with ‘Loretta’. One of thirteen interviews conducted as part of Study 1.

Interviewer: Okay, so this is mind, um, are you happy to share your age, please?

Loretta: I’m 48.

Interviewer: Okay, and how would you define your gender?

Loretta: Female.

Interviewer: Okay, do you consider yourself to have any disability that impacts you on a daily basis?

Loretta: Apart from my eyes at the moment, no.

Interviewer: Okay, okay, and are you in full or part-time employment and or education?

Loretta: Hmm. No, seasonal doesn’t really come into that, does it?

Interviewer: No, you can talk through seasonality, that's fine. So what what's the nature of that seasonal work?

Loretta: Actually, At the moment, I'm a mad elf playing the bodhran for four hours at the <Event> in <City Name> City Hall. Do you know that? dressed as an elf?! <laughs>

Interviewer: I love that...

Loretta: Honestly, and, and I lost my trousers, and thankfully, I had trousers under them, but I thought my elf trousers fell to my ankles, which obviously was extremely funny to all the children. There you go, yeah?

Interviewer: <laughs> Okay, okay, and so you said you're doing about sort of, four hours at a time on that.

Loretta: Yes, so well it again it's, it's just seasonal. It's over the weekend, so I'll probably say seasonal event work.

Interviewer: Okay, and what's your highest level of education?

Loretta: Third level set, third level in the UK?

Interviewer: Um, so you, you've been to university? You've got a first degree?

Loretta: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, and um, are you in the first generation of your family to go to university as far as you're aware?

Loretta: Ohh yes I am, actually.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you. So how many currently live in your household?

Loretta: Four because <Child 1> is not here anymore.

Interviewer: Yep, and could you give me an overview of the relationships of the four of you?

Loretta: What, how we're getting on? or just what they are?

Interviewer: No, just generally what they are.

Loretta: Oh right, Okay, um, crazy house husband and two sons and no females. Apart from me.

Interviewer: Okay, great thank you. So, finally, I mentioned in the information document that you'll be asked to provide a unique pseudonym. I'll save the meeting recording and subsequent transcripts using this name, and if I quote you in any write-up, I'll also use this name. In both cases, this is done to protect your privacy.

Note that if you want to draw from participating in the study, I'll need you to quote this name so I can identify your data and remove it, but I won't be able to completely remove your notes from the study after January 30th next year, as by this time I'll have consolidated the outcomes from across the interviews. With that in mind, what name would you like me to use for you?

Loretta: Loretta.

Interviewer: Loretta, Okay, well... thank you Loretta. We'll crack on.

Loretta: That's Okay.

Interviewer: So, let's talk 1st about your viewing habits. Um, just talk me through typically how much TV you're watching, when you're watching it. I don't need to know the, the, the sorts of programmes that you're watching, just sort of, how much and when for now.

Loretta: Okay, um, well, more recently, it's probably been most evenings, and it's usually about, from about, about half seven, 8:00 o'clock, and it's... so it's, it's literally the day's work is done, the kids are all sorted and it's just my time. Um now, if I'm really good, I might watch, say... you know, I can never just watch one episode, I'll definitely watch 2 and then sometimes they can be 50-minute ones. That's quite a lot. But then if I'm in that kind of, gotta get ready in the morning, then I'm really good. But, like, last night, I watched about 4 cause I didn't have to, cause the kids weren't at school today, so it meant that I didn't have to get up, and, um, so I ended up watching about 5.

Interviewer: Okay.

Loretta: Until I finish this, this, this season. And that's the problem, if I get into something, I will end up watching it or it's like a packet of biscuits... I can't just, I... I could end up... I don't have... I don't buy biscuits because I've finished the whole bloody packet, so it's the same kind of thing. And so, I can be disciplined if I know that I've got things that I need to do, but then... if I feel like, do you know what I've ended up being on till like 2:00 in the morning? And then I feel really bad about that.

Interviewer: Okay, no problem, we'll come, we'll come back round to that in a bit, but, for now, you, you'd said about... sort of you, you'd watched 5 on, on the bounce yesterday and, you stopped at the end of the series. Do you think if there was another episode, you'd have carried on watching?

Loretta: Yeah I would have because I'd think ahhh, I just need to finish that one more. I have, I have done that yeah.

Interviewer: And does it make a difference to you when you're deciding whether you've got one more episode in you? If it's the last one that's available, or sort of, there's another 5 or 6, but you... you're still awake, so you could go for another one?

Loretta: Yeah it depends, like for instance... So for instance, I go down if, if I've suddenly got, if I, if I decide right, I'm going downstairs, to sleep in the front room because I just like the idea because obviously I'm not gonna watch my laptop and disturb <Husband> um... and then that's, that's when it you know? And if I haven't got something early to go to, I could end up... For instance, I watched, there's um a thing on Netflix, it's called... Ohh you must watch it, you'll love it, it's called 'Dead to me'. it's really good and I'd seen the... and... but they're short. <I'm> seeing <them> again, actually.

It depends on the length, so they're about 30 I think, about 30 minutes long. So I'm more likely to think ohh, and just see how many I might I might actually consciously make the decision, as I start, watching what I'm definitely going to watch at least about 3 or 4. Whereas if it's an hour, 50 minutes, hour, I think um I should really just watch the 1, but I know that I'm gonna watch 2.

And then if I'm, if I'm suddenly, I'm just feeling it and I think what happens as well. It can be dangerous at night, I say dangerous, that's dramatic, but, what happens is your brain gets tuned into it, so you're not, so you're feeling more awake. It... it doesn't tire me, I get overstimulated so I have to carry on watching.

It's a different experience to say reading, whereas you know it's the same sort of, um, and is it, is, it's the same sort of interesting thing you know. You know when you're reading something about yourself, but if there's a boOkay that I'm really into, I literally eat it, I can't put it down. Or I can make a cup of tea and I'll be picking it up, and I've literally got to read it all the way through. I can't just enjoy it for a certain amount of time and put it down. I'm just I'm obsessed with it and that, and actually, that's the, that's the problem with...

When you watch programme, I get obsessed and thinking about it, it is kind of, it kind of can be a bit overconsuming. And I think it's escapism in this other world and um, it just takes, takes you to a different place, I suppose. Anyway, so I'm going off tangent.

Interviewer: No, that's fine. There's a couple of points I'd like to follow up on that you'd said earlier about when you've watched a lot you feel guilty?!

Loretta: Yeah.

Interviewer: Would you feel that same level of guilt if you'd spent that time reading?

Loretta: I wouldn't no, no.

Interviewer: And why's that?

Loretta: I feel with reading, it is controlled and I also find that, like in... and actually I feel I, I really want... I, I really need to... well I need to get a pair of glasses for a start cause I can't read at the moment, and because you, you can get, you get tired. Like I could be reading a boOkay in the evening and that's one way if I'm feeling like I'm struggling to get to sleep... read. I'm enjoying the story, but um it sends me, you know it's a different sort of stimulant if it make sense? it, it's actually isn't stimulant. Ohh no, it makes no sense, I'm reading, but I feel more tired and I, and I get, you get to the point where ohh... you have to put the boOkay down and go to sleep.

Whereas. Um, so you feel that it's a, it's, it's, it's like a nice pastime, it's a good pastime. Whereas, when I'm watching something like... you know, a series on Netflix, I'm overdoing it and I'm, I'm taking too much. It's like there's no balance with it. It's like I can't just enjoy chocolate bar and you know what I mean? I've got to just binge, gotta have too much, and then that's why the guilt, 'cause I've had too much.

Interviewer: Okay... so, so could I confirm that, that a couple of reasons that you're not feeling the same sort of guilt is 1, because the, the reading is something that actually makes you tired and so it's a bit more of a wind-down activity for you?

Loretta: Yeah.

Interviewer: And, and 2, you're just less likely to do it for as long because of that.

Loretta: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, okay... so it's not that you're, you're thinking that either activity is a better or worse use of your time, it's more about um... the amount of time that you're likely to invest into it and how you feel about it afterwards.

Loretta: Yeah, I'd say so, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you. Okay. Um, you talked before about kind of what sounded like a typical week day. Just wanting to check is the viewing similar on the weekend as well? i.e. it's kind of more like 7 or 8 at night, once you've got everything done or is your viewing pattern a bit different at the weekends?

Loretta: No, it's um, it would be the same unless we're going out. Um, and that's, and it's good if you've got um, yeah, unless, unless you, yeah, which we don't really do very much, so it would be the same and it would be the same sort of time as well. Like I would not be a viewer, I wouldn't look at anything in the day.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you and, um do you think, um... Give me an estimate... sorry, on the sort of balance between watching live TV and watching streaming services, such as, as Netflix like you've mentioned, or Prime or Now, or anything else that you might have.

Loretta: I don't watch any television at all.

Interviewer: Okay, so it's 100% video on demand.

Loretta: It is, apart from... I've noticed that for instance... like with Sky, like with the 'House of Dragon', you know the, the whole 'Game of Thrones' franchise, and they've started doing this on Disney Plus... But, if it's something that have been a couple of seasons where they'll release what you know, they release one a week and then obviously if you, if you don't want to... so you're having you're watching it in the same way that you would watch, you know, a television programme or whatever. So you have to watch when they give it to you. Unless you want to wait <until the> very end and watch the whole lot in a binge.

But there's been a couple where... because I... those have been nice because they've been experienced where I shared that with somebody else, like with <Son 1>, like with the whole 'House of Dragons' and that, so that would be on a Monday night. That would be our thing, and I liked that, and that felt like it was a fun thing to do and something to look forward to. And it wasn't over the top like the 'Peaky Blinders'.

Um, but when it, when it's a shared thing, might go, ohh we're gonna, this is gonna be something, we're gonna do together, you would allocate a time during the week and you... and it would be something you would do and then that would be it whereas, whereas when I'm viewing stuff on my own in my own time, I'll be, I'm... basically, it's kind of like I'm doing something for myself away from everybody and, and I end up just bingeing. I think that's not the reason I feel guilty is because I'm not doing something creative, and... but it's just really easy just to sit there and press play. I'm talking at the tangent. Sorry Jo, I'm doing on it.

Interviewer: No, it's all relevant. It's all absolutely fine. Thank you. And actually, coming back to this whole, having almost, making an appointment to, to have a shared viewing experience with someone else...

Loretta: Yeah.

Interviewer: Have you ever tried that with series that are all available together or, or does that just not happen because, because you...

Loretta: I have done, no. I've... no I have, and in fact that was um, and that was good because then you, you then stop yourself 'cause you can't. I did it once. Actually <Daughter> fell out with me. It was 'Altered Carbon' and... but it was only because she couldn't watch and we, we, when she was living at home, was it when she was living at home or when she came? I can't remember. But it was years. It was one of the first seasons of that and urm, and she kept not being available so in to see it because she was doing the things so in the end, I ended up going watching one before her and then I ended up watching them all <laughs> and she was really unhappy. "I'm never gonna watch anything with you again", but with <Son 1>...

Interviewer: yeah, 'series cheating' I, I think it's called.

Loretta: It was, it's called... what's it called?

Interviewer: It, it, it's a thing, it's series cheating.

Loretta: Series cheater, yeah? Well, it was.

Interviewer: Yes, so when, when you, you, you cheat on, on your other viewing half by, by watching ahead of the agreed viewing schedule.

Loretta: <Laughs> Fair enough, but anyway I felt really bad with <Daughter> so I thought I'm not gonna do that to <Son 1> and it's really frustrating, actually, because 'Walking Dead' have just released another I don't know, few episodes? and it was quite a long time because they, we, we were up to date with it and then it was for ages and another sort of um, and I am dying to watch it, but I won't do it without <Son 1> because that's, I just can't do it without him.

Interviewer: So, so it when you have somebody else involved, you create control, but when you do something on your own it...

Loretta: It's just anarchy I'm just like...!

Interviewer: Okay, thank you. So out of interest. Which streaming services do you use the most?

Loretta: I'd say Netflix, and, and then probably Disney Plus after that, are you... we've, we've taken Amazon Prime off and because, well, it's just too many. I just thought we got to. We gotta save something. But it... what I do is if there was something like, for instance, 'This Is Us'. I got this, I got Amazon Prime purely so I could watch all this, the 'This Is Us' series or there's something like that so, um... but Netflix, I would say, is probably my first one.

Interviewer: Yeah, and just looping back to something else you mentioned before about kind of... sometimes even on the streaming services an episode per week is released.

Loretta: Yeah.

Interviewer: Um? If it was entirely up to you, it wasn't something you were intending to watch with someone else, would you watch it as and when it comes out? or would you hang fire so that you, you had a, a bulk of them build up for you to be able to watch at your own rate?

Loretta: If it was something, that, I will be watching on my own that I wouldn't be sharing, you know that none of the others would be interested in watching, I would save them up and I would watch them in one go. If it was something that I think Ohh <Son 2> would like this, this is something we can watch together... then we would you know or <Son 1>, then I would make a point of making that you know on a... I, I watch it once a week.

Interviewer: Okay, okay, so yeah, there's different types of programmes that you may or may not watch with others in the household. The stuff that you're watching with other people. Who do you think tends to make the choice to watch that?

Loretta: Hmm, it's, um, it is a joint choice, because I won't watch something I really don't want to, to, to watch. Yeah, I've got to have an interest, but I, I do like quite a lot of different... I like fantasy stuff, um, but it's got to be appropriate as well. I like the darker sort of stuff so it, depending, so it's kind of if I know it's something that they would like, then it's easy and I know that I like it. You know, I mean, so it's, it's kind of their decision, but it's in, there's an influence there as well, so I don't just sit there. I, I won't... I won't spend an hour of my time watching something I bloody hate. I have done. Actually, there have been some that I thought wow! and then I won't, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah, I think it's called football, isn't it?

Loretta: Yeah exactly that <laughs>, so like if <Son 2> is "ohh yeah, can we watch some of this new programme called Football?", I just yeah if you like, nah.

Interviewer: Yeah. When you...

Loretta: And I've got to like it too. Thankfully I do have quite... I consider myself quite eclectic in my taste.

Interviewer: Yeah, I think I know the answer to the next one, but would you describe yourself as a binge-watcher?

Loretta: Absolutely not.

Both <laughing>.

Loretta: Yeah I would, I, I, I would. Yeah... I've, I've got very addictive personality.

Interviewer: Okay, and what, what to you, makes someone a binge-watcher?

Loretta: Um, I think if there's a, if there's some dependency and, and it's, it's basically not having that balance as in you can't just go and watch one and you know, keep it, keep a lid on it. I think if you, if you, if you end up where a binge watcher is, that if you're watching a programme and you get towards the end. . . If you weren't a binge-watcher, you could walk away. But if you're a binge-watcher and it goes next episode, press, you know, and then you end up letting it play on, then you definitely go into binge territory because it's lack of control isn't it, I think.

Interviewer: Okay, so do you think it's more this lack of control than possibly hours? i.e. from what you're saying I'm, I'm picking up a, a kind of this, that it's very challenging to stop watching, but you might have someone else who's watching just as much as someone you'd consider a binge-watcher, but they're entirely sort of 100% in control of it. They ring-fence this time, they have every intention of, of watching several episodes and then, and then stopping and they, they stopped when they intend to? Or would you still class them as a binger?

Loretta: Yes, I think, I think you're dead right, cause, cause actually, um, typically it is quite a lot of, um, yeah. When you, when you sort of say. . . right for instance, if you think to yourself, "Ohh Okay, we're going to have, um, a 'Lord of the Rings Marathon' for the <indistinguishable>, which is going to be so many hours". So, it's a long period of time, you are technically binge-watching... your, your, your, your, your behaving, you know you're, your, doing that but doesn't necessarily make you binge-watch.

It might be you're treating it like an event. You going "right, I'm gonna do this on a set day at the weekend, and that's what I'm gonna do as a one-off". I would not consider that a binge-watcher. I would consider it binge, you're bingeing on it. You'll use... you know? but you're not a binge-watcher.

Loretta: Whereas somebody who's a binger? They're, as you just said that you're not allocating a sort of a time, you're, you're allowing yourself to carry on watching another one, another one. You don't really plan it. You kind of let it get caught up and in actual fact, if I was to, if I was to be really strict and tot up all the hours of my, what, what? when I watch stuff, and in the ratio to my working or, or to my day is probably not a huge amount compared to somebody who like goes "right. I'm going to watch a certain amount on a certain day and I'm gonna do this certain number of times a week", they could probably end up watching more um screen than someone like me but they are controlled, so I consider binging, it's a control thing.

Interviewer: Okay.

Loretta: Sorry was very long winded. I don't know if it makes sense.

Interviewer: No, no that's fine. I just, I just thought it was worth kind of probing the, the, the, the specific definition. So, so for you, the, the factor is, is... it's much more about how in control that person is of, of the amount they're watching rather than, than perhaps the hours.

Loretta: Yes.

Interviewer: Yeah, Okay. Do you think...

Loretta: It's, it, it, it crosses over a little bit cause obviously you know...? like what I'm saying, you could be a binge... yeah, there is. Obviously, if you are watching as a... quite a lot of hours and you are going to that binge, but it, but I'd say primarily it's about um, you just keep going, you bit. It's like, it's like alcohol. It's the same sort of thing. It's sort of, it's okay to have a couple you know? You might go... "Ohh, go out and have a one", but then you, you don't. You know, you end up just going crazy and bingeing. You might do that once a week, but you're actually, you know, it's that lack of control.

Loretta: Whereas somebody might be, you know, a glass with their dinner and you wouldn't consider that binge, but they probably, if you were to tot up the amounts the glass of wine they had in a week... it wouldn't be binge because it's a glass of wine on an evening after work compared to somebody that goes at the weekend and completely, absolutely gets obliterated.

Interviewer: Yeah so...

Loretta: But probably has less wine, that makes sense?

Interviewer: Yeah, it, it does make sense and I was actually going to ask you what other sorts of binge you could name so you, you, you mentioned sort of binge drinking there. Any other sorts of binge occur to you?

Loretta: Any other binge...? God. I wish I could binge the gym cause that'd be great um, yeah, anything that's addictive. Um? Like not, not for myself, but for instance you, you know it's, it's... you know, you... Listen, you think about retail therapy, and well I say therapy, that's a ridiculous way of it, retail therapy but people that get caught up with credit cards or they, they, they... it's definitely that release of what is it, is it? Endorphins? no it's not endorphin, it's a type of hormone.

Interviewer: Dopamine?

Loretta: It's what?

Interviewer: Dopamine?

Loretta: Dopamine? yes, exactly, so you hear a lot of that where people get caught up in going and put buying things, and they're probably buying a lot for sake of it and getting themselves in loads of debt and I would definitely... that's a binge thing, so, so any anything that's addictive I've, I've considered bingeing addiction. Definitely.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay, thank you and do you think that, do you think binge-ing has any other impacts? You've listed a few, but, but... just kind of summarise the sorts of impacts that you think and we're gonna go back specifically to binge-watching <for this>.

Loretta: Yeah.

Interviewer: What sort of impacts binge-watching might have on someone?

Loretta: I could imagine it might make them a little bit impatient. I, I, I think it can make them... I, I think it just creates a <indistinct, potentially: lack of balance>. Um, and that in itself can affect how you behave or how... affect how you are in everyday life a little bit, actually.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Loretta: You might find less enjoyment, um... with general things. You might, it might, it might be just very easy to slip in cause it, it's... you know, you get that instant kind of like ohh... I'm enjoying this and being left um, to kind of just... do this particular activity and it doesn't require any effort. And therefore stuff around it, generally I think it's, it could be quite impactful. You know? and negatively in, in the sense that you might not get that same sort of hit or enjoyment of other stuff, which would be... you're kind of not really living in the real world which I don't think is a very healthy thing.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Loretta: There you go. Therapy ohh! <laughs>

Interviewer: Okay. Can you think of any positive impacts of a, of a binge-watching session or binge-watching generally?

Loretta: Hmm. Not really...

Interviewer: So, so in, in your case for example. Um, we talked earlier about you maybe saving stuff up so that you could actively binge-watch it over watching it as it's released one episode per week. Why are you doing that? What are you getting out of, out of that? Because you're, you're showing control there, you're, you're, you're waiting. Um, and you're waiting for even longer. So, so you're making a choice to do that. I'm just wondering why.

Loretta: I think, I think, um when I, when I make a decision to watch something at certain, so there is some control. The fact that I won't allow that.

Interviewer: So, like if a new series comes out that you're, you're waiting for, for several episodes to build up before you start watching, you, you, you said you do that sometimes, so I'm wondering, sort of... why it is that you're deciding to do that.

Loretta: Yeah, I see what you say. Yeah, because, there's a, there's a sense of impatience. Um, it, I know that sounds mad because I couldn't, I, like if I'm doing it this shared experience, um, I've managed to reframe that and think, "okay, well, this is an event, this is me doing something with <Son 1> or <Son 2>". If it's something for myself and I'm impatient to find out what happens, and, and therefore, I will just feel kind of <tuts> not anxious, I wouldn't say that, but... I like the idea of having the choice to keep watching if I want to, which invariably does happen.

Interviewer: Okay. So, um, comparing that experience to when you are watching things once a week and with someone else, what are the benefits? Sort of, is there any extra positive impact you're getting from that experience of, of watching with one other person or, or well... however many other people watching it once a week?

Loretta: The benefits of that is that does fit, that feels like I'm doing something that's a, it's a connection there, I think. Then I think when you do, when you're doing something, is share with somebody, it feels like you're doing something. I know that you are effectively not, you're, you're sat there watching something on the screen, with somebody else rather than just on your own, but you've, you've made it an event, sounds a bit bombastic, but you, you've made it an occasion. You've made it something that you're doing with somebody else too, therefore that is a positive thing. But... I'm going to the analogy with drinking, it's like you go out drinking with friends, it's, it, it's a connective thing, you're doing it, you're being sociable if you like.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Loretta: Whereas when you know... to sit there and drink alcohol on your own, which would just be very, you know, that's quite sad thing to do, so that's kind of like that with watching something on your own.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Loretta: And and you enjoy it, it's, it's, it's like a, like a, a fix, it's so it's always afterwards if that sense of hmm... yeah, I didn't need to do that, I should, I should have done something else with my time?!

Interviewer: Okay, well um actually it was later question, but we'll, we'll cover it now. Do you, do you ever feel like sort of the amount that you've watched has displaced other things that you should have been doing?

Loretta: Yeah, definitely.

Interviewer: So can you think of any, any specific examples of times where you've gone... "I really should have stopped, I needed to do this", or "I've cut that short"?

Loretta: I haven't cut anything short, but I, I think it would have been nice to have, it would be nice to be creative again. And I'm, and I'm just, um, and I, and I think that's what for me personally doing this, it's, it's a distraction from that, it's starting and when I say being creative until it could be writing a story, it could, for myself, be writing a song, it could be playing music, um... but then when I'm doing stuff like that, I get interrupted. So um, that's why I go to this because I don't, I can stick the headphones in and it can be me on my own and be left alone. So that's why. But then I feel it's a shame because I could be doing something else.

Interviewer: Okay.

Loretta: That I would like to do, truly.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Loretta: But I could be doing Duolingo, sorry just got a duolingo thing there... Spanish lesson. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yes? How is the Spanish going?

Loretta: Sporadic, sporadic? is, is it sporadic or sporodic?

Interviewer: Sporadic.

Loretta: Sporadic, yeah. It's, it's good they've updated it now, so they're doing kind of weird verbs and stuff and, but I'm gonna try again, I need to get into that. It's getting to the rhythm with things I think isn't it? You have to what, you have to have sort of routines with stuff.

Interviewer: Yeah ohh okay. Can you think of any other impacts that that bingeing has had on you personally? Again, we're sticking to watching now, just watching.

Loretta: Um, I think it's mainly the fact that I should be doing other things with my time.

Interviewer: Okay.

Loretta: Um...

Interviewer: Do you ever feel like you get more out of the programme because you're watching episodes back-to-back?

Loretta: No, I actually think less. What's yours, do you know what's really weird? It's, it's weird how the memory works. I find that I retain less by bingeing. That if I was watching it, you know, say once a week, or you know, but, by watching episodes back-to-back, um it's almost like your brain isn't taking it all in 'cause I can be kind of way down, and I could be like some episodes later on... I'm thinking how did that happen again? Ohh, something about that I've completely forgotten about it. Probably crucial plotlines that I've missed. So it does make you wonder how much I'm paying attention.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you. Okay, what about... we'll think about other people. If I asked you to sort of picture a typical binge-watcher, what sort of person do you think they would be? Describe them to me.

Loretta: A really big fat person with a string vest. And a beer can in their hand.
<laughs> That's what...

Interviewer: I think you've just described Enzo Ohh?!

Loretta: Yeah, yeah, is that the one in them from Mrs Bouquet?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Loretta: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. um...

Loretta: That's me, <laughs> I'm sat here <indistinct>.

Interviewer: Do you think it affects certain age groups more or less?

Loretta: I think the, I think that's the, ohh yeah. I think the younger ones, they're all bingeing on... games you know?, gaming and that and... but then again you could, and you could argue that they're playing with other kids, so they're actually, you know, they've been quite... connected, you know? Whereas I think that maybe, I'm... I don't know, it could be wrong, but I, uh... Okay. So I'm, I'm in my 40s. I would say 30s upwards are probably, be more likely to binge than younger generations. That could be completely wrong there, and it's weird because, if you think about it, when we were kids, it was always like "get off the tv", too much the watching, too much TV. Um... so it's almost replaced that, but in a much more intense way, I think because there was...

Interviewer: Yeah, do you think? Do you think though it's because we've got, we've got the choice of which we watch now and when we were kids there were four channels?

Loretta: Yet there were but, but, the thing is, it was like... I don't think <my sister> and I watched loads. But we could have done it. Depends because <she> had her programmes she watched like 'Dogtanian', remember that one? <hums theme song, laughing>.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Loretta: Um, and all those 'He Man' and all that, but you, there was control on it, but it was always that thing wasn't it. Get home from school, was it 4:00 o'clock? and you just be on it until about 6:00 or whatever. So, you'd watched a solid couple of hours and you could say, "well, that's too much TV for a kid!".

Interviewer: I think I'd be on it until my Nanna kicked me off to watch Countdown.

Loretta: Yeah so yeah, but... so what, so... I think it's an extension of that actually, and I do think it's probably an, I'm just basing it on the fact that, like <Son 1> and <Son 2>, um... they wouldn't be bingers when it comes to Netflix at all. In fact, I'm saying "Ohh, come on <Son 1>, come and watch 'Walking Dead'".

Interviewer: Yeah.

Loretta: "No, I'm playing with my friends" you know...? I'm like ohh, like yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, so that, that, that you've described is sort of him. You're trying to encourage him to start watching with you once the episode is on. Does he find it equally easy to walk away at the end of the episode or you don't know because you, you're only really watching the once-a-week stuff with him?

Loretta: Ohh yeah, no, totally. I remember when we were watching 'Game of Thrones', which we, it, um, obviously we were like one of the last to watch it. So we actually had that all, we could watch as many. So there was an opportunity to binge as well and we weren't watching it once a week. It was all, it was all released in the box set and, and, and I was like "ohh, I can watch one more" and it's like "no mum, I got my homework to do".

I was like so sad and like with <Son 2> and like um, we watched the whole 'Merlin' on Netflix and that, that was again, we, you could, you, you had the opportunity to binge if you wanted to but it, hear me, what, you know it was the whole episode, but sometimes he'd always say "Okay, how long I've got to bed because I want to have my 20 minutes chill out".

His chill-out was not watching something with me, his chill-out was something to do on his own, but he, he would do before he went to bed. So sometimes he cut it short. We watched 'Locke and Key' which is brilliant by the way, so he loved it, but he'd say "oh, okay, can we just watch 15 minutes of it now so that I can get my 20 minutes chill-out?" so it's almost like him humouring me?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Loretta: So it's quite sad, isn't it? <laughing> My kids are like there's something different place but yeah, so they, there is absolutely no bingeyness with them. They can quite happily walk away. They'll watch it, they'll enjoy it, but then they've they've got a life, they've got the things they wanted to do. <laughing>

Interviewer: So, so from everything you've been saying, it's, it's definitely sort of you that drives any kind of bingeing behaviour, you can't 'blame' it on anyone else saying "ohh, let's watch another episode"?!

Loretta: I take full responsibility.

Interviewer: Okay, um when do you think you're most likely to do it? Is it... is it driven by a cliffhanger or is it driven by like it, "it's only 9:00 o'clock and I'm not going to bed anytime soon" or any other factors?

Loretta: Both, those are both. It could be the time. Um, so I'll go ohh, watch one more. Or again, yeah, actually there's a cliffhanger and I, I'm thinking, ohh, I'll, I'll, I'll probably make it possible for me to watch that, I, I can't wait then if there's a cliffhanger, I need to find that so, so one I could end up watching an extra one because it's like ohh I can watch another one because it's a little bit earlier than I thought and I've got some time, you know? 'cause that's the thing. Nighttime is a dead time, but it's, it's, it's that time where I can just be left.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Loretta: And so yeah, both of those reasons.

Interviewer: Yeah, and how often do you find yourself watching?

Interviewer: More on reflection than you intended to when you started watching.

Loretta: It's a 50/50 thing I think I've been... I've become such an experienced expert binger at this point. <laughing> I can like, I can, there is some, some kind of like putting some on its head. Now I'm always, I can control... there is an element of that, so I, I can sort of, I know. But I've lost the thread of what you asked? You say that again <indistinct>?

Interviewer: Um, I'm just thinking about kind of how often when you, when you sit down to start watching TV... Say for example, you start watching TV at 8:00 o'clock, you've decided "I need to knock this on the head" at 10:00 'cause "I've, I've, I've got an early start tomorrow" or something and you find that doesn't happen. Um, how, how often does something sort of like that situation occur?

Loretta: Yeah, okay, so I would say, I would say actually, thinking about it now, so I'm looking at more recently, I would say probably 75%. There is no amount of control, and one of the other reasons as well is I will... So the set up in our house, <Son 2> tends to take over the extension, <Husband> takes over the front room and so I just come to my room and <Son 1> will be in his room. <Husband> always comes to bed for about 10:00 o'clock so I can't watch anything unless I physically get out of bed and go downstairs, which is a bit of a, you know? So in a way, it's like <Husband's> almost my go-to sleep alarm clock, if that makes sense. So...

Interviewer: It does. If he wasn't coming in...?

Loretta: Yes, I know that I would end up watching more definitely.

Interviewer: Okay, okay, and you mentioned before about feeling guilty sometimes 'cause you feel like you should be doing sort of other things with your time...

Loretta: Yeah.

Interviewer: Um... when you have had a, a, ohh an event where you've ended up watching sort of, far more than you intended, um, has it gotten in the way of other things? We, we, we've talked about the creativity piece, but have you ever found it getting in the way of, of the amount of sleep you should have, for example? Or you mentioned at the beginning about going to the gym, that you've kind of had to sacrifice that to make up time that you, you had spent watching TV or anything else, anything like that?

Loretta: Yeah, there have been so those times that, um... So say for instance, um, if I've been on my own, you know, like I've got, I've been downstairs on occasion and I've got the sofa bed out, so I'll get to have my own space, I've ended up being like 3:00, 4:00 in the morning watching something and then I'm absolutely shattered the next day. That, but that, that's, that's the, that's a very occasional time that's actually happened.

Interviewer: Okay. So say we've, we've got to 8:00 o'clock. You've got all your stuff done. You sit down to, to, to the TV. What sort of things do you think about when you're deciding what you're going to watch? The first thing you're going to choose at that point.

Loretta: Well. Usually, if it's um... so, obviously it's, if it's as, if it's a season I'm watching, anyway, that's easier goes straight onto that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Loretta: But, let's say I've watched it all and I'm trying to find something else. I kind of... one of the influences, it's like what's the top ten? I look to see what's that. Obviously the, the genre. Um... funnily enough, right? there's an... in Netflix, you've actually got a category 'binge-worthy TV', and I never choose one from that, I never, I actually...

Interviewer: 'Cause, 'cause you don't need any help in that, in, in that area?

Loretta: No, I don't want to. I want to watch something that I enjoy and you know, so I'm, I'm in constant flux with it. I'm constant, kind of like want to watch me something but I want to be more, I want to try and watch it in a way that's not binge-y.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Loretta: So something that actually turns me off. If I see 'binge-worthy TV', it is, it's, it's like going into... binge-worthy TV, it's like, it's like a really horrible bottle of whiskey instead of a nice bottle of wine, you know?!

Interviewer: Okay. I like that. Um, so when you're choosing stuff, sometimes you're, you're deliberately avoiding, kind of if, if, if you're series is done and it's a, it's a case of picking something new and what I'm hearing is that... sometimes you deliberately avoid getting into something that you think is going to be sort of a bit bingeable and addictive?

Loretta: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, um, so would your ideal content be kind of series of things that are one-offs rather than continuing storylines?

Loretta: No, you see, that's, that's it. I'm gonna... you know this is, this is the weird thing. No, I actually... Because there's always, I feel a bit kind of sad afterwards. If it's just one season, like ohh, you know... Um so, for instance, recently I watched 'Orange is the new black', ohh, that's... I really enjoyed that actually and it was great. I can't remember how many seasons, there was loads, but I did get a bit binge-y with that one. Um, I just love the characters and, and knowing that you've got, actually it's, it's really unhealthy 'cause you think "I've got this whole massive, box of series which is going to last me and I don't have to worry about watching anything else", but then you end up probably bingeing more because you, you know you've got more to come. So you left...

Interviewer: So when. yeah.

Loretta: Precious with...

Interviewer: So when you're looking at a new, a new programme that you've not seen before...

Loretta: Hmm.

Interviewer: Um, do you ever check sort of... how many episodes are available before deciding to, to commit to it?

Loretta: That is part of my decision process, yep.

Interviewer: Okay.

Loretta: But it's not, it's, there have been a, there's been a few that look really good and I've ended up just watching the, and it's just one season.

Interviewer: Have you binged to catch up with friends or family that are watching something?

Loretta: No.

Interviewer: Okay, and I...

Loretta: I don't think I have. Ohh maybe...?

Interviewer: Okay, maybe...

Loretta: No. No, I haven't, not the <indistinct>.

Interviewer: Yeah, sorry. Are you ever concerned about hearing, overhearing spoilers when you're behind on something?

Loretta: Oh not um really. You know what, yes and no. It, it depends on what it is 'cause a lot of the stuff that I'm watching that you know they're not... hmm. no because I don't really get, I don't, it's not, it's just something that's just something that's not come up. I suppose, I mean what there has actually, yeah, because um I remember when <my sister> and I were watching um 'This Is Us', and then again, you see a lot, a lot of the shows you watch. It's very Tarantino, it's um, it's not umm... is the word linear?!

Interviewer: Yeah?

Loretta: A lot of the programmes they, and I love them, you know, you could suddenly be in the future, in the past or in the middle. And things have happened and then they expect... and actually, that's what I liked about 'This Is Us', it was flitting between different times all the time and I like that 'cause you constantly... fitting the puzzle together or you got an answer, but then I like to then have the process of how it came to that. So actually, I don't think I'm... comes down to... I'm not really bothered about spoilers.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you. Um so thanks for everything you shared so far. We've just got two more areas to explore and the first, kind of, kind of carries on from, from where, what we've been talking about now, which is sort of at the beginning, deciding what you're going to watch.

The next part... I'd like to look at is, is kind, of what happens at the end of, of that episode. So first of all, um if you think about the different um video on demand platforms that you use, can you recall what happens at the end of each episode if you don't take any action, say the remote control's poofed into non-existence?

Loretta: And uh <laughing> that's so, when you say what a plot line? or what have, ohh what happens...

Interviewer: Just, just with the platform, what, what would it do at the end of the episode if you didn't take any action?

Loretta: Alright, so um... it comes up with new episode, um... and then you see the bar going, um... so you let that go, and it is goes straight, so you got like about, you know, got kind of, I don't know, a short time. So you'd actually have to physically, you know you'd have to stop it, otherwise it would continue.

Interviewer: And do you feel like it gives you enough time to decide to stop it?

Loretta: I don't. Do you know I would not have thought of that until you just asked it then and I actually don't know. I, I wonder if it should be a little bit longer. Um no, it could be quite irritating if it was longer, because you think you know, "I just wanna watch the... come on. I want to put it on", you know? but actually, it might be a, a way, be interesting to see whether it actually would have an effect because it's just too easy just to go <tuts>, ohh and just let it go cause it is quite fast.

Interviewer: Yeah, do you think that's ever happened to you, that you've, you've, you thought "ohh, I'm gonna stop now" but then it was like "ohh, the next episode is playing I'll let it carry on"?

Loretta: Yeah, I think that happens quite a lot, actually.

Interviewer: Yeah, so um, lets see. Um, with that in mind, what would be the ideal thing to happen at the end of the episode for you personally?

Loretta: I actually think 'cause it's, it's just too convenient and too smooth, right? I think you would actually have, that when it comes to the end of a, an episode, then it should have the credits and it's finished. So it's a bit like a DVD, so you, but so then you would... if you think "ohh, you know what I fancy watching the episode", you'd then be out, you'd have to then go back in and click, actually physically click on um, the next episode. Whatever you wanna watch.

Interviewer: So...

Loretta: And a lot of people probably think... "well, that's just a bit of pain", you know? that would probably piss a lot of people, especially 'cause of being used to this, yeah but it's just so smooth and you've been spoon fed it. Whereas if you actually had to act and retrieve something yourself... I would, I would definitely think that would reduce binge. I think I'd probably go do "you know what, that's been enough for tonight". Um, but definitely that next episode and the, the, the bar moving it's just like "ah, okay then!". It's like someone giving you a, I keep making the alcohol and analogy, what was going on? <laughs> But it's, it's like, if somebody just hands you a glass of wine and you, you think, you know "that's my last one", but someone hands it to you... "ohh, alright then right".

Interviewer: Ohh yeah or tops up your glass with when you're just decided, yeah.

Loretta: Ohh topped up your glass, exactly that, as opposed to going into the kitchen and pouring yourself another. You know you might just think, you know... "I'm messy, I'm going to bed now" you know?

Interviewer: So if you had the choice with your sort of interface, um would you go into the settings and, and, and kind of say "this is what I want to happen at the end of the episode, that it, it plays the credits, it stops and I don't even have a button to hit play next, I have to, I kind of have to browse to choose my next episode"?.

Loretta: Yeah, I think I probably would put that on, I think that would be a really good idea. Actually, I think it would be a great idea for um, giving people a choice because to be fair, you know... um the convenience of it, like for those people who... "Do you know what, I want to sit down and I want to watch 2 episodes of blahdy blah yeah?!", um, it would be annoying for them if they, if this facility's been made available now, take that away, would piss a lot of people off.

Loretta: Um, um therefore, like you said that... I think if you could have the choice and that, and the right messaging to be there? and it's... sort of, let people know that they have a choice, that they can do this. I think that'd be a really good thing to do, and I think I would, I would definitely use that. And then sometimes I might go... I might put it in the settings that I, let it, you know, allow it, if I, if you know, if you think yourself "I want to watch back-to-back two or three episodes, I'm going to feel okay about doing this. It's my Saturday evening, um, I'm gonna reset it so that it will do that", and then you can reset it back. You know you should have a choice, definitely.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay, thank you, so we've got this utopian interface and we can set it to do whatever we want at the end of the episode...

Loretta: Yeah.

Interviewer: What do you think should be the um, default setting for someone when they first set up the account?

Loretta: The default setting should definitely be where you would have to um, go and... physically go and retrieve it. Um, if you want another episode, so it shouldn't, the default setting shouldn't be... because I think you, you, you fall into a pattern um, and if it's made, if it's made from the get-go. Where it just goes automatically into the next episode, that, that is the, the, the sort of um habit that you get into, so definitely should be defaulted...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Loretta: To um retrieve yourself.

Interviewer: When you're watching episodes of sort of 1 programme back-to-back, um... do you ever decide to stop watching to switch to a different programme rather than to stop watching altogether?

Loretta: Um? <tuts> no, I, I tend um, I would say I tend to um... The only time that's really happened is obviously when I'm, if I'm doing a shared thing with <Son 2> or <Son 1>, then obviously I'm flitting between two different programmes, um, but that's different. But if it's something on my side, um once I'm on something I will... I will see that through before I go on to something else. Um, very occasionally, there's been stuff that I've, I've started watching, and I just <indistinct> and... Usually if it's not great, I have continued because I just need to see it to the end. But there has been the occasional one where I've just thought this is an absolute load of shite, I really can't get this back in my life so I'm gonna have to not watch this anymore.

Interviewer: So um, can I confirm then that sometimes you'll, you'll watch stuff because... you feel you have to watch it till the end unless it's so rubbish you can't put up with it?

Loretta: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, okay, so last thing then, um we talked about the, that, that potential default setting um on the interface. Can you think of any other features um that could help people stop watching when they intend to? And that might be the interface... it might be something external altogether... Just anything that you could think of that would help give people more control to, to stop when they intend to stop.

Loretta: I think, I think the likes of, um... 'Star Wars', 'Star Wars', 'Star Wars'... Disney Plus got the right idea in terms of um releasing stuff weekly and then obviously you know, 'cause a lot of people tend to want to watch something when it comes out first of all. I'm not bothered but a lot of people do. I think that gives it some sort of, I think, I think releasing it one a week is great and then obviously the people then have got the choice if they wanna catch up later on um, and I know that Netflix is my...

Interviewer: Sorry, hold that thought, just had the door knock.

Loretta: Ohh, it's okay, go away, that's fine.

Alexa: Someone is at the video doorbell.

<long pause>

Interviewer: Of course, it's not for me!

Loretta: Awe that's <indistinct>.

Interviewer: Okay, sorry, so you were saying about... Um? Disney Plus, releasing things once a week, but people could catch up if they want to, and then the doorbell rang I think.

Loretta: Yeah, but I like the fact that... I think it's a good thing that they're doing that. I mean, obviously they're doing that as well 'cause people are gonna carry on keeping their subscriptions and... we kind of feel, you kind of controlling it, but actually I think it's a good thing.

Where as Netflix? as soon as something gets put up, it's, it's all in one go and nothing... There's a lot more bingeing encouraged through Netflix um than any of the other ones. And also you know and for instance, the fact that you've got a category saying 'binge-worthy TV', they should remove that, I just don't think that's healthy. Now I, I'm turned off by it, but, um, it's encouraging, I don't think, I don't think it's in good to encourage bingeing at all.

It's the same with, you know you've almost got to sort of like, you know, enjoy it. But if you've got to kind of have that message about a bit of a life balance, it's like going to McDonald's. And now they're then having to put little things like, you know, eat, still eat a healthy, balanced diet, and this is, you know, this is a treat kind of thing. Or, you know, drink aware with their ads. It's kind of like it's about, you know, having some sort of balance with what, with what you're doing and not, you know bingeing is not a good thing. So it shouldn't be encouraged.

Interviewer: So, um, but interestingly, you've said that you've deliberately avoided stuff that's been kind of advertised as bingeable. So what about maybe having something like a, a binge rating warning that you could have something that kind of... works out how likely someone is to, to keep watching the next episode after the next episode, and that that's actually on as a, as a warning rather than as a, as a selling point so that people could make a decision that...

Loretta: Yeah, I think that's a very good idea, I think. Yeah, I think you just um, hit the nail on the head there. It's, it should, it should be an, it should be kind of more as a negative thing than than a positive thing. That should definitely... You know, like, it's like um, you know they're doing it now, you know it's like driving in that and you have all these ads now saying you know... um driving when tired and you know, stop for a break, have a coffee, have a... you know, it's, it's like anything, it's... If you do too much of something over a period of time, then it's not a good thing. So there should be warnings of like you know, "give yourself a rest from this". You know, because the irony is you think you're doing something that's restful, but actually it... it's not.

Interviewer: Yeah, so what about... 'cause Netflix have a message don't they? That kind of comes up every now and again asking if you're still watching. Um... do you think maybe that message could come up more often or be rephrased? Or, um, well, anything really relating to a message?

Loretta: Yeah, I think maybe looking at it is, is rephrasing would be an idea as well 'cause it's almost like "are you still watching cause we're gonna, we'll put it off 'cause it saves the 'leccy' but we're not, we don't really care if you keep, want to keep watching" you know? Maybe it should be, you know, it would be another <indistinct> message or what the phrase would be, but... a couple of... does Netflix do that actually? I know that ITV does that.

Interviewer: Um, I, it's been a while since I've used Netflix, but I've um, it certainly used to. I think it was sort of several episodes in before it would come up, but yeah, you'd get a message saying "are you still watching?".

Loretta: Yeah, Okay, yeah, but definitely... Um... It should definitely, yeah, definitely, maybe few more of those? 'cause you probably get one of those after about, I don't know how long it would be. But maybe phrase it in a certain way. So yeah, I do think some carefully worded warnings, um would be good idea, and it's not to make people feel confused, to be a bit aware, to be a bit more self-aware. Although having said that, I've, I feel like I am very self aware about... I take full responsibility for my bingeing <both laugh>, but I do see it as a bit of a, I see it as a vice, I don't see it as a good thing. If I was having a conversation with you now and you saying "how often are you gyming?" and I was just going loads of time to the gym, I'd see that as a much healthier choice. But then again I don't think going to the gym too much is good for you either! You know it's, it's funny cause like um <Son 1>, um, he's not been going, well he's been going a lot less because he's overdone it.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Loretta: And so he's, his back's not great. But I kept saying to him, I think it's great going to the gym but I think you're just doing a bit too much.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Loretta: And I think that that is the whole, that that's, that's it in a nutshell, and that's with everything you know? it's... you can just do too much of certain things, I think.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you. Last question for you then, we're, we're at the end and it could be an easy one. Is there anything else that you'd like to share um, in relation to what we've been discussing today? Nice open one to finish!

Loretta: Yeah, I definitely think you should um check out... um, 'Dead to me' <both laughing>. Ohh that's... I can recommend some, some great um, some great shows anyway. But yeah, but um advisory is to maybe, um spend a little less time watching them. Put them in your diary for the, you know, put it in for a calendar year <both laughing>.

Interviewer: Yeah Okay, well thank you very much for your time and insights. This concludes the interview and I shall hit stop on the recording.

Appendix B

Study 2: Questionnaire

The following is a full copy of the final questionnaire on behaviours and attitudes relating to binge-watching that was created with Qualtrics and released via Prolific. The results of which are discussed in Study 2. Note: Questions written in **orange** are conditional upon earlier responses.

Statements written in **blue** indicate the mechanics of the questionnaire.

The psychology of excessive Viewing on Demand Survey

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you may change yo mind about being involved in the research at any time, and without giving a reason.

By completing this form (please tick each box), I confirm that:

I have read and understood the Participant Information Page in Prolific. I have been able to ask questions (via email) about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

☐ Agree

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.

☐ Agree

Taking part in this study involves a survey completed by the participant via Prolific.

☐ Agree

Personal information collected about me that can identify me (my Prolific ID), will not be shared beyond the study team.

☐ Agree

My words can be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs. My responses to quantitative items will be aggregated with those of the other survey respondents.

☐ Agree

I give permission for the de-identified (anonymised) data that I provide to be used for future research and learning.

☐ Agree

Please enter your Prolific ID so that payment may be made upon completion of the survey:

Prolific ID:

The following questions are asked in order to gauge how representative the respondents are of the UK population. While helpful to the research, it is not compulsory to answer any/all of them.

How do you describe yourself?

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Non-binary/third gender

☐ Prefer to self-describe

☐ Prefer not to say

The next question displays if the participant selected 'Male' or 'Female' in response to the previous question:

Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to say

How old are you?

☐ 18-24 years old

☐ 25-34 years old

☐ 35-44 years old

☐ 45-54 years old

☐ 55-64 years old

☐ 65+ years old

☐ Prefer not to say

What best describes your ethnic origin?

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black/African/Caribbean
- ☐ Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, any other Asian background)
- ☐ Mixed two or more ethnic groups
- ☐ Other (Arab or any others)
- ☐ Prefer not to say

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ☐ Some Primary
- ☐ Completed Primary School
- ☐ Some Secondary
- ☐ Completed Secondary School
- ☐ Vocational or Similar
- ☐ Some University but no Degree
- ☐ University Bachelors Degree
- ☐ Graduate or Professional Degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, JD, MD, DDS)
- ☐ Prefer not to say

The next question displays if the participant selected 'Some University...' or more in response to the previous question:

To the best of your knowledge, are you in the first generation of your family to go to university?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Prefer not to say

The following questions relate to lifestyle. Please answer all questions in this section.

Typically, how many hours per week do you work (please include any apprenticeships/volunteer work, please exclude any time spent in non-work-based education)?

- ☐ 0 to 11 Hours per week
- ☐ 11 to 20 Hours per week
- ☐ 21 to 30 Hours per week
- ☐ 31 to 40 Hours per week
- ☐ More than 40 Hours per week
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Are you undertaking any form of formal education at present?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

The next question displays if the participant selected 'Yes' in response to the previous question:

Nature of education:

- ☐ Full Time (at least 21 hours per week during term time)
- ☐ Part Time (less than 21 hours per week during term time)
- ☐ Short Course
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Including yourself, how many people live in your household?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3 or more
- ☐ Prefer not to say

The next question displays if the participant selected '2' or '3 or more' in response to the previous question:

What is the nature of the relationship(s) in your household (e.g. housemates, couple, family)?:

Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expecting to last 12 months or more?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

The next question displays if the participant selected 'Yes' in response to the previous question:

Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry-out day-to-day activities?

- ☐ Yes, a lot
- ☐ Yes, a little
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

How active do you think you are compared to other people your age?

- ☐ A lot more active than my peers
- ☐ More active than my peers
- ☐ About as active as my peers
- ☐ Less active than my peers
- ☐ A lot less active than my peers
- ☐ Prefer not to say

How many days per week do you typically undertake some form of exercise?

- ☐ 0 days per week
- ☐ 1 or 2 days per week
- ☐ 3 or 4 days per week
- ☐ 5 or more days per week
- ☐ Prefer not to say

*The next question displays if the participant **didn't** select '0 days...' or 'Prefer not to say' in response to the previous question:*

Typically how many hours per week do you dedicate to exercise?

- ☐ Under 2 hours
- ☐ 2 or 3 hours
- ☐ 4 or 5 hours
- ☐ 6 or 7 hours
- ☐ 8 or more hours
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Typically how many hours of sleep do you get per night?

- ☐ 4 hours or less
- ☐ 5 or 6 hours
- ☐ 7 or 8 hours
- ☐ 9 hours or more
- ☐ Prefer not to say

How often do you have trouble getting to sleep/staying asleep?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Hardly ever
- ☐ Monthly/once a month
- ☐ Several times a month
- ☐ Weekly/once a week
- ☐ Several times a week
- ☐ Daily
- ☐ Prefer not to say

In the last 6 months, how often have you felt:

	Never	Hardly ever	Monthly/once a month	Several times a month	Weekly/once a week	Several times a week	Daily	Prefer not to say
that you lack companionship?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
left out?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
isolated from others?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
lonely?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

This section relates to your typical viewing behaviours. Please note that Video on Demand (VoD) refers to any streaming services where you can choose to watch the available content whenever you like.

Please answer all questions in this section.

How often do you binge-watch Broadcast (Terrestrial/Cable) TV/Video on Demand?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Often
- ☐ All the time

Timed - note, some responses/sections are timed to verify participant engagement and provide further insight into responses

How regularly do you watch Broadcast (Terrestrial/Cable) TV/Video on Demand?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Hardly ever
- ☐ Monthly/once a month
- ☐ Several times a month
- ☐ Weekly/once a week
- ☐ Several times a week
- ☐ Daily/once a day
- ☐ Several times a day
- ☐ Prefer not to say

*The next 7 questions (the rest of this section) display only if the participant **didn't** select 'Never' or 'Prefer not to say' in response to the previous question:*

Approximately how many hours of Broadcast TV/Video on Demand do you think you watch in a typical week?

- ☐ 5 hours or less
- ☐ 6 to 10 hours
- ☐ 11 to 15 hours
- ☐ 16 to 20 hours
- ☐ 21 to 25 hours
- ☐ 26 or more hours
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Approximately what percentage of the time that you are watching TV/Video on Demand, is that viewing your primary activity (i.e. not something that you have on in the background while focused on something else)?

- ☐ My main focus is elsewhere for more than 90% of the viewing time
- ☐ My main focus is elsewhere for 60 to 90% of the viewing time
- ☐ It's fairly balanced between the two
- ☐ It's the primary focus for 60 to 90% of my viewing time
- ☐ It's the primary focus for more than 90% of my viewing time

In the last 6 months, which of the following Video on Demand Services have you used? Select all that apply:

☐ All 4	☐ ITVX	☐ Prime Video
☐ Apple TV+	☐ Kanopy	☐ Shudder
☐ BBC iPlayer	☐ Mubi	☐ True Story
☐ BFIPlayer	☐ My5	☐ UKTV Play
☐ BritBox	☐ Netflix	☐ YouTube Premium
☐ Curiosity Stream	☐ NOW	☐ Any other VoD
☐ Disney+	☐ Paramount+	Service
☐ Hayu	☐ Pluto TV	

Approximately what percentage of time that you are watching TV/Video on Demand is spent using each of the following streaming services (don't worry if they don't total 100%):

Participants were presented with sliders for each of the options selected in the previous questions. Any value could be selected between 0 and 100 by moving each slider. Increments of 20 were indicated above the slider (0, 20, 40, 60, 80 and 100).

In the last 6 months, how often have you found yourself regretting the amount of television you have viewed?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Often
- ☐ All the time
- ☐ Prefer not to say

In the last 6 months, have you delayed/been late to/missed altogether, any of the following in order to keep watching a programme?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the time	Prefer not to say
Working on education related coursework	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Attending some form of formal education (e.g. lectures)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Undertaking exercise	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Completing household chores	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Carrying out paid work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Socialising with friends/family	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Going to sleep	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Taking care of personal admin like paying bills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Attending any other type of appointment not listed above	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

**This section is about your perceptions of ‘binge-watching’ behaviour.
Please answer all questions in this section.**

Do you think that the following people are binge-watchers? Read about their viewing habits and select the rating that’s most like them:

Character A enjoys a good viewing streak. They wait for a new series to be released and watch 1 episode each day until the series is finished. Based on the description provided, is Character A a binge-watcher?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Possibly
- ☐ Probably
- ☐ Definitely

Question response time captured

Character B tends to watch around 4 to 6 hours of TV most nights, hopping between different channels until they find something that grabs their interest. Based on the description provided, is Character B a binge-watcher?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Possibly
- ☐ Probably
- ☐ Definitely

Question response time captured

Character C waits until the whole series is available when it's released 1 episode each week. This is because they hate not being able to watch episodes back to back Based on the description provided, is Character C a binge-watcher?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Possibly
- ☐ Probably
- ☐ Definitely

Question response time captured

Character D frequently watches 3 or more episodes of the same series to fill their evening but doesn't hesitate to turn the TV off when it's bed time. Based on the description provided, is Character D a binge-watcher?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Possibly
- ☐ Probably
- ☐ Definitely

Question response time captured

Character E doesn't watch much TV in the week but looks forward to a relaxing 'movie marathon' at the weekend and may allocate 6 or 7 hours for this. Based on the description provided, is Character E a binge-watcher?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Possibly
- ☐ Probably
- ☐ Definitely

Question response time captured

Character F just can't wait to find out what happens next and often loses track of the time while watching 3 or 4 episodes back-to-back. Based on the description provided, is Character F a binge-watcher?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Possibly
- ☐ Probably
- ☐ Definitely

Question response time captured

Character G often has the television on in the background while they are completing their chores and may get through 3 or 4 episodes this way. Based on the description provided, is Character G a binge-watcher?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Possibly
- ☐ Probably
- ☐ Definitely

Question response time captured

Character H has been dealing with a long-term health condition which has resulted in them spending a lot more time watching TV than they used to. Based on the description provided, is Character H a binge-watcher?

- ☐ Definitely Not
- ☐ Probably Not
- ☐ Possibly
- ☐ Probably
- ☐ Definitely

Question response time captured

Now that you have thought more about your typical viewing behaviour and given more thought to what may or may not count as binge-watching, please respond to this question from earlier again: How often do you binge-watch Broadcast (Terrestrial/Cable) TV/Video on Demand?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Often
- ☐ All the time

Question response time captured

Please answer all questions in this section.

Read the following statements and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each one:

	Strongly Dis-agree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Dis-agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
There's no such thing as watching 'too much' television/VoD	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I find that I am more engaged in the content when I can watch episodes back to back	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
If an episode ends on a cliff-hanger, I have to find out what happens next as soon as possible	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I lose track of who's who in a programme if I watch too much of it at once	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When one episode finishes, I'm more likely to watch another if it's quite short	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Read the following statements and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each one:

	Strongly Dis-agree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Dis-agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Reading for hours is a better use of time than watching television/VoD	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I think that access to television/VoD is really important to some people's quality of life	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am likely to keep watching episodes even if I've promised to wait for a friend to catch up	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The mood I am in is likely to influence the amount of television/VoD I watch	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I enjoy anticipating what is going to happen next when I have no choice but to wait for it	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Read the following statements and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each one:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Watching television/VoD has cheered me up when I've felt down	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I find I'm far more likely to stop watching at the end of an episode if the next one doesn't automatically play	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I think that people who watch 'too much' television/VoD are missing out in some way	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I find it easier to remember all the plot lines when there is time between episodes to process them	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel greater connections to characters when I can watch episodes back to back	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Read the following statements and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each one:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I only watch television/VoD when I've nothing better to do with my time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I get frustrated when I have to wait for the next episode	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
VoD interfaces are designed to make you keep watching	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I find it much easier to step away from a programme when there are advert breaks	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I sometimes watch multiple episodes to catch up, specifically so I don't have to worry about spoilers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Read the following statements and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each one:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Many people need to exercise more discipline in their viewing behaviours	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
If I'm feeling unwell, watching television/VoD helps me to pass the time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How an episode ends has a great deal of influence on how likely I am to watch the next one	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I need to exercise more discipline in my viewing behaviour	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
As soon as the next episode starts to play, I am very likely to watch it until the end, even if I hadn't intended to	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Question response time for each set of 5 statements in this section are captured

This section relates to existing and potential Video on Demand interface features. Please answer all questions in this section

Which of the following Video on Demand interface features would help people who struggle to control the amount that they watch? Please indicate how likely each feature might help.

	Extremely unlikely	Unlikely	Neither likely no unlikely	Likely	Extremely likely
Option to automatically return to main menu at end of each episode	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Option to switch off autoplay of next episode	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Auto switch-off at a time of the viewers choosing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
'Are you still watching?' notifications with intervals that may be set by the viewer	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Option to sync with calendar to receive onscreen reminders of upcoming commitments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Which of the following Video on Demand interface features would help people who struggle to control the amount that they watch? Please indicate how likely each feature might help.

	Extremely unlikely	Unlikely	Neither likely no unlikely	Likely	Extremely likely
Displaying time the episode will finish when it is selected	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Chapter or scene markers (as found on DVDs) to help viewers identify good places to pause watching	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Next episode to only autoplay once full credits have run on current episode	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Option to set 'bed-time' to receive 15 minute warning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
'Bingeability' rating to warn viewers which shows tend to be watched in bulk	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Question response time for each set of 5 statements in the above questions are captured

Which of these Video on Demand interface features would you consider using?

Select all that apply:

- ☐ Option to automatically return to main menu at the end of each episode
- ☐ Option to switch off autoplay of next episode
- ☐ Auto switch-off at a time of viewers choosing
- ☐ 'Are you still watching?' notifications with intervals that may be set by the viewer
- ☐ Option to sync with calendar to receive onscreen reminders of upcoming commitments
- ☐ Displaying time the episode will finish when it is selected
- ☐ Chapter or scene markers (as found on DVDs) to help viewers identify good places to pause watching
- ☐ Next episode to only autoplay once full credits have run on current episode
- ☐ Option to set 'bed-time' to receive 15 minute warning
- ☐ 'Bingeability' rating to warn viewers which shows tend to be watched in bulk
- ☐ Other (please describe)

Appendix C

Study 2: Demographic Data

Demographic details are as follows:

- Gender
 - Female: 207
 - Male: 191
 - Decline to respond (DtR): 2
- Age
 - 18to34: 109
 - 35to54: 143
 - 55+: 147
 - DtR: 1
- Ethnicity (simplified)
 - White: 342
 - Asian: 28
 - Black/African/Caribbean: 14

- Mixed: 9
- Other/DtR: 7
- Education
 - Up to Vocational or similar: 148
 - Some University time plus: 248
 - * In first generation of family to attend: 160
 - * Not in first generation of family to attend: 82
 - * DtR: 6

Lifestyle details are as follows:

- Working Hours
 - Up to 30 hours per week: 182
 - More than 30 hours per week: 206
 - DtR: 12
- currently Studying
 - In education: 43
 - * Full time: 21
 - * Part time: 13
 - * Short course: 8
 - Not in education: 352
 - DtR: 5

- Household
 - Live alone: 51
 - Live with 1 other person: 146
 - * Couple: 190
 - * Housemates: 9
 - * Parent and Child: 7
 - Live with 2 or more people: 199
 - * Family: 179
 - * Family and Housemates: 3
 - * Housemates: 17
- Disability Declared
 - Yes: 124
 - * ability to carry out day-to-day activities not affected: 33
 - * ability to carry out day-to-day activities affected a little: 69
 - * ability to carry out day-to-day activities affected a lot: 22
 - No: 264
 - DtR: 12

Appendix D

Study 3: Tweets Log

The following tables all gathered ‘Traitors US’ Tweets posted during the first 24 hours of the release of ‘The Traitors US’ on BBC iPlayer on January 13th 2023 along with any replies (regardless of date). The results of which are discussed in Study 3.

Note, the last 2 rows of the table on each page are the total number of tweets allocated to each category and percentage of total tweets that this represents. Content of the tweets has been removed to ensure anonymity.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

	DATE	TIME	POSTER ID
FORMAT COMPARISON	Prefers US version		
	Prefers other formats		
	Comparison of hosts		
	Observation of similarities		
PRODUCTION ELEMENTS	Drama (cast/situation)		
	Challenges		
	Aesthetic (Sound, location, edit)		
ACCESSIBILITY	Where available / Broadcaster		
	Captions (lack of after ep. 2)		
CASTING CHOICE	Enjoys celebrity cast		
	Dislikes use of celebrities		
	Observation about host		
	Fan of the host		
	Dislikes the host		
	Diversity of the cast		
	Mention of specific cast members		
GAME PLAY	Strategies used		
	Alliances formed		
BINGE-WATCH	binged (or intend to)		
	skipping scenes (usually challenges		
	Querying complete series release		
SPOILERS	Appeals that they don't happen		
	Avoiding giving/seeing spoilers		
	Anger at spoilers		
ANTICIPATION	Excitement about show/intent to watch		
	Disinterest in the format		
REACTION TO SHOW	Disappointed/disliked it		
	Hate watching it		
	Enjoyed it		
	Good ending /gets better		
	Poor /predictable ending		
	Should I watch? What happens?		
	Recommend to watch/persevere		
SPELLING			

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TWEET ID	13AD 16A	14-Jan	08:47:00	#251																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																													

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Tweet ID	Date	Time	Poster ID
13AD 58N	16-Jan	14:19:00	#010
13AD 58O	14-Jan	01:19:00	#446
13AD 58P	14-Jan	08:11:00	#248
13AD 58Q	14-Jan	09:47:00	#381
13AD 58R	13-Jan	21:08:00	#156
13AD 58RI	17-Jan	01:33:00	#476
13AD 58R2	13-Jan	21:32:00	#469
13AD 58S	14-Jan	02:29:00	#159
13AD 58T	15-Jan	06:42:00	#340
13AD 58U	17-Jan	20:33:00	#170
13AD 58V	14-Jan	09:25:00	#083
13AD 58W	13-Jan	23:02:00	#361
13AD 58X	14-Jan	21:10:00	#044
13AD 58Y	14-Jan	19:39:00	#152
13AD 58Z	14-Jan	10:39:00	#370
13AD 58AA	15-Jan	13:04:00	#389
13AD 58AB	15-Jan	14:39:00	#389
13AD 58AC	18-Jan	22:15:00	#260
13AD 58AD	15-Jan	03:19:00	#110
13AD 58AE	14-Jan	09:09:00	#051
13AD 58AF	19-Jan	14:26:00	#364
13AD 58AG	14-Jan	13:19:00	#548
13AD 58AH	17-Jan	23:33:00	#030
13AD 58AHI	17-Jan	23:38:00	#030
13AD 58AHIA	17-Jan	23:39:00	#030
13AD 58AI	13-Jan	23:10:00	#123
13AD 58AJ	14-Jan	13:14:00	#001
13AD 58AK	15-Jan	19:33:00	#327
13AD 58AL	14-Jan	18:09:00	#564
13AD 58ALI	14-Jan	18:54:00	#339
13AD 58ALLA	15-Jan	10:35:00	#564
13AD 58AM	15-Jan	13:51:00	#411
13AD 58AN	14-Jan	16:48:00	#358
13AD 58AO	16-Jan	15:51:00	#269
13AD 58AP	16-Jan	01:13:00	#031
13AD 58API	16-Jan	01:14:00	#032
13AD 58AQ	14-Jan	17:43:00	#477
13AD 58AR	13-Jan	21:56:00	#293
13AD 58AS	14-Jan	00:52:00	#294
13AD 58AT	14-Jan	00:11:00	#369
13AD 58AU	13-Jan	23:59:00	#532
13AD 58AV	13-Jan	22:09:00	#160
13AD 58AW	14-Jan	09:50:00	#491
13AD 58AX	14-Jan	09:03:00	#020
13AD 58AY	14-Jan	19:44:00	#498
13AD 58AZ	13-Jan	22:51:00	#002
13AD 58BA	15-Jan	14:13:00	#193
13AD 58BB	13-Jan	20:43:00	#014
13AD 58BC	14-Jan	06:36:00	#133
13AD 58BD	17-Jan	19:11:00	#412

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[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

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Appendix E

Study 4: Industry Dialogue Transcript

The following is a transcript from the dialogue held with Simon Roberts and Colin Greenwood. A conversation that was conducted with industry professionals as part of Study 4.

Interviewer: OK, brilliant. OK, so so thanks both again as as one of you mentioned, when we were chatting before, it's probably worth just um you letting me know about your um role and background with, with, um with IPlayer. So Colin, would you like to go first?

Colin: Can do, um so Simon and I basically kind of co-lead the video iplayer and partnernships design team. So, essentially the BBC is divvied up into um various portfolios which various of mine and Simon's peers lead on. So video is essentially the the players, so the actual media players, that's obviously pretty key to the sort of product experience and they're shared across lots of different products. And then iPlayer being the BBC's main long form video products and main consumer of those players, that's kind of key.

Colin: And then partnerships is the bit of the BBC's product group that focuses on um all those content distribution partnerships, not the commissioning and content creation partnerships or the distribution partnerships, so the relationships with Sky and Google and all the... and the TV manufacturers.

So like we, we sit as part of product group, but we're, we work really closely with marketing and editorial and distribution and business development in other parts of the BBC.

So, um, my... I won't go into detail the bits that I look after because Simon and I kind of run the team jointly, but yeah, we sort of divvy that up between us, yeah.

Interviewer: Ok, great, thank you. And how long have you been um, with sort of in this particular role and with the BBC as a whole?

Colin: So I've been in a version of this role because this role's sort of morphed over the years, but essentially in the iPlayer space for three years now, which is kind of unbelievable <laughs> um and then was um doing sort of staff facing stuff still in the design role for a couple of years before that so I've been at the BBC for maybe six years in, in January and then before that I was basically an agency creature for 15 years, I worked in digital and service design and brand agencies doing various flavours of experience design. So that's me.

Interviewer: Ok, great, thank you, Simon?

Simon: Yeah and um, in terms of history um I've just past two years in iPlayer in this creative director role with Colin.

Colin: <exclaims> I've had this two years? <laughs>

Simon: I know. It's unbelievable. Yeah, it is crazy. It is crazy. Only just. But yeah, just past that two years and then prior to that, I worked as a senior designer on uh sounds... um and prior to that, uh a senior designer on iPlayer and then before that I was uh, so that was my time in public service and then before that I was at BBC Studios for a few years um which is as you know, the commercial arm of the, the BBC working on load of different projects there, but still as a designer, a UX designer and then uh before then I worked agency side as well for I think about 3 and a 1/2 years uh and freelanced. So um yeah... so I've kind of been in both studios and, and public service BBC.

Interviewer: OK, great. Thank you. OK. So what we'll crack on with um is... um and, and try not to be influenced by the things that I was sharing before, before we started the call. But I, I guess just to kick things off... um, what's your vision of an ideal consumer experience on BBC iPlayer? The, the, the sort of gold standard of what you want to deliver? A nice big open question to start!

<all laugh>

Simon: Hey, do you want to go? Colin? That's... I might need a coffee before I answer that one, so yeah...

Colin: Ha ha... yeah look, I, I'm gonna pick up that that ethical... I'm gonna get right to the heart of the matter. Um... so this, this actually, interestingly popped up in my MSc, so that... I'm sort of cheating a little bit here, but um, I think it's very unclear because the question of... um, what is a valuable BBC experience is very fuzzy. So, I'm, I'm going to, I'm gonna quote someone I'm, I'm sure you've come across, I actually dug it out while we were chatting before.

Colin: There's a really good quote by two academics called Lowe and Martin cited in Mazzucato article where um, where they said "*the BBC, like other organisations delivering public value, is often torn between evidencing market value, a concept strongly embedded in commercial logic where success depends on achieving sufficient popularity and embodying its mandate as a not-for-profit institution with values that in principle, contraries that logic.*".

<Quote from 'The Value and Values of Public Service Media' [95]>

So there is this, this fundamental tension where we never really in the 100 years of the BBC existence, pinned down... exactly what is the value we're trying to deliver. We talk about public service value but you start to unravel exactly what does that mean, um, and you quickly find yourself in a place where we're, we're trying to be this sort of force for good... on the one hand, at the same time, we're kind of trying to take take on our competitors or we have to hold our own against our commercial competitors who have a whole completely different set of stakeholders, completely different set of um, are running on a completely different logic. And I don't, you know, I don't think we've ever solved it, I don't think Tim Davey <Director-General, BBC since 01 September 2020> even wants to solve it. I think it's a bit like Israel and Palestine, it's one of those tensions that can probably only be, be managed rather than solved.

So in terms of an ideal iPlayer experience, I mean I would like someone to watch loads and loads of content and get loads of value from it. I would like someone, but at the same time for someone to... um, to open their minds to, to things they haven't come across before and challenging new perspectives but also want it to kind of inform their life. I don't, I wouldn't want to be sort of sucked away from their family life or their hobbies and just sort of, you know, burning their eyeballs and, and sort of, you know, competing with sleep like um, um, the, the Netflix, the Netflix dude said all those years ago. So yeah, I mean that's, that's a vague answer, but I think it's just... it's intention is, is my best answer.

Simon: Yeah. No, I think all I'd add to that, I think I, I personally think that um, that tension is healthy and I think it's something that is impossible to resolve. Like you know, if I sit and think about it, I can't really see any other way um... that the BBC wouldn't have that tension because then you would slip into kind of like more of a... um, it wouldn't be objective, it wouldn't be kind of like a reflective of the broader media landscape, and I think that's the other thing... that media landscape is in a constant flux sooo I think that is something that absolutely, you know, the BBC has to kind of morph and shape to adapt to it and, and, you know, and the kind of epoch we're in at the moment is particularly bonkers because, you know, you've got a kind of mass decentralisation of media.

You've now got artificially created media that is just proliferating and like, the genies out the bottle with that as well. So it within, you know, that and, and, and the, the ruptures of that like disinformation and, and kind of bad actors, if you like leveraging it. um it's, it's just... it's just a really, really difficult space to be in um and in terms of what you know, I guess when I get out of bed in the morning and think about the BBC and think about what differentiates us between some of our commercial competitors, I think you know there is that, that inform, educate and entertain... you know, it's, it's, it's been around forever but it is quite a nice sound principle to kind of anchor your thinking really about what we're doing. And I do think we are different. We are different to a Prime, we are different to a Netflix um and you know, we need to keep a view of that, I think.

Interviewer: Yeah, I, I always liked the idea of sort of the whole Aunty Beep thing that it was kind of this, this benign figure that um, that wants to do something nice for you, but also, also sort of make sure that you're growing as a person as, as well. I always thought that the, the analogy was, was an appropriate one that that sort of embodied the inform, educate and entertain.

Simon: Hmm...

Colin: I, I think, yeah, yeah... but it's, it's interesting, isn't it because inform, educate and entertain. I mean, they're, they're, their, their intention... I mean that that kind of summarises it really, that's been there from the get go and then and then the other the only other thought was um, was around, around how the BBC's attempted to sort of square this circle of the past. So when I first joined the BBC there was a lot of talk about kind of time well spent and...

Simon: hmm... and that was a kind of concept where we were trying to kind of yes! hold our own against our commercial competitors but, but also um, you know not, not be, not, not of this extractive, distracted distraction, distracted?!
<ha>,

Simon: distractional

Colin: distraction based relationship with our, with our audiences. And it's an interesting idea, but you very quickly find yourself in this paternalistic space where you know we're sort of "worthy" and watching the BBC is like "eating your broccoli" um, and, and you know, we need to be entertaining and that's, that... the BBC is definitely moving towards being more entertaining in response to kind of how, how um the Netflixes is in the world position themselves.

Simon: Yeah, and...

Colin: So, so, so there is... so I guess the point is that that whatever we try to kind of square the circle, you know it, it, it's... we struggle but there is something in that time well spent concept which I think is, is important. It's like, like I said, it's not about burning people's retinas with hours and hours of constant watching. It's something really important about enjoying the content, gaining some from the content, it enhancing your life and not kind of competing with your life.

Simon: Yeah. And I guess what I was getting at earlier is I think that tension is becoming more and more pronounced because what we're starting to do is the way people consume the media is they're, they're, they're... it's becoming normalised to be addicted to the way that the content's served up, so often in the discussions that you know me and Colin are in with our wider stakeholders and, you know, leadership teams that, you know, TikTok comes up quite a bit as a, as a paradigm, as a way of kind of serving media and obviously that isn't benign and it is something that is, you know really um uh... I'm trying to use the right words that aren't too hyperbolic, but it is potentially quite dangerous and it is something that is um, you know, needs to be kind of really kind of cautiously approached... and I think it's challenging because if we want to have that reach, that retention that, that dialogue with the public and what they're used to and how their consumer stuff going to them, if we want to do all that stuff, we're kind of having to go through these, these really kind of, you know, ethically kind of questionable kind of means of doing it, uh and I think something that's going to become more and more challenging for us over the next, you know, couple of years I think.

Colin: Yeah, it does it... it's a really, really good point actually, Simon. It's an interesting conversation, we'll chat about this stuff all the time, but it's like the, the, the world is forcing the BBC to take a side basically...

Simon: yeah

Colin: ...that that's kind of what it means. Like, you know, if we're to copy our commercial competitors and try and take them on on their turf... yeah, we end up in the TikTok space and, and that is dark.

Colin: I mean, you know, it's, it's probably 15 years ago, there was like a really interesting thread of debate about should these algorithms be treated as controlled substances in the same way that alcohol and tobacco and narcotics are because, you know, they, they, they work and then gambling 'cause they work on the same, essentially work on the same principle as gambling, it's the uncertainty principle.

Simon: hmmm

Colin: So um, so, you know, is the BBC going to kind of go down the rabbit hole, you know, normalised as it is but kind of go accept, accept the fact that these um addictive algorithmically generated experiences are now the norm... or are we going to sort of draw a line in the sand and, and, and take a hit on our commercial impacts and perhaps leave ourselves kind of being a bit irrelevant, you know?! and getting squeezed out the picture...

Simon: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Colin: ... which way are we going to go? I mean, I should add... there's some. There's some planning work going on at the moment and the short form video has been discussed a lot. Like, you know, if we're trying to grow iPlayer as a platform, how deep do we want to go into short form video? Is it that we just treat it as complementary marketing content to sort of promote our long form content? Do we treat it as like a destination itself? So you've got, like clips from, from, from, from um, from a football match that you know is destination content, bit of short form video or do we want to go all out and just basically, you know, create it, make the purpose of iPlayer this kind of video sharing platform and it, and it, and it, and it... and we, we sort of follow the TikTok and then a YouTube bottle. So yeah...

Simon: Hmm, yeah. And I was just gonna say 'cause we're, we're on those platforms now, aren't we... so we're on TikTok. So the, the other day... a bit of anic' data... but my um, my, my son showed me a clip of the BBC weather done on TikTok in a kind of mean format where they were using kind of vernacular from his generation. So it was like skibbiddy rears and all this sort of <laughing> crazy terminology that I'm still learning, and it was kind of like, I kind of watched it and it was kind of excruciatingly embarrassing and he thought it was ridiculous as well.

And I'm not knocking it. I'm not knocking the team that put that together or whatever 'cause it was, it was done in a bit of a fun way, but it, it, it was a very stark kind of example of us embracing a platform and, and going with it and, and, and it kind of made you think is this right?, is this right for what we're trying to do is this right for us as an organisation? So there's a very stark example of that which kind of made me think.

Interviewer: It's reminding me, I'm fairly sure recently I saw an advert for I think, Leeds armouries or something that was done in a similar vein with um, a gentleman who I'd say was probably in his 70s, walking around and using the same language, very tongue in cheek um but uh, yeah, the like you say, it's, it's, it's that uncomfortable dichotomy and...

Simon: Yes.

Interviewer: ...and kind of you either have to do it tongue in cheek or run the risk of just coming across as too "try hard" to, to fit it.

Simon: Yeah, since the Waitrose just did a campaign for brats, you know the summer of brats. So the... and, and it was... it got panned like because, you know, I say it got panned you... there was a lot of criticism online about it because it was just... it felt very bizarre seeing sales staff at Waitrose doing all these kind of TikTok memes and stuff, you know, around the fruit and veg or at the, the fish counter. It was just a bit weird.

Colin: Mm hmm

Simon: So yeah, another interesting example of trying to adapt.

Colin: I mean, social media's always been about credibility, hasn't it, and people spot a phoney in two seconds, I guess is that going on. It's worth adding though... just, just, you know, as a, as a... as a final musing on this point that what is a good iPlayer experience like, you know, you know, I hope... I hope and I don't know, but I hope that this will start to converge like... chat to younger members of the team, you know they're very conscious that they are the product when they're like hammering through bazillion tick tock reels, you know there is some awareness of where your data is going... not much to be honest with you, that data, the service exchange seems to be a kind of a... privacy seems to think that that is a generational worry and, and you know, young members again, this is all anic' data of course, young members of team don't seem to worry about that too much, but um, but they're very aware that, like hammering away on Instagram reels for two hours in bed at night is not a good use of time.

So... you know, yes, we have optimised how to make addictive experiences by tapping into like capabilities and our, or structures of our ape brain.

Colin: But whether, whether we will continue to use that to kind of waste our lives away or whether there is room for to, to, for that to become a, you know, a richer, more time well spent type experience. You know um, as a next generation wraps ahead round, it rejects the bits they don't want, you know, remains to be seen.

Interviewer: Thank you. So moving on slightly from that then... if, if we think about...

Colin: I'm sounding like a pompous arse there, sorry, but you know what I mean.

Interviewer: No, not at all.

Simon: That's a good point.

Interviewer: It's, it, it goes very nicely into the next area that I want to talk about, which is kind of that that um... self-awareness and I speak as someone who... the next episode plays and I've got a monologue going in my head that I really need to reach the remote and hit stop, I've got to get on with other things but... ah heck, we're a couple of minutes in now, let it, let it run and, and, and the whole sort of, trying to balance what I know I should do versus, versus what I, what I want to do. Um so I guess what I'd like to know, when the conversations are coming up about new developments or, or, or you're sort of building on old developments... what discussion, if any, is given to that balance between encouraging the engagement and and, and sort of promoting more um autonomy? <incoming email chime> And I've seen the ref come through, thank you. So um, kind of that piece about giving people what they want but, but trying to do so in a responsible way and if it's not a discussion that's happening, that's... that's fine. I'm, I'm happy for your reflections on it as a concept as well.

Simon: Yeah...

Colin: Sorry, say that, say that tension again, sorry, I didn't...

Interviewer: So that... the tension between supporting the users with what they um, what they want and, and perhaps what they should have, so kind of making sure they've got their, their complete autonomy over their viewing experience, because I'm assuming that you know we're not, we're, we're not judging someone that, that is choosing actively to, to spend a large amount of, of time watching. There's, there's all kinds of people in all kinds of circumstances where, where having access to, to this form of media and having so much control over what's sort of... not having to wait weekly for series to be dropped, for example, that's, that's a good thing for them. But I guess I'm just wondering are there conversations around um... kind of, are we providing a platform that might be an unhealthy distraction um for others and are, and are we presenting content in a way that's encouraging people to override their best intentions?

Simon: Yeah, I mean, I was just thinking of that. So those conversations do flare up now and again, say for example, at the end of playback we had erm, some recommendations work that we were looking at and there was some very active conversations about what was right to do there in terms of recommending additional content for people. But, but I guess this goes back to what we were chatting about earlier is that it's a, it's a slippery slope for us.

So if I go back a couple of years when I was first working on iPlayer, the idea of trailers before content was, you know, there was a lot of pushback from it. It was kind of like something that from a UX point of view we, we question the value of when we tested it, users pushed back on it as well. I'm pretty sure we had quite a bit of pushback from research going right back. I'd have to check that.

Simon: Um, Now, looking at it now, it's such it's such the norm. It's such a kind of feature that's baked into a lot of our competitors, that people habituate and now there's a kind of complete acceptance of that um happening before they get to the content that they've actually selected to watch. So, back to that kind of point around shifting sands, it is really tricky because um, stuff that you know, felt questionable two years ago... becomes the norm, becomes accepted and then you know, we kind of have to embrace it. Again, back to that tension, um. we don't have to, but if we're trying, if we're trying to hit certain metrics, you know there are ways of more effectively doing it and we can see how competitors do it. We test it with users, they don't have a problem with it anymore, so it gets kind of, you know, becomes an option for us to explore.

So yeah, it's, it's a challenging one. And then back to kind of the point around, you know, our colleagues, I think um, this this kind of parallels of accessibility, I think in terms of the accessibility... accessibility wise we have, or at the moment there's a team working on some new guidelines for us around what, what we need to hear in terms of requirements, what's expected, what's best practise and we kind of have that as a guide for the team, you know, when they're actually doing the design work. And I think ultimately it would be good to have some sort of framework for us when we're doing design work as well so we can kind of meaningfully kind of measure, you know the, the, the, the proposals that we've got around an interaction, you know... how, how are... you know, are they good for the user? What's the kind of implication of them and the... that law of unintended consequence, consequences... you know, what could happen with, with this particular pattern? But it feels really early days with that. Doesn't feel that we've it doesn't feel very robust. I don't know, what do you think, Colin?

Colin: Yeah, no, I, I, I totally agree. I made a couple of notes as you were talking, I think, I think, I think um basically... I don't think we think about, I mean, I think you've got to be realistic, you've got to be real here.

Colin: The overwhelming focus is on driving growth, driving weekly active accounts, so and you know we, we... I would say yeah, that... so I'd say the overwhelming momentum and energy of the organisation is focused on driving growth. There is a kind of cultural, kind of cultural break on that and I think it's a cultural thing where people get really uncomfortable if it feels like we're copying, you know, a Snapchat or a TikTok and you see a leadership sometimes talking about, you know, of course, we want to do things in the BBC way, and it's a bit sort of vague way, a little nod to the fact that, you know, we don't want to have this sort of extractive relationship with our, with our audiences. But I'd say, like 99.9% of the time, we're just focused on driving growth <laughs>. What would you think? I mean, do you think that's fair, Simon?

Simon: I think so. And again, it's back to that tension, isn't it? And we have raised that where we're kind of trying to measure ourselves against the same metrics that a commercial organisation is and that, and that is just difficult. And you know, we've done some exercises within the team um around kind of dark patterns, around kind of more kind of insidious design and, and we understand it and you know, back to my kind of studio days, my BBC studio days where I did a lot of work around display advertising and I've bored Colin with these anecdotes many, many times, but we used to do some very, you know, within digital publishing, there are some very established ways of getting more eyeballs on, on ads and, and they work. And they're very, very easy to do. So it's kind of like, um you know, that again, who stops us doing those things too. At the moment, we're kind of making a call on it and generally, there is a consensus that we shouldn't do, you know, um, kind of more, you know, dark patterns, um but there... that, that tension is becoming ever more apparent and it's not quite clear how we, how we kind of push back on it and meaningfully kind of push back on it, you know.

Colin: Yeah. I do think what is interesting is like, you know, the, the role of choice in all this like... You know, linear TV, old fashioned linear TV was, was, was designed to be addictive in the same way that TikTok was.

Simon: Yeah.

Colin: It was like a very crude version of TikTok basically.

Simon: Yeah.

Colin: And um, and people forget that you know you the, you know, the BBC hoped that you'd spend an entire evening. And I remember as a kid, you know, like you'd, you'd, you'd sit down and spend an entire evening with this, this, this schedule of programming. So this isn't a new thing, but there's a question here, like, and Simon, you mentioned this... like, there's this tension in, in I guess in our profession, in the design profession, is like to what extent are we led by the audience and to what extent do we lead the audience?

And we're kind of finding ourselves, like I say, as, as the world forces the BBC to... almost take sides, umm, we're, we're, we're forced to kind of take, have a, have a point of view on that. So you know, should we just be led by the audience and just serve them up the kind of algorithmically generated filler that that they seem to want? um or... you know, should we take a stand against that and actually try and make the experience kind of slightly more frictionful? Like you said, Simon, and, and, and, you know, create natural break points.

And it's, it's, it's interesting. I mean, you know, people... people don't want choice really, people don't... choices is an anxiety making thing.

Colin: So, I think everyone thought the back of Netflix is massive growth, that, that all the, you know, the future of long form video is basically like the, the, the library shelf of content, the rails and you pick something you'd watch it and why would you not like that you can choose whatever you want but people don't like it and so within the BBC, we're starting to kick around ideas now as to how can we bring together the, the, the... the the power, the choice, the power of video on demand, combined with the kind of lean back curated ease of of, of, of linear experiences. So again, you know, to, to what extent should we be trying to make that just... shamelessly and nakedly addictive? I don't know. I guess we'll find out as we figure it out.

Simon: Yeah, and, and there is, you know, there's so much opportunity around um, you know, to your point earlier, Colin, how generations now hopefully, I mean, I'm kind of, I'm kind of on the fence a bit because sometimes I sit and read stuff that, you know, is profoundly depressing in terms of people's um... acceptance of these type of eh mechanisms, now that you know, uh... interactions that we have daily, people just seem to accept and they seem to becoming more and more kind of extreme. Like a good example being people forming relationships with AI, I mean and that's becoming a real big thing where, you know, generations of young guys... the article I read was, was mainly about males, you know, forming these relationships with AI, I mean, that's to me is highly disturbing and worrying so, but on the other side, as you were saying earlier, Colin, you know, there does seem to be a bit more of an awareness around what's going on and these, these, these things that we interact with and the kind of the payoff for them. Um...

Colin: So I'll, I'll kind of hope that, you know, maybe there is something in there that the BBC could tap into, maybe we could, do, you know, we, you could have a viewing experience that explains some of this stuff or it does have a healthy friction that is... caveated and you know and, and, and framed, you know, and I think, and I think people might be receptive to that if it's done in the right way, I, you know, I think it could be something quite exciting and could be really kind of innovative and quite different. Um...

But it's again, it's carving out the time to explore that and having those conversations when you're when, you're speaking to a product, you know, exec who's on the hook for a certain metric, it's very difficult to start talking about introducing healthy friction and educating people around dark patterns or whatever. You know what I mean? But... you know, we're trying to do that and maybe we should do more of it and maybe there that there is a, you know, a cause for optimism there.

Colin: Yeah, I think there is a kind of cultural, there's a cultural break on some of this stuff, which I think you know, people like me and you and the exec PMs and you know, the doers of the organisation collectively feel. But ultimately, if this was to, if the BBC was to really embrace this, it would need to come from Tim Davey, you know, the overwhelming pressure from leadership is to grow ahead of the charter renewal. You know, all these... you get into kind of questions of institutional survival and that drives a lot of what the organisation is doing.

Colin: But you can imagine the Tim Davey, Post '27, post December 2027, when we got the new charter, whatever shape that takes, it says, “right, you know, we’re, we’re, we’re set for the next 10 years, now we’re going to reinvent the relationship between, you know, a media company and its, and its, and its audiences, you know, to truly deliver public service value and this is what it looks like.”, I think the organisation would be like 100%, you know, excited and behind that um, but you know, whether that’ll happen or not is a, is another matter.

Simon: Have you emailed him yet, Colin?

<all laugh>

Colin: Funnily enough, funnily enough, I haven’t... “Tim, I’ve got an opinion for you. I’ve solved it, I’ve solved it, mate. Just, you can head to the beach. I’ve got it all worked out!”. <laughing>

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah, I mean I, I suppose... Many moons ago, when maybe there was a time when the, the licence fee was, was sort of less under threat, um... that the the BBC would have the space to, to, to, to do what it thinks is right, rather than have to, to, to chase and compete and show value and, and, and consider a landscape where it has to be completely commercial, um... I’m, I’m trying to remember, I mean I mentioned to you before, I’ve been involved in the BBC since ’95 and, and even then, there was always talk about... about the justifying the licence fee. So I’m, I’m... I don’t know if there’s been a time in my lifetime where it’s not been at risk.

Colin: I don’t... I don’t think the Beeb to be honest... I don’t think that’s realistic. I don’t think that would happen because I don’t think the BBCs very good at making those kind of definitive decisions. I think it would. It would fudge it, um, and I think when I joined the BBC like six years ago, you know, it was a very different BBC and it was much richer and more confident in its place.

Colin: And it wasn't making the difficult decisions, it was fudging them because it didn't have to. So... so yeah.

Interviewer: OK, thanks. So we've talked about the um, the consumers and what hmm, what we might deliver for them if we've got time, we might come back to some of the stuff around the dark patterns and also, and also the matrix that um, that, that you're being measured against, which has to, to a large extent influence your your approach to design. But I'm just wondering before we get on to that...

How involved are consumers in the design process? Is it a case of, of sort of the, the trial and error of stuff before and adjusting based on how consumers react or, or, is there a consultation, sort of... how is it that you determine that the direction that you want the design to take?

Simon: I mean, we do quite a bit of user testing, don't we, Colin? I'd like to do more, but um, we, we do um remote testing, we do in lab testing, um... we do all sorts of diary studies over a period of time to gauge how people understand and interact with the things that we're proposing, um, and then, you know ultimately, the, the ambition is that then we, we get a steer early on, you sort of a more qualitative kind of insight and then we can scale that up and and test via experimentation to see if that plays out with bigger numbers.

Um, there's, there's quite an appetite at the moment um, for us to have more agility around our, uh... consultation with users and to try and have it much more frequently and have the feedback loops much, much, much quicker as well, so hopefully things are going to really evolve in that space and I know some of the product peeps are really kind of behind that... but I would say generally we're, we're pretty good in terms of speaking to the audience. Would you, would you agree with that, Colin?

Colin: Yeah, I think so, yeah, I, I, you know, yeah, there is, there's definitely a kind of cycle I'd say like kind of early in the sort of the sort of innovation cycle if you like, when it's like this thing is no longer working, we need to, we need to innovate and find some new source of value. You know, we're pretty good at doing quite in depth all studies, ethnographic studies, we have a design research function, we have an audience research function, they work very closely together and you know we'll, we'll, we'll... we have a strategy function and you put those three things together and we'll sort of go deep and try and work out where, where is the, where is the next big opportunity and then and then once you've kind of started on that journey, you know we'll do concept testing around those ideas, essentially bring new propositions to audiences, get them to react.

And then, when you're into actually kind of designing solutions and trying to get to ship shippable code like, like Simon Says, that may be informed by another round of more detailed qualitative research, but we'll certainly be doing kind of evaluative research on the back of that, where we test solutions with users. And interestingly, you know we're, we're trying to kind of get much better at... you're bringing audience insight from a much more diverse range of our audience.

So, you know, when you when you're recruiting for these things, you tend to end up with a similar profile. But you know, if the BBC is going to grow like it needs to, we need to become a much more inclusive product. So not just in terms of accessibility needs, but also just inclusive products that everybody can use, like my parents, who basically for whom the Internet is a ongoing source of rage and frustration <laughs>.

So, so you know, when we're doing usability testing, we're trying to make sure that we're recruiting diverse panels, you know and, and, and so that, that, that's going on as well. So I think we do all right, I think we can always do more.

Simon: Hmm.

Colin: But you know the conversation we have with our designers is about risk. You know, ultimately... bringing, you know, audiences to bear and getting their feedback on our designs is about, is about managing risk. If there's something that's low risk in terms of impact or something that we're super confident just needs to be done, then we'll do it. You know, we've and we'll just, we'll just see what happens when it launches. And we'll keep an eye on the data and make sure those guardrail metrics are OK and we have a pole axed iPlayer. But oftentimes we're less certain, there's more risk.

Colin: And then that's when we'll kind of bring more research to bear and more, more audience insight to bear on it.

Simon: Yeah, and, and around kind of wider industry trends like we have, the audience team that Colin mentioned, they, they, they run all sorts of different studies and reports, but they also do this um really brilliant, I think it's the audience team that do the VIP sessions where they, they have a cross section of um, you know, demographic and uh, from, from, from the UK and they just talk about viewing habits and you know what they're into, what they're watching, what they like and all of that stuff is, you know, we pay a lot of attention to that, both around kind of, you know, obviously the content strategy and but, but, you know, also down to interactions and the UI and, and you know those patterns that we've been talking about what the expectation is there. So yeah, I think it does really inform what we do and we could always do more of course, yeah.

Interviewer: Sure. And in terms of um, of the, the interface design... has there been any talk? and any implementation of anything that that you think might actively sort of help viewers manage their, their time and their viewing habits better or is there discussion on, on the horizon for this?

Simon: I can't think of anything that's happened um... explicitly about that. It comes up like, like I said earlier, when we had, we had a project, uh, Aurora it was called which was all about um, end of playback recommend, recommendations and how we present them. And there was a lot of healthy discussion then about what's most, what's appropriate to do and, and the, the more kind of um, you know, uh...

Some of the, some of the industry standards that we didn't feel comfortable about were not considered. You know what I mean? And everybody was very aligned around that, um... but explicitly about that point, no, I don't think I've had a conversation about that, but I'd love to. I'd love to explore more on that.

Colin: Yeah, I think I agree. I think the only thing that's come up is the context of um, autoplay on content, so potentially autoplay of, of, of trailers. You know in a hero promo space, should we do that and then kind of auto playing next episode and then potentially auto playing the next piece of content when you get to an end of the series and that whole end of series experience. So those junctions, I think it's come up in the context of those junctions.

But that that's kind of it really in in otherwise we just try and make our content look as shiny and attractive as possible and get people to watch as much as possible. We don't we don't try and sort of sabotage our content rails, do we, Simon...

Simon: No.

Colin: ...or it's all about you know... we want people to see it, get excited by it, find those lovely, serendipitous surprises and, and go kind of deeper into all these, this lovely world of content that we've got.

Simon: Hmmm

Interviewer: Yeah, there might have been other broadcasters that were doing it before, but certainly of the suppliers that I was using, the BBC was the first that I noticed that would start auto playing the next recommendation at the end of your series. That, that...

Colin: I mean, lots of people don't do that. Disney don't do that. You know, they deliberately break the experience. So you, you know. And interestingly, when, when you're at the end of a series, you know, you normally get the little, the little, little um... controls that say, you know, continue watching or, or, or next episode, and it counts down to next episode and skips through the through the credits. I noticed on Disney at the end of um, end of the series, they'll, they'll play the full credits. I think it's almost like it feels almost like respectful to the people that made the programme that at least once in this experience, you you can see everybody that made it.

So yeah, some of our competitors are actually less, less pushy than we are, which is interesting.

Interviewer: Yeah, and I think they've joined with everyone else with the autoplay, but there was one that did actually, at the end of the episode would stop and take you kind of back to the main screens. So you had to actively select the next one as well.

Simon: Hmm.

Colin: It's, it's one thing, accessibility is a big factor on this. There's just that that often the conversation ends up being around accessibility because if you got like auto playing video left, right and centre, it can get really... umm... confusing and overwhelming for either users who are who have got motor control um, impairment or people who are um kind of ADHD or on the autistic spectrum, it becomes just kind of really overwhelming noisy experience.

Colin: so yeah, the accessibility considerations often end up being the kind of sharp end of these decisions.

Interviewer: Thanks, and with the discussion around autoplay and whether or not to cut into the credits and have a timer and things like that, what discussions are had about how long that timer should be and, and, and, um... what the recommended play would be? Is that recommended play based on the users viewing profile or is it just this type of programme is similar to what they've just watched so it makes sense to, to move on to that as a recommendation?

Colin: Sounds like project Aurora stuff. Simon, I think you know more about this than I do.

Simon: Yeah, I mean, I mean at the moment it is, it is quite crude, but we're we're doing. Um... gosh, we've got a whole load of work going on at the moment around improving our recommendation capabilities, which are not brilliant at all. I mean, they're very, they're very basic.

So the ambition is that the whole of the um, the home page itself would essentially be generated from, you know, uh... recommendations based on what you've been watching and what we think you like.

At the moment it is it is very, very crude, but we will be looking to kind of improve it over time.

Colin: The, the other thing is um... around pre rolls so that another one that's probably worth mentioning is, is when you get a pre roll just in front of the programme you chose... do you know what a pre roll is? Or shall I just quickly explain that?

Interviewer: If you could explain it that would be helpful. Thank you.

Colin: Essentially, it's just, it's just, it's just a trailer that we show before the programme you've chosen, but um, obviously it's interruptive, you know. But hopefully there's there's pre, roll should be personalised so it's something relevant to you. That's where we want to get to at the moment they're editorially chosen. Um... but that, the exact flow of how controls switch on and switch off is something that we're going to need to spend a lot of time working out. So, you're watching the pre roll. So I wanted to watch North Water and so BBCs shoving an advert in front of me, bearing in mind one of the things we always promote ourselves on is the fact that we don't do advertising but actually do we just advertise our own stuff.

So we've interrupted your experience. Hopefully that's content rather than marketing, something you want to see, but what? How, how, how far into that pre roll do we need to get before we show the, the, the add to watch list and the skip button? Um, do we show them greyed out and then make them enabled or do we hide them all together and then and then bring, bring them up on the screen enabled. There's a lot of kind of subtle interaction design that we need to work through and, what's... how long does someone need to watch a pre roll before they can make a decision as to whether they like it or not? And if someone doesn't like it, how long can we show it to them before we're gonna start irritating them so... that, there's a really fine timeline that needs to be designed on, on, on how things like that work. So I think that's an example of where we're, we're, we're, we're interrupting the experience but trying to do it in a kind of really smart, thoughtful way.

Interviewer: OK, I am very conscious of the fact that you're both very busy and there's only a couple minutes left, so I'm going to ask a last question, which is just jumping past a bunch of others, but everything you've given me has been really useful content.

Interviewer: So thank you for that. I guess in uh... what role, if any, do you think that iPlayer could have in, in promoting healthy, self-directed viewing habits? And I'm talking in sort of realistic terms, commercial terms that... take into account the fact that you, you do need a certain something out of the consumers as well.

Simon: Hmm, I do think there's an opportunity for it. I really do. But it would be as we were kind of chatting earlier, it would be a bit of a course a pivot, it would be a slight pivot because at the moment we are really trying to um increase that, that growth number in the weekly active accounts. Um... but I think there's a there's. There's a real opportunity there and it's exciting and it's interesting, but we haven't really explored it at all.

I mean, you know, the team have had some loose conversations about it, we have had some just, you know, team, UX team um away days where we've explored ideas around kind of ethics and, and looking at iPlayer through that lens. But it's something that we haven't really explored properly at all. But I do think there's loads of opportunity there.

Colin: Yeah, I totally agree. And you know, if you look at the the trajectory of this industry, you know, iPlayer would be one of the first streaming services, but we didn't really back it or invest in it. It was just an interesting little thing. And then you got the Netflixes and the Amazons of the world just, you know, invest hugely in at scale, that business model massively become these big global players. And suddenly BBC is overwhelmed by these huge competitors, like holy crap, we've got to, we've got to catch up. So there's this kind of assumption that that those companies with the endpoints that they nailed it, that they figured out the best way of serving up streaming experiences.

Colin: But as we slowly try and sort of catch up with them a little bit and get back on least parity, I think we're starting to realise that they have, they're not the end point at all, they're a, they are almost a bit of a cul-de-sac and there's another paradigm that with our public service background, with our expertise in, in linear broadcast with our live experiences with our news content, with all these, these, these things that we have our disposal, there's another paradigm that we can, that we can invent, that you know to and potentially you know lead the market, you know, if not us then who, you know?

Simon: Hmm. And we're, we're, we're growing and we had some great figures this week that we're growing more than any any of the other uh VOD services in the UK. So we're, I think we're double growth Netflix this financial year. I think I'd have to double check that uh, and quadruple ITV and Channel 4. Possibly, but, but... so we're growing, we, you know, it's, it's kind of, there's some really good progress there. How do we tap into that? How do we leverage it? and how do we go into new waters, new, and a new paradigm? As Collin says, is super exciting and I really hope we can, we can do that.

Interviewer: Great. Thank you. I really do appreciate that you've, you've taken the time to chat with me.

Colin: If, if you get to anything and they have to skip some questions, but if you're kind of thinking, "damn it, I wish I'd been able to ask Colin and Simon this question...", do get, do get back in touch you know, if there's any gaps we can use that usefully fill, I'm sure we can squeeze out a bit more time.

Interviewer: I appreciate that. Thank you. I was certainly going to ask if it would be OK, because you'd mentioned things like the guidelines and, and, and metrics that, that... are to an extent, guiding you, if those are things that you, that aren't commercially sensitive that you can share, it would be great to, to have a look at those.

Simon: Yeah, I'm not sure. I don't know if we can, eh...

Colin: And. I don't know if we can share that. Yeah, we've got. We've got things like.

Simon: Yeah, we'll have a look. Yeah.

Interviewer: No, I appreciate, I appreciate you might not be able to.

Colin: I mean basically it's, it's, it's, it's, I mean I can give you a quick answer on this, weekly active accounts is the output metric. That's the thing which leadership is looking at within product group increasingly across the BBC to say are we moving everything in the right direction, but the input metrics, the things that people like me and Simon can, can try and move the dial on are very ill defined and lots of teams are working on different sets of input metrics, so you know weekly active accounts is the output metric that's that's emerging as a pretty, pretty useful um, sign of healthy BBC but the input metrics are all over the place.

Interviewer: That can be a blessing and a curse, right? Gives you some freedom with how to interpret what you need to do. But...

Colin: Why? But it, but it, no, it's, it's it definitely a curse, 'cause. It makes it very hard to align with other teams and, yeah, and it just makes it for a very noisy environment.

Interviewer: OK, great. Well, I will let you both go there, um, unless you've got any questions for me and let you enjoy the rest of your day.

Simon: Cool. Thanks a lot, Joanne. Yeah, good luck.

Colin: Nice to meet you and good luck with it.

Interviewer: Thanks very much. Bye bye.

