Media Lives 2015: A Qualitative Study

Wave 11 Summary Report

About this document

This document provides analysis of the 2015 findings from our Adults Media Lives study, which was set up in 2005 to provide a small-scale, rich and detailed qualitative complement to Ofcom's quantitative surveys of media literacy. The project follows the same individuals over time, and interviews them on camera each year about their media habits and attitudes. The interviews provide evidence about the motivations and the context of media use, and how media is part of daily life and domestic circumstances.

The project also provides us with rich detail of how media habits and attitudes change over time, in particular linked to life stage.

The Communications Act 2003 placed a responsibility on Ofcom to promote, and to carry out research into media literacy. This report contributes to Ofcom's work in this area.

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Introduction to the study

The Media Lives study was originally set up in early 2005 to provide a small-scale, rich and detailed qualitative complement to Ofcom's quantitative surveys of media literacy. Whereas the surveys seek to quantify, in a statistically robust way, how many and what kind of people have different levels of media access, awareness, skills and understanding, Media Lives aims to provide a human face to the data.

This 11-year ethnographic video study has tracked the evolution of individuals' relationship with digital media – how it fits into their lives, what motivates them to adopt new technology and learn new skills, their usage habits, levels of understanding, issues and concerns.

Each participant is interviewed in-home and at length (each interview lasts around 90 minutes). This allows both for a full exploration of the relevant issues and for demonstration/observation of media use in situ. Eleven waves of research have now been conducted; the first was in February 2005, with subsequent waves in October 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. The most recent interviews took place between 12 October and 7 November 2015, and were conducted by Mark Ellis, Tony Harbron and Tony Palmer of The Knowledge Agency.

The number of participants in the study is relatively small, but these people have been chosen carefully to reflect a broad cross-section of the UK population in terms of age, location, ethnicity and social circumstances. The unique methodology has allowed us to have extended discussions with these individuals, and to track their progress over time. Five of the 19 participants in the latest round of interviews have been part of the study since the start, and seven more joined the study in 2006. As the profile of the sample becomes – by definition – progressively older, we have regularly recruited new participants at the bottom end of the age range.

Certain subjects have been tracked consistently each year; many of these have been subject to great change over the ten years of the study, for example:

- acquisition of new media hardware (DVRs, DAB, smartphones, tablets etc.) and services (e.g. superfast broadband, streaming services);
- development of media skills, confidence in the use of digital media, and adoption of new online activities (e.g. sharing content via social media);
- use of mobile devices to consume content;
- sources of knowledge and information about media, and methods of learning new skills;
- trust in media providers across different media platforms; and
- concerns about privacy, security and safety.

However, the research model is flexible enough to explore specific topical and/or emerging issues each year; for example, (in 2015) smartphone dependency, the sharing of news content via social media and attitudes to voice activation technology.

All interviews are filmed, and video is the main vehicle for the presentation of findings from the research. The key insights from each individual interview have been clipped and catalogued by theme, platform and participant each year of the study. This cumulative collection of nearly 4,000 video clips now represents a uniquely rich and detailed resource for exploring the evolution of attitudes to digital media and media literacy issues in the UK. It is used widely across Ofcom and in presentations to a range of stakeholders.

Section 2

Overview

Media Lives is a qualitative study designed to complement Ofcom's large-scale quantitative audit of media literacy in the UK. The number of participants in the study is small – 19 in 2015 – and so is not statistically representative of the population as a whole. However, these participants have been chosen carefully to reflect a broad cross-section of the UK population in terms of age, location, ethnicity and social circumstances. We track the same individuals each year and so can explore how their relationship with media changes over time.

This eleventh wave of Media Lives research (conducted over October and November 2015) revealed changes in participants' claimed consumption of audio and video content across different platforms, their use of social media and user-generated content, their relationship with mobile devices (especially smartphones), attitudes to advertising, online privacy and security, and their consumption of news.

Section 3: Television and streaming content
Over two-thirds of the participating households now have television sets that are connected to the internet, either directly (smart TVs), or via set-top boxes and/or games consoles. Their main use of the internet on these sets is for watching either the broadcasters' on-demand services and/or pre-installed streaming services such as Netflix.

Streaming services continue to play an increasingly prominent role in participants' viewing behaviour. Although Netflix continues to be the best-known service, this year we saw significantly greater awareness and more widespread adoption of a range of streaming video services, including Now TV and Amazon Prime.

Participants understand that diverse, high quality content is now available across a range of streaming services, as well as on mainstream television. This has led to the emergence of concerns about the number of subscriptions a user might need to be able to access all the content they want.

Streaming has had a significant impact on how many of our participants watch and talk about television. Shared family viewing experiences and 'live' viewing of programmes are increasingly rare among much of our sample. Most claimed that the majority of their 'appointment' viewing is now of recorded or on-demand programmes or streaming content.

Section 4: Radio and podcasts
Radio continues to be an important medium for some of the participants aged 25+. However, some claimed the 'localness' of local radio has been eroded through the proliferation of networked content and national station brands.

Streaming music on-the-go via mobile data has become a viable option for some of our younger participants. More sophisticated mobile devices, access to 4G, and generous data packages are all contributing factors.

Podcasts have been 'discovered' in the past year, although by a minority of our participants. Reported interest in podcasts overall remains low, however two younger participants have begun to download more serious factual content in this way.

Section 5: Social media

In 2015 we noticed further evolution in participants' social media use. Most now have a segmented approach to using a portfolio of social media services – they describe themselves using different platforms for different purposes, or to communicate with different audiences. One by-product of this change has been a resurgence in claimed use of Facebook.

Participants now share a much wider range of content than previously, and are sharing much more often. They are not *originating* most of this content, but *propagating* it by sharing it with their networks. This form of content curation seems to have become an important way for social media users to express their identity online, and is far more widespread than other creative uses of the internet (e.g. website creation, blogging) which we have explored in earlier waves of the study.

Younger participants in particular seem to be more conscious of what they are posting and sharing online than in previous years. Several described concerns about their 'social footprint' and its potential impact on their future prospects. As a result, they are more selective about what they share and where. Although few admit to consciously managing their online image or reputation, many participants modify their online behaviour based on what others might think of them.

Section 6: Other online activity

Interest in user-generated content continues to grow - in particular, content such as how-to and funny videos delivered via YouTube. However, access to these is increasing via social media and not directly via YouTube. There has also been an increase in the younger participants reporting they now use YouTube to watch documentaries and factual content.

Participants described a more sophisticated and critically aware use of online reviews than in previous years, including looking at reviews on other sites other than the one selling the product. Some participants have also started to leave reviews themselves, where previously they tended to read but not contribute to them.

The vast majority of our sample now use at least some government services online. These include applying for licences, permits and road tax, and submitting petitions or complaints. Generally, participants were positive about the experience of using these online services.

Section 7: Mobile devices

The smartphone continues to be the most important piece of media technology for most of our participants, and its importance appears to be growing. Many claim to be using their smartphone increasingly as a means of going online, even when at home. However, smartphones are not yet able to satisfy all that participants want from a connected device, and a significant proportion of our sample are still ambivalent about mobile phones.

There was still much confusion in our sample about mobile data volumes, but many participants are now more careful about their data use. Some have sought out contracts with large data allowances specifically to avoid situations where they might be confronted with an unexpectedly large bill.

Tablets continue to be widely owned and used, but in some households they are less important than they were a year ago. The role of the tablet seems to have been at least partially usurped by smartphones and, in a reverse of a previous trend, some participants are reverting to laptops as these are seen as much more practical for work and homework-related activities, especially typing, form-filling and printing.

Section 8: Privacy and security issues

Some (mostly older) participants claim to be deeply concerned about privacy, and this is a barrier to their being more active online. Our three oldest participants have all, to varying degrees, backtracked from earlier forays into the online world. This is at least in part driven by concerns about how accessible their personal data seems to be. Others take a more pragmatic view, and are prepared to share their details in return for benefits (e.g. free Wi-Fi).

Most of our sample are more confident than before about using mobile devices to shop and bank online, but the vast majority are still wary of mobile payments (only one participant had, at the time of the research, attempted to use Apple Pay). However, this level of mistrust is entirely consistent with attitudes we have seen in previous years towards, for example, online banking and shopping via mobile devices.

Section 9: Attitudes to news

Over recent years we have seen a strong trend towards increasingly diverse patterns of news consumption across our sample. This continues to evolve. Compelling news stories and powerful images in 2015 have driven stronger interest in news, especially among some younger participants, but have also heightened the concerns of 'news avoiders'.

Social media platforms (especially Facebook) are becoming an increasingly important source of news. Many participants described themselves consuming news from a wide variety of different sources as a result of social media 'shares'. This is one facet of an apparent growth in the reach and influence of alternative and non-traditional news sources such as Huffington Post, Buzzfeed and Vice.

Section 10: Attitudes to advertising

Most participants claim to routinely avoid television advertising, and use tactics to do this such as fast forwarding when on playback, focusing on another device, and series stacking from advertising-free channels.

The majority of participants claimed they were not influenced by television advertising, although did have concerns about 'vulnerable people' being targeted by advertising on daytime TV such as betting websites and payday loans.

Participants were generally more tolerant of online advertising, especially within social media as it was considered to be relatively discreet and therefore easy to ignore. Contextual advertising - personalised to the individual based on their web browsing behaviour – was even considered to be useful at times.

Section 11: Attitudes to children's media use

Parents in the sample recognised significant educational benefits to their children using the internet and connected devices such as tablets. However, the increase in ownership of such devices, and easy access to Wi-Fi, have created new problems for parents in terms of limiting the time spent by children on devices and protecting them from inappropriate content and interaction.

Section 12: Anti-social media use

The amount of time spent online (particularly by young people) on mobile devices and games consoles was a widespread cause for concern, especially for the parents and grandparents in our sample. Despite the many benefits they offer, digital media and communications technology are also seen to be anti-social in certain respects, and are accused variously of damaging family life, preventing the development of social skills, and making it impossible to escape from work.

Section 3

Television and streaming content

3.1 Most participants now have at least one TV set which is connected to the internet

Over two-thirds of the participating households in Media Lives now have television sets that are connected to the internet.

A number of factors have contributed to this increase:

- some growth in the ownership of smart TV sets within the sample;

- access to the internet via connected DVRs (for example Sky+ or YouView boxes); and

- access via games consoles or other connected devices such as Apple TV or Google Chromecast.

In many of these participating households there are now multiple connected devices attached to television screens, and multi-set access to internet-based services.

> **I mean even with [son's] laptop we can connect it up to the TV, put the programme on the laptop and we can watch it on the TV. I can't remember whether this is the smart TV or the other one.**

Female, 42, Stay-at-home mum, rural Essex

Currently, participants' main use of the internet on television sets is for watching either the broadcasters' on-demand services (iPlayer and similar), and/or for using pre-installed streaming services such as Netflix. Typically, participants do not watch YouTube on their television sets (although many of them use YouTube extensively on other devices), or use their TV sets to browse the internet.

Although penetration of online TV services has grown, some participants claim to have reduced their time spent using services such as iPlayer in the past year. This is partly a consequence of having so many alternative sources of content to watch, and partly due to the arrival of new DVRs in some households (these participants were recording more and streaming less).

> **Before we had the box where we could record as well, I think we were a bit more dependent on Netflix and iPlayer because they were our on-demand routes at that point.**

Male, 36, web officer, Cardiff

> **I missed *Match of the Day* the other day because of work, and my mum forgot to record it. So I had to go onto iPlayer to watch that. I would say iPlayer is the last resort, really.**

Male, 17, student, rural Yorkshire

3.2   Streaming services continue to play an increasingly prominent role in participants' viewing behaviour

Over the last two years there has been a steep increase in the number of participants claiming to use paid-for video streaming services, with Netflix by far the best-known service. Ten of our participants (just over half of the sample) now claim to have a subscription to at least one of these services.

> **I watch Netflix all the time on my iPad, and my phone.**

Female, 23, student, Edinburgh

While some participants continued to talk specifically about Netflix playing an important role in their viewing behaviour, for others the novelty of Netflix does appear to have worn off a little; these participants typically described themselves as having "run out of things to watch".

> **I had a new bank card. I didn't change my payment details in time, so a couple of months ago my subscription to Netflix finished. If I had been right in the middle of something like *House of Cards* – which I totally got into – then I would have restarted it. But we weren't in the middle of any kind of programme or box set at the time, so we've just gone without it for a few months.**

Male, 36, web officer, Cardiff

Ongoing subscribers rely both on recommendations from friends and suggestions from Netflix itself for ideas about new programmes to watch.

> **Because they have like 30 or 40 suggestions, chances are there will be quite a lot of things that you'll be interested in.**

Male, 19, student, Oxford

3.3 Greater awareness and more widespread adoption of a range of streaming video services

Awareness of alternative services to Netflix was much higher this year. Many more participants were aware of Now TV and Amazon Prime than in the 2014 wave, and several participants (ranging in age from 23 to 41) described themselves now 'chopping and changing' between multiple providers, based on their current content preferences. In some cases the availability of 'must see' content on one particular service strongly influenced the choice of provider.

> I've got Now TV but I only really signed up to that to have access to *Game of Thrones.*

Male, 32, banker, London

3.4 Perceptions of high quality content are no longer exclusive to the broadcast channels

In the 2014 wave we reported that PSB channels such as BBC One, ITV1 and Channel 4 were still regarded as providing valued, high quality content in genres including news, drama and entertainment. However, high quality drama is no longer seen as the exclusive preserve of the mainstream broadcast channels.

Many of our younger participants were often unclear as to whether or not content being shown by streaming services had, or had not, previously appeared on broadcast TV channels – particularly with US-originated programming. We found no evidence that participants saw 'exclusive' streamed content as different or inferior to broadcast-originated programming. On the contrary, the best of the drama content commissioned by the streaming services was highly praised – two participants even suggested that services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime were forcing broadcasters to 'raise their game'.

> I think it's a good thing because I do think that the standard of programmes that are being developed since the era of the box set is improving.

Male, 32, banker, London

3.5 Emerging concerns about needing multiple accounts to access the content you want

In this year's wave we have seen more widespread and sophisticated use of streaming services than ever before.

However, some participants did express concerns about needing multiple accounts to access the content they wanted. So, for example, if they wanted to watch the *Barclays Premier League* and *Champions League* football, they would need to have pay-TV accounts with both Sky and BT. If they wanted to watch *Breaking Bad* and *Game of Thrones*, they would need a subscription to Now TV and another to Netflix. And if they wanted access to a full range of streaming music, they would need accounts with both Apple Music and Spotify.

> **Because Dr. Dre has his Beats headphones deal with Apple, when his album came out it was exclusively on Apple Music for about two weeks. It was really annoying hearing everybody saying how great his new album is, it grates that you know that it's not going to be on Spotify for a while.**

Male, 19, student, Oxford

> **I wouldn't mind watching this and I wouldn't mind watching that, but you don't have anyone who is consolidating it all as one package, which is what you really want.**

Male, 29, project sponsor, Stevenage

Across the different services, this could lead to consumers needing multiple premium content subscriptions. This was described by one participant as "choice not working in the consumer's favour".

Moreover, it was noted that the proliferation of subscription options has had other negative consequences; there is now less live football on free-to-air TV, for example.

> **It's not monopolised coverage by one company, but it is monopolised in terms of the type of services who are providing it. I'm not even sure that terrestrial television has any coverage of, say, the *Champions League* any more.**

Male, 32, banker, London

Although many participants were resigned to this, some did note that such a situation would increase the temptation for them to stream or download content illegally.

> **Eventually it will be out on YouTube; you'll be able to watch it on YouTube in a week. I know you're not really allowed to, but it will be on there.**

Male, 26, bar manager, East Barnet

3.6 Streaming has had a significant impact on how many of our participants watch, and talk about, television

The range of content available on demand seems to be changing participants' television viewing culture, with an ever-increasing emphasis on instant gratification.

Participants often described themselves watching multiple episodes in one sitting. Indeed, being forced to wait a week for a new episode is now considered by some to be extremely frustrating.

> **You know that it can be on whenever you want it – you know that you don't have to wait a week for it, or that it's going to be on a certain day. You can literally just put it on and watch it.**
>
> *Female, 54, casual worker, London*

> **Typically one episode is about 45 minutes long, so I can usually watch about three or four. I can get into bed at about 10.30 or 11.00 and be asleep by 12.30 max.**
>
> *Male, 17, student, rural Yorkshire*

In the 2014 wave of Media Lives we reported examples of young viewers (under 25) no longer watching broadcast series because they didn't want to have to wait a week for the next episode. This attitude is now more widespread among the under-35s in our sample. An interesting further development this year is that, by releasing the latest episodes of popular series on a week-by-week basis, the streaming services themselves have now become the target of similar complaints.

> **I think that watching things on a weekly basis now seems quite archaic. And waiting for each episode to be released is quite frustrating. It was quite hard to get into the last series of *Game of Thrones*, which was released on a weekly basis on Now TV, whereas we used to be able to watch perhaps two or three episodes a night… you forget it.**
>
> *Male, 36, web officer, Cardiff*

As we have already discussed, television viewing patterns are becoming increasingly fragmented and individual. But this does not mean that our participants no longer discuss what they have watched. They describe themselves discussing television in a different way – for example, recommending series to friends and family rather than discussing the latest episodes (being careful to avoid 'spoilers').

> I don't think you get people watching the same shows and in the same kind of rhythm as before. But we do still talk about television shows. Sometimes with box sets you get certain points within them where they tend to plateau a bit in terms of storyline. Sometimes you need a push from other people: *"Just work through that because it gets a lot better in the next series."*

Male, 36, web officer, Cardiff

3.7 Shared family viewing experiences, and live viewing of programmes, are increasingly rare among much of our sample

The traditional image – perpetuated by programmes like *Gogglebox* – of families around the country simultaneously sitting down together to watch the major TV shows of the day is no longer a true reflection of our sample's real behaviour, based on their own descriptions of how they watch television. Three factors seem to be affecting this:

- there are more viewing devices available in each household;

- there are more viewing choices available; and

- families have more fragmented lifestyles.

All of these contribute either to more individual viewing, or viewing as subsets of the family group.

> *Strictly Come Dancing…* I think that is now the only time we sit down together as a family, because of the diversity within the family, the hours of work and college… My all-time favourite book is *An Inspector Calls*. It was on [TV] on Sunday night and I could see everybody's faces drop thinking *"Please tell us we don't have to sit through this with her"*. So I actually recorded it and watched it on my own.

Female, 49, housing officer, Coventry

Most participants (16 out of 19) claimed that the majority of their 'appointment' viewing is now of recorded or on-demand programmes, or streamed content, rather than watching programmes live.

> I would say 90% is recorded.

Female, 49, housing officer, Coventry

> **I never think *"I will just switch the telly on and see what's on".* I'm always sitting down watching something for a purpose.**

Female, 23, student, Edinburgh

There were some exceptions to this, however, including live sport (the fieldwork coincided with the *Rugby World Cup*), news bulletins, and a few high-profile entertainment shows such as *Strictly Come Dancing.*

Older participants living alone were more likely than younger viewers or families to view programming live. Younger viewers did say they watched some live programming, but this was typically background viewing (e.g. breakfast TV) or late night, low-engagement programmes to help them unwind.

> **I'm at home all day so I can watch the programmes I watch [live]. It doesn't worry me if I miss anything because a lot of them are repeated on other channels.**

Female, 82, retired, Coventry

> **Fifty per cent of my shifts are night shifts, so morning TV is good… Yesterday I watched *Jeremy Kyle*, which isn't something I would want to watch on a regular basis, but that kind of TV is good after a night shift… to fall asleep to.**

Female, 27, doctor, Bristol

Section 4

Radio and podcasts

4.1 Radio continues to be an important medium for some participants

Apart from the younger members of our sample (those under 25, few of whom are active radio listeners), radio continues to be an important medium for some of our participants. Most described themselves using radio primarily as background listening, or when driving.

> **Whenever I come down in the morning to go to work the radio is always on. And then it's on again in the car.**

Male, 54, alarm fitter, Lisburn NI

Likelihood of listening is typically influenced by lifestyle factors, and changes according to life stage or circumstance; this is the most likely cause for an individual to listen more or less.

> **Radio was always for me just a convenience thing – it was there to make the journey to work more interesting. Now that I'm on the train and I've got my phone, I'd rather be reading the news than listening to the radio.**

Male, 29, project sponsor, Stevenage

Radio continues to be seen as an important source of timely local news.

However, there were some claims that the 'localness' of local radio has been eroded, through the proliferation of networked content and national station brands.

> **Red Dragon doesn't exist anymore. It's been swallowed up by the Capital group. The only thing that is local about it now is the breakfast show and some of the news, so I've switched off that.**

Female, 38, fundraising manager, Cardiff

4.2 4G network connectivity now makes streaming music a viable alternative for some of our younger participants

Streaming music on-the-go via mobile data has become a viable option for some of our younger participants. This is due to a number of factors:

- more sophisticated mobile devices;

- access to the 4G data network; and

- more generous data packages as part of the monthly contract.

> **Now that I've got unlimited data on my phone I listen to YouTube quite a lot… When walking to work I just put YouTube on my phone on 4G and I can listen to any song I want.**

Male, 26, bar manager, East Barnet

Two participants, in particular, specifically described themselves as listening to the radio less this year as a result of having better mobile access to streamed music.

4.3 Some younger participants have 'discovered' podcasts in the past year

Reported interest in podcasts has been low for a number of years. However, in the past year two of our participants (both young males) have begun to download podcasts containing more serious factual content: *In Our Time*, from BBC Radio 4, and the popular US podcast *Serial*.

Their patterns of consuming podcasts are similar to the way in which they describe their streaming of TV programmes. Indeed, their interest in podcasts may well have been influenced by the broader streaming culture of which they are part.

> **I started listening to podcasts recently. I got hooked on one called *Serial* about a month ago. I listened to the whole 12 episodes in three and a half days.**

Male, 32, banker, London

Section 5

Social media

5.1 Further evolution towards a more segmented/portfolio approach to social media use

In 2015 we saw the intensification of an ongoing trend over a number of years - towards participants having a more segmented approach to social media, using a portfolio of services. There is overlap between the functionality of social media platforms, and this has led to a complex and eclectic landscape of social media use across our sample.

One by-product of this evolution has been a resurgence in claimed use of Facebook, which has a place in almost all of our participants' social media portfolios.

In recent years we had seen a loss of interest in Facebook among our sample, particularly among younger participants, in the wake of competition from new platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr etc. However, its role seems to have evolved. Rather than posting status updates, participants reported more diverse use – with content sharing and messaging being at least as important now as status updates.

> **I don't remember whether or not I was using Facebook last year, but now I'm on Facebook loads, more than Twitter or whatever.**
>
> *Female, 23, student, Edinburgh*

> **I didn't really know what you can actually do on Facebook. All I thought it was, was people saying *"I'm having a sausage sandwich"*, and stupid things like that.**
>
> *Female, 42, stay-at-home mum, rural Essex*

5.2 Segmented use of different platforms for different types of content and different audiences

Participants report that they are using different platforms for different purposes (or to communicate with different networks).

For example, one participant uses Facebook Messenger to communicate with his university peer group, while keeping in touch with his school friends via WhatsApp (using two different platforms for the same task, segmented by audience).

Even within platforms, we are now seeing segmented communication with specific subgroups via (for example) group chats within Facebook Messenger, and specific Facebook pages for special interest groups (e.g. school parents).

> **Their coaches made an under-13s rugby team Facebook page for fixtures and so on. They post everything on there now.**
>
> *Male, 41, engineer, Derbyshire*

> **It has got a lot more popular to make group chats for events that are coming up. You can add people to the chat, remove them from the chat. I'm in a load of group chats at the moment – they've become really popular.**
>
> *Female, 15, student, Warwick*

5.3 Participants share a variety of content across different platforms

This year participants described themselves sharing a much wider range of content than previously, and doing this much more often. Nine participants (just under half of the sample) claimed to share content in this way.

Participants share a variety of content including:

- Personal photos and videos.

- Light-hearted, funny, entertaining photos, videos, etc.

- More serious articles, news content and campaigns/messages.

Our participants were not *originating* most of this content, but *propagating* it by sharing it with their networks.

> **People don't really write what they are doing any more. It's more like sharing videos – that kind of stuff – funny ones, or news articles.**
>
> *Female, 15, student, Warwick*

> **I might post a comment that I've heard in a conference that might resonate with a few people. It might not. But it tends to be stuff that I find interesting, as opposed to what I think other people will find interesting.**
>
> *Male, 36, web officer, Cardiff*

This form of content *curation* seems to have become an important way for social media users to express their identity online, and is far more widespread than other creative uses of the internet (e.g. website creation, blogging, etc.) which we have tracked in the past.

Where there is the option to either 'share' or 'like' content (e.g. on Facebook), participants were conscious of using these in different ways, implicitly giving different levels of endorsement to different types of content. Sometimes this was viewed as a conscious display of social conscience, or even low-key activism.

> **If there is something important being said on Facebook, I usually like it.**
>
> *Male, 19, student, Oxford*

> **A picture like that [image of drowned Syrian refugee child] will get a lot of attention. The reason I would share it is because I know what effect it had on me, and I'm thinking *"Right, I'll share it so someone else will think about it".* And eventually, if everybody who sees it thinks about it the way I do, it might make a difference to what's happening.**
>
> *Male, 17, student, rural Yorkshire*

Some participants also described having clear strategies for sharing different types of content on different platforms and with different audiences.

> **If I'm publishing something publicly, I want to make sure that it's not ambiguous. But if I'm just talking to a small group of friends or a single friend on Messenger you can pretty much say what you want because it's just in their inbox.**
>
> *Male, 19, student, Oxford*

5.4 Greater awareness/understanding of the subtle differences between platforms

In 2015 our younger participants demonstrated significantly greater awareness and understanding of the subtle differences between platforms than in previous years – how identifiable you are as an individual, who the audience you are talking to is, etc.

For example, several participants described Twitter as being more open, anonymous and impersonal than, for example, Facebook (where you are much more easily identifiable to, and known by, your audience). There is more risk of causing offence, or being subjected to abuse. As a result, several have chosen to use Twitter less.

> **When you're on Twitter people aren't looking at your name or picture… I tend just to read what people are saying – I don't even notice who's saying it. For all I know it may not even be a real person.**
>
> *Male, 19, student, Oxford*

> **On Facebook I think a lot of people have the common sense to realise that if your mum is on it then there is no reason why your boss wouldn't be on it too.**

Male, 17, student, rural Yorkshire

5.5 Younger participants in particular seem to be more conscious of, and concerned about, what they are posting/sharing

Over the past three years we have seen growing concern among our younger participants (and/or their peers) regarding knowing how to behave appropriately online. This has led to various examples of individuals encountering problems including online bullying, 'trolling' and disciplinary issues at school.

In 2015 our younger participants all described themselves as being more responsible and cautious than before. They claimed to be more conscious of what they are posting or sharing, and who might see it.

Some described being particularly concerned about offending family members who might see something that wasn't intended for them.

Others described concerns about their social footprint and its potential impact on their future prospects. (This appears to have been the focus of a major push in schools.) In some cases participants have gone back to earlier social media posts and removed them.

> **I'm starting to become a little bit more sensible about what I'm putting up, but I know a lot of people put up photos and I don't think they realise that, if they get out, they wouldn't be able to get certain jobs.**

Female, 15, student, Warwick

> **You're not just arguing with someone, you're publishing something that is going to be on the internet forever. If you write something with loads of bad swear words, anything racist or really offensive, even if you delete it, it can still be found. It's still on the internet.**

Female, 23, student, Edinburgh

As a result, our participants described themselves as being more selective about what they share and where. Snapchat was described as the platform most likely to be used for any kind of 'edgy' content. Its use tends to be exclusive to close friends and peers, and they believe that because posts disappear after a few hours, there is no lasting social media footprint.

> **If it's happening at a party you don't want your mum to see it. I'm friends with my mum on Facebook, but my mum wouldn't be on something like Snapchat.**

Female, 15, student, Warwick

5.6 Many participants modify their online behaviour based on what others might think of them

As part of this year's discussion guide we asked participants how conscious they were of their online image/reputation. In the same way that participants refuse to admit that they are influenced by advertising, they similarly deny having any interest in their online reputation, although this is not necessarily reflected in their behaviour.

Many *do* consider what others will think of them, at least when considering what *not* to post (they don't want to appear, for example, sexist or racist, and typically do not post on controversial subjects like politics).

> **If I share something to do with terrorism I'll make sure that I can't be called racist; if I share something to do with feminism I don't want to be seen as sexist.**

Male, 17, student, rural Yorkshire

More rarely, participants admit actively curating an online persona. Some admit that they only choose their best photos to put on Instagram; a few are more open about their behaviour.

> **You wouldn't post something if you don't look good, or if you are with the wrong sort of people. You want to post photos when you're at a social event that everyone wants to be at. You want to make your life seem a bit more fun than it actually is, I guess. You certainly wouldn't want to post anything boring.**

Female, 15, student, Warwick

Participants do, however, find it much easier to cite examples of 'other people' projecting an image of themselves online.

Several participants described friends or acquaintances making great efforts to make their lives seem more glamorous than they really are. They accused others of seeking attention, followers and approval. They saw this as a facet of a sometimes pernicious 'like' culture among young people in particular.

> **What people post on Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, whatever, isn't really reflective of their life. They are choosing things specifically to share for a purpose. People create these imaginary lives that they would love to have, but they don't… Everyone is bothered about how many followers they've got.**

Female, 23, student, Edinburgh

Section 6

Other online activity

6.1 Many of our participants continue to use YouTube extensively for 'how to' and funny videos

As we saw in the 2014 wave, interest in user-generated content (particularly, but not exclusively, delivered via YouTube) is both widespread and growing.

In 2015 participants again described their high levels of engagement with how-to and funny videos. However, these are increasingly accessed via social media rather than directly via YouTube.

> **I've used YouTube, if anything, more for anything to do with cooking. Instead of having a book with pictures in, which was great, to actually see how something is done is brilliant.**

Female, 49, housing officer, Coventry

> **I watch a lot of make-up tutorials, and that's a massive thing. Everyone my age does that. I never go looking for videos now, it's more like something comes up [on Facebook] saying someone has been tagged in a video, or somebody likes this video… My timeline is filled with things like that.**

Female, 23, student, Edinburgh

6.2 Increased use of YouTube by younger participants (especially) for documentaries and other factual content

A few participants described themselves subscribing to specialist interest channels on YouTube (e.g. music).

However, a more significant development this year is the increased reporting by younger participants of their use of YouTube to watch documentaries and other factual content. This is partly (but not exclusively) driven by schools and colleges providing links to these videos as study resources.

> **I'd say I use YouTube a lot more now for my A-levels. There are a lot of things that we are told to watch.**

Male, 17, student, rural Yorkshire

Participants described themselves subsequently following links to other content; they are therefore exploring a broader range of content than that which is prescribed to them by their teachers.

> **I'm into crime documentaries at the moment so I type that into YouTube and watch them on my laptop. Sometimes you get a bit side-tracked and you end up watching something else. Then, when I come back to YouTube, I've got like topics and things recommended for me.**

Female, 15, student, Warwick

This phenomenon does not always meet with parental approval. Some parents specifically expressed concern about children going 'off-piste' by following YouTube's related content links; their children may be consuming an initial piece of content which is quite acceptable, but this can potentially lead to other, less appropriate content.

Some of the young people themselves demonstrated limited critical awareness of the content they are consuming on YouTube. They are often not conscious of, or not concerned by, the source of the material that they view.

When describing the role of regulation in ensuring that content can be trusted, one participant drew a direct parallel between television and YouTube, describing YouTube's filtering of adult content as being similar to the kind of regulation undertaken by TV broadcasters – apparently unaware that programming on television is also regulated in terms of balance, accuracy, etc.

> **I think there are regulations about what you can put on YouTube, because I have clicked on a few things where it has said that you have to be over 18 or that it has been taken off for some reason... I haven't really seen anything rude.**

Female, 15, student, Warwick

6.3   More participants now claim to leave online reviews

In previous waves of Media Lives we have reported that many of our participants used online reviews as a way of informing their purchase decisions, but that very few actually contributed reviews. In the words of one participant, they are "consumers, not contributors".

However, in 2015 we have seen a significant increase in participants claiming to leave online reviews – three said that they had started doing so this year. In part, this change in behaviour has been prompted by requests from suppliers to leave such reviews.

6.4   Participants describe a more sophisticated and critically aware use of online reviews than in previous years

Some participants described themselves using online reviews in a more sophisticated and critically-aware way, for example:

- looking at reviews on sites other than the one selling the product in question; and/or

- using online reviews to inform 'high ticket' purchases or decisions which might have far-reaching personal consequences.

For example, one of our participants who was planning a 'tummy tuck' operation used a mixed methodology approach to research her choice of clinic. She looked at written ratings

and reviews, comments on forums, and user-generated video diaries on YouTube to find out as much as possible about the various options open to her before making a final decision.

> **Write down what it is. Don't look at the reviews on that site where you're buying it, just write it down and look elsewhere on the internet or go on YouTube.**

Female, 54, casual worker, London

> **It was a very big help because you can actually see people having the operation, see what it entails. You can see where it can go wrong. You can see the worst that can happen.**

Female, 54, casual worker, London

6.5   Participants use a range of online government services

The vast majority of our sample (15 out of 19) now use at least some online government services. The only participants not using such services were the very youngest and oldest in our sample. Most access a broad range of services; examples included:

- applying for licences, permits, road tax etc.; and

- submitting petitions and complaints through online channels.

> **I rely on a lot of the government websites with, for example, carers' allowances, attendance allowances, things like that.**

Female, 49, housing officer, Coventry

> **You mean government websites? Yes, I used that for updating my car tax. It was really, really good. Even the mobile website - that was really clear and well laid out.**

Female, 23, student, Edinburgh

> **Signing petitions, I do a lot of things like that. I've been in regular contact with [local MP]. Some of the things he agrees to, some of the things he doesn't.**

Female, 42, stay-at-home mum, rural Essex

Participants mostly recounted positive experiences of their use of these services. However, one participant did describe how such systems can quickly become problematic if something goes wrong. Her inability to purchase a parking permit through the local government website led to her receiving a series of parking tickets.

> **The parking was a complete nightmare, and I still don't understand the system that you're meant to go through. I think you're meant to do it online… It was really frustrating… I ended up going to about three different council buildings trying to get it sorted out.**

Female, 27, doctor, Bristol

Section 7

Mobile devices

7.1 The smartphone is now the most important piece of media technology for many of our participants

We have seen growth in the perceived importance of mobile phones among our sample over the past five years. For most it is now the most important piece of media technology they own, and they seem to be becoming even more dependent on their smartphones as time goes by.

> **How dependent am I? Ten out of ten. You can't live without an iPhone once you've got one, I think. I've lost so many purses and house keys but never my phone because it's always, always on me and I would notice if it wasn't.**

Female, 27, doctor, Bristol

> **My life is on it – bank, social media, phone, WhatsApp, FaceTime, shopping, everything. I do everything on it.**

Female, 23, student, Edinburgh

Many participants claimed to be using their smartphone increasingly often as a means of going online, even at home. They described it as being more convenient than a laptop or tablet as it is a *personal* device which they almost always carry on them. There is no requirement to negotiate access with partners, children, etc.

> **Because the laptop is always up in my son's room, rather than go and get that we will sit there on our phones instead.**

Male, 41, engineer, Derbyshire

Moreover, the growing importance of internet-based communication services like iMessage, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger mean that participants are going online to do things that they might previously have done via calls or texts.

Another way of understanding our sample's degree of smartphone dependency is how they describe the degree of inconvenience they face when *losing* access. In some cases the dependency was practical (e.g. needing to be able to contact friends and family), but in others it appears to be more psychological – a form of addiction.

> **I had my phone confiscated from me in school the other day, because I was on it in lessons… I was really worried because I had to get the bus into Coventry and I needed contact with my mum… He [teacher] was going to keep it until the next day so I had to go and see him and say** *"No, I need to have it back".*

Female, 15, student, Warwick

> **We'll find a pub to stop and have a drink. The first thing my son will do is ask for the Wi-Fi code. At times like that I think** *"Surely you can do without it for ten minutes"*, **but then I look at my wife and she's on her phone as well!**

Male, 41, engineer, Derbyshire

7.2 But smartphones are not yet able to satisfy all that participants want from a connected device

Despite the important and growing role played in our participants' lives by their smartphones, there are still some limitations.

Participants sometimes criticised apps and/or mobile versions of websites for lacking some of the functionality of the 'proper' website. And the memory limitations of handsets mean that the range of apps and content some users can have on their smartphone is less than they would like.

Many participants still consider a laptop to be better for some tasks – for example, work-related emails and documents. Where typing and/or printing is involved, the majority of our sample, regardless of their age, still prefer to use a traditional keyboard.

> **It's really fiddly when you're typing in your address and stuff – it's quite a small screen so it's annoying having to do that. Because you have to fill in forms, or a lot of information, I just think it's a lot easier to do that on my iPad. I have a keyboard for that as well – it saves a lot of time and it's not as fiddly.**

Male, 19, student, Oxford

The screen size of smartphones is also an issue for some (especially older) participants, and limits their usefulness for viewing content.

> **I could probably watch BBC iPlayer on my phone but no, I don't. It would hurt my eyes too much and you can guarantee that when you're in the middle of watching something someone texts you and it cuts you off.**

Female, 42, stay-at-home mum, rural Essex

And attitudes in general to smartphones are not universally positive. A significant proportion of our sample are still at best ambivalent about mobile phones. Five out of 19 participants (about a quarter of the sample) either choose not to have a smartphone or use one in a very limited way.

> All the smart stuff I don't need, most of it I don't use. You're probably talking about [dependency level] two or three out of ten. It wouldn't bother me if I lost it.

Male, 54, alarm fitter, Lisburn NI

7.3 There is still much confusion in our sample about mobile data, but most participants are now more careful about their data use

In previous years participants reported experiencing problems related to mobile data, for example receiving unexpectedly high mobile phone bills as a result of either using large volumes of data, or using data abroad. This was still happening in 2015.

> I was in Portugal. I took my phone with me and, after a day, I couldn't make phone calls out or anything. It was data roaming, it had used up all my credit.

Male, 54, alarm fitter, Lisburn NI

A major part of the problem seems to be that participants struggled to understand how the volume of data they paid for corresponded to time online or content used. This difficulty is exacerbated when, for example, apps update automatically in the background, using data.

> I said *"What's 100MB in time?"* and they said *"It all depends on what you're doing"*… I never got a grasp of it. So I just upgraded my package. I found out that if I upgraded by £6 I would probably save myself about a tenner already by not topping up every five minutes.

Male, 26, bar manager, East Barnet

There is still much confusion about the relationship between data volume and use. But most participants are now at least aware of the potential hazards, and therefore much more careful about their data usage. In some cases they have taken pre-emptive action to avoid any nasty shocks with their bills, by:

- making use of alerts provided by their mobile network provider, and modifying their behaviour across the course of the month if necessary;

- avoiding using services that might rapidly consume their data allowance (e.g. music streaming) on the mobile network; and

- upgrading to contracts with a higher data allowance to make sure that they are 'covered'. Indeed, when reviewing mobile contracts, participants often claimed that the volume of data was the single most important element that they considered.

> **On Snapchat now they have a Skype-type conversation feature. I was using that quite a lot on 4G and then about a week in I got a text from my provider saying *'You've used 80% of your data'*, which is something I never had with my old phone.**

Male, 19, student, Oxford

> **I'm conscious that I don't download music and things when I'm not on Wi-Fi.**

Female, 27, doctor, Bristol

7.4   Tablets continue to be popular, but in some households they are less used, and less important than a year ago

In recent years we have seen massive growth among our sample in the level of claimed ownership of tablets. Although tablet penetration remains high, in at least five of our households they are less used, and seen as less important than a year ago.

It seems that the novelty of tablets has to some degree worn off, and a tablet is now just one of many device options available to most of our participants.

> **I hardly use the iPad now. I used it a bit more when I first had it. I think the problem is we just have too many things now… we've got the iPad, then we've got the Hudl, and then I decided to get another phone… I have actually got on quite well with that.**

Female, 79, retired, Bucks

In some cases the role of tablets seems to have been at least partially usurped by smartphones, which are seen as more portable, better for taking photos, and less reliant on access to Wi-Fi. Several participants who were using tablets as a laptop replacement last year have ended up buying a new laptop this year, because it is more practical for work/ homework-related activities, especially typing and printing.

> **The iPads barely get used now. The kids just go on their phones. They don't use the iPads, and I find it easier to use the laptop than I do the iPad for surfing on different websites.**

Male, 41, engineer, Derbyshire

> **I don't really use my iPad anymore because I got my laptop for Christmas. I use that for schoolwork and stuff.**

Female, 15, student, Warwick

> **I'm using my laptop all of the time at uni now. That's when I realised that using my laptop would be a good idea because I was writing notes on my iPad, but it wasn't quick enough.**

Female, 23, student, Edinburgh

The main enduring uses of tablets among our sample are leisure/entertainment-related:

- watching on-demand programming and streaming services;

- web browsing;

- viewing photos; and

- entertaining and educating young children (through apps and videos).

> **The only reason I use the iPad now is to watch things. I use the Sky Go [app] on it quite a lot, but that's probably about it.**

Male, 17, student, rural Yorkshire

7.5 Increased interest in, and use of, voice activation features - although many struggle to make this work effectively

In 2015 there was evidence of increased interest in using voice activation among our sample, particularly in relation to smartphones. A few participants are now using this routinely for certain tasks. One participant with poor eyesight largely relies on voice-based searches on Google. Another uses the dictation feature on her phone to send texts while travelling.

> **I'm not very dexterous with my fingers, like some people are, and by the time I've spelt out my message, that person has gone to bed. So it's easier for me to talk into it and then correct the bits that are wrong, because it never writes it out exactly as you say it.**

Female, 54, casual worker, London

However, many participants have found that voice activation does not work for them, and usually blame the software's inability to recognise their accent. They don't see this function as a compelling benefit, so one or two bad experiences tend to put them off.

> **You start talking and it says *"Sorry"*, then you say it again and it's like *"I don't understand"*… That really annoys me, so I just type it in and it's a lot quicker and easier.**

Male, 17, student, rural Yorkshire

One participant raised a concern about the extent to which the limited search results provided by a voice-activated device could be trusted. It was felt that a traditional search engine, such as Google, would provide a broader set of results.

> **If it worked correctly I probably would use it, but then it comes down to trust as well. Is it a recommended thing that they are bringing up, or is it genuinely the best option for you? So say for example you say to Siri *"Find me the cheapest flight from Cardiff to Glasgow"* and the flight popped up… Maybe it's because I'm a cynical charity fundraiser, but I'm not convinced that would be the best option for me.**

Female, 38, fundraising manager, Cardiff

7.6 Currently there is very little interest among our sample in wearable technology, and so far none of them use any such devices

So far, no one in our sample has acquired any wearable technology, such as a smart watch, and interest in the concept was very limited.

A few participants did express some interest in fitness devices such as fitbit – in part driven by peer influence.

> **I go to Weightwatcher, and they're all about fitbits at the moment, and I am going to get one as a Christmas present to myself. I know about the Apple Watches and I've got a friend who's got one, but I'm not convinced.**

Female, 38, fundraising manager, Cardiff

There is currently little interest among our sample for the Apple Watch. Most can't see the point of having one; a few are more open-minded, but are happy to wait for the technology to become more mainstream, more established, and (ideally) cheaper.

> **She walked to the other side of the room but I could hear what she was saying and what the other person was saying back. I'm thinking *"Where is the privacy? There's no privacy any more"*. And she's there, walking along looking at her watch. I'm thinking "*It's so much easier just to use a phone… What a waste, you look stupid!"***

Male, 41, engineer, Derbyshire

> **It's not on my radar at the moment, but when everybody else starts getting them I'll probably think about it.**

Female, 23, student, Edinburgh

Privacy and security issues

8.1 Some (mainly older) participants are deeply concerned about privacy

In 2015 we saw a shift in attitudes towards privacy, and specifically, a degree of polarisation of attitudes and related behaviour.

Some (mostly older) participants claimed that they would rather be 'invisible' online. Our three oldest participants have, to varying degrees, all back-tracked from initial forays into the online world. Their choice not to be more active online is at least partly driven by concerns about the accessibility of their personal data.

As direct evidence they cite 'junk' and phishing emails, and one recounted narrowly escaping falling victim to an online fraud. Moreover, they conflate these concerns with a broader fear of 'being scammed' via other forms of direct marketing such as nuisance phone calls. Several described themselves feeling threatened by unsolicited callers "with foreign-sounding voices" who knew their names and personal details.

> **They can find out everything about you. In another part of the world they know where you live, how much money you've got. You haven't got any private life now in my opinion because everybody can find out.**

Female, 82, retired, Coventry

> **They annoy me because they keep on sending me all this stuff and I never seem to be able to stop it.**

Female, 79, retired, Bucks

8.2 Others take a more pragmatic view, and are prepared to share their details in return for benefits

Other participants *are* prepared to share their details online in return for benefits such as free Wi-Fi access. Nevertheless, most still claim to be cautious about whom they give their data to – they are much more comfortable doing this with familiar mainstream brands.

> **If somebody tells you that you need to provide an address, a name and an email to be able to use public Wi-Fi, and you need to use the Wi-Fi, you might not be comfortable with that but it's the only way you can use the Wi-Fi so you just accept it for what it is.**

Male, 32, banker, London

8.3   Some disquiet at being 'spied on' by data technology, or risks of sharing via cloud-based services

In recent years the online services available to participants have become more sophisticated. Personalised services from companies such as Google, based on aggregated data, have brought valued benefits to users. However, several participants expressed disquiet about what they now fear to be technology 'spying' on them.

One such area of concern is contextual advertising. This is a subject we have explored in earlier waves of Media Lives, when participants were relatively unconcerned about being served personalised advertising based on their previous browsing behaviour. But this year, views were more mixed.

The aggregation of data by Google for marketing purposes, and social media marketers' ability to mine users' social activity to target them with tailored advertising or offers, were both mentioned by more sophisticated users in the sample as further causes for concern.

> It's difficult, because I don't have a full understanding of how they use the data they have about me. I think that's the most intrusive thing, that some of the ads track your behaviour because of various sites you've visited, or GMail just takes keywords out of your email.

Male, 36, web officer, Cardiff

Concerns were not limited to commercial/corporate use of personal data. Even the ostensibly benign sharing of location information with family and friends was cited by one user as an unwelcome intrusion on her privacy.

> I'm late for life, I'm late for everything. I can't ever be there on time. I want to be able to tell a little white lie like *"I'm on my way"* when really I'm not. I want a wee bit of privacy whereas I feel that with [location tracking] apps like that you have absolutely no privacy.

Female, 23, student, Edinburgh

Another participant described a highly upsetting incident where the syncing of content via Dropbox across the family's various mobile devices led to her ex-husband inadvertently sharing inappropriate content with their children.

8.4 Most of our participants exercise caution when transacting online, sticking to mainstream sites (or relying on user reviews for reassurance)

Most of our participants exercise caution when transacting online, preferring to stick to 'mainstream' sites; indeed, some claimed that they are less prepared to experiment with shopping on unfamiliar websites than perhaps they might have been in the past.

> **I think the trick is to stick to websites that a lot of people use. The way I see it is that if there are a thousand people using this website then chances are it's going to have to be quite secure.**

Male, 19, student, Oxford

Several participants had been victims of small-scale online 'scams'; for example, products bought as apparently great deals which turned out to be of very poor quality, or didn't turn up at all.

Online reviews have a role to play here: when a new user is unfamiliar with the brand in question they sometimes consult user reviews for reassurance – as mentioned in Section 6.4.

A high-profile hacking case, featuring a mobile service provider, happened around the time of the fieldwork. This came as a shock to many, and was a further cause for concern when it was revealed that the perpetrator was a teenage boy. It was seen as a reminder that "nobody is safe".

> **They got four million people's details, and yet they've arrested a wee laddie of 13 or 14… That's frightening.**

Female, 71, retired, Edinburgh

> **I think the way we all live now, you have to accept that there's the possibility that something like this could happen, and protect yourself as much as you can.**

Female, 38, fundraising manager, Cardiff

8.5 Most are more confident about using mobile devices to shop and bank online, but the vast majority are still wary of mobile payments

Conversely, the majority of our participants describe themselves being more confident than before in using mobile devices to shop and bank online.

Multi-step security methods, used typically for online banking and transacting via mobile devices, were seen as a source of added confidence.

> **I'm very confident. For a start I have a padlock on my phone, a completely random passcode so it's almost impossible to guess. Then to get onto my online banking you have to type in another password.**
>
> *Male, 17, student, rural Yorkshire*

Although most participants are now reasonably confident about using their smartphone to bank and/or transact, some are still cautious about *where* they use their device – specifically avoiding conducting transactions on public Wi-Fi connections.

Many still prefer to use a computer to conduct important transactions, though some claimed that this was primarily because it is easier to input the necessary data accurately on a laptop than on a mobile device – as mentioned in Section 7.4.

And although a number of participants had considered using mobile payment services (e.g. Apple Pay), at the time of the research only one had actually tried this out.

> **I've recently started using Apple Pay as well. I've only used it a couple of times. I'm quite used to contactless anyway. It took me a while to work out how to actually do it, but after I upgraded the software I put the card on there and it was great.**
>
> *Male, 36, web officer, Cardiff*

Many were, in fact, wary of mobile payments – a similar pattern of mistrust to that seen in earlier waves of Media Lives in relation to online banking and shopping via mobile apps.

> **How does it work? Can mistakes be made? How easy is it to use? Can other people do it on my phone? All that kind of stuff, all those kind of questions you would ask. The same questions you would ask of any other similar form of technology.**
>
> *Male, 32, banker, London*

Attitudes to news

9.1 Very diverse patterns of consuming news across the sample

Over recent years we have seen a strong trend towards increasingly diverse patterns of consuming news across our sample. This continues to evolve.

- Main TV news bulletins are still followed by some of the older participants (but are now seen by some participants as archaic).

- The majority of our sample now use an eclectic range of news media to fit in with their lifestyle and areas of specialist interest.

- Others make no active effort to consume news, instead relying on the 'drip feed' of news that they receive within their daily environment. This might include news bulletins on a music radio station in the car, news headlines on their internet login page, or headlines in newspapers at the checkout of their local supermarket.

> **Because it's on this kind of 24-hour drip, it's not such a big thing any more. It has been a long time since we sat down and said to each other *"Come on, let's watch the news"*.**

Female, 49, housing officer, Coventry

9.2 Specific news stories have driven stronger interest in news, but have also heightened the concerns of 'news avoiders'

A series of compelling news stories and powerful images (for example the refugee crisis, the Charlie Hebdo attacks, and Ebola) appear to have driven stronger interest in news among many in our sample this year. In particular, several of our younger participants describe themselves as being more interested than previously in news.

> **I do watch the news more. There's more news to get involved with.**

Female, 82, retired, Coventry

> **I was interested in the migrants and we were talking about it in school in quite a lot of detail – it was quite a big thing.**

Female, 15, student, Warwick

In 2014 we noted the emergence of a segment of 'news avoiders' who actively seek to limit their exposure to what they consider to be dull and/or depressing news stories (they sometimes cited the emotional impact on themselves or their children as a reason for this). The distressing nature of many of this year's major news stories seems to have heightened the concerns of these people and made them withdraw further.

> **I used to have the breakfast news on but it started affecting [daughter]. She had a nightmare about it. She must have seen something about what was going on in Afghanistan or something. So we've stopped putting the news on in the mornings because of that.**

Female, 38, fundraising manager, Cardiff

9.3   Social media, especially Facebook, is becoming an increasingly important source of news

One reason for our young participants engaging more with news in 2015 is almost certainly the appearance of more news within social media.

Many participants (12 out of 19) described Facebook and/or Twitter as an important source of news. Participants both read and share news stories, especially those relating to their local area (social media operating as a kind of 21st-century 'parish pump').

> **While I'm at uni, Facebook and the internet are my only source of news.**

Male, 19, student, Oxford

> **I'm seeing things that are [happening] in this area more than anything else. Like there was a stabbing in [her town] the other day. I heard about that all through Facebook.**

Female, 15, student, Warwick

Some participants actively follow news content providers, but this is the exception rather than the rule. Most news just appears in their timeline via shares from other people.

Many of them said that they consumed news from a wide variety of sources, whose websites they would never otherwise visit, as a result of social media shares.

> **Because I'm friends with a lot of junior doctors on Facebook it's all over my Facebook, and people are using that to plan protests and share news. I would never actually go on the Guardian website to read them, but there have been a couple of really good articles which I read [on Facebook] and then shared with my mum and dad.**

Female, 27, doctor, Bristol

Equally, some users are unaware of and/or unconcerned about the source of the news story that they see on social media. News content is typically consumed within Facebook, rather than a web browser, so the source is sometimes less clearly branded. In these circumstances it can be difficult to exercise critical judgement.

> **I do know a lot of it [news on Facebook] is, like, not trusted, and wouldn't be true… You do get a lot of fake news. But I'm not too particular about what I'm reading.**

Female, 15, student, Warwick

9.4 There is evidence of the growing reach and influence of alternative/non-traditional news sources

Access via social media seems to be part of a broader picture of the growing reach and influence of alternative/non-traditional news sources. In 2015, for the first time, brands such as Huffington Post, Buzzfeed, Vice and Al Jazeera were all described by our participants as significant news sources.

> **Al Jazeera, you can watch RT for the news – Russia Today – and Press TV, that's another news outlet run by the Iranians, I think.**

Male, 29, project sponsor, Stevenage

> **You look at Vice now and what it's become. It has turned into a real bona fide news distributor. It's interesting to see that development from where it came from. And the interesting thing, on top of that, is that it hasn't lost its tongue-in-cheek approach to almost everything.**

Male, 32, banker, London

Section 10

Attitudes to advertising

10.1 The majority of our sample claim to use a variety of ad-avoidance tactics when watching television

Most participants claim to routinely avoid television advertising. Tactics include fast-forwarding through the ad breaks when watching on playback, focusing on another device during ad breaks, going out of the room to make a cup of tea, and series-stacking children's shows from advertising-free channels to prevent children from being exposed to advertising.

> **If something was on at, say, 10.15 we would wait a few minutes until, say, 10.30 and watch it then, so that we could fast-forward through all the adverts.**

Female, 23, student, Edinburgh

Consequently, a number of participants expressed particular frustration when they could not skip the advertising on some broadcasters' on-demand platforms (e.g. ITV Hub, All4). This was much criticised.

> **When it came to the ads we used to pause the programme while we went out to make a cup of tea… and then when we came back we would fast forward through the ads, so that you didn't see them. With the iPlayer [sic] of course you're not able to do that. At least I haven't found a way. So the only way round it is turn the volume down, go and do something else, and let it continue.**

Male, 61, semi-retired, Pinner

There were, however, some examples of ads which participants did find engaging and enjoyable. Some were even viewed as special TV 'events' – for example the *John Lewis Christmas ad*. Occasionally, participants claimed that they would make a special effort to watch these ads, having seen them mentioned in the press.

> **I'd read in the paper that the Milk Tray man was coming back. I did stop and watch that advert.**

Female, 49, housing officer, Coventry

10.2 Most participants claim not to be influenced by television advertising

In discussion about attitudes towards advertising, most participants insist they are not personally influenced by TV ads.

> I wouldn't say that there's a big correlation between TV adverts and behaviour. I don't think I've ever been affected by one.

Male, 17, student, rural Yorkshire

10.3 However, many of the same people did voice concerns about 'vulnerable people' being targeted by ads for (e.g.) gambling or loans

Some participants, including many of those who did not believe that advertising influences *them*, voiced concerns about 'vulnerable people' being targeted during daytime TV by advertising for betting websites and apps, payday loans, etc.

> They're using the media to get to very, very vulnerable people – people who, if they went to their own bank, their bank would refuse them.

Female, 49, housing officer, Coventry

There were also some concerns about the impact of charity advertising shown during daytime TV, particularly on children.

> With the charity adverts, I think some of them just go to the point of being too much sometimes. I know they can be on at any time during the day, and it bothers me that [daughter] might see the NSPCC advert, for example.

Female, 38, fundraising manager, Cardiff

10.4 Participants were generally more tolerant of online advertising, especially within social media

Participants were generally more tolerant of online advertising on social media, as they considered it to be relatively discreet and therefore easy to ignore. Occasionally, contextual advertising – where advertising is personalised to the individual based on their previous web browsing behaviour – was even considered to be useful.

> I don't really mind advertising on social media because they don't want to annoy people so it's usually very discreet. I don't really have a problem with that.

Male, 19, student, Oxford

> I think it's quite useful. I recently came across a lipstick website on Instagram, and ended up going onto the actual website and buying some because I liked it.

Female, 17, student, Warwick

However, some participants were irritated by seeing contextual advertising for products either they had already bought, or were not really interested in buying in the first place.

> Sometimes when you've clicked on something, or liked something, that normally you wouldn't – a one off – and you get advertising for a similar product, that can be kind of annoying… you feel like you're being watched.

Male, 19, student, Oxford

There was very low awareness of ad-blocking software (with the exception of pop-up blockers within web browsers). None of our sample had so far employed any such software.

Section 11

Attitudes to children's media use

11.1 The internet and connected devices are providing benefits to parents (access to educational content and child-appropriate entertainment)

Parents recognise the significant educational benefits to their children from using the internet and devices such as tablets. Online connections between home and school have facilitated greater access to information about children's progress etc., and parents also see this as a major positive development.

> **The tablet is her access to the internet. She's got times table games that she plays on there, and memory snap tests.**
>
> *Female, 38, fundraising manager, Cardiff*

> **I can see his attendance; I can see everything that he does. The poor teachers have a lot more work filling in all the information these days!**
>
> *Female, 42, stay-at-home mum, rural Essex*

11.2 However, the increase in internet-connected devices and access to Wi-Fi have created new problems for parents

Over the course of Media Lives we have seen major changes in areas of parental concern.

Whereas in 2005 most concerns related to content on television, this is now much less of a concern for parents. Their focus seems to have switched overwhelmingly towards their children's behaviour online – the amount of time they spend consuming online content, and the interactions they have with other individuals, more than the nature of the content they are consuming.

The multiplicity of internet-connected devices, both in and outside the home, and the ubiquity of Wi-Fi, has created new problems for parents, both in terms of limiting the amount of time children spend on devices and in protecting them from inappropriate content and interactions.

> **If you're not careful he will come home, he'll go on his Xbox and he'll stay on it until bedtime. He's up there talking to his friends from the village.**
>
> *Male, 41, engineer, Derbyshire*

Parents struggle because there is no precedent for dealing with these issues – they have to invent new rules rather than being able to take inspiration from their own parents. And the challenge constantly evolves as technology changes and their children get older. The children themselves are very quick learners so it is difficult for parents to stay one step ahead.

We changed the password… but the little madam was standing over her dad's shoulder when he picked up the iPad to put the password in, and he didn't realise.

Female, 38, fundraising manager, Cardiff
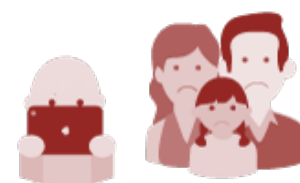
Section 12

Anti-social media use

12.1 There are widespread concerns that too much time using devices damages young people's ability to socialise normally

Although throughout the research participants articulated many positive benefits of using media technology, they do not see behavioural change as universally positive.

The amount of time spent (particularly by young people) on mobile devices and games consoles is a cause for concern for the parents and especially the grandparents in our sample. Many participants described what they saw as excessive media use affecting young people's ability to socialise normally, in terms of causing fatigue, changing their mood/attitude, and as a core reason for a perceived decline in 'good manners'.

> **The more people use phones and technology, the less they are able to interact with people. When you go onto the Tube, you can bet your bottom dollar that on the seats opposite you at least five of every ten people will be on their mobile.**

Male, 61, semi-retired, Pinner

> **I don't understand it. People have just become ruder and ruder because they don't have to face people. I think they've lost the art of smiling, being warm to other people.**

Female, 54, casual worker, London

Mobile phones were seen as very intrusive in social family situations, and most parents in the sample had developed rules for mitigating this impact. So, for example, phones are variously banned from the dinner table, at bedtime and on holiday. Although children are seen as the biggest culprits in this respect, the same issues also appear to affect some adults.

> **One granddaughter [in her 30s] who comes to visit me, she's usually looking at her phone when she is meant to be talking to me. I think it's very bad manners… When [the family] come to dinner on Sunday I make sure everybody switches off their phones.**

Female, 82, retired, Coventry

12.2 In a world in which it is difficult to 'escape' from work, there is increased pressure to be available/ productive

The advent of new technology, and in particular mobile internet access, has profoundly affected some of our participants' working lives. Several now work either from home or 'on the road', facilitated in both cases by mobile and remote access technology.

Although this was mainly seen as a positive development, the ability to – for example – access email everywhere and at all times means that it is increasingly difficult to 'escape' from work. One participant in particular described feeling pressure to be 'productive' at all times, leading to less privacy and less downtime.

> **Part of the problem with having work email on the phone is that it doesn't help you switch off from work. But that's the nature of work at the moment. It's just filling those gaps, and compressing things into spaces that maybe don't need to be filled.**

Male, 36, web officer, Cardiff

Section 13

In summary …

- Streaming services continue to play an increasingly prominent role in participants' TV viewing behaviour.

- Radio continues to be an important medium, although streaming music on-the-go has become a viable option.

- Participants are taking a more segmented approach to social media, using different services for different purposes. They are more likely to be sharing content online, as a key way of expressing their identity online. However, users are more selective than previously about what they share online and where.

- Interest in user-generated content continues to grow, such as that on YouTube, with an increased interest in watching documentaries and factual content on this platform.

- The smartphone continues to be the most important media device for most participants. However, they remain confused about mobile data and how to gauge how much they have used, and they are more likely to be careful about their use of such data.

- The role of the tablet seems to have been at least partially usurped by smartphones, and laptops are now seen as more practical than tablets for work and homework related activities.

- Concerns about online privacy can act as a barrier to being more active online for some, in particular accessibility to personal data. Other, younger participants tend to be more pragmatic and accept that they have to provide data in order to access services.

- Compelling news stories and powerful images have driven a stronger interest in news, but have also heightened the concerns of 'news avoiders'. And social media platforms are becoming an increasingly important source of news, providing for various participants alternative and non-traditional news sources.

- Advertising on TV is avoided where possible, and there are concerns from participants about vulnerable people being targeted by certain types of ads. Online advertising is considered to be more discreet and therefore easier to ignore.

- Educational benefits for children in using the internet and connected devices were recognised by parents, although new problems such as inappropriate content were also a concern.

- Despite the many benefits they offer, digital media and communications technology were seen to be anti-social in certain respects, and damaging to family life and the development of social skills.

Annex 1

Summary profile of wave 11 participants

Sex	Age	Job	Location	Years in study
F	15	Student	Warwick	2
M	17	Student	rural Yorkshire	3
M	19	Student	Oxford	2
F	23	Student	Edinburgh	8
M	26	Bar manager	East Barnet	10
F	27	Doctor	Bristol	10
M	29	Project sponsor	Stevenage	5
M	32	Banker	London	11
M	36	Web officer	Cardiff	10
F	38	Fundraising manager	Cardiff	10
M	41	Engineer	rural Derbyshire	11
F	42	Stay-at-home mum	rural Essex	10
F	49	Housing officer	Coventry	11
M	54	Alarm fitter	Lisburn, NI	8
F	54	Casual worker	London	10
M	61	Semi-retired	Pinner	10
F	71	Retired	Edinburgh	8
F	79	Retired	Bucks	11
F	82	Retired	Coventry	11