



Media Lives – Wave 8 (2013)

Summary Report

Research Document

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Section 1

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 eight-year ethnographic video study has tracked the evolution of people's 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 about media.

Each participant is interviewed in-home and at length (each interview lasts around 90 minutes), which allows for a full exploration of the relevant issues and for demonstration/observation of media use in situ. Eight waves of research have now been conducted; the first was in February 2005, with subsequent waves in October 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011. The most recent interviews took place between 10th and 29th October 2012 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 – between 12 and 18 each year – 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 sixteen participants in the latest round of interviews have been part of the study since the start, and seven more joined the study in 2006. (Section 3, below, highlights some of the areas in which experiences and attitudes have changed significantly over time.)

Certain subjects (many of which have been subject to great change over the eight years of the study) have been tracked consistently each year, such as...

- Acquisition of new media hardware (PVRs, DAB, etc.) and media (e.g. web) skills, confidence in use of digital media, and adoption of new online activities (e.g. social networking)
- 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

- Concerns about privacy, security and safety

However, the research model is flexible enough to explore specific topical issues each year. In many respects 2012 was an extraordinary year, partly because of the presence in the calendar of major media events including the London Olympic Games and Paralympics, and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, and partly because of the impact on public perceptions of the Leveson Enquiry (which was still ongoing at the time of the fieldwork) and the Jimmy Savile case, which came to the fore half-way through the fieldwork period. Inevitably such events and issues had an impact on behaviour and/or attitudes, and this is reflected in some of the findings from this year's interviews.

All interviews have been filmed, and the video is the main vehicle for the presentation of findings from the research. Each year's debrief is a 'living documentary' featuring extensive themed montages of participants talking about key issues – more than an hour of video in each presentation.

In addition, the key insights from each individual interview have been clipped and catalogued by theme, platform and participant each and every year of the study. The cumulative databank of over 2,000 video clips now represents a uniquely rich and detailed resource for exploring and communicating the evolution of people's attitudes to digital media and media literacy issues in the UK.

Section 2

Key findings from 2012

2.1 Olympics: London 2012 engaged and delighted participants all over the UK

Almost all of our sixteen participants were captivated by the coverage of the Olympic Games in the summer of 2012. Media coverage of the games was seen as a major success for the BBC.

“The coverage was brilliant. The BBC had it all covered, they had everything on the red button.”

Male, 51, unemployed, Lisburn NI

On the evidence of feedback from our participants, London 2012 successfully managed to engage people from all across the UK – several of our participants in the nations described an “infectious” enthusiasm for the Games capturing their imagination, sometimes contrary to their own expectations beforehand. Moreover, the fact that Team GB was both ethnically and geographically diverse was seen as a positive asset in engaging different parts of the community.

“I think because Team GB did so well, it almost made it infectious.”

Female, 35, fundraising manager, Cardiff

Enjoying the Games was, for most of our participants, a multi-media event. They variously described using a mix of television, radio, websites, apps and social media to follow events unfold.

“When it wasn’t on the TV [at work], but there was something I was particularly interested in, I would follow it using the BBC’s live commentary on their website.”

Male, 29, banker, London

London 2012 also seems to have given many participants a compelling reason to use the red button service on their television. There was lots of reported red button use across the sample, sometimes for the first time (although many claimed that they did already use it occasionally, with coverage of the Wimbledon tennis championships being specifically cited

on a number of occasions).

“It was just outlandish for a sports fan, there was something like 15 hours of sport every day... I just got home from work and hit the red button... I realised I liked sports I didn’t even know existed three months ago.”

Male, 29, banker, London

However most of those participants who had used the red button as one means of following the Olympics claimed they had not used the red button since the Games ended.

Knowledge of the dedicated digital channels set aside by the BBC for coverage of the Olympics (and those provided by Channel 4 for the Paralympics) was less widespread, and few of our sample claimed to have used these channels.

Following the Olympics was also a real social event for many of our participants: some threw parties or watched with friends; most discussed the action with friends, family and work colleagues. Media technology was a facilitator to this; for example, using phones to keep in touch with friends abroad, sending text messages, and commenting on events on social media.

“Twitter was buzzing with some of the events... not just the results, but people’s reactions to the performances.”

Male, 33, web officer, Cardiff

“Friends of ours were on holiday, and they were watching it where they were while we were watching it at home... suddenly the phone went... ‘Isn’t Britain great?’”

Female, 46, housing officer, Coventry

2.2 The Paralympics engaged audiences in a different way

For the majority of our participants, the Paralympics were less engaging than the Olympic Games themselves. Nevertheless, many did follow the Games to some extent.

For some, the Paralympics were intrinsically less interesting; others *could* have been engaged more strongly in other circumstances, but claimed to have had enough ‘2012 fever’ by then.

There were mixed views on the television coverage of the Paralympics on Channel 4.

Some (mostly younger) participants really enjoyed what they saw as a fresh approach to covering this kind of event, and the focus on key athlete personalities and their 'back-story'.

“I think it was a bit more youthful... a bit cooler. I think everything's like that on Channel 4... I think I enjoyed the Channel 4 one slightly better [than the Olympics on BBC].”

Female, 20, civil servant, Edinburgh

Others (mostly older members of the sample) were less impressed. In particular, several were highly critical of what they perceived to be intrusive advertising breaking up the flow of Channel 4's coverage.

“It was getting ridiculous, the amount of adverts... I think I actually counted how long it was at one point... you were getting one race, then another advert.”

Female, 68, retired, Edinburgh

A few felt strongly that the Paralympics *should* have been covered on the BBC, and that it was somehow demeaning to the event to be televised 'only' on Channel 4.

“I thought it was actually quite cruel, because I don't think the Paralympians worked any less hard... it almost seemed like they were relegated to Channel 4, whereas they could have been on BBC2 even.”

Female, 35, fundraising manager, Cardiff

2.3 The profile and perception of Twitter have changed radically

In previous waves of Media Lives research, Twitter has largely been perceived by our sample as a niche platform, used primarily by celebrities to communicate with their fans, and of little direct relevance to most of our participants.

“I don't follow anyone on Twitter... I've never really looked into it... after I moved away from Facebook I was never really interested.”

(2011) Male, 25, planning assistant, Stevenage

These perceptions have changed radically in 2012. Several of our participants are now active users of Twitter, and others have become much more aware of it because of high-profile media coverage of incidents such as those involving Ashley Cole and Tom Daley.

Interestingly, as far as our sample is concerned, Twitter is becoming a kind of 'chameleon' platform, used in quite different ways by different people. For some it is a way of following celebrities, for others a specialist newsfeed, a marketing platform for their work, or a way of communicating with friends, television shows, etc.

“Programmes like Geordie Shore and The Only Way is Essex, Twitter is all about it... it’s funny to read... if someone comes on in a stupid hat, everyone’s writing about it.”

Female, 20, civil servant, Edinburgh

“My Twitter feed is particularly useful to me... It’s kind of like bookmarking, but a bit more in-your-face.”

Male, 33, web officer, Cardiff

Some participants pointed to this inconsistency in the role and use of Twitter, and in particular the fact that it is both a very personal medium but simultaneously on display to millions of people, as the root cause of many of the issues that have come to the fore this year.

- Without fully understanding who and what the platform is for, it’s difficult to know how to act or what to say, and no organization appears to be taking on the role of educating people that what they write is, effectively, published content.
- It is a difficult environment to police because it is so accessible to all.
- It gives a platform to people ('trolls') to be critical, offensive, and abusive in a highly public way – either deliberately or inadvertently.

As a result, these participants recognised the potential for Twitter to be a source of 'social drama' on a grand scale (potentially far greater than what we might have seen previously on Facebook), and acknowledged that this can be very quickly magnified by press coverage.

“With Twitter I don’t think people realise that they’re publishing something that other people can see, and if they’ve got an opinion it might offend somebody, it’s not just going to go to people who are on their friends list, like Facebook... It’s bigger than that.”

Female, 20, civil servant, Edinburgh

“It’s not two of you in a room together having an argument, this is taking place in front of a million people... Then the tweets are copied and re-tweeted, then it hits the papers... it’s crazy.”

Male, 29, banker, London

Where voiced, there were mixed views across our sample about how to strike the right balance between the right to free speech on Twitter, and the right of participants on the platform to remain safe from abuse.

“You have a responsibility, just as you would if you were speaking to someone face to face, to treat them in a respectful way.”

Male, 29, banker, London

“I don’t believe they should come down hard on anyone that says anything on Twitter... people have lost their jobs over it, but that’s just the fault of modern technology... If you’d said it in a crowd of people, that would be it.”

Female, 79, retired, Coventry

2.4 Some of the Leveson Inquiry revelations have personalised and complicated questions of trust in journalism

Over the eight years of the Media Lives study, we have witnessed a gradual decline in the level of trust and respect participants demonstrate towards journalists – particularly those writing in the press, but also, by extension, broadcast journalists.

“My buy-in to the news, specifically to the mainstream, has lessened, based on the fact that I don’t trust it... it doesn’t seem to bear any resemblance to the facts that you find out when you start digging around.”

(2010) Male, 26, technician, Coventry

This year, in the wake of the highly-publicised Leveson Inquiry, trust in journalism might reasonably be described as being at an all-time low among our sample.

“I take everything with a pinch of salt... There is always a bias, no matter who you go to.”

Male, 26, planning assistant, Stevenage

In practice, few participants were surprised by the revelations of widespread phone hacking, and alleged complicity between the police, politicians and journalists, as described at the Leveson hearings.

Nevertheless there was still a degree of outrage, expressed by some participants, that these techniques might be used against unsuspecting members of the general public who happened to be caught up in a news story, rather than high profile figures and celebrities,

whom many of our participants considered to be 'fair game' for the tabloids. The Millie Dowler case was described as particularly shocking, not least because it raised the spectre of this kind of press intrusion affecting individuals like them.

"I think we all knew that this went on anyway... It's just that nobody took it seriously until that Millie Dowler case... Most people just said: 'Well, it's just celebrities, they make loads of money, they've got to expect that.'"

Female, 51, catering worker, London

"After that, to me, you know Big Brother is watching you, you can be monitored. Anyone with a connection can intrude into your personal life."

Female, 46, housing officer, Coventry

The Leveson revelations did also provoke deeper reflection among some of our participants, who suggested that perhaps we are all somewhat complicit in that we provide the demand for this type of story, or are so interested in the story itself that we do not question adequately how the story was obtained.

"It's a bit like a distraction burglary – they keep you distracted with the information, so you don't think about how they obtained that information."

F, 46, housing officer, Coventry

Section 3

Technology adoption

3.1 The iPad is this year's 'must-have' device

In terms of media technology, the item with by far the highest profile among our sample this year was the Apple iPad. Five of the sixteen households participating in the survey had acquired at least one iPad in the past year, and some of the other participants described it as their next 'must-have' piece of technology.

In many cases, children or teenagers were the primary catalyst in acquiring an iPad; in some cases adults may have used their children as a justification for buying one for themselves. Either way, in most cases families have shared their iPads across the generations:

“The kids [each have] an iPad... they’re virtually glued to them... They use them for other things as well as playing games... they do all their homework on them... and we go on them at night.”

Male. 38, engineer, Derbyshire

The way in which participants describe using iPads is also interesting, in that the iPad does not appear to be a direct functional replacement for any specific existing piece of household technology. Participants variously described using the iPad as a mix of portable TV, electronic magazine, games console and laptop replacement. While most of the adults owning iPads described them as making their 'family laptop' more or less redundant, it is clear that in practice people are doing more with the iPad than they previously did with the laptop.

“We’ve taken it on holiday and done videos, we’ve done pictures, spreadsheets, letters, e-mails, use Safari to go online, watch iPlayer on there, download apps for [3 year old daughter]... I can’t remember the last time we switched on the family laptop because we do everything through the iPad.”

Female, 35, fundraising manager, Cardiff

One of the main positive features for participants was its user-friendly interface. Several described this as being significantly easier than using a PC. Indeed, the iPad was specifically described as being a good way of converting the digitally unengaged, who are put off by the idea of using a mouse and keyboard. In one instance a participant's wife had been persuaded to be much more active online because of this, and another participant was planning to buy an iPad specifically with the objective of getting her husband online for the first time.

“My wife has gone from being a relative novice on the computer to being in advance of what I do in relation to the iPad – she absolutely loves it.”

Male, 58, semi-retired, Pinner

“One of those iPads would be good because you can play with... it’s not so intimidating.”

Female, 76, retired, Bucks

Participants also thought that the portability of the iPad was a real benefit. They described travelling with their iPad (particularly taking it on holiday with them, something they would never do with a laptop); the near-ubiquity of WiFi meant that the iPad could be a useful and engaging travelling companion. Battery life (compared to a PC) was also seen as a key benefit in this respect.

3.2 Mobile TV is beginning to catch on

One knock-on effect of the popularity of the iPad this year among our sample has been significant growth in their reported use of mobile devices to watch TV.

Although viewing on smartphones has been possible for some time, almost none of our participants had done this in the past, and many had been dismissive of the idea.

“No, I don’t think I’d want to watch TV on something that small [phone], I’d rather wait until I can watch it on a proper screen.”

(2010), female, 22, medical student, Exeter

This year, however, five of the sixteen described themselves as watching at least some content on a mobile device.

“I watch telly in my bed... I use an app called TV Catchup... if that’s connected up to the Wi-Fi it’s really fast. Even though I’ve got a telly in my bedroom I just watch it on my phone.”

Female, 20, civil servant, Edinburgh

The iPad, with its bigger screen, appears to have been a catalyst to people re-evaluating the value of services such as the BBC iPlayer on mobile devices.¹

¹ The BBC recently reported that 36.5 billion minutes of BBC programmes were watched or listened to on iPlayer in 2012, with the most significant trend being huge growth in iPlayer requests from mobiles and tablets which almost trebled compared to 2011.

“My wife watches on the iPad. When she goes abroad she downloads the programmes before she goes then watches them when she’s away.”

Male, 58 semi-retired, Pinner

Although this viewing is taking place on devices that are designed to be used outside the home, in practice much of the mobile TV viewing reported by our sample actually takes place at home, with the mobile device effectively becoming an additional set within the household. In this respect, mobile TV represents another facet of the fragmentation of viewing patterns within households.

Reported viewing of mobile TV was typically via WiFi (in-home) or watching programmes that had been downloaded to the device at home but then viewed outside the home. Almost none of our participants could recall an example of using the mobile data network to view mobile TV.

3.3 Smart TV is also gaining ground

The other emerging technology to impact upon our sample in the past year is smart TV sets. Three of our sixteen participants had bought a smart TV set in the past year.

However, this was not necessarily something that they had specifically gone out to look for. The purchase of a new TV was part of their normal upgrade cycle, and they had been persuaded to buy a smart TV set because it was the most up-to-date/future-proof option in this product category. Indeed, at least one of the purchasers was largely ignorant of the ‘smart’ functions of her new set.

“Do we need to be able to get up the computer on the TV... the reality is, probably no you don’t, but then you get into a discussion about ‘are these going to be obsolete?’... You start to feel like your parents must have when gadgets first came out... For us it was the first time that buying a TV was difficult, because there were so many things to choose from.”

Female, 46, housing officer, Coventry

For those using smart TV sets (and indeed for those considering the possibility of getting one in the near future) access to the iPlayer through the TV was described as the most compelling function. Indeed, there was some anecdotal evidence that this is changing viewing behaviour in smart-TV households, with a shift in balance from live to on-demand viewing.

However, there was some criticism of the iPlayer interface on smart TV sets; this was not considered to be as good as the online version.

There was also some interest in streaming movie services through smart TV sets, and one of our participants had subscribed to Lovefilm through his smart TV. But there was much less interest in some of the other apps on the set (e.g. YouTube), or in the idea of using the TV set as a means of *browsing* the internet.

Section 4

Long-term trends

4.1 News consumption continues to fragment

Over the eight-year period of the Media Lives study we have seen significant changes in the way in which participants consume news output.

Ease of access to news across different platforms such as 24-hour news channels, websites and social media, and the availability of ‘ambient’ news through newspapers on display at supermarket checkouts, giant screens at railway stations, etc., has made headline news available to audiences as part of their daily routine. As a result, their dependence on news ‘bulletins’ to stay informed has lessened. This is a trend that was explored in some detail in the 2011 wave of Media Lives.

“I cannot remember the last time I sat down and watched the news on the TV, the full half an hour.”

(2011) Male, 28, banker, London

2012 has seen a significant further fragmentation in the news consumption patterns of our participants. Each participant described their own unique approach to following a bespoke news agenda through a diverse mix of platforms and news-provider brands (although the BBC News, in one of its forms, remains a constant in most, if not all, participants’ repertoires).

“At work, when I’m on my lunchbreak, I’ll go on the BBC website to check out the serious news, then go on to the Daily Mail site to look at the celebrity news.”

Female, 20, civil servant, Edinburgh

There is now so much diversity and fragmentation in our sample’s patterns of consumption that there is no longer any obvious programming ‘reference point’ for the news of the day – a role that in earlier waves may have been attributed to the Today programme on radio, or the ITV News at Ten on television. The BBC website is now perhaps the nearest thing to a common reference point among our sample.

Many participants described their news consumption pattern in a way that can be perhaps best summed up as ‘skimming and diving’. They check headlines, in passing, on a regular and routine basis; for example, on their default internet home page, or via the hourly radio news headlines in their car, then occasionally switch to a different medium (e.g. a news

website or a 24-hour news channel) to delve into stories of particular interest in more detail.

Among our sample, 'skimming and diving' seems to have become a more common approach to keeping up-to-date with the news than making an 'appointment to view' a particular news bulletin, as might have been the case in earlier waves of research, and certainly with earlier generations.

“When I open up my home page and see MSN I’ll have a quick look and if there’s a picture or a headline that looks interesting I’ll click on that and have a read of it.”

Male, 23, warehouse man, Tring

The ability to filter the type of news they receive, in particular through online platforms including Twitter and RSS feeds, has also led to some participants (particularly those with a stronger interest in news) consuming a more personalised and specialist news agenda, in some cases at the expense of more 'general' news.

“I follow the main news feeds like the Guardian, BBC, a couple of technology feeds, and then, at the next level below that, some of the journalists that work for the news agencies, like Rory Cellan-Jones.”

Male, 33, web officer, Cardiff

4.2 Confidence in online security continues to grow

Another area that we explored in some detail in Media Lives 2011 was online privacy and security. In 2012, as in the previous year, most of our participants claimed to be relatively confident about online security. But this year there has been a marked increase in participants having the confidence to conduct online transactions using their phone, rather than relying on a PC.

“I would never buy anything on my phone before, I would always do it on the PC, but I’ve started doing that now... I’ve got my [shopping] apps, and I did my Tesco shop on my phone for the first time yesterday. It’s easier now that the screen on the phone is a bit bigger.”

Female, 39, housewife, Essex

Individual participants continue to adopt various strategies to limit their exposure to online fraud. These include avoiding certain environments (e.g. public WiFi), using payment services such as PayPal rather than inputting their card details directly to make purchases,

and in some cases avoiding what they consider to be the highest-risk online services (e.g. banking).

Several participants in our sample have been victims of card fraud, which may or may not have been linked to online transactions. All claimed to have received excellent support from their banks, which has led to them remaining confident to transact online in spite of their negative experience.

“I had an experience where a sum of money was stolen from my account over a period of about two weeks... It’s easy to say it wasn’t too bad an experience given where everything ended, but if the bank hadn’t been prepared to reimburse that money, it would have been a terrible experience.”

Male, 29, banker, London

Viewing online security in a broader context, several participants raised the notion that security issues are not restricted to online transactions. Many of our participants expressed concerns about the security of the postal system, and a number recounted bad experiences of valuable post going missing.

“The postal system would be good if you could trust the people within it... I saw something on Panorama... I remember sending my niece a birthday card and I wrote ‘Nothing of value within this card’ [on the envelope] because I just wanted her to get the card, because often they just never receive it.”

Female, 51, catering worker, London

4.3 Decline in the personal use of post

In 2011 we explored attitudes towards the postal system for the first time, as Ofcom had recently taken on regulatory responsibility for this sector. 2012 has seen a continuation of some of the trends revealed then.

Most of our participants claim to be using the postal service less and less for personal letters (although some of our participants still use it extensively for business). The one exception that most participants articulated was the sending of Christmas cards. Email and other forms of electronic communication have replaced many of the routine personal uses of letter post for the majority of our participants (and particularly the younger ones).

“If you’ve got to send a letter to a company, then you send a letter, but if it’s contacting a friend or family, or something like that, there are so many other options available that I could not

imagine ever using the post over anything else that's available to you."

Male, 29, banker, London

"There are certain periods like birthdays or Christmas when an e-mail wouldn't be appropriate... I wouldn't be impressed getting an e-mail saying 'Happy Christmas' from my son or someone like that."

Male, 58, semi-retired, Pinner

Participants described most of their incoming post is being bills, junk mail, or other generally unwelcome material. 'Real' letters were considered to be exceptional, but nevertheless still a pleasant treat.

As reported last year, the increase in online shopping has driven significantly greater use of parcel services, particularly among those who actively buy and sell on eBay. Concerns about the security of items sent through the post, and bad personal experiences, have led to participants using Special Delivery much more frequently for their parcel post through Royal Mail.

"If we sell anything, we always sell it with Recorded Delivery, so you've got a tracking number, you can find out where it is... It's just so much safer."

Male, 38, engineer, Derbyshire

4.4 Portability of content is beginning to emerge as an issue

As the use of digital content has increased across the sample, and an increasingly diverse range of devices are being used to consume that content, the portability of digital content between devices, and related issues surrounding ownership and copy protection, are slowly emerging as an issue for some participants.

Almost for the first time this year, we heard anecdotal evidence of the same digital content being accessed across multiple devices; for example, cloud-based music collections being accessed by phone, laptop and iPad. However, this type of activity is still relatively rare among our sample.

Nevertheless, the interoperability of content between devices, either now or in the future, is already a concern for some participants, and is influencing some of their purchasing decisions.

“Compatibility is now one of the major issues when it comes to buying different devices... If Apple had Flash player technology, I think I would have bought an iPad by now.”

Male, 29, banker, London

The principle of ‘not actually owning digital content you think you’ve bought’ did emerge as a concern for some participants (one person recounted the story of Elton John’s dispute with Apple about his right to leave his iTunes music collection in his will).

However, those who appeared to be most concerned about this issue were unlikely to be active users of digital content in practice. The more active users tended to demonstrate a more relaxed view, and in some cases argued that the benefits of digital content outweigh the potential restrictions.

“Ownership of digital content is a different kind of concept really... One of the reasons that I signed up for services like Lovefilm and Spotify is that I don’t necessarily feel like I own my digital collections anyway.”

Male, 33, web officer, Cardiff

“It doesn’t bother me, to be honest. Clutter bothers me, and I think that’s probably why I’m glad I don’t buy CDs any more.”

Female, 35, fundraising manager, Cardiff

4.5 Facebook is becoming a minority activity among our sample

Social networking as a phenomenon has appeared, gone mass market, and begun to decline in importance over the course of the Media Lives study. Individual participants have fallen in and out of love with their social networks, as exemplified by the following two quotes from the same participant, five years apart.

“Because I’ve been to Uni, and different schools, I’ve got somewhere between 450 and 500 friends on there [Facebook]... If you update it regularly, it’s like a timeline of your life.”

(2007) Male, 24, banker, Chelmsford

“I cannot remember the last time I logged on to Facebook... There’s nothing really on there for me... I’ve thought of closing my account, but there’s a chance that someone from my past might try and get in touch.”

(2012) Male, 29, banker, London

Over the past two to three years we have seen the level and breadth of interest in Facebook across our sample peak and begin to decline. In 2012 this decline seems to have accelerated. Only four of sixteen participants now claim to use Facebook regularly.²

Facebook is, without doubt, still an important part of some participants' lives. This group however, now represents a minority of intensive users (mostly younger women). These participants are using Facebook more regularly than ever, facilitated in particular through dedicated mobile apps.

“I still go on it about a hundred times a day because it's there on my phone. Every time I pick up my phone I check my Facebook.”

Female, 24, trainee doctor, Truro

But broader attitudes to Facebook have changed significantly among our sample over the past year. Many (especially men) were openly dismissive, both of Facebook itself and (in some cases) of its users.

“I think it's pretty sad really. My cousin's on it, and he's checked in that he's at work, or that he's at home, and I think.... why?”

Male, 38, engineer, Derbyshire

Some users thought that Facebook is now less 'cool' than it once was, with the suggestion that there is now more 'buzz' around Twitter. And some users complained about changes to the way Facebook works, which has made it less appealing to them.

“Facebook is dying a slow death. You see loads of people leave status updates like: ‘Yawn... forgot Facebook even existed.’”

Female, 20, civil servant, Edinburgh

² Since the fieldwork ended data have been published suggesting that nearly 1,000,000 people in the UK stopped using Facebook in December 2012

Section 5

Life in the 'connected society'

5.1 The internet is close to being viewed as a utility by our sample

Over the eight-year period covered by the Media Lives study, going on the internet has been steadily adopted as a daily activity by more and more of our sample. In 2005 six of our twelve (at that time) participants were confident, regular internet users; by 2007 this had increased to twelve out of fifteen.

During this time more and more of our participants have recognised, and begun to enjoy, the practical, tangible benefits of being online, and across the sample use has become steadily more *functional* in nature – using the internet to *do* things (buy, sell, book, etc.) rather than going on the internet as an activity in its own right.

“I can’t remember the last time I went on the internet and just surfed... But it’s very frustrating when you don’t have access to the internet... You think: what did you use to do when it didn’t exist.”

Male, 29, banker, London

In 2012, for the first time, all of our sample are now online at home (or on the verge of being so – our oldest participant, a 79-year-old widow, had just bought a PC at the time of her latest interview and was reviewing options for broadband providers).

For the majority of our sample, going online is now just part of their daily routine. They use the internet to access email, do research into subjects and products they are interested in, shop, bank, book everything from airline flights to classes at the gym, plan holidays, use social networking sites, and communicate with friends and family abroad using Skype.

“We book the holiday through the internet. We renew the car licence, the television licence, I just paid the gas bill on the internet, and I do internet banking.”

Male, 58, semi-retired, Pinner

“I wake up up in the morning, and it’s the first thing I do. Facebook, then Twitter, then Instagram. You just have a wee check.”

Female, 20, civil servant, Edinburgh

This makes having access to a reliable broadband connection at home a vital service to many participants, as important as electricity or water. Several described frustrating experiences when they lost their broadband connection, and dissatisfaction with the performance of their ISP in restoring the service in a timely way, particularly those who rely on the internet for working from home.

After seven years of relentless growth, in 2012 there was the first suggestion that internet usage has plateaued among our sample. It certainly remains important to them, and in practical terms is probably more important than ever, but several respondents spontaneously commented that they were spending less time online than before, and that they were less engaged or interested in the internet than perhaps they had been in previous years.

“I have to make time to use the computer... I suppose it’s true to say that I’m not dependent on it.”

Female, 76, retired, Bucks

“I spend less time on the internet now... Now when I need to do something I just go on the internet and do it... I’m a lot more focused in the way that I use it.”

Male, 29, banker, London

Most of our participants now feel that they know enough to be able to get by on the internet, or know as much as they want to know, even if that isn’t very much. Only the most recent converts to the internet in our sample demonstrated any real appetite to learn about how to use it. This is also a significant change to some previous years, when we witnessed a much stronger appetite to learn; either via formal training or from friends and family, and among a larger proportion of the sample.

“I could equate it to a piano teacher – someone who you can get on with and who would work one-on-one with you. That would be useful, and I’d be prepared to pay for that.”

(2005) Female, 69, retired, Bucks

5.2 Mobile internet use continues to grow

We have seen steady growth in mobile internet use across our sample in recent years, fuelled by the growing ownership of smartphones among the sample.

In 2012, we saw further growth in the use of the mobile internet, but whereas in previous years this had been across a diverse range of devices, the clear focus of attention this year was on the Apple iPhone. This is now the dominant device among the younger end of our

sample (the eight youngest participants in the study *all* now have iPhones; several had switched from either Blackberry or Nokia devices in the past year).

“I’ve got an iPhone now... Everyone I know who used to have a Blackberry, all of my friends, have now got iPhones. There used to be BBM and all that malarkey, now I think they prefer something a bit more technical, the App Store and all that.”

Male, 23, warehouse man, Tring

Participants also described using more of the functions of their smartphones this year, including listening to music, watching TV, taking and sharing photos, playing games, and social networking. This continues the medium-term trend towards smartphones being seen increasingly as a laptop alternative.

The targeted use of apps to make mobile internet access quick and easy seems to have played a central role in this change of behaviour. Participants talked about convenience being key; many of the apps they use are used very frequently.

“I’ve got my eBay... you just press it and you’re straight onto it, my Facebook, my Amazon.”

Female, 39, housewife, Essex

The availability of mobile internet on phones and tablets has resulted this year in several of our participants getting unexpected bills for data use. Many participants, particularly those who are occasional or first-time users of the mobile internet, expressed confusion about what is and isn’t covered by the contract, and didn’t understand how much data they were using.

“When we first got the iPad, we were collared the first month through the amount of usage that we had, because we went well over, and in fact we had to change the package to the maximum, after we’d paid out the first month, an extra sixty quid.”

Male, 58, semi-retired, Pinner

Finally, we heard more examples of the use of smartphones for specialist or professional purposes, including to track and trade investments, and the widespread reported use of iPhone apps by doctors.

“All junior doctors will use them on ward rounds. There’s an app that you can get, that if you type in the condition and the

patient's weight and age, it will give you the exact dose... people use that quite a lot."

Female, 24, trainee doctor, Truro

5.3 The connected society is viewed as a mixed blessing

Participants viewed the notion of living in a 'connected society' – a world in which we are now always accessible via electronic communications – with a degree of ambivalence.

Many participants liked being constantly connected. For them, it facilitates more flexible and efficient working (particularly those who are mobile workers or do some or all of their work from home).

Although personal attitudes towards the internet and social media have cooled in some respects over the past year, conversely, these tools have become a more integral part of the working life of some of our participants.

"As a fundraising manager, you don't miss any opportunity, if somebody wants to do something for you they can get hold of you all the time... Your emails ping straight through, your texts ping straight through, Facebook is on there, Twitter's on there..."

Female, 35, fundraising manager, Cardiff

However, the 'connected society' is having a negative impact on some participants' lives.

Several described themselves finding it more and more difficult to 'switch off' or escape from work. Work calls and emails seem to be encroaching more and more on their personal space and time.

"I think I have mixed feelings... because I'm so attached to being connected through work and I depend on it so much to communicate with networks – peers and so on – it's getting harder for me to disconnect from work. But that said, it's so useful for my personal interests as well."

Male, 33, web officer, Cardiff

Some of our participants also commented on the anti-social nature of phone calls and texts in social situations and/or in public places such as pubs, trains and theatres.

“You’re out for dinner with someone and they are on the phone, or they keep checking their phone... their attention is not on you... I just think it’s rude.”

Female, 51, catering worker, London

For others, although having constant access to electronic communication is not intrinsically a bad thing, the sheer *volume* of communication this entails, and the amount of effort required to deal with it, can sometimes feel overwhelming.

And finally, there is the flip-side of the ‘connected society’. For those who are *not* connected, it’s very easy to feel left out, or in some way disadvantaged. This was a concern voiced by several of our older participants.

“Every place you go, they ask you if you’ve got an internet, can they get in touch with you via the internet... I feel left out now, it’s asked so many times.”

Female, 79, retired, Coventry

5.4 Children are growing up differently in a connected society

One feature of the shift towards a connected society is the way in which our sample’s parental attitudes and concerns about their children’s media consumption have changed in recent years.

Whereas in earlier years of the study, parents voiced concerns about the nature of content, particularly in television programmes, issues around the watershed, etc., by 2012 very few concerns were expressed by parents about their children’s television viewing. Their concerns were mostly internet- or mobile internet-related, and often more to do with the amount of time spent online than with the risk of children accessing unsuitable content.

“I have to be careful... If she goes off the children’s channels I monitor what she’s actually watching.”

(2006) Female, 40, housing officer, Coventry

“I have fears in regard to anything that has access to the internet, with a young child, regardless of whether it’s a phone, an iPad or a laptop. It’s very difficult to give a child a device and then watch them all the time. There are times when we’re busy and we know where he is, we just don’t know what he’s doing... and there he is playing on the phone.”

Male, 26, planning assistant, Stevenage

On the basis of our participants' feedback, children are becoming mobile technology- and internet-savvy at a very early age – in some cases below the age of three. It is not unusual among our sample for children to have outpaced their elders in terms of digital literacy before they are old enough to go to school. Children are often very good at teaching older people how to use digital technology, and several examples of this were cited in our interviews this year:

“She was showing one gentleman in the choir how to use an iPad which he’d just got, and he was clueless, and he’s sitting there watching [my daughter] do this, this and this, and he’s saying ‘Go back, and show me how you did that’... She’s three and a half.”

Female, 35, fundraising manager, Cardiff

One of the main worries was the volume of time spent by children playing computer games of one form or another (particularly on mobile devices), with some parents and grandparents also expressing concern about the fact that children now spend less time in the fresh air or exercising.

“I know there are loads of games that you can play, but in the summer you need to be out and about. If you’re stuck in the house all day with your games, how are you going to learn to interact with people when you’re older.”

Male, 51, unemployed, Lisburn NI

It is clear that some parents find it increasingly difficult to police their children's use of the internet in WiFi-connected homes, with multiple and portable devices that allow children access to various forms of internet connection (Xbox, tablets, etc) in their own rooms. Life has become much more difficult in this respect than in 2005 when, in the households involved in the study, children's only means of access to the internet was a desktop PC in a home office or family room.

Current teenagers, who have grown up having their web usage carefully policed, were considered by their parents to be less problematic than younger children who are now growing up with easier internet access via multiple access points.

One way parents talked about mitigating this risk was the use of apps. Several described apps as being particularly good for their children in that they provide targeted and controlled access to the internet.

“They [my kids] don’t use the internet that much, what they use is the apps. They download different games, maths apps,

drawing apps. My son likes doing word searches, so he downloads a lot of those.”

Male, 38, engineer, Derbyshire

The increased use of smartphones as an alternative to PCs, and the arrival of iPads in many of the households in our sample this year raises the possibility that a generation of post-PC children is beginning to emerge. These children are highly digitally literate, but via a touch-screen rather than a keyboard or mouse. We are starting to hear the first evidence of this from our young parents.

Annex 1

Summary profile of Wave 8 participants

Sex	Age	Job	Location	Years in study
F	20	Civil servant	Edinburgh	5
M	23	Warehouse man	Tring	7
F	24	Trainee doctor	Truro	7
M	26	Planning assistant	Stevenage	2
M	29	Banker	London	8
M	33	Web officer	Cardiff	7
F	35	Fundraising manager	Cardiff	7
M	38	Engineer	Derbyshire	8
F	39	Housewife	Essex	7
F	46	Housing officer	Coventry	8
M	51	Unemployed	Lisburn, NI	5
F	51	Catering worker	London	7
M	58	Semi-retired	Pinner	7
F	68	Retired	Edinburgh	5
F	76	Retired	Bucks	8
F	79	Retired	Coventry	8