ADULTS' MEDIA LIVES WAVE 16: 2020/21

A report for Ofcom
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1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Adults' Media Lives is an ethnographic video study which tracks the changing nature 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 about media. The methodology comprises extended filmed interviews with the same individuals each year, allowing us to see how this relationship evolves over time.

The study was set up in 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 different levels of media access, awareness, skills and understanding, Adults' Media Lives aims to provide a human face to the data.

In many cases these changes have been dramatic, not only inspired by the availability of compelling new devices and services, but also as a result of changes in the lifestage and domestic circumstances of the individual participants. We have learnt that (for example) going to university, entering or leaving the world of work, becoming a parent, experiencing the break-up of a family or financial hardship are important catalysts to changes in participants' relationship with media. These experiences often create new needs or give people an added incentive to develop new skills, but also sometimes create barriers to getting the most out of the opportunities presented by digital media. Elsewhere change has been slower, especially among some older participants.

Sixteen waves of research have now been conducted; the first was in February 2005, with all the subsequent waves taking place around October each year. Usually each participant is interviewed in-home and at length to allow both for a full exploration of the relevant issues and for demonstration and observation of media use in-situ. However, because of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, this year's interviews were reduced in length (to around 60 minutes) and undertaken online via Zoom. A total of 18 interviews were conducted between 6th and 30th October 2020 by Mark Ellis and Tony Harbron 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. Ten of the 18 participants in the latest round of interviews have been part of the study since either 2005 or 2006. As the profile of the sample becomes – by definition – progressively older, we have regularly recruited new participants at the younger end of the age range.

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

- Acquisition of new media hardware (smart TVs, smartphones, smart speakers, wearable technology etc.) and services (such as super-fast broadband, streaming services, etc.);

- Development of media skills, confidence in the use of digital media, and adoption of new online activities (e.g. sharing content via social media);

- The role of the internet in daily life (e.g. education, work, shopping, banking, interacting with government and other institutions);

- Use of mobile devices to consume content;

- Viewing behaviour and other content consumption;

- Sources of news and information;

- Trust in content and media providers across different media platforms;

- 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 the latest interviews, we discussed experience of online misinformation and conspiracy theories, particularly about Covid-19.

This study provides rich contextual insight into trends that are observable through large scale quantitative surveys. It also acts, on occasion, as a bellwether, indicating a direction of travel in terms of attitude or behaviour that is not yet observable in other data sources. However, its findings should be read as illustrative and illuminating, rather than as fully representative of the population.

2. OVERVIEW

Key insights from the 2020/21 wave include:

Impact of Covid-19 (Section 3)

- The life of almost everyone in the sample has been affected substantially by the pandemic, and some participants were concerned about the impact of social isolation and excessive screen time on their physical and/or mental health.

- Technology has played a particularly important role in participants' lives over the past year and – in the short term at least – their technology purchase priorities have changed, with a greater focus on home entertainment technology and equipment to support home working.

- Home working and remote study have become the norm for many of our participants, and most believe that at least some of these changes will be permanent. There were several perceived benefits to this way of working but also drawbacks, particularly for those in the early stages of their career whose opportunities for on-the-job learning and relationship-building with senior colleagues has been limited.

- The use of video conferencing platforms and features has grown considerably. These platforms have proven invaluable for keeping work and social interaction going during the pandemic, and for providing support to potentially vulnerable friends and family.

- Health-oriented technology has been more widely adopted, including hardware and apps which track health and fitness, and the use of online diets and exercise routines. Some participants also relied heavily on online resources such as YouTube to research medical issues.

- The pandemic has been the catalyst to a step-change in digital skills for some participants. Several older participants have embraced new technology such as online shopping, banking and video meeting apps for the first time as a result of the pandemic.

TV, radio and streaming services (Section 4)

- Streaming services continue to play an increasingly important role in participants' viewing repertoire. Subscription services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Now TV and Disney+ continue to be extremely popular but participants also reported increased use of BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub and All4. Some participants claimed to have struggled to find enough content to enjoy on the subscription services during lockdown.

- Public service broadcasters (PSB)[1] are valued for providing a mix of content including both high-quality drama and more easy-going and light-hearted programmes (sitcoms, panel shows, etc.), which have played an important role in keeping participants' spirits up during the pandemic.

- Attitudes to the TV licence are changing. Compared to previous years there was more overt resentment about having to pay among the over-75s, those who don't feel a strong level of engagement with the BBC and those who only watch via the iPlayer and/or on mobile devices.

- In contrast to viewing, claimed listening – especially to radio, but also to podcasts – has declined since the start of the pandemic. This is largely as a result of participants spending less time driving or commuting.

Social media and online content (Section 5)

- Participants' use of social media continues to evolve, with more claimed use of Instagram at the expense of Facebook. A few of the younger participants have become heavy users of TikTok.

- Some participants are making a conscious effort to be less active and/or visible on social media for a mix of reasons including concerns about how much time they're spending online, negative feedback from fellow users, and concerns about the potential impact of their digital footprint on future career prospects.

- Participants reported that Facebook and WhatsApp groups had played a valuable role in fostering neighbourhood spirit and providing a support network for those in need during lockdown.

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[1] The BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5, STV and S4C

- YouTube continues to serve an important and diverse role as a source of online content. Increased ownership of smart TVs has led some to watch YouTube more often, but others claimed that they were watching less than before, largely because of what they considered to be excessive advertising.

- Direct experience of harmful content has been minimal this year, but some participants nevertheless commented that they believe social media has become an "angrier" and less tolerant space since the start of the pandemic.

- Online ratings and reviews were considered important in helping participants make certain purchasing decisions (e.g. restaurants, hotels), but participants generally view them with a degree of scepticism and adopt a variety of strategies when it comes to interpreting this information.

Personal data, privacy and security (Section 6)

- Most participants displayed a greater level of awareness than previously of how their personal data is collected and used. As a result, some (but not all) claimed to have modified their behaviour in the past year (e.g. by picking and choosing more carefully when they accept cookies).

- There was a wide disparity in appetite for knowledge about personal data and privacy. A minority are actively seeking to educate themselves about these issues whereas some others have chosen to deliberately avoid finding out too much.

- Nevertheless, the majority believe that there is no escape from the harvesting and use of their personal data by the major tech companies such as Google and Facebook for commercial purposes.

- Participants are increasingly cautious when presented with evidence of a potential security breach – even, on occasion, when they don't need to be.

News and misinformation (Section 7)

- The use of news and information sources re: Covid-19 has evolved. Local and regional news and information sources have become more important as rules and restrictions have become more diverse around the UK; in the meantime the blanket coverage of the pandemic has led some participants to avoid national coverage altogether.

- The televised ministerial briefings were considered essential viewing during the first lockdown, but many participants in England have now stopped watching them. The attention of those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has mostly been focused on their own dedicated national briefings rather than the UK-wide ones.

- Most participants said they had seen misinformation re: Covid-19 on social media but felt confident distinguishing fact from fiction. A few expressed fears that – in the effort to prevent misinformation – legitimate counter-argument might be being suppressed.

- The BBC has been the main reference point for news and information about the pandemic. As a result – and contrary to the medium-term trend of disillusionment with the BBC we have witnessed amongst our sample in recent years – support for the BBC as an institution has grown. Nevertheless some participants remain sceptical about aspects of its output.

3. IMPACT OF COVID-19

3.1 The life of almost everyone in the sample has been affected substantially by the pandemic

Almost all the participants in the study had been impacted to a significant degree by the Covid-19 pandemic. Several were on the frontline or key workers; many were working or studying remotely; two had been furloughed and two had lost jobs directly as a result of lockdown; one participant was isolating awaiting the result of a test and another was recuperating from Covid-19 at the time of their interviews.

This impact was not seen as entirely negative. Some participants really appreciated the opportunity to spend more time at home with family. Others had taken the opportunity to "re-boot" their lives, particularly in relation to exercise and diet. Many commented that lockdown had given them pause for thought and that they had become more appreciative of good health, friends and family.

However, as the year progressed, some participants felt that they had become more concerned about their own and/or other people's mental health, particularly the impact of social isolation and excessive screen time. One participant was especially worried about the mental health of her sons (who live with her), and she herself had started taking anti-depressants to help her cope.

'The boys have not been good at all, [Son A]'s mental health has been really bad, proper deteriorated and so has [Son B]'s, so I've had to go back on my meds to be able to deal with it all.'
Female, 47, Stay-at-home Mum, Rural Essex

Another, a mental health first-aid volunteer for his workplace, described the challenges of trying to fulfil this role at a time of high anxiety for all, and when there is less face-to-face contact with his co-workers.

'My training is in person; how to read someone's emotion, how to make sure that they're not at imminent risk to their health and make sure they're not going to hurt anyone or hurt themselves… When someone messages you on Slack saying X, Y and Z I have no idea how serious that is because you can't see their emotions. That was something that I found extremely challenging and extremely detrimental to myself.'
Male, 21, Betting Odds Trader, Leeds

3.2 Technology has played a particularly important role in participants' lives over the past year

Over recent years of this study we have observed how an ever-greater part of participants' daily life relies on the internet. When the study began in 2005, broadband internet access was still in its infancy; over half of our sample either weren't online at all at home or were only connecting via dial-up. Going online was considered an activity in its own right.

As time went on, our participants started to spend more time online, and many of their everyday activities moved online: shopping, studying, banking, house-hunting, applying for jobs and engaging with public services. The internet has become a utility which facilitates much of their daily life.

This importance has been magnified during the pandemic; participants have been very heavily reliant on technology – especially the internet – for the practicalities of daily life, for keeping in touch with work, friends and family and for entertainment.

'It was the lifeline to outside the flat. It meant that we could still see our family's faces. It meant that we still had entertainment.'
Female, 32, Doctor, London

'I think what it showed is how essential it is… if it was down, what we would lose. Quite a lot of things to be honest with you – from jobs, to entertainment, to keeping in touch.'
Male, 66, Semi-retired, Pinner

Having reliable access to home broadband was therefore seen as essential. Participants did not necessarily take this for granted, and some expressed gratitude that this had – on the whole – been consistently available to them.

'I think it would be a big deal if this all went down. If somebody pulled the plug on this, what on earth would happen?'
Female, 76, Retired, Edinburgh

'It's worked out really well, and I feel grateful and I actually feel really blessed that we've got this kind of technology.'
Female, 54, Housing Officer, Coventry

Online shopping – especially for groceries – had become more important for most of the sample.

'I don't go to the shops very much. I do order in groceries online.
We try and do most of the shopping online these days.'
Male, 76, Retired, Warwick

'I don't really want to go in supermarkets. When I've been before they've not been
particularly pleasant experiences. I don't know that many people know how arrows
work.'
Female, 43, Fundraising Manager, Cardiff

In the short term, at least, participants' technology purchase priorities had also changed somewhat; perhaps understandably there was greater focus on home entertainment technology (e.g. smart speakers, smart TVs) and equipment to support home working at the expense of (e.g.) having the latest smartphone.

'The surround sound went wrong and the TV wasn't doing what it should be doing
either. We had to cancel the holiday so, with the spending money we had for that, we
just decided we'd upgrade what we've got and it has worked out brilliantly.
Brilliant TV, I don't know how we put up with the other one for so long.'
Female, 47, Stay-at-home Mum, Rural Essex

'We've got a smart light bulb in my bedroom – that's where my temporary office is
at the moment. It allows me to change the dimmer level on the light,
which is quite handy when you're working at screens. Also when you're going to bed,
when you want the light off, you don't have to switch it off and stumble to bed, you
can actually get to bed and tell Alexa to switch the light off.'
Male, 41, Web Officer, Cardiff

Several participants had decided to keep their current handsets with a SIM-only contract at a point in their contract when they might previously have upgraded, and two who had recently changed their handsets had bought second-hand.

3.3 Home working and remote study have become the norm for many of our participants

Working primarily or exclusively from home, with meetings and interviews conducted over video conferencing apps such as Zoom and Teams had become the norm for all the office-based workers in the sample since the initial lockdown in March. Similarly students' learning experience had been almost exclusively online. Most participants believed that at least some of these changes will be permanent.

'Basically, I've been told by work that we're working from home indefinitely now, it's definitely till New Year but it's going to be a lot longer.'
Male, 21, Betting Odds Trader, Leeds

'It was probably coming anyway, in the next few years, that interviews would all go online. Our exams are all in London, so people from Liverpool and Sheffield have to travel to London and pay for overnight accommodation to sit an exam that's already cost five or six-hundred pounds so I think if there was a way to put it online it was going that way anyway in a few years, and this has just accelerated it.'
Female, 32, Doctor, London

Participants had created makeshift office spaces in spare rooms, bedrooms, kitchens and conservatories. The level of employer support they had received varied widely.

'They expensed an extra monitor for me so I've got two now, which is what I need, as well as my laptop screen.'
Male, 21, Betting Odds Trader, Leeds

'I saw that Spain enacted a policy where whatever you have to buy to allow you to work from home, whether that's a desk or a chair, a phone, you should be able to expense that to your company if you're employed full-time. When I thought about it, it's crazy that that doesn't exist in the UK. Why should I have to pay for things to allow me to do the work to make money for this company?'
Male, 24, Tutor, London

There were several perceived benefits to this way of working, particularly in terms of having the flexibility to work when you want and less time commuting.

'Once you've got used to the fact that all your teaching is online, there are so many pros to doing it that way, saving yourself time, travel, money… I don't know how eager I'm going to be to go back to face to face.'
Male, 24, Tutor, London

'We're a lot more comfortable now conducting meetings across these digital platforms… that'll stick. I think we're going to cut down on travel. We're going to focus on not only the environmental aspects and benefits of working from home… There are potential other wellbeing benefits of not having to do that commute, of not having to rush to different places.'
Male, 41, Web Officer, Cardiff

However there are also perceived drawbacks, especially for younger participants. The two students in the sample both commented that they felt that the quality of their education experience was being compromised and that they were receiving poor value for money in relation to the fees they were required to pay.

'The second half of second year was mostly online… That wasn't so bad because you'd got to know your lecturers in person, you kind of knew what you were doing. Whereas this year it's all new lecturers for third year… The work's a lot harder... You're not able to go to your lecturer and say: "I don't understand this" and you can't shout out the same way that you can in Uni... because there's four-hundred people all listening.'
Female, 20, Student, Belfast

Young professionals in the early stages of their career commented that limited networking opportunities and a lack of face-to-face contact with senior colleagues was hampering their professional development.

'A huge part of the legal profession is networking and getting your name out there, especially because after I finish my traineeship I'll be looking for an NQ (newly qualified) position. You want to give yourself the best chance you can. Before we went into lockdown, there would be drinks every Friday or lunches and dinners, and I got to know loads of people in the department through that.'
Female, 27, Trainee Solicitor, Edinburgh

'It has affected my training progression probably quite significantly because I just don't know what's going to happen with getting a job.'
Female, 32, Doctor, London

The social impact of the lack of direct face-to-face contact with work colleagues was a concern to others in the sample too. Participants also voiced concerns about the potential impact of excessive screen time on their physical and/or mental health.

'It was all right at first but now, as the months have gone on, it's just got more and more repetitive. Obviously, I don't leave the house a lot, not a lot of social interaction... Personally, I'd love to be back in the office, speaking to everyone again, properly.'
Male, 21, Betting Odds Trader, Leeds

'It can be quite solitary, in a way. That does allow you to get on and do more work without being disturbed, but there is something to be said for having that human interaction, not even for being efficient in work terms, just in human terms.'
Male, 37, Financial Services Exec, London

'A lot of the things I do to chill out, like watching a series or messaging people or having a FaceTime with someone, that's also all on screen… The stuff that I do to be productive outside of my job, like learning Arabic and writing, also involve screen time so I've noticed that, whereas before I'd be on the iPad for four hours a day, it's now more like nine to ten hours a day.'
Male, 24, Tutor, London

'Because I'm spending more time at home, I'm also spending more screen time. I'm rather fearful of registering and measuring the screen time because I know it's truly excessive, and what I find now is that I suffer from eye strain.'
Male, 76, Retired, Warwick

Some parents in the sample struggled to juggle work and parental duties when their children were at home during the first lockdown. Whilst there were adequate online resources available, they did not always feel confident in using them.

'My wife's a teacher with special needs kids and that has meant that she's been in much more than other teachers, which is fair enough but it has meant that I've had to manage some of the homeschooling and have the kids at home whilst also trying to chair Zoom calls and things like that.'
Male, 41, Web Officer, Cardiff

'I did have to Google a couple of things. What on earth is that asking you to do? The way I was taught to do maths in school is not the way they're taught to do it now. Same answer, just totally different process to get there.'
Female, 43, Fundraising Manager, Cardiff

3.4 The use of video conferencing platforms and features has grown considerably, both for work and social applications

Every participant has been active on at least one video calling/conferencing platform in the past year. Zoom, FaceTime, Skype, WhatsApp and Teams were all mentioned.

These platforms have proven invaluable for keeping some kind of social life going and providing support to potentially vulnerable friends and family during the pandemic.

They have also opened up social interactions (e.g. regular contact with family abroad) which would not otherwise have taken place.

'We use Zoom quite a lot and then at work we used Microsoft Teams all the time,
so that's become the new norm, which was quite strange at the start
but now I'm quite comfortable with it.'
Female, 27, Trainee Solicitor, Edinburgh

'The virtual pub quiz has actually been a bit of a godsend. It has meant that we've
been interacting quite a lot as a group of friends. Where it would have been maybe
weeks or months between get-togethers, it's been much more consistent.'
Male, 41, Web Officer, Cardiff

'I was using WhatsApp calls, group calls with my sisters.
I have two sisters that live in England.'
Male, 59, Unemployed, Lisburn NI

'We'd just not long become grandparents and it was lovely.
They'd send me videos of [grandson] and we'd WhatsApp one another.
That's where technology was absolutely fantastic.'
Female, 54, Housing Officer, Coventry

'The technology was there before but we would have never thought of doing it,
there just wasn't the kind of commitment to get everybody across four different time
zones to meet at a certain time and have an hour's conversation as a family,
but now we're doing that a lot more. It has opened our eyes a little bit.'
Male, 37, Financial Services Exec, London

At the time of our interviews (shortly before the second national lockdown was
announced) use of these platforms for group calls had declined since its peak during the
first lockdown (quizzes in particular were seen as a bit of a fad). But these apps were still
being used much more than before for both work and leisure.

'We had a daily family Zoom in the Spring, which was more than we would have
talked to each other otherwise. We don't do it daily anymore but we do have
weekly family Zooms, which we didn't do before.'
Female, 32, Doctor, London

'It's like everything… Once the ban was lifted everyone went back to normal.
We still keep in contact, but just not as frequently now.'
Male, 46, Engineer, Rural Derbyshire

3.5 Health-oriented technology has been more widely adopted as part of a broader interest in health-related issues sparked by the pandemic

In keeping with a broader interest in health, diet and fitness sparked by the pandemic and lockdown, participants reported increased interest in – and use of – apps (e.g. Strava) and hardware (e.g. Apple Watch) which track health and fitness, as well as online diets and exercise routines.

'I've been getting into my running a bit more so I've got the Strava app on my phone.'
Male, 21, Betting Odds Trader, Leeds

'One thing we're doing a lot more of since lockdown is our exercise at home, so we use the internet for that because gyms were closed... The gyms that I go to in London like Third Space, Barry's and Digme have all got IGTV (Instagram TV) workouts and some of them on YouTube so I've just been doing some of those in my living room.'
Female, 32, Doctor, London

'I was looking at what to do to go to the gym, to lose weight and I came across this Snake Diet thing; it's like a fasting lifestyle. I eat one meal every seventy-two hours.'
Male, 31, Labourer, Swansea

Several participants mentioned their use of online resources (e.g YouTube) to research medical issues. The use of such resources, although not new, was certainly more widespread this year. For some this was driven by Covid-specific concerns (e.g. how to do a test) or problems accessing in-person medical services. In two cases it was due to their extreme reluctance to visit healthcare settings for fear of exposing themselves to the virus.

'I've been going on the internet, trying to do my own research when I've got some kind of infection because normally they'd just keep me in the hospital but I don't want to go in hospital. I'd rather be in pain and have an infection than go in and die. That's how I feel.'
Female, 59, Unemployed, London

The fieldwork took place shortly after a major awareness campaign for the UK Government's Track and Trace app. Whilst some participants had downloaded the app, claimed usage was limited. This appears to be due to a mix of lack of awareness, limited understanding about who and what the app was for, concerns about false positives and (for some) mistrust of how the data might be used.

'I have been using it, you sort of need it now because whenever you walk into anywhere, they ask you to scan something... I put in my symptoms and my positive test result and it showed me how many days I had to isolate so I guess it's good in that sense.'
Female, 20, Student, Loughborough

'I don't have it because a lot of people keep forgetting to deactivate it at work and are getting constant updates to self-isolate and then it's impossible to tell which ones are legit.'
Female, 32, Doctor, London

'On my wife's, it says that she's got to self-isolate. So if she was to go out and take her phone, technically they can keep an eye on where she is… That's a bit of a Big Brother… I think once this [self-isolation] is over we'll probably get rid of the app, just for that reason.'
Male, 46, Engineer, Rural Derbyshire

3.6 The pandemic has been the catalyst to a step-change in digital skills for some participants

Several participants with limited digital skills (particularly, but not exclusively, older members of the sample) have embraced new technology for the first time as a result of specific needs created by the pandemic – finding a new way to access information and services which are no longer available face-to-face, staying connected with family and their other support networks. Notable changes included an increase in online shopping, adoption of online banking, visiting government and local government websites and using apps that facilitate keeping in touch with friends and family.

'You're forced to learn and to keep up with what was going on. It was a point of contact, it was important... I was so grateful for WhatsApp, and I was grateful that I could do the banking online.'
Female, 54, Housing Officer, Coventry

As a result of using these technologies (largely successfully) their confidence in the use of technology and online services has grown significantly.

'Because I'm over seventy-five I've got to apply for a [driving] licence every three years… I was able to do that online without any assistance which was quite good... Certainly I'm more comfortable enquiring about things, I'm not so frightened of clicking buttons and making mistakes.'
Female, 76, Retired, Edinburgh

Other participants (already digitally literate themselves) reported similar changes among their older relatives (sometimes with their help and support).

'They've actually stepped up quite a bit with the tech, the parents, to be fair... I've actually got them on online banking which is a bit of a coup because my dad is [usually of a mind that] if he hasn't got his passbook it's not happening.'
Female, 43, Fundraising Manager, Cardiff

Although their experiences of change had been almost wholly positive, participants nevertheless claimed that they made these changes because they felt that they had to. Indeed, some would still ideally prefer to do things the old-fashioned way.

'It's other people that push me into doing it, I'm still not happy, but I can see that I'm going to have to do it.'
Female, 59, Unemployed, London

'I'm still quite frightened of technology. In my new job they use Teams and they were looking for early adopters… but I wasn't comfortable being taught the technology. Simply because I thought: I can hold on for four or five months and then we'll revert back to the old chalk and talk type thing. But of course it hasn't worked out that way… Either I'm not going to be employed or I've got to get myself involved.'
Male, 66, Semi-retired, Pinner

A few also remarked that the risks associated with digital exclusion for those who have not made the leap to new technology have been magnified by the current crisis. One 76-year-old participant had been using her new-found skills to support similarly-aged neighbours who weren't able to access the internet for themselves.

'I've helped [neighbour] next door. I'll go online if she wants to know timetables… I've got a scanner as well, so I'll photocopy knitting patterns for her.'
Female, 76, Retired, Edinburgh

4. TV, RADIO AND STREAMING SERVICES

4.1 Streaming services continue to play an increasingly important role in participants' viewing repertoire, but participants have at times struggled to find content to enjoy during lockdown

Over the course of the study we have witnessed a shift in participants' viewing behaviour from linear TV to time-shifted and on-demand viewing. This first became evident as our subjects started to use hard disk recorders like Sky+. The emergence of smartphones and tablets as viewing devices, and the availability of the BBC iPlayer and similar catch-up services began to drive uptake in streaming video, even more so once these began to appear as apps on smart TV sets, set top boxes and games consoles.

From about 2013 onwards, subscription streaming services like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Now TV became increasingly popular – to a point where, by 2019, almost all of our participating households had access to at least one of these services.

Most participants reported that they had been watching more this year as a result of more time spent at home due to the impact of the pandemic. Nevertheless (and in line with the long-term trend), participants claimed to be watching less live TV than ever.

'As far as television programmes, I can't actually remember what I've watched live. Everything's just recorded'
Female, 54, Housing Officer, Coventry

'There are some programmes which I do watch, but not at the time they broadcast, and I'm very selective about it.'
Male, 76, Retired, Warwick

'For years we haven't really watched TV in real time – apart from the news I guess – but even that, we pause so we can make a coffee.'
Female, 43, Fundraising Manager, Cardiff

The notable exceptions to this trend were the ministerial briefings (especially during the first lockdown) and live sport – particularly after Premier League football resumed and live coverage of matches was available across a range of platforms.

'More so than ever, our TV viewing is focused towards box sets. For me, there is very little in the way of terrestrial TV watching. I'd say the only thing that I've watched terrestrially is sport.'
Male, 37, Financial Services Exec, London

'On Saturday I watched three games, yesterday two games, there's another one tonight. [Nottingham] Forest are on tomorrow night, Forest are on Friday night.'
Male, 46, Engineer, Rural Derbyshire

Subscription services like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Now TV continue to be extremely popular amongst our sample (and three had subscribed to the new Disney+ service). Many box sets, films and documentaries had been consumed since lockdown on these services, but participants also reported increased use of the broadcasters' catch-up services, particularly BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub and All4.

'At the very beginning we started binge watching random TV programmes. I think we went through a period of watching historical-based dramas. Not Jane Austen, I mean like The Last Kingdom – violent Vikings and things like that.'
Female, 43, Fundraising Manager, Cardiff

'We watched The Crown. We didn't actually think that would be something we'd be into, but we just started watching it and really loved it… It was quite educational.'
Female, 20, Student, Belfast

'Shameless, I've been watching [on All4]… It's quite easy to watch, I suppose; you can just switch off. My job is extremely intense so sometimes, say I finish at eleven, I'll put that on… and it'll help me switch off and go to bed.'
Male, 21, Betting Odds Trader, Leeds

For the first time since the emergence of streaming services such as Netflix, viewers described themselves sometimes struggling to find content to enjoy. Word of mouth recommendations from friends and family had not always turned out to be reliable and, while "watch next" links from the platforms themselves were considered useful, these were sometimes criticised for recommending too much of the same sort of content.

'In work we have what we call our "Hummus Huddle" – a half hour catch-up just for morale… We've been sharing what we've been watching… Some of the films they have been recommending have been really random… You're half an hour in and you have to decide whether you're going to persevere with it and waste an hour of your life just because your friend recommended it… We watched quite a few of those.'
Female, 43, Fundraising Manager, Cardiff

'There's quite a few Viking programmes and – at the end of the day – one Viking programme is the same as another. I don't want to watch too many.'
Male, 46, Engineer, Rural Derbyshire

'They were watching Safe. I come in, sit down and I think I'm watching The Stranger. I said: "Well who are these?" and they said "Mum, this is something different." I thought I was watching the same one, because it felt like I was.'
Female, 54, Housing Officer, Coventry

4.2 PSB channels are valued for providing a mix of content, including high-quality drama, but don't always get the credit for their own programmes

As well as driving changes in viewing behaviour, services like Netflix have changed our participants' attitudes to what constitutes high-quality viewing – especially since the advent of originated programming on these platforms. The "British is best" attitude to TV drama which was widely held in 2005 has given way to a more international outlook. And PSB channels are no longer necessarily seen as setting the benchmark for quality.

Nevertheless, BBC, ITV and Channel 4 programmes were often mentioned alongside content from subscription services like Netflix in participants' viewing highlights. Programmes like *Des*, *Life* and *Normal People* were cited as examples of high-quality drama series on these channels, and a match for the best content on the subscription streaming services.

PSB channels were also praised for providing other types of programming. This includes documentaries such as *Lance*, but there also seems to have been a notable resurgence of interest in – and appreciation of – more easy-going and light-hearted content such as sitcoms and panel shows. This is in part a direct result of the pandemic – participants talked about watching these programmes as a way of cheering themselves up. But they were also enjoyed as a break from the intense drama usually associated with popular box sets.

'I watch Gogglebox, Taskmaster, Would I Lie to You?; light easy things to watch.'
Male, 31, Labourer, Swansea

'I've been looking at All Creatures Great and Small because I think in the current climate, personally, I want to have something that's a good news story.'
Male, 76, Retired, Warwick

'It was intense at work and then if they were watching these box sets, where some of them could be quite intense, I just thought I need something that's going to make me laugh... I used to have half an hour, and I'd watch Birds of a Feather, because it just made me smile.'
Female, 54, Housing Officer, Coventry

Content originated by the PSB channels was being consumed on a range of platforms, including their own streaming services and Netflix. This led to some confusion as to who had commissioned or produced specific programmes.

One conspicuous example was *The Fall*, which two younger participants had discovered for the first time on Netflix and liked very much – both for its compelling plot line and (for one Belfast-based student in particular) for the fact that it was set and made in Northern Ireland. They were unaware that this was originally a BBC programme, and so any potential positive impact on their impressions of the BBC was lost.

'I've just watched The Fall, that was really good, I really enjoyed that.
That was like a serial killer thing… I'm quite into them.'
Female, 20, Student, Loughborough

'We watched The Fall. It was quite good because we were able to street spot…
I think sometimes whenever people think about Belfast, they automatically
think about The Troubles or negative things.'
Female, 20, Student, Belfast

In another example, however, this link was made. Although most of the back catalogue of *Line of Duty* was available on Netflix, the most recent season was only available on BBC iPlayer, so the same participant was aware in this instance that it was a BBC programme.

'I've just finished watching Line of Duty as well... There's only four seasons of it
on Netflix so we had to go to BBC iPlayer for the fifth season.'
Female, 20, Student, Belfast

4.3 Attitudes to the TV licence are changing

With so much viewing now done online, a TV set is no longer seen as a necessity, particularly by some younger participants. Others do still have a TV set, but don't have it connected up to a traditional TV service such as Freeview, Virgin, Sky or BT. As a result, over the last three years a small but growing minority have chosen not to purchase a TV licence.

This year, however, two of these participants reported having received warning letters from the TV licensing authorities as a result of watching BBC iPlayer without a TV licence.

'I watched Normal People on my iPad and then got a letter saying:
"We notice you've been watching iPlayer."'
Male, 24, Tutor, London

'I only thought that live TV needed a TV licence, but apparently, BBC iPlayer needs it
too. So I was watching it and we got a letter through the door to say we're under
investigation so we need to stop… so I've stopped that now.'
Female, 20, Student, Loughborough

Both acknowledged that they were in the wrong, but they were nevertheless surprised
and disconcerted to discover that the licensing authorities were able to track exactly
what they had been viewing and link their behaviour to their home address.

'I was a bit shocked when it came through, they can actually pinpoint
which house is watching. It actually had a list of the things we were watching.'
Female, 20, Student, Loughborough

'I had a BBC account, which I assume they somehow managed to link to my address. I
don't a hundred percent know how they would have done that.'
Male, 24, Tutor, London

They were shocked at being expected to pay a year's TV licence for watching a handful of
programmes, and this had prompted further thoughts about the appropriateness of the
current licence fee mechanism for accessing BBC content.

'I think the issue is if you want to watch one thing on BBC iPlayer, you then have to pay
however much it is per month for the whole year, to watch that one season,
whereas it'd be quite nice if you could buy individual things on BBC. The thing is,
I haven't used my TV licence since purchasing it about four months ago.'
Male, 24, Tutor, London

This was part of a more widespread pattern of complaints about the TV licence – among
the over-75s in the sample, those who don't feel a strong level of engagement with the
BBC and those who only watch on mobile devices. An increasing number claim to pay the
licence fee through gritted teeth. Those who don't want to pay now actively avoid BBC
content.

'Well I've just renewed my television licence, because I'm over seventy-five and I have
to pay it. I must say I resented having to pay a hundred-and-fifty pounds odd.'
Male, 76, Retired, Warwick

'It's a lot of money for nothing... It's not great, for what you pay, I know it's a yearly thing but even so. It was meant to be the people's TV.'
Male, 59, Unemployed, Lisburn NI

'I still feel a little bit of resentment… I associate the TV licence with the television, whereas I've got an iPad; for some reason it changes my perception of why I need a TV licence.'
Male, 66, Semi-retired, Pinner

'I think it is quite expensive, and obviously we're students. We do have a TV but we've been plugging our laptops in with an HDMI and then we've been watching films on Netflix or on Amazon... Channel 4 have like an iPlayer thing and you don't need a TV licence for that, so we were re-watching all the old Inbetweeners as well.'
Female, 20, Student, Loughborough

4.4 In contrast to viewing, claimed listening has declined as a result of the pandemic

Historically, the large part of our participants' reported listening to radio (and, latterly, podcasts) has been either in the car, commuting via public transport, or in the workplace. Because of less time spent out and about, more home working and less commuting claimed listening was down for all platforms this year, but especially for radio.

'Since I've lost my job going down to the South Coast, the radio has taken a bit of a back seat, because most of my radio listening was when I was in the car.'
Male, 66, Semi-retired, Pinner

'I don't really listen to the radio, unless I'm in the car, but even then I'd use Bluetooth because I still use Spotify all the time. I don't listen to podcasts as much as I used to. I think a big difference is I don't commute anymore. That was a big part of my commute: listening to a podcast or listening to something on my phone.'
Female, 27, Trainee Solicitor, Edinburgh

Nevertheless, a minority of participants still claimed to make a special effort to listen to podcasts and/or audiobooks, especially while exercising. Much of the varied content they listen to is factually-based and comes from a wide range of sources.

'I did listen to quite a few podcasts during lockdown because I got engaged and there are quite a few wedding podcasts that I listen to.'
Female, 32, Doctor, London

*'I'm still trying to listen to a bit of politics, a bit of financial markets type stuff…
Light entertainment has definitely waned because when I do have the time and
bandwidth to listen I want to listen to stuff that's informative, that I'll learn something
from, or something that will bring me up to date with current affairs.'*
Male, 37, Financial Services Exec, London

*'I've been listening to one podcast pretty regularly; it's called Yang Speaks… That
started in March, so I've been working through trying to catch up to the present day.'*
Male, 24, Tutor, London

Although only a few participants were listening regularly to podcasts, several more
claimed that they had intended to do so, but never quite got around to it. Strong word-of-
mouth recommendation has created a positive reputation for podcasts. They have
become something that people feel like they ought to listen to. As a result, some of the
participants who have not done so confess to a certain level of guilt.

*'I tried to start listening to podcasts because I thought it would be better for me to
listen to more informative things than music but I got a bit sidetracked… I don't really
know what happened to them. I think, just because I got busy again, they sort of
dropped off.'*
Female, 20, Student, Loughborough

*'I promised myself that I'd get back into podcasts throughout lockdown, there are lots
of really interesting sports podcasts, documentary podcasts that I've been pointed
towards. There's a will but I haven't yet found a way to commit to it yet.'*
Male, 41, Web Officer, Cardiff

5. SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE CONTENT

5.1 Participants' use of social media platforms is evolving, with increased use of Instagram and TikTok

Over the past four years participants have reported use of a more diverse range of social media platforms, as well as the widespread adoption of messaging apps such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. Younger participants in particular now use a portfolio of services for specific communication tasks or to keep in touch with different social circles. As a result, Facebook is no longer the dominant platform it was previously.

In line with this trend there has been continued growth this year in participants' uptake and use of Instagram, at the expense of Facebook in particular.

'A few of my friends are on Instagram and they use it as a way to encourage people to get outdoors, go running, to go walking with the kids and that was a big focus throughout lockdown, so it appealed – so I signed up.'
Male, 41, Web Officer, Cardiff

A few of the younger participants have also started using TikTok. Their use of the platform was still considered to be in the novelty phase and a source of slight embarrassment, as it was perceived as being targeted primarily at young teens. Users remarked that TikTok is highly addictive; this leads to extended periods of usage.

'I'm quite embarrassed to say I've downloaded TikTok out of curiosity. Whether or not it will stay on the phone I haven't decided yet.'
Female, 20, Student, Belfast

'I was averaging – at one point – over nine hours a day, on my phone, which is literally outrageous. There's no need for that whatsoever. I was a massive fan of TikTok… to the point I had to delete the app because it was taking over my life – and at the age of twenty-seven that's not something that you should admit… The algorithm is so accurate that you just kept on wanting to see what the next one was; there was literally no way that you could go on it for five minutes.'
Female, 27, Trainee Solicitor, Edinburgh

5.2 Some participants are making a conscious effort to be less active and/or visible on social media

Several participants reported having deliberately reduced the amount of time they spend on social media, while some others reported being more circumspect about what they post online or even withdrawing from certain platforms altogether. Various reasons were cited – including concerns about how much time they were spending online, negative feedback from other users and concerns about the potential impact of their digital footprint on their career prospects.

'When I got this new phone it would send me weekly screen updates and I think I was averaging six and a half hours a day on my screen – and a lot of that was just mindless scrolling that was completely pointless, adding nothing to my life.'
Female, 32, Doctor, London

'I'm not doing Facebook anymore and I'm not doing [Facebook] Messenger... I went on the political side of things, I think I got too involved... Some people don't want to know. They don't want to hear it. They call you "The Tin Hat Brigade" so I'm thinking: what is the point?'
Female, 47, Stay-at-home Mum, Rural Essex

'In my job, it's really strict and I just get really paranoid now. So I've not got my full name on any of my social medias, I'm not on Facebook anymore and I've changed my Twitter name to a really cryptic name... I could post something that is completely innocent and everyone in my generation would find funny, but it would only take one person to be offended by it… I would not want to work this hard to get this far to be given a warning by the regulator for a stupid TikTok that I put up.'
Female, 27, Trainee Solicitor, Edinburgh

Lifestage is certainly a factor in some of these changes. Contrary to the previous example, one student in the sample described herself as being more active now as a content creator on Instagram – building her online profile with a view to potential future business opportunities.

'I've come up with a bit of a business idea: I want to go into more coaching in the future... so I'm starting to post a lot more on Instagram now because I want to start building more interest in it.'
Female, 20, Student, Loughborough

This mirrors very closely the behaviour of our previous participant when she was a university student…

'I started doing more and more people's make-up and then I started a wee business on Instagram and Facebook because so many people were asking me... It's far more financially beneficial for me than working at Costa.'
Female, 27, Trainee Solicitor, Edinburgh in 2016 (then a Student, aged 23)

5.3 Facebook and WhatsApp groups have played a valuable role in creating social cohesion during lockdown

The use of messaging apps such as WhatApp and Facebook Messenger has grown significantly over the past four years of the study, and family, work and friendship WhatsApp groups have become important communication channels for most of our participants.

This year, both existing and newly formed Facebook and WhatsApp groups were mentioned several times as having played a valuable role in fostering neighbourhood spirit and providing a support network for those in need during lockdown.

'I live in a housing estate, and that has a Facebook group... all the neighbours know each other well. One of our neighbours actually died from Coronavirus and it was nice to see all the neighbours come together to rally around the family.'
Female, 20, Student, Belfast

'During lockdown there was a street WhatsApp group set up... It has been brilliant actually... In London you hardly ever know your neighbours so it's really nice to have that community feeling.'
Female, 32, Doctor, London

5.4 YouTube continues to serve an important and diverse role as a source of valued online content

YouTube has been an important video content consumption platform for the majority of our participants for several years. By 2019, 15 out of 19 participants were using YouTube at least occasionally.

During the pandemic they have continued to use YouTube to consume a variety of content including "how to" videos, excepts from TV programmes, sports highlights, documentaries, special interest and user-generated content.

'The American TV series that I like... the Bravo stuff... we get them quite late over here... You can go on YouTube, find them there and watch them in up-to-date time."
Female, 59, Unemployed, London

'With looking after the wee granddaughter I've watched more YouTube… the kiddy stuff and some movies and songs… There's quite a lot on there.'
Male, 59, Unemployed, Lisburn NI

'Anything to do with Steve Irwin, anything with Bear Grylls. He's got a new YouTube channel, that's really interesting… Meerkat Manor, Lemur Island, any nature programmes.'
Female, 47, Stay-at-home Mum, Rural Essex

A few participants described themselves using YouTube more this year, in some cases as an escape from pandemic-related content in the mainstream media. Increased ownership of smart TVs has facilitated this growth in part, but participants continue to view on a mix of devices and in a variety of locations.

'I am absolutely addicted to YouTube, more so than I am to the TV. There is major beef going on amongst the bloggers about 90 Day Fiancé… Oh my God, the drama… It's just craziness.'
Female, 59, Unemployed, London

'Because I can access it on my TV it's much more enjoyable to watch. I'm used to watching it on my phone so I didn't realise how good quality it was.'
Female, 27, Trainee Solicitor, Edinburgh

'How to use gym equipment properly… highlights of the football and the boxing… facts programmes, documentaries about mass murderers… I normally sit in the bath for an hour and a half a day and scroll through YouTube on my phone because I'm so bored.'
Male, 31, Labourer, Swansea

Others claimed that they were watching fewer videos on the platform than before, largely because of what they considered to be excessive advertising.

'If I want to learn how to do something I'll watch a YouTube video, but otherwise, no… YouTube is annoying me at the moment because it never used to have so many adverts. Now if you're watching a longer video it has an advert in the middle of the video, so I can't be bothered.'
Female, 20, Student, Loughborough

5.5 Direct experience of harmful content has been minimal this year, although social media is considered to have become an "angrier" and less tolerant space

None of our participants reported that they personally had been the victim of online abuse or directly exposed to harmful content online in the past year.

That said, many observed that social media (in particular) seems to have become an "angrier" and less tolerant space in the past 12 months. This was felt to be partly a result of the effect of the pandemic on people's morale, and partly a reflection of continued polarisation in attitudes to politics and other public issues.

'I haven't had any personal experience of that. I've noticed it more, especially with the football. I think people are getting a lot angrier because they are generally more unhappy in their life so they're directing it at other people.'
Male, 21, Betting Odds Trader, Leeds

'I have seen hateful things in politics at the moment, people voicing their opinions on Boris and Covid and everything.'
Female, 20, Student, Loughborough

Some platforms (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube) were felt to be more prone to heated discussion and aggressive comments – especially directed towards people in the public eye – than others (e.g. Instagram).

'When I was watching the live video yesterday of Arlene Foster giving the restrictions, the comments pop up while you're watching it… Just the amount of people commenting on the way that she looks… I felt so bad because it comes up on Facebook Live who's watching with you. Her daughter went to school with me, and it came up that she was watching. That poor girl is watching her mother give this speech and she's probably able to see all these comments as well. You have to remember that they're real people at the end of the day.'
Female, 20, Student, Belfast

5.6 Online ratings and reviews play an important role in certain purchasing decisions but participants generally view them with a degree of scepticism

Almost all the sample claimed to pay at least some attention to online ratings and reviews when it comes to buying products and/or choosing where to stay or eat. The bigger the financial commitment, the more attention they will tend to pay to ratings and reviews. This is broadly in line with what was reported when we last explored this topic with participants, in 2015[2].

'I always look at the reviews and sometimes if I can't find reviews I won't buy anything.'
Female, 59, Unemployed, London

'Recently I went up to St Andrews and we were looking at hotels… Much of that was based on ratings as well. There was one hotel that had more bad ratings than the other, price was roughly the same and that swayed me to go to one particular hotel rather than the other.'
Male, 66, Semi-retired, Pinner

'It kind of depends what it is I'm buying. If it's a holiday or an Airbnb or something then they're probably the most important thing along with the location of the place, but if it's just a jumper or something then probably less so. I'd be more inclined to buy it and make my own mind up and then return it if I didn't like it.'
Female, 32, Doctor, London

Each participant described themselves using the available information in different ways, but there were numerous recurring themes, all of which demonstrate a degree of sophistication in the way they are choosing to interpret this data: paying attention to the number and timing of reviews, as well as the headline rating; reading a mix of negative and positive reviews; focusing on 2 and 3-star (rather than 5 or 1-star) reviews; looking at reviews on multiple and/or independent review sites; even factoring in cultural differences when looking at reviews from different countries.

'I tend to look at the date the review was posted. If all the reviews are in September 2017, I'm a bit suspicious.'
Female, 59, Unemployed, London

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[2] Adults' Media Lives Wave 11 (2015). Link: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0028/69256/media_lives_2015_summary.pdf

'I'll usually look at the star rating, so I want it to be at least four, and then I'll also look for how many… I want it to have at least hundreds. Then I'll look at the bad reviews, rather than the good ones, because I'm more interested in seeing what they've done wrong, rather than what they've done good because they should be doing good things.'
Female, 20, Student, Loughborough

'If I look at an Amazon product they have a range of evaluations and I will look at the three -star and the two-star. The one-star is usually some stupid thing like the packaging was broken or something like that. People are ridiculous.'
Male, 76, Retired, Warwick

'When we went on a holiday to America, I'm aware that sometimes the Americans are a bit more discerning than us, in that they'll write a bad review for things that the Brits would not necessarily write about, so I take that into account as well.'
Male, 66, Semi-retired, Pinner

6. PERSONAL DATA, PRIVACY AND SECURITY

6.1 Most participants displayed a greater level of awareness than previously of how their personal data is collected and used

As media usage has evolved – and participants' understanding of personal data and privacy issues grown – the nature of their concerns has shifted. In the early years of the study participants were worried about their personal data being hacked or private details of their personal lives leaking into the public domain. Over time, they have grown more savvy about managing their privacy settings effectively on social media and developed strategies to minimise the amount of personal data they share overtly with social media platforms and other websites.

 In the latest wave of interviews almost all participants displayed a greater level of awareness and understanding than previously about how their personal data is collected and used (e.g. to target them with personalised advertising). Although there was a wide disparity in the absolute level of knowledge between participants, all either appeared to know more than they did before, or had at least become more aware of contextual advertising, for example.

'I don't know if I'm being crazy, but I think that phones listen to you because I swear there have been a few instances where I've not even searched something, I've been talking about it, and then I've had an ad for it.'
Female, 20, Student, Loughborough

'I've noticed that when we've booked hotels, within a short time you get other adverts based on that location... Am I bothered about it? Not yet.'
Male, 66, Semi-retired, Pinner

A minority of the more tech-savvy participants have started to make an effort to inform themselves in more detail about big tech's use of personal data via books, documentaries and podcasts. Indeed, two participants spontaneously suggested that they would be willing to pay for a search engine or social media platform that did not use their data for commercial purposes. (This is the first time we have heard such views from any of our sample.) But most participants still have limited knowledge and a few seemed to be determined to avoid knowing too much.

'I've started using alternatives to Google Search and the Google ecosystem where I can. My search engine at the moment is Quartz. It's necessary for there to be some data sharing for search engines by virtue of the product itself, but their commitment is that they minimise that and to be fully transparent about how they use that data. I've also signed up to be an early tester of Neeva, which is another search engine that's come out of Silicon Valley with the same kind of ethics.'
Male, 37, Financial Services Exec, London

'You know there was that programme that came on Netflix and it was about social media? Because I don't want an opinion on it, I didn't watch it; I didn't want it to scare me.'
Female, 20, Student, Loughborough

Some participants claimed to have modified their behaviour in the past year (e.g. by picking and choosing when they accept cookies) but were unsure as to how effective this might be.

'The cookies that come through as well, I've found myself not accepting them as much now that I've researched what they actually mean. In the past I just quickly clicked: yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever; and then I've realised that you're actually giving all your personal information and stuff away.'
Male, 21, Betting Odds Trader, Leeds

'I clear the cookie cache every now and again on my laptop and the tablets, and the browsing history. I think that helps because if it's got no reference of what you've been looking at then it can't do that then, can it? You won't stop it but you can certainly reduce it I believe.'
Female, 43, Fundraising Manager, Cardiff

The majority, however, believed that there is no escape from the harvesting and commercial use of their personal data.

'It requires so much effort to try and reduce your data footprint that it's almost impossible... I don't go on Facebook but Instagram is owned by Facebook and so is WhatsApp… It's impossible to escape... Facebook isn't even the worst offender, the worst offender is Google and unless you start to put your tin foil hat on and only use Dogpile, it's quite difficult to escape Google.'
Male, 24, Tutor, London

'The thing that you see a lot on Facebook is all about how TikTok is gathering all of your data to use against you. You see the conspiracy theories, but I think your phone is constantly tracking you anyway.'
Female, 20, Student, Belfast

6.2 Two individuals had experienced significant privacy/ security issues

Though not necessarily indicative of any wider trend, anecdotal evidence from two participants provided interesting examples of how privacy and security issues play out in practice, and how equipped our participants feel to deal with them.

One was horrified to discover that images and personal data from her Instagram profile had been harvested and used (more than once) to create fake profiles on Tinder. On a positive note, she found Tinder's complaints process to be responsive and effective.

'Someone used my pictures on Tinder... It's not like someone's found my Insta, found my Twitter or found my Facebook and just taken my photos and made up a fake account with a fake name, it was someone who knew my name, where I'm from and a rough age – that's what freaked me out more. It's just creepy... Everyone was saying to me: "Listen, it happens all the time, it's not something to get worked up about", but obviously I did.'
Female, 27, Trainee Solicitor, Edinburgh

Another was shocked and dismayed when his personal data was accidentally shared with several hundred other people who had all taken Covid-19 tests booked via a holiday company. In this case, however, our participant didn't know what his next steps should be. Although he suspected that this was a serious data breach, he was unsure about his rights or the process for making a complaint.

'They sent an email out to customers who have bought tests from them, and they've accidentally attached everyone's email and everyone's name at the bottom. I'm in the process now of deciding what to do next. It's crazy, there were about two-hundred emails on there with names next to them as well so it's not too good.'
Male, 21, Betting Odds Trader, Leeds

6.3 Participants are increasingly cautious when presented with evidence of a potential security breach

Some of our participants have learned to be increasingly mistrustful in relation to online security even, on occasion, when they don't need to be.

One was worried when he received an alert from Apple that someone was trying to access his Apple ID. It turned out to be his daughter trying to move apps he had bought for her from his account to hers with the help of staff at an Apple Store.

'She wanted her own account, so to get her off my account they went to the Apple store in Leicester. She wanted all her apps and everything transferred over, so they did it all for her. I got a text message saying: "Someone's trying to access your account… Do you want to let them have it?" and I just texted: no. Literally five seconds later, my daughter phones: "Have you got a code?"'
Male, 46, Engineer, Rural Derbyshire

Another grew suspicious when her Virgin TiVo box started recording programmes she hadn't set to record. These recordings were in fact made by a smart recording feature within the TiVo box.

'With the Virgin, it's weird because we'd hardly used it but someone had been accessing it and it had loads of programmes recorded that we don't even watch. I had to ring them up and say to them that this isn't our stuff... In the end we just unplugged it and put it in a drawer.'
Female, 47, Stay-at-home Mum, Rural Essex

7. NEWS AND MISINFORMATION

7.1 The use of news and information sources relating to Covid-19 has evolved over the period of the pandemic, with local and regional sources becoming increasingly important

When we interviewed a subset of participants early in lockdown (in April 2020)[3] most were consuming more news than usual, but over time the picture has grown more complex and varied. A few participants (mostly those we know from previous waves to have a strong interest in news media generally) are still consuming news heavily. But the blanket coverage seems to have led others to switch off almost completely. What they perceived as constant references to Covid-19 in other programmes made the topic feel inescapable; consequently some felt that they don't need to follow the news to stay informed.

'I've probably been watching more news. Normally I don't like watching the news, but I've been watching more… At 6 o'clock whenever the new things [Covid-19 updates] are coming out.'
Male, 59, Unemployed, Lisburn NI

'It was almost suffocating and choking to the point where you wanted to press the stop button.'
Female, 54, Housing Officer, Coventry

'It got to a stage in March and April where we would fall down a Twitter hole and just read so much conflicting stuff… I was going into work every day and living it, and any time I spoke to my family it was all they wanted to talk about…
It was just too much.'
Female, 32, Doctor, London

'Because I was getting so fed up of life constantly revolving around Covid, I muted the word "Covid" on Twitter, just so I could get away from it.'
Male, 21, Betting Odds Trader, Leeds

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[3] Adults' Media Lives Lockdown Interviews (2020). Link: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0030/195627/adults-media-lives-lockdown-interviews-report.pdf

As the pandemic evolved, local news and information became particularly important. Participants described themselves paying closer attention to regional TV news, following local news sources on social media and visiting local government websites more often than in previous waves – particularly as the rules and guidelines became more disparate by location.

'BBC Wales and S4C are specific to our national context, which is really important – especially now when we're in a situation where the rules in Wales are still different from the UK.'
Male, 41, Web Officer, Cardiff

'We don't watch any live TV, so we weren't watching the news on TV or anything. We mostly use Facebook because we follow the Belfast Telegraph and BBC News and all that on Facebook.'
Female, 20, Student, Belfast

'You've got to have an email from your county council or go on EssexLive or whatever, to find out what's happening in Chelmsford, because people just don't know, or what's happening nationally, or can we go on holiday now, or can I go to work, which is in Southampton or something. There's all these restrictions and people just don't understand them.'
Female, 47, Stay-at-home Mum, Rural Essex

The Prime Ministerial briefings were essential TV viewing for most participants in the first few weeks of the pandemic, but over time many became less interested either as they became disillusioned and/or found that more specific briefings relevant to their location were more useful to them. Participants in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland had continued to follow their respective ministerial briefings more closely than those in England.

'At the start it became a Corrie type of thing where you'd sit down at 6 o'clock and you'd know that Boris would be giving an update, or Chris Whitty or whoever it was. So me and my Mum would always make sure that was on.'
Male, 21, Betting Odds Trader, Leeds

'We got all the tea all plated up, on the trays, television on and nobody was to talk while he was addressing the nation.'
Female, 54, Housing Officer, Coventry

'Nicola Sturgeon, she came on every day and told us exactly what was happening, and it was clear. And then Boris Johnson started getting his tuppence worth in, and everybody was confused.'
Female, 76, Retired, Edinburgh

'There was a time when I was watching every single update that was coming out of the UK Government but then, when it started to be the Welsh Government doing something different, it started to get a bit confusing about which one was the right one to watch. So since we're in Wales we thought we'll just watch the Welsh one.'
Female, 43, Fundraising Manager, Cardiff

'I think once Boris Johnson stopped coming on and it was his aides, it didn't seem important.'
Female, 54, Housing Officer, Coventry

7.2 Most participants had experience of seeing misinformation relating to Covid-19 on social media, but felt confident distinguishing fact from fiction

Almost all of our sample were supportive of government measures (e.g. lockdown) to try and contain the spread of Covid-19. There was a high level of trust in the authority of those making medical judgements. Only one participant claimed to be sceptical about the risks posed by the pandemic, and the advice of bodies such as SAGE. Many in the sample either had first-hand experience of Covid-19 or had close friends or family members who had been affected or were working on the front line.

'I follow some people on Instagram who like to mouth off about what Boris is doing and how none of it's real and everyone should just be able to do what they want but I know that it's real because I've had it.'
Female, 20, Student, Loughborough

'It's clearly true. All my mates think that I would be a sceptic, but my Auntie had it and my best mate had it… I think all these protesters in London are stupid… If any of them get it and go to the NHS for treatment they should get turned away.'
Male, 31, Labourer, Swansea

'If the Chief Scientist and the Chief Medical Officer for the UK or for England, stands in front of me... behind them there will be a whole range of scientists and medical people. All these people would have to be involved in a conspiracy and that's testing it too far.'
Male, 66, Semi-retired, Pinner

As a result, there was broad consensus about the kind of Covid-related content which might be classed as misinformation, and most participants claimed to have come across what they considered to be misinformation or conspiracy theories about Covid-19 on social media.

*'There's been a whole lot of silly things come through, which is probably
fake news… about China, obviously, and 5G.'*
Male, 59, Unemployed, Lisburn NI

*'My brother in law is possibly one of the worst in the country for it... Some of the things
that he puts on Facebook; I don't even read them now. I just see his name and
scroll past it.'*
Male, 46, Engineer, Rural Derbyshire

Many argued that this kind of content was quite easy to spot and remarked that a quick
look at the profile of the poster was often enough to help them judge the trustworthiness
of a post.

*'There are ways of picking out within social [media] what isn't true. It's usually to do
with what flags are in a profile or what it says in the bio.'*
Male, 41, Web Officer, Cardiff

*'There's this hashtag: KBF (Keep Britain Free) on Twitter, and it's all these anti-
maskers, anti-vaxxers, spewing all these fake graphs about how Covid isn't actually a
thing and you just think: I'm all for free speech but this is idiotic.'*
Female, 32, Doctor, London

A few participants suggested that social media platforms should do more to suppress
misinformation, but most acknowledged that this is difficult in practice. (The fieldwork
took place shortly before the US presidential election and arguments about whether or
not it was appropriate to censor and/or flag the tweets of Donald Trump and his
supporters were prominent in the news media at the time.)

*'If you create a culture where people think that a certain politician or party is being
deliberately targeted by social media, that creates distrust, even more distrust...
The mistruth becomes insignificant because the story is that it got censored,
not that it was a lie in the first place.'*
Male, 24, Tutor, London

Conversely, a few participants expressed fears that the mainstream media was
suppressing valid counter-argument about the pandemic. By trying too hard to "control
the narrative" there was a danger that the authorities would drive sceptics to look
elsewhere for alternative viewpoints.

*'Because of the politics involved we're not getting to see as many of those
counter-arguments. They're being hidden or politicised as opposed to being
discussed reasonably.'*
Male, 41, Web Officer, Cardiff

'There is a big argument that lockdown's not the best way to go… Having #KBF people spew it on Twitter isn't that helpful, but having people that have actually researched it and have an argument behind their point, surely that has to be out there so that we do question it and it doesn't turn into a Boris dictatorship.'
Female, 32, Doctor, London

'It's forcing people who are interested enough in the subject to go out and find other information and when you step outside of what you would see as being your core, reputable sources, you're in a world of unregulated, unmoderated information.'
Male, 37, Financial Services Exec, London

7.3 The BBC has been the main reference point for news and information about the pandemic, but many participants remain sceptical about the BBC

BBC news bulletins on TV and the BBC News website/app were seen as the main reference point for Covid-19 briefings etc. Turning to the BBC is still most people's first instinct at times of crisis, and the BBC was relied upon by our participants to present key facts, rules and regulations clearly and objectively.

'I'm a bit fed up with the main news, but I will listen to the one at half-past six – Reporting Scotland – and that's BBC.'
Female, 76, Retired, Edinburgh

'That's how I keep abreast of things, especially because now they have a live Covid feed. I find that useful for keeping abreast of what's going on.'
Male, 24, Tutor, London

'Every single morning I get The Guardian and the BBC News newsletter sent to my work email address.'
Female, 27, Trainee Solicitor, Edinburgh

Since the EU Referendum in 2016 criticism of the BBC has become more widespread among our participants. In Wave 15 (2020) around half the sample were critical of BBC News in some way – usually in relation to its coverage of UK politics and the Brexit debate.

The prominent role played by the BBC during the pandemic has led a few participants to think more positively about it compared to views they had expressed in previous waves, but there was a distinction between this support for the institutional value of the BBC and participants' more mixed attitudes towards its content.

'My interest in the BBC gradually waned over the years but now it has skyrocketed again.'
Male, 24, Tutor, London

'It wouldn't be one of my core news sites to go to for information, because I don't think their analysis is that great. On stories for which I have an interest, I find more interesting angles and analysis from other outlets. Having said that, I do think I should have a commitment to them as they are going through a period at the moment where they are whipping boys. There seems to be a concerted effort from various parties to dismantle them, to discredit them and I think they're an institution we really need as a country. I think we would be a lot worse off without them.'
Male, 37, Financial Services Exec, London

Indeed some participants claimed to have become more sceptical of BBC News. This continues the trend we have witnessed since 2016 and does not appear to be limited to those of any particular political persuasion.

'Occasionally I'll read BBC News articles but I wouldn't take it as gospel.'
Female, 32, Doctor, London

'I don't watch the BBC... I don't know if it's a massive left-wing agenda or something like that… It seems like that to a lot of people.'
Male, 31, Labourer, Swansea

'There have always been murmurings that the BBC have leaned a particular way, but very few people have brought up any evidence… But it appears that this may not have been wrong… You've got senior management now introducing stipulations of what the presenters can and can't do. I feel a little bit disappointed in some of the presenters trying to push back on the idea.'
Male, 66, Semi-retired, Pinner

ANNEX 1

Summary of participant profiles – Wave 16

Sex	Age	Job	Location	Years in study
Female	20	Student	Belfast	2
Female	20	Student	Loughborough	7
Male	21	Betting Odds Trader	Leeds	8
Male	24	Tutor	London	7
Female	27	Trainee Solicitor	Edinburgh	13
Male	31	Labourer	Swansea	15
Female	32	Doctor	London	15
Male	37	Financial Services Exec	London	16
Male	41	Web officer	Cardiff	15
Female	43	Fundraising manager	Cardiff	15
Male	46	Engineer	Rural Derbyshire	16
Female	47	Stay-at-home mum	Rural Essex	15
Female	54	Housing officer	Coventry	16
Male	59	Unemployed	Lisburn, NI	13
Female	59	Unemployed	London	15
Male	66	Semi-retired	Pinner	15
Female	76	Retired	Edinburgh	13
Male	76	Retired	Warwick	4

ANNEX 2

Discussion Guide

General media usage

What, if anything, has changed in your household since last time we spoke and what impact that has had on you?

What new media technology have you acquired in the last 12 months? What were the reasons for getting this new 'stuff'? Were they upgrades/replacement, or new items?

What factors influenced your choice of product/service? [PROBE ON THE ROLE OF INTRINSIC (E.G. FEATURES, PRICE) VS EXTRINSIC FACTORS (COVID/LOCKDOWN, REVIEWS, PESTER POWER)]

Thinking about the different electronic media you have access to, including TV, radio, the internet and gaming, which media are you using more than last year, and which are you using less? Why is this? [PROBE ON INCREASED/SOLE USE OF SMARTPHONE FOR GOING ONLINE]

Covid-19: overview

How has your day-to-day life been affected by the Coronavirus pandemic? [PROBE ON E.G. WORKING FROM HOME, QUARANTINE, SHIELDING]

Which media have you been using to keep yourself informed about the Coronavirus crisis? [PROBE ON TV, RADIO, ONLINE SOURCES, SOCIAL MEDIA, NEWSPAPERS]

(Where participants are using social media to stay informed) How conscious are you of the source of the information you're seeing (e.g. directly from NHS or the Government, mainstream news sources like the BBC, Mail, Guardian, other news sources, opinions from people you do or don't know)? Do you trust some more than others?

Have you come across any misleading information, "fake news" or conspiracy theories relating to Covid-19? [PROBE FOR DETAILS] How did you know not to trust this information, and what (if anything) did you do about it?

Has the pandemic influenced your media use at all (e.g. watching more TV/box sets/etc.)? Or have you considered cancelling any of your services to save money?

To what extent have you stuck with any changes made during lockdown? Do you think these will continue long-term?

How have you been using technology to keep in touch with friends and family? [PROBE ON ROLE OF SKYPE/FACETIME/ZOOM ETC. AND OF WHATSAPP/MESSENGER GROUPS DURING LOCKDOWN AND BEYOND] How is this any different to what you normally do?

As a result of the pandemic, have you helped another family member (for example) get online or taught them how to use a new service? [PROBE FOR DETAILS]

[PARENTS ONLY] How have you been using technology to keep your children entertained and/or up to date with their studies whilst they have been at home?

To what extent has the pandemic changed your outlook on life? How has your behaviour changed as a result?

Customer Experience

AUDIT: WHO PROVIDES THEIR TV/LANDLINE/BROADBAND/MOBILE – INCLUDING BUNDLES?

Have you had any problems with your TV/phone/broadband/mobile service in the past year (either in terms of technical issues – including internet speed – or customer service)? [PROBE FOR DETAILS] What impact did not having access to [SERVICE] have on you? Did it make you consider switching supplier?

Have you switched TV, telephone, broadband or mobile provider in the past year? If so…

What prompted you to switch?

What was the experience of switching like?

How did you decide on which provider to go with? Did you shop around for deals (online or otherwise)? Did you ask friends/family/other people for advice?

How easy was it to compare the different providers? And how did you do this?

Have you renewed a TV, telephone, broadband or mobile contract with your current provider in the past year? If so…

Did you consider switching? Why (not)?

Did you investigate other providers? How and how far did you get?

Why did you decide to stick with your current provider?

Television – Overview

How do you watch television and streaming services now? What changes, if any, have you made to your TV viewing over the past 12 months, and why? [PROBE ON CONSUMPTION OF LINEAR VS ON-DEMAND TV, USE OF STREAMING SERVICES SUCH AS IPLAYER, ITV HUB, NETFLIX AND AMAZON PRIME, AND ROLE OF DIFFERENT DEVICES, ESPECIALLY WATCHING ON SMARTPHONES AND TABLETS.]

Has your opinion of TV and/or streaming services changed over the past 12 months? How and why? [PROBE: ARE THEY MORE/LESS IMPORTANT? ARE THEY USING THEM FOR DIFFERENT REASONS?]

On-demand (OTT) or streaming services

Do you currently have a subscription to an on-demand online film/video service? Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and NOW TV are the main ones, but there are lots of others, including Disney+, which was new this year. Are these household subscriptions (for the family) or personal ones?

How do you tend to watch these services (laptop/mobile/tablet/smart TV/etc.)?

Has the amount of time you spend watching services like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and NOW TV – or the way in which you watch them – changed?

What are you watching on these services? [PROBE FOR VIEWING OF ORIGINAL OTT CONTENT SUCH AS AFTER LIFE, STRANGER THINGS, THE MARVELLOUS MRS MAISEL, JACK RYAN, ETC.]

What other TV viewing (if any) has been replaced by these services? Do you still watch regular TV channels like BBC, ITV, Sky, etc. "live" (i.e. at the time of broadcast/scheduled times) as much as you did before?

Has the way that you watch BBC, ITV, etc. changed as a result of using services like Netflix? For example, are you now more likely to watch programmes on those channels on demand, as a box set or on a device other than a TV set? [PROBE FOR EXAMPLES/DETAILS]

Are you more interested in programmes that are made or set in the UK than those made or set in the US? Do you make any special effort to seek these out?

Would you consider getting rid of your TV set?

Have you considered no longer having a TV licence? [PROBE FOR DETAILS]

PSB Content

How much do you watch the traditional 'public service' channels like BBC One to Four, ITV1, Channel Four and Five these days (or programmes from those channels on the iPlayer, ITV Hub etc.)?

What programmes do you watch on these channels and why? [PROBE ON E.G. FORCE OF HABIT/ROUTINE, ACCOMPANIMENT TO DAILY LIFE, SHARED VIEWING EXPERIENCES, DIFFERENCE TO PROGRAMMES AVAILABLE ELSEWHERE]

How much of your viewing of these channels is via streaming services like the BBC iPlayer or ITV Hub – whether it is on-demand or live streaming of programmes?

Radio and other audio content

How are you listening to radio and/or music and other audio content these days? And how has this changed? [PROBE FOR ONLINE AND ON-DEMAND LISTENING, MUSIC STREAMING (E.G. SPOTIFY) USE OF PODCASTS, LISTENING VIA DAB, DTV AND MOBILE DEVICES.]

Do you have a paid subscription to a music service like Spotify or Apple Music? When and where do you listen to this? [PROBE FOR DETAILS]

Do you ever listen to podcasts? If so…

Which podcasts do you listen to and how often? What do you particularly like about them?

How do you listen to them? [PROBE FOR DEVICES AND PLATFORMS – E.G. BBC SOUNDS, SPOTIFY, APPLE PODCASTS – USED FOR LISTENING]

Has this had any impact on your radio listening, or your consumption of any other media?

Internet – Overview

Has the way in which you access the internet changed over the past 12 months? [PROBE ON CONSUMPTION OF ROLE OF DIFFERENT DEVICES, ESPECIALLY SMARTPHONES AND TABLETS.] How did this come about? Has this changed the way you use the internet?

What do you use the internet (most) for? What would you say your favourite activities are when online? Has this changed over time?

Would you say you are using more or fewer websites, apps and online services these days? Why is that?

What new things are you doing online that you weren't 12 months ago? Who or what has inspired you to do/try them?

[Limited/NEW users of internet] What is stopping you from using the internet more, or doing more things online? Have you tried to overcome these challenges, either by yourself or by seeking help or advice from others?

Social media

How has your use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.) changed over the past year? Which are you using, which ones are you using more or less, and why? Are you using any new ones?

How often do you look at social media? Do you look at certain ones more than others? Why is this? [PROBE ON E.G. PERSONAL PREFERENCE VS ABILITY TO ACCESS SPECIFIC SOCIAL GROUPS]

Do you post (or share content) more or less than you did last year? Why?

Has your attitude to social media companies like Facebook or Twitter changed in the last year? How and why?

[FOR THOSE WITH CHILDREN UNDER 16] Do your children use social media at all? Which ones?

More generally how aware are you of what your children are doing/viewing online? How closely do you monitor their internet use? Why (not)? How?

Have you been any more or less strict as a result of (e.g.) time spent out of school as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic? [PROBE FOR DETAILS]

Messaging apps

Do you use any of the instant messaging apps (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Snapchat)? Has your usage of them changed in the past year?

Have you experienced any issues with untrue, inaccurate or misleading information being shared through these apps? [PROBE SPECIFICALLY FOR ANY COVID-19 RELATED MISINFORMATION]

YouTube

How often do you watch YouTube? More or less than last year?

What do you watch on YouTube? Are there specific people or channels that you go back to regularly? [PROBE FOR DETAILS]

How often do you watch videos recommended for you by YouTube's "up next" function? How do you think these are chosen for you?

What do you think are the benefits and drawbacks (if any) of this kind of function? [PROBE IN TERMS OF HOW THE ISSUE AFFECTS THEM PERSONALLY AND OTHERS E.G. CHILDREN]

Do you trust what you're watching on YouTube? More or less than what you see on TV, for example? Why (not)? What about other content you view online?

Have you encountered any issues to do with the truthfulness or reliability of information you have found on YouTube, or elsewhere online in the last year? [PROBE SPECIFICALLY FOR ANY COVID-19 RELATED MISINFORMATION.]

eDemocracy

Have you used the internet in the last 12 months to access information from the government or public services like the NHS (e.g. about lockdown rules), and/or to contact (local) government or public services? [PROBE FOR DETAILS.]

Has the pandemic led you to get more involved with any local community groups or neighbourhood networks (either online or offline)?

WHERE RELEVANT] Do you ever feel that you are at a disadvantage compared to other people because so much contact with government and public services is now online?

Ratings and Reviews

When (for example) shopping online or choosing a place to stay or eat, how much attention do you pay to online reviews and ratings?

Do you read the reviews, or just look at the number of five-star ratings?

Do you read the positive reviews, the negative reviews or both?

Are you ever suspicious if a product or service only has positive reviews?

In terms of deciding (e.g.) what to buy, how important are ratings and reviews compared to other factors such as price, brand awareness, etc.?

Harmful/hateful and inappropriate online content

Have you (or anyone in your family) seen anything that upset or offended you in the last 12 months on social media, YouTube, messaging apps or any other online media you use?

[IF YES] What was it about it that upset or offended you?

Was it aimed at you, or someone else?

Was it aimed at a particular group or type of person (e.g. religious, sexuality, disability, gender)?

What, if anything, did you do about it (e.g. ignore it / report it / respond to it / make a comment / unfriend that person, etc.)? Why?

[IF HARMFUL CONTENT WAS REPORTED] How easy was it to report? What response did you get?

Did it put you off visiting that site/platform again?

[IF NO] Would you know what to do if you were to see something that upset or offended you online, for instance on social media or messaging apps (e.g. ignore it / report it / respond to it / make a comment / unfriend that person, etc.)?

Should internet companies like YouTube and Facebook take more responsibility for regulating the content which users post on their platforms, or should the responsibility fall on the end user to protect themself and their family online? [PROBE FOR DETAILS]

Has your view on this changed in the last year? Why (not)?

Privacy and Security

What concerns, if any, do you have about giving your personal data (e.g. address, phone number, email address) to websites or apps?

Have you had any bad experiences in the past year as a result of giving your personal information to (e.g.) a website?

How much information do you make public on your social media profiles? Has this changed in the past year?

Do you feel you have a good understanding of who your personal data is being used by, and what for? Does this give you any cause for concern?

How aware are you of social media such as Facebook and Instagram serving up specific posts and advertising to you based on content you have previously viewed, liked or commented on?

Is this a good or a bad thing? [PROBE SEPARATELY FOR POSTS AND ADVERTISING]

Do you mind them doing this? [PROBE SEPARATELY FOR POSTS AND ADVERTISING]

Do you think this has any impact on your opinions or the choices you make? [PROBE SEPARATELY FOR POSTS AND ADVERTISING]

Do you have any other particular concerns about the security of your information online at the moment? Do you always feel safe when you are online? If not, when and why not?

News

How are you accessing news these days? How has this changed at all in the past year? [PROBE SPECIFICALLY ON THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN NEWS CONSUMPTION.]

Have you been watching/reading/listening the news more (or less) often than you usually do since the start of the pandemic? Why (not)?

Are you looking at any different news sources now, compared to a year ago? [PROBE ON ALTERNATIVE SOURCES MENTIONED IN PREVIOUS WAVES]

Which are your go-to 'brands' for news now?

Are you interested in local news? If so, where do you get this from?

Have you been more or less interested in local news since the start of the pandemic?

News websites and apps, as well as social media, sometimes choose which specific news stories to show you in your feed based on your prior behaviour. How aware are you of this happening, and how do you feel about this?

To what extent have you "trained" your apps/websites to show you certain types of content (e.g. by choosing subjects of interest, liking or disliking certain stories)?

Are you more or less trusting of the news you see or hear on TV, radio or online these days? Why?

[Where participants are using the BBC to keep informed having previously been critical or mistrustful of it…] Has your experience of using the BBC during the pandemic changed your views about them at all?

Have you seen anything in the past year that you would consider to be "fake news"? If so, how did it make you feel and how did you react?

How often do you try to check the accuracy of the news you see or hear (e.g. by looking at alternative sources)? [PROBE FOR DETAILS]