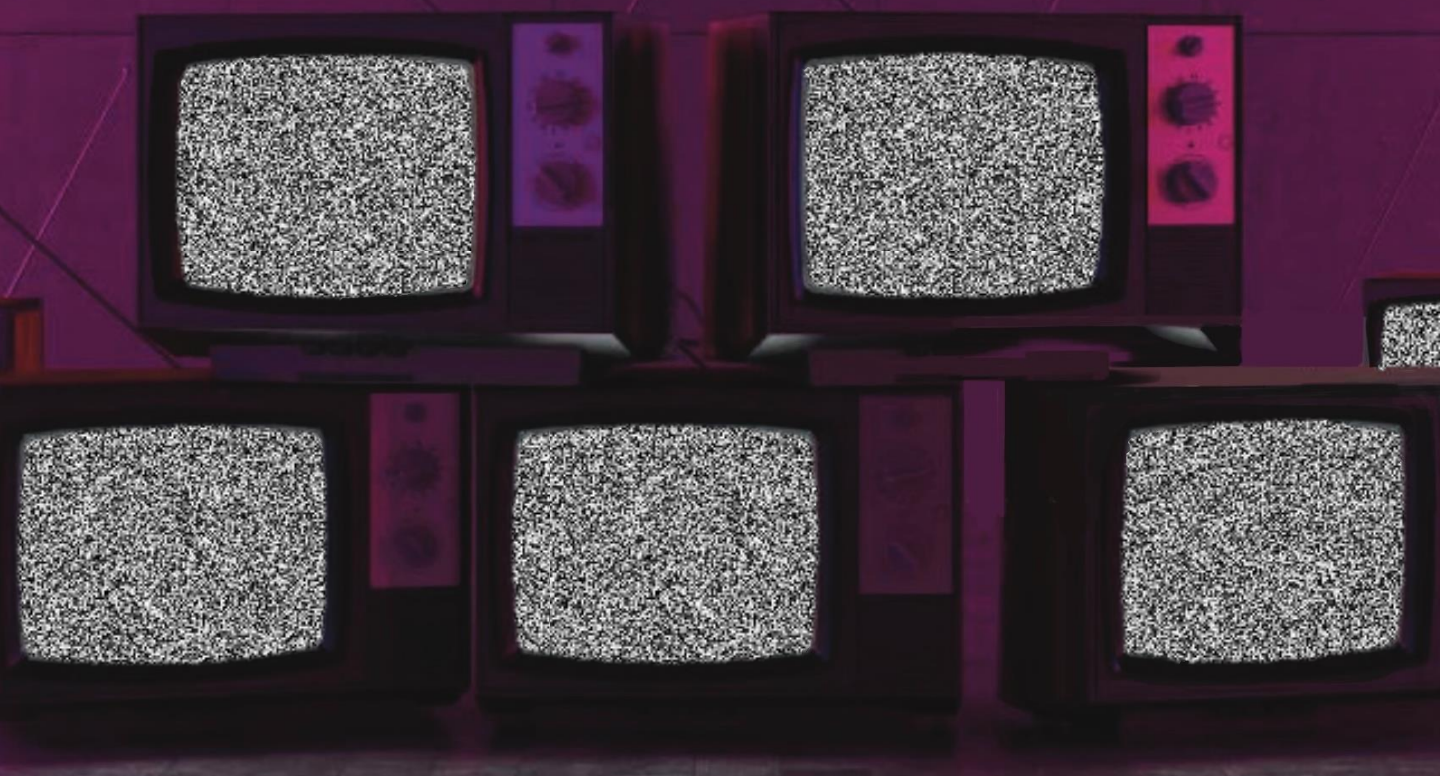# TV2054: Imagining the Future of Television

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Contents

Brief

The *Radio Times* was the world's first listings magazine, providing details on radio and television programming for audiences since 1923. However, the television landscape has undergone significant changes over the past two decades, with the emergence of digital technologies and online streaming services providing audiences with a wider range of options over where, when and how to watch television. This has led to major changes in television industry strategy and increased uncertainty regarding how to best serve audiences in the future.

As a listings magazine, the *Radio Times* has been particularly affected by the shift towards streaming media, where the television schedule holds a less dominant role not only in how TV content is organised but also how audiences experience it. In amongst this uncertainty, the *Radio Times* were keen to learn more about how audiences of all ages understand television and what they imagine television will become in the future.

The aim of TV2054 is to provide insights into these imaginaries and enable the *Radio Times* to:

- Provide the industry with valuable insights and so inform future programming and strategy decisions;

- Develop content for publication in the magazine exploring audience attitudes and behaviours;

- Reflect on their own role as an intermediary point between the television industry and their audiences.

Methodology

Focus groups with adults

Seven focus groups were run exploring how audiences imagine the future of television. Participants were recruited via *Radio Times* marketing and University of Nottingham students:

- 30 participants in total, aged 18-75+
- Groups were run in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff, Manchester, Nottingham & Bristol

The focus groups lasted 1.5-2 hours each and used discussions and creative tasks to explore:

- **What** television content should/will we be watching in the future?
- **How** will we be watching television in the future?
- **When** will we be watching television in the future?
- How will we **discover** what to watch?

Focus groups with children

Three focus groups were run with children, exploring how under-18 audiences understand television and its potential future. Parents were asked for consent.

- Approx. 70 children total, aged 6-17
- Activity sessions took place at the Pauline Quirke Academy in Nottingham

The focus groups lasted one hour each, with each hour dedicated to a different age group (6-8, 9-12, 13-17). We used discussions and creative tasks to explore:

- Attitudes towards and value of television **content**
- Attitudes towards and value of television **devices**
- What might the future of television look like and how do they **feel** about it?
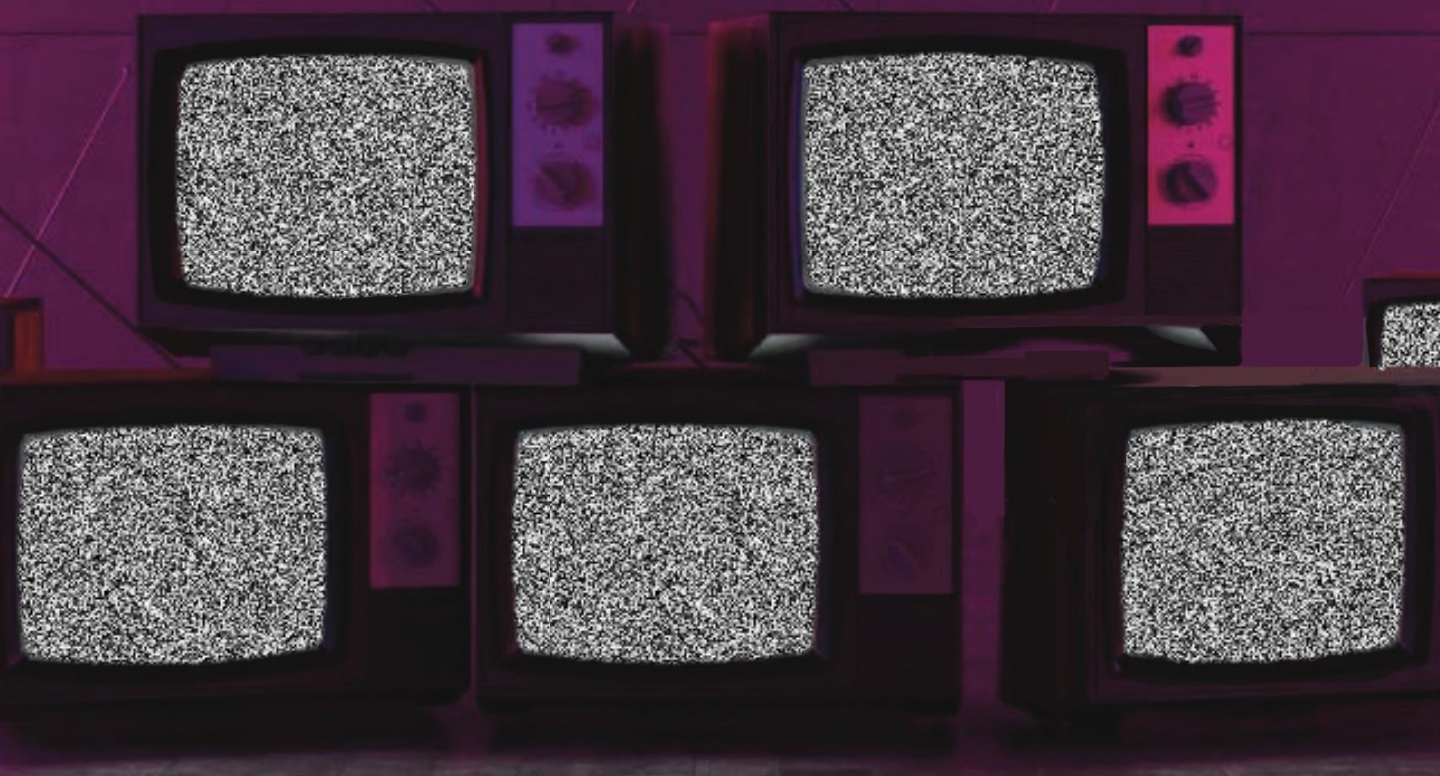
TV2054: Imagining the Future of Television

FOCUS GROUPS WITH ADULTS

FINDINGS

Finding 1: TV will be valued as a source of information…

Audiences see television continuing to be a valuable source of information about the world around them.

Older audiences saw broadcast news as particularly valuable for two main reasons:

- TV news provided audio-visual storytelling that promoted a **stronger empathetic response** from its audience and generated a **deeper understanding of the topics** than online news articles

"There's a difference when you can see the person as opposed to just listening. ... I think also you get used to seeing certain correspondents, reporting from certain areas. Over the years you learn to trust them."
(55-64F, London)

"Especially because of the fact that you can see it. If there's been an earthquake or something they might tell you that, but actually to see it makes a big difference."
(65-74M, Edinburgh)

- The regular scheduling of television news broadcasts provided a **clear structure to the day**, marking out shifts between morning and daytime, and daytime and evening. How these shift mapped onto changes in daily routines (e.g. from work to home) was seen as a useful scaffolding around regular daily behaviours, even when compared to streaming services.

"You know the structure of it. You know you're going to get the News at 6, and you'll get Newsnight. [Streaming] channels don't have that variety, so that blend of stuff you have to create yourself. If you're into Netflix, you have to create your own schedule." (55-64M, Cardiff)

Younger audiences showed greater interest in online news sources and showed more diversity in their news consumption platforms. Despite this, however, there was a prevailing **acknowledgement of the value of the broadcast news schedule** in creating social community (both cultural and domestic).

Finding 1: TV will be valued as a source of information… (contd.)

"It's traditional, I feel like even now more people probably see the news at 6 on a weekday evening than pick up a newspaper, pay for it. It's always on back home, my parents will watch it or my grandma will watch it." (18-25F, Nottingham)

"I don't really watch the news, I read or listen to it. But I think it's important that it exists to make it more accessible. I think there's something quite nice about 6 o'clock, many people around the country are going to be sitting down to watch the news. I don't, but I know my parents watch the 6 o'clock news every day and there is almost a sense of community around it."
(25-34M, Edinburgh)

However, news was not the only source of information considered and all groups valued predicted the ongoing **educational function of TV documentaries** for expanding knowledge on a range of political, cultural and historical topics. Key to this was a belief in **the wider social value of television to inform us about the world**, even if they do not personally watch much content that explicitly addresses that social role.

"[Wildlife documentaries are] now showing you how climate change and human behaviour is changing the animal world, and that if we want to do something to stop species being destroyed, then we need to learn what's happening to them so we can do something about it."
(55-64F, London)

"There's a million and one ways to get information about things, but sometimes having it in a format where you sit down and have something explained to you in an engaging way gives you knowledge on things that you might otherwise not have." (18-25M, Nottingham)

> **TV's wider social value (if not popularity) will be its ability to inform audiences. Generational differences emerge in how audiences gain information about the world around them, but television remains an important source due to its ability to create empathy and the comfort of its schedule.**

Finding 2: … But TV will primarily be used for entertainment and escapism

When discussing their own television viewing habits, both now and in their imagined future, all audiences highlighted **light entertainment** (game shows, soap operas, comedy) for its escapist impact on their lives, with Saturday night family-oriented entertainment privileged amongst the weekly schedule for this. **Primetime and prestige dramas** were also popular for being enthralling and immersive, allowing for a different kind of escapism. This escapism was seen as **necessary for mental and emotional wellbeing.**

"[Family entertainment was] the stuff that got me into television. Just stuff that was on like a Saturday night that you could watch with everyone. As a kid they were brilliant, you'd go into school and you'd talk about them and it helped everyone become more involved with television. I feel like that should continue."
(18-25M, Nottingham)

"As opposed to the documentaries and the educational stuff and the seriousness of what else is going on in the world, you need comedy. Quizzes as well, that sort of light entertainment, wanting to be entertained some of the time by watching TV. It's an enjoyable activity rather than always talking about what's wrong with the world, some kind of counterbalance."
(65-74M, Manchester)

Conversation in Edinburgh focus group:
"You can relate to on a personal level to some [soaps]. It's bringing a familiarity into seeing how somebody else might live." (65-74W)
"But you know it's made-up so it just entertains you like a rubbish book or magazine. It's fluff."
(55-64W)
"Yeah. I think you need it though. I like murder mystery books and the same thing there, Agatha Christie is like my soaps." (25-34M)

"I like [light entertainment] because you can switch off. You can watch it and it just plays in the back and you ain't really gotta concentrate. It doesn't require me to remember, and I can just sit there."
(45-54W, Cardiff)

Finding 2: … But TV will primarily be used for entertainment and escapism (contd.)

"Things to cheer you up are really important because the world can be quite grim at times, we just went through COVID, there's wars going on, and there'll always be a place in my life for watching something that makes me laugh."
(25-34M, Edinburgh)

Entertainment, comedy and drama was seen as **escapist and appealing but not necessarily more widely 'culturally valuable'.** However, it remained a central part of audience's own experiences of television, now and in the future, and so points to **a contradiction in how audiences understand their own use of television and how television is valued in wider society.** Audiences imagined continuing to want and need television for entertaining, escapist reasons. **Multiple genres of television were used in different ways as a vital method of mood management amongst wider social uncertainty and daily stresses.**

There is scope for changing the terms of public debate around what television 'should' be in the future to better reflect audience needs and television's role in mood and wellbeing management.

Finding 3: TV will be communal and create social cohesion

All focus group participants discussed **television as an activity that they share with others** and that such behaviour would continue in the future. This was primarily part of familial or domestic relationships (e.g. their spouse, partner, children, housemates) where television content was watched together. However, the television 'experience' was then extended to wider social groups (e.g. friends, colleagues) through discussions about television.

This communal viewing was based on **a desire to create shared 'communities'** at both the domestic level (within specific social groups) and at the national level for major televisual events.

"When I think of television, I think of it being a communal thing, a family thing. I watch a lot less television when I'm at uni on my own because there isn't that sense of community whilst watching it. I'd hopefully have other people there [in the future] like a family or friends, because I do think that television is better when watched with other people."
(18-25M, Nottingham)

"Very often my husband and I will split up to watch different things because he doesn't like some of the dramas that I like to watch, so he'll go watch something in a different room and then we might come back together to watch the news or settle down to watch Strictly or catch up on things that we've taped during the week." (55-64W, London)

Finding 3: TV will be communal and create social cohesion (contd.)

Television's capacity for **liveness and immediacy were motivating factors in creating these shared moments,** with audiences not wishing to 'miss out' on content that was fresh or new. This happened through both broadcasting and streaming, with live television events being discussed alongside streaming premieres. However, **streaming makes this sense of community harder to create. Live sport and national events** were consistently highlighted by participants as a key appeal of live broadcasting by all audiences, including younger ones.

"If you're not watching sport live, then there's no point in watching it. It's one of those events where everyone gets really involved in the moment. It's something that brings so many people together. I think sport is one of the only things where people will still watch it live because I feel like sport is one of those things that's supposed to be communal."
(18-25M, Nottingham)

"I miss that structure of TV because at school next day we'd all be talking about [something we watched]. I like TV shows released on streaming platforms on set days, not all released on the same day. You watch one episode and then the whole week you're talking about that episode and the next one comes out. It's interactive as well, sociable."
(18-25F, Nottingham)

Television is - and will continue to be - fundamentally about bringing people together through shared moments and a sense of community. Watching the same content at the same time will be central to this, whether on broadcasting or streaming.

Finding 4: TV sets will be both domestic and portable but ideally 'invisible'

Focus group participants were invited to design their ideal future television set. These designs fell into two related, but distinct categories:

- Some participants imagined future TV devices that were **designed for the home** (see Fig 4.1)

- Other participants designed devices that were **portable and able to be carried or worn on the body** (see Fig 4.2 & 4.3)

These categories did not easy map onto age groups, with both forms of TV set being created by both older and younger audiences.

The repeated design of domestic devices reinforces finding 3 and the importance of television as a form of social cohesion within immediate familial or social groups.

Portable devices allowed television to be taken out of the home, but only by creating a sense of private viewing. Glasses- or headset- based devices created a sense of sensory immersion and privacy in public spaces.

Finding 4: TV sets will be both domestic and portable but ideally 'invisible' (contd.)
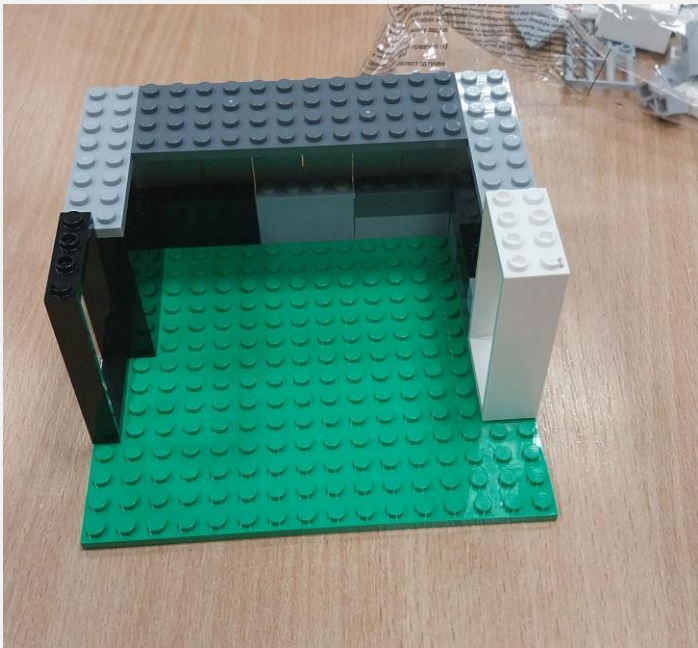

Fig. 4.1 Immersive home cinema (Nottingham)

Fig. 4.2 Hologram pop socket, attached to a mobile phone (Nottingham)
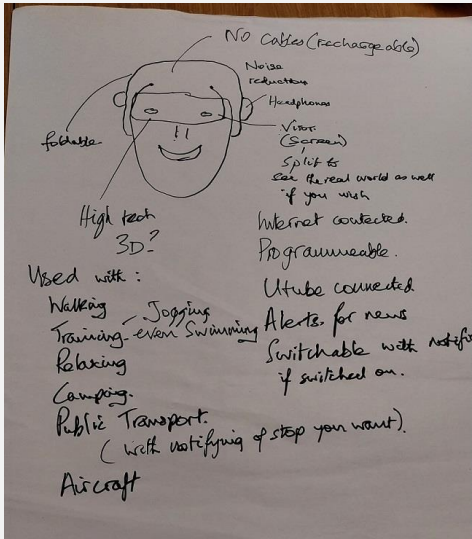

Fig. 4.3 Multimedia headset (Edinburgh)

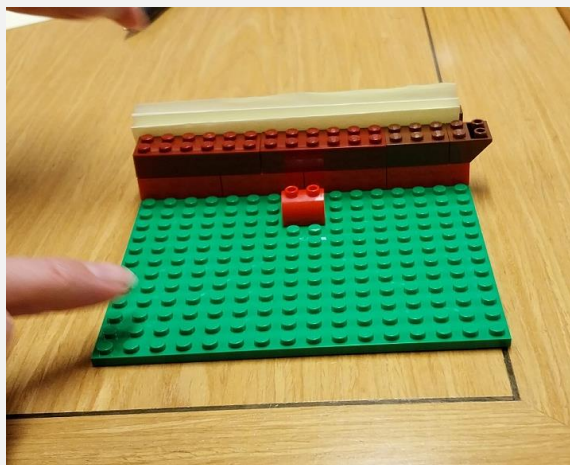# Finding 4: TV sets will be both domestic and portable but ideally 'invisible' (contd.)

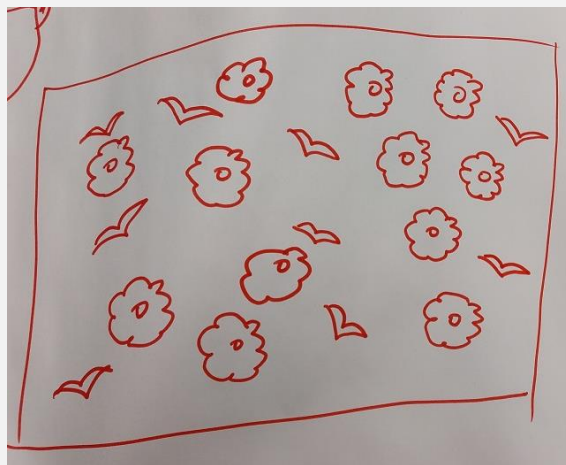Fig. 4.4 Portable, foldable TV
(Edinburgh)
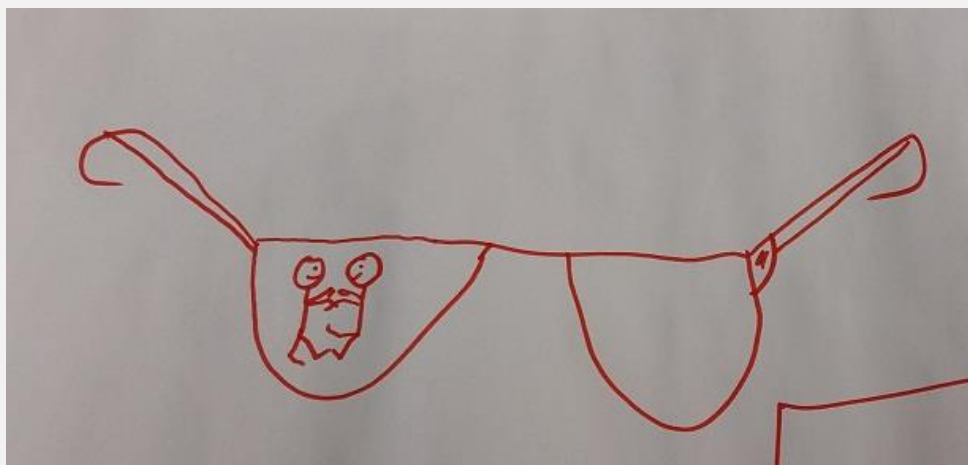

Fig. 4.5 Disappearing wall TV
(London)

Fig. 4.6 "TV-enabled glasses" – prescription glasses
with TV built in
(London)

Finding 4: TV sets will be both domestic and portable but ideally 'invisible' (contd.)

Multiple groups, however, designed devices that made television technology 'invisible'. This was done via a number of ways:

- TV sets that were hidden inside cabinets, reminiscent of sets from the 1940s and 1950s (see Fig 4.4)

- TV sets that blended into walls, either using projection equipment or screens that transformed into picture frames (see Fig 4.5)

- Portable, non-descript glasses devices that were worn on the face with little to distinguish them from normal prescription glasses (see Fig 4.6)

Although television *content* is universally valued, **audiences take a more ambiguous position in relation to television technology.**

> **Audiences want a future where they can control how the physical objects of television feature within their homes and daily lives, including how visible or intrusive they are.**

Finding 5: The definition of what 'television' is will broaden

When asked about television content, some younger audiences questioned whether short-form online video (e.g. TikTok, YouTube) should be included in discussions. This demonstrates **how blurred the boundaries between different forms of audio-visual media have become**. This blurring is likely to continue or increase in the future.

Edits, montages and cut-downs of broadcast content, published on social media either by official broadcaster accounts or fan accounts were discussed positively. Audiences were aware that these edited videos came from a longer, broadcast source, but were often unaware of specific industrial origins (e.g. that BBC content was made by the BBC).

Younger audiences use short-form online video to 'test out' content before committing to a full episode or series. This indicates their continued marketing value to producers and broadcasters.

"[Social media is] how a lot of us already watch stuff. Along with recommendations and reviews, you see certain shows go viral and clips of things where you just become intrigued and then you go back and watch it."
(18-25F, Nottingham)

"[On social media] people put on clips from a show, and you think 'damn this is really good'. So then you go and try out the show. I trust the TikTok algorithm with my life and I think if it comes up on that then it's gonna almost certainly be something that I get."
(18-25M, Nottingham)

Social media platforms are now a key part of the 'television' ecosystem and could become a space for audiences to test out content.

Finding 6: Content discovery practices will be multiple but trusted

When asked how they find out about content, focus group participants gave different answers that aligned with different age categories.

Older Audiences

Older audiences **make conscious choices about what content to watch and seek out advice from specific sources they trust.** These sources are as follows:

- Existing **social relationships** such as family members and friends
- Certain kinds of media sources based on the kinds of recommendations they are seeking:
    - **Magazines & newspapers** (including the *Radio Times*) for taste-based opinions with some participants paying particular attention to certain critics (e.g. Peter Bradshaw, Mark Kermode)
    - **Television chat shows**, most notably *The Graham Norton Show*, for access to and insights from the actors and/or personalities who appear.

"[Friend/family recommendations] certainly have an influence on things that I watch, things that I might not have considered or haven't got around to watching. If somebody says, 'oh, it's absolutely brilliant', then I would definitely have a go at it." (55-64W, London)

"[Print sources] give me a lot more information about the programs in advance, and that kind of information I find really useful … they do a lot of information about the streaming services as well now, and you can pick up things that you might think, 'ohh I haven't really thought about that'. Anyone like me that's really interested in television, I find it absolutely invaluable."
(55-64W, London)

"I love watching Graham Norton because of the way he brings people out. He's always got actors on who are promoting things. That's one of my go-tos."
(55-64W, Manchester)

Finding 6: Content discovery practices will be multiple but trusted (contd.)

Younger Audiences

In contrast to older audiences, **younger participants discussed discovering content serendipitously**, following suggestions that seem intriguing or interesting rather than consciously making decisions over the kind of content they may want to watch. Their discovery process included **a wider range of sources, with none privileged as more 'trustworthy' than the others**:

- Algorithms

- Awards buzz

- Existing social relationships

- Promotional material

- Review aggregators (e.g. Rotten Tomatoes)

- Social media networks including influencers

"When I'm looking for something to watch, sometimes I'll put on my Snapchat private story 'what are people watching?' Sometimes what comes up is something I never would have even been able to search for or is on my recommended. Sometimes it takes an external mind to say 'Oh yeah, you might not have thought of this, but here's something I think you'd like'."
(18-25M, Nottingham)

"Netflix or Prime will say this has just come out, and it's the algorithm saying that you watch similar things or you liked these things. It knows what I watch, what I like, and there's the kind of scary side to it having all my data, but at same time it knows quite a lot and it does recommend good things to me."
(25-34M, Edinburgh)

Finding 6: Content discovery practices will be multiple but trusted (contd.)

"I feel like it's quite easy to stumble across release dates and things, even if you're not looking for them. You might get some promotional post on Instagram and now you know that information and you don't need to look it up in a watch guide."
(18-25M, Nottingham)

This does imply shifting habits of content discovery in the future, as younger audiences see themselves carrying these habits through as they age. Serendipitous content discover is valued, but sources still need to 'prove' themselves as aligning with a viewer's taste.

Trust will continue to be fundamental to content discovery practices, but the range of trusted sources that audiences turn to will increase.

Summary

Although the television landscape has changed dramatically, this change is primarily based on technological developments and the devices or distribution sources that audiences use to access to TV content. **The core value of TV remains consistent with audience attitudes and behaviours from the broadcast era**, even when discussing television with younger adult audiences. Focus group participants predict this to continue.

Adult audiences **see the future of television as a mix of the old and the new**. New technologies may open up what they'll watch, where and how, but there is an enduring power in the domesticity of television, the schedule, and broadcasting. Television remains a key force in creating a shared cultural and social space, and this is something adult audiences continue to highly value about it. **Certain characteristics are not only valuable now, but audiences believe they will continue to be valuable in the future**:

- TV's liveness and immediacy and so its ability to create a shared 'community'

- TV's ability to act as a 'common ground' and so form a foundation for establishing and maintaining social relationships. This relies on audiences watching the same content and audiences take steps to ensure that they can watch the same content as their family and friends.

Although older and younger adult audiences do display some differing opinions, most notably on the boundaries of 'television' and in how they discover new content, this is inconsistent and the audiences across all ages share a number of views on television's value and future.

Despite disruption to the broadcast schedule, television plays a primary role in connecting us to each other through shared moments, and opportunities to learn about the world. Adult audiences see that as continuing in the future.
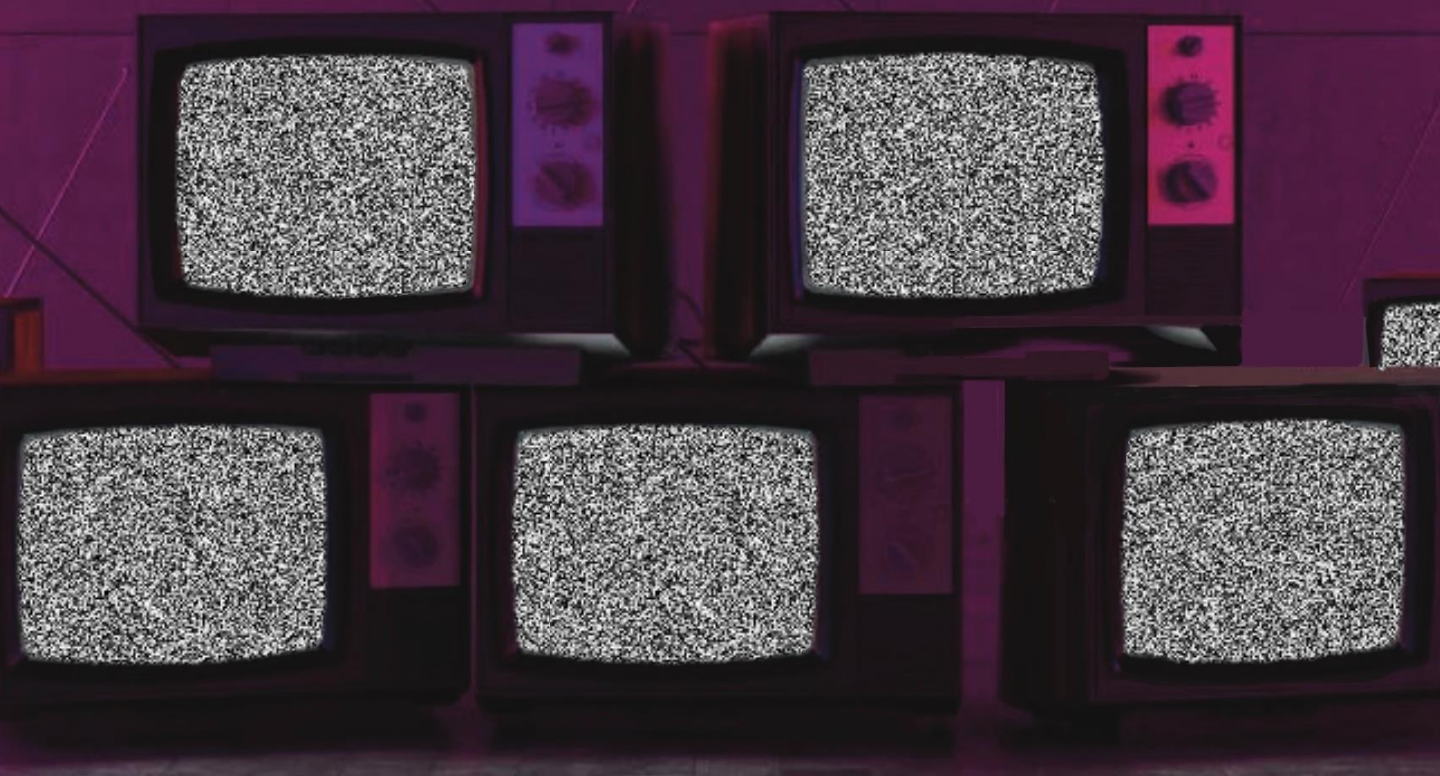
TV2054: Imagining the Future of Television

FOCUS GROUPS WITH CHILDREN

FINDINGS

Finding 1: The concept of television is becoming increasingly blurred

Child audiences most readily identified subscription streaming services as 'television', Although streaming was generally, although not universally, their preferred mode of watching television, **they watch and value broadcast channels for specific reasons.**

- Live and reality TV dominated children's understanding of broadcasting and its appeal
- Younger audiences primarily identified Saturday night family entertainment (*Britain's Got Talent, X Factor*); older children also mentioned regularly scheduled reality TV such as *I'm A Celebrity* or *Love Island*
- Key features of streaming vs. broadcasting were identified as: convenience, choice, binge-watching, recommendations

"[With streaming] it's easier to find something and watch it whenever at the click of a button. My grandma looks through a magazine to see what's on and has to wait until it's on." (13-17F)

"[With streaming] if you want to watch something you can sit down, watch it and waste your time. But [with broadcasting] when it's not ready to watch yet, you can do other things and not just sit there for hours watching." (13-17F)

The television set in the home was the main way children reported watching TV. They also conflated other activities that take place on the TV set with 'television', particularly watching films or online content such as **YouTube videos** and playing video games. Although some children identified that YouTube differs from other forms of broadcast media because of its user-generated content, all age groups nonetheless included it in their definitions of 'television'.

> **The domestic television set remains a key means through which children access and understand TV. The multiple audiovisual functions of contemporary television sets have broadened their understanding of what TV is, but the television set still underpins children's engagement with TV.**

Finding 2: Television's value remains social and communal

All child age groups valued watching television with family, with domestic environments and the television set the main location and technology used (with some younger children also watching TV on tablets).

Children did not differentiate between streaming and broadcasting in terms of their levels of enjoyment from communal watching, although they watched streaming content more often.

Television's role in helping children relate to others was discussed across all ages but emphasised most strongly in 13-17s. In addition to regularly watching and enjoying TV with family, they frequently **talk to friends** about recently-aired programming – both broadcast and streaming – as a means of reaffirming social bonds.

Children's imagined future television devices, particularly in the younger age groups, frequently featured domestic TV sets or opportunities for communal TV-watching.

Fig. 4.7 Lego TV set for the living room (6-8F)

Fig. 4.8 Communal TV set that flies to different houses in the community (6-8M)

> **Television remains part of young people's social fabric. Regularly watching streamed and broadcasting content remains a transgenerational activity, and television helps young people relate to others.**

Finding 3: Children have concerns about the future of television…

When asked to imagine future television devices, children produced objects that showed an **uncertainty and concern regarding future media technologies and TV consumption.**

Younger children (6-10) commonly imagined television objects with **anthropomorphic traits**, for example by giving their devices arms, wings or faces. These objects were often able to interact with the user in ways that felt authentically human. Incorporating these human or natural features renders the TV more familiar, trustworthy, and relatable.

Fig. 4.9 Domestic TV set that follows you around (6-8F)

Fig. 5.1 Domestic TV set that talks to you (6-8M)

Fig. 5.2 TV set that offers recommendations (9-12F)

Finding 3: Children have concerns about the future of television… (contd.)

Older children (13-17) rarely produced future devices resembling the traditional TV set, instead imagining objects that were **intensely technological and futuristic**. VR bodysuits, headsets and glasses were designed for solitary use, which conflicts with the communal watching they told us they enjoy.

Their devices also drew on **science-fiction dystopian imagery, featuring technological augments that invade or control the body** such as microchips, surgical brain implants and VR bodysuits. Children voiced concerns about VR technologies, differentiating between what they thought would happen in the future vs. what they would like to happen.

Fig. 5.5 writing reads "VR movie/viewing experience + microchip for the brain … it attaches to one's face … this device also imitates the taste and smells that are in the video you're watching" (13-17M)
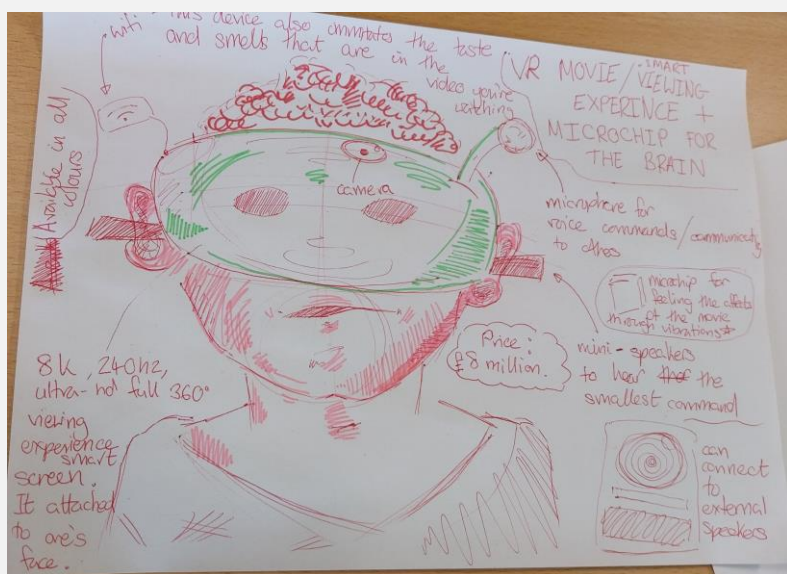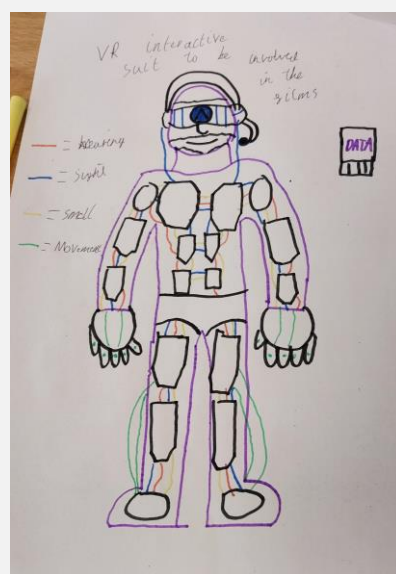
Fig. 5.6 "it's a VR bodysuit, so you can interact with all the actors. There's a datachip that can be plugged into the headset. If you want to actually be there, this will be the solution" (13-17M)

"You can keep old ways to do things instead of focusing on robots and stuff, so you don't become dependent on them and you can live without them if everything goes." (13-17F)

Finding 3: Children have concerns about the future of television… (contd.)

"I'm scared for the future to come. The telly's not gonna be a thing anymore and everyone's going to be using VR just like tellies … It's better to be sociable. It's better to enjoy things with family. I want TV to stay the same, because it brings people closer together." (13-17F)

"[I want TV to be] the same as it is now or you'll be online 24/7. If AI gets more popular, it'll take over." (13-17F)
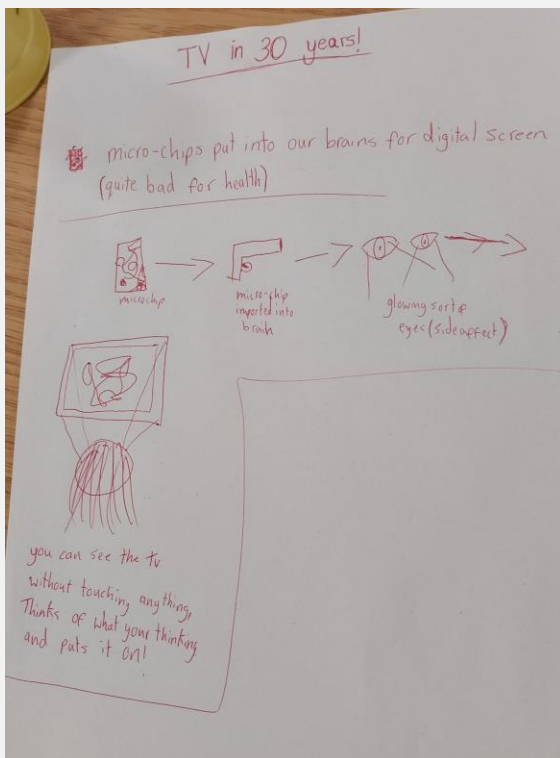

Fig. 5.4 "it's an HDMI chip and it has everything you can think of, you just plug it in your head and close your eyes and watch whatever you want" (13-17F)

Fig. 5.3 writing reads "microchips put into our brains for digital screen (quite bad for health) … glowing sort of eyes (side affect)" (13-17M)

Child audiences are still learning what TV is and how it fits into their lives, and they display concerns over their lack of control over television. In younger children, this manifests as a desire to make TV more familiar by assigning it anthropomorphic attributes, while older children imagine a technologically-determined future of surveillance, dehumanisation and technological control where they have less agency.

Finding 4. ... So they seek control over their experience

Some of the children's imagined devices demonstrated concerns over television technology and its potential future, while others demonstrated how children seek to make television less threatening, easier to control, and more suited to their desires.

Children's future devices prioritised choice and agency. Three key interlinked but distinct themes emerged:

- **Convenience, or "whenever I want it"**
    - The ability to choose when to watch television content and how it integrates into the schedule of everyday life

- **Portability, or "wherever I want it"**
    - The ability to choose what objects to watch television on and where television can be watched

- **Customisation, or "however I want it"**
    - The ability to choose what the experience of watching television is like, including how to adapt, access and use the object

Finding 4. … So they seek control over their experience (contd.)

Convenience

Children largely expressed a preference for streaming services in enabling them to choose what, how much, and when to watch television. This was pronounced across all age groups, but particularly in the 9-12 age bracket who valued the agency that watching outside of a schedule brought them.

13-17 year olds also valued rewatching shows they enjoy, or being able to pause or rewind, which suggests an ongoing shift in the value of time, away from the broadcast schedule and towards individualised schedules, in relation to television consumption.

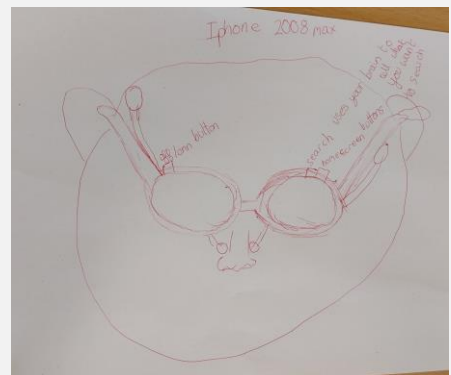Fig. 5.7 Flying TV & sofa to watch TV anywhere (9-12F)
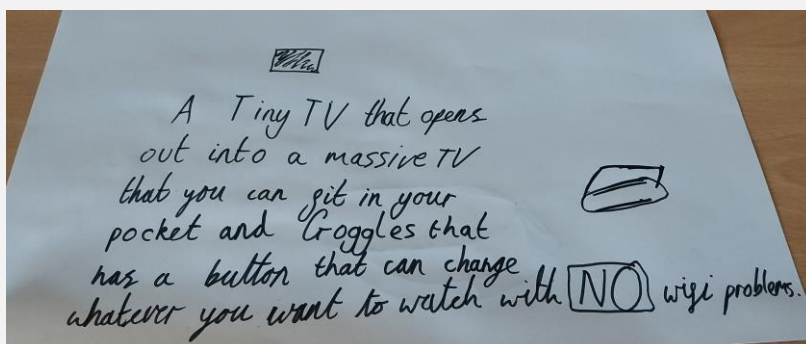

Fig. 5.8 Glasses for watching TV (9-12M)

Fig. 5.9 TV that changes size to fit in your pocket (9-12M)

Finding 4. … So they seek control over their experience (contd.)

Portability

Children are ambivalent on the topic of portability. Not all children discussed portability as something they value of TV, but it nonetheless featured strongly in their imagined futures, including by integrating TV into familiar objects such as phones and watches or giving television devices a shapeshifting form.

This preoccupation with the ubiquity of television reflects previously mentioned concerns about a potentially technologically-dominated future, but **children also imagine asserting agency over these television devices**, such as by incorporating a social function to communicate with others or a personal recommendation assistant.
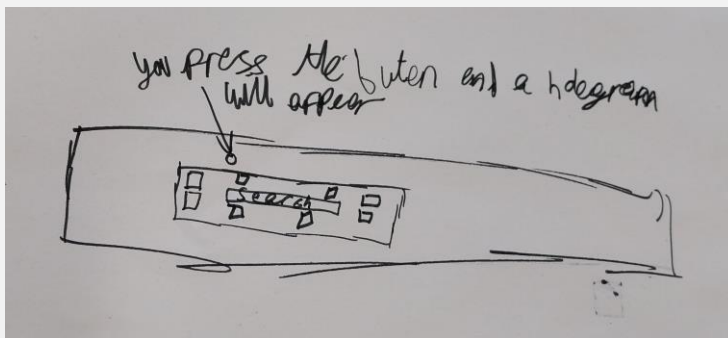

Fig. 6.1 a "bionic watch" that projects a hologram of TV content (9-12M)

Fig. 6.2 TV on wheels that "reads your mind when you want to watch TV and puts it on" while "following you around" (9-12F)

Fig. 6.3 Each circle is a device connected digitally to the others, so people can watch things simultaneously while apart (6-8F)

Finding 4. ... So they seek control over their experience (contd.)

Customisation

Children's imagined futures featured the ability to customise television devices to their own preferences and to shape their own desired experiences.

Aesthetic customisation was common, for example **to change the device's appearance or to cover it up**. Children also designed technologies that catered to their individual interests, such as a live concert TV, private cinema, or video games console.

Customisation, like convenience and portability, emerges as a key theme in children's imagined futures as a means to assert agency over the television experience, to make the technology more familiar, and **to use television to meet individual desires**.

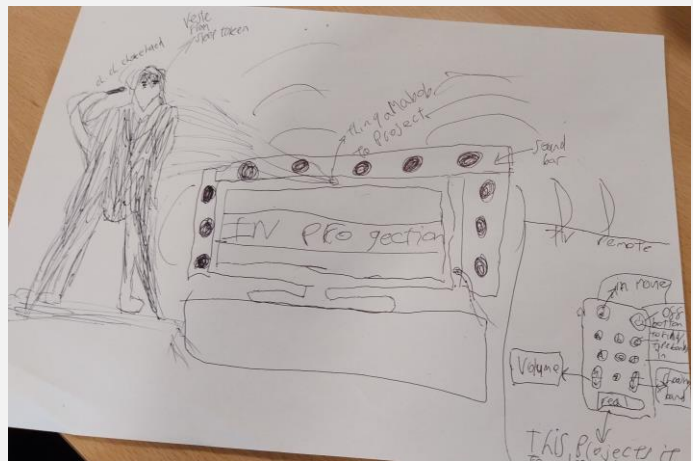Fig. 6.4 TV screen that can turn into a picture to cover it up (9-12F)

Fig. 6.5 "you can watch concerts and it'll be like you're actually there. You can project it into your living room and it'll be like the band's performing but it's actually a hologram" (12-17M)

Children seek to make television technologies feel less threatening or unfamiliar by imagining futures in which they have more control over their devices and experiences. They imagine an individualised relationship with television that gives them choice about what, when, and how to watch.

Finding 5: Children relate to the immersive and emotive potential of television

Despite uncertainty about the future of television, children value TV's role in facilitating **escapism, relaxation, and immersion**. All age groups imagined future devices with immersive components that enable greater engagement with content. Younger children also enjoyed **emotive storytelling** that provokes a physical or emotional response (fear, humour, suspense).

Television was also linked with health. A key appeal of TV was its capacity for relaxation, and concerns over mental and physical health emerged from children's future devices, for example a portable device that encourages "fresh air while you're watching TV" (9-12M) or a microchip device that will be "quite bad for health" (13-17M).

"When I come home from school, I'm so tired I just like to jump on my sofa and chill out watching telly" (6-8M)
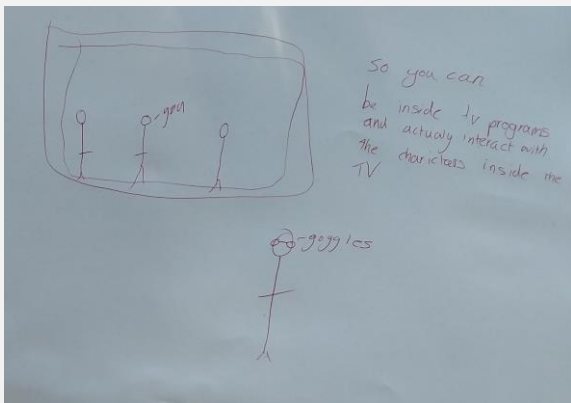

Fig. 6.6 Immersive TV with goggles "so you can be inside TV programmes and actually interact with the characters inside the TV" (9-12M)

Fig. 6.7 Immersive TV room with one large screen on walls, floor, and ceiling (13-17M)

> **Television serves immersive and escapist purposes for children, who seek both to relax and to be absorbed into other worlds. Children desire further opportunities for engagement with fictional storyworlds – in ways that make them feel empowered.**

Summary

Children's understanding of television is flexible, with many categorising diverse online and audiovisual content accessed via a TV set as 'television'. This suggests that **the television set as an object underpins children's understandings of TV**, as much as or potentially more than modes of production and distribution (e.g. streaming vs. broadcasting) or types of content.

- **Streaming is a common experience in children's lives and is their generally preferred mode of watching television**. All age groups immediately identified services such as Netflix or iPlayer as television – but, when prompted about 'television with a schedule', identified that they also consumed broadcast television, albeit less often.

- **Broadcasting's value was largely associated with its liveness**, with reality TV and family entertainment dominating children's broadcasting preferences. Children were more likely to use streaming services to watch fictional series.

- **Children did not mention watching the news or other informative programming.** Children understand and value television less as an educational tool and more as a means of relaxation, escapism, entertainment, and immersion.

The value of **watching TV socially was consistent across all age groups**, with all attesting to watching television with family members, including siblings, parents and grandparents, as a transgenerational communal activity. The social component of television was most strongly emphasised amongst 13-17 year olds, who also valued talking about TV with friends in order not to 'miss out'.
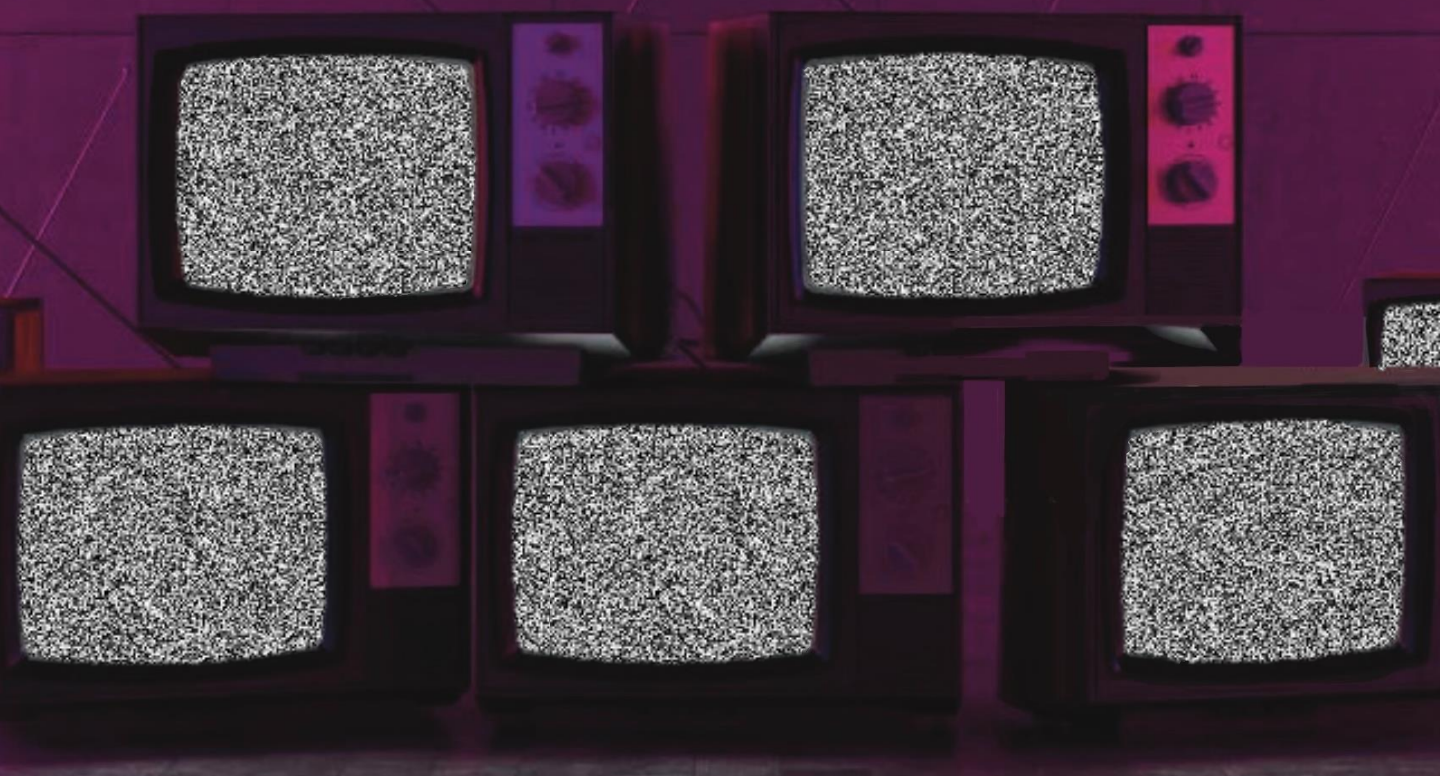
Children gravitated towards, both in their current viewing habits and in their imagined futures, feelings of choice and agency in their television experience. Binge-watching as a mode of consumption was generally favoured, with convenience, portability and customisation to individualise their TV habits highly valued. This aligns with a general preference for streaming services, but their imagined futures of television also suggested underlying concerns about the ubiquitous and potentially dehumanising nature of future media technologies that deserve further research.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions

The concept of 'television' is changing. While older audiences demonstrate a clear understanding of the differences between broadcasting and streaming – often with a preference for the former – younger adults and children are less likely to know or value the difference. Instead, in a reflection of the increasingly multimedia environment in which television is produced and consumed, younger adults and children tend to conflate varied audiovisual content, such as social media, YouTube, films, and video games, with television.

However, across all age groups, television continues to retain certain key values.

- **Television is often a shared activity** as part of familial or domestic relationships (e.g. partners, family members) and wider social groups (e.g. friends, colleagues) as a means of maintaining social bonds and experiencing shared enjoyment. **Live TV and new content was privileged as means of creating these shared moments**, and watching the same content at the same time as others is something that children want to continue.

- **Television is important for health and wellbeing.** Children discussed the relaxation that TV brings and pointed to examples of potentially 'unhealthy' forms of future television such as implanted microchips or VR. Meanwhile, adults identified the value of content such as **fictional dramas in facilitating escapism, which they saw as necessary for emotional wellbeing** and to mitigate stress. Television therefore will continue to play an important role in mood and wellbeing management.

- **Audiences have an ambivalent relationship with television technology**. In their future television devices, both adults and children imagined, and were enthusiastic about, **futuristic multimedia devices such as glasses and headsets that facilitate greater immersion** into audiovisual worlds. They also sought greater control over television as a physical technology, for example by creating devices that control its visibility or portability. This **impulse for control and agency was even more pronounced in children's devices**, however, with dystopian imagery such as surgical implants or AI-led technologies demonstrating their concerns about television's future.

Conclusions

Variances between adults' and children's responses can offer insight into changes in intergenerational attitudes towards television and how they understand potential future trajectories of television. Our findings suggest that:

• **Television's educational function is changing**. Despite its value amongst adults, from child audiences there was little acknowledgement of the value of news or other educational programming. Given that younger adults were more ambivalent about their engagement with educational content, and that all ages cited the appeal of light entertainment and fictional series, this may suggest **a trend towards consuming television primarily as a source of entertainment.**

• **Methods of content discovery were mixed between age groups**. While adult audiences often based their viewing decisions on trusted sources or social influences, this was less common amongst children, perhaps because of their lack of control over their television viewing at this life stage. However, recommendations still featured in some children's future television devices, which suggests **the ongoing importance of trusted sources in helping to navigate the televisual landscape**. Social media as a source for recommendations was only mentioned by younger adults, not appearing in discussions with older adults or children.

Overall, **attitudes and values amongst varied age groups are not tremendously different**. Modes of accessing television are changing, as are understandings of its cultural role. However, many core values still endure: television remains an integral part of the social and cultural fabric of audiences' everyday life, with its capacity for liveness and improving wellbeing distinct factors in its appeal.

> **Despite ongoing threats to the broadcast schedule, television – including broadcasting – will continue to play a primary role across all ages in connecting us to each other, teaching us about the world, and contributing to positive emotional wellbeing.**

TV2054: Imagining the Future of Television