

## **In the Living Room: Second Screens and TV Audiences\_**

“The second screen” or “the companion device,” ... is a huge development for the mobile app industry and a target-rich environment for our advertisers. (Mark Challinor, 2013)

“The recent phenomenon of the second screen has not had a large influence of (sic) TV”  
(DigitalTVEurope, 2014)

The epigraph neatly exemplifies William Boddy’s observation that media firms have responded to the newly ‘dispersed audiences in complex and sometimes contradictory ways’ (Boddy 2011, 76). The growth of second screen use while viewing television has captured the imagination of broadcasters, techno start-up companies and advertisers eager to cash in on the social TV phenomenon. Meanwhile, technological changes unsettle our understanding of audience as they disperse across platforms, and time-shifting technologies and video streaming interrupt the scheduling rhythm. The resultant challenge to the one-to-many model of broadcasting undermines the idea of TV as a shared cultural form while second screen innovations extol digital technology’s promise to revolutionise TV viewing by connecting viewers across space via applications (apps) and social media sites.<sup>1</sup>

Ofcom, the independent regulator for the UK communications industries, in their *Communications Market Report* (2013) “The Reinvention of the 1950s Living Room” states that developments in media technologies are transforming the “traditional living room” into a digital media hub in which families still gather in front of the TV set. However, uptake of smart phones and tablets is “creating a nation of media multi-taskers” fragmenting attention

across multiple screens: “Our research shows that increasingly families are gathering in the living room to watch TV just as they were in the 1950s ... Unlike the 1950s family, however, they are also doing their own thing. They are tweeting about a TV show, surfing the net or watching different content altogether on a tablet.” (James Thickett cited in Ofcom 2013).

Ofcom’s report mirrors much industry research that registers second screen use but not the complexity of ways in which audiences actively engage with these screens, the degree to which they are embedded within the rhythms of daily life, and how they may/may not deepen engagement with and enjoyment of television viewing. In his survey of industry research on second screen use, Dan Hassoun makes a similar point arguing that despite the interest in convergence, what audiences are *actually* doing in front of the TV remains “somewhat of a mystery.” (Hassoun 2014, 281 Nor do we know much about what communication is taking place *within* the living room between those gathered to watch while also using their other devices.

This paper addresses a lacuna in academic and industry literature by foregrounding and exploring the dichotomy that emerges in their accounts of second screen users in which their behaviour is characterised in terms of both connection or immersion and estrangement or detachment I will argue that we need to develop a nuanced understanding of viewing habits which addresses audience pleasure (and displeasures) in second screen usage that transcends the statistical analysis characterising much of the existing literature; and that genre is a key factor – more than age or gender - in determining how second screens are used, what they

are used for. Ultimately, I argue that second screen use is characterised by a complex interplay of the cultural and the everyday on the one hand, and the commercial imperatives of broadcasters and media companies on the other, and that the convergence between broadcast television and other digital communication media complicates our ideas about audiences in the contemporary cultural landscape.

The paper is presented as follows: firstly, I outline the academic literature relating to TV audiences to highlight the theories and arguments that I have drawn upon in order to conceptualise my own research about viewing practices and second screen experience. Next, I summarise and problematise industry discourse about second screens in order that arguments concerning the imagined audience, the attention economy, immersion and detachment may be addressed more directly. Here I separate out the discussion of social media and companion apps in order that their function in relation to the imagined audience is made evident. Finally, I discuss the findings of a pilot audience study I conducted, and consider these in the context of both the academic work and industry literature on TV audiences. My research is comprised of six focus groups – three family and three social groups – that were selected on the basis that (a) they declared using second screens while watching television and (b) they covered a range of age groups and interests: the youngest were 13 year olds at a youth club, and the oldest were women in their 70s at a lunch group.<sup>2</sup>

### **TV audiences - academic approaches**

As we know, audience research has a long and rich history within television studies and has shown over and over again that TV is “a technology of the social that works through encouraging intensity, intimacy and belonging, in which the screen is generative of affect, providing the interface for connection” (Skeggs and Wood 2012, 71). Work such as that carried out by

Helen Wood (2009) on viewers “talking with television”, and Beverley Skeggs & Helen Woods’ research (2011) on reality TV audiences provides empirical evidence of the ways in which television watching facilitates interconnectivity. This approach to, and understanding of, television audiences has long been established as embedded with familial and social dynamics that impact on meanings and pleasures produced while watching; an understanding of this has led to audience research, over the past 30 years, taking an ethnographic approach where the researcher often watches TV with her/his participants in order to gain a deeper understanding of television viewing (cf Morley 1980; Hobson 1982; Wood 2009; Skeggs and Wood 2012). As David Morley has argued, watching television is a complex activity enmeshed with “a range of other domestic practices” (Morley 1992, 173). In the digital era, the proliferation of channels and fragmentation of audiences appear to pose a threat to the ontological security (Silverstone 1994) provided by the dailiness of broadcast television, the rhythm of scheduling sutured into the lives of the audience. Conversely, the rise in second screen usage could be seen to counter this threat as audiences are invited to sign up, join in and share responses to TV content. Viewed in this way, the second screen, particularly when connected to social media, is holding opposing forces of connection and dispersal in tension and offering the means through which audiences (re)connect.

Additionally, the market-led fragmentation of audiences re-shapes the conceptualisation of viewing in academic research: “Audiences apparently converge to produce new hybrid interactive consumption practices: ‘viewers’ combine ‘using’ and ‘viewing’ to make the new ‘connected consumers’ of the future.” (Wood and Taylor 2008, 145) Here, Wood and Taylor

identify a shift in the language once used to describe audiences and texts that has become “technospeak: programmes become ‘meta-data’ while viewing pleasures become ‘protocols’”.

(ibid) Underpinning this shift towards technospeak is a culture in which technology and change is privileged over continuity, text and experience. (Wood and Taylor 2008, 14).

Reducing audience activity (and television texts) to technospeak brings to mind Ien Ang’s formulation of audiences in the postmodern context, now nearly two decades old, when she states that “it is often said ... that the television audience is becoming increasingly fragmented, individualised, dispersed, no longer addressable as a mass or as a single market” (Ang 1996, 67). In spite of (or perhaps because of) the social disintegration encouraged by postmodern capitalism, strenuous attempts are made by both researchers and the television industry to conceptualise diversity as an ordered unity through which to construct society (and television audiences). Warning against reading audiences as a “contained diversity” (Ang 1996, 172), Ang argues that “not order but chaos is the starting point”, that the “social is a site of infinite semiosis, it always *exceeds* the limits of any attempts to constitute ‘society’”. (Ang 1996, 172-173) (emphasis in original). We should, she argues, properly understand audiences as a chaotic, or complex, form of order, “an order whose ultimate suture is impossible because it is a system born out of the precarious structuration of chaos.” (175) The point about a chaotic system is not that it lacks order, but that it produces a great deal of information. And as Ang says, too much information invites the propensity to construct “the (simulated) orderliness of the audience” (175).

Although hers is an argument very much of its time, Ang's formulations are pertinent here because it offers the starting point from which to understand the apparently 'inexhaustible ocean of information' about audiences and second screen usage that is being generated by industry and which signals the impulse to impose a stable structure on the elusive commodity that is the audience.<sup>3</sup> The varied and sometimes conflicted claims generated by producers of second screen content invoke the imagined social life of audiences to drive innovation while those audiences are simultaneously constructed as profit-generating objects. While revenue is dependent on enhancing viewer pleasure, the *actual* viewers slip from view so that constructions of them slide over the surface of rhetoric while the central medium itself, television, and the multiple reasons for watching it are eclipsed almost entirely.

Certainly there is work being conducted on audiences and second screens, (Hess *et al* 2011; Mantzari *et al* 2008; Martins *et al* 2012) who explore the relationship between audiences and social TV apps. However, much of the current work on social TV work relies on data mining through which to draw inferences about audience preferences and activities. My own work provides an intervention into this debate by exploring the social dynamics of family viewing (however that family is comprised) when second screen/s become a part of viewing practices, to determine what kinds of communication take place, and whether practices vary across age groups.

### **Imagined audiences: industry perspectives**

Firstly, second screens: what they are, and what they are for. Although what is meant by "second screen" may seem obvious I want to clarify my own use of the term and have drawn on the definitions offered in the Ofcom commissioned report *Assessing the Impact of the*

*Second Screen* (Technologia 2014). The term is somewhat ambiguous. One definition: “a class of connected *devices or applications* ...designed to be complementary to TV watching ...” (Ofcom cited by Technologia 2014, 18) (my emphasis) conflates devices (laptop, smartphone, tablet) and applications as does a similar definition used by the BBC in a 2010 R&D project (ibid.) For the sake of clarity my references to “second screen” relate to a mobile hand-held device such as a phone, laptop or tablet; the specificity of that device is not an issue addressed here. But I want to separate out the hardware from the software so I utilise Technologia’s definition of an app as the software loaded onto the device *as well* as the connected services - websites and servers - that support it. Thus... an “app can include websites” (ibid.) that might involve the appropriation of already existing social media sites such as Twitter or Facebook.

As we know, the impulses driving development of second screens and apps are commercial. Although, as Technologia report, “each type of commercial entity has different core motivations and is using apps in different ways” (Technologia 2014, 11), the central concerns are pretty uniform: to enhance the viewing experience in order to generate income by harvesting audience attention.

The multiscreen, multitasking environment created by the so-called “second screen” devices and applications adds an interactive layer to television viewing, delivering on the monitoring, sorting, and customising functions treasured by marketers and

advertisers in the digital era. Indeed, *second screen* is a credible candidate for 2012 buzzword of the year in the television industry. (Lee and Andrejevic 2014, 41) (emphasis in original)

And there is a lot of industry buzz about the second screen app that aims to synchronise “real-time monitoring, customization, and targeting envisioned by the developers and promoters of the interactive commercial economy.” (Lee and Andrejevic 2014, 41) Apps, then, are designed to harvest viewer data through enhanced engagement during the broadcast of a programme as well as stimulating interest prior to broadcast, and keeping it alive post-broadcast.

This presents us with an interesting paradox: the importance of the social is acknowledged, but as a means to gain viewer attention, that is to say the commercial imperatives driving innovation reduce audience connectivity to the commodification of attention. The endeavour to buck the time-shifting trend initiated by DVRs and streaming services signals an attempt by broadcasters and advertisers to bring viewers back to live television with its tried and tested attractions for advertisers as well as programme makers and broadcasters. Crucially though, although second screens are ancillary to the main TV set, it is they (the ancillary screens) that hold the key to ‘monetising’ (to use the vernacular) audience attention by generating lucrative new opportunities for advertisers, techno start-up companies and hardware manufacturers.

We now have the complex and somewhat contradictory situation where the ideal audiences is constructed as a return to the pre-digital mass, viewing (and connecting) while at the same



time hardware and software technologies position audiences as atomised and networked individuals dispersed across platforms and delivery devices.

However, second screen activity is less widespread than may be imagined amidst the industry buzz. As the Technologia report states,

Despite the hype, the available data do not support the view that the ‘battle for eyeballs’ is yet particularly intense. If X-Factor has an audience of 11 million and its app has around 550,000 downloads, then 95% of eyeballs are still on the first screen. (Technologia 2014).

Meanwhile the *Los Angeles Times* reported that viewers are luke-warm about second screen apps with fewer than half of Second Screen users trying apps designed to be used while programmes are on air. “In other words, viewers aren’t that into the apps.” (Faughnder 2014).

### *Social Media*

The claim that “All the start ups encourage viewers to participate in Social TV and run platforms to facilitate this” (Futurescape, 2011) indicates the push to connect audiences in virtual spaces rather than with those with whom a physical environment is shared. Currently Twitter is seen as the social network site that best offers access to, and monitoring of, audience responses to output (including adverts as well as programme content). According to John Moulding, Twitter is now the “go-to company for a wide section of the TV industry” (Moulding 2014) superseding other social media platforms and companion apps rendering “packaged social TV redundant”. (Thielman 2013) The value of Twitter to broadcasters for

gathering audience data is not to be underestimated: SecondSync is a UK-based company that monitors online talk and provides analytic data to broadcasters and advertisers which in January 2014 announced a partnership with Facebook. However, in April 2014 the company posted a message stating that it is 'joining up' with Twitter (which also acquired Paris-based Mesagraph) leading SecondSync to declare that "Twitter is the only place that hosts a real-time, public conversation about TV at scale. By joining Twitter, we will be able to help take that experience, in concert with the rest of the TV ecosystem, to the next level" (SecondSync 2014). The reason for Twitter's popularity is, according to Harry McCracken, that "as with many things on the Internet, community trumps technology — and Twitter is where there's a thriving community of TV fans" (McCracken, 2014).

Whilst community-building offers the attraction of inter-connectivity for the viewers and a coherent target for broadcasters, programme makers and advertisers, we are presented with a problem. The claims made by SecondSync and others imply that joining the social media/Twitter community has become an essential element of TV viewing and the means of enhancing viewer engagement; however the attention of the majority of viewers, according to Technologia, remains with the primary screen – a claim supported by my own research. Thus, the focus of industry attention is on a minority of viewers potentially producing an echo chamber affecting future broadcast decisions and rendering the (silent) majority invisible.

*Companion apps and branded websites.*

Ethan Tussy's research, conducted with his students, explores the use of companion apps leading him to conclude that apps limit engagement, and that 'they are simply the latest example of a "digital enclosure" reaffirming rather than transforming viewing practices in the domestic environment. (Tussey 2014, 204) This is interesting because it suggests that, despite technical innovation, the *actual* experience of viewing remains largely unchanged. Nonetheless, the use of apps allows for the enhancement of branding and publicity for TV programming.

Consequently, there is considerable industry interest and investment in these digital enclosures. For example, for BBC's third season of *Sherlock* (2010-) Red Bee Media developed an interactive trailer for iPhones and iPads that encouraged viewers to click on hotspots linking to "exclusive content, giving fans a tantalizing tease of the storylines coming up in series 3" (Red Bee 2013). Playing with the detective genre, a further hotspot was hidden requiring a code to unlock it rewarding the viewer (or fans as they are referred to) with behind the scenes interviews with the cast and writers. Red Bee then created an on-air trailer directing viewers to the interactive trailer on the BBC website as well as the BBC1 Facebook and Twitter pages. The campaign was evidently successful:

In the first hour after the trailer launched there were more than 300 views per second, with nearly 500,000 views recorded within 48 hours and nearly 1 million clicks on tags. Average interactions per active viewer exceeded 4.5. The trailer is 60 seconds long but total average time spent in the experience so far is 5 minutes 19 seconds. (Red Bee Media 2013)

The opening episode attracted a reported 9.7 million viewers although how much of this was due to the app and extra-textual material is unknown. Seemingly, the interactive trailer speaks to the “audience engagement and interaction with content” called for by Futurescape in their White Paper (Futurescape 2011, 5), and exemplifies John T Caldwell’s notion of second-shift aesthetics where new initiatives are made in order to ‘brand’ content across platforms. (Caldwell 2003). In this instance, the app helped shore up both *Sherlock* and theBBC as quality brands in the national and global market place tapping into what Henry Jenkins calls “affective economics.” This is where the line between entertainment and brand message is blurred, and the viewer/consumer is “active, emotionally engaged, and socially networked [inviting] the audience inside the brand community” (Jenkins 2006, 20). However, it is likely that initiatives such as the *Sherlock* app will be taken up by an already existing fan community; and it remains to be seen if the casual viewer is drawn into the “digital enclosure”, and if they are, what it is that captures their attention.

Evidence from industry on the efficacy of companion apps is somewhat mixed. For example, Red Bee’s project for *The Walking Dead* (AMC 2010 - ) suggests that companion apps do grow audiences. Developed not just for the lead up to a new season but to also run alongside the television narrative the app uses audio-watermarking technology to synchronise with the show’s story lines allowing viewers to play games and participate in online conversations while watching live or on catch-up. Reporting on his experience of using the app, Bryan Bishop states that he enjoyed the story sync experience, participating in polls, and

reminiscing about older episodes. “Updating in real time, the polls give you a taste of what it would be like to watch the show in a room full of other fans”. (Bishop 2014) Further, Red Bee report a 37.8% uplift in viewers and a 65.3% jump in audience share (Red Bee 2012).

However, industry anticipation does not always match audience appreciation and behaviour. ABC had a less happy experience with their companion app launched for its then forthcoming show *My Generation* (2010). Story sync technology was used so viewers could use the app while watching the show as broadcast or via a DVR. However *My Generation* was cancelled after two episodes due to poor ratings. Undeterred, ABC developed an app for its long running and very popular medical drama *Grey’s Anatomy* (2005-). But this too turned out to be a failure because “many viewers complained that the continuous flood of information from apps was distracting them from the show”. (Lee and Andrejevic, 2014, 42)

So, in the case of the first example, no matter how sophisticated and playful the companion app, if the primary TV show is not appreciated, the app will not be enough to seduce audiences. On the other hand, if the show is very popular, audiences would rather focus on the show than be distracted by an app. Nonetheless, the *Sherlock* example does underline the potential for apps to draw an audience into a production prior to broadcast, and keep that community engaged post-broadcast.

The creativity involved in developing companion apps is undeniable as is some audience enjoyment of them, and the data captured by SecondSync and Mesagraph is valuable to advertisers and broadcasters, but amongst all this excitement and noise the *actual* audience and television *itself* seem to disappear from view.

This is, in part, evidenced by the frequent conflation of viewers and fans; this problematic slippage is a by-product of the ways in which television audiences have been discursively produced over decades Anna Washenko at Mashable offers an illustration:

[C]ritics have predicted the demise of live TV for some time. But the real *fans* know that's not so ... One of the most exciting new developments is second-screen apps. By keeping their smartphones, tablets or even laptops handy, *viewers* can get new insights into their shows and tap into an active community from the comfort of their couches. (Washenko 2014) (my emphasis)

Likewise, Gayle Weiwasser, Vice President of Social Media Communications at Discovery Communications argues that “Social media has made TV a social experience again. We’re very interested in ... tapping into the power of social conversations across different platforms to give *viewers* the power to connect with each other and build our relationships with our *fans*” (Futurescape 2011, 2). (my emphasis)

The problem here is that this approach to audiences elides the different levels of engagement that characterises fandom with more casual TV viewing. This is further evident by Washenko’s reference to the “couch” which stands in for the construction of television viewers as passive consumers of a ‘lean back’ medium. However, as audience research over the past thirty years has shown (and as we know from our own experience of watching television), there is no single mode of attention that can be attributed to the audience or to essential qualities inherent in the medium itself; sometimes viewing is distracted, sometimes

it is fully engaged. “Lean back” and “couch” signals a retreat into the well-worn trope of TV audiences as lounging on their couches, passively soaking up low brow, undemanding entertainment while users of digital (new) media are leaning forward, eager to interact, engage, pay attention. So, while audiences are leaning back on couches, they are being encouraged to lean forward and engage actively via additional digital media in order to become more fully immersed in the primary TV text. My point here is not to take issue with the assumptions underlying the phrase “lean back” (although I do take issue with it), but rather to point up the series of contradictions inherent in the conception of TV audiences held by producers, advertisers, pay-TV operators, TV manufacturers and start-up companies who “aim to build better viewer engagement, in order to increase revenues and open up new revenue streams.” (Futurescape 2011, 1).

Not all industry professionals have allowed their enthusiasm for developing technologies to cloud their understanding of what is a complex and elusive commodity: the audience.

Richard Kastelein, founder of Appmarket.tv, identifies what he calls “the main problem”:

“how to satisfy both the lean back couch potato and the lean forward active viewer.” How, he

asks, does the development of increasingly complicated narratives designed to extend “user

journeys” accommodate “old user habits”? (Kastelein 2013). Although this observation relies

on the over simplistic lean back/lean forward binary, Kastelein nonetheless recognises

different modes of attention that are in play while watching TV. It is here that I move from

industry discourse about the audience’s use of second screens and turn to my own

investigations of viewer experiences.

## **Knowing the audience**

### *A note on method.*

As stated earlier, I conducted a pilot project in order to explore ways in which audiences use second screens while watching television, and the degree to which their viewing pleasures were either enhanced or disrupted. I was interested in looking at the social dynamics of family viewing (however that family is comprised) when second screens become a part of viewing practices, and finding out what kinds of communication take place, and whether practices vary across age groups. I wanted to include older (60 years +) viewers/users of second screens as this group is largely invisible when it comes to questions concerning digital media (or any media for that matter).

I am aware that the responses may have been shaped to 'fit' an interview with a university researcher (I was especially aware that the group of 13 year olds might have been adapting their responses to make them seem cool or more adult), and also that recollections of what is watched, when and how may not be the same as when actually watching. This is further complicated when asking people to think about what they are doing when they are using second screens as that activity is often repetitive and taken for granted; a number of participants commented that they had to 'think hard' to recall what they did on a daily basis whereas all were very clear about viewing practices when watching programmes they are highly engaged in. Future work would involve spending longer with each participant group and watching television with them.<sup>4</sup> However, this requires a degree of intimacy that takes time to develop, time not available to me during the present research period. Nevertheless, my findings indicate an interesting degree of dissonance between audience use of second screens and industry aspirations for take up.



## *Social media*

Having specifically sought participants who use a second screen while watching television, I anticipated heavy usage of programme-related social media. However, few claimed to use programme-related social media while a programme is being broadcast. In the Thomas family - comprising Sue (42 years, lecturer), her husband Mike (48 educational psychologist), and daughter Ruby (12 years)- it was Sue who reported using Twitter usually during reality TV shows when she enjoys the 'funny comments' made about on-screen antics. Describing the sense of fun that they have when connecting with others while watching a TV event such as the Olympics, she says:

I suppose if it's like a Big Thing you're interested in knowing what other people are saying. When it was the Olympics opening ceremony we had friends here, and ... it was interesting because people started off with "this is a pile of nonsense", but there was a gradual shift wasn't there, where people were going 'hang on, this is really great', and by the time the NHS beds came, it was like 'Yay! Go Britain, it's alright after all'.

For this family, Twitter is most enjoyed when it contributes to an *already existing* social situation; the sense of fun and connection is expanded when social media became a part of that experience. However, unsurprisingly, there are times when they are all together in the living room but with attention dispersed across screens. This fragmented attention particularly annoys Sue who feels she is watching alone especially when Ruby is using Facebook; she wants Ruby to do one thing or the other which she then acknowledges as

'hypocritical' because she (Sue) will read the newspaper while the TV is on. Sue: "I dunno why it annoys me. [Maybe] because we are watching something that Ruby has chosen and then doesn't really want to look at it". So, here the screen is experienced as a barrier to those others physically present, but to counter this Mike also says that they stay in the same room as a way of being "vaguely together."

This sense of separation brings to mind Sherry Turkle's work *Alone Together* (2011) in which she argues that our use of digital technologies is reducing our capability for intimacy.<sup>5</sup> But interestingly, Ruby says that while watching TV without another screen "would be boring", she would never look at Facebook (her main go-to site) if she is watching a programme for the first time, and never when they are watching a programme as a family on Thursdays which is "tea in front of the telly night."

The annoyance expressed by Sue may be a symptom of the 'alone together' syndrome but this does not account for the totality of the family's experience. The living room is described as the primary social space (by all my respondents) but one that is fluid; second screens provide the means of sharing physical space allowing people to be "vaguely together" even if they also create distance - and as we know people have always multi-tasked while watching television. But there are also times, and sometimes specific programmes, that signal viewing as a united activity that both underpin and reflect the intimate relationships of those within a household.

The majority of my respondents report turning to social media as an adjunct to television viewing when not fully immersed in a TV show and are used to “chat” with friends or absent family members. For example, the Wendells are a retired couple in their early 60s with grown-up children living away from home; they only watch TV in the evenings. Nancy browses through Facebook but mainly uses whatsapp on her phone to communicate with her daughter and grandchild who live on the other side of the world. Connecting during the evening cuts across time zones to coincide with her daughter’s non-working time and regularly takes place in front of the TV set. Family news and updates are shared with Neil, who is usually “checking out” ebay for items he is selling (the evening being the optimum time for auction bidding). Thus the Wendells’ viewing practices are based on a mixed media and social ecology where attention is sometimes solely focused on the TV screen, while at other times absent family members have a virtual presence in the room, and occasionally attention is split across completely separate realms.

These snapshots present a complex picture. On the one hand, the sense of connectivity afforded by social media is used to enhance the viewing experience for some kinds of programming, while at others, the attention on a second screen is seen as divisive, a means of separation. Nonetheless, it is also clear that using a second screen allows for a companionship, a sharing of the same space whilst (dis)engaged with the primary screen.

The issue of using social media in relation to time-shifted viewing (and which represents a problem for the industry practice of using advertising revenue based on ratings ) became apparent when interviewing the Southall family who present a more complex rhythm to their

viewing practices. They report that everything they watch is recorded, stored and viewed at a time of their choosing, a habit dating back 15 years when Tim (43 years; IT consultant) built the family's own "early time-shifting device"<sup>6</sup>; their time-shifted viewing is a point made at the start of the interview to explain their lack of engagement with any kind of "real-time" social TV. Their highly selective nature of viewing means that when the whole household comes together to watch, the programme has their undivided attention; no second screens will be used. The exception described by Beverley (44 years, speech therapist) is watching TV with Ben (10 years and the only child) when he gets home from school. While Ben watches children's television Beverley is with him but not paying much attention to the programmes, and instead uses her laptop, iPad and iPhone to multi-task across screens with specific activities designated to each device. This will include engaging with work-related issues and using social media such as Facebook and Pintrest, the latter absorbing most of her attention: "I'm big on Pintrest; I've got 1200 followers." Sitting with her son as he watches TV affords "down time" together while the secondary screens also allow for a separation of attention and focus; Beverley's attention is nowhere near the TV screen but being in the same room engaging in some other screen-related activity allows for a pause in the day. Interestingly, Jane (45, friend and lodger) says that she always makes sure that, during these periods, Beverly and Ben have the living room space to themselves in order that they "have mum and son time." Thus, as with my other respondents, we see evidence that the living room is the site where watching television, with and without second screens, allows for the dynamic interplay of intimacy and separation within the domestic sphere.

### *Companion apps and branded websites*

Across my sample, little enthusiasm for apps was expressed. Of all groups, the student group might be most expected to use second screens and companion apps; they are the sought after digital natives attractive to broadcasters, start-up companies and advertisers. However, while they access websites such as IMDB or Wikipedia to find additional information on a programme or specific actor they do not, as a rule, use companion apps. Nicholas says “When I am not being a good student and reading [ahem] then I will watch TV live, but for American high quality drama series I will most likely illegally stream that online, on whatever website is providing a source.” This demographic is highly attractive to advertisers and the technology companies that develop increasingly sophisticated apps as a means of drawing in and growing an audience but illegal file sharing and downloading means that this group is sidestepping mainstream attempts at capturing attention. All stated that when immersed in a TV drama they turned off all secondary screens. Only one, Nicholas, had used an app during a broadcast - an interactive advert for a forthcoming film - but when the programme he was watching returned after the ad break the app was abandoned.

It is here that the issue of genre in relation to companion apps becomes more apparent, because apart from the older women at the lunch club (who cited football and the news as TV that would most capture their attention, as the most immersive television) all except the older women cited TV drama as the programming for which they would most often turn off their second screens. Clearly, favourite TV dramas – particularly long-form dramas – offer immersive experience without the adjunct of social TV or apps which, in this context, are seen as an irritation.

Interestingly, and rather surprisingly, the youth club group of 13 year olds were most vociferous about the none-use of apps and official websites. When asked if they would download an app or travel to an officially designated site they all said that they would not. When asked for a reason, one girl said that she did not want the spam, “and it’s probably going to be rubbish anyway.” One of the boys said: “too much hassle. You have to register, get a password, wait for it to download...” [another boy adds] “it takes ages.” The threat of spam seems to be a deterrent signalling a problem for advertisers aiming to capitalise audience attention. One girl in the group said that “if it’s with Facebook” she might “just ‘like’ the pages” but the whole group agreed that they have stopped doing this because when you “like” a page “they just spam you with loads of stuff; it gets annoying.” But another, often cited, reason for not using companion apps during a programme is to avoid interruption of immersion; again, this was mostly frequently cited in relation to drama.

However, there are exceptions to app resistance which flags the importance of genre in relation to the use of both social media and companion apps. In my research, it is quiz shows, reality programmes and live events that are, unsurprisingly perhaps, the instances where audience activity and industry aims are most likely to cohere as apps deepen levels of connection and immersion for viewers while generating valuable data for broadcasters and programme makers. One enthusiastically endorsed app was for the quiz/game show *Million Pound Drop Live* (Monterosa Productions) and which deserves some detailed explanation as it illustrates the ways in which apps can facilitate both playfulness and sociality. Amy, a female student, described in detail the pleasure she and her flatmates (other students, mixed

gender, same age) derived from the *Million Pound Drop* app that allows viewers to play *Million Pound Drop Live* (Channel 4, 2010 -) alongside the contestants on television. *Million Pound Drop* is a TV quiz show hosted in the UK by Davina McCall in which two contestants aim to win £1 million by answering all questions correctly. Facing a multiple choice, money is spread across the answers deemed most likely to be correct. If the right answer/s have been chosen, that money is safe; money placed on wrong answers is lost. While viewers at home are not in the position of losing or gaining any money, they do play alongside the studio participants. As the drama in the studio is taking place, McCall gives updates on viewers playing along at home giving information like “the women in the North East are doing better than the men in the South West” etc. For Amy and her flatmates, the sense of jeopardy is heightened when playing alongside the live show and watching the seconds count down as they try to decide which answer to opt for. Meanwhile, McCall’s acknowledgements of the home audience expand the perception of sociality, of connectedness with other viewers/players across the UK. Amy described this as an intense and immensely pleasurable way of watching TV.

Brand websites can also facilitate playfulness and connectivity with co-present others.

Although expressing a mistrust of “official websites”, Jane, lodger with the Southall family, is corrected, by reminding her of brand sites that she has visited:

Jane: I have been to Kirsty Alsop’s website [and] some of the sciencey/psychology ones. We’ve been and done some of their psychology experiment ones afterwards.

Beverley: Oh, the psychopath test!

Jane: The psychopath test! Yes! I came out badly after that. [much laughter.] They put a bolt on my door after that. On the outside.

This brief exchange illustrates ways in which companion apps enhance TV viewing when they are a part of an already existing social situation. Taking the psychopath test appears to have been stimulated by the source documentary (about psychopaths) facilitating a deeper engagement with the programme's subject material as well as a playfulness that, on recounting, continued to be enjoyed at the same time as shoring up Jane's position in the family as the lodger.

The experience of watching reality TV/talent shows can also be enhanced by using apps. The Thomas family recall using an app which was for *Britain's Got Talent* (ITV 2007 -) so that they "could make the noise" [the buzzer pressed by the judges when they do not like a performance]; this, they agreed, made viewing more fun. Mike says "it did add something, it made it more live, it made it more part of the programme." Nonetheless, the app was also experienced as an irritatingly distracting when it was showing clips of previous acts. Mike: "Am I supposed to be looking at this or that?" Meanwhile for dramas that demand emotional and intellectual investment, the second screen is an annoyance, an intrusion. This is, perhaps, unsurprising. What is more surprising is that this response is consistent across all age groups including the older women whose ages range between 67 - 77 years.

## **Conclusion**



The title of Ofcom's report, "The Reinvention of the 1950s Living Room", gestures towards traditional modes of viewing co-existing with individualised screen activity suggesting that the living room is simultaneously a social and anti/social space. While the main TV set retains its central position in the living room, it is simultaneously displaced, almost disappearing from view amongst the multitude of screens. At the same time, audiences are connecting (perhaps) with each other in the living room but are also present in virtual social spaces as they Tweet, message, surf.

However, as we have seen, industry notions of "old [television] user habits" implies a preferred audience paradigm that gestures towards "new" digital media. An audience typology needs to emerge that accommodates the idea that audiences' attention will vary according to genre, social circumstance, and mood. As it is, there is tension between the conceptions of the ideal audience that watches TV while leaning back and that other ideal audience that leans forward to use a variety of other screens through which to consume even more content while simultaneously producing valuable data for advertisers and for broadcasters. Two key issues emerge: firstly, the tension between the formulation of "lean back" and "lean forward" modes of engagement, and secondly, that second screens enable television viewers to encounter communities of other viewers with whom they engage in banter and conversation, and at other times enable individuals to use second screen apps to further immerse themselves in the diegetic world of the television programme. Certainly, there seem to be occasions when (or rather, genres for which) second screens both offer the possibility of enhanced viewing experience *at the same time* as boosting income for

advertisers and social TV start-up companies. However, this is certainly not uniform, and I would argue that engagement via a second screen depends more on genre than age or gender. A third issue is the way in which second screens affect the social relations of the living room by creating a split attention with some people using them to enable a focus on other activities unconnected to television viewing while also allowing them to share a social space with others in the family as they watch television “alone together.”

Twenty years on from Ang’s discussion, the condition of postmodernity has accelerated with neoliberal economics creating ever more fragmented, decentred and unstable social relations; . Despite the much-celebrated global interconnectivity, audiences are, in theoretical terms, less coherent and therefore less “readable.” This unreadability accords with Ang's claim in her earlier work *Desperately Seeking the Audience* that there is a very real difference between the audience as constructed and the actual real social world of the audience. (Ang 1991, 3-5, 13)

Certainly, audience ethnographies would help us understand the impact second screens are having on the dynamics between those viewing TV together as well as on the relationship to the programmes themselves. To more fully understand audiences’ use of, and engagement with, second screens more empirical research needs to be undertaken about how and why people use them to enhance their viewing pleasures. This is to risk what Ang warns us against: reading audiences as a contained diversity. But it would help to offer a more complex explanation of why audiences are engaging with television, or in some contexts choosing not to do so, through their second screens.

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<sup>1</sup> Although the term ‘second screen’ is most frequently used indicating a subservient status to that of television, there are other terms in use. The BBC refers to the ‘companion screen’ when there is an ‘intelligent’ awareness between the two screens ie the content on one is ‘speaking to the content on another, whereas Decipher Media Research and Red Bee Media refer to ‘dual screening’ for any activity on a second device, ‘synchronous activity’ for that which is prompted by the TV, and ‘companion experiences’ to refer to second device activity created by the content being viewed. (Technologia 2014, p19)

<sup>2</sup> I should note that all my respondents were middle class and white and the adults had been educated (or were being educated) to degree level; a more mixed demographic would have been desirable and may have produced different responses. My findings confirm the observation that middle class respondents tend to see television as a guilty pleasure, one ameliorated by the educational possibilities it offers (Seiter 199; Skeggs and Wood 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Regarding audiences as consumers/producers of income is not a new phenomenon of course. The 1986 Peacock committee was set up in the UK to consider the introduction of advertising on the BBC. Although the license fee and the BBC as a public service broadcaster were maintained, in the report is viewers and listeners were referred to as ‘consumers’ marking a decisive shift in the ways in which viewers are perceived by policy makers. (see Holland et al 2013)

<sup>4</sup> Thinkbox has carried out research that explores how audiences use multiple screens while watching television. They managed to persuade 20 households to have CCTV-type technology installed in their homes in order to capture multi-screen (phones, laptops, tablets) behaviour in relation to television viewing. While their findings are very interesting, the main interest lies in gauging audience attention, and the degree to which viewers are able to recall an advertised brand while multi-screening as the advert is broadcast. (Thinkbox.tv 2014)

<sup>5</sup> I thank my anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

<sup>6</sup> This makes the family unusual as, according to Ofcom, live TV accounted for 90% of viewing in 2012 (Ofcom 2013)