



## Journal of Promotional Communications

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://promotionalcommunications.org/index.php/pc/index>

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To cite this article: Steele, L., James, R., Burrows, R., Mantell, D. L. and Bromham, J. 2015. The Consumption of On-Demand, *Journal of Promotional Communications*, 3 (1), 219-241

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# Louisa Steele, Rebecca James, Rosella Burrows, Demi Leigh Mantell and Jo Bromham

## The Consumption of On-Demand

This paper will document how consumers use on-demand services. In particular, it will focus on individual and collective viewing of television and film on-demand.

There is currently limited research about the consumption of on-demand content, despite it being a significant practice in consumers' day-to-day lives. Mintel reported that 80% of consumers that own a television in the home watch online content (Davies 2014b). The investigation carried out an exploratory qualitative study, using a compressed phenomenological approach, with the purpose of attaining first-person descriptions of the respondents' experiences with on-demand services. The key findings show that on-demand has become a linking device enabling consumers to bond with others over the content they are watching. This research has adapted Collective Spectatorship to include engagement and social interaction producing the concept: Connected Collective Spectatorship. The core argument is illustrated by three key themes. To Connect not Escape, Creation of Events and The Gift of Recommendation.

Keywords = On-Demand, Consumption, Television and Film, Recommendation, Events, Connect.

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper will capture consumers' experiences viewing on-demand and its integration into everyday life, within the household, paying special attention to individual and collective dimensions of on-demand viewing. In the context of this paper the term on-demand refers to "video on demand, [which] is technology that allows viewers to choose their own television content..." (Hackney 2010, p.41). The increased presence of technological gadgets in the homes had led to consumers watching on-demand services on multiple devices, with tablets dominating the way consumers are viewing (Davies 2014a). In 2014, the amount of adults that had played or downloaded films had doubled since 2007 (National Office of Statistics 2014). The growth of subscription-based video on-demand

services in 2013 was the largest increase in the television industry (Gee 2014b). Research shows that after the most commonly purchased video media (DVDs), the next format consumers are most likely to buy is a subscription to a video streaming service, which have been successful in changing the ways in which the average consumer watches television and film in the home (Gee 2014b). Therefore, it can be concluded that consumer appetite for on-demand content is on the increase.

It is essential for practitioners to be ahead of the trend in order to proactively understand their audience. Netflix accounted for 34% of all internet usage during primetime hours, while YouTube's bandwidth declined by 5% in 3 months, thus emphasising the unstable, competitive environment (Spangler 2014). The boom of on-demand services requires a better understanding, so practitioners can react accordingly to their audience's consumption patterns and behaviours. In 2012, "video-on-demand was a £115-million ad business, up 28% from £90 million in 2011" (Nielsen 2013). As the popularity of on-demand in the UK grows, the industry is recognising its potential for gaining incremental reach. Advertisers are starting to take money from central television budgets to use in video-on-demand advertising (Nielsen 2013). Such services also affect the writing and production of television content as viewing patterns have changed, such as the growth in the popular practice of binge-watching. Binge-watching can be defined as "watching between 2-6 episodes of the same TV show in one sitting" (West 2014). There is currently a shift in the television and film industries, as more consumers are renting rather than owning content and "becoming less reliant on live broadcasts" (Davies 2014a). Therefore, the industry needs to be more informed on how consumers are integrating these services into their day-to-day lives, so advertisers can effectively target them.

Despite the significant increase of on-demand services in the last 7 years, there has been limited research on how consumers experience on-demand content in the home. So far, attention has been placed on the debate between whether viewing television and film via the traditional television set is a social or alienating activity. Many academics would agree that watching television is a social experience that allows relationships to be built and maintained (Lull 1980; Gauntlett and Hill 1999; Barkhuus and Brown 2009; Cameron and Geidner 2014). On the other hand, academics have argued that the increase of technology has led to an individualised way of viewing (Andrew 1986; Livingstone 2007; Lee 2010). There is a gap in the research as viewing on-demand has yet to be explored regarding this discussion. In a recent Mintel report, Davies (2014a) states that "consumers desire to be taken on an enjoyable journey to another time and place" when they watch on-demand content. However, academic studies are yet to expand on this hypothesis, namely that consumers are watching on-demand content to escape.

Previous research has focused on piracy regulation (Danaher and Waldfogel 2012) and illegal streaming (Lehtinen 2012), as well as ethics regarding the film industry. Several studies have quantified the findings in the analysis, limiting the depth and understanding of the consumer experience (Anderson et al. 1986; Garitaonandia et al. 2003; Saxbe et al 2011). There has also been a focus on how viewers experience terrestrial television content

in the home and how film consumption is shaped by timing and scheduling within people's lives (Jancovich 2011). Jancovich (2011) states that new technological devices in the home allow for place-shifting and time-shifting, thus enabling consumers to watch films and television not only where they want, but also when they want. However, there is limited research on how viewer experience television and films on-demand and whether or not there are differential effects between terrestrial television and on-demand viewing.

This paper aims to expand on previous research (Krugman and Gopal 1991; Gunter 1995; Schmitt et al. 2003; Saxbe et al. 2011) regarding the experience of watching television through on-demand services. In particular, it aims to enrich the previous understanding and develop the theory of Collective Spectatorship when watching television and film on-demand within the home, compared to the traditional cinematic experience. Hanich states that "audience communication is not celebrated" (2014, p.358). However, Hanich does not reject communicative and interactive types of spectatorship. This paper will investigate if these experiences are common within the home and whether it is a type of spectatorship that is widely enjoyed when watching video on-demand.

The research paper is structured in three key parts. It will start with a comprehensive review of existing literature by highlighting the contribution to research. To follow, there will be a detailed report of the method undertaken in the research. Finally, the paper will end with a discussion and conclusion of the key findings.

## CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

### Television and Film Viewing in the Home

Over the past 20 years, television has been fully integrated into consumers' daily routines (Silverstone 1994; Gauntlett and Hill 1999; Briggs 2010). As previously mentioned, it is clear that television viewing is a core part of consumers' lives. Silverstone (1994, p.3) states:

"[T]elevision accompanies us as we wake up, as we breakfast, as we have our tea... It comforts us when we are alone. It helps us sleep. It gives us pleasure, it bores us and sometimes it challenges us".

Academic research has shown that when watching traditional broadcast television at home, viewers concentrate and observe less as they are more likely to take part in a secondary activity simultaneously, such as eating, reading, playing or doing housework. Sometimes family members are not present in the room whilst the television is on and may be elsewhere in the house, partaking in a different activity (Hopkins and Mullis 1985; Anderson et al. 1986; Krugman and Gopal 1991; Clancey 1994; Gunter 1995; Schmitt et al. 2003; Obrist et al. 2008; Briggs 2010).

Existing research has also highlighted how the introduction of the Video-Cassette Recorder in the 1990s initiated a viewing experience different from traditional television watching (Krugman and Gopal 1991). The study showed that viewers are more likely to pay attention to the television screen and are less likely to participate in other social or individual activities if they were watching a movie rental (Krugman and Gopal 1991).

More recent research regarding how new technology is changing practices of watching television is shown in a study by Barkhuus and Brown (2009). The results suggest that new technologies in the home such as PVRs (Personal Video Recorders) like TiVo and Sky+ and downloading television content from the Internet has had an impact on viewing habits and behaviour as they “allow for time-shifting” (Barkhuus and Brown 2009, p.20). Television viewing is less structured as viewers can now record content and watch it when they please, allowing audiences to control their scheduling around their individual lifestyles. Barkhuus and Brown (2009) propose that engagement is more active than it used to be, as PVRs allow viewers to skip adverts, fast forward scenes of little interest, and even bookmark favourite shows and content so they can return and view them repeatedly. This highlights that viewing content via on-demand services within the home is changing, thus enforcing the need to investigate it further.

Currently television viewing still remains a big part of life, both as a social and solo activity (Krugman and Gopal 1991; Clancey 1994; Gauntlett and Hill 1999; Schmitt et al. 2003; Saxbe et al. 2011; Zillich 2014). However, since the increase of technology and multiple devices within the home through which audiences can watch television and film, there is an underlying debate into whether this causes alienation or facilitates social connections.

#### Individual vs Social Viewing

There has been a decline in family television viewing in homes, as society has entered an era of channel proliferation and multichannel services. Lee (2010) argues that because of the greater choice of channels, television audiences are discouraged to watch it together as a family and instead view more content individually. Livingstone (2007) has highlighted the change in young people's television consumption patterns due to the availability and amount of technology devices in the home. As a result, there has been a shift from family television viewing to ‘bedroom culture’. To further investigate this, Saxbe et al. (2010) recorded families’ television viewing patterns at home. The study showed that whilst parents are engaging in the viewing of television as a social activity, children are more likely to watch television as solo viewers, alone in their bedrooms.

Further evidence has debated that consumers are watching television and film more privately (Andrew 1986; Lee 2010). Einav (2010) finds that new screens, times and place-shifting have all contributed to the decline in traditional television watching. Supporting this, a Mintel report (2014) shows that the amount of technology in households is increasing, with 96% having more than 1 television, 1 in 2 owning a tablet and 83% owning a laptop. Due to the increase of technological devices in the home, viewers have adopted the method of place-shifting:

“Place-shifting enables consumers to watch live or DVR [Digital Video Recorded] content on any device with an Internet connection, anywhere they happen to be” (Slingbox 2014).

Jancovich (2011) states how new technological devices allow for place-shifting as well as time-shifting. Technologies that allow opportunities for the viewer to download films or television programmes, or record them to view later, allow consumers to fit these activities

into their own schedule. This refutes previous research that has found how “everyday activities are shifted, elongated or cut to accommodate the programmes” consumers want to watch (Gauntlett and Hill 1999, p.23). Jancovich touches lightly upon how on-demand services, such as BBC iPlayer also allow for time-shifting as it can “convert the schedule into a menu to be watched when one wishes” (2011, p.94).

Furthermore, modern devices enable consumers to partake in television viewing away from the traditional setting of the living room, where the viewer chooses to watch content alone or with others. This place-shifting (Thinkbox 2013) has not only encouraged the physical migration of watching content in different places around the home but the movement from the television screen to modern devices. Consequently, studies have implied that the increase of technology has led to audience’s conversing in real-time during the programme through online and virtually connected devices.

Previous research confirms the importance of relaxation and escapism as the motivations for watching television programmes and films (Rubin 1983; Clancey 1994; Obrist et al. 2008; Hamilton and Wagner 2011; Jancovich 2011; Davies 2014a). However, contrasting studies highlight how television consumption could be moving away from the concept of escapism for viewers and is increasingly becoming a social activity. Lull (1980) built a typology of the uses of television, one of which is communication facilitation. This emphasises television’s integration into consumers’ social relationships, as it has been suggested that television allows people to maintain relationships through the discussion of shows and content (Lull 1980).

Barkhuus and Brown (2009) also stated that watching television is not about switching off from the rest of the world and instead holds social implications. The research suggests that audiences’ motivations are beginning to change and adapt with the increase of new technologies such as PVRs. Television viewing is now becoming a social activity that not only plays an important part in socialising with those in the home, but also those outside of the home. Television can be a core part of social interaction with colleagues, friends and family, allowing viewers to engage in conversations about the television programmes and films they watch with others who have a shared interest (Gauntlett and Hill 1999; Barkhuus and Brown 2009). Gauntlett and Hill (1999) also suggest that television viewing is collective, as interactions will “take place around and through the watching of it” (p.35). This is aided by the arrangement of television sets in the home, as 90% of respondents had a television in the living room; a room where the family would often sit together and bond (Gauntlett and Hill 1999).

In support of this research, Cameron and Geidner (2014, p.414) have stated:

“[T]elevision provides a space for social comparison or establishing and confirming social and cultural values”.

Second screen viewing, where viewers are using other technology devices such as tablets and smartphones at the same time as watching television, allows the viewer to create a group viewing experience (Wohn and Na 2011; Cameron and Geidner 2014). Research

states the use of second screens allows viewers to actively engage with television content by sharing their experience. It also enables viewers to interact in real-time with others who are interested in the same content (Elmer 2012; Smith and Boyle 2012; MECinAction 2013; Cameron and Geidner 2014). Moreover, Einav (2010) finds that media audience measurement is moving toward a three-screen model, which includes television, online and mobile.

### Collective Spectatorship

The abovementioned demonstrates a blurred understanding of social uses of watching television. Technology devices have enabled consumers to connect virtually, opening the need to understand social viewing, through interaction (physical and virtual) and shared viewing (together). Hanich (2014) touched upon a phenomenon in the era of cinema spectatorship that is apparent in today's proliferation and diversification of television watching. With a focus on the quiet attentive audiences, Collective Spectatorship suggests viewers are engaged in the collective intention of a single activity: viewing film (Hanich 2014). Therefore, consumers may be choosing on-demand as there is a greater social flexibility than watching in a cinema setting, as this environment is "robbing themselves of their motor freedom" (Hanich 2014, p.347).

Hanich (2014, p.359) comments that the film experience is at stake and suggests it is becoming an "individualised and solitary experience", as the traditional practice of viewing film is changing through the increase of accessibility and new devices. It is argued that audiences do not gain the same experience from watching a film alone compared to watching a film with others. Hanich proposes that the latter includes the phenomenon of both joint attention and joint action, developing the theory of Collective Spectatorship. Viewers have the shared intention of watching a film together and obtain the pleasure of silently watching with co-present spectators. However, Hanich's hypothesis only considers physical accompaniment, but due to a "shift in types of collectivity" consumers now have the choice to explore face-to-face interaction and expressive participation (Hanich 2014, p.343).

Research is yet to demonstrate how the use of on-demand services contributes to this shift in consumption. Therefore, this paper will explain how on-demand services influence the experience of consumption to understand why people choose this service as an alternative medium. The study will explore whether television viewing is an isolating or socialising experience and how it may influence on-demand viewing. The paper will also gain further insight regarding place-shifting and its collaboration with on-demand services within the home, as well as a greater understanding of Collective Spectatorship and its adaption with on-demand services.

### METHOD

An exploratory qualitative study was conducted, involving 13 semi-structured interviews using a compressed phenomenological approach (Thompson et al. 1989). The phenomenological interviews, more appropriately named conversations, aimed to attain

first-person descriptions of the respondents' experiences with on-demand (Thompson et al. 1989), gaining insight into the complexity of the meaning people allocate to the lived experience (Massimiliano and Mortari 2010). This approach was designed to understand what the interviewees see as relevant or important, and how they make sense of the world (Bryman 2004; Bryman 2012). Capable of producing rich, valuable data (Punch 1998), this approach was seen as the optimum method to comprehend interviewee's inner state and their reasoning behind their actions and feelings (Seale 1998).

The sample consists of an almost equal distribution of men and women, with an age range from 21 to 53-year-olds. A large proportion of participants were aged between 21 to 24-years; to prevent any concern regarding a demographic bias, several participants were of broad age ranges to reduce this predisposition. Quota sampling was employed for the participant recruitment process, as this ensured all respondents met the required criteria. The study requested participants who were heavy users of on-demand services, defining heavy users as consumers who watch on-demand several times a week or everyday (Becker and Connor 1981).

The interviews were conducted for a minimum of 1 hour and a maximum of 1 hour 45 minutes. This duration allowed the conversational dialogue to develop between the researcher and participant. As the interview format is conversational rather than a question and answer session, the respondent set the course of the dialogue, while the interviewer prompted the flow and topic of conversation (Thompson et al. 1989).

The questions and probes used during the interviews followed "the course of the dialogue and [were] aimed at bringing about descriptions of experiences" (Thompson et al. 1989, p.138). Conversation prompts were inspired by Ernest Dichter's (2004) storytelling descriptions to gain comprehensive knowledge of participants' experiences. Questions included: "Tell me about your best or worst experience of watching on-demand content" and "Talk me through the last time you used on-demand services".

A participant characteristic table was completed to differentiate participants and enable a better understanding of their on-demand usage (see Figure A). A connection was built with the respondent through personal introductory questions that identified the participants' personality and individual qualities, allowing for a greater understanding of the insights. Gradual progression into topical questions followed, as successful research techniques have been found to include different types of questioning activity; personal questions, research questions and field questions (Clough and Nutbrown 2007).

Interviews were conducted at the participants' homes when available to aid in the understanding of the individual's lived experience, as they perceive it (Massimiliano and Mortari 2010). Therefore, in-home environments allowed the interviewee to be prompted by personal artefacts and memories. After each interview had been conducted, observations were written about the participant and their home environment; both the observations and notes assisted with the analysis of the findings.



For occasional circumstances, interviews were conducted via Skype; thus jeopardising the connection and rapport between the interviewer and respondent. Adopting a reflective posture, this may reduce the validity of data collected through such interview techniques. However, 2 unsuccessful interviews allowed the practice and polish of interviewing methods, benefiting the interviewer for further data collection.

Ethical considerations and precautions were adopted prior the research commencement. All interviewees were given a participant information sheet, informing them of research requirements and participant expectations. Agreement and understanding was assured from each participant before commencing the interviews, including signed consent forms and guaranteed anonymity. Participant withdrawal was allowed at any time during the research.

The interviews were conducted between the 14th November 2014 and the 5th December 2015. 16.6 hours of data have been collected 157,039 words have been transcribed and 12 pages of observation and interview notes have been used for cross analysis. An idiographic analysis identified the key outcomes, which were then reviewed in an interpretative group for cross-case analysis (Thompson et al. 1989), refining the significant findings and increasing the the data's credibility.

Figure A – Participant Characteristics Table

Name	Age	Marital Status	Occupation	On-demand services used	Most used	Ways they access	How long on-demand's been used for	How often
James	53	Married	Engineer	Netflix, BBC iPlayer, 4OD, ITV Player, Virgin Media	Virgin Media	Smart TV	10 years	Everyday
Carrie	21	Single	Student	Netflix, BBC iPlayer, Sky Go, 4OD, ITV Player	Netflix	Laptop, TV - via console	2 to 3 years	Everyday
George	30	Cohabiting	Sales	Netflix, BBC iPlayer, Sky Go, 4OD, Apple TV, Sky Box	Apple TV, Sky Go, Netflix	TV, Laptop, Tablet	Sky Go (3-4 years) Netflix (year & a half)	Everyday
Rosie	21	Single	Kitchen Designer	Netflix, Sky Go, BBC iPlayer, 4OD, ITV Player	Netflix	Tablet, Laptop	Since it became available	Everyday
Charlotte	21	Single	Assistant Manager at Osteopath Company	Netflix Amazon Prime Instant Video, BBC iPlayer, 4OD, ITV Player	Netflix Amazon Prime Instant Video	Smartphone, Kindle, Computer, PlayStation 3, TV	Since it became available	Everyday
Louise	21	Single	Student	Netflix, Sky Go, BBC iPlayer, 4OD, ITV Player, Virgin Media	Netflix, BBC iPlayer, 4OD, ITV Player	Smartphone, Laptop, TV	3 to 4 years	Everyday
Andy	24	Single	Freelance musician & producer	Netflix, BBC iPlayer	Netflix, BBC iPlayer	Laptop, Xbox 360, iPad, PS3, Smart TV, PS4	18 months - 2 years	Everyday

Lucy	22	Single	Finance graduate	Sky Go, BBC iPlayer, 4OD, ITV Player	Sky Go, BBC iPlayer, 4OD, ITV Player	Smartphone, Laptop TV	3 to 4 years	Everyday
Ben	28	Married	Chef	Amazon Prime, Netflix, SkyGo, BBC iPlayer, ITV Player	Sky Go	XBox 360, Laptop	1.5 to 2 years	Everyday
Millie	21	Single	Fabric Assistant & Shop Stylist	Netflix, BBC iPlayer, 4OD	Netflix, BBC iPlayer	Smart TV, iPad, Laptop	4 to 5 years	Everyday
Alex	21	Single	Student	BBC iPlayer, 4OD, ITV player. Sky Go, Amazon Prime	BBC iPlayer. ITV player, 4OD	Smart TV, Laptop, Smartphone	2 to 3 years	Everyday
Stephanie	21	Single	Student	Netflix, 4OD, BBC iPlayer, ITV Player	Netflix, 4OD	Laptop	2.5 years	Everyday
Mark	24	Single	Electrician	Netflix, BBC iPlayer, 4OD, ITV Player	BBC iPlayer, 4OD, ITV Player	Smart TV, Laptop Smartphone	5 to 6 years	Everyday

## FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### On-Demand as a Linking Device

On-demand has become a linking device that allows consumers to bond with others over the content they are watching. The findings highlight that on-demand services enable connectivity between and within audiences, for individual and social benefits. The manipulation of television schedules and ability to catch-up have equipped audiences with the options and facilities to converse over shows and build connections through face-to-face or online interactions. The ease and accessibility of content via on-demand allows consumers to reciprocate others' suggestions in order to build on or extend relationships. Audiences can recreate the excitement of watching television programmes and film through socially scheduled viewing.

### Connected Collective Spectatorship

Developing Hanich's Collective Spectatorship (2014) regarding the quiet attentive audience, which states viewing is a silent activity, the findings suggest an evolved viewing experience. This study proposes Connected Collective Spectatorship; a secondary activity of engagement and social interaction between two or more viewers simultaneously takes place during the viewing experience. Hanich proposes "acting jointly may be supplemented by feeling jointly" (Hanich 2014, p339), thus building a connection between viewers and linking them together.

Connected Collective refers to the emotional connection consumers feel through the interaction over the shared viewing of television and film content. It was found that audiences feel connected to others via physical, virtual or emotional similarities, as well as the common interest in television content. Collective Spectatorship was adapted to Connected Collectivity as it was found the co-viewer does not have to be physically present and in the context of television viewing via on-demand services in the home, or in other words the audiences do not need to watch the show simultaneously.

### Theme One: Accessing Content Not To Escape but to Connect

Prior research has shown that one of the key motivations for watching television programmes and films is linked to escapism (Rubin 1983; Clancey 1994; Obrist et al. 2008; Hamilton and Wagner 2011; Jancovich 2011). Although previous research has focused on viewing via a traditional television set, Davies (2014a) stated in a recent Mintel report that escapism was the key motivation for watching on-demand content.

However, the findings from this research suggest differently. Previous literature has focused on the social viewing experience versus the alienating experiences of watching television within the home. When applying the key debate discussed in the conceptual background to this research, it is clear that viewing on-demand is a social experience, whether or not the consumer is physically watching the content with other people or alone. Those that are watching on-demand do so not to escape, but rather to connect with others. Consumers are in fact seeking access to on-demand to feel part of a group and link

to other people, whether it be creating a topic of conversation amongst others or continuing the conversation online if this linking cannot be fulfilled in the home. The research has built on Lull's (1980) typology of the uses of television, in particular communication facilitation. This research suggests that viewing on-demand content also allows consumers to maintain relationships by discussing the content they watch. Gauntlett and Hill (1999) and Barkhuus and Brown (2009) suggested that television is a core part of social interaction with colleagues, friends and family, as it allows viewers to discuss the television programmes and films they are watching. It is clear from the findings that the same can be applied to the consumption of video on-demand.

Earlier research has suggested that consumers are watching more content individually (Andrew 1986; Livingstone 2007; Lee 2010). This research has confirmed that the rise of technology and on-demand services in the home has led to some consumers watching television and film more privately. However, instead of this type of consumption alienating consumers, it has brought them together in a completely different way. Even if consumers are viewing on-demand content alone, they are still linking and connecting with others to talk about the television shows and films they are watching.

Charlotte is a 21-year-old film enthusiast from Surrey, who has always had a passion for watching films ever since she was young. She grew up watching them with her family and now revels in the fact that she can watch them whenever and wherever she likes. She loves being able to talk to others and to share her passion for the things she watches on-demand. For Charlotte, on-demand services have allowed her to maintain friendships and connect with friends that she would not even speak to if it were not for their link through on-demand. Charlotte narrates:

“For example, with Ru Paul's Drag Race and American Horror Story, there's one friend that I don't really see anymore, cos she is at uni, but we do just talk over Facebook about like TV erm... and I say that's probably like mainly what we talk about so in that sense that's why we're friends; that's my connection with her - it's about TV interests that we watch on-demand but that's fine with me, cos like I wanna talk about it so I'll just go to her cos I know she'll have watched it...”

It is apparent that despite Charlotte and her friend not being as close as they used to be, they still connect with each other over their interest in television and the content they both watch on-demand. Charlotte admits that they might not even be friends at all if it was not for their link through on-demand content. In this case, Charlotte is not watching on-demand content to escape, but to connect with a friend that she knows will have watched it too. The freedom that on-demand provides does not alienate Charlotte and her friend, instead it brings them together in a way that would not have happened before. Charlotte may be watching on-demand privately, but she still discusses the programmes she is watching with her friend.

Alex is a 21-year-old corporate communications guru who recently finished work experience at a respected and well-recognised car manufacturer. He loves getting involved in extracurricular activities and also has a growing passion for performing arts. Alex enjoys

catching up on the latest television series in his spare time, especially watching on-demand with his friends:

“So, it could be any show really, but like *Celebrity Juice* and we would like tweet about it or like, we’d whatsapp each other and then afterwards we would call each other, but it’s just nice to be able to watch something, I mean sometimes we do it by Skype..So you can do a split screen... So like, we’d both be watching *celebrity juice* but we can both talk to each other whilst it’s going on, so it’s like something really interesting like that because like, so I’m in Bournemouth and my best friend is in Sheffield like it’s quite a way a way to go so it’s nice to be able to do that.”

Even though Alex and his best friend live in different parts of the country, they are still able to converse and connect over the programmes they are watching on-demand. The split screen facility on Skype enables Alex and his friend to converse whilst watching on-demand, providing evidence that the key purpose is to connect with the co-viewer. The variety of methods that Alex uses to link with others reinforces the concept of watching on-demand to connect not escape.

This can be seen as a reflection of Connected Collective Spectatorship as the viewing activity is a subsidiary consequence of on-demand services enabling connectivity between the friends. It was evident that they watch content at their will and leisure, but yearn for a collective experience. Thus viewers actively seek to increase further engagement in relation to the content.

When Charlotte cannot speak to her friends and family about the films and television programmes she is watching, she will seek conversation with others online who are watching the same shows as her:

“I remember when I was watching *House of Cards* no one else was watching it at the same time and I was like online is anyone watching *House of Cards* I need to talk about it and then I started talking to someone about it who I didn’t know just over Twitter erm, and we were just talking about it cos it was interesting cos I just needed to talk about it...”

Charlotte expresses her need to be able to discuss the content she is watching with other people, highlighting that just because she may watch on-demand content by herself, she still wants to connect with others. Charlotte pointed out that despite the person was a stranger, she still spoke to them as it was interesting and enabled her to discuss the television programme. In this example, Charlotte’s need to connect and converse with others who share the same television interests was fulfilled by the use of social media.

Furthermore, developing Connected Collective Spectatorship that suggests “the audience predominantly experiences jointly without reflectively experiencing each other” (Hanich 2014, p. 339), it is evident Connected Collective Spectatorship implies the viewing experience via on-demand services co-exists with the interaction between the audience members.

In summary, Charlotte and Alex's stories illustrate how they use on-demand as a linking device, enabling them to access content to connect, maintain and create new relationships. The research has found that consumers are not watching on-demand content to escape their day-to-day lives. Consumers are accessing on-demand content as a way of connecting with others. It enables conversation, both online and offline, with friends, family, colleagues and even strangers about their shared interests and opinions of the content they are consuming through on-demand services.

#### Theme Two: The Creation of Events

As society has entered an era of channel proliferation and multichannel services, research has indicated that there has been a decline in family television viewing in homes. Academics have argued that because of the greater choice of channels on television, audiences are discouraged from watching together and that this has led to an individualised way of viewing (Andrew 1986; Livingstone 2007; Lee 2010). On the other hand, it has been proposed that the flexibility of on-demand services and technological advances allow viewers to come together and reschedule their viewing habits collectively (Elmer 2012; Smith and Boyle 2012; Cameron and Geidner 2014). This emphasises the current controversy into whether traditional television viewing is individualistic or social.

This study's findings show that consumers are not using on-demand services to individualise the viewing experience, but in fact are using the services to create social conversations and events. The study revealed that consumers are now adding personalised meanings to viewing experiences through collective events, linking with one another. Research, highlighted in the conceptual background, supports the notion of television facilitating the creation of events as a bonding activity (Gauntlett and Hill 1999; Barkhuus and Brown 2009; Cameron and Geidner 2014). In support, this research found that television is a social experience that allows relationships to be built and maintained.

Louise is a 21-year-old final year student at university; she has always enjoyed television and film from a young age. Louise grew up in London but moved to Europe at the age of 10. She explained that she watches on-demand content on multiple devices but enjoys using these services with her housemates in the evening to share the experience and socialise. Louise recounts:

“...Yeah, we will save it, if it is a programme that we all watch, so I think we've got like two or three maybe four programmes that we all watch together, and like it's frowned upon if one of us watches it without the rest of them, or like two out of five watch it without everyone included, so er, yeah, we do do that a lot...”

Although Louise and her friends all have very different schedules due to university commitments, they use on-demand services to create a collective event. On-demand provides flexibility and accessibility that means the friendship group are able to connect by watching and discussing the programmes together at the same time. This highlights that on-demand is not being viewed in an individualistic style, but that friendship groups are optimising the service and coming together to create meaningful events.

Louise explains that if on-demand services were not available, her housemates would then most likely not watch television together:

“I think on-demand is a very big part of our, the way, how we operate as a house and I think, I don’t think it would be worth really just watching normal TV, like I think we are very social, like yeah I think we are more social with on-demand because we will watch that together, whereas if it’s just normal TV, then we will probably just break off and watch on-demand by ourselves because we are not interested in what’s going on in the programme [...] So, yeah, I definitely think that we all would collectively watch on-demand a lot more.”

Louise illuminates the need for on-demand within her social sphere. The interview highlighted that on-demand services were used as a connecting device between her and her friends. These findings oppose previous research that suggests on-demand viewing is becoming individualised, but evidences that it is enabling consumers to create their own events within the comfort of their own home.

Similarly to Louise, Carrie is also a 21-year-old student, and after finishing university, she aspires to travel the world. She loves spending time socialising with her friends, in particular trying out some of the best bars in her local area. When she is not studying, Carrie is often found watching CSI on Sky Plus, as she is obsessed with the programme. Carrie spends time every evening watching films on-demand with her housemates. She narrates:

“We’ve made a list of films, erm, as a house that we want to watch and we all watch them together so we’ll only ever watch any of these films if we’re all together... It’s like before we go to bed, so if we all hang-out in the living room and watch something together, erm... We’ll watch it like someone will bring the mattress into the living room and we’ll all watch a film and then maybe it will get to like midnight and everybody goes off to their rooms...I don’t think I’d watch as nearly as much if we didn’t watch it in a group, erm, I’d probably find other things to do er, but... it brings you all together or fear of missing out or there’s like so many different elements in like watching TV as a group that I think on-demand has such a big part in”

In this example, Carrie creates an event of viewing on-demand with friends by altering the physical space by moving a mattress into the living room, constructing a personalised environment. The event is given meaning by connecting the housemates over their similar tastes in television and lifestyle. Therefore it is evident that consumers are using on-demand services to create events and deeper meaning to their viewing experience by connecting with others and watching collectively. Connected Collective Spectatorship encourages conversation and the freedom of adapting any viewing environment.

Louise furthers this notion of constructing a personalised environment with co-viewers:

“... I like the comfort of being in your own home, I think, really, as much as it’s nice to go to the cinema and see it on the big screen, and apparently it’s the best viewing experience and all that, like at the end of the day, you’re in a room with a bunch of strangers.... It’s just not comfortable. At home, you can be with your friends, you



don't have to worry about making noise, like being quiet, you can wear your trackies and your PJs and like you can make a cup of tea at any point of the film, like you just have, you are in familiar surroundings and you can pause it..."

The pausing feature allows conversation to flow freely without the worry of missing out and adds greater flexibility to the viewing experience. The comfort aspect of viewing on-demand in the home also proved to be a key feature in audience enjoyment. This supports the hypothesis of Connected Collective Spectatorship, as while joint viewing involves the companion receding back in the audience's consciousness (Hanich 2014), the strong presence of the co-viewers in this instance is the key motivator for the experience.

Overall, the findings highlight that consumers frequently use on-demand content to create events with friends. They use the flexibility that on-demand services provide to organise events when everyone is free and able to engage in the viewing. It encourages group conversation, proving that on-demand is becoming increasingly more of a linking device amongst consumers.

#### Theme Three: The Gift of Recommendation

Furthering the underlying debate into whether watching television causes alienation or facilitates social connections; the findings from this research conclude that with the use of on-demand services, viewing does facilitate social engagement. Consumers build relationships and maintain friendships through fulfilling and offering recommendations; these are considered as gifts through the personal connection and reciprocal nature.

Earlier research from Gauntlett and Hill (1999) found that 90% of respondents had a television in the living room; a room where relationships were developed and bonds were built between people. This is updated from the findings of the investigation, which found that people no longer have to be together to feel connected. Those that are viewing on-demand are doing so to create conversation by offering recommendations to maintain and build links with others by sharing or passing on the experience. On-demand services aid personal recommendations that help identify common viewing interests, and therefore build social connections between the giver and recipient(s). This concept allows consumers to bond indirectly because this gift is considered to be thoughtful and personal. The gift of a recommendation is a new concept that has not yet been discovered in past literature in the context of on-demand television and film.

Consumers offer a recommendation to share an experience with another person to spark conversation about the film or television programme. This interaction is a core part of socialisation with colleagues, friends and family; allowing viewers to engage in conversation about what they are watching (Gauntlett and Hill 1999; Barkhuus and Brown 2009). This research develops Barkhuus and Brown's (2009) study, agreeing that television viewing upholds social connections by taking the time to carefully consider another's television or film preferences in order to recommend. Often when consumers have received a gift of recommendation, they feel appreciative and thankful, usually giving a gift in return.

Prior research suggests that audiences' motivations are beginning to change and adapt with the increase of new technologies. Research has suggested that due to technological advances, opportunities for the viewer to download films or television programmes, or record them to view later, contributes to the alienation of viewing content. However, this research has found that this flexibility has brought people together. In fact, people are more likely to fulfil and reciprocate recommendations as on-demand allows consumers to fit these activities into their own schedule.

George is a 30-year-old London city worker who loves playing sport, talking about sport or watching sport. In his free time, he enjoys playing golf with friends and is currently training for a marathon in April, 2015. In addition to all of his hobbies, George is also organising his wedding in May. He uses on-demand services to keep up-to-date with what his friends are watching. George takes advice and opinions on what to watch because he trusts their taste, he states:

"I think just chatting to friends is the main one, say if we're watching this film and it's like, oh this is really good, really like that bit or something like that, erm, friends always seem to have a good view on how good a film is, and cos I've been friends with them for a long time you do listen to them and you do take their advice...I think we watched, er... I forget what it's called now... Sons of Anarchy, erm, I watched that cos a friend recommended it to me, erm, I didn't actually like it that much but I watched a couple of episodes and the only reason I watched those episodes is cos someone said it was pretty good..."

Even though George did not like the series he was recommended by his friend, he still watched several episodes, as he respected their opinion; This highlights the traditional process of receiving a gift and applying this to the offering of a recommendation.

Meanwhile Charlotte, the film enthusiast from Surrey, loves being able to recommend television shows to her colleagues at work to create conversation and to get to know their preferences better. She wants to feel connected and giving a recommendation to someone allows her to share her experiences with others:

"At work, I like to recommend series to my colleagues and they can go home and watch it that night because it's there and they come in the next day and we'll talk about it, which is nice and... Yeah, it's just something to, like, connect to and just something to talk about. I suppose like you might not watch it together, but it's like a shared experience because you both watch the same thing because one of you has recommended it..."

Charlotte enjoys sharing her passion for television content with others as this enables her to pass on her experience. The gift of a recommendation can easily be fulfilled through the ease of access to on-demand content and therefore a connection can quickly be established.

The facilities of on-demand services enable consumers to reciprocate recommendations and achieve social inclusion. This can be seen as Connected Collective Spectatorship, as

through the joint viewing experience the audience can become or are connected to others, supporting Hanich's (2014) suggestion of practical, cognitive and affective collective intentionality.

Ultimately, this study has displayed that consumers use on-demand services to continue to maintain or build relationships amongst one another. More often than not, as highlighted above, recommendations are passed on through friends and family. On-demand services have given people the opportunity to continue to watch new content and recommend to others; thus it has become a linking device enabling consumers to engage and share experiences.

## CONCLUSIONS

To summarise, the findings have shown that on-demand services have become a linking device that enables consumers to connect, converse and socialise. The research highlighted three distinctive concepts that are evident when consumers use on-demand services. are accessing on-demand content not to escape, but to connect and to feel inclusive of a social group. It is evident from the findings that the consumption of on-demand content is a social experience and consumers are connecting over the content they watch. Even if consumers are watching on-demand alone, they are still likely to converse with others during or after their experience. This has been greatly aided by the increase of present technological devices within the home.

The findings have shown that consumers create personalised viewing events to add meaning to their experiences, by sharing and prolonging the occasion. It was concluded that collective viewings or organised post-viewing conversations are an encouragement to watch television and film on-demand. The practice of gifting a recommendation has emerged within the findings, as the ease and accessibility of on-demand has allowed viewers to share the content that they have enjoyed. This personalised selection process enables social bonds to be established or further developed. The findings have furthered Hanich's (2014) Collective Spectatorship in the context of on-demand resulting in Connected Collective Spectatorship. This adapted concept is where the on-demand viewing is a simultaneous activity to the conversation and connection that takes place during the experience. Connected Collective Spectatorship fulfils Hanich's concluding statement, that argues:

“...societies [...] insist on remaining highly individualised yet simultaneously yearn for a collective experience” (2014, p359).

Therefore, it can be concluded from the research, that Connected Collective Spectatorship is a consequential motivation for the experience of viewing television and film via on-demand services. Agreeing with Hanich, the collective emotions and connections the audience produce creates a bond between viewers.

### Recommendations for Further Research

The discovery of consumers' desires to connect over content requires further research regarding their urge and willingness to fulfil the post-viewing conversation. The variety of methods, duration and level of need for social connection could be explored in greater depth. Another area which could be further investigated is the gift of recommendation as a concept, regarding the recommendation process that a viewer transitions through. More specifically, how long before a viewer is confident in recommending content and who is constituted as a worthy recipient; are there any environmental factors that may contribute to when it is acceptable to gift a recommendation? Additionally, there is space for future research on how consumers react when they receive an unsatisfactory recommendation.

This research explored the consumption of on-demand within the context of the home. However, the findings may differ when on-demand is explored in different environments. Place-shifting outside of the home has become increasingly popular due to the increase of technology and availability of devices; this would benefit from further research to understand evolving consumer trends. For example, how they consume on-demand content using their tablet on their commute to work.

### Recommendations for Practitioners

Communication practitioners can take advantage of these findings by implementing strategies to improve their services. As on-demand services have been identified as a linking device, the following suggestions encourage connections between audience members. An instant-messaging facility within the on-demand platform would enable conversations to take place between viewers. Alternatively, the solution could be a separate application that can be branded to individual on-demand platforms that allows consumers to join a conversation or chat-room. The opportunity for viewers to discuss pre, post and during viewing will enhance the experience. This would allow consumers to fulfil their need to discuss content relating to specific series or films, illustrated in this research's first theme: To Connect not to Escape. An additional suggestion is to provide the viewer with the capability to send electronic recommendations of content (from the on-demand service they use) to the recipient(s), so they can view it at a discounted rate (decided by the service provider). Utilising the findings from the third theme: The Gift of Recommendation, this could encourage recommendations between consumers, potentially leading to new subscribers. These recommendations apply the findings that on-demand services are a linking device and aim to enhance the service for users, as well as providers.

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