

## Will iPlayer adopt the Netflix structure?

[Maddie Scarlett](#) investigates the future of the BBC's iPlayer

Wednesday 13 December 2017



BBC

Counting down to Christmas, the BBC announced in a [press release](#) the addition of numerous boxsets to iPlayer for the festive season. Charlotte Moore, Director of Content at the BBC, stated:

“... we have an even richer offer across the BBC than ever before. We are always home to the very best British programmes during the festive season but with so much content to fit in, it's fantastic to give audiences a special gift on iPlayer to complement our schedules; with boxsets of some of this year's biggest shows and a selection of more recent hits to binge on with family and friends together this Christmas.”

On December 16th 2017, old favourites and BBC classics will be available including *Peaky Blinders*, *Frozen Planet*, and *The Mighty Boosh*. Although only available for 30 days, this marks another significant 'experiment' in moving towards a Netflix style of catch up.

Starting as a movie rental service, [Netflix](#) quickly developed into an online streaming service where films and television could be watched whenever and wherever. Now, it has over 109 million members in 190 different countries, each one paying a monthly subscription service for the privilege. Amazon Prime quickly arrived and many other smaller companies have since followed suit. iPlayer is currently warding off an 'old-fashioned' label and earlier this year Tony Hall [stated](#) that “iPlayer needs to be reinvented” in order to keep up with the extremely successful competition. An [article](#) in The Guardian states that “while both Netflix and Amazon have invested heavily in content, it was the quality and simplicity of their technology that provided the foundation of their success. iPlayer may have led the online TV revolution, but it has since fallen behind in features and usability”.

Netflix's research and development spending in 2015 was £530m, which was more than five times the £105m the BBC spent on development and its research department in 2015/2016. It is clear to see from

this that the BBC were destined to achieve less advancement. Proving this fact, an [analysis](#) from YouGov clearly showed how perceptions of value, satisfaction and quality have dramatically decreased for the BBC whereas Netflix and Amazon Prime Video have seen incredible improvements (Figure 1).

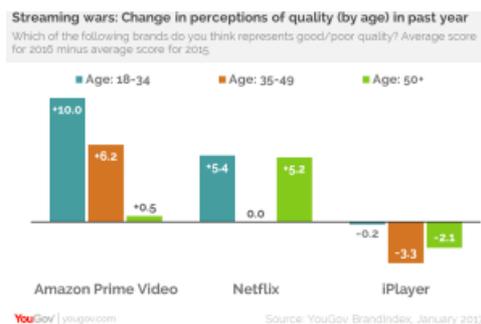


Figure 1 - YouGov

Instead, the BBC now sell their series digitally through iTunes and Google Play.

However, it is worth bearing in mind that the main difference between these companies is that the BBC is a public serving broadcaster and therefore has the duty to be available as widely as possible; iPlayer must be compatible with Sky, Virgin, YouView, Smart TVs, and many other devices. The corporation have previously dabbled in increasing their online content. The 'BBC Store', a service which lasted just 18 months, offered audiences the chance to buy and download digital copies of major BBC series or single episodes once they left iPlayer.

A [second move](#) towards a boxset culture is the BBC adding a "From the Archive" section to the iPlayer. Starting in September this year, it's currently unclear how successful the move is. The archives offer over 450 shows with promises to add more in the future. Tony Halls [stated](#) that "at this stage we're thinking about how we best use our archives but it's far too early to pin that down".

To see whether the new boxsets put on for Christmas would be watched, I asked the participants of the survey whether they planned to watch any, and if so, which. *Sherlock* and *Blue Planet* came out tops, scoring 41.67% each. Comedy also did well with *Miranda* catching the attention of a quarter of the participants. Only 18% of the participants admitted they probably wouldn't watch the newly released content within the 30 day period. After investigating the industry's opinions on changing iPlayer, I thought it best to talk to BBC audiences to find out their view. I conducted a [survey](#) which 48 people responded to, of different gender and ages. The majority of participants stated they used iPlayer weekly to catch up on content, with their favourite genres being Drama and Factual (Figure 2).

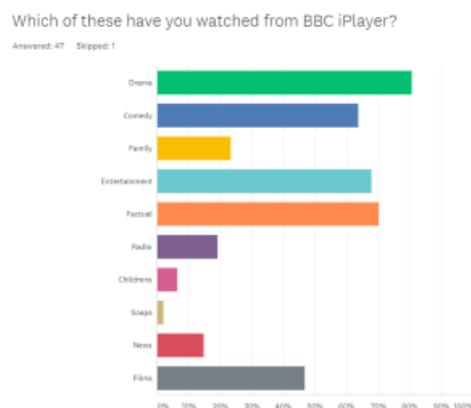


Figure 2 - Maddie Scarlett

However, the 87.5% of participants who watched content from services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video voted for Films, Drama, and Comedy as their most watched (Figure 3).

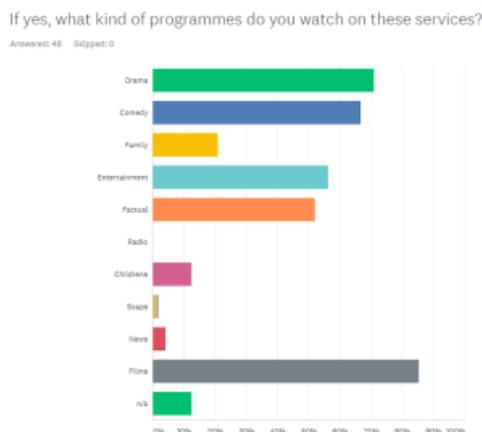


Figure 3 - Maddie Scarlett

This perhaps shows the difference in wants between the platforms, the BBC offers great factual content and has a reputation for quality original programmes, something which Netflix and Amazon have only really just got into.

The other common reason for not wanting to pay for iPlayer was that many believed that Netflix had more content. Although Netflix perhaps has media from a wider variety of production companies, it also has a large selection of BBC archives, recently including *Black Mirror*, *Broadchurch*, and *The IT Crowd*. If BBC iPlayer was to become a rival to Netflix, these programmes would quickly be removed and audiences would not be able to watch BBC content except through iPlayer. It would have been interesting to ask how many of the participants used Netflix to watch BBC programmes. When asked outright whether they would pay a monthly subscription for access to the iPlayer, there was overwhelming unhappiness with an average figure of 28% likely to pay.

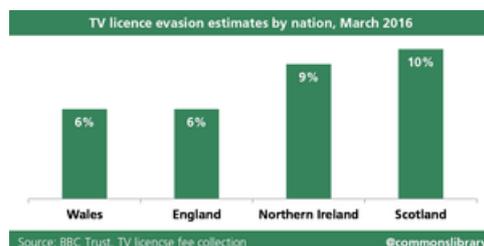


Figure 4 - UK Parliament

Most of the reasons given were that they already paid the TV license fee and therefore would not want to pay both. This is not perhaps what the BBC are proposing, it may become the only charge for accessing the BBC after research showed the amount of evasion across the nation (Figure 4).

Estimated TV licence evasion rate was between 6.2% and 7.2% in 2015/16.

Overall, it's clear that it is still unknown as to whether iPlayer should/will become the 'new' Netflix. An [article](#) in the Guardian states, and I believe rightly so, that:

“the BBC, through a combination of established relationships, long-running series and the fact it still broadcasts live to millions, retains an appeal to producers that is hard for the tech firms to match. It also still makes its own shows, and is for the most part pretty good at it.”

Tony Hall aims to make the iPlayer “the place you go for your complete experience with the BBC”. We shall see what the future holds.



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