

Taste and Standards: qualitative research

Final report

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The BLINC Partnership

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1. Research objectives

In November 2008 the BBC Executive convened a pan-BBC Steering group to consider the area of taste and standards in the media, and in particular to consider the BBC's role in this area within a fast-moving and diverse media landscape.

To this end, in February 2009, the BBC commissioned the Blinc Partnership to undertake a wide reaching piece of qualitative research.

The scope of the review, as outlined by the BBC Steering Committee, identified four broad areas:

- Language – the appropriateness and acceptability across a range of programme outlets
- Sexual content – imagery, tone and issues of candour, respect, personal privacy, and the expectations and boundaries of personal privacy and sexual allusion
- Generational questions and expectations – how do experiences of media usage across different generations and communities impact on the role and expectations of the BBC
- Expectations of genre, channel, station, slot and broadcast talent

It was agreed not to cover violence in this research study.

A review of existing literature into the area of taste and standards highlighted particular need for attention in certain areas:

- Research on radio and online – much of what has been done in this area is with regard to television
- Research with children and young people – most research is amongst adults
- Research about different genres of programming, particularly the newer 'hybrid' genres such as factual entertainment and reality TV
- Research about the BBC's role in this area and specifically about the feelings and expectations around different channels and services (both BBC and other media brands) – much of the existing research is about broadcasting generically

Our response to this was to design a wide-ranging research study that looked at:

- the audience's attitudes to taste and standards
- their propensity to be offended
- the nature of content that may offend
- the impact that the context in which they are consuming media, has on their propensity to be offended e.g. channel, time of day, with or without other people.

The parameters of what constitutes taste and standards ranged from degrees of 'offence' felt by audiences in relation to specific broadcast content, to deeper attitudes concerning morality, values and standards in society – and how these may impact on what is expected of broadcasters in general and the BBC in particular.

Consequently, the research was wide-ranging and exhaustive. Experiences and views across all society are represented, from the fringes to the mainstream, across rural, suburban and urban areas, from young to old and across all socio-economic groups.

2. Overview of methodology

Our approach was to develop a methodology which enabled us to talk to people with very different cultural and religious sensibilities, with very different media consumption habits, and across a range of ages, life stages and a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds.

To achieve this we designed a mixed approach aimed at speaking to people in as honest and realistic a way as possible, allowing their real views to emerge. The methods comprised:

Research Labs

Central to our research methodology were large-scale workshop-style Labs. We know from experience that these are an effective way of ensuring that opinions are challenged as well as shared, giving us the opportunity to work with respondents as they explore their own feelings about these issues. Importantly, workshops allow us to get past strongly held, potentially entrenched opinions towards the truth in all its nuances.

Practically, each session lasted 2.5 hours with 20 or 30 people in 6 locations (London, Manchester, Edinburgh, Belfast, Leicester and Cardiff). The sessions began with a whole group discussion to set the topic within the context of other issues, and then broke into smaller focus groups to discuss tastes and standards in the media in more detail.

Within the smaller sub-groups, we used a selection of TV and radio clips to provoke discussion around different kinds of potentially offensive content; from strong language to questions of sexual candour. These clips were not under scrutiny themselves, but provided invaluable stimulus for discussion.

Household Depth interviews

Broadly speaking, people's sense of what is acceptable is tempered by family life, but our everyday experience of taste and standards can depend on whether we are with our partner, our kids, our parents, our grandchildren, or any combination of these. Spending time with people in household depth interviews is the surest way to understand this dynamic in the context of the different spaces where content is consumed in the home.

Practically, we conducted 17 household interviews across a range of lifestyles, in urban and rural locations. Each session lasted 1 hour. All adults in the household were present but parents exercised discretion as to whether children aged 11 to 15 should also be included. The objective was to understand the family dynamic around consumption of media, what is consumed by whom and how parents feel about what their children consume. The depth interviews also looked at the programme clips as stimulus for further discussion around specific issues.

School sessions, age 11-18yrs

From our first experience of school, social environments both reflect and reshape the standards learned in the home. We felt it important as researchers to experience the discourse within the school environment to give a much needed insight into attitudes towards taste and standards amongst children and young people.

We convened 4 group discussions with groups of 8 children from the same year groups in schools from London, Manchester and Suffolk. The discussions were more open-ended than with adults, and we did not show them programme clips as stimulus as this would have been inappropriate.

Ethnographic Social Hubs

As well as the formally organized focus groups and depth interviews, we wanted to capture the views of groups in society who are often not picked up by conventional recruitment. In these 30 minute spontaneous 'dips' into a range of real social environments, the moderator arrived unannounced in the pub or place of work to elicit a more informal discussion about the issues. The 8 sessions took place in teachers' staff rooms, pubs, a hairdresser's, a solicitors' office and sporting clubs.

Community Leaders

As another key dimension of the research, we spoke to local religious leaders (a priest, an Anglican vicar, a muslim cleric) and also to an inner city youth worker.

In total we spoke to over 250 people up and down the country, in the nations and regions, from the age of 11 to aged 80 plus, and from all socio-economic groups.

Fieldwork took place between 23rd February and 20th March 2009.

3. Executive summary of key findings

1. The overall finding of this research is that concern over morality and standards in the media does not dominate people's lives. The majority are not offended by what they choose to consume. However there are significant levels of vicarious offence felt on behalf of others, particularly children and older people. But even these concerns are not top of mind and frequently needed to be drawn out in the groups.
2. Respondents were asked to express what *in the media* caused most offence or related most pertinently to their concern about standards. The following points were listed spontaneously:
 - violence on television
 - a sense of more emphasis on sensationalist content and slick presentation in some news reporting
 - the perceived ubiquity of Reality TV which many believe actively endorses lower standards
3. Generational and socio-economic differences do have an impact on attitude to media standards and propensity to be offended, but sensibility is as important. This sensibility is influenced by such factors as attitude to change, media consumption and broader cultural openness. We therefore experienced a range of attitudes from the more concerned through to the unconcerned.
4. Television is most prominent in the debate about taste and standards as it occupies a more public, talked-about space and is more relevant to a broad audience. Where there was concern about online, the ability to time-shift post-watershed TV shows dominated. Radio poses fewer issues overall.
5. At least half the sample (including most people over 50), question some aspects of multi channel television and the licence it appears to have given all broadcasters. The proliferation of digital channels competing for audiences in a more fragmented market and the flexibility of access to content via time-shifting, can leave some people feeling overwhelmed by choice and can exacerbate unease over standards.
6. The increasingly competitive nature of programme-making, marketing and scheduling has been noticed by respondents. The consequence of this competition is articulated by respondents as 'ratings chasing'. Their perception is that all broadcasters, including the BBC, are preoccupied with ratings to a greater degree than previously. This has led to a sense that all

7. People we spoke to were often uncertain of the decision-making around the subject of taste and standards and frequently feel they are left to decide whether things are suitable for themselves. For the majority this is to be welcomed, but some feel a degree of unease that this should be the case.
8. The received wisdom of the broadcaster as a filter through which to judge content has been overtaken by *context*; time, presenter/talent brand, genre, show, taste and (to a lesser extent), channel. The distinctions between different channels are thought to be less clear cut than previously, exacerbated by the migration of high profile programme brands from one channel to another. The values of the BBC and those of other broadcasters, are becoming increasingly hazy for audiences *under 30*, who have grown-up with multi channel television.
9. A small minority of respondents under 50, and the majority of older, 50 plus respondents, have a specific concern about the way strong language is perceived to have proliferated across channels, schedules and shows (notably reality television). For these viewers, the extent of this does not always seem justified. The other main area of concern focused on strong language combined with aggressive behaviour. This could be seen in influential presenters and talent or as part of a programme concept where a degree of conflict between presenter and participant is part of the mix.
10. For the majority, the bar which measures what is or is not 'necessary' or justified, need not be particularly high, providing they believe proper editorial discretion has been exercised in relation to the issue. This is also the case for those who claim to be 'slightly uncomfortable' with strong language.
11. Concerns notwithstanding, many across the sample believe that the BBC *should* encourage creativity and take risks to deliver relevant, good quality programming in step with modern life, even if that means broadcasting content that others might deem offensive.
12. Ultimately, the majority believe that, given that there are concerns over standards, it is right that regulation is in place. Respondents *are* confident that regulation exists and many across the sample appreciate reassurances of this, such as warnings when necessary. The large majority of respondents did not want *increased* regulation.

13. In the area of regulation most believe that although *all* broadcasters should be subject to the same standards, the BBC is *more* likely to set the agenda in this area.

14. The challenge for the BBC therefore remains complex. The majority understand that it should make entertaining and challenging programmes which reflect society and strengthen the corporation's position as a viable broadcaster for future generations. They also expect it to do so in a more considered and responsible way than other broadcasters.

4. The broadcast context

In this section we explore the broad media context that influences audience attitudes to taste and standards and forms a backdrop to more specific concerns covered later.

Overall

Concern about morality, values and standards of behaviour goes beyond the confines of the media. This wider sense of unease about behaviour in society eclipses specific issues of what may or may not be deemed 'offensive' in broadcasting terms, and focuses on issues that include:

- Violence on the streets and in the world (although this research does not take this issue further with regard to the media)
- Behaviour and standards in young people (especially bad language and disrespect)
- Concern over standards generally, including in politics – what are standards now and who upholds them?

The intensity of this concern varies considerably (but not exclusively) across different generations and socio-economic groups; this could also be seen when applied specifically to broadcasting.

Broadcast context

It should be stated that concern over morality and standards in the media does not dominate people's lives and research showed that most are not offended by what they *choose to consume* – though there are significant levels of vicarious offence felt on behalf of others, particularly children and older people. (See also *Section 6: The interplay of the media and wider social change*)

In addition, concerns were not top-of-mind for our groups, and specific concerns often needed to be drawn out through discussion, using programme clips to provoke debate and to help respondents articulate what they felt.

However, when asked to express what *in the media* caused most offence or related most pertinently to their concern about standards, respondents *spontaneously* listed the following:

- Violence on TV: that reflects and even influences our more violent times (though this is not explored further in this research)
- Some news reporting: a sense of creeping sensationalism/less factual/more slick presentation
- Reality TV¹: that is ubiquitous, of variable quality and which actively endorses lower standards (*See also: Section 7, Specific context: the impact of different broadcast elements /Genre*)

TV undoubtedly dominates other media in people's minds (even the internet), particularly in the field of the shared experience: it is regularly talked about and broadly consumed.

At least half the respondents (including most people over 50), question some aspects of multi-channel TV and the licence it appears to have given all broadcasters. This questioning focuses particularly on quality issues associated with the proliferation of digital channels and the increasingly competitive approach by all broadcasters when vying for audiences in a more fragmented market.

Multi-channel TV

The sheer volume of content now available, and the ability to time-shift TV programmes via PVRs and online (to an extent), exacerbates audience unease over standards in broadcasting. This is because there is a feeling of being out of control in both quantity and quality terms, and a degree of confusion about where content can be found. However, TV is also seen as attracting its share of a more general, societal blame for the perceived lowering of standards of morality, behaviour and values, along with schools, parents and politicians. The fact that it is regarded as a very public space (when compared with radio and the internet) makes it more prominent in the debate.

The number of channels, the nature of 24/7 broadcasting and the increasingly competitive nature of programme-making, marketing and scheduling (articulated by many respondents as 'ratings chasing') has resulted in a blurring between channels in terms of what the audience expects to see.

¹ To the audience, Reality TV refers to a wider range of programming than understood by broadcasters, including on the BBC, *The Apprentice*, *Strictly Come Dancing*, *the Restaurant* and all the Blue Light shows on ONE. On C4, *Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares*, *Secret Millionaire*, even, for some *Grand Designs*.

It was obvious from the research that many in this new TV landscape are finding it difficult to make clear distinctions between channels (including those within the BBC portfolio) and thus struggled to answer the question, 'How do I know what is for me and what to avoid?'

This particularly bothers those who declare themselves to be 'more concerned,' whether for themselves or others.

Proliferation of content

The proliferation of content (both as a consequence of multi-channel TV, and online) has led to a perception that broadcasters are 'turning up the volume' to get noticed generally;

- all broadcasters (including the BBC) are perceived by an increasing proportion of the audience to be chasing ratings, resulting in more sensationalism and use of 'shock tactics'
- TV is seen to have become more 'shouty', so subject matter has to be extreme to cut through

Consequently there is a sense from a broad cross-section of the audience (but felt more acutely by those aged over 50) that we are seeing the more negative side of life being used as entertainment, resulting in more bad language and aggressive behaviour on screen.

'Channel 5 used to be the channel that pushed the boat out, that pushed the envelope. But now all channels are trying a little bit harder to get the viewers to watch. And going down the road of violence, sex, and it's just become the norm for all the stations to win the audience over.' Male, 40s, Wales

Some older people feel left behind by the changes they are witnessing in society and on the screen:

'I've got an elderly aunt and she hardly watches television now because it's rough to somebody of that age, and it's not anything they are used to. It does spoil your normal viewing. You used to put the TV on, it was light-hearted, good fun, or it was very interesting. Now, basically it's boring. I think so. Because you can go out onto the street and see that sort of behaviour.' Female, 60s, Wales

In addition, the profusion of content of variable quality that multi channel TV represents (the ubiquity of so-called Reality TV programming drives this perception), leads a significant minority to doubt the extent of editorial control,

and thus to question who is making the decisions, other than from themselves as viewers.

Thus, the majority find themselves basing judgements about standards ('Do I think this is acceptable?') on the more subjective grounds of taste ('Am I enjoying it?'). For some who also lack an obvious moral or ethical prism through which to focus, such as religion, politics or culture, this contributed to their sense of unease.

We explore this more fully in the next section which looks at the audience in detail.

5. The shape and feel of the audience

In this section we explore the range of responses and perceptions within the broad audience we spoke to and the effect of these on attitudes to taste and standards.

We found there were 3 broad aspects defining respondents' attitudes to taste and standards and their propensity to be offended.

- The first aspect is largely to do with age, and particularly the stage of life i.e. pre-family, parents, grandparents.
- The second is to do with a person's sensibilities, which have little to do with age or socio-economic group and more to do with their life experiences and cultural horizons
- And finally, the third aspect we found that affected respondents' attitudes was whether or not they had strong beliefs, religious or otherwise.

These 3 aspects defining attitudes can be seen as prisms through which we can look at the audience.

Prism 1: Age and generational differences

We found that differences are as much to do with the stage of life (i.e. single, married, families, grandchildren, widowed) as they are with age.

Pre family aged between 18 and 35 are displaying more vulnerability than might be expected for their age.

Many of our respondents in this age range perceive the world to be a tough place in which to grow up, whether their focus is on the insecure, competitive, credit-crunch job market or the levels of violence prevalent both at home and abroad. Yet this generation also feels entitled to fun, money and glamour. The media (including magazines/press) and its sponsorship of celebrity culture play a part in fuelling such aspirations.

They tend to be relatively phlegmatic about taste and standards in the media, though they can be sensitive to strong content on behalf of others, especially when it comes to what they perceive as unnecessarily offensive or derogatory language and/or aggressive behaviour, with racism the most keenly felt.

'I swear as much as I like when I'm in the pub with my mates, but I'd never swear in front of my mum. I'd hate it if the BBC just gave up on the idea that you don't swear in certain situations.' [Male, early 20s, Scotland](#)

'Racism offends me. I don't like to see bullying. But swearing – I'm not sure I even notice it.' [Female, 30s, Manchester](#)

For those with **Young Families (those with children under 5yrs)**, their newly-acquired parental responsibilities sit heavily.

Their world has changed abruptly and they want it to be a positive, safe place. There is no place for relativity in areas such as education or the NHS, and this absolutism can extend to strong content in the media. This type of content confirms the dangers they perceive in the world and they are predominantly concerned with violence and aggression. The issue here is less about children consuming content (as parents believe their role to be key in managing this) and more about observing the world in which their children will grow up and wanting it to be safe, kind and generous-spirited.

'It didn't used to bother me, but I've just had a daughter recently, and already I'm not sure...I've got a vested interest...I don't want her exposed to inappropriate material. There's obviously a role for me there to police her viewing.' [Male, 30s, Manchester](#)

Older Families (those with children between 10 and 16 yrs) are keen to preserve a safe, family environment but have found strategies to rationalise problems/challenges, and have realised that change (in their children, the media and in life generally) cannot be completely controlled. Strong content, of a sexual nature for example, can be a convenient access point for discussing difficult subjects with children, but too much and they retreat.

The early-evening scheduling of *EastEnders* can be problematic for this life stage: it is pre-watershed but most feel, at least for their 10-14 year old children, that it is a show they claim they would rather not leave them to watch unaccompanied, as they want to be able to contextualise and explain some of the more mature themes. (See also: *Section 7, Specific context: the impact of different broadcast elements /Genre*)

*'I'm not viewing greater exposure (of strong material) and boundaries being pushed as negative. And from my perspective, I've got three kids, from twenty-five to six; I'm protective about the six year old, that's the line in my head, around about that age. But I've got a thirteen year old who I'm comfortable watching *Shameless* – I don't have an issue with it at all, because I don't think it's a bad thing how he sees other people may or may not live.'* [Male, 50s, Scotland](#)

Among **older Post family** respondents (aged 65 plus) there is some divergence of views. Some are happy to re-experience the world with a freedom and relaxation they didn't have as active parents. Others feel more fragile, increasingly redundant and consequently turn towards comfort and security.

However, both types in this generation are most critical of excessive swearing and strong language. They do feel threatened by aggressive behaviour in the media and they extend this to an overall concern for the type of world their children and grandchildren will inherit.

Young people aged between 11 and 16 years old are dealt with later in Section 10. This is because their media experience is significantly different than that of previous generations.

Prism 2: A difference in sensibility across the audience

Although age and generational differences are considerable in determining people's reaction to taste and standards, so too is a person's *sensibility* which cuts across age and stage of life.

This difference in sensibility stems from the breadth of an individual's cultural horizons.

1. Those with Narrower Cultural Horizons

This group's sensibility might be summed up as watchful or distrustful of change. They tend to prefer a British sense of humour/perspective, are less likely to be fans of US imports and are more likely to agree that TV was better a few years ago.

They regard media consumption as a largely passive, 'lean-back' activity. This may contribute to their sense of distrust, as they are less likely to describe scenarios where they would exercise control in a positive way (i.e. simply turning off or over).

In specific consumption terms, TV is a big part of the lives of much of this group. Many have more traditional tastes and are selective in their viewing. Choices include period drama and high profile series such as *Blue Planet*. Radio listening is dominated by BBC Radio 2, Radio 4 or commercial radio (*Classic FM*).

In terms of issues of taste and standards, they are more likely to find stronger content unacceptable than those with broader cultural horizons.

2. Those with Broader Cultural Horizons

This group's sensibility might be summed up as a willingness to embrace new things, inquisitive and culturally generous. This sensibility results in a more inclusive attitude to different types of programming (including shows from the US) and crucially, ways of accessing content; they are more 'lean-forward' in media consumption terms.

They are accessing a mix of TV, radio and online. Content choices include modern drama (Eg: *Spooks*), lifestyle (Eg: *Grand Designs*), comedy (Eg: *Gavin and Stacey*) and some Reality TV (Eg: *The Apprentice*). They are more likely to be users of time-shifting online applications such as BBC iPlayer.

In terms of issues of taste and standards, they are likely to be broadminded and accepting of a wide range of stronger content.

'I remember as a youngster watching Play for Today, and I was about thirteen or fourteen, with my father. And it was all about someone getting raped, and it was a very explicit rape scene and I'm sitting there with my Dad and I'm sure it was BBC one, and you do get little gems of hard hitting drama but I don't expect, oh this is the BBC so we shouldn't get any of this. I think that's good, the BBC showing something a little bit more experimental, a little bit more exciting or hard-hitting. [Female, 40s, Scotland](#)

However different these two sensibilities may be, *both* groups have similar expectations of the BBC. They both believe that at *certain times*, the BBC should provide quality programmes in a safe environment for families. They also believe that the BBC should be sensitive to a range of audience sensibilities. These views are driven by the expectations that the majority have of BBC One; a channel 'for the nation' and also for family entertainment.

Prism 3: Beliefs and principles vs. personal tastes

Group 1: Beliefs/principles-driven	Group 2: Taste-defined
<p>Tended to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious • Traditional mentality • Morality is <u>absolute</u>, not relative • Clear opinions on what should or should not be broadcast (for example, no swearing) • Tend to be older (but not exclusively) • Small 'c' conservative <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confident in their own, self-defined moral compass • This means they don't want others deciding <i>for</i> them what's right or wrong • Feel very comfortable in their own moral choices eg; they would be confident in <i>their</i> ability to explain to a child why a racist comment is inappropriate • They value choice • Happy to defend stronger content they enjoy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal taste about which programmes /personalities they enjoy dictates whether or not they will watch/listen to a programme with potentially strong content. <p>For example an individual may tolerate strong language from a presenter they like, but not from a presenter they dislike.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot make absolute pronouncements on what is right or wrong – they will give a programme more latitude if they like it or they like the personality involved • Expect editorial leadership and moral champions to varying degrees

Although we found some respondents who expressed very certain views about taste and standards, coming from a position of strongly held beliefs and principles, the majority of our sample tended to make decisions about the acceptability of content on the basis of personal taste. This group of 'taste-defined' respondents were often less certain in their opinions on taste and standards.

Apart from a small group (about 10% of the sample) of those who claimed to be entirely unconcerned about the issues of tastes and standards ('You either like it or you don't'), most people (around 70% of the sample) fell into the 'taste-driven' group and around 20% into the Beliefs/principles driven group.

Group 1: Beliefs/principles driven

Around 20% of our sample. While they share a sense of certainty around issues of what is right or wrong, their belief systems are quite different:

- a) Those with strong religious, political or cultural beliefs, who can explain before seeing any stimulus, what should or should not be permitted.

'I don't like to hear swearing on TV; I don't care what it is. I don't think it's right.' Female, 50s, London

- b) Those who feel they are able to defend or explain any content in terms of its right to be broadcast according to their own moral code. They do not believe they need 'managing', or 'protected' in terms of what is or is not acceptable on TV, radio or online .

'I don't want it to be a case of people worrying about everything so it's just –you know...I feel I can make my own choices...' Male, 20s, Belfast

Group 2: Taste-defined

This is the largest group by some margin, approximately 70% of the sample. They can also be split into two groups, although they might be better understood as occupying a sliding scale, mainly but not exclusively driven by age:

At one end of the scale are those whose taste primarily determines whether they watch or do not watch a show that has strong content, but who are very clear upfront that they still want to know that there is some editorial leadership. They are likely to be older.

'I think (the type of) TV, magazines, video games being allowed, that are being permitted...we might say it's a portrayal of life as it is...but there is nothing there to counteract that...actually it's wrong. Just because it happens, doesn't make it acceptable. It shouldn't be acceptable. There should be standards.' Female, 50s, Wales

'If we're condoning all this bad language, immorality and things, I don't think it should be heavily censored but – you know – the BBC or ITV have a responsibility not to only give people what they want, if they want a load of rubbish with swearing. Just because people want that, doesn't mean to say they have to come up with that. And I think if they offered better programmes, of a better standard, people would still watch them even if there wasn't any sex or violence or rubbish on it.' Female, 60s, Wales

At the other end of the scale are those who have lower expectations of editorial leadership/authority than their parents' generation, yet who still worry that, without editorial leadership, standards will fall. They are likely to be younger, multi-channel viewers.

'I suppose the moral guardian bit of me doesn't think there should be... graphic stuff some of the time. But generally I'm OK, but sometimes you think, yeah, alright – we know what happens, we don't need to see it in that much detail.' [Male, 20s, Leicester](#)

The Unconcerned

The Unconcerned made up approximately 10% of the sample and could also be described as 'passive' when it comes to the issue of taste and standards in the media.

They displayed minimal to no spontaneous interest in the subject and this passivity remained unchanged by the end of the debate and after seeing programme stimulus.

'There's enough on TV now to watch what we like. I don't see the problem.'
[Male, 30s Leicester](#)

6. The interplay of the Media and wider Social change

In this section we examine how expectations of the media have been influenced by wider social change.

The impact of digital media

Looking back at the pre-digital TV world, even pre-Channel 4, many people felt that most of what was broadcast then could be watched within what could be called 'polite society'. Language was perceived (remembered) as mild, with sex and violence the exception rather than the rule.

Even when 'real' life intruded, it was felt to do so in relatively muted forms; for example, 'Play for Today' or a social documentary. Audiences were rarely confronted with reality without clear parameters within which to decode it: for example a police drama would give viewers the key context within which to expect tough language or violence.

In contrast, there is now a sense from viewers, that real life in *all* its guises (bad language, sex, violence, disrespect, aggressive behaviour) has simply become part of the programme mix; and that in order to achieve cut-through in a competitive media world, content more often than not places the emphasis on the more negative aspects of life; with an intention to shock. (This was also true for the marketing of programmes and their titles, as well as the broader media world.)

Rather than this material being confined to specific contexts as before, for some (and for the majority of our respondents over 50), it has permeated *all* levels of TV broadcasting. Therefore they feel that programmes that they might enjoy can be spiked with moments that they describe as 'unnecessary' or 'embarrassing' or in 'poor taste' or, very occasionally 'offensive'. Even young people under 18 have a sense that non-explicit sexual references can now be encountered in many different kinds of show, including before the watershed. (See also: Section 10 *Young People 11-16*)

Consequently these viewers are at best made to feel uncomfortable, and at worst, unwelcome to the point of exclusion.

'There's nothing wrong with the odd swear word, but you hear it all the time these days - everywhere, so when it's on the TV as well, and you think that was unnecessary - you don't think it's offensive, just...you know. Why? Because it's everywhere else.'

Male, 40+, South

A step-change in society

A sizeable majority of the sample expressed concern that behaviour and attitudes in public life had deteriorated generally, and that a 'tabloid' sensibility was taking over.

These people cited evidence of greed, self-promotion, materialism and selfishness becoming normal benchmarks for behaviour; they sensed that this kind of behaviour was glamorised and condoned because of an implicit endorsement by the media of celebrity culture.

As well as the responsibilities borne by broader social drivers than just the media (such as education, politicians and parents), aspects of the media such as reality shows, tabloid newspapers and multi-channel TV are all perceived as part of the problem, helping cause the shift in societal attitudes.

A sense of social responsibility

Throughout the research, it was clear that some people cared deeply about what others might think or feel when confronted by strong content, second-guessing the effect on older people and children. This concern on behalf of others was inter-generational and observed in 19 year olds as well as those over 60.

Ultimately, it was evident that many respondents believe that TV is an influence on society for good or bad; although it is interesting to note that they did not perceive it to be an influence on themselves.

7. Specific context: the impact of different broadcast elements

In this section we begin to look at the effect of context on audience perceptions of whether something is deemed to be offensive. By 'context' we mean specific broadcast elements such as:

- the channel it is broadcast on,
- when it is broadcast,
- the type of programme,
- who is in the programme and their reputation,
- the quality of the execution.

As mentioned before, in a world of predominantly taste-driven, not absolute values, expectations deriving from context play a crucial role in determining audiences' ability to decode content and in their propensity to be shocked or offended by what they see.

The platform and channel context

Platform: TV

In the last 5 years, TV is perceived by the majority to have changed *beyond* channel proliferation:

- there are more purely entertainment-based channels,
- there are more purely entertainment-based shows,
- there is perceived to be more cheaply made TV,
- there is perceived to be more intense competition between all broadcasters, including the BBC.

As a consequence of this, the majority we spoke to claimed to be less confident about programme quality and provenance (what channel it was shown on) than they once were.

The degree of doubt over what channel a programme has come from is a relatively recent issue and might derive from the frequent movement of shows; not only within broadcaster portfolios, but across broadcasters (Eg: channels like *Dave* showing BBC programmes *and* making their own shows). This issue was raised spontaneously by many of the respondents.

In addition, the majority of viewers do not fully appreciate, understand or access the BBC TV mixed-genre portfolio of channels beyond the occasional view of a key show. This can add to confusion about what is, or isn't appropriate to watch.

BBC Channels

When respondents were asked about the differences between BBC One and Two, most people over 30 had fairly uniform *perceptions*: that BBC One is the more mainstream, broad, family-focused channel, where the flagship shows will be aired, while BBC Two is described as more serious, niche and adult.

Respondents under 30 are significantly less clear on the differences between all channels, including BBC One and Two.

In terms of *experience*, both BBC One and BBC Two are watched by the majority as entertainment channels. Many respondents cited the kind of content migrating to BBC One (e.g. *Little Britain*, *QI*, *The Catherine Tate Show*, *The Apprentice*), as a signal that BBC One is going to become an increasingly edgier channel. In addition, some perceive BBC Two to carry what they describe as more popular content than in the past.

For many viewers (particularly those over 30 who retain expectations of the channels built over time), this makes it more and more difficult to know what to expect from each channel, in terms of content and tonality.

'There's no difference between One and Two; there used to be, but not these days – they even have the same programmes.' [Male, 35+, London](#)

However for the majority over 30, BBC One on Saturday and Sunday night pre-watershed, is regarded as the more family-orientated channel they remember and this is appreciated.

A number of respondents across the sample describe BBC Three as a seed channel for new comedy aimed at younger viewers. Those who were aware tended to be younger (under 45) and at least occasional viewers of the channel.

The relatively small number of regular viewers of BBC Four, describe the channel as one of the few places on TV that they feel they can find well-crafted, non-sensationalist content. However more mainstream audiences were not sufficiently aware of what BBC Four has to offer to comment.

Platform: Radio

Of Radio 4: 'It's for us; not for them' Female, 50s, Midlands

With regard to the chance of offence: 'I think radio does come across as safe'

Male, 20s, Leicester

'I think of the radio as a bit more fun, in a nice way.' Female, 30s, Leicester

Radio is perceived to have changed much less, if at all, in recent years. Digital radio is regarded as having an impact on reception rather than the offer, and despite the Ross/Brand affair, there is considerably less concern over standards in radio.

However, the Ross/Brand affair was regarded by a majority of the audience to be both anomalous and symbolic of what could happen more fundamentally to the BBC if it were to allow a celebrity-driven, sensationalist tone to dominate.

As a platform, radio is discussed and shared less than TV, but there are other reasons for the audience's quiet appreciation and sense of security.

In general terms, respondents found it much more difficult to discuss radio than TV. In part, this is a function of the fact that there are perceived to be fewer discrete programmes (even BBC Radio 4 can be experienced as a tonality over and above a mixed genre, speech radio station), but also the role that radio plays in people's lives: it is described as company, as a friend, it is on in the background and it is a very personal medium.

For example, this intimacy leads many to claim a particular station (and thus its content) as their own and to defend it against any criticism.

Many BBC Radio 1 listeners will defend Chris Moyles in this way, and BBC Radio 4 listeners will do exactly the same with content on Radio 4.

The consequence of this is less demand for hard and fast rules to be applied, apart from 'no strong swearing until after 9pm' for the majority of older, 50 plus respondents and a minority of younger audiences. (However, even these rules don't always stand up to individual examples.)

The other key difference compared to TV when making judgments on standards, is that radio is frequently live and thus there seem to be mitigating circumstances when it comes to strong content:

- being live, it was felt a presenter/producer can respond more quickly to mistakes or ill-judged comments; say sorry and move on

- mistakes made live on air ‘in the heat of the moment’ are felt to be less pernicious than those that have been scripted, pre-recorded and (implicitly ratified by) broadcast

BBC Radio 1 is regarded by music radio listeners as a key station for a broad audience, with respondents aged from 14 to 40 plus citing it as their top station. The sheer breadth of the station’s audience means that there will always be something that someone likes less, whether it is the music mix or a particular presenter. And for its more leading edge audience, it will always slightly lag behind ‘what is happening on the streets’. However all listeners know what to expect, namely new music, gossip and controversy in a language/idiom they understand and enjoy. At certain times of the day (evening/late evening), and for certain music fans, it is felt Radio 1 needs to be edgy to be relevant.

The *Breakfast Show* with Chris Moyles is the most complicated part of the offer: Chris Moyles is a strong personality, which is welcomed by Radio 1’s young, modern listeners, yet the show is scheduled at breakfast time when many parents are doing the school run and as a consequence some claimed to find some of its content inappropriate for that time of day.

Radio 2 is generally perceived by many to have improved in terms of music relevance and presenter line-up, both by regular listeners and occasional listeners who also may listen to Radio 1 or Radio 4.

Terry Wogan’s profile on the network is very high and established over time. Both he and Jonathan Ross are perceived to dominate and counterbalance each other’s style – sometimes for the same audience.

Radio 4 is perceived to be a station for ‘grown-ups’ and not a place that children are going to seek out or stay with. Consequently listeners are relatively sanguine about difficult content, and confident in their ability to explain it away if it was heard by mistake.

However, because of listeners’ relationship with radio generally and the relatively consistent tone of stations, strong content is more likely to surprise and startle if they come across it at a time, or in a place when they don’t expect it.

Platform: Online

The online debate varies depending on what services are being accessed and more crucially, what life stage/generation the user is part of. Even so, for a sizeable majority, online is the most trusted platform ‘*not to surprise*’ with strong content.

Generational/life stage differences in attitude to online services

It is those more middle aged, especially parents, who display the most concern about online content. Those with *young* children claim to be particularly anxious about the internet as this is often their child's first online experience. However this does not necessarily extend to an overall judgement that online services and the internet have had a negative effect on taste and standards in the media generally. Parents have experienced the benefits of online services for themselves, so they are keen to balance negatives with positives. (See *The internet below*)

There is lower awareness of (and therefore less anxiety about) online applications like BBC i-Player and social networking among those over 65 , although a minority who are aware of sites like Facebook find the notion of exposing your personal life publicly contrary to their own upbringing and values.

We cover the extensive use made of social networking sites by young people in *Section 10: Young people aged 11-16*. Their behaviour and attitudes are specific to their generation but the extent to which this will shape them as adults is as yet unknown.

The internet

As mentioned earlier, parents in particular have concerns about what their young children might come across on the internet. However, even those with concerns over content on the internet concede that, as a relatively private, lean-forward medium, users are in control over what they consume; more so than with any other media. For the majority the internet represents the epitome of personal choice; you only access what you want to access. This is unlike the more public space of TV and, to a lesser extent, radio.

'On the internet, you are actually going out and searching for something, and therefore you are very, very much in control of what appears on your screen. Somebody having gratuitous sex isn't just going to appear on your computer screen.'

[Male, 40s, Manchester](#)

Consequently, though you could see any amount of strong, offensive content on the internet, it is up to you and you are therefore less likely to be ambushed by something offensive.

There is high claimed awareness and usage of the various checks and balances available on the internet to protect very young children from strong content, though by the time they are teenagers, parents concede that their children will have learnt to bypass these. At this point though, parents themselves tend to relax slightly and talk about 'having to let go' and resort to trust.

Social Networking

Overall, concern around social networking and its impact on notions of what is, or isn't private is limited. Some non-users express surprise that anyone should find such sites interesting or worthwhile, but most adults who use social networking sites are both aware of the potential for invasion of privacy, and of the steps which they can take to minimise the risk. Adults in their 20s described unsolicited use of their image in photos posted by friends of a drunken night out. There is concern about social networking specifically, from parents of younger children aged 11 and under.

This age group is dealt with in detail in *Section 10: Young People aged 11-16*.

Time shifting content online

The fact that PVRs and TV on-demand allow potentially unsuitable content to be accessed by children is spontaneously raised as a concern. However time-shifting content *online* is insufficiently embedded in the behaviour of a significant number of the broad audience for them to have a particularly strong view on how this impacts on *taste and standards*.

However it is clear that *online* time-shifting brings other issues. PVRs such as Sky Plus have greater visibility to the parent than online viewing (via BBC i-Player etc) as they are often part of the main household screen, with a clear pin-code functionality to control access. In addition, although many children have TVs in their bedrooms, currently they often don't have all the digital channels.

Content consumed via time shifting online is potentially *less* visible to the parent because many children have computers with internet access in their rooms and access online content unsupervised. Time-shifted, post-watershed content available on BBC i-Player at the tick of a box was spontaneously mentioned in many groups as a cause for concern. Indeed we had an example of an 11 year old girl finding *Family Guy* assuming it was 'just' a cartoon. No one in the groups mentioned the BBC i-Player PIN protection function.

Despite the fact that time-shifting online hasn't yet taken hold of the broad audience, there is a strong expectation going forward that the BBC would take all measures to ensure that post-watershed content is not available to minors.

'You can watch anything now on i-Player, you just tick a box to say you're over 16. There's no watershed there.' [Female, 40s, Manchester](#)

Impact of the Broadcaster on perceptions

BBC

To those under 30, the BBC is increasingly described as “just another set of channels” and its brand profile as a broadcaster fades dramatically for those aged below 20. For some viewers under 20, programme-brands and presenter brands eclipse the broadcaster almost entirely and have far more impact on expectations of content. This is the case for all broadcasters to a greater or lesser degree, not just the BBC.

However for older viewers aged 30 and over, the broadcaster and channel context *do* have an impact on expectations. While for some respondents, distinctions in *content* terms between BBC One and Two are blurring, the expectation of the majority is that the BBC does have higher standards than other broadcasters and is expected to be more thoughtful and considered than say, Channel 4 or ITV2.

Channel 4

Channel 4 continues to be perceived as the terrestrial channel that takes risks and pushes the boundaries with edgier material, albeit in a less anarchistic way than it used to. This brand image has stayed relatively consistent since its inception and consequently viewers feel they know what to expect from the channel and therefore how to access when and what they want.

E4 is perceived as a slightly less edgy brand extension, though all the Channel 4 digital channels are subsumed to an extent by the strong image of the parent brand and as such are subject to a similar set of expectations.

ITV

ITV's profile as a broadcaster is relatively low. It is perceived and judged more as a channel brand, with ITV1 dominating. As a consequence it is exempt from some of the heat that being a responsible, 'top down' broadcaster generates.

As a channel, ITV1 is seen to be dominated by big, high profile programme/talent brands which largely conform to what expectations people do have of the brand: mainstream, family entertainment.

There is some awareness of ITV2 as younger and having more risqué content, but this is not seen to 'bleed' across into ITV1.

'I don't find the f word offensive, but I say watch ITV, after 9 o'clock and if it was on a drama, I think I might think it's a bit way off, because you just don't normally experience that with a drama' [Female, 30s, Manchester](#)

Sky

Expectations of Sky are less about broadcasting and more about business. This has the effect of distancing them as an organisation – both from the taste and standards issue, and from any responsibility for it.

The specific channel brands are indistinct and audience expectations are driven by genre (US drama, movies and Sport) and high profile programme brands. Thus the audience is more likely to blame a specific show or personality for anything offensive, rather than Sky.

The genre context

The context provided by a particular type of programme has a strong impact on audience expectations. This affects the way in which issues such as strong language or content are judged.

Comedy

Comedy is arguably the most complex genre for the audience in this area of taste and standards. It is an extremely wide-ranging genre and opinions are often very subjective. Individual taste may permit or sanction what others may feel is in poor taste. For the majority, comedy overall comes with its own licence and even more specifically, each style of comedy/comedian has their 'own' licence; although this does not make them immune to perceived lapses in taste if they are felt to be out of step with expectations of the programme audience.

Strong language was defended by some as adding to a joke's impact and improvisational comedy, including the well-placed use of a strong word, is perceived as a skill. For example, *Mock the Week*, was appreciated by fans for the clever improvisation of its contestants. However most think swearing should not be used casually, but within carefully justified circumstances.

Scripted swearing in particular is more problematic and for many respondents programmes are felt to need to earn the *right* to use strong language. For example a long standing panel show of repute such as *Have I Got News For You* is sufficiently established to push boundaries in a way that less established ones are not. This is also the case with established and newer comedy personalities and we cover this more fully later in the section on *Talent and programme context*.

For some mainstream viewers and older audiences, there is a sense that all comedy is edgier these days:

- 'shouting' to get heard
- dominated by point-scoring males (panel shows)

- boundary-pushing at the expense of broader humour and (to some) the audience itself

'Some of the programmes...that have been mentioned are cruel, and when you're looking at morals and standards, what I think society has become is more aggressive, our sense of humour is more aggressive, it's more about laughing at people, and I think some TV programmes perpetuate that.' [Male, 40s, Leicester](#)

Drama

Drama, by definition, gives language and action context. As such, strong language is expected to be character-driven and a candid sex scene is expected to be judged as part of the plot.

Specific contexts such as police dramas bring their own set of expectations and, as such, perhaps have extra licence to show strong material. (However, it should be remembered that this sub-genre is particularly enjoyed by the older, more conservative audience who are likely to be more critical of strong content.)

The majority of audiences want and expect the BBC to attract a broad, modern mainstream audience and expect BBC One in particular, to be sensitive to those who may be more concerned by standards but who still expect to enjoy a drama.

Reality TV

Reality TV is one of the biggest drivers of concern about taste and standards, both in society and in the media.

As a genre it was felt by many to lack gravitas. The perceived high number of such shows, many of which are considered of low quality, leads to a barrage of criticism for gratuitous, cynical sensationalising of content.

However, even then it is not a uniform view. Viewers' propensity to accept strong language within these programmes depends on the perceived quality of the show and the degree to which they feel manipulated.

In some cases the bad language and behaviour is for many dismissed as simply boring and in poor taste, with the broadcasters to blame for allowing it to be shown (or even manipulating it). However there is also a residual belief that reality TV *does* reflect life, and that this inevitably includes the general decline in manners, language and behaviour prevalent in society. The genre, therefore, can be criticised for reflecting the worst in society. It is worth remembering that the genre is always associated with a level of distrust by the audience: 'to what extent *is this real life or reality TV real life?*'

Consequently even reality shows that audiences consider of higher quality, such as the research stimulus clips of *The Apprentice* and *Ramsay's Kitchen*

Nightmares, need to be able to justify any stronger content so that it is not seen as merely gratuitous, 'cheap' TV.

The Apprentice does so for many via Alan Sugar's 'dog-eat-dog' philosophy, the nature of the competition and, ultimately, the fact that bad behaviour in business is not endorsed by the show. Also, for the majority Gordon Ramsay is known to be a committed and talented chef (see *Programme and Talent context*), which for his fans mitigates his strong manner to an extent.

That said, there *is* unease among many viewers of all types of reality shows in terms of the real-life behaviour they are seen to reflect; the perceived social impact of TV, combined with the collective effect of these reality shows, is believed by many to potentially endorse aggressive, bullying behaviour and bad manners.

Soaps

In contrast to most drama, soaps are seen both to *address* difficult issues and to highlight the *consequences* of people's actions and behaviour within an obvious moral framework, often providing follow-up support.

However, not all soaps scheduled pre-watershed are felt to be the same.

There are perceived differences between shows when it comes to the strength of the content: *EastEnders* is regarded as more intense and adult than *Emmerdale* or *Coronation Street*. Consequently, many parents feel they should watch *EastEnders* with children aged 11 to 14, or prevent them from watching at a time of the evening when they feel they should be able to.

Documentaries

This is the least problematic genre in relation to taste and standards. Quality documentaries are regarded as programmes that reflect and explore real life honestly, without censorship or agenda, and in a way that doesn't manipulate or sensationalise. This latter point is very important to the majority.

That said, even here we see an echo of audience disquiet over the attention-seeking programme making that they believe to be a function of ratings chasing. To some, there is a feeling that extremes may be documented and presented as the norm.

Of some concern for a minority of our respondents is a feeling that the line between documentary and reality TV is becoming increasingly unclear.

Talent and programme brands as context

Viewers will often defend strong content by saying ‘you know what you are letting yourselves in for’ by choosing to watch a particular programme or presenter.

Many in the groups agreed with this to an extent, and the language and behaviour of personalities such as Gordon Ramsay, Jonathan Ross and Frankie Boyle was balanced for many by the fact that audiences knew what to expect, as they do for certain programmes

Talent is a crucial indicator of what to expect, and almost all respondents were able to demonstrate an ability to decode programme cues based on knowledge of personalities.

‘With Gordon Ramsay, in the context of what he is, that’s what he does. You wouldn’t watch him if you were offended by it.’ [Female, 40s, Leicester](#)

‘That’s what I’m saying, people are deliberately going to be offended? You know what Jonathan Ross is going to be like...if you like him you’re going to watch his programme. If you don’t like him, if you don’t like what he’s about – watch something else. [Male, 30s, Northern Ireland](#)

Furthermore, when it comes to presenters, a distinction may be drawn by the audience between those seen as having a ‘twinkle in the eye’, who have more licence to push boundaries and those who can appear more mean-spirited and so more easily engender disquiet. For example, a clip from *Have I Got News For You* prompted respondents to describe Paul Merton as someone who is well-known for being able to use his comedic ability to diffuse a potentially offensive remark by a guest on the show.

‘I say I mind the swearing, but I’m not sure I do, when you say those names: I love Paul Merton, I quite like Frankie Boyle.’ [Male, 75, South](#)

On the other hand, ‘cheekiness’ may be seen as developing into something slightly ‘nastier’ when an aggressive tone is used.

As seen in relation to how people judge shows, negative judgements may also be made if a personality is not perceived as having earned the right to push boundaries. Judgements like these are frequently linked to perceptions of quality of execution. If a comedy is felt to be not funny enough or a panel show perceived as merely derivative, any strong content is likely to be judged more harshly.

Complications arise when sections of the audience *want* to enjoy shows and personalities, but feel pushed away by the content.

While many agree that having rebellious, apparently un-biddable talent is important, and even *crucial* to the BBC remaining relevant, appreciation is subject to taste and everyone has a limit on extreme behaviour. Once again, managing audience expectations and consideration of context is key.

The importance of quality

When audiences are watching live TV, they do not necessarily make judgements on morality, standards and what is or isn't offensive.

However as we have seen, when they are asked to consider the issue after the fact, many do have views on standards or views on behalf of others, even if they are not actually *offended* by anything specific.

Along with the specific issues on taste and standards, another key discriminator raised its head: one that in some senses is more subjective and sits outside the debate. Yet for the sizeable majority we spoke to, it is central to it, particularly in relation to the BBC: that of *quality across all ranges of output*.

For this majority, the quality of the output is frequently judged first and foremost, and is placed in importance *before* issues associated with strong content. This is summed up by the 32 year-old Anglican vicar we spoke to:

'I know a lot of people would expect me to be shocked by bad language or sex on TV but I'm not really. It's a reflection of what real life is like now. I'm more concerned that the BBC might feel inhibited or stop making good quality programmes – it's the quality of the stuff on TV that bothers me more'.

As we have seen, *all* broadcasters, including the BBC, are perceived by many to be overly preoccupied with ratings and competition between themselves. This has resulted in an apparently more cynical approach to programme-making and scheduling.

Many we spoke to thought that this was evident in the amount of what is described as copy-cat content, the blurring of boundaries between channels in terms of their content, and the sense of the increasingly strident, sensationalist tone across genres and channels.

While judgements on the quality of individual programmes are inevitably subjective, audiences are astute at spotting where they may be being manipulated or 'fobbed-off' with cheaply made, derivative shows or insufficiently crafted programme spin-offs.

As we have seen, the way and the extent to which they feel this affects *them* is largely influenced by generation and life stage, but respondents *across* generations feel unease on behalf of others.

All these issues have an impact on the broad debate about taste and standards in the media.

However, many are also aware that this heightened competition is the modern broadcast environment, for better or worse. Again, the degree to which this constitutes a reasonable 'excuse' for some of the issues raised, depends to an extent on age and to perhaps a greater extent, on sensibility.

8. Managing 'strong' content

In this section we look at the ways in which audiences approach the issue of 'strong' content. The majority of the sample believed that the BBC should take creative risks and that management of expectations via devices such as the watershed was preferable to censorship or more regulation.

Creative licence

Amongst our sample, people who rarely took offence tended to believe that the BBC should take risks to deliver relevant programming in step with modern life.

Those who described themselves as unconcerned were spontaneous in defence of content that might attract complaints but was unlikely to be watched by detractors, and dismissive of what some described as overt political correctness. This is a stance they believe is often led by the press with the Ross/Brand affair being a case in point for many of them

Likewise, the majority across the sample stopped short at the prospect of censorship and believed that the BBC should encourage creativity, even if that meant broadcasting content that others might deem offensive.

Ultimately, the majority believe that given that there *are* concerns over standards, it is right that appropriate regulation is in place (this includes existing regulatory measures such as the watershed). Many across the sample appreciate reassurances of this, such as warnings when necessary. Most people do not want increased regulation.

The majority believe that *all* broadcasters should be subject to the same standards, and the BBC is *more* likely to set the agenda in this area.

The watershed and warnings

The watershed: TV

There was a clear understanding across the groups about the value and purpose of the watershed, and also a clear sense from the majority that now more than ever, the television watershed is important. This view is held by audiences across generations.

The importance of the watershed can be perceived as *symbolic*. This is a perspective of many young people, who while they may simultaneously criticise it as anachronistic, express a desire to protect others younger (or older) than themselves. Ultimately they feel that there is no better alternative.

It is seen by many others as the one clear, consistent signal that strong content, unsuitable for children, is to be expected.

'You can have sex and swearing and nudity on the TV after 9pm' [Female, 30s, Leicester](#)

'In theory anything that's shown before 9pm should be...your child should be able to view without you...a child from about 12yrs. But I do think they are asking for parents' discretion as well.' [Female 40s, Leicester.](#)

The watershed: BBC One

On BBC ONE, the watershed gives audiences clear expectations; they do not expect to hear strong language (the 'f-word') or see explicit or aggressive sex before 9pm.

Although 9pm is commonly agreed to be the turning point in viewer expectations, a sizeable minority express a desire to see a softer transition at 9pm, with 'hotter' content starting later, perhaps around 9.30pm. This is particularly relevant for BBC One as the more mainstream of the BBC channels. The change at 9pm can seem abrupt to some and the mainstream BBC One audience can feel 'caught out' if they hear strong swearing or explicit references to sex on the channel.

This more nuanced approach at 9pm is called for, partly because children go to bed later than they used to, and partly because of the stronger, more extreme tone perceived in many programmes these days.

BBC One is considered to be more family-oriented than BBC Two on *Saturday* and *Sunday* nights and audiences appreciate that. The need is felt to be *more* acute for the watershed to be sensitive about family-viewing stretching later than 9pm at weekends, especially on Saturdays.

'I don't believe after 9pm you can have sex and swearing. I'd expect...I might seem prudish, but I wouldn't expect that until 10-10.30pm, around Jonathan Ross time. 9pm still feels a bit (early). But if they did start swearing straight after 9pm within a couple of months that would become the accepted norm.' [Male,30s,Leicester.](#)

The watershed: BBC Two

Whilst BBC Two is increasingly perceived as a mainstream entertainment channel, there is a residual understanding that BBC Two has more boundary-pushing comedy and a slightly edgier feel than BBC One in terms of comedy and drama. This has an impact on expectations of the watershed.

However, even on BBC Two, edgy comedy at 9pm is expected to be less extreme or include less aggressive language or explicit sexual references than a show scheduled later. Even the older, BBC heartland audience recognise a step-change may occur with programmes beginning at 10pm for example, when they can accept stronger content.

Warnings and bleeping

Warnings are seen as a regular and necessary aspect of TV viewing.

Despite viewers setting expectations and making judgements according to the context afforded by programme brands, personalities and (to a lesser extent) channels, this does not mitigate the need for warnings where appropriate

The majority regard a warning to be a helpful barometer of strong content and used in conjunction with time of day it is on, warnings are valued as an extra indicator to help the viewer decide whether to watch or listen. A warning at 10pm for example, can signal something out of the ordinary, even for that time.

Even young people who claimed not to be shocked by anything in the media, felt that warnings were a useful way to signpost strong content to others, and expected this to happen.

However, many felt there should be no warnings before the watershed as, by definition, having a warning indicates that the content should be shown after 9pm.

By the same token, the majority we spoke to do not believe bleeping is necessary post watershed, especially for the odd word. However, there was some concern about repeated strong language that is neither part of character in a drama or a genuine expression of feeling in a documentary.

Of the remaining audience, most feel that bleeping very strong language at least shows a respect for audience sensibilities. Only the minority *most* likely to take offence at strong language, felt there was no difference between audible and bleeped out swearing.

9. What types of content are people concerned about in the area of tastes and standards?

In this section we explore the areas under review such as strong language, aggressive behaviour and sexual candour.

To help in stimulating discussion, we showed respondents across our research sample the same set of 10 programme clips from TV and radio, plus several others where relevant. These were used purely as examples of *types* of content that may offend and to stimulate debate; they were not in any way under scrutiny as individual programmes. Specific clips from the list we showed are referred to where appropriate in the text below. (*A full list of clips shown during the research is to be found in Appendix 2.*)

It is important to note that the clips were not experienced by most respondents as a flood of poor taste and offensive content; rather they served to remind people of things that had possibly made them uneasy in the past. For the most part, they were felt to be representative of some of the issues under discussion, rather than exceptional. Respondents were aware that there was more of that type of content available to view.

Strong vs. offensive language

Bad language in society generally and in the media, is raised spontaneously as an area of unease for the majority.

The key word here is *unnecessary*. In relation to strong language in a programme, most people would like programme makers to ask themselves, 'Is this really necessary?'

For the majority, the bar which measures what is or is not 'necessary' need not be particularly high, providing they believe proper editorial discretion has been exercised in relation to the issue. This is also the case for those who claim to be 'slightly uncomfortable' with strong language.

The problem however, is that the majority we spoke to feel that a strong 'tone' to content is now the norm rather than the exception; or rather that the bar has been set by those for whom a strong tone is the norm.

This unease is focused on TV. It is not generally perceived to be an issue for radio.

The audience can and do distinguish between 'strong' and 'offensive' but various nuances are applied when passing judgement.

A key filter is the extent to which the strong language (or indeed sexual candour), is *justified* (or necessary) and, as we have seen in relation to taste and standards generally, context is an important discriminator here. Below we explore some examples of audiences applying their knowledge of context, the impact this has

on their expectations and ultimately, their judgement on whether something is justified/offensive or not.

- The 'f-word' for the majority is described as 'strong' but not necessarily offensive. However when it is used in a literal way by Jonathan Ross to Gwyneth Paltrow in the clip of *Friday Night with Jonathan Ross*, it is considered offensive by some – not least because he could have used an alternative word. (It is worth noting that respondents did not consider this as aggressive as the interviewee was considered to be largely complicit in the joke.)
- Where a strong word is perceived to be integral to a joke, audiences are more likely to accept it. If a swear word is simply used as a default word, this is often deemed unnecessary. A clip of the panel show *Would I Lie To You* contained examples of both: Angus Deayton uses the 'f-word' as part of a scripted gag that respondents claimed would not have made sense without it, whereas panellist Sean Ritchie uses it casually as part of his normal speech.
- The 'c-word' is considered both strong and offensive, to women particularly, but also generally. However, when it is used within what is seen as a high quality drama as illustrated by the clip of *Fiona's Story*, use of the 'c-word' is felt to be an appropriate expression of feeling and therefore justified – provided it does not lead to a normalisation of the word on TV.
- Derogatory terms such as 'gypo', 'retard' and 'bitch' are considered offensive as they are perceived to be demeaning. This is felt particularly strongly by women, the younger and the politically aware generally.
- The word 'nigger' is complex. If used within rap lyrics it is perceived as strong, but is contextualised within a set of understood cultural references. If used by a white person, it becomes derogatory and as such is seen as offensive.

However, of greater significance is the fact that *excessive* and *repeated* use of bad language on TV often causes greater unease in people than an isolated example here or there.

A clip from *Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares* served to remind people of this. In the clip, the repeated use of the 'f-word' accompanied by aggressive behaviour renders it potentially more offensive than merely strong. Another clip from *The Apprentice* caused some concern, although respondents contrasted Sir Alan Sugar's humour and common sense with the competitive and sometimes cynical behaviour of the contestants. This contrast reduced the potential for offence.

By contrast, the 'f-word' was used repeatedly by John Lennon in an archive interview broadcast on BBC Radio 4 at 9am (*The Wenner Tapes*). Despite the

repetition, the majority felt that it was justified given the intensity and passion of Lennon's argument. A small minority felt that the 9am slot merited a warning.

This potentially offensive accumulation of bad language can appear to extend across channels, programmes, an evening, even the week. Many older viewers (50 plus) and a minority of younger people, felt that it was sometimes difficult to find content after 9pm that did *not* contain stronger content.

'I think sometimes if it's (strong material) put in a comedy version some people, especially young people, see it as an accepted thing – Oh, that's alright because it's funny.' [Female, 40s, Manchester](#)

'It's hearing it all the time – on the streets, as soon as you turn on the TV. Once or twice for...I'm not saying I disapprove – you know of everything, but we didn't used to hear it ever on TV, now it might be on every channel. It's become the norm, or it seems that way...' [Female, 50s, Cardiff](#)

Aggressive behaviour

When respondents were initially asked about offensive content and standards in the media, nobody spontaneously raised aggressive behaviour or bullying; it doesn't rank in the more obvious canon of potentially offensive things, such as sex and swearing, though it clearly has a connection with violence.

However, via some of the clips shown it became clear that there *are* latent concerns about media portrayal of aggressive behaviour (and indeed aggressive behaviour in the wider world), and that these concerns are shared across generations/life stages. Young people are more exposed to it in their own lives, parents are protective and some older respondents claim to feel more vulnerable generally as they age.

The unease that young people displayed over aggressive behaviour is linked to the rawness of their immediate experience – if not their own, then that of friends/peers/younger siblings. Thus the effect of aggressive behaviour on how an individual may feel is sometimes described by respondents as 'bullying'.

It is perhaps less about aggression and bullying *per se* and more about the perceived need of one individual to dominate another, potentially promoting a more aggressive manner in day-to-day interaction. In one of the programme clips used as stimulus, Gordon Ramsay is shown berating a restaurant manager, using strong language. In a clip from the *Radio 1 Breakfast Show*, Chris Moyles argues with a female co-presenter and in another clip (also from the *Breakfast Show*), he debates the merits of Polish women as prostitutes.

Both men were seen to press home their points of view in an aggressive tone.

As we have seen, aggressive behaviour accompanied by strong language has the effect of making both potentially more offensive. There was a strong belief from the majority, that seeing aggressive behaviour from successful, aspirational people and in popular, mainstream shows, potentially legitimises and even normalises, this kind of behaviour.

This is connected to a belief among older (mostly 30 plus) respondents that celebrities have become too influential while failing to behave as good role models for young people.

Referring to a clip from Kitchen Nightmares: 'Swearing, nudity, you can explain away; but not bullying, not behaviour like that of Ramsay - what message does that send? Shouldn't be on, shouldn't be on.' Male, 30s, Leicester

Mockery

Audiences draw a distinction between a more derisive, potentially bullying tone and mockery, and as with the comedy genre, taste makes judgements quite subjective. How a line is delivered, and by whom, are crucial factors which define content as acceptable or unacceptable.

The absence of very strong language (the 'f-word') and lack of aggression are key discriminators, as is the personality of different presenters. For example, a clip of Frankie Boyle in *Mock the Week* where he mocks the Queen was judged by the majority to be inoffensive. Those who knew and liked the show appreciated the witty, edgy tone. The majority of those who did not know the show, felt that Frankie Boyle had sufficient sharpness, a 'twinkle in the eye,' to get away with it. Criticisms tended to come from those who actively didn't like him and a minority of older women who objected to what they regarded as disrespect.

In another clip of *Mock the Week* that we showed some respondents, derogatory comments made by Frankie Boyle about the appearance of a well-known sports personality were considered to be made in a lightly mocking tone, rather than a particularly aggressive one. Those who saw the clip felt that this turned what could have been a nasty comment into a cheeky remark made by a typically edgy comedian.

As mentioned earlier, a comedian like Paul Merton is perceived by audiences to use wit to mock others in a sharp, but affectionate way. This was exemplified in an exchange with Toby Young in a clip of *Have I Got News For You*, in which he diffused a potentially difficult exchange between two other guests.

Some respondents watched a clip of Joan Rivers where she jokes about Heather Mills and refers to her disability. Almost all described this as typical of her caustic style as a performer and given that she mocks herself and her family as well, this was unexceptional and no cause for concern.

Similarly, a sketch from *Harry and Paul* was judged by the majority of those who saw it, to mock a number of social stereotypes, including a 'dim-witted' Northerner, a 'posh' Southerner and a Filipino maid. Consequently no one felt that the sketch was designed to target Filipinos in a racist manner.

However, in the two clips mentioned earlier from the *Radio 1 Breakfast show*, Chris Moyles was perceived by the majority to overstep the line from mockery into an unacceptably aggressive tone. (Although fans dismissed these as typical of his style.) He was considered to do so both tonally and by not knowing when to stop. When this happens, mockery is perceived to become something more sharp-edged and potentially more unpleasant.

Comic satire and mockery sit quite closely together. Satire is regarded as the cleverer and more insightful of the two by audiences. When in the right hands, we have seen that mockery can be light hearted and witty.

Both comic forms are seen to have greater potential to offend when religion or race are at its heart. However the perceived quality of the material has a key role here. Religious comic satire of Monty Python's *The Life of Brian* contrasted sharply for respondents with a clip of *The Katy Brand Show*. While those of a strong religious belief were likely to be offended by any humour around religion (and a minority feel this on behalf of others), the majority were critical of the quality of the clip from *The Katy Brand Show*, though not offended by its content..

Sexual candour (language, nudity, simulated sex)

This emerges as a less complex issue than bad language and aggressive behaviour from this research.

Nudity does not rate highly on the offensive index for the majority and simulated sex is accepted as a given, post-watershed at 9pm. If it is particularly explicit or aggressive sex (strong sexual content), then audiences suggest that a later time may be required.

Pre-watershed, the majority (including younger audiences) do not expect to see strong sexual content. The simulated sex portrayed in a clip we showed from the BBC One series *Holby Blue* was considered by all, even teenagers, as too strong for 8pm without a warning. This was because the sex shown appeared aggressive, not because of nudity.

For the majority, content that needs a warning shouldn't be shown before 9pm.

'Nudity's not offensive, is it? But you'd expect it to be after nine. But sex, something like that (Holby Blue) - may be a little later. That was quite strong.' [Female, 30s, Midlands](#)

A clip of *2 Pints of Lager* was shown in some of the groups and while it was considered more verbally explicit than the *Holby Blue* sex scene, it caused less

concern. Respondents regarded the scene as typical of the comedy, which in its turn, is typical of BBC Three for those who know the channel's values/target audience.

As mentioned earlier, strong, sexual language used literally (the 'f-word') is most likely to cause actual offence, whereas sexual innuendo is less likely to cause concern. For example, in a clip of the BBC Radio 4 comedy *4 Stands Up*, a suggestion of bestiality is made within the sketch, though not overtly. The large majority had no issues with this degree of innuendo as the sketch was of sufficient quality and in a slot on a station where children would be very unlikely to listen.

Some groups were also shown a clip from *Katie and Peter: the Next Chapter*. In the clip the couple are simulating oral sex and joking. While all respondents who saw the clip found the material unappealing to watch, they claimed they would simply turn over, or dismissed it as typical of the image portrayed by Katie and Peter and as such, hardly surprising.

However, while they did not express deep concern over the clip *per se*, they *did* say that this was not the *quality* of programming they would expect to see on the BBC. Nor did it reflect a standard of behaviour that they would expect the BBC to endorse by making such a show.

Sexual violence was outside the remit of this research.

10. Young People aged between 11-16

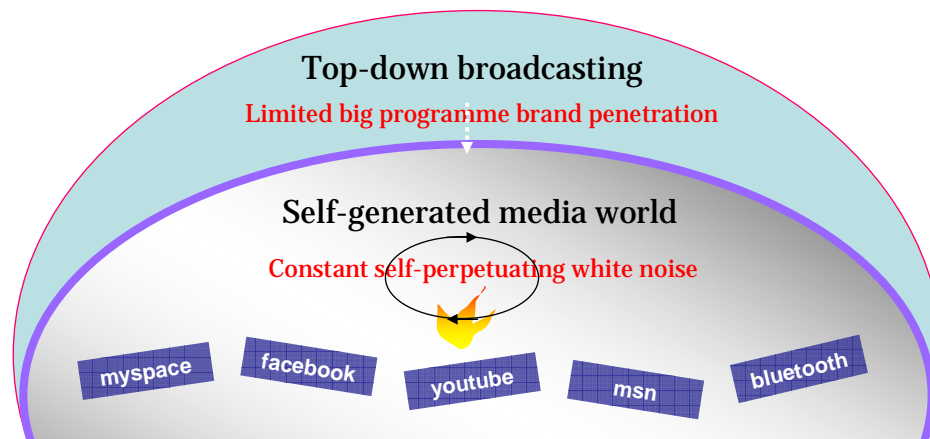
In this section, we explore the attitudes of young people aged 16 and under. Their media experience is significantly different from that of older teens and adults.

This age group made up approximately 8% of our sample and via depth interviews we were able to get a clear sense of how their media world operates and the impact this has in the area of taste and standards.

Our discussions with young people were more oblique than with adults and we sought to listen and understand, rather than present them with issues, concepts or clips of potentially offensive content.

Media and the impact of broadcast content

A new generation is growing up in a way that is highly influenced by 'new' media. They are the most active users of interactive applications and platforms and as such, occupy their own, self-generated media bubble for much of the time. Penetration of linear broadcasting in terms of truly compelling content appears to be limited to a number of key programme brands.



The graphic above outlines this self-generated media world. It is unregulated, self-defining and readily accessible. It draws on and feeds into the energy, humour and cruelty of the playground – and therefore can be a combustible environment.

The big programme brands that *do* penetrate the 'self-generated media bubble' (such as *EastEnders*, *Hollyoaks*, *Skins* and *Shameless*) are thus consumed within a somewhat unstable arena, and extreme or challenging content can become another source of tension or uncertainty.

All the young people we met were articulate about the pressures still exerted by top-down media, particularly television and teen magazines.

'I think shows like Skins kind of raise the stakes for planning your social life, people think parties are going to be like that, they think they should behave like that.'

Female, 6th Form, Manchester

Aggressive tone or content enters the online arena where bullying can and does take place, while sexualised content can add to the pressure on teens to grow up fast: teen magazines are also referenced by respondents in this context.

There was a sense amongst the young sample we spoke to that TV content is increasingly sexualised, and not just after the watershed. This can leave children confused, uncertain as to whether they are being excluded by, or invited to join in with, the adult references.

The degree to which control (in either the top-down broadcast world, or the self-generated world of Web 2.0) is exerted by family and respected by children, varies across socio-economic groups. In general, the less prosperous (and more vulnerable) children we met were both less likely to have restrictions such as pin codes applied, and less likely to observe those restrictions that were in place.

Social Networking and young teenagers

Some young adults and teenagers reported instances in which they believe social boundaries have been crossed in this area.

For example, two teenagers cited images of an explicit nature captured and posted by their peers. These young people were certainly aware of the potential for embarrassment at best, and humiliation at worst. However, although younger teenagers are conscious of the potential dangers, they can also be carefree to the point of recklessness in their use of technology.

'When I'm in the cinema, I'll Bluetooth anyone.' Girl, 15, Manchester

The sense of freedom and excitement generated by the random possibilities of 'bottom-up' technologies is at least as top of mind as the potential danger.

Children aged 11 to 12 and the internet

This age group stands on the cusp of the online immersion which characterises teenagers and sets them apart. They use the internet for schoolwork and gaming, but only half we spoke to regularly use social networking sites.

Children of this age are very conscious of scare stories concerning the internet and 'stranger danger' online and this shapes their attitude to social networking sites. Even 10 to 11 year olds are aware that they can choose how much they wish to reveal on *Facebook*, for example, and many claim to exercise restraint.

'There's no way I would put a picture of myself up' [Girl,11, South](#)

'It's scary because you don't know who's got your details... what that might lead to... may be kidnapping' [Girl,11, South](#)

'There are people that go on there (the internet) to try and gain your trust'
[Boy,11, South](#)

They criticise friends for opening up too much and are quick to imagine the possible consequences of this. Arguably they are already more savvy in this area than adults. They lay the responsibility for sensible use on the individual and do not feel that their privacy is invaded, confident that they control the process.

However, they are frequently unsupervised when they are online and do access strong content without necessarily being able to explain *how* they did it.

They may be looking at something innocuous (on YouTube for example), but this content can be tagged with random material that may or may not be unsuitable or shocking. As a consequence this group often describe 'horrible' or 'scary' things they have seen online, as 'pop ups'. They do describe feeling ambushed by this type of content and examples mentioned ranged from the random (violent video footage of a car crash) to the specific (an anti-speeding advert).

The majority deal with this by informing an older sibling and discussing it with friends. Older siblings generally describe themselves as protective of younger brothers and sisters. All the 11 – 12 year olds we talked to claimed that they were trusted to use the internet sensibly by their parents. However, parents can be the last resort if they find something offensive, as at least half of the children spoken to felt that they may be unfairly blamed for deliberately looking at something unsuitable.

'I'd tell my older brother more than my mum in case she blamed me for seeing something' [Girl,11, South](#)

It remains to be seen how these sea-changes in media use and functionality will affect today's young people as they move into adulthood. If younger teens are already more engaged by self-generated and non-broadcast content, a key question arises. What will happen when they start to disengage further from TV as their social life develops - as is generally the case with older teenagers?

The ready availability of extreme content online, and the fact that they have no pre-digital paradigm against which to test their experience of the new media world, may lead them to develop a quite different relationship with linear broadcasting.

'My grandmother watches quite a lot of telly and she says it's completely changed, and the more things that come out the more she's shocked, but it's always been like that for me, I'm used to what I see.' [Girl, 17, Manchester](#)

11. Appendices

Appendix 1: Discussion guides: Audience Labs, Family Depths, Schools

Appendix 2: Stimulus

Appendix 3: Recruitment and sample

Appendix I: Discussion guides

1a: Discussion Guide – Labs²

The evening will be divided into 4 main sections. Each section is designed to create a different type of debate:

1. spontaneous opinions
2. general, unprompted thoughts about key areas
3. prompted, stimulated debate about particular content
4. impact on BBC

Part One - Plenary Session: 20 minutes

This section aims to understand who we have in the room, discover their spontaneous opinions on the subject and sensitise them to areas that might be covered. It will also allow us to 'park' certain areas that might interrupt the discussion later on. For each of the following sets of questions, images will be projected on a screen.

Welcome respondents. Outline structure of evening. Explain we might move them around a little so we get an even mix of responses in the groups.

Headlines about the NHS / Education / Global Warming / TV

- What are your first thoughts about these headlines?
- How much notice do you take of these kinds of headlines?
- Which concerns you most?
- Which of these would you be likely to read more about – some / none?
- Which ones do you agree with and why?
- Which do you disagree with and why?

Brief Mood health check

- What do you feel about the credit crunch?
- How is the credit crunch affecting how you feel generally?
- Is it affecting your behaviour / your mood / decisions you make?

² Platform will be discussed in more detail during the depth stage when we will be in respondents' homes.

Image of Jonathan Ross / Russell Brand

- Who heard / saw when it was broadcast? Who heard / saw it later? Where? Who didn't see / hear it?
- How would you describe your personal reaction to the material itself?
- Why do you think it became as big an issue as it did?
- Did it make a difference that it was on BBC Radio 2? What if it had been on Jonathan Ross's show – better or worse?

At this point respondents will be divided into groups of ten, with a mixture of attitudes to the various subjects above.

Part Two – General Discussion: 40 minutes (3 groups of 10 respondents)

In this section we aim to establish in more detail how they feel about this subject, what they understand by the different areas of offence, how they behave, how they might talk about it, the impact of context. (*We will use clips as stimulus if relevant.*)

Key areas: potential hotspots: breakfast programming (TV and Radio); difference between BBC 1 @ 9pm and BBC 2 @ 9pm; differences across genre, with special attention to comedy, drama, entertainment, factual etc.; understanding of the watershed:

- Tell us about what media you use – TV/Radio/Internet
Briefly explore what they use most, when they tend to use it, what programmes etc they enjoy
- Still thinking about media (TV, Radio, Internet) - has anyone found they have seen/heard something that has caused offence in the recent past? What? Why?
- Still thinking about TV, Radio, internet, what kind of material would you need to see to cause you 'offence'?
- How would you describe 'being offended' – are there alternative/better words you would use if you were affected in this way?
- What's the difference between being shocked and offended? Or between something in 'poor taste' and being offended?(ask for examples – play clip / or something similar, if necessary / if we have one to illustrate)
- How might you tell someone about something in poor taste / something shocking, something offensive? What words would you use?

- What influences whether something might cause offence in terms of TV and radio? Wait for spontaneous responses before prompting on (in order):

- Broadcaster: C4, BBC, ITV, Sky etc
- Platform: TV, Radio, online

Is there a difference between TV / Radio and online? If so what / why? Can you think of examples where content would be more / less acceptable on a different platform?

Channel

- BBC 1 and 2? BBC 3 & 4? SKY 1, Five, C4, Living
- Time
 - *Is there a difference between radio and TV during 7-9am?*
 - *Difference between BBC 1 and 2 at 9pm*
- Genre (swearing in drama / documentary, for example)
- Presenter
- Whether there is a warning or not
- Who's watching with you
- Other people feeling offended
- In terms of your own use (when you are in control), which of the following do you trust most not to cause offence / shock / upset you: TV, Radio, Internet? Why?
- Which of TV, radio, Internet do you feel the most need to monitor a child's use of? Why? And how do you do it?
- If offensive language is used on a panel show, how is it different on radio or TV?
- Have you ever been offended on behalf of someone else? How might that work? Ask for examples.
- Have you ever complained about something you've seen or heard?
- When might it be acceptable to complain about something you haven't seen or heard?

Online, catch-up etc

- What effect do you think the internet has had on standards / taste across other media?

- Are people more accepting of this kind of content / or more wary because of the internet?
- Are you aware of social networking sites (Facebook / Myspace / Bebo / Twitter)? Who uses them? (*but don't get stuck on opinions of sites themselves*) What impact do you think these sites have had on the areas we've been discussing? Prompt if necessary: does it make it seem like invasion of privacy is more acceptable these days?
- What about the impact of catch-up TV, Sky +, PVRs/BBC i-Player etc – when you can watch/hear things whenever you want?
- Discuss the issue of a watershed at this point – the importance of vs. lack of (on radio, catch up, online)
- Thinking about all the things we've talked about, how would you describe yourself in terms of these issues?

Push for self definition but then ask them to rank themselves from 1 to 5 in terms of not concerned to concerned - then explain we are going to look at some clips and it will be interesting to see whether they regard themselves as more or less concerned / offended after they see the clips; they should feel free to change their mind.

Please read out:

'We are about to show you a range of clips from TV and radio that illustrate the issues we've been discussing. All the clips you will see have been transmitted on TV / radio. It is important that you are aware that some clips may cause offence. If at any point, due to the nature of the clips, you feel you would rather not take part, please feel free to leave and join us later. This will not affect the incentive you will receive. We will inform you before each clip what it will contain, for example: sexual references, offensive language, nudity.'

Part Three – Clips: 40 minutes

In this section, respondents will be exposed to a number of clips to understand and explore their opinions and reactions and asked to record reactions on a form.

Before each clip tell them when and where it went out.

Moderators – depending on reactions to clip, we can vary the pace through this section as it is important that we leave time for final group discussion

After each clip...

- What comment have you crossed on your form? Why that? (Use this to explore what they thought etc)

(If offended/bothered) What words would you use to describe the effect this had on you? (look out for differences and probe why that word: offensive, shocking, poor taste, innuendo, dismissive language etc)

- Is it something you might complain about officially?
- What effect would it have on your viewing / listening?
- When / where might it be more or less acceptable? (platform, channel / time of day / audience / warning - beware of hot spots: 7-9am / 1 & 2 @ 9pm / genre)

Now you have seen all these clips, what difference do you think the following makes when discussing/coming to a view on these areas:

- What difference does the broadcaster make? Would it cause more or less offence? Would your reaction to it be different in anyway?

Repeat this across these key areas:

- Platform – esp. radio vs TV
 - Channel – BBC 1,2 and BBC 3,4
 - Time slot (esp; breakfast, pre/post watershed)
 - Genre
 - Presenter
 - Warnings
 - Who's watching with you/others being offended
-
- Overall – what bothers/offends you least about all we've discussed?
 - And what bothers/offends you the most?
 - Even if something did offend/bother you, do you think there is a place for this sort of material/content on TV/Radio – why, why not?
 - What about those who were less offended/bothered?
 - Early on we asked you to describe yourself in terms of these issues, now we've talked further, seen some clips, has that changed?

On a flipchart mark a 'line of acceptability' and ask respondents which clips in their view crossed that line.

Part Four – BBC specific – 10 mins

In this section we aim to understand how the BBC is affected by the areas discussed, what is different about the BBC compared to other broadcasters, and how they feel the BBC deals with the issues discussed.

Much of this might have been covered off in the preceding sections; but if not:

- How would you describe the BBC's role in society when it comes to the issues we've been talking about?
- Are there things the BBC should never show / say, regardless of context (time, warning, genre)?
- Is the BBC different to other broadcasters in regards to these issues? Why / why not?
- How would you rate the BBC's record on these issues generally?
- If you had to pinpoint one area that was affecting standards / taste in society negatively – what would be?

Part Five – plenary sessions - last thoughts – 20 mins

Nominate one corner of the room as 'care a lot', one as 'care a little', one as 'don't really care' – ask respondents to assemble in the corner that best represents their feelings. In all cases, try to get respondents to say why they're standing where they are.

One corner 'offensive language', one 'sexual candour', one 'pejorative language', 'all of it'.

Is there anyone the BBC shouldn't have on? Who / why? List:

Roy Chubby Brown / Jim Davidson / Bill Hicks / Bernard Manning / Joan Rivers / Chris Rock etc.?

One 'BBC should have higher standards than other broadcaster', one 'the same', one, 'don't know'

Finally, if you wanted to say one thing to the BBC about this issue, what would it be?

Summary and end.

1b: Discussion Guide – Family depths

The 60 minutes is to be divided into 4 parts:

- A tour of the media platforms in the house
- General discussion around offence
- Clips-based discussion
- Implications for BBC

Tour – 15 minutes

Ask to be taken around their home wherever they consumer media, i.e. the TVs, radio, computers. Whilst doing this ask them about who uses what, when, what channels / stations / sites they use. Who might be in the room when they watch, listen, surf? When they consume media alone / with others? It is important to note how much media they consume online, or at their computer – BBC i-Player, YouTube, any file sharing etc.

Ask them to consider their answers in this section because it's important they understand the context in which the things we ask them / show them later is consumed.

Use all you learn from this section as a guide when you ask the questions below, adapting / expanding where relevant.

Offence – 20 minutes (parents)

- If I was to say the phrase, 'morality, values and standards of behaviour' what do you understand by it?
- Have you heard / seen anything on TV, radio, online in the last six months that has caused you offence? (pay attention to how they describe their reactions, especially if they don't think they have been offended).
- What kind of material would you need to see to cause 'offence'? How would describe being offended?
- How is this reaction affected if someone else is in the room? Can you remember anything that you felt you needed to turn off because of others in the room? Who was in the room? Why did you feel that? (don't automatically think it's because of children, it may be that partners have different thresholds)
- Do you make choices (e.g. radio stations) because of other people in the house in terms of what content may or may not be suitable. Examples? (for grandparents, prompt them on behaviour when grandchildren are around, if it doesn't come up spontaneously)

- In terms of your own use (*when you are in control*), which of the following do you trust most not to offend / shock / upset you: TV, Radio, Internet? Why? Then which?
- Which of TV, radio, Internet do you feel the most need to monitor a child's use of? Why? And how do you do it?
- If you had to put these things in order, in terms of how much you care about them, which order would you put them in: decline in NHS, decline in Education, decline in standards of taste on TV, Global Warming, Credit Crunch. Why that order? Why does taste and standards go where you've put it?
- What influences whether something might cause offence in terms of TV and radio? Wait for spontaneous responses before prompting on (in order):
 - Broadcaster: C4, BBC, ITV, Sky etc
 - Does the broadcaster have an effect: can something be less shocking / offence etc if it's on C4 for example; more so because it's on BBC 1?
 - Platform: TV, Radio, internet
Is there a difference between TV / Radio and the Internet? If so what / why? Can you think of examples where content would be more / less acceptable on a different platform?
 - Channel
 - BBC 1 and 2? BBC 3 & 4? We need to understand any subtle difference in terms of how shows are perceived on different BBC channels.
 - Time
 - *Is there a difference between radio and TV during 7-9am?*
 - *Difference between BBC 1 and 2 at 9pm (very important – when playing clips explore Would I Lie to You on BBC 1 at 9.15pm on Sat Night / Mock the Week at 9pm on BBC TWO)*
 - Genre (swearing in drama / documentary, for example)
 - Presenter
 - Whether there is a warning or not
 - Who's watching with you
 - Other people feeling offended

Online, catch-up etc

- What effect do you think the internet has had on standards / taste across other media?
- Are people more accepting of this kind of content / or more wary because of the internet?
- Are you aware of social networking sites (Facebook / Myspace / Bebo / Twitter)? Who uses them? (*but don't get stuck on opinions of sites themselves*) What impact do you think these sites have had on the areas we've been discussing? Prompt if necessary: does it make it seem like invasion of privacy is more acceptable these days?
- What about the impact of catch-up TV, Sky +, PVRs/BBC i-Player etc – when you can watch/hear things whenever you want?
- Discuss the issue of a watershed at this point – the importance of vs. lack of (on radio, catch up, online)

- Thinking about all the things we've talked about, how would you describe yourself in terms of these issues?

Clips: - 30 minutes

Please read out statement and get them to sign beneath it.

'We are about to show you a range of clips from TV and radio that illustrate the issues we've been discussing. All the clips you will see have been transmitted on TV / radio. It is important that you are aware that some clips may cause offence. If at any point, due to the nature of the clips, you feel you would rather not take part, please feel free to leave and join us later. This will not affect the incentive you will receive. We will inform you before each clip what it will contain, for example: sexual references, offensive language, nudity.'

Please ensure you have parents' permission if a child over 16 is going to be present – ideally they will be...so we might explore generational differences.

Before playing clips tell them what channel and time it was broadcast so they understand how to judge it and then when it's finished ask them to fill in form. Go through all the clips before chatting through them.

- What is your first reaction?
- Who finds this shocking / offensive / in poor taste? What makes it so?

- (To those who find it offensive) How would you describe it to someone / what words would you use to describe what you find offensive about it? Why might others not find it offensive?
- (To those who don't find it offensive) How would you describe this to someone? Why might it be offensive to others?
- Is it something you might complain about officially?
- What effect would it have on your viewing / listening?
- Is this type of content acceptable? Why / why not?
- When / where might it be more or less acceptable? (channel / time of day / audience / warning)
- What other factors come into play with such material? (genre / presenter etc.)
- What difference does broadcaster make? What if this was on BBC / Channel 4 / 5 / Sky, a digital channel? Would it be more or less offensive? Would your reaction to it be different in anyway?
- Early on we asked you to describe yourself in terms of these issues, now we've talked further, seen some clips, has that changed? (Were they more easily offended / was the content more or less offensive than they might have imagined? Etc)

BBC – 15 minutes

- Is there any performer you know of who you think the BBC shouldn't show? If not, what would someone have to be like for the BBC not to touch? Why that?
- How would you describe the BBC's role in society when it comes to the issues we've been talking about?
- Are there things the BBC should never show / say, regardless of context (time, warning, genre)?
- Is the BBC different to other broadcasters in regards to these issues? Why / why not?
- How would you rate the BBC's record on these issues generally?

Thank you.

1c: Discussion Guide – Schools

Groups with children are most productive at 30-45 minutes long

The objective of the discussion is to get a sense of what their attitudes are to the media they are using, what they are watching and – to an extent – what they think is acceptable/unacceptable. Moderators will use the following questions as a guide for format – the discussion itself will be very informal.

There are some questions that will only be asked of Y8/11/12 children (not Y6, many of whom are still only 10).

General warm up: names, ages, family, likes, dislikes, pets, holidays, ambitions

1. Media Use

- Tell us about the media you use – TV/Radio/Internet

Explore what they use most, when and where they tend to use it, what they like about it etc. *Look for spontaneous mention of social networking sites (MSN Messenger etc)*

If they do, discuss *how* they use social networking sites and how much personal information they share and how comfortable/secure they feel on the sites (*NB: this may not be relevant for Y6 children*)

- Briefly explore (*NB: may be a bit tough for Yr6*) what they perceive to be the differences between:

- TV and internet
- TV and radio

(If they seem to have a relatively clear idea of channels - especially older children, briefly explore their perceptions of these: BBC vs other)

- Tell us about programmes, sites, channels you particularly enjoy – and why.
- What about your favourite films and video games? (*NB: note examples as these are frequently above their age levels*)
- What about people on TV etc – who do you admire, would you like to be like him/her? Why?

2. Standards generally

Yr6

- Talking now about school, have you ever been surprised or shocked by anything you have learned/heard at school? (*Prompt a little if necessary, but look for spontaneous responses rather than pushing them to find anything - eg: could be something in a lesson, a fact in history or science – or behaviour/language in the playground?* Tell us about it if you can.

Yr 8 plus only

- Talking now about school, have you ever been surprised or shocked by anything you have learned/heard at school?
- What about behaviour / language in the playground? How much bad language is there – probe too much, about normal, not much?
- Have you heard / do you use language (slang, swear words) your parents – or other adults - wouldn't understand?

3. Standards in the media

- Going back to TV/radio/internet, have you ever been surprised or shocked by anything you have heard or seen on TV/Radio/internet? Would you tell us about it?
- Do you think that most of the stuff you see is acceptable/right for your age group?
- Can you think of anything that you think isn't acceptable/right for your age group?
- What would you do if you did come across something you thought was unacceptable?
- Do you have any rules at home about when or where you watch TV? How much do you watch TV alone and how much with your family?
- Do you have any rules at home about using the internet e.g how long, what sites?
- Do you know if your computer has filtering or monitoring software?
- If yes, do you know how to get around it? (ditto TV pin codes for on demand content)
- Have you ever done this - accessed content without your parents' knowledge/agreement? *e.g. downloading programmes from the internet, visiting sites they shouldn't, accessing on demand content requiring a pin code*
- Should your parents be worried about what you watch/listen to/look at? Why / why not?
- Do you think you need 'protecting' from the media? Why/why not?
- If you had children, what would you worry about?

All

- Finally, if you HAD to throw away the TV or the computer – which would it be?!

Thank them, praise them and say goodbye.

Appendix 2: Stimulus

We had a long list of programme clips which encompassed a range of subjects relevant to the research. We selected 10 from this list that were shown to all adult respondents in the Audience Labs and in some Depths. These clips are marked with an asterisk on the table overleaf.

We then showed a small selection of other clips in some of the groups. These are marked with two asterisks. Finally, moderators used other clips very occasionally, where it was felt to help stimulate debate. These are marked with three asterisks.

We told viewers the channel and time of transmission in order to give each clip a context.

All respondents signed a consent form to view the clips on the understanding that they were free to leave the room at any time and then return, without compromising the incentive they received. Only once did three individuals do this, although there was a perceptible reaction in the room to the more sexually explicit clips.

The effect of the clips on the discussion

It is important to note that the clips shown were not experienced as a flood of poor taste and with one or two exceptions, moderators sensed that clips were less strong than many respondents had expected, having signed a consent form.

The clips were used purely as examples of *types* of content that may offend and to stimulate debate; they were not in any way under scrutiny as individual programmes. They served to remind people of things that had possibly made them uneasy in the past. For the most part, they were felt to be representative of some of the issues under discussion, rather than exceptional. Respondents were aware that there was more of that type of content available to view.

List of programme clips shown

* denotes clips shown to all respondents

** clips shown to selected groups *** clips shown at moderator's discretion

1	Apollo Live *** BBC ONE, 10.30pm	Joan Rivers joke about Heather Mills' disability
2	The Apprentice * BBC TWO, 9pm	Sairi and other competitors argue: swearing
3	Chris Moyles ** Radio 1 breakfast show	Mockery of co presenter: 'you need to get laid'
4	Chris Moyles * Radio 1 Breakfast show	Chris discusses the merits of Polish women as prostitutes
5	Fiona's Story ** BBC ONE, 9pm	Use of the word 'Cxxx'
6	Friday Night with Jonathan Ross * BBC ONE, 10.35pm	Jonathan discusses sex with Gwyneth Paltrow; "I'd like to fxxk you"
7	Harry and Paul ** BBC ONE, 9pm	Mating the northerner with the Philippino maid
8	Have I Got News for You *** BBC ONE, 9pm	Comment by Toby Young about Obama as 'black enough'
9	Holby Blue * BBC ONE, 8pm	Rough sex scene
10	Katie and Peter; the next Chapter ** ITV2, 9pm	Simulation of oral sex
11	Katy Brand Show * ITV1 10.35pm	Katy plays Jesus's girlfriend, implying he is promiscuous
12	Kitchen Nightmares * Channel 4, 9pm	Gordon Ramsay swearing aggressively at a restaurant owner
13	The Wenner Tapes * Radio 4, 9am	John Lennon repeatedly swears in an archive interview
14	Mock The Week * BBC TWO, 9pm	Frankie Boyle tells us what the Queen wouldn't say on her birthday
15	Mock the Week *** BBC TWO, 10pm	Mockery. Jokes about sports personality's looks and what her boyfriend must see in her
16	4 Stands Up * Radio 4, 6.30pm	Rhod Gilbert explains how the family dog fathered his younger brother
17	Two Pints of Lager *** BBC TWO/THREE	Gaz and Janet have just had sex and refer to 'your cock in me'
18	Would I Lie To You? * BBC ONE, 9pm	Angus Deayton presents. Al Gore fxxking chickens

Appendix 3 : Samples and Recruitment

Family Depths				
	South	Midlands	North	Scotland
Singletons	Urban DE Non-BBC preferers		Suburban DE Non-BBC preferers	
Pre-family		Suburban BC1 Non-BBC preferers	Urban DE (ethnic) Non-BBC preferers	Rural BC1 BBC preferers
Young family (children under 11)	Urban BC1 (ethnic) Non-BBC preferers	Suburban BC1 BBC preferers	Rural BC1 BBC preferers	Urban DE Non-BBC preferers
Older family (children over 11)	Rural (Sophie) BC1 BBC preferers	Rural DE Non-BBC preferers	Suburban (ethnic) BC1 BBC preferers	Rural DE Non-BBC preferers
Post-family	Rural DE (with grandchildren) BBC preferers	Rural DE (with grandchildren) Non-BBC preferers	Rural DE Non-BBC preferers	Suburban BC1 BBC preferers

Ethnographic Social Hubs

Teachers' Staff room – Suburban Manchester B	Rural Pub Suffolk C2D	High St Solicitors London AB	Community Club Manchester DE
Teachers' Staff room – Urban Manchester B	Urban Pub London C2DE	Hairdressers Kent DE	Golf Club Kent C2D

School Sessions

Urban Battersea	Urban Chiswick	Suburban Manchester	Urban Manchester	Rural Suffolk
Year 6	Year 7	Year 9	Year 12	Year 12

Community Leader Depths

Rural Priest	Inner city Anglican	Muslim cleric	Inner City Youth worker
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Audience Labs					
South 30 Respondents	Midlands 30 Respondents	North 30 Respondents	Scotland 20 Respondents	N. Ireland 20 Respondents	Wales 20 Respondents
35-44yrs	18-24yrs BBC Three	25-34yrs BBC Three	18-24yrs	25-34yrs	45-54yrs
45-54yrs	25-34yrs	35-44yrs	35-44yrs BBC Four	45-54yrs Radio 7	55+yrs
55+yrs BBC Four	35-44yrs Radio 7	45-54yrs			

All labs 50/50 gender BC1C2

Overall number of respondents across all methodological units:

35 approx in depths

30 in school sessions

32 in social hubs

5 community depths

150 approx in labs

Lab Recruitment Screener

Screening

S1 Do you or any member of your household work in any of the following occupations?

Financial Services	1	Construction	8
IT	2	Manufacturing	9
Wholesale	3	Energy / Utilities	10
Media / Publishing	4	Television or TV programme making	[CLOSE]
Business Services	5	Market Research	[CLOSE]
Entertainment / Culture / Sport	6	Journalism	[CLOSE]
Broadcasting	[CLOSE]	None of the above	
Transport / Distribution	7	96[Always the last option]	

S2 Are you... ?[SC]

Male1
 Female.....2

S3 Please type in your age: _____

HidS3 Under 16.....[CLOSE]
 16 - 171.[CLOSE]
 18 - 242
 25 - 343
 35 - 444
 45 - 545
 55 - 646
 65 + 7

EXCLUDE ANYONE BELOW 18;

SQ4. What is your ethnic group?

White

Scottish
Welsh
Other British
Irish
Any other white background

Mixed

Any mixed background

Asian

Indian

Pakistani

Bangladeshi

Chinese

Other Asian background

Caribbean

African

Any other black background

Other ethnic background

S5 Which of these best describes the current occupation (or previous occupation if retired) of the chief income earner in your household? [SC]

Gender: 50/50 across all groups

SEG an equal spread of BC1C2

Ethnic Group: London, at least 5 should be from ethnic minorities; Leicester and Manchester at least 3; everywhere else 1

Q.1 Which of the following best describes you?

Life Stage

18 -24yrs & 25 - 34yrs

Living with flatmates

Living alone

Living with partner

25 - 34yrs & 35 – 44yrs

Living with partner and child / children under 10yrs

Living with child / children under 10

35 – 44yrs & 45 – 55yrs

Living with partner and child / children over 10yrs

Living with child / children over 10yrs

45 – 54yrs & 55yrs +

Living with partner / without partner, children left home

Please ensure even spread of colours over relevant age-breaks

Media Consumption

Q.2. Which TV platform do you have?

Sky Digital

Virgin Media

Freeview

Digital Other (Top up TV / BT Vision)

Analogue only (4/5 terrestrial channel)

Please try and recruit at least 2 analogue only respondents; at least 8 Freeview only; the rest as they fall.

Q.3. Out of the following, which are your favourite channels out of the following – you may choose **4 channels**, starting with most favourite?

	1st Favourite	2 nd Favourite	3 rd Favourite	4 th Favourite
BBC 1				
BBC 2				
ITV1				
C4				
Five				
BBC3				
BBC4				
ITV2				
ITV3				
ITV4				
E4				
More 4				
SKY 1				
Living				
Paramount				

For each lab, at least one third to choose a BBC channel as their favourite channel, and no more than a half of the sample. The rest must choose another terrestrial channel or digital channel, in roughly equal measures (No need for this half of the sample to code for BBC channels at all)

Q.4. Are there any terrestrial channels do not watch ever? Please write in.....

Close, if write in BBC

Q.5 Which of the following radio broadcasters do you mostly listen to nowadays

BBC radio stations (national or local)

Commercial radio

50/50 division between BBC and Commercial Radio

Q.6. Please rate the types of shows below

Really like Quite like Don't mind watching Don't like

Entertainment shows
(Quizzes / Game Shows /
'reality' / celebrity-based
shows)

Dramas

Lifestyle (Cooking /
Gardening / Cars / Fashion)

Comedy (My Family /Gavin
and Stacey etc)

Panel Shows (Have I got
News For You, QI, Mock the
Week etc)

Factual Shows (nature /
history / culture)

Documentaries

Please ensure a good spread of types of shows, with at least 2 in each age break coding at least 'quite like' for Panel Shows

Q.6 How often do you use the internet (for more than email)?

(A least) once a day Once a week Once a month Never

At least 50% to use the internet once week or more

Q.7 Which of the following social networking websites have you joined and been a member of for at least one month?

1. Facebook
2. Myspace
3. Bebo
4. Twitter
5. None of the above (write in)
6. I have never belonged to a social networking website

At least 50 % of all 18-44yrs to code at least one 1-4

Depth Screener

Screening

S1 Do you or any member of your household work in any of the following occupations?

Financial Services	1	Construction	8
IT	2	Manufacturing	9
Wholesale	3	Energy / Utilities	10
Media / Publishing	4	Television or TV programme making	[CLOSE]
Business Services		Market Research	
5		[CLOSE]	
Entertainment / Culture / Sport	6	Journalism	[CLOSE]
Broadcasting	[CLOSE]	None of the above	96
Transport / Distribution	7	[Always the last option]	

S2 Are you... ?[SC]

Male	1
Female	2

S3 Please type in your age: _____

HidS3 Under 16.....	[CLOSE]
16 – 17.....	1 [CLOSE]
18 – 24.....	2
25 – 34.....	3
35 – 44.....	4
45 – 54.....	5
55 – 64.....	6
65 +.....	7

EXCLUDE ANYONE BELOW 18;

SQ4. What is your ethnic group?

White

- Scottish
- Welsh
- Other British
- Irish
- Any other white background

Mixed

- Any mixed background

Asian

- Indian

- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Other Asian background

- Caribbean
- African
- Any other black background
- Other ethnic background

S5 Which of these best describes the current occupation (or previous occupation if retired) of the chief income earner in your household? [SC]

Q.1 Which of the following best describes you?

Life Stage

Singletons

Living with flatmates

Living alone

Prefamily

Living with partner

Young family

Living with partner and child / children under 10yrs

Living with child / children under 10

Older family

Living with partner and child / children over 10yrs

Living with child / children over 10yrs

Post family

Living with partner / without partner, children left home

Media Consumption

Q.2. Which TV platform do you have?

Sky Digital

Virgin Media

Freeview

Digital Other (Top up TV / BT Vision)

Analogue only (4/5 terrestrial channel)

Q.3. Out of the following, which are the favourite channels in your household out of the following – you may choose **4 channels**, starting with most favourite?

	1st Favourite	2 nd Favourite	3 rd Favourite	4 th Favourite
BBC 1				
BBC 2				
ITV1				
C4				
Five				
BBC3				
BBC4				
ITV2				
ITV3				
ITV4				
E4				
More 4				
SKY 1				
Living				
Paramount				

BBC prefers to code one BBC channel as their favourite channel,

Non-BBC preferers choose another terrestrial channel or digital channel, in roughly equal measures (No need for this half of the sample to code for BBC channels at all)

Q.4. Are there any terrestrial channels do not watch ever? Please write in.....

Close, if write in BBC

Q.5 Which of the following radio broadcasters do you mostly listen to nowadays

BBC radio stations (national or local)

Commercial radio

50/50 division between BBC and Commercial Radio

Q.6 How often do you / or your partner listen to the radio in your home?

At least an hour a day

At least 3 hours a week

About an hour a week close

Less than an hour a week close

Q.7 How often do you / your partner use the internet (not for email) a week?

At least an hour a day

At least 3 hours a week

About an hour a week

Less than an hour a week close

Q.8. Please rate the types of shows below

	Really like	Quite like	Don't mind watching	Don't like
Entertainment shows (Quizzes / Game Shows / 'reality' / celebrity-based shows)				
Dramas				
Lifestyle (Cooking / Gardening / Cars / Fashion)				
Comedy (My Family /Gavin and Stacey etc)				
Panel Shows (Have I got News For You, QI, Mock the Week etc)				
Factual Shows (nature / history / culture)				
Documentaries				

Please ensure a good spread of types of shows, with at least 2 in each age break coding at least 'quite like' for Panel Shows

Q.7 Which of the following social networking websites have you joined and been a member of for at least one month?

Facebook

Myspace

Bebo

Twitter

None of the above (write in)

I have never belonged to a social networking website

At least 50 % of all 18-44yrs to code at least one 1-4