



BBCiii Consultation

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Question 1: What do you think about the potential public value of our proposals for a BBC Three broadcast TV channel, including the extent to which our proposals contribute to the BBC's mission to serve all audiences through the provision of high quality and distinctive output and services which informs, educates and entertains?

The proposed broadcast channel has much merit, however, we argue that this is a simplistic approach for an audience segment that increasingly doesn't organise their media in such channels. In other words, the concept of a linear channel is becoming outmoded for most young people. Such a channel could work if it were organised as one element of a media ecosystem aggregated around branded programming (such as Ru Paul's Drag Race or EastEnders). We note that the first few hours of the proposed channel will be designed for younger viewers, and this is to be applauded.

As a network of scholars we are particularly focused on the 12-16 year age group. Our joint research and knowledge exchange is concerned with asking the research question: what public media and communication do young GenZ want public service media outlets to provide? We are from London South Bank University, Ryerson University (Toronto, Canada) and the Applied University of the Ruhr. In 2019 we collaborated with BBC R&D, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and ZDF, the German public service media to submit a proposal to answer this question and have continued to work together, as a network since then. To date we have completed an extended literature review, two bids for funding, and a series of seminars drawing together scholars and industry experts working in emerging forms of media and positive psychology. This is therefore ongoing 'work in progress'.

Our findings to date are that young people think in terms of 'media ecosystems', not single channels. They are oriented to story-worlds that are often situated across different media forms and consumed across different receiving devices. The point of locus is the story-world, its characters, and its purpose. Whilst we note and commend the stated rationale for serving lower socio-economic groups and those without digital access, we are therefore concerned that the move back to broadcast may exclude young people aged 12-16. This rationale appears to argue that the BBC needs to lead young audiences to legacy media in order to retain their interest, or spark it, for when they mature. This BBC proposal aims to provide pre-watershed content to this age group, selected from the offering designed for 16-34 year olds, and also promises to 'strengthen' the offering from BBC (designed for up to 12 year olds). 12-16 year olds, who

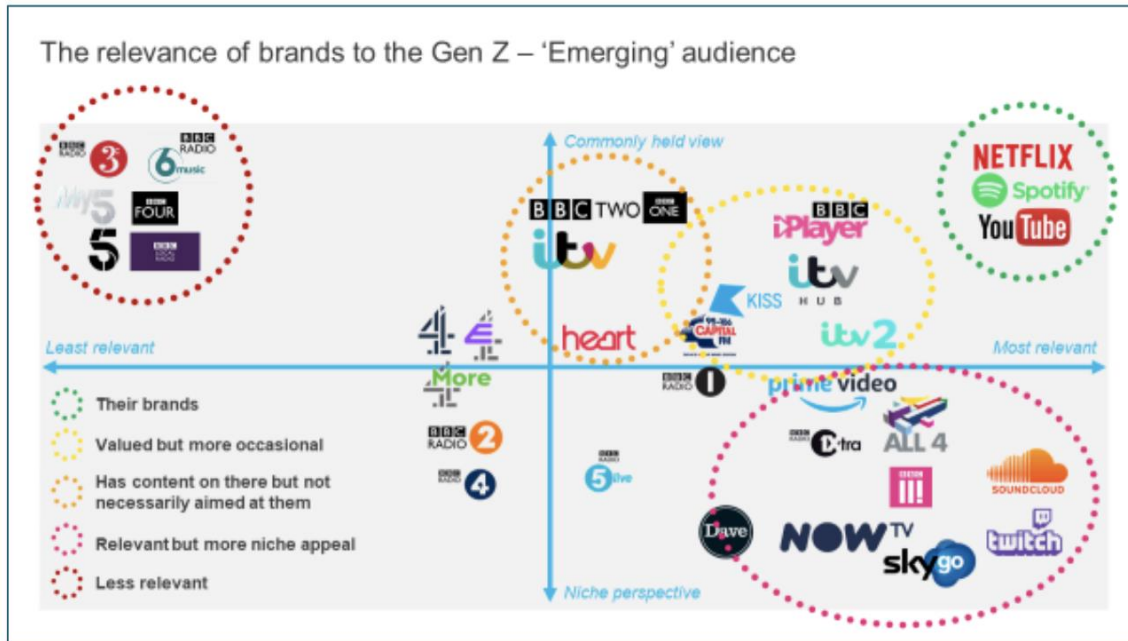


currently fall through the gaps of this proposal, have their own distinct interests, capabilities, orientations and anxieties, and need media that is specifically designed to address them.

This age group are conspicuously eager adopters of digital communication practices. Their world is saturated by streaming and social media, making this cohort a thoroughly 'POPC' generation (permanently online and permanently connected; Vorderer et al, 2017). According to researchers (Grassmuck, 2021) most commercial media is either providing or locating their offerings where young people go, and increasingly, these are interactive online media worlds. Members of Gen Z have extensive experience with interactive media: Exposure to the Internet, online social networks, streaming video services, and to ubiquitous communication "has produced a hypercognitive generation very comfortable with collecting and cross-referencing many sources of information and with integrating virtual and offline experiences" (Francis & Hoefl, 2018). Young people view the media as media worlds, not as channels. They are not excited by channels but by the branded offerings within those channels. Although there are significant market challenges acknowledged in the BBC's proposal, a 'paratextual approach' could be taken (ie video with social media, a quiz, an immersive experience, and an opportunity for the audience to leave something of themselves behind. This has been achieved with success by the German broadcasting company ZDF and its channel for youth provision, *Funk*, which provides cross-platform media content to young people aged 14-29.

In the OFCOM report, "An exploration of people's relationship with PSB, with a particular focus on young people"¹, participants aged 16-24 rated BBCiii's content as 'relevant but niche' in terms of brand interest. They also noted significant structural barriers to consumption, namely the confusing layout of the website (P37) and a lack of confidence in the content recommendation algorithms (P38), as well as an overall perception that the BBCiii content is not tailored to their interests.

¹ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0024/199104/exploration-of-peoples-relationship-with-psb.pdf



[“An exploration of people’s relationship with PSB, with a particular focus on young people”, OFCOM July 2020]

The use of machine learning/big data and its ability to segment audiences into groups by interest, age, geography, could solve this issue whilst retaining the online element of the BBCiii channel. Young people could be offered ‘residency’ editorial opportunities to host content and provide suitable segmentation categories. The 12-16 age group like to have a percentage of ownership over the content they consume, and be highly visible within media ecologies. Geographic segmentation is easily possible, however assessing the different socio-economic groups will need careful attention and - most likely - specialised input. The BBC already have a working model for this in ‘BBC Sesh’², which produces short-form online media for 18-34 year olds whilst developing creative talent from Wales. This would support OFCOM’s finding that “the majority (of participants) feel that the profile of the content aimed at them should be raised through a combination of marketing on social media and improved navigation and personalisation on the PSB on-demand services”.

Of course, online content is not a cost-saving strategy. The iterative, engaging, and immersive content that young people like, is expensive and requires new production structures, and also new partnerships with external specialists such as those working in games, eSports, immersive media, data technologies, and pan-media creatives. The BBC has a talented body of staff, but there will be a need to work with external suppliers, as has happened in the past. This would have high benefits to the independent/commercial sectors and continue the BBC’s long history of training and support for the UK and global media and communications sectors (Bennett et al, 2012). However, the current commissioning structure and partnership support is insufficient.

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p064gs10>



Question 2: What do you think about the benefit to audiences who will watch the channel, as well as wider potential social and cultural impacts?

The proposed channel could, if organised as part of a wider, coherent, offering *clustered around branded programming* that already has a following (Stacey Dooley, Normal People etc) work for GenZ. It is already a BBC convention to insert storylines and content into well-known brands that promote eudaimonic media and communications (media for wellness, or media in the public good). The Archers and EastEnders have used plot-lines to educate, inform, and entertain about paedophilia, drug use, bullying and so on.

What could this look like in practice? Following the success of *Normal People*, there are a number of texts that could be adapted for young audiences (12-16) that could also be attractive to 16-24 year olds. Examples of these include Young Adult fiction texts by British authors that enjoy a wide audience and feature a strong local identity, or address complex themes:

- *The Henna Wars by Abida Jaijirdar* - a coming-out tale where the main character is a young Bengali-Irish girl.
- *City of Ghosts by Victoria Schwab* - a ghost-tale set in Scotland with high potential for transmedia elements
- *The Spinster Club Series by Holly Bourne* - A poignant look at feminism, OCD and friendship for young women.

There is high potential in supporting the development of young people through this proposed channel - and this is particularly true in a post-pandemic social-economic climate - in the following areas:

- The formation of identity
- Increasing agency (ability to make a difference in the world).
- Media literacy (ability to spot fake news, for example)
- Understanding of support available to them from - perhaps - a wider range of not-for-profit organisations than other media outlets would be able to offer.
- Explorations of their own, ever-changing, cultures and cultural perspectives that appeal to young people.
- Entrepreneurialism.
- Concern for the planet, democracy. These are issues that concern young people (European Broadcasting Union, 2020).

What might the measures of success be in terms of attracting hard to reach or 'at risk' audiences? Typical measures for social media managers are, of course, attraction > conversion > retention > engagement. These could be measured via the suggested 'Public Service Algorithm' (if you like this, you'll like that). They could also be measured through a registration system which would require rewards for signing up and additional rewards at every completed action (submitting a comment, video, text, recommendation). The suggested pan-platform aggregation of content around brands delivered across a range of different devices would extend the reach to teens who have no internet (content on TV being the solution), or to a teen that only has access to a mobile



phone (content via the iPlayer being the solution). This pan-platform approach could possibly be facilitated through the construction of the new channel using 'Interoperable Mastering Format'³. This production format enables a recombinatory approach to content from different files into a version for the iPlayer, a mobile phone, playout for the small screen (an iPad or gaming device). The BBC, alongside other broadcasters have been investigating IMF, and adopted early on by Netflix. We believe the reach of Netflix has been partly enabled by IMF for Netflix, obviously alongside its investment in algorithmic structures.

There is possibly no greater moment in time that this age group has needed support to reach their potential. They are the 'lost' generation who have lived constrained, locked-down, lives without proper access to social and educational systems from March 2020 to date. The effects on their development have yet to be accessed, however the early indications are that a significant proportion of GenZ are suffering what may be potentially long-term psychological trauma. Certainly, they have not received the educational and cultural stimuli that previous generations were able to access despite incredible efforts from the BBC to provide at-home educational content.

The 14-16 year olds are the critical group to reach as this is when young people are forming their identities and likes/dislikes. Their development is intrinsically linked to puberty and their physical, mental, and technological progress and explorations. The age of puberty is, inevitably, different for each young person, which accentuates the problematic nature of catering for this audience group. Valkenberg and Piotrowski (2017) offer useful insights, "Puberty, the period between the ages of eleven and sixteen, is characterised by intense physical changes that, in turn, affect adolescents' emotions and cognition" (p. 79). They go on to describe how these physical and hormonal changes cause questioning of "all manner of authority, including their schools, teachers, and, especially, parents" (p.81). The recipe for keeping the attention of young GenZ is to keep things fast, compact, and true to life. They enjoy irony, wit, and sarcasm. Storylines (or story *worlds and ecologies*) should reflect their cultural and social backgrounds and be plausible. Psychologically complex characters are attractive. Vampires, sports, and horror are media worlds that would be compelling. All this indicates that a closer (ongoing?) reading of this age group, or rather *maturation stage*, is essential. Once engaged, young GenZ will transmit to others that an exciting site of experience has been located. For more on this very specific age group we recommend: Valkenburg and Pietrowski (2017), *Plugged In: How Media Attract and Affect Youth*, and a report from the European Broadcasting Union, *EBU Youth: What Works?* (2020).

It is our concern that the return of BBCiii to a broadcast channel will not benefit 12-16 year olds, despite them being a critical group to reach. The proposal does not mention specific commissioning for this age group, and the digital orientations and preferences of this age group are also not addressed.

³ <https://tech.ebu.ch/imf>



Question 3: What impact (positive or negative) do you think our proposals for a BBC Three broadcast TV channel might have on fair and effective competition?

A 2012 study by James Bennett et al. asked whether BBC activity had a positive or negative effect on the commercial or independent sectors in the UK. The findings very conclusively showed that innovation by the BBC, alongside collaborations/partnerships/and the naturally-occurring exchanges of staff between the BBC and independent companies of all kinds had an overall beneficial effect for the media industry. More recently, Glowacki and Jackson (2020) found collaborations and partnerships between public service media and high technology firms such as those found in 10 high technology clusters in North America and Europe, to be highly beneficial for the clusters as a whole. Glowacki and Jackson found, however, that there were barriers to collaboration between the public service firms and SMEs (small to medium-sized businesses) relating to a lack of ongoing support frameworks (creative, organisational, financial, legal). SMEs were universally found to be the site of most innovation within the clusters, hence the importance of developing such frameworks. SMEs were also most likely to have the necessary skills required to make the kinds of content and media worlds that might appeal to young GenZ.

Question 4: Are there any steps you think we could take to minimise any potential negative effects on fair and effective competition or to promote potential positive impacts?

Noting that the proposed channel needs to come out of 'within existing distribution capacity' (P:15) we believe the strategy should be to work in close partnership with the competition and also to promote new and innovative independent companies through partnership working. Larger scale investment in co-working and collaboration frameworks than currently exist will be required (see the findings from Glowacki and Jackson, 2020⁴). This is likely to include dedicated staff who are experienced in the creation of neutral spaces where the cultural transfer of production norms between different disciplines can take place. In addition, there would need to be contractual arrangements that go beyond the commissioning model where a supplier is engaged to produce work to BBC Channel and Editorial/Technical guidelines. Reaching this demographic - working in partnership with innovative media and communications outlets - will require:

1. New collaboration structures between the BBC and content providers specialising in content for young people.
2. Access to adult advisors on positive psychology who specialise in GenZ as a unique audience segment or set of segments.
3. The creative involvement of GenZ (concepting, continuous feedback loops, advising).
4. Flexible budgetary and legal arrangements to suit iterative content that may require longer-term investment.

⁴ <https://www.creativemediacusters.com/findings>



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5. Potential sharing of cost or benefit systems to minimise the cost for the BBC and enable IP to be exploited elsewhere for commercial outlets, perhaps by the 're-skinning of content'. There are precedents for this historically within the BBC.
6. Investment in 'public-service' recommendation algorithmic structures (if you liked this, you may like that).

Investment in this audience future-proofs the continued relevance and cultural impact of the BBC with a growing future audience with novel media consumption habits.