

Netflix and be chilled?

The on-demand service is highly addictive but also keeps a close eye on its audience



Netflix hit The Crown stars Claire Foy and Matt Smith (Image: Getty Images Europe)

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The phrase “Netflix and chill” has (in its most literal sense) become common parlance over the past few years - perhaps indicating just how quickly this facility for watching television programmes and films via an internet connection has taken hold.

When it began two decades ago, [Netflix](#) was a conventional video library service which would send DVDs directly to customers' homes.

Now, for [a starting fee of £5.99 a month](#) in the UK, viewers pay for access to a vast collection of titles including original content such as the ground-breaking dramas House of Cards and The Crown.

The beauty of the service is very simple: it allows the audience to watch content wherever and whenever it wants, crucially free from the intrusions of advertising.

It can also be a highly addictive process. Whole series are available to watch in one go (perfect for the instant gratification generation?), which means that as soon you have finished watching one episode of your favourite show you can watch the next.

Subscribers will be aware that Netflix actively encourages users to want more and more, as a countdown timer to the intriguing next episode is placed at the bottom of the screen just as the present one is finishing.

Hence the phrase [“binge watching”](#) which is, believe me, becoming just as much of an issue in student culture as binge drinking. In recent times, latecomers to my 9.00am seminars are dishevelled and distracted, not because of last night’s shots but because they’ve been up until the early hours ingesting Stranger Things.

And of course, Netflix is watching, recording and adapting to what everything audience is watching.

This has come as a surprise to some people - despite the company’s [privacy policy](#) being pretty transparent about its collection of information on the use of their websites and applications. It’s also upfront about allowing advertising companies access to that data.

I’ve [written elsewhere](#) about this being common practice. The fact is, as HV Jagadish, professor of engineering and computer science notes, all our networked devices have the ability to spy on our every move and communicate in ways which we may not want them to.

MORE: [You think your gadgets serve you - but they may be serving others](#)

But when this is made clear to us, we just don’t like it.

Just this week, Netflix US posted a tweet which read:

To which academic and science writer, Ben Goldacre responded:

Though it’s clear that Netflix’s tweet was intended to amuse rather than offend it does highlight what information can be mined and how specific it can be.

As my colleague and co-director of Cardiff University's Data Justice Lab Joanna Redden [has written](#): people are being negatively affected by the uses of “big data’ whether it’s through discrimination (where “algorithmically driven systems offer, deny or mediate access to services or opportunities to people differently”) or data breaches where identity theft, blackmail, and reputational damage can occur.

Meanwhile, Netflix goes from to strength to strength as the shift from viewing television content traditionally to on-demand continues apace.

[The Guardian](#) reported in July that the company was valued at \$78bn (£60bn), making it worth “almost nine times as much as the UK’s ITV and 1.5 times bigger than Rupert Murdoch’s 21st Century Fox.”

According to its [own promotion](#), it’s now the world’s leading internet entertainment service, with nearly 110 million members in over 190 countries – all enjoying more than 140 million hours of TV shows and movies per day.

With these figures and such growth, perhaps it should be “Netflix and be chilled”.

The Daily Mail versus the BBC – an eternal battle

On Sunday, the [MailOnline reported](#) that over the Christmas period last year the BBC “racked up” nearly £13,000 on taxis for workers in just three days.

James Price, from the TaxPayers’ Alliance, was quoted as saying: “Transport is difficult on Christmas Day, and no-one relishes working it, but these high costs are indicative of the BBC’s attitude towards spending.”

Well, fair enough. But perhaps the BBC’s Home Affairs Correspondent Daniel Sandford had it right when he responded that workers who have to get to work when there is no public transport (eg Christmas Day) sometimes use minicabs (NOT London taxis.)

In his view, this was an idiotic, daft story from increasingly daft newspaper.

This being the Mail, the bigger story was actually alleging BBC profligacy and the corporation’s misuse of licence fee payer’s money.

The report also took the opportunity to mention how much stars such as Gary Lineker were paid. Lineker, by the way, is [frequently in the Mail’s crosshairs](#), partly as a result of his anti-Brexit views and what the paper sees as his left-wing take on global politics.

But it was ever thus. A [2014 editorial](#) in the Daily Mail said: “The enormous, unanswerable power of the BBC in modern Britain is comparable to that wielded by the trades unions 40 years ago. It is far too great and ought to be diminished.”

Which rather neatly encapsulates the Mail’s historical attitude toward the corporation and we should be aware of the steady drip of anti-BBC reports which appear both in its newspapers and online.

As a public institution, the BBC is an anathema to the Daily Mail.

It stands for everything about modern society that the newspaper disapproves of. It enjoys the benefits of a fixed-tax system which, the Mail believes, allows it to fritter away public money on minority interests and inflated staff salaries.

The Mail also believes, as Margaret Thatcher did, that at journalistic and management level, the corporation is inhabited by individuals dedicated to left-wing politics, multiculturalism and the dismantling of traditional values.

In completely unrelated news, it was also revealed this week that Daily Mail [editor Paul Dacre](#) received a pay package worth £2.4m this year, which is an increase of £1.5m from the year before.

*** Sections of this article have appeared on www.theconversation.com**

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