Listener online engagement with BBC Radio programming

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Foreword

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This report has come out of a year-long collaborative project between the BBC and three universities - Birmingham City University, Cardiff University and London Metropolitan University. The project was jointly funded by the BBC and the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in an initiative aiming to enable collaborative arts and humanities research between the BBC and universities in the UK. Overall this is a study of the online behaviours and cultures of listeners and fans of BBC radio but it consists of four distinct yet connected case studies; interactivity on the BBC Radio messageboards, the off-bbc.co.uk activity of fans of Terry Wogan, online fan cultures around the Archers and, finally, how the BBC serves specialist music fans and the relationship between online and broadcast media.

But first, some background. At the beginning of 2007 the BBC's Innovation Culture team sent out a Call

participation. It also identifies a number of common themes which also occur in the other studies. By studying the messageboards of BBC Radio 1 and Radio 2 and by surveying the participants the study finds a number of common deficiencies in the BBC messageboards, and suggests both technical features and editorial behaviours that would be greatly appreciated, and even expected, by the regular users.

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"TOGs - 'This Ordinary Group' - Official and Unofficial Listener Activities around Wake Up to Wogan"

This study looks at the online behaviours of fans of "Wake Up To Wogan", the flagship breakfast programme presented by Sir Terry Wogan for BBC Radio 2, that is noted for it's irreverence and strong fan loyalty. The research primarily focuses on interactions on the non-BBC fansite togs.org ("Terry's Old Gals/Geezers"). Matt Hills is a renowned academic in the fan studies field and has found several archetypal fan behaviours here; mirroring (where fans take on personas that reflect the object of their fanship), brand performance, anti-celebrity content and even self-archiving fans. The report suggests a number of directions the BBC could take to facilitate these fan behaviours and support the Wake Up To Wogan brand.

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"Online Fan Cultures around The Archers"

Contrasting Interactivities: BBC Radio Message Boards as an Extension of and Break from Radio's History of Listener

the narcissistic havens of squabble or sex solicitation often invoked by mention of chat and online messaging.

An accessible, usable space in which citizens can discuss contemporary topics is important not only within the political realm, but also for fan culture. The relationship between radio and community is longstanding – Douglas writes of early radio's 'pivotal role' in aiding our connections to other citizens and in constructing 'imagined communities' (2004) – but the internet has introduced new possibilities for nurturing this relationship. The other sections of this report explore fan activity and culture as it relates to radio and online interactive media. Here, I simply want to emphasise the degree to which entertainment is often overlooked in discussions of public spheres and mediated communities.

listener noted Alyn Shipton as a regular participant on Radio 3 boards, and hoped for similar active

also suggested that message boards are not considered public in the same way as other forms of contact,

context. The current system is an insult to the licence fee payer. I would like additional, more attentive hosts – or the use of volunteer elves. (I would volunteer to help, for example)' (R2; Male, 52, Yorkshire). It is clear from such responses that users are not opposed to the existence of House Rules, but recognise the need to evaluate the nuances of individual cases against the criteria. They also recognise the stress such close attention would place on the current moderators, and noted that it could be partly relieved by a volunteer system. The involvement of users would also address a related request for 'More, and more informed, moderators' (R2; Female, 44, Sussex).

As hinted at by the suggestion of user-moderators, easily the most common gripe among BBC Radio message board users is the role and behaviours of the moderators. In fact, critiquing the degree of moderation is practically a message board law, regardless of the management details. Yet, with the BBC Radio message boards, such complaints stand out as shared among many users; although the survey did not prompt informants to comment specifically on moderation, 33 (43.4%) informants provided critiques of moderators and the moderation process in their responses. That moderation emerged so consistently as an area in need of improvement suggests a justification for the critiques, at least insofar as tensions between users and moderators ultimately serve no one. Responses indicate a need for moderation of the moderators if the boards are to serve the community's wishes.

Users from both boards expressed frustration with the moderators, with users of the Radio 2 boards particularly acerbic in their conceptualisations of the moderators as controlling, severe and patronising.

and noted, 'On the Surgery I have the chance to discuss any problems that I have in an anonymous environment where I will get honest opinions from others. Also to help other people with their problems and to share experiences' (R1; Male, Cambridge). As the 'off-topic' rule controls the scope of discussion, so, too, it limits the possibilities of interaction.

Users were further concerned by what was viewed as a low-threshold for potentially sensitive content.

Ultimately, in order for BBC Radio to best serve its listeners' requirements in terms of message board provision, it needs to first decide what its purpose is and how it understands and communicates its own interactivity – whether it aims to encourage interaction between users or between user and BBC. Features and tools can then be modified to better reflect those goals.

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Appendix

This survey includes ten open-ended questions about your use of the BBC Radio X Message Board and other ways in which you have interacted with the BBC. You may answer only those that are relevant to you, and you may write as little or as much as you wish. Your thorough and thoughtful responses can help shape the future of BBC interactive media. Thank you for your participation. Contact music.fans.research@bbc.co.uk with questions or comments.

1. Why do you choose to use the BBC Radio X Message Board?

2. Could you describe the types of topics that you read and post about on the BBC Radio X Message Board?

3. What experience have you had on the BBC Radio X Message Board involving the participation of BBC employees or DJs?

4. What sort of changes or improvements would you like to see made to the BBC Radio X Message Board?

5. Individual BBC radio programmes often include forms for requests or comments on their websites. Could you describe your use of and experience with such online forms?

TOGs - 'This Ordinary Group' - Official and Unofficial Listener Activities around Wake Up to Wogan

Matt Hills and Amy Luther, Cardiff University

Background and Method

As part of the AHRC/BBC research project tackling BBC Radio and online listener engagement, we were interested in studying in fan communities surrounding celebrity DJs. Matt's previous work has focused on media fandom more generally, e.g. in the book *Fan Cultures* (Hills 2002). Initially we set out to examine two off-BBC fan sites: togs.org and chrismoyles.net. We analysed most-popular and most-viewed threads at specific snapshot moments and asked for participants to get in touch for over-the-phone interviews. Matt was interested in getting detailed qualitative feedback rather than survey data, so semi-structured interviewing was used. Here, the interviewer can ask for follow-up information rather than just rattling through a set list of questions.

Our target was 10 interviews per site; a small number, but one we hoped would be able to generate a range of indicative responses (this number was also a product of the level of funding allocated to this project component, given that carrying out one-to-one qualitative interviews can be time and labour-intensive). Validity rather than generalisability was the watchword.

Ultimately, research on chrismoyles.net did not generate a sufficient number of interviews, despite very helpful support from the site-owner. Participants were suspicious of us as resear(m) 6 (e ( ) -3fd7(wer 1 ((d) 1tesea) 4 (r) -

Analysis of the togs site: Mirroring WUTW

TOGs, or "Terry's Old Gals/Geezers" represent a socially-organised, self-defined audience group. As

regulations here, other than that you shouldn't take any of this too seriously – a bit like listening to Wake Up to Wogan, really" (www.togs.org/index.html). Fan-text mirroring underpins togs.org to this extent; its asymptotic relation to 'seriousness', its performative emphasis on word-play, and its flights of surrealist, tangential humour all reflect attributes of the WUTW text, and STW's celebrity persona.

Being a TOG means playfully mirroring the value-systems of these brands, while steadfastly refusing to discuss them. In this manner, TOGs can evade any implication of media dependency, i.e., that their performed identities are derivative of Wogan/WUTW. Rather, they can self-represent as highly autonomous media consumers. *Nonetheless, they perform the brand rather than interpreting it.* This process would more than likely be of no value to a nakedly commercial broadcaster, who would require far more obvious and direct articulations to their content, capable of being instrumentally leveraged. From within a commercial logic, the TOGs move under the radar of branding or conventional brand extension. But their assimilation of brand values may be highly important to the BBC as a public service broadcaster, looking to engage distinctively with online audiences, as we will go on to argue.

Despite descriptions of the diversity of TOGs, there remains a loose communal identity, within which a 'Recommendations' board makes sense: "Something or somewhere that other TOGs may like" (http://togs.proboards53.com/index.c.cgi?). This contains threads on 'Thought-provoking reading', music, e.g. 'Covers as good as/better than the original', and the BBC TV shows *Strictly Come Dancing*, *Torchwood* and *Planet Earth*. At the time of our snap-shot, no non-BBC TV shows were contained on the first page of threads, and no radio programmes were being actively recommended and discussed.

There are patterns of taste recurrently performed, both in the 'Recommendations' board and in the 'Book Club'. TOGs frequently display a taste pattern which combines "cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1984; educationally-valid knowledge, 'the classics') with specific fractions of "subcultural capital" (Thornton 1995; i.e. forms of knowledge not widely recognised as educationally-valid). This produces 'classic/fantasy' reading lists in the 'Thought-provoking reading' thread. Though they may seem counter-intuitive genre combinations, these reading tastes nevertheless articulate TOG identity:

> *These 2 I read once a year: The Road to Wigan Pier – George Orwell; A Christmas Carol – Charles Dickens (I don't read any fiction, except Dickens and Douglas Adams) (Online 5)*

conjunctions of Eliot and Milligan, Dickens and Pratchett, or Conrad and Adams. Tim Wall (2003:119) has rightly noted that "radio... is part of a wider popular music system", and though there are musical debates within togs.org, the conflation of 'canonical' classic literature with fantasy is a far more prevalent performance of TOG identity. In this instance, radio becomes part of a literary system. And there is a further symbolic mirroring of STW and WUTW evident here: Terry Wogan's radio persona can also be interpreted as carrying specific cultural capital (see Taylor 2003:83). The "discursive world" of WUTW (Scannell 1996:133) displays a pleasure in the materiality of words, in the cadences and rhythms of stylized language. WUTW involves "cultural capital" expressed through badinage. TOGs mirror this middle-class emphasis on the word, via a logic of cultural consumption which takes in literatures of neologism and wordplay (sf/fantasy) as well as classic literature's poetic, expressive status.

Having presented this summary analysis of togs.org, stressing the manner in which TOGs symbolically "fold together" their appreciation of WUTW and online identity performance (Bailey 2005; Sandvoss 2005), we will now move on to assess how interviewees made sense of WUTW's online content. Though our primary aim was to generate data and findings for BBC Future Media and Technology, the small-scale qualitative study undertaken also necessarily raises larger issues of BBC policy and distinctiveness.

Interview Themes: 'Missed Opportunities' in a BBC symbolic universe?

As might be expected of participants in an online community, our interviewees took the internet very seriously as part of their media consumption. Only the audience-created persona, Chuffer Dandridge, playfully questioned whether WUTW should have a greater online presence. This response can be interpreted as a deliberate and self-conscious performance of fogeydom:

Another TOG possessing a high level of techno-cultural capital described WUTW's on-BBC online

Great British Menu or *Waking the Dead*, both discussed in WUTW during the course of our study, then online brand extension could organically mirror and take into account these intertextual links, emerging in WUTW as a result of production decisions and audience interest.

But to summarise, the key themes emerging in our interviews were:

! "TOGs control" (off-BBC) versus "BBC authority" (on-BBC);

! some listeners' lower techno-cultural capital versus others' high levels of online expertise, but

On this basis, content for the established audience could be developed, along the lines put forward by Interviewee 9, who argued for a far greater integration between text and online content. Emails received by WUTW could be used as an online resource, displayed via a well-designed graphical interface, organised by date or by topic, and searchable by listeners. An "archive" of listener-generated content would supplement the radio show by mirroring its values; enabling listeners to "show off" that their submissions were used (i.e the "TOGS stats" that we were told about), or to search for content which was

Our suggestion, fitting with recommendation 1 above, is to more closely integrate the online brand

perceive and encourage the ways in which listeners symbolically integrate their appreciation of shows (like WUTW) into online performances of identity. We would argue that this type of audience activity is by no means restricted to our case study (see also Thomas on The Archers, this project), as current 'fan studies' in the academy suggests. It would repay further BBC attention, especially by Future Media and Technology and Audio and Music.

Finally, we would like to conclude by thanking all those who took the time to participate in our research. We would also specifically like to thank the site owners of togs.org and chrismoyles.net for their support.

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Online fan cultures around The Archers

Lyn Thomas, London Metropolitan University, with Maria Lambrianidou,

Introduction

The aim of this research is to explore the nature and social composition of online fan cultures around *The Archers*. We hope to show how listeners engage with the programme online both on BBC and independent sites, and how this activity adds to their enjoyment of the programme. We have used two

Who are the online fans?

Our sample consists of people recruited mainly through the BBC Archers website, but also 10 people were recruited via the Addicts website and 7 through the Facebook 'Archers Appreciation' group. We conducted 18 telephone interviews[4] and received 108 completed questionnaires (with open-ended questions regarding the programme, the websites and listeners' online engagement with *The Archers*). Our sample is 76% women, mainly white British (81%) and UK residents (78%). While the largest number of respondents was in the 50-59 age range (34%), a significant 28% were between 40 and 49, and therefore younger than the average listener age in the RAJAR survey of the Archers audience (56). Most of them own their houses/apartments (80%), live in cities (37%), villages (24%) or towns (18%), with either their family or partner (36% and 37 respectively). It is interesting to mention at this point that 17% are British people living abroad, who only have the opportunity to listen to the programme online. For them listening to *The Archers* is often a means of keeping in touch with British cultural life, and it is significant that almost 20% (a further 2% live in Ireland) of our sample live abroad. The BBC Archers website is clearly crucial for this group. Our sample is very highly educated: 74% have been through higher education and a 13% have a PhD. Finally, according to the National Occupational Standards Classification most of them exercise Professional Occupations and Associate Professional and Technical Occupations (33% and 32% respectively), followed by 14% in Administrative and Secretarial Occupations.

According to RAJAR statistics on the total Archers audience (this includes both the daily listeners and the Sunday Omnibus ones), the audience is predominantly female (58%), having an average age of 56, where 10% are between 15 and 34, 33% between 35 and 54 and 58% over 55. We recruited 18% more women than the broader audience and slightly younger age groups: 45% of our sample is under 50, as opposed to 43% under 55 in the RAJAR sample. This is an indicator that there are more women and a very slightly younger age range in the online 'fan' audience of the programme, though it should also be noted that women are more likely than men to express publicly an interest in soap opera, and therefore to participate in qualitative research such as this (Hargrave and Gatfield, 2002). The RAJAR statistics indicate that 73% of the Archers audience are ABC1 in terms of social class; we do not have the breakdown within the RAJAR figure, but it seems likely that at 65% in professional and associate professional occupations, our sample is even more weighted to social classes A and B. This, along with the very high educational levels can probably be attributed to a recruitment based on web use – given the social stratification of IT skills and computer ownership in the general population.

Clearly women are overrepresented in both the Archers general audience and our sample as the UK population (based on the 2001 census) has an almost even split on gender. In terms of age, 15.7% of the overall population of UK is aged over 65 which is very close to the 18% of our sample aged over 60. Thus, Archers fans of these generations are part of a generally ageing population, which the BBC could be said to be serving in terms of age and gender, through this provision. Finally, in terms of ethnicity our sampling was relatively representative of the overall UK population insofar as it is mainly white British. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that ethnic diversity in our sample consists mainly of non-British white groups (12% of total sample). Only 4% belong to Asian or mixed race ethnicities, and there are no respondents of African or African-Caribbean origin. Online fan cultures around *The Archers* thus remain white spaces, despite efforts to represent multicultural Britain in the programme.

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[4] 18 respondents were recruited for interviews: 13 through the BBC site, 2 through the Addicts site and 3 from the Facebook group. A further 3 respondents interviewed had participated in Thomas's earlier research on *Archers* fans: two of these do not post and one posts mainly on the Addicts board: they are occasionally quoted but as their interviews followed a different pattern, are not included in statistics.

Our conclusion is that the online 'fan' audience of the programme is predominantly white British women between 40 and 59, middle-class and highly educated. Furthermore, although these tendencies also characterise the broad *Archers* audience, they are more marked here, particularly in terms of gender and level of education, than in the broader audience who may listen more casually and may not go online in relation to the programme. There seem to be significant differences between the profile of fans of *The Archers* (and still more so our sample of online fans) and those of television soaps, with the predominance of women in the fan audience as the common point. Hargrave and Gatfield found that respondents they defined as 'fanatics' in terms of soap opera viewing were mainly women, tabloid readers, younger and of lower social class while those dismissive of TV soaps were mainly men, in classes AB and readers of broadsheets (Hargrave and Gatfield, 2002). It seems that *The Archers* distinguishes itself from its TV equivalents by providing 'soap' for the educated middle classes. As previous research, and the comments of many of our interviewees indicate, *The Archers* is perceived as a high quality soap opera (Thomas 2002). This 'quality' attribution derives not only from the programme's production values, but also from the higher cultural status of Radio 4 and from the fact that the programme has some information values (and a history of association with information), and from the longevity of the programme generally: *The Archers* has become, for many, a national monument.

Online Fans' Responses to the Programme

As previous research on The Archers suggests (Thomas 2002), an extraordinary feature of The *Archers* is not only the programme's longevity, but also the fidelity of its audience over decades. Although interestingly the largest number of respondents (27%) started listening in the 1980s, over half (53%) started listening in the 50s, 60s or 70s. Given that 45% of our sample are under 50 (and therefore under the average age of the broader audience) this implies that many started listening as children. Many respondents commented on this:

> *'I cannot remember not listening to the Archers as my parents were also fans. I began tuning in deliberately myself when I was about 11 in 1992.' (F, 20-29, Project Development Officer, Q[5])*

> *'Alright. When I was in school we used to listen to Dick Barton. Dick Barton, special*

programme an added depth and resonance. Some respondents comment directly on how the programme is

'It is the only 'soap' that I follow. It is enjoyable to have good storylines with realistic time scales, some episodes where not much happens, just like real life, humour, great characters, and the chance to use my imagination thinking about what the characters look like, and where they live etc'. (F, 40-49, Self Employed Classical Musician, Q)

'It's very comforting and they cover the storylines very well and the characters are very

Again, the fact that the majority of our sample are in professional occupations means that they do not always have the time to listen to the programme daily, so that features such as listen again and the synopsis are very important. The latter is particularly useful as away of catching up quickly and of getting new perspectives on the programme:

> *'The thing I use the most is the synopsis of the daily episode because I can never listen in real time, so what I will do every morning as a ritual is check my emails and have a look at the synopsis cause I don't ever listen in real time on my computer. I will pick episodes according to what I like the sound of it from the synopsis or if I'm doing the ironing on a Sunday I'll listen to a whole week's worth of episodes or the Omnibus edition.' (F, 50-59, Librarian in an International School, I)*

> *'It gives me background and allows me to listen again if I miss anything. It isn't the site, but I also receive emails whic*

'It's just a really good website, it's a good messageboard; I mean going back to the website, the articles that they put on, things like anaerobic digestion that was very interesting, the messageboard will always have useful information about anything, good comments about TA, enjoyable, fun writing from people and it's just a great place to be and well done BBC for providing such an excellent service' (M, under 19, student, I).

Responses to the BBC Messageboards

33% of our respondents use the messageboards, either just to read them (12%) or post and read (21%). When asked what they liked or disliked about th

of the writing is really really good, on a lot of online messageboards there is rubbishy writing and people who cannot spell but on TA messageboard quite a lot of the commentary is very witty and well written and precise and I enjoy that, it is entertaining reading material.' (M, 30-39, University Lecturer, I)

It is clear that the quality of English and of the discussion on the boards are important to this 'lurker' and to many others, and that if *The Archers*

in each case, and will generate a particular habitus[7] (Bourdieu 1984). Again, inevitably, feelings of unease will result from visiting an unfamiliar habitus and in this sense the fan cultures analysed here reflect and participate in the hierarchies and inequalities endemic in contemporary British society.

It would, however, be wrong to characterise the BBC boards as functioning solely as fora for intellectual debate and argument. The non-Archers boards (The Village Hall and The Bull) also seemed to be of great interest to many people. The sense of community discussed earlier creates a supportive environment which people can bring their problems to:

> *'No, dreadful things that have happened to people tends to be the Village Hall which I avoid. And the Village Hall is full of people having a good moan and I've read some of that*

almost 4 days – as opposed to the 20 posts in one hour rate observed on the BBC site. Our conclusion from this mapping exercise is that the BBC site is the most active online, Archers fan venue, but that the programme has generated several smaller, less active groups, who zealously affirm their difference from other Archers sites / boards, and particularly from the BBC site.

In terms of social networking sites we found significant discussion of *The Archers* in two places: Mumsnet and Facebook. On Mumsnet [13] we found discussion mainly under the 'Culture Vultures' and 'Telly addicts' headings. A thread under 'Telly addicts' – 'Admit it…someone else must listen to The Archers!!!' had 62 messages by 30 posters. We can conclude that on Mumsnet this is a minority interest, but the presence of *The Archers* on this site is nonetheless an instance of a fan culture around the programme in a broader cultural context than its own fan sites and the BBC Archers site. It is also indicative of the programme's popularity among women.

Discussion of *The Archers* on Facebook strongly reinforces the point that diverse fan cultures around *The Archers* exist online and are not confined to specific fan sites. The numbers involved here, and degree of involvement, are far more significant than Mumsnet. Facebook has an Archers Appreciation group with 5 officers and over 2000 members[14], having attracted almost 800 members (and 3 officers) since our first mapping of the sites in February 2008.[15] Facebook also hosts three smaller, less active groups: 'I listen to the Archers and I love it!' which has 83 members, 'Petition To Make "The Archer's" Theme Tune The National Anthem Of England' whose 41 members only discuss this topic, and a spin off from the BBC site – a facebook 'Mustardland' where group members are encouraged to use their BBC screen names. Here there are 57 members, 30 wall posts and one discussion thread, alongside an announcement for the BBC Archers messageboard 'Mustardland' meet at Tate Modern, London in January 2008. This Facebook sub-group clearly does not replace the BBC messageboards but allows participants in the latter to exchange profiles and photographs and and thus connect in other ways. The Facebook site connects to the Mustardland theme (mustard is the background colour of the BBC site) by displaying photographs of Mustardland meet badges, packets of Colmans mustard and so on…

Having surveyed these sites, we selected four for detailed analysis on the grounds that they are the most

paintings' (Post 82, F., 9.08.07, Captain, Adam's Angels thread). Some screen names refer to the programme, as is the case here – 'Captain' was the name of a long lamented dog belonging to one of the characters, Jack Woolley. Screen names of this kind often refer to Ambridge pets or to silent, minor or

Interestingly, the agas and shaggy dogs seem to be borrowed from the fictional world of the programme,

whom the ability to be critical is both a sign of this status and a deeply ingrained habit resulting from their education. The messageboard thus illustrates Bourdieu's theory of distinction, where 'taste classifies, and

> *'Right it's now official. This posting from the host tells us in no uncertain terms that ML as we have known it is dead and buried' (Post 33, 12.02.08, KT, Powerpoint Presentation thread).*

The notion that the board is being censored inspires many posts in this 1134 post thread, and the discussion goes on for several weeks. Here, the posters become heroic defenders of freedom of speech, as well as rallying round the individual whose original post (asking whether one of the main characters,

The 'Archers Addicts' Board

The question of realism – which is ubiquitous in talk about media texts (Thomas 2002, Buckingham 1987) – is the main issue here, and in many other threads on this board. The discussion of how realistic a character's response is allows the posters to reveal something if their own beliefs, in this case on the subject of gender. As in previous research on *The Archers* we find feminism associated with modernity,

many areas of discussion and is linked to the complex cultural negotiation of the demands made on modern mothers. Humour about the programme or one's own fandom is part of a generally ironic self-presentation, as exemplified by screen names such as: yeahinaminute, Elasticwoman, QueenofBleach,

like. And it becomes a bit of a disappointment when you actually see the actors that play them because they are not how you imagine them from listening to their voices. But because it is on the radio you have to use your imagination. Not only to imagine what they look like, but they become like friends.' (F, 30-39, full-time mother, former office worker, I)

Summary and Conclusions

The research confirmed that the BBC *Archers* website is used by large numbers of listeners and is very

of not allowing anything 'too terrible' to happen.[20] This research suggests that this is an important aspect of the programme's success and of the complicity between producers and listeners on which it is based. Both producers and listeners are mainly middle-class, white British, highly educated women, who range from middle-aged to younger age groups (20s and 30s). The culture of the programme and of many of the online spaces we analysed is one of femininity, which of course does not prevent a minority of men from participating. However, for the mainly female fans, narrative trajectories emphasising the capacity to repair relationships and the role of community in supporting vulnerable individuals are likely to be pleasurable. These qualities of commitment to relational work are also found in some of the online spaces, alongside, particularly in the case of the BBC boards, a middle-class highly educated habitus which values critique. The 'anti-fan' and ironic fan postures adopted by some posters can lead to a strongly critical tone which those involved in the programme's production may, quite understandably, find undermining at times. However, our research shows that the messageboard posters are a minority, even among online fans, and that these kinds of engagements are typical of fan cultures more broadly, particularly in online spaces. We would recommend that these discussions, like the website as a whole, be seen as a successful adjunct to the programme – a broadening of its cultural wings and a sign of the passionate engagement of some listeners. They also indicate that *The Archers* is part of a changing context where new technologies are blurring the boundaries between cultural producers and consumers. Fan cultures, as the independent development of the Facebook site attests, have their own modalities and conventions, and cannot be predicted or indeed controlled.

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[20] Mary Cutler - interview with Lyn Thomas, 11 August, 2008.

to genre-specific music, or a notion of the music as innovative. Implicit in this definition is a distinction between a majority mainstream, and a series of minority 'taste groups'. This is, of course, made explicit in the BBC's practice, which reproduces this distinction within its broadcast schedule as daytime = wide appeal; evening = specialist (= small audiences). So fundamental is this calculus to public service broadcasting as it relates to music radio that it has been articulated in the statement "ratings by day; reputation by night". This phrase is widely used within the UK radio industry (across both public and commercial sectors) when justifying their practical steps to balance programming aimed to attract sizable audiences with a public service commitment.

Although the justifications for a public service mission, and the broadcast practices which have emerged from this mission, have been quite varied, historically they have most often been rooted in ideas of frequency scarcity, the need for cultural uplift and, more recently, the need to rectify market failure in the provision of public goods. The emergence of new distribution technologies based on the internet, the way that interaction is engineered into them, and the way that communities have been built around them, require a new analysis. As we will show, there have been some profound changes in relation to music broadcasting and the idea of specialist music resulting from this new online media. Specifically, from the perspective of the broadcaster, scarcity has been superseded by ubiquity; 'cultural uplift' by new sorts of relationships; and traditional broadcast models by new structures of political economy.

Specialist music and public service broadcasting

The idea of specialist music is widely used, and generally taken for granted. However, some clarity about how the idea developed, and an appreciation of its central place in the development of the idea of public service broadcasting, are essential first steps in thinking through the challenges for the BBC in providing for such specialist interests.

Specialist music as an alternative; and as a market

Primarily, the idea of specialist music is constructed through what it is not: mainstream popular music. As we will see, it developed out of a binary opposition between ideas of seriousness, commitment, and focused listening and ideas of triviality, transience and secondary consumption. The fact that this is an idea created through contrast should also alert us to the fact that specialist music is not simply musicologically different from mainstream music. Rather, we should see it as a cultural space created through the interaction of certain music fans, with the practices of sections of the music industry, and with the music and music-making itself. The particular usage was most likely developed in the record industry and radio to signal music that relates to particular groups of music consumers, and takes its designation from the idea of a specialist interest. Of course, record companies organise their activities around a general music divisions and other specialist divisions for smaller music markets, and radio stations use the idea to organise their programme schedules or formats around general and nicspeciali d prs9[3]203Tm /F8.-6 (01000000

regeneration of the music is amongst fans, where tendencies for increasing sophistication are in tension

Understanding specialist music fandom online

In researching this area we undertook an extensive survey of the sorts of online activities undertaken by fans of indie rock, jazz and urban music. We have interpreted these activities by using some of the academic work on online communities and on fandom, and by thinking through the role of BBC specialist music radio programming and online services within these activities. We were particularly mindful to develop concrete suggestions for utilising insights into online culture for the BBC's aim of making public service provision for specialist music beyond the radio programmes currently offered.

We sum up our findings as: communities participate in an online environment in distinctive cultural ways. This statement seeks to extend an appreciation of online activity beyond the concept of an individual sitting at a computer doing something with online technologies. That is to say, we found that the online activities were communal rather than individual; set within a virtual environment rather than determined in any simple way by technologies; and involved cultural activities which were developments of, but distinct from off line fan activity. It is necessary, therefore, to place contemporary radio broadcasting in a wider context than seeing the internet as a new channel through which radio can be broadcast, or a new medium to promote those broadcasts.

The most significant finding of this area of research is that the BBC's specialist music radio output plays very little part in the online activities of specialist music fans. We found very few references to the BBC output online, and almost all of these were in dedicated BBC message boards. Secondly, the BBC's own online material did not appear prominently within the wider online activities. Of course this could be because online fans tend to use BBC sites as a distinct and separate part of their online activities. However, both these observations, and our longer analysis of online activity suggest that there are a wide range of ways that staff at the BBC could further exploit the online infrastructure, communities and activities to develop the corporation's public service remit.

In structuring an account of our findings, then, we concentrate on the idea of an online environment, on the nature of online fan communities, and finally on the distinctive cultural activities associated with these communities.

Online environments for specialist music fandom

Following Marshall McLuhan we can understand communication media like radio, music and the internet

dedicated web site pages, online radio stations and other forms of streamed and downloaded audio and video services, including Last FM, YouTube and My Space.

Each of these technologies forms part of an infrastructure created by the particular activities of music fans. So, for instance, while some of the technologies are used to provide access to professionally-produced content, others provide space for fan contributions. For specialist music, the quantity of fan-established locales is many times greater than professional providers, but the latter tend to attract more visits, probably because of their strong brand identities, often associated

Online activities

Forms of specialist music are particularly fruitful for the production of self-identities, where the music's discursive separation from the 'mainstream' allows the music fan to distinguish themselves from the everyday of the non-fan. As we have noted, the online activities often develop practices of music consumption which are found offline, and most often these are built around recorded music. Public discussions of the online environment have also concentrated on digitised music, but because the debates have been dominated by the fear of record companies that the way digital files of music are manipulated online undermines the economic foundations of their industry, the detail of this activity is vague. It is not surprising that record companies should understand online consumption of music in the same way that they understand offline consumption: as the acquisition of recorded music.

Our research indicates that online activity is far greater than the story about 'file-sharing as theft' would suggest. We have argued elsewhere that the music industry will have to come to terms with the new artefactual form of music and its distribution on the internet, but here we want to concentrate on the details of online fan-activities around specialist music for radio. Three clusters of activity are particularly relevant: listening, ordering and framing, and repurposing.

If we want to understand online fandom in its own terms, rather than as an adjunct of record buying or radio listening, models in which music fans are seen as individual 'listeners' or 'record buyers' are inadequate. It is particularly easy to translate the idea of secondary listening which is part of the professional framework of radio professionals to listening through online media. Such a perspective is reinforced by the large proportion of radio output, and music distribution, which is made up by the simulcasting of over-the-air radio. However, this ignores the significant way in which listening is integrated into practices of sharing and interacting, and the way these activities fit into the community hierarchies of the social media in which the music is listened to. In addition, it ignores the way in which most online radio takes a far more narrow-cast orientation than that found in over-the-air radio.

Unsurprisingly, online radio tends to organise narrow-cast stations at niches of specialist music, and in pursuit of new business models often uses the interest, knowledge and commitment of tastemakers to produce 'programmes' [41]. Such 'programmes' or 'stations' often replicate the mix-tape culture of earlier forms of music culture, and perhaps the most successful online development of the idea of music radio, Last FM, integrates the idea of sharing personal maps of musical meaning, with the idea of a radio playlist/mix-tape, and automated output.

Listening online, then, is almost always a form of interaction at a number of different levels, and it usually takes place within the context of two further activities around organising music and knowledge. Digital music files, especially in the areas of specialist music, are hardly ever simply downloaded. Firstly, they are increasingly accessed through sites which offer social fora, large amounts of metadata, and the ordering agency of the tastemakers who control them. Secondly, these sites are largely understood to constitute spaces for sharing, for actively linking the music and metadata, and for making sense of the specialist music form. Finally, the music is actively collected and ordered on local computers in such a way that the individual's computer is conceived to be part of a wider plane of music culture activity.

BBC staff and specialist music

Existing specialist music output.

At present, the BBC provides a range of services for the specialist music fan. By and large, these are spread across the radio brands, and for the most part cater to fans of broadly popular specialist music forms.

Radio 1's weekday evening output features dance, indie rock, hip hop, electronic, jazz and urban specialist music, and these are divided up into themed programmes. While these programmes are diverse in themselves (both Gilles Peterson and Zane Lowe play a variety of musical subgenres), taken individually they each broadly represent and give voice to a specialist music scene.

On Radio 2, genre-specific programmes are scattered

When we spoke to the work of radio production staff and managers, and to the interactive teams that answer to those brand managers, there was a general understanding that the BBC's online presence was to 'extend the brand' and 'bring audience to the brand'. The internet was used to reach out to new places, and then bring the people found there back to the radio brands. Indeed, this ideology seemed so pervasive that it was possible to surmise that all content put out on the radio or on the internet was intended to serve this function.

In any event, our studies were restricted to specialist music, and it was clear that, in this area, the broadcast text was seen as the primary expression of the brand, and that the online components 'extend and reinforce' this. To that end, radio shows on the BBC and the online interactive elements that support those radio shows are subservient to the over-arching notion of the brand: a broadcast-orientated, one-to-many conception of the relationship between the Corporation and what it considers to be its audiences. These audiences are understood in terms of their allegiance to a brand: Radio 1 listeners, Radio 2 listeners, 6Music listeners and so on. We came to think of this strategy as the 'broadcasting orientation'.

This distinction was important, as we came to notice a difference in the way that online-oriented staff related to the idea of brand extension, and that that understanding related to the way in which they understood the notion of public service with regard to specialist music.

From our observations, radio production staff appeared to focus almost exclusively on the audible output of the programme; that part of the brand that constitutes the broadcast element of the communication. The extent to which the online element of the text is considered is in relation to the ways in which that can inform and contribute to the performance of the radiophonic qualities and attributes of the show. For instance, feedback from SMS and discussion boards is evaluated in terms of whether it should be read on air – in other words, its *presentability* rather than the value of its content.

Online material is used as reference to either feed into or inform the programme. In one specific instance, a title of a track considered for airplay was dropped after a news item was discovered online that highlighted potential sensitivity. A third way in which the broadcast production staff use the interactive media is to 'take the temperature' of the listening audience ("They're loving this track", etc.). However, on the whole interactive media were seen as secondary to, or at best supportive of, a 'primary' text – that of the radio programme.

An example of this support relationship between programme production and interactive teams could be seen in the studio during the creation of Zane Lowe's show. Simply in terms of workflow and production practice, interactive staff provided a role that was in a subordinate power relationship with that of broadcast staff. For instance, the role of one member of the interactive team was to verify the playlist and type the name of the songs being played as they were broadcast into the show's official website. Another team member's role was to monitor, moderate and engage the IRC channel where the live chat was being conducted. Printing out the best comments and passing them to the broadcast production team to select what would be read by the host was one of the more directly influential activities the interactive team had on the programme's output.

With respect to the production staff's consideration of interactive media as secondary to the core text of

distribution on YouTube and inclusion on the programme's BBC website. The interactive staff member's role was to be as unobtrusive as possible while the production staff, presenter and guest continued with the 'real' business at hand of making the live radio show. Once the video had been filmed, the interactive staff's role was to edit and post it online as quickly as possible, so that the programme's presenter could include it as part of the text of the show.

While the interactive staff were keen to express specialist music public service in a way that understood specialist music fans as not merely members of an audience, but as participants in a network of knowledge, their activities were configured in relation to their service role in support of the production team. In our discussions with interactive teams, it appeared that this orientation was a source of frustration that more could have been done to address specialist music fans in more interactive ways.

The rest of Audio & Music Interactive and the associated Future Media and Technology team operate in relation to the interactive teams for the radio stations and are, in a sense, at arm's length from the broadcast orientation, in that they are not directly involved with the production of radio programming. The role of these teams is to provide strategic direction and support for the interactive sites and services and to produce the tools and services that enable them.

Most importantly, we believe that the BBC is in a unique and exciting position, because it has the capacity to bring together those two orientations in a way that no other media organisation has. Nobody

Implications and recommendations

In our research, we have identified the need for a conceptual shift from a framework of Public Service

adopting a conversational and informal approach rather than an authoritative one; linking content permanently and deeply; searchability and providing many routes to the same content; accessibility; and linking to, rather than hosting, discussion.

There are many clear opportunities to advance the BBC's media offering in these ways in the area of specialist music. The provision of open archives, the modularisation and metatagging of spoken content, and the aggregation of opinion leadership amongst BBC presentation personnel as well as the 'savants' of specialist music fandom are just some of the ways in which these objectives can be approached. However, some aspects of the BBC2.0 vision are problematic from the perspective of Public Service Media – in particular, that of the corporation's non-commercial mandate.

From a BBC2.0 perspective, it makes perfect sense to create both BBC content and upload it to sites like MySpace and YouTube on the grounds that this is where the relevant audiences congregate online, and where the content can be integrated into a daily experience of online media. While this prevents a walled garden approach that could only restrict the public value of the content, it does raise the issue of commercialisation, since that popular content provided on those platforms generates traffic and advertising revenue for corporations like Newscorp (MySpace) and Google (YouTube).

While it is outside the scope of this report to offer ready solutions to difficult problems such as this, it is

One example of a way in which this could be approached would be for a technical solution to be introduced which created a separate recording every time the microphone was turned on in the studio. When the microphone was switched off, thereby completing that recording, a dialogue box would prompt the online team to identify and add metadata to that discrete piece of content, which could then be named, tagged and archived as a modular and searchable piece of online content.

While a broadcaster will prefer to remain in a broadcast mode, they are always considering other factors when they develop their continuity and talk. Hearing modularity in action will accustom the broadcaster

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Project partners
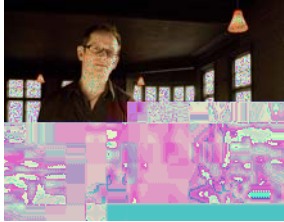
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