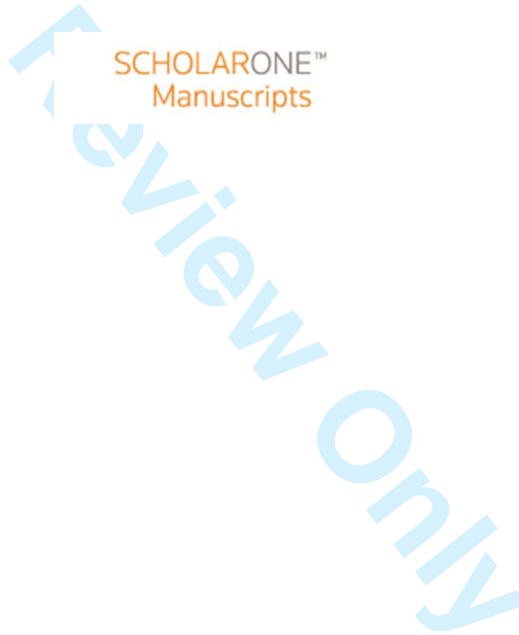


'Moments and Opportunities': On-air promos and the popular imagination of BBC iPlayer

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'Moments and Opportunities':**On-air promos and the popular imagination of BBC iPlayer****Abstract**

This essay examines the promotion of the BBC's online streaming and download service, iPlayer, as it has been presented to audiences through broadcast television. Analysing transitions in the BBC's representation of iPlayer, it considers the popular imagination of iPlayer within on-air promos during the 2010s, a period when the Corporation was striving to communicate its role as a digital public service broadcaster ahead of charter review. Examining the paratextual function of iPlayer interstitials, the essay considers the vernacular move from portals and platform mobility in the early 2010s to narratives increasingly based on the 'need-states' of audiences.

Keywords: BBC iPlayer; interstitials, on-demand television; paratexts; promos; public service broadcasting

On 16 April 2014, the BBC launched a new marketing campaign for its on-demand iPlayer service. This comprised a series of ten-second scenes depicting the British Easter vacation. These ranged from portraits of travel delay on motorways, in airports and at ferry ports to rain-battered tents and remote hamlets, both without access to wi-fi. Each vignette ended with the pink logo of BBC iPlayer and the strapline 'download something good before you go'. Emphasising TV viewing as something mobile and portable, the trailers presented BBC iPlayer as a travel companion, a device ideally suited to the behaviours and rituals of individuals, couples and families on the move during a national holiday weekend. Appearing in the junctions of the BBC's linear schedule, the promotional address of the trailers worked to reconstruct the ephemerality of broadcast television. Short in length, and functioning in TV's interstitial space, these promotional texts focused on fleeting scenes of non-domestic

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3 British life; they dramatized a digital media environment where the ephemeral nature of
4 television, and its contexts of viewing, were being recast by asynchronous forms of media
5 distribution and consumption.
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9 This essay examines the promotion of BBC iPlayer as it has been presented to
10 audiences through broadcast television; it considers how on-air promos have been used in
11 the linear TV schedule to invite viewing behaviours beyond it. iPlayer branding and
12 promotion became increasingly ubiquitous within the 'flow' of BBC television in the 2010s,
13 consonant with the platform's centrality to the broadcaster's digital strategy. Launched on
14 Christmas Day in 2007, BBC iPlayer initially provided access to broadcast television through
15 a seven-day catch-up service delivered through personal computers. By the time of the
16 'download something good' campaign, however, iPlayer had developed across four screens
17 (mobile, tablet, PC, television) and over 1200 devices, and was receiving ten million user
18 'requests' per day in the UK (BBC 2014). While BBC iPlayer accounted for just 2-3 percent of
19 all BBC audience viewing in 2014, reflecting the endurance of live broadcast television in the
20 UK,¹ the Corporation's on-demand service had developed a powerful brand presence in
21 British media life. Indeed, its promotional presence was such that a YouGov poll named 'BBC
22 iPlayer' the UK's number one brand in terms of consumer perception in 2013, ahead of
23 Samsung (2nd), John Lewis (3rd), BBC.co.uk (6th), YouTube (7th) and Marks & Spencer (8th).
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36 I seek to explore the promotional imagination of BBC iPlayer since 2010, the period
37 when, according to James Bennett and Niki Strange, the product emerged as the
38 'predominant strategic innovation of the Corporation' (2014, 67). In doing so, this essay
39 builds on a growing body of scholarship that considers how promotional and advertising
40 materials contribute to the social construction of new technology. This incorporates work in
41 film and television studies that examines how industrial discourses associated with digital
42 delivery have produced vernaculars around media technology and consumption practice. In
43 *New Media and Popular Imagination*, William Boddy suggests that 'ephemeral television
44 commercials can illuminate some of the wider issues involved in the take-up of new
45 domestic electronic media since they typically enact dense and affective scenarios of socially
46 embedded technologies' (2004, 24). Boddy is concerned with examining how changes in the
47 forms and uses of electronic media in the home during the twentieth century, principally in
48 the US, have 'served to incarnate and condense wider social tensions around the shifting
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3 definitions of public and private space, the roles of men and women inside and outside the
4 home, and the construction of personal and national identity' (ibid, 4). Promotional
5 materials become a key resource in this context, a vernacular site for examining how
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7 'strategic fantasies of consumption' have taken hold in specific historical junctures, and in
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9 ways that have come to affect the meanings and fortunes of new communication
10 technologies in particular markets.
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14 Analysing developments in convergence culture, Chuck Tryon turns similarly to
15 promotional materials, considering how advertisements by US cable television companies
16 and mobile media firms 'imagined platform mobility' in the 2000s. Examining tropes of
17 mobility, flexibility and convenience, Tryon considers how promotional texts helped 'to
18 naturalize new viewing platforms, while also showing how they will enable users to
19 transcend the limitations of current media technologies' (2012, 294). Focusing on the same
20 period, Max Dawson (2014) examines commercials for digital video recording (DVR)
21 platforms such as TiVO in the 2000s; he identifies linear TV ads as one of a number of
22 discursive sites that helped develop the proposition of DVR technology 'rationalizing' the act
23 of watching television, making it more efficient and productive as a leisure activity. While
24 Tryon suggests that audiences were given representations of how digital screen
25 technologies could be incorporated into daily life as a way to minimise their potential
26 disruption to traditional viewing habits, Dawson sees a more extensive ideological project in
27 DVR advertising at the turn of the twenty-first century; he suggests that digital television
28 technologies inspired fantasies of watching television 'faster' and 'better', something he
29 connects with neoliberal social ideals. In different ways, Boddy, Tryon and Dawson examine
30 the discursive function of ephemeral advertising materials, something that Paul Grainge and
31 Catherine Johnson (2015) develop more broadly in their study of the way that promotional
32 screen content imagined transformations reshaping media culture across the connected
33 fields of mobile communication, television, film and live events in the late 2000s and early
34 2010s.
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52 This essay's focus on the promotional imagination of BBC iPlayer between 2010 and
53 2015 corresponds with a moment when the BBC was navigating its role as a digital public
54 service broadcaster. Responding in 2009 to a government report called *Digital Britain* which
55 laid out plans for developing digital infrastructure and participation in the UK, the BBC
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3 described its role 'not just in developing digital technologies, but in making them an
4 everyday experience for tens of millions of Britons' (BBC 2009, 3). In the context of
5 government policy measures to develop and enable the social and economic potentialities
6 of 'being digital' (Carter, 2009), technologies like iPlayer were positioned by the BBC as
7 strategic in helping drive broadband take-up and the market of mobile and online TV. Of
8 course, iPlayer was not the only development in the nascent field of online television
9 distribution. While major networks in the free-to-air (ITV, Channel 4) and pay-TV (Sky, Virgin
10 Media) markets all developed catch-up and video-on-demand services in the second half of
11 the 2000s, hybrid digital television and broadband services such as BT Vision and standalone
12 providers like Netflix and Amazon became powerful new players in the subscription video-
13 on-demand market. Between 2006 and 2015, the BBC's share of the broadcast market fell
14 from 40 to 25 percent (Higgins 2015, 223). This gave rise to searching questions about the
15 meaning and identity of public service broadcasting in a digital world. For Tony Hall, the
16 BBC's Director-General from 2013, BBC iPlayer was central to the Corporation's digital
17 future. Rather than a catch-up service offering extended windows for linear broadcast
18 content, iPlayer was increasingly conceived by BBC managers in the 2010s as an
19 entertainment destination in its own right, a personalized on-demand service described by
20 Hall as 'the front door to many people to the whole BBC' (Hall, 2013). It is my contention
21 that the BBC's identity as a digital broadcaster - what Hall would call 'an internet-first BBC
22 which belongs to everyone and where everyone belongs' (2015) - would be performed
23 *within* TV thresholds and junctions, and through iPlayer logos and promos specifically.

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41 Considering the BBC's move to become a 'digital destination' in the 2000s, Niki
42 Strange (2011) notes the multitude of messages and calls to action that began to appear in
43 programme end-credits in the mid-2000s. Drawing attention to end-credit 'windowing' and
44 the use of interactive graphics such as the BBC's Red Button, she examines the way that
45 online and interactive appeals in the 'screen real estate' of end-credits envisaged a
46 transforming audience, one inclined to pursue onward journeys to others types of (digital)
47 content. Similarly, Catherine Johnson demonstrates how television junctions reveal a
48 change in the 'communicative ethos' of broadcasting in the late 2000s (2013, 26).
49 Specifically, she points to the increasing significance of spatial, as well as temporal,
50 metaphors in the way that broadcast flow has been structured and presented through BBC
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3 television junctions, visually representing 'the parallel journeys that the viewer could take to
4 watch television programmes across different channels or platforms' (ibid, 31). Since 2007,
5 the iPlayer logo and 'play' symbol has become part of the BBC's spatial and temporal
6 address; it has been used in end-credits as a reminder of programme availability through
7 catch-up but also as a call to action, encouraging audiences to engage with content
8 extensions and interactive services as part of the BBC's digital offer.² If, as Daniel
9 Chamberlain contends, media interfaces 'have offered personalization and control as a
10 challenge to liveness and flow as the dominant ontologies and ideologies of contemporary
11 entertainment media' (2011, 251), the heightened visibility of the iPlayer logo and web
12 address on terrestrial screens has become a mark of this 'challenge'; it draws attention to a
13 process where the ontology of television has been promoted as moving between
14 broadcasting flow and digital database.
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25 The popular imagination of BBC iPlayer is not simply shaped by the logos and promos
26 that sit in television junctions but also by the very design of iPlayer as a media interface.
27 Indeed, the architecture and look of iPlayer all help frame user experience in ways that
28 contribute to iPlayer's sense and meaning as a product. My interest, however, lies in the
29 media paratexts (Gray 2010) that surround iPlayer and that create interpretive frames for
30 the service. This brings to the fore bespoke promos that have appeared in the BBC's
31 broadcast schedule. Forming the basis of marketing campaigns which have been developed
32 and extended through digital media, iPlayer interstitials range from fleeting 10-second
33 teasers (such as 'download something good before you go') to 30-40 second trailers that
34 enact or offer tutorials in iPlayer use. In addition, minute-long promos have been used to
35 tell a brand story ('always there when you need us', 'if you love something let it show'). In
36 the remainder of this essay, I look at four interstitials shown across BBC channels in the
37 2010s which demonstrate transitions in the BBC's representation of iPlayer. It is not my
38 intention to provide an exhaustive account of the creative genesis of these promos, or
39 provide a detailed discussion of their production history within and between BBC marketing
40 teams and the promotional intermediaries such as Red Bee Media that have made them
41 (see Grainge and Johnson 2015, 66-76). Instead, I want to provide a portrait of the BBC's
42 construction of iPlayer through the fleeting, but ubiquitous, form of on-air promos.
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Pink portals, mainstream mums and recommendations of love: iPlayer interstitials

The history of BBC iPlayer is tied in policy terms to the review of the Corporation's charter that took place between 2003 and 2006, the government process that reviews the role of the BBC and its right to collect the license fee from the British public. Following proposals in 2003 by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport that the sixth 'core purpose' of the BBC was 'building digital Britain', the 2006 charter review gave the Corporation responsibility for 'helping to deliver to the public the benefit of emerging communications technologies and services' (DCMS 2006, 3). iPlayer became a key BBC service in this context, and expressed the BBC's public service role as a 'trusted guide' within the potentially disruptive world of digital distribution. According to Elizabeth Evans and Paul McDonald, BBC iPlayer and Channel 4's equivalent on-demand service 4oD (redesigned as All 4 in 2014) are the most common platforms for digital distribution in the UK. They note that 'during intense industrial change, the established broadcasters act as a signal of consistency and predictability in a moment of upheaval in the way that audiences can engage with media texts' (2014, 167). In a period of connected viewing, iPlayer became, and to a large extent remains, the most prominent embodiment of television's interface with digital in the UK. It is not in the scope of this essay to address the various techno-cultural debates that stem from this, from iPlayer's formalization of streaming technology to questions of whether iPlayer should be available internationally or fall within the scope of the licence fee. Rather, I seek to trace vernacular shifts that have occurred within iPlayer interstitials since 2010 that encapsulate the BBC's attempt to broaden the service within mainstream use. These shifts reflect the BBC's development strategy for iPlayer, known internally as the 'three beyonds' - 'beyond PC, beyond catch-up, beyond the early-adopter' (Dan Taylor-Watt, interview. 16 December 2014).

Reflecting on the challenges of marketing iPlayer, the BBC's audience research manager for the service, Alison Button, would comment in interview,

iPlayer is extremely difficult to market because if you show what it does, it looks like you're trying to advertise *Doctor Who* and *EastEnders* - people get hung up

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3 with the visuals of the content [iPlayer] has got - and if you try and focus on the
4 features it sounds like a geeky advert for a website with a lot of technical lists
5 and that is not what it is either. So it is really hard to get across. (interview. 16
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8 December 2014)
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13 Button's point of reference in making this observation was a marketing campaign in 2010
14 that wedded the visuals of BBC content to images of technological wonder. Developed on
15 the cusp of the multiscreen explosion associated with tablets and smartphones, this
16 campaign used the motif of the digital portal to enact the discovery of iPlayer's 'next level';
17 the campaign depicted people (mostly in their twenties and thirties) stepping and jumping
18 through a mystical pink gateway that hovered magically in city streets, across the face of
19 buildings, and in a forest outside a tent.
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26 *Insert Fig. 1. iPlayer as portal: the 'Next Level' campaign (2010)*
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29 In metaphoric terms, the depiction of iPlayer as a 'pink portal' was of its time. Indeed,
30 Will Brooker suggests that the representation of digital platforms within popular narratives
31 in the late 2000s often used the imagery and language of portals as a means of 'training us
32 in the uses of digital technology and emphasizing the social mastery that results from
33 understanding the world as data, and learning to read it, navigate it and manipulate it'
34 (2010, 554). By this account, the pink portal trailers imagined the BBC as a world of data, an
35 environment that could be read, navigated and manipulated by jumping through iPlayer's
36 digital threshold. Foregrounding the facility of iPlayer to recommend programmes to friends
37 online and remember personal favourites, iPlayer was portrayed as an electronic cosmos.
38 The promos depicted pink auroras containing the literal stars of the BBC's primetime
39 schedule - digital constellations that could be touched and shared by anyone stepping into
40 the BBC's online universe. Reminding audiences of the public service value of this digital
41 experience, the promos finished with the strapline 'your very own BBC'. The 'next level'
42 campaign was the first to position iPlayer as an entertainment destination, a portal that had
43 multiple functions that enabled new ways of encountering BBC content (favourites,
44 recommendations, downloading, parental lock) rather than as a simple device for catch-up.
45 However, Button notes that the 'next level' campaign didn't 'cut through' in marketing
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3 terms, either in the way that it sought to convey iPlayer in experiential terms, or in
4 communicating with audiences beyond early-adopting (male) users. This led to alternative
5 vernacular strategies in the way that the BBC sought to 'get across' iPlayer in the design of
6 on-air promos.
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11 The popular imagination of iPlayer would shift in the early 2010s as managerial
12 discourse at the BBC focused on the 'three beyond' strategy. This would correlate with the
13 extension of iPlayer as a multiplatform device, but also with attempts to expand
14 mainstream usage, tenets of the BBC's public service remit to drive new digital platforms
15 and consumption patterns among a wide-ranging demographic. In 2012, a 40-second trailer
16 was broadcast in the BBC schedule called 'beyond the computer'. Moving away from the
17 imagery of portals, the promo represented the 'play' logo of iPlayer descending onto screen
18 devices being used in buildings and spaces across the UK. Set to a ballad with the lyric 'I've
19 been searching all my days', the play logo dropped quietly onto buses, beach huts, canal
20 boats, office blocks, bus stops, holiday homes, windmills, council flats, terraced houses,
21 even portable toilets. Contemplative in tone, the trailer ended with a shot of a twinkling
22 urban night sky with multiple pink logos falling to the ground.
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32 *Insert Figure 2, 'Beyond the computer' (2012)*
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35 Released in the year of the final switchover from analogue to digital terrestrial
36 television in the UK, 'beyond the computer' depicted iPlayer as something existing in the
37 national ether. In the same period that households in the UK were being trained through
38 government information leaflets and TV campaigns to prepare for digital switchover, the
39 promo vernacularized the discourse of 'digital Britain'. One of a number of images of
40 platform mobility developed by television and telecommunication companies in this period
41 (Tryon 2012), 'beyond the computer' gave mobile digital culture a public service imprimatur.
42 Promoting the ability to watch 'your favourite BBC programmes wherever and whenever
43 you want to', the ad mapped the BBC's world of data onto British spaces and spectrums.
44 Although bearing out Chuck Tryon's observation that 'media mobility promotes a more
45 fragmented, individualized notion of spectatorship' (2012, 288), iPlayer promos conveyed
46 digital connectivity as a project of collective national bearing. According to the BBC, 'a fully
47 connected digital Britain could be a nation in which everyone, irrespective of income or
48 circumstance, could benefit from the social, cultural, economic and practical benefits of the
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3 new digital environment' (2009, 3). 'Beyond the computer' offered spatialized images of
4 these 'practical benefits', audiences empowered to access BBC content according to their
5 own schedules in a port-a-loo if they so wished.
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9 The promo did not contain images of BBC content or focus on technical features.
10 Instead of representing iPlayer as a luminous gateway that people jumped through, the
11 promo accentuated the effortless portability of the service on tablets and mobile phones.³
12 Meanwhile it depicted users 'beyond the early-adopter', moving away from twenty-
13 somethings and gadget-loving men and towards camera-shots and close-ups of women, the
14 last image of the promo showing a middle-aged woman viewing her tablet alone, smiling
15 contentedly in bed. If, as William Boddy argues, digital technology is often inflected with the
16 rhetorical project of remasculinizing the television apparatus through fantasies of power
17 and control (2004, 73), 'beyond the computer' mapped this sense of control more overtly to
18 the public and private needs of female users. This gendering would continue in subsequent
19 iPlayer interstitials, the female user becoming a discrete lens used in BBC marketing to
20 imagine and drive mainstream take-up of the service.
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31 Expanding mainstream usage of iPlayer was a key objective for the BBC in the 2010s.
32 For those responsible for iPlayer strategy at the BBC, the fact that iPlayer accounted for
33 under 3 percent of all BBC audience viewing signalled a problematic gap between high
34 brand awareness and actual use among mainstream audiences. While rebutting claims that
35 iPlayer's audience had plateaued in 2015, the Head of BBC iPlayer, Dan Taylor-Watt (2015),
36 remarked in a blog post, 'the challenge for us is to get everyone using iPlayer – whether
37 that's to make the journey to work better, the holiday in the middle of no-where in the rain
38 more enjoyable or just easily catch-up on what you've missed from the comfort of your
39 sofa'. This rhetoric was also used by Victoria Jaye ('Head of TV Content, BBC iPlayer') who, at
40 the time of writing, leads the 'product development group' for iPlayer within the BBC along
41 with Taylor-Watt. As early as 2012, Jaye explained her view that getting everyone to use
42 iPlayer meant communicating *the relevance*, rather than simply the availability, of iPlayer to
43 audiences. She commented,
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3 I have always said that to get mainstream audiences into iPlayer, we have to
4 answer a need for them . . . we have got to solve their entertainment needs
5 rather than present them with new, clever technology . . . Brand awareness
6 of iPlayer is very high in the UK, but large sectors of the population still don't
7 use us regularly, so why is there the gap? They (mainstream audiences) just
8 don't think it is relevant to their entertainment needs and I think that is the
9 thing we have got to crack. We want iPlayer to be a daily habit for
10 audiences. Promotion is a key part of getting audiences to think iPlayer is the
11 place where they want to go first, for the best entertainment (interview. 2
12 July 2012)
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24 By Jaye's account, 'beyond the computer' was a brand awareness trailer. In this respect, it
25 was significant in reminding broadcast viewers about the availability of the service but not
26 as focused on communicating relevance, of helping 'big television audiences understand the
27 value that is delivered to their viewing television, how it transforms it and enables it on
28 more of their terms' (ibid). The next major campaign focused more purposefully on what
29 Jaye calls the 'need-states' of audiences (interview, 16 December 2014). Rather than a
30 ballad to platform mobility, the on-air promo that accompanied the launch of a redesigned
31 iPlayer in March 2014 identified 'moments and opportunities' where iPlayer could fit into
32 people's daily lives.⁴ Focusing on what the BBC audience and marketing team for iPlayer
33 referred to as 'mainstream mums', the campaign would enact a vernacular shift in iPlayer
34 promotion in the mid-2010s, the service framed in relation to ephemeral moments in
35 everyday British life.
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46 The focus on mainstream mums developed from audience and marketing analysis by
47 the BBC that used questionnaire data to identify six main demographic segments of the
48 iPlayer audience. These were based on life stage and included the segments 16-24, 25-39
49 (with and without children), 40-55 (men and women), and 55+. Mainstream mums became
50 a key target group within this breakdown and described females 'in their thirties and forties
51 who have probably got some kids, have the least time because they are juggling work and
52 children and families and everything. And they often have no control of the remote because
53 either dad has got it or the kids have got it' (Alison Button, interview. 16 December 2014).
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3 As an audience personae, 'mainstream mums' were seen to represent a group 'who just
4 think it [iPlayer] is not for them . . . because they think it is a bit geeky or they think they
5 have to be a super user on the phone' (ibid.). This provided the context for a sixty second
6 television promo called 'always there when you need it' which developed a sense of BBC
7 iPlayer as a tool, friend and form of support. Focusing on the 25-39 segment (with children)
8 - with the 16-24 segment figured, in marketing parlance, as 'the halo' - the promo used The
9 Smith's accessible, up-tempo hit 'This Charming Man' to code a depiction of bustling, on-
10 the-go, iconoclastically British life.
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18 *Insert Figure 3. 'Always there when you need it' (2014)*
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20 In narrative terms, 'always there when you need it' enacted a range of scenes
21 corresponding with prospective iPlayer 'moments'. These included, to name just four, 'half
22 term when you need to get things done' (depicting a mother on the phone with children
23 running noisily around the table), 'the breakroom where no-one talks to each other' (two
24 colleagues of different generations uneasily sharing lunchtime), 'waiting for your mates to
25 wake up after a sleepover at his house' (a young boy gazing wistfully out of a bedroom
26 window), and 'Dad's total domination of the remote' (a father wrestling the TV remote from
27 his three young daughters). While the trailer played on linear television, other moments
28 more relevant to 16-24s (e.g. a Sunday morning hangover) were extracted and played
29 through digital media. Following on from the 'download something good' teasers described
30 at the start of this essay, 'always there when you need it' connected iPlayer with scenarios
31 of social and familial need. Unlike 'beyond the computer' which dwelt on individualized
32 images of platform mobility, 'download before you go' and 'always there when you need it'
33 imagined scenes where iPlayer could fit into the time-pressed lives of people negotiating
34 hectic, harassed, occasionally hungover and sometimes socially awkward moments of the
35 day. Without showing a single screen device, the promo focused on iPlayer's capacity to
36 meet entertainment needs and become a 'daily habit' within fleeting moments of the day.
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51 According to Max Dawson, digital television technologies in the US became linked in
52 the 2000s to prevailing discourses of attention management. He suggests that digital video
53 recorders, in particular, were 'reimagined as a time-management tool, a defence against
54 distraction, an educational instrument or parenting aid, and the DVR owner as an
55 enterprising investor in her own time and attention' (2014, 225). In many ways, 'download
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3 before you go' and 'always there when you need it' accurately fit this description in their
4 various depictions of dead travel time, and situations where children need occupying.
5 Where Dawson connects promotional discourses around the DVR to wider neoliberal
6 ideologies, however - notably the reflexive project of learning how to allocate attention
7 profitably - I would argue that the promotional imagination of iPlayer is parsed differently in
8 these and other trailers. In discursive terms, iPlayer promos have been used to make an
9 argument for the public value of the BBC. As Alison Button suggests, echoing comments by
10 Victoria Jaye, the tactical purpose of 'always there when you need it' was to focus on 'the
11 people who have all the right kit and are easily competent to do it and yet they're not
12 seeing that they could get value from the BBC and catch up on the programmes they love'
13 (interview. 16 December 2014). The language of value invoked here was widely used at the
14 BBC between the charter reviews of 2006 and 2016. According to Niki Strange, 'public value'
15 was adopted wholesale by the BBC in the 2000s 'as a notion for achieving efficient public
16 management' (2011, 135). In one sense the managerial goal of maximizing the efficient
17 delivery and consumption of BBC content can be seen to connect with the ideology of
18 neoliberalism mapped by Dawson. At the same time, what Strange calls the BBC's attempt
19 to 'reframe notions of public service as "public value" in the digital age' (ibid.) develops
20 from wider attempts to rationalize and protect the BBC from the assault of hostile
21 commercial rivals and a Conservative government seemingly intent on reducing its size.
22 Indeed, attacks on the BBC became acute in the years leading up to charter review in 2016,
23 and in ways that had a bearing on promotional discourse around BBC iPlayer.

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41 This was especially marked with the publication of a government green paper in July
42 2015 that acted as a post-election, pre-charter broadside. In what can be seen as an early
43 attempt by the newly elected Conservative Party to diminish the BBC's role and operations
44 as a public service broadcaster, the green paper presented a number of proposals designed
45 to narrow the BBC's scope. This included the suggestion that the Corporation no longer
46 make popular entertainment but, instead, restrict itself to highbrow programming supplied
47 less readily by commercial broadcasters. It is in this context that a pan-BBC promotional
48 campaign called 'if you love something let it show' took on particular discursive resonance,
49 celebrating the BBC as a provider of popular entertainment for all. Released four months
50 before the green paper, and broadcast through 2015, the sixty-second promo featured a
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3 cover of The Beatles 'All you need is love' and conveyed BBC content in terms of affect. In
4 narrative terms, the promo captured people in moments of happiness, pride, absorption,
5 and joy. This included a father carrying his daughter to bed, a child cooking, siblings at play
6 in the kitchen, a man avoiding football scores in a shop window, four twenty-something girls
7 dancing in a bedroom, an elderly Afro-Caribbean man conducting music while listening to
8 headphones, another pensioner sitting proudly on a lawnmower, and a grey-haired couple
9 ballroom dancing. As the chorus of the song builds, a red heart appeared on screen with the
10 name of BBC content relevant to the image - ♥ CBeebies storytime app, ♥ Bake Off,
11 ♥ Doctor Who, ♥ Match of the Day, ♥ Annie Mac, ♥ The Proms, ♥ Gardeners' World,
12 ♥ Strictly. The campaign was accompanied by interstitial videos of celebrities explaining BBC
13 programmes they love, and a website curating collections of 'most loved' programmes.
14 These collections were based on ratings, online data and social media, but also interactive
15 clicks made through a heart button included within programme information pages on BBC
16 iPlayer.

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28 *Insert Figure 4 'If you love something let it show' (2015)*

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31 The core purpose of the campaign was to facilitate practices of sharing
32 recommendations through iPlayer. This was linked to an initiative called 'myBBC', launched
33 by the Corporation in March 2015 to encourage audiences to sign-in when using BBC online
34 services. At one level, 'if you love something' helped foreground the BBC's focus on data as
35 a mechanism of delivering more personalized BBC content. The prominent heart-shaped
36 icon within the promo served as a 'call to action'. By inviting viewers to use the love button
37 and discover the associated website and hashtag, the campaign was designed to connect
38 iPlayer to social media behaviours and an ethos of 'public service recommendation'.
39 Situating the BBC's place within a culture of connectivity, the promo was an articulation of
40 Tony Hall's mission statement for the BBC in the internet era, in particular the ambition to
41 'reinvent public service broadcasting through data' (Hall 2015). At the same time, however,
42 the promo inscribed values of universality and mixed-programming in its symbolic
43 inscription of BBC content. Set to a cover version of one of the Beatles' most recognisable
44 songs, the promo referenced programmes and enacted quotidian scenes that conveyed a
45 sense of common 'feeling' for the BBC. Reminiscent of the BBC's evangelical 'Perfect day'
46 video in 1997 (Grainge 2010) - released in a previous election year to shore up popular
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3 support for the BBC - the affectivity of the promo anticipated tempestuous political winds.
4 With charter review looming, the promo would serve the BBC's own political 'need states' in
5 a moment when the Corporation's public service identity - specifically the BBC's role
6 providing shared viewing experiences around popular entertainment – was being challenged
7 by newly vituperative government attacks.
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12 The on-air promos discussed in this essay form part of a lineage of marketing texts
13 that have been used by the BBC to help justify the Corporation's value and unique funding
14 arrangement to government and the viewing public (Johnson 2012, 84-111). By examining
15 four key paratexts between 2010 and 2015, I have traced shifts in the marketing address of
16 iPlayer in a period when the BBC was striving to communicate its role as a digital
17 broadcaster (Johnson and Grainge, 2018). Initially marketing iPlayer in 2007 through a focus
18 on catch-up - captured in the tagline 'making the unmissable unmissable' - the BBC sought
19 in the 2010s to extend the function *and imagination* of the service as a mainstream
20 entertainment destination. In vernacular terms, this was signalled by a transition from the
21 metaphor of portals and the rhetoric of platform mobility to a narrative emphasis on 'need-
22 states' - promos that enacted the role of iPlayer within fleeting, everyday moments where
23 the social practices of on-demand television (both real-life and networked) were seen to
24 have value.⁵
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36 Considering the transition from analogue to digital television since the late 1990s,
37 William Boddy points to ongoing uncertainty about television's 'role as signifier of national
38 identity (and public service broadcasting's political rationale in the UK and elsewhere), its
39 ontology of liveness and photographic realism, and its place as a consumer product within
40 the gendered household' (2004, 124). In different ways, iPlayer promos articulate these
41 questions of national identity, media ontology, and gendered domestic (and non-domestic)
42 practice. Along with it, they express the attempt by the BBC to frame the Corporation's
43 public service rationale in a digital world. If, as Charlotte Higgins suggests, the BBC stands in
44 the 2010s as 'both beloved institution and cultural and political battleground' (2015, 212),
45 iPlayer promos help illuminate not only the social construction of on-demand television in
46 the UK market, but also the ongoing negotiation of the BBC's beloved-cum-battleground
47 presence in British media life. As a cultural and critical resource, on-air promos for BBC
48 iPlayer provide their own 'moment and opportunity' to consider how ephemeral TV
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3 interstitials have helped to position the BBC's digital relevance and social role in an age of
4 public service media.
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¹ According to research by Ofcom, 89 percent of all television viewing was live in 2013 (Ofcom 2014, 141)

² In 2013, for example, iPlayer logos signalled initiatives such as BBC Playlister, a personal music platform enabling audiences to create playlists from BBC radio and TV content. Similarly, in 2014, iPlayer was positioned as the gateway to BBC iWonder, newly launched interactive educational guides developed around programme-related themes.

³ The mobile app for iPlayer launched in 2011 and was downloaded 28 million times in its first three years (BBC 2014).

⁴ This redesign introduced new features within the iPlayer's user interface such as smarter search and image-led navigation, online first commissions, and collections of curated programming, among other technological-editorial changes (see Johnson and Grainge, 2018).

⁵ Writing about the 'culture of connectivity', José Van Dijck suggests that 'many of the habits that have recently become permeated by social media platforms used to be informal and ephemeral manifestations of social life' (2013, 6). On these terms, 'if you love something let it show' foregrounds ephemeral moments in daily life as a means of promoting the 'platformed sociality' of iPlayer.

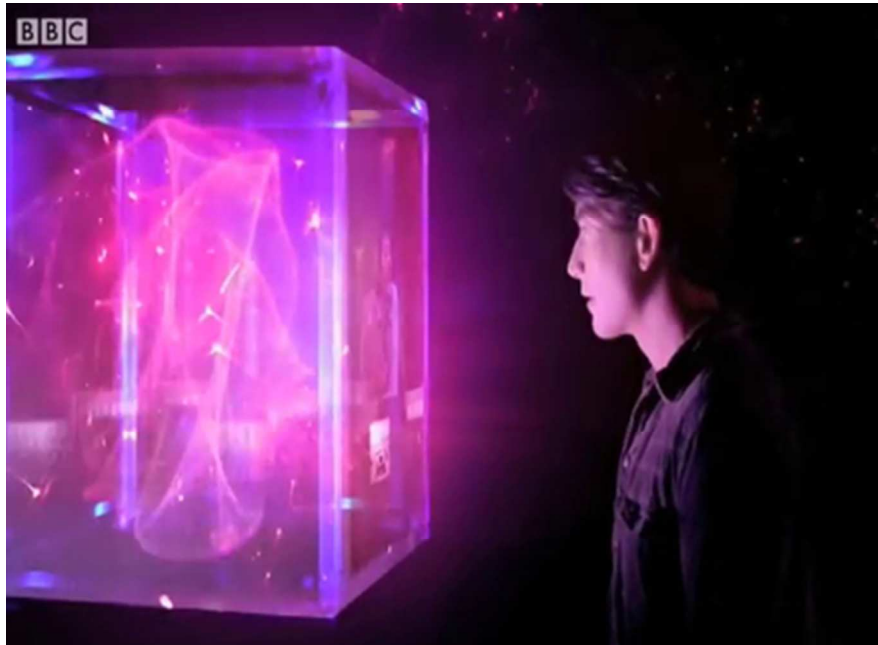


Fig. 1. iPlayer as portal: the 'Next Level' campaign (2010)
18x13mm (600 x 600 DPI)

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Fig. 2, 'Beyond the computer' (2012)
21691x12192mm (1 x 1 DPI)

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Fig 3. 'Always there when you need it' (2014)
21691x12192mm (1 x 1 DPI)

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Fig. 4 'If you love something let it show' (2015)
32512x18288mm (1 x 1 DPI)

Review Only