

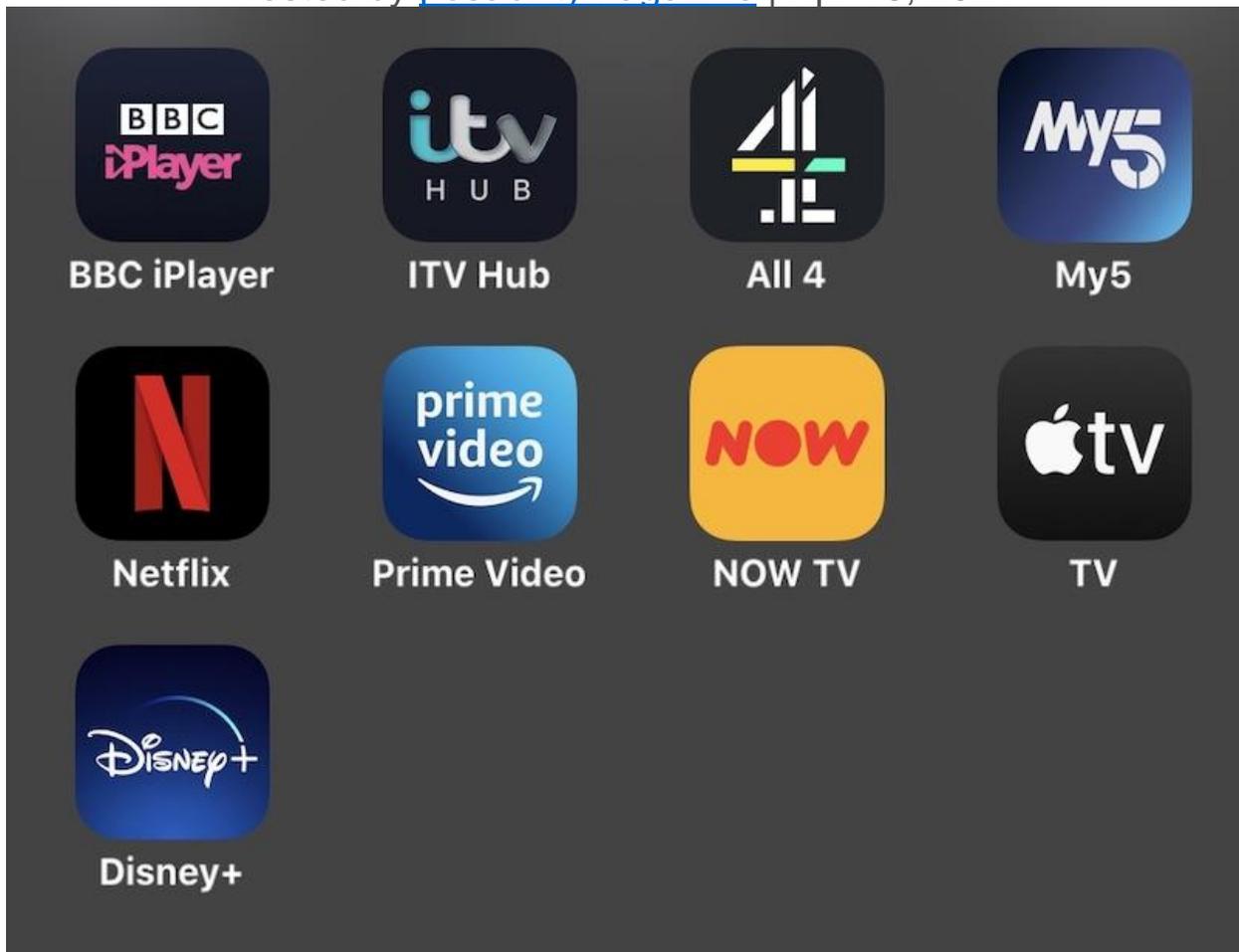
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POSABILITY

MAGAZINE

Report: audio description missing from three-quarters of Netflix content

Posted by [posabilitymagazine](#) | Apr 16, 2021



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By Emma Purcell | Twitter: [@P94Emma](#)

Research has found more than 75% of TV series and films on the streaming service Netflix has no audio description available, potentially impacting two million people in the UK who are visually impaired or registered blind.

The study conducted by [Lenstore](#) found that only 25.4% of Netflix's content provided audio description. It also compared audio description on Disney+, which was found to have audio description available on 62.6% of its films and TV shows.

Amar Latif, blind entrepreneur and broadcaster, and blind comedian Chris McCausland are just a few of well-known people raising their frustrations over the lack of audio description.

Audio description essentially describes the elements of a show or film that people with sight loss can't see. For instance, facial expressions, body language, settings, actions, text and images. According to [Ofcom's Code on Television Access Services](#), broadcasters should provide audio description to a minimum of 10% of its content. However, many broadcasters including BBC, ITV, Channel 5 and Amazon Prime Video say they have exceeded that obligation. A BBC spokesperson said: "We have a quota in the Communications Act for 10 per cent of our content to have audio description. We deliver well in excess of that and have voluntarily committed to providing at least 20 per cent of content on our regulated linear channels with audio description."

The BBC also stated that much of its content does not need audio description and instead it follows guidelines on presenting and narrating. Plus, some content can be used for both television and radio. They added: "Unlike subtitling, audio description is not necessary or possible on all content. Much of what the BBC broadcasts is live content, or reportage where audio description cannot be added.

“When this is the case, we have rules around presentation and foster good practice in commentary to ensure live events like music or sport can be understood without dependence on pictures. We also have guidance on narrating information contained within TV graphics.

“Sometimes, programmes simply work without images, which are produced using an approach called bi-media production. This was developed by the BBC in the 1990s to enable more TV reportage to be reusable on our radio stations, and also improves the accessibility of our programmes for people with visual impairments.”

ITV has also confirmed that it is providing a high number of audio described programmes: “Across all of the ITV channels, we audio describe about 35% of all programmes. This ranges from 21% on ITV main channel (where there are also lots of live programmes) to over 50% on ITV3 and ITV4. Given that our Ofcom target is 10%, this represents a very significant amount of AD over and above the obligations.”

Channel 5 say it is committed to making as much of its programmes as accessible as possible: “At Channel 5, accessibility to our content for all UK viewers is a priority and we are continuously looking to improve our access services across both Channel 5 and its VOD service, My5.”

A spokesperson for Amazon Prime Video said how the online streaming service has increased the number of shows and films with audio description: “Prime Video has doubled the size of the number of titles in the UK Prime Video catalogue with audio description available including 100% of titles produced by Amazon Studios since 2016 and work continues to continue the expansion.”

The research conducted by Lenstore found that a number of popular titles on Netflix UK titles do not have audio description, including Steven Spielberg’s classic war movie Saving Private Ryan, BBC cop drama Line Of Duty, and classic ‘90s sitcom Friends. Some of the

films and television shows on Disney+ that do not provide audio description include beloved cartoon The Simpsons, Oscar-winning The Sound Of Music, and the X-Men movie series. Whilst many titles on Netflix UK and Disney+ are missing this feature, both services ensure all of their original content is fully accessible including Bridgerton, The Mandalorian, The Queen's Gambit and WandaVision. Netflix UK and Disney+ were both unavailable for comment. Despite most networks and streaming services providing more than 20% of content with audio description, more is needed to make 100% pre-recorded content accessible.

Amar Latif is a blind entrepreneur who started the company Traveleyes, which supports blind and visually impaired people who enjoy travelling. He has also made TV appearances including Pilgrimage, Ready Steady Cook, Travelling Blind and Celebrity MasterChef.

He shares his frustration over the lack of audio description: "I am extremely passionate about audio description, TV shows and movies alike. They are such a fantastic form of escapism and allow us all to delve into stories and other worlds."

"Sadly, many of these wonderful shows are not accessible to blind folk, and I have found myself time and time again frustrated at my lack of options across mainstream media channels."

Not having audio description available for blind and visually impaired audiences can make them feel isolating and unable to join in the conversation.

Amar added: "It can feel incredibly lonely to hear my friends or colleagues discussing the latest show that is trending and I find myself unable to join in the discussions because more often than not, the show hasn't been released with audio description. On the flip side, when audio descriptions are included it feels incredible, to be able to

enjoy new shows and movies and feel like blind people and their needs have been considered.”

Amar would like to see audio description be a legal requirement when creating and distributing content: “It would be great if there were some sort of law or policy in place that required audio description, rather than relying on companies deciding themselves whether to include it because, as we have seen, they tend not to,” he said.

Blind comedian [Chris McCausland](#), who has made appearances on *Would I Lie To You*, *Have I Got News For You?* and *8 Out Of 10 Cats Does Countdown*, shared his experiences of poor quality audio description when purchasing and streaming films and TV shows. He said: “I would love a service that allowed for AD to play over a separate audio channel so that it could be listened to on one earphone and others in the room didn’t have to put up with it.”

Chris would also like to hear the audio description with surround sound: “Currently audio description mainly seems to be provided over the standard stereo soundtracks. So, if you have a film with surround sound, you cannot have audio description over the immersive audio track. Ridiculous really as blind people would benefit so much from immersive surround sound audio, but currently have to choose between this with no AD, or AD with a more basic stereo mix.”

Chris has also had to make a complaint to Apple after a film he purchased later removed the audio description. “I have bought tons of titles from iTunes over the years, and it’s not unheard of for an audio description track to just disappear off a title that has already been purchased with AD,” he said.

“I have contacted Apple about this, and they just pass responsibility for this over to the film distributors. There should be an obligation for online storefronts such as Apple to ensure that this does not happen.” He added: “Also, they should do more to ensure that films have AD tracks included when the AD track is available on other formats. For

example, the Back to the Future trilogy has just been upgraded to 4k on iTunes, but only the third film has AD, when all of them do on the 4k physical release – bonkers and annoying.”

A petition to make audio description compulsory has been created by journalist and audio description user Emma Purcell.

Emma, who lives with the eye condition [Acute Retinal Necrosis](#), began the petition – [Make audio description available on ALL films, TV programmes and streaming services](#) – in October 2019 following her own frustration of not being able to access all TV shows and films.

18 months on, she has reached more than 2,500 signatures but is eager to reach thousands of additional supporters. Then television networks, streaming services, production companies and governments will be pushed to do more to make access for all.

You can sign and share the [petition](#) using the hashtag #ADForAll.