[GB] An overview of how COVID-19 is effecting the UK media industry

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Julian Wilkins
Wordley Partnership

The effects of COVID-19 and the lockdown have dramatically affected the UK film and TV industry, with cinemas closed and most studios shut as productions are suspended. Below is a summary reflecting the impact this has had on the industry.

For example, soaps such as BBC's *Eastenders* and ITV's *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale* have had their production suspended for the foreseeable future and fewer episodes are being broadcast each week to maximise the supply of pre-filmed material.

However, as a significant proportion of the British population are confined to their homes, there has been a marked increase in demand for new streaming services such as Britbox and Disney+. Netflix is set to limit its streaming quality in European territories in a bid to cope with network overload brought about by increased usage.

All the UK broadcasters have launched programmes to cater for the current coronavirus lockdown, such as the BBC having chat show host Graham Norton interview celebrity guests online from their homes. The BBC has launched a daily educational programme called *BBC Bitesize Daily* to ensure that children follow their school curriculum from home. Sky has introduced educational children's programming to its Sky Kids service.

The UK Chancellor (finance minister) has launched measures to support freelancers and the self-employed within the creative industries hit by the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. Freelance workers and the self-employed in the United Kingdom will be able to apply for a grant of up to GBP 2 500 a month from the government to compensate for lost earnings during the coronavirus crisis. However, payment will not begin until June 2020.

UK organisations such as the British Film Institute and the Film & TV Charity have partnered to create an industry-backed COVID-19 Film & TV Emergency Relief Fund. The fund is supported by initial donations totalling GBP 2.5 million from Netflix, the BFI, BBC Studios, BBC Content, WarnerMedia and several individuals. ITV is launching a GBP 500 000 development fund to support self-employed workers (so-called "indies") on lockdown.

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The BBC has unveiled a five-step plan to help independent production companies. The five-point plan includes a “company-centric approach to impacted productions”, with the BBC working closely with production companies on current projects that have been disrupted to find supportive solutions wherever possible, including being flexible around delivery dates and varying cash flow as appropriate. The BBC has increased the Small Indie Fund from GBP 1 million to GBP 2 million this year to encompass a larger number of companies, focusing particularly on the smallest businesses, those in the nations and regions or with diverse leadership.

Channel 4 is planning to reduce its content budget by GBP 150 million as part of measures to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis; these measures also include furloughing 90 employees. On the other hand, it has launched a raft of shows to cater for the lockdown, whilst many international broadcasters have acquired Jamie Oliver and Channel 4's fast-turnaround cooking show targeting viewers in lockdown.

ITV has cancelled bonuses and cut the salaries of its most senior executives as the coronavirus crisis continues to hit advertising revenues. The London-based independent media agency Generation Media has warned that investment in TV advertising in the United Kingdom could fall by more than 50% as a result of the pandemic.

By contrast, Ruth Berry, who is the Managing Director of Global Distribution at ITV Studios, announced: “We are so fortunate to have an incredible depth and breadth of a library with over 46 000 hours of programming, and we're also really fortunate that many of our new dramas that we were expecting this year are already well on the way to becoming available. So quite a few of the titles that we discussed at our drama festival in mid-February are still delivering as expected and we're out selling them now.”

Various conferences which have been cancelled, such as The Creative Cities Convention in Glasgow, will reappear in 2021. The annual Edinburgh Television Festival in August has moved online in 2020. Big sporting events have been lost from screens for the foreseeable future, such as Formula One racing, Premier League football and the Wimbledon tennis tournament. Big non-sporting events have been cancelled, such as Glastonbury’s 50th anniversary Music Festival, but the BBC say they will create output to celebrate the occasion.

TV News broadcasters including the BBC, ITN (who produce output for ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5) and Sky News have had their journalists and crews designated as key workers and are not restricted by the lockdown rules.

The gaming industry sees further development arising from the lockdown. For instance, Adam Harris, Global Head of the Twitch Brand Partnership Studio, says: "As the technology becomes more immersive and creators continue to develop

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new innovative storylines, video games will be a staple for all future generations, further eating away at the ability of traditional TV to attract attention."

BBC moves to protect indie sector

https://www.c21media.net/bbc-moves-to-protect-indie-sector/

COVID-19 Nothilfefonds

https://filmtvcharity.org.uk/covid-19-help-advice/covid-19-relief-fund/

BBC to deliver biggest push on education in its history

https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2020/coronavirus-education

C4 preps shows for viewers in lockdown

https://www.c21media.net/c4-preps-shows-for-viewers-in-lockdown/

ITV looks to support indie sector during lockdown with GBP 500k development fund

https://www.itv.com/presscentre/press-releases/itv-looks-support-indie-sector-during-lockdown-ps500k-development-fund

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