This is a transcript of the presentation given by Professor Katie Ellis for a JCIPP Curtin Corner Webinar on Friday 17 June *One Audience for Accessibility: How Captions and Audio Description Help Everyone*

Professor John Phillimore (JP)

Our speaker today is Professor Katie Ellis. Katie is a Professor and Director of the Centre of a Culture and Technology at Curtin University.

She's an internationally recognized expert on disability, media and digital access. She's incredibly prolific, I hadn't realized that until we put together her bio this morning for today's talk.

She's listed all these various publications from just the last three or four years – an incredible number. She has co-authored books called the Routledge companion to disability and media; Manifestos for the future of critical disability studies; Interdisciplinary approaches to disability – looking towards the future. This one I quite like the sound of – Trauma and disability in Mad Max, and also Disability and digital TV culture. So it's no surprise that in 2020 she was named as Curtin University researcher of the year for research leadership because she's clearly having a real purple patch in terms of publications and research so it's fantastic that she's found the time to talk to us today. We did try to have Katie on I think a year or so ago but for various reasons that didn't happen.

So I'm really pleased that you've actually managed to make it, Katie, and after a few little hiccups in the last 20 minutes we've actually got you there on the screen, and you're raring to go. So we're really looking forward to it and, over to you and then I'll come back when we do the Q and A in about 40 minutes time. Okay, we're here ready to go.

Professor Katie Ellis (KE):

So I'd also like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land and pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging and as my presentation today is about disability I'd also like to acknowledge the disability leaders in this country and this university and all the work that they are doing for disability access and Disability Justice, in an often hostile environment.

I'd also like to celebrate and point out the existence of indigenous sign languages, which is a language format that's used by both people with and without disabilities in Indigenous communities and I think it's just a really great example of how access for people with disabilities can be used by everyone, for all sorts of benefits and ways of connecting and communicating with one another. So, to get into my talk today, which has been delayed because of the pandemic.

It seems like everyone's going on their delayed holidays, post pandemic or coming out of the pandemic and I'm doing my Curtin Corner now.

Finally, so my talk today is going to be about accessibility of video on demand.

I'm going to be talking a bit about TV accessibility and how people with disabilities access TV, and how this is being improved through video on demand and how non-disabled audiences have kind of got into accessibility through video on demand as a form of mobile or innovative television entertainment. So before I start, I'd like to position my work within a social model of disability framework, and this is a way of thinking about disability that I like to focus the problem within society.

Disability is a problem we have had, we've decided to create society around able bodied nodes. And I consider impairment to be something located in the body and the disability is basically the social reaction to impairment or the social exclusion of people with impairments. And I think we can see that really clearly with the television.

So to get right into it -our TV is an audio visual medium so it can be inaccessible to people who have impairments related to our vision and hearing. But television is something that can be redesigned to include people with vision and hearing impairments, and actually, other types of disabilities too so when I, when I talk about the ability to access television, because I'm really focusing on audio description, which is audio description is exactly what it sounds like – it's a track of narration that describes the important visual elements of the TV show, a performance to people who cannot see it, so they can still experience TV but just in a different way.

Captions are probably something that, you know, we're most familiar with because captions have been around for a long time. They're legislated on broadcast television captions in words, along the bottom of the screen.

We've got captions available in this webinar today so I find captions are something that are really useful to turn on when I'm in these types of webinars anyway because I'm always getting distracted or I'm not quite picking up on what people are saying because they are talking to quickly so captions are a tool.

Pandemic - I'll talk about this later that we're all starting to use in these digital media platforms.

So on TV, we can also have these other accessibility features that are listed here but I'm not going to go into too much throughout this talk today but they're important it's important to know that the technology is there, and we can create these kinds of features for people who might need them such as lip reading avatars, or signing avatars which animated hands providing sign language on screen.

We can also have functionality for subtitles of other languages to be spoken out and clean audio.

I think it's an accessibility feature to watch for the future so clean audio is providing this speech amplified without any of the background music or other sometimes distracting sounds that you can have when you're watching a, you know, an action or some sort of drama say this is an audio feature that's not available in Australia.

But it is something that I know the broadcasters are getting quite interested in.

So, I'm going to begin the talk today by talking about a project back in 2015.

And this was when the video on demand started coming into Australia so for a long time we had no Netflix people might remember I said I remember there was no Netflix here in Australia and then sort of all of a sudden in 2015 we had Netflix, Stan and Presto into the market.

And we did have another on demand platform at the time, which was called Quick plugs and Foxtel was starting to play in this space too with Fox by their own.

And so, when, when all these new entrants video on demand entered the market I thought it would be a really great time to do some, some research into how accessible these platforms are so kind of marketing themselves as you know this is a really new flexible way of accessing TV, and because I was already doing research on accessibility and TV I was wondering what does this mean for people with disabilities.

Will this result in a more accessible environment. Will this be the same.

Or will it be worse so these drone communications. Consumer Action Network they funded this project where we assessed the availability of audio descriptions and captions mainly on the video on demand coming into the country and what we found was that Netflix entered the market without any audio description but then, coincidentally within two weeks of launching here, they introduced audio description into their platform which was really exciting for the blindness community here in Australia because at the time we were the only English speaking nation in the OECD not to have any audio description available on TV so Netflix came in, gave the community that first consistent offering of audio description within, within two weeks of launching.

But the issue here was that this is a subscription service so people had to pay for it. So there are all kinds of issues we need to unpack around that. Um, there was, was no audio description on any of the other platforms. At that time in 2015.

But what was interesting was that Netflix launched with captions and Stan kind of quietly introduced them during the period of the project.

You know, we only found out via social media chatter that Stan did introduce captions on their on demand platform back in 2015.

It was not something that they actually promoted so it was unclear how to access them you had to go into this, this dance. So we made we made some tip sheets and instructions for the community about how you actually access these accessibility features.

So, another question we asked people was which services were they using.

At the time of this project. I think only 50% of the people we talked to were actually using video on demand because it was very new to the country people weren't quite sure what it was or if it was worth investing in, but these, these are the platforms that we, we were researching, at the time, most people were accessing Netflix Australia and Foxtel and catch up TV but we weren't actually doing a big investigation of the what the top TV offers that were available through SBS ABC channel seven, nine and 10 at the time because the project really focused on the subscription services.

So people were still talking about this was the second most popular service and then we had Foxtel, and you can see by looking at my graph. There was not a huge amount of different platforms to choose from at this time it was good, the first year of getting video on demand Netflix, Stan and Presto, as you'll see later in my talk, we have a lot more choice around this now.

And so when you're also asking people how did they access these services and we got some really interesting insights around this so people were mainly using their iPad.

A lot of people use a desktop computer at the time. Smart TV was getting out there, the phone was also another platform, whereby the disability community was accessing video on demand back in 2015. And we will also ask them questions about you know what kind of other accessibility features would be good for you, trying to access these services and we were getting insights like a really big TV or a comfortable lounge so you know for the disability community it was both about creating a space to access these new services, but also using perhaps different types of technology, then the non-disabled community were using at the time, the desktop computer.

Yeah. So we said how video on demand view is that more, or is it less accessible.

And it's not massive amounts of differences in this graph for me, I think, you know this this really demonstrated that people felt at the time maybe it was too soon to call no slightly more people said yes video on demand is more accessible.

Similar amount said it was less accessible and then you know some people were saying it's about the same, and a big funding from this particular project was the cost of video on demand having to pay a monthly subscription fee to access video on demand particularly, you know, which people were interested in doing the audio description aspect, it was the only way to get it at the time, and people talked a lot

about the economics of disability to us that you know having to pay additional amounts of money for these accessibility features just to access recreation and leisure and cultural texts, like the rest of the community wasn't always something feasible for this particular community and you know we talked to people about, you know, whether they chose to pay for a subscription service to video on demand or pay for internet or pay for food that much. So back in 2015 there was, you know, a real strong discussion about the cost of having a disability in this country as well and I think that was really fascinating insight to get within a project about accessing video on demand. Television and video was accessible to people with disabilities through captions and audio description in particular.

And what was interesting was at that time the industry felt this was a government issue as well.

But the government was trying to find other ways to encourage the introduction, put a description in particular on on-demand on broadcast television, were just so gutless about accessibility to television. Never legislate to bring this in and it's their responsibility. So 2015, and I'll talk about this, towards the end of my research, you know, big shift happens later, the back then and this was very very strongly considered to be a problem that the government needed to solve, and they were at the time really stepping up to have that conversation, although things have happened in the intervening time.

So, just to sum up on this project.

This 2015 based project, which happened during what was described as a streaming wars in Australia when we had presenters and Netflix into the market rapidly and compete for people to subscribe to just their platform.

Yeah, we had a streaming war at a time so our recommendations during the peak of the streaming war period of this topic where we made three recommendations and we focused on government we focused on the industry.

And we also focused on people with disabilities. So our recommendation to the government was to actually legislate in this area to not just legislate for video on demand but to introduce accessibility features to ensure that disabled audience could access.

This form of entertainment, also to legislate broadcast television which people can access for free, and we all have a human right to access television, according to the International Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities the public broadcasters have a charter, that says that you have to ensure that everyone can access platform so we strongly argue that if captions are legislated then audio description should be legislated as well, and that we should consider legislating both broadcast, an on demand. And we also recommend that the government really communicate what they were doing about this issue not just go out and do things behind closed doors that this was, you know, a passionate important issue for people

wanting to access these types of services and others, the government should actually do something about it and then communicate to the community what they were doing. So, the video on demand providers we recommended that they recognize that people with disabilities are a significant group in the community 20% of the Australian population has a disability.

This is a significant audience, and video on demand is all about attracting smaller audiences, it's not like broadcast television where the point is to access a mass big audience as much as you can.

The point of video on demand is to is to attract smaller audiences and then when aggregated those audience become quite large. And it really struck us that people who wanted to access entertainment by captions or via audio description, were described audiences that video on demand providers could focus on and welcome into their platforms.

And then finally we recommended to people with disabilities that they should keep advocating for more accessible TV platforms and create their own advocacy groups online and demand is access so throughout the 2015 project there was, there was an online group code.

The accessible Netflix project which is based in the US and they really agitated for the change around bringing audio description. Onto the Netflix platform which people might remember okay around the show Daredevil yeah they created a great campaign that said you can't have a superhero show about a blind superhero, and not make sure it's accessible to your blind audience. So when the show was released on Netflix that was when audio description came in.

So the advocacy and the industry recognition of a disabled audience that really worked together to make audio description available to people with vision impairments internationally because Netflix is an international platform.

So, in the time since this little project has really become quite large within, within the body of my work.

I've started thinking about accessible TV, a few different ways.

How can we make television more accessible. I think there are three things that we can do. First is, is legislation, which has been successful with captions now captions need to be available on 100% of content on broadcast TV.

But it's not it's not perfect right it's only on the, on the primary digital channels the multi channels do not have to provide captions so in using this example of captions on broadcast TV and I'm aware that it's not a perfect example, there is more is more to be done and we are doing more, but that that is one way, the TV can be made more accessible is through legislation or government support government can invest as they did in 2020, in making audio description, available on the public broadcasters.

But I started thinking about accessibility as innovation.

So, people with disabilities obviously benefit from these accessibility features like audio description, like captioning, like the clean audio I mentioned earlier, signing subtitles and so on.

But how can people without disabilities benefit?

That is something I'd like to talk a bit more about. Now, I've also got penalties here, we are not good or bad. That is one way we could agitate, and change, but today I'm going to talk about innovation for the rest of the presentation.

So as, as I said at the beginning captions have really become quite mainstream in the time that I've been working on this type of research. I remember back about 2013 2014 reading articles you know where captions were described as visual clutter on screen and people found them really distracting to in the last couple of years where people are now using captions on are almost anything. You know, I had a meeting with someone today who was talking about a friend who just has captions on TV all the time, and I'm in a bit of an epic battle with my husband at home I always turn the captions on to watch TV just because I like having them there. He turns them off and then I turn them on.

And I've got a couple of articles here about captions and people using them who don't have any kind of hearing impairment or who I know are hard of hearing. So the first one is the real reason you use closed captions for everything now in this article, the author really talks about how we've been watching a lot of TV and we're missing a lot of TV, because what we tend to do when we, when we binge watch TV is we get distracted we're not always paying attention to the screen so what captions can do is pull our attention back to those kind of details, you might have dozed off about, or, just help us to focus on screen and not on something else, you know on our phones or whatnot if you, if you're accessing the captions you're not going to go off to your phone quite so much.

The other article is just talking about using captions as something that the author really likes to do and they talk about judging new friends, on the basis of whether or not they'll access captions and she kind of says well people might have resisted at first but then once they start using the captions regularly, it is something that they also will embrace in their own viewing.

So, actions are quite established as something that lots of people use for lots of different reasons, not necessarily just for accessibility and got me wondering about audio description is this something that could happen to audio description.

Would people just want to access a description of what we see on screen rather than watching what we see on screen, and evidence suggests yes, or maybe, so I've got a couple of articles here.

One is about the Netflix show called Sensei, which was a very complicated show that was set in multiple settings and it had multiple different characters who would never quite sure where you were and what people audiences of Netflix did was in order to fully understand what was happening within the show, which could get quite complicated and complex, they started accessing the audio description track which would fill in those missing details about character, about location, about what was going on so this was a really creative use of audio description by the not blind community.

That is one use of audio description that we have considered in other research projects, could audio description help people pick up more detail about what's happening on the screen, can audio description, the kind of fan feature where fans who want to access as much information as possible about what they're viewing on screen yet, often people will watch something on screen and then they'll engage in some second screen activities looking at wikis, about what's actually going on and these types of shows, put audios description in to fit into that sort of environment, that context.

And also on life hacker was this other article here that really looks at how people can use audio description as an audio book, to go and do things like walk their dog while still accessing their favourite TV show.

So then we had the COVID 19 pandemic which was a time of really great digital innovation where all of a sudden, completely overnight, everything became digitized we had to access work, study, social life, going to the doctor, the shopping, we were doing it all digitally from our own homes.

So people really started innovating with these different types of audiences online and so captions and audio description really did emerge during this time with really quite interesting and useful features for the entire population so people were using captions in their work meetings to, to actually follow along with what was going on, make sure that they focused on the, the accuracy of automatic captions and inclusion improved because more people were using them or people wearing headsets to access if they weren't in meetings.

But at the same time people got what we will call a screen fatigue and they didn't want to just be tied to a screen all the time.

You know, accessing every single part of their life so audio description immersion is time away to engage with all the necessary things but also take a break from staring at a screen for an entire day.

So, at this time we thought it'd be a really good idea to do that 2015 research again and see what a change, see if the audio description captioning environment had improved.

See if more people without disabilities were using video on demand for flexibility and accessibility so when we repeated the research from 2015, we tried to include more people without disability they talk about.

So, in 2015 we ran a survey had 173 respondents. In 2020, we ran another survey with the same questions, but there were a lot more video on demand providers to include within a set because we went in during a streaming war in coexistence you know there were a lot more entrants to the market, we had, you know, Disney plus Amazon and a lot, a lot of other providers, which I'll talk about in a minute.

So this survey expanded to include more providers, and it also expanded to include more responses, because we did want to hear from people with disability as well.

To recap the 2015 only 52% of people were watching video on demand it was really new to the Australian television landscape, but in 2021, 93% of respondents were using at least one video on demand or streaming service, and we felt this was because of four reasons. So, there was an increase in the streaming service providers, we have a lot more choice now the video on demand audience was better established.

We also have the availability of accessibility features which might have something to do with that. And you also have wider audiences becoming more aware of the accessibility features. So in this project, we actually did include the, the broadcast TV apps change in accessibility that had occurred between 2015 and 2021, 2020, which was that the government funded the ABC and the SBS to introduce audio description on the ABC and the SBS.

Both have received further funding to introduce to maintain audio description on their broadcast but then also introduced on demand platforms which their audiences are using for flexibility.

And for increased choice.

So, as I said, most people are subscribing to or accessing multiple services.

It was rare for anyone to just be using one app in this study. So the devices people were using this was, it was quite, quite similar to what we found earlier.

But whereas in the 2015 study we found that people with intellectual disabilities maybe were using a smartphone more than other, other people in this one you know the people who are blind they predominantly use smartphones, which makes sense because they were accessing via audio description.

People were also using smart TVs more in this study. And so these types of preferences, we believe were related to the accessibility of device, and something that was really strongly communicated to us was that whether or not they are compatible with technology. And so I add new findings in this project, we can explore the 2015 one was the co-viewing experience. So we talked to some people who were

both visually impaired and not visually impaired watching TV together, and what the co- viewing experience was like for today's groups with these particular features. So, what we're finding in 2021 was that people with or without disabilities are watching TV together.

And so they both wanted a really quality accessibility feature so quality of captions quality of audio description, they wanted accurate captions they wanted the captions to be accurately describing what was happening on screen, they wanted the audio description to be accurate and good quality as well. So what we have found is that in the co-viewing experience with people who are blind watching TV with people who are not blind is the person who can see has often had to be a proxy audio describer for this group. But with the introduction of quality audio description on these kind of on demand platforms and broadcast capture options, they can just watch TV together as a recreational social experience. We had some great interview focus group discussions around, enhancing the experience of watching TV with these people within their relationships. So, a question we ask in all of our studies what accessible features would make watching TV easier for you.

People do often say, closed captions because this is you know something that people are quite familiar with.

So we have that again closed captions are accessibility feature that people really do want to use and wanting continued clean audio is something that's coming up of interest and now that we have audio description perhaps this is where we can turn our attention. We've clean audio at 31%. Spoken subtitles.

Talking menus. So, speaking remote controls and best compatibility. And all of these kinds of things I think things that the entire audience wants regardless of disability we all want, you know, accessible, flexible, digital platforms that are easy to use that are intuitive to us that we don't have to think about too much that we don't have to ask somebody to set up for us. We just know how to do it.

Okay, so, stability features, were used by people with, with that disability, 56% wanted to use accessibility features, 76% use closed captions, we've got the audio description spoken subtitles are things that people really would like to see more of a description through this project, it really has become quite a significant feature for people with disabilities, 45% of the people with disabilities that we surveyed use audio description, and this, as I have been saying, is a feature that is barely available, you know even five years ago. Closed capture and talking menus are also of interest.

So we spoke to people about their experiences of accessibility.

About half of our respondents thought video on demand was more accessible. That's a big change from 2015, when it was all kind of people were not quite sure if it was more or less accessible, or the same.

So, set up assistance has always been something that people have asked me about in my work on digital TV and access and representation for people with disability, in this project 23% said it was either difficult or very difficult to set up video demand. And about 38% ask for somebody, family or friend, to help them we set up. So we've seen people using assistive technology with video on demand as well.

But we also found that about half the people with disabilities we surveyed were using no additional assistive technology.

So, the availability of accessibility features and accessible content, about half of our participants with a disability studied, it was never, rarely or sometimes available and 30% of people had trouble finding this content.

So to me that sounds like an issue of communication. Again, that I spoke about earlier, while the accessible content might be there, it's not always clear how people with disabilities can get into it, so that's something to be worked on.

People were no longer thinking about this issue as a common issue it was really very strongly an industry issue and a video on demand provider issue so the audiences of people with disabilities have really changed their focus in 2021.

And they believe that accessibility was an issue that industry need to solve, industry need to be aware of, to acknowledge people with disabilities who to make up that 20% of the population are a significant part of the audience.

And there's, there was significant work that can be done within the industry to make video on demand much more accessible for people with disabilities so I've put some of the suggestions here in in the slides, these are all coming from people with disabilities that we spoke to either during interviews, or we did a few app walk throughs where people showed us how they use their video on demand. And together with these participants we co-design some tip sheets, about how to make it easier for people with disabilities to access different types of features but these are some of the feedback we got is, that this person believes that setting up should be easier.

Search Options need to be simplified and menus need to be simplified and a large number of technical support and frequently asked questions should be made available online and in the menus, so that they don't have to contact tech support by the phone, and this is particularly important to groups of people who are hard of hearing, or who might not use the phone for accessibility, uses a microphone or a different type of communication.

OK, so, we also have someone suggesting that apps need to be simplified, maybe a section or a filter that only shows programs with certain features.

So, you would only have shows recommended to you that have captions on them, if that is what you choose, and I actually think this is a great idea for audio description, you know, having a menu of only audio describe shows available to people so they

know immediately what they're accessing and whether that particular production would be available to them without having to start the show and realizing that there's no audio description here or that there's no captions so having little menus available to the libraries, and we know the technology is to do that because, you know, we get recommended different things all the time on Amazon and Netflix, based on our previous viewing.

And this this one in the middle here is an interesting one.

And I think really does speak to some of the insights from the 2015 project as well when, when Stan just kind of quietly introduced captions without promoting it to people so we had participants suggest that to promote the accessibility of the services so people know prior to the service, what's there and what's not.

And then, like the first feedback having some tutorials or some frequently asked questions to give instructions on how to access different features right at the beginning of the app or the website, would be useful.

And I realize I've gone over time. And this is my last slide, but I would just like to conclude by saying that, you know, we've seen lots of changes with the captions and audio description available on both video on demand and our broadcast free to TV, and as I said, whereas this used to be a problem that we thought the government had responsibility to so now the community is sending a strong message to the industry.

And the industry is as responsible, or perhaps more responsible for solving this issue and making video on demand more accessible to everyone.

That's great Katie. Thanks very much for that.

End of Presentation.

Question and Answer with Professor Katie Ellis – KE and Professor John Phillimore - JP (John Phillimore chairing Q&A)

JP: So thank you very much, just reminding everybody who's already we've got sort of seven or eight questions already on Slido but if you'd like to submit a question.

Just go to www.slido.com or download the app, and our event code is JCIPP. So maybe we should get stuck straight into it. Okay.

There's a couple of questions from Annabel sort of following on from some of the things you mentioned right towards the end there some of those quotes you've got from the various people, and Annabel was saying, where do you suggest the best place is for including a note that captions or transcripts are available, is it at the top of the content, where, where do you put that so how do people find it really easily as opposed to having to troll through.

KE: This is such an important question and this is actually something that I know the industry are speaking about. Now I know that ABC, SBS is speaking about it at least, because the way it exists now in some of these platforms is audio description is right at the end of a long list of many other things.

So you know you have to get down through that list with your screen right up before you know you know that these shows doesn't have audio description or if it does have audio description.

I think the accessibility should be shown right at the top, and straightaway and I think it should be different, in multiple formats. So, this information should be communicated visually, and it should be communicated, depending on people are accessing, so I know SBS have done this with audio description on broadcast they have a chime. At the beginning of it, of a TV show so yeah when you come to recognize that this chime means there's audio description on this particular show but there's also the ad symbol down the bottom of the screen.

So, that they're talking about it.

JP: I mean, do these companies, the streaming services compete, or do their own research to upgrade and improve their accessibility services, or are there outsource companies, who specialize and do it for everybody?

So, you know, does Netflix compete with ABC having its own in-house, sort of research team or is basically there's a company, x out there that provides it for everybody.

KE: So, people have to search by going into the platform, and there's no standard about this. Sometimes there is an excess of sorry I don't have, you know, a great answer for you but this is a situation that you know sometimes it is in language sometimes it's seen in accessibility and you just have to figure it out platform to platform, and that's why we created these tip sheets because we, you know, and I can make that available to you to put up with this recording. So we talked to the community how you accessing this and so if you go to Netflix do this.

Here's what some of them do - Amazon does it in a particular way or Disney does it another way, which comes to your question John, so they all do things, they have their in house research and they do things differently but they, they are also engaging outside researchers to come in so I've been talking to SBS and ABC about these kinds of issues and doing a lot of work with the Centre for inclusive design, who are really active in this space.

And, and that was actually one of our recommendations in 2015 that these companies actually hire accessibility consultants, and those accessibility consultants should be people with disabilities who have lived experience of these kinds of issues, and try to navigate these often frustrating platforms.

I mean, I'm assuming I mean, there's always a tension between universality and being the same. This is trying to personalize things, but this seems to be one of those things a bit like people want to have the same plugs for things rather than having to have three different plugs for different standard talk apps or for the devices, the same as maybe as an accessibility issue having a standard, but really high quality.

Accessibility protocol would be really since, across all samples.

And this is a strong message that we get through the research is people want them to be the same. You know, you don't want to be learning how to figure out how to turn on audio description.

Every time you go to Disney, Amazon, Stan, you know, Netflix, it's wonderful that they're all there, but it's, you have to access it in a different way each time and you know the community, are very strongly saying to us at least that they, they want standards, they want there to be one way of doing this. Yeah, so that it's clear each time and that actually makes things more accessible.

JP: Yeah, okay. Someone just toward the very end, they said, I wish YouTube had a feature that enables you to upload transcripts from video, because she writes, she writes captions and transcripts for work at Department of fire and emergency services so you're not quite sure what YouTube, I mean like we just mentioned.

KE: YouTube are doing captions, but they are really inaccurate at times so I think they stopped investing in it but I think if you do turn on that captions option on YouTube people can access a transcript of it as well.

I know I've done that on some YouTube videos that I've been watching, I thought I'd really much rather read these then watch the video for, for no particular reason other than personalization and personal choice and I have been able to get that transcript, but maybe again this is one of those issues with intuition that it's hard, it's hard to figure out how to do these things. And then that usability aspect really is part of the whole accessibility discussion and absolutely more work to be done.

JP: Barbara's asked, what is the research around use of captions in an educational context – do they assist learning?

KE: I have great research on this. I'm glad you asked this question so I actually did some research, just prior to the pandemic. So we made captions available to every single student in about 22 units.

So students, these were our remote students but it was not during the pandemic so it's just people who are learning, you know, via the internet that's how they were enrolled. So we made on the lectures we made captions available to everyone and we gave it to them and said what do you think, and then we did some focus groups afterwards and the feedback was, it was great for maintaining concentration.

It was great for, if you have other distractions in the home, such as teenage children or other people living there were trying to get their attention, they could, you know, they could use the captions to stay on track with their studies, it was good for revision, it was good for keyword search.

And one of my favourite findings was that people really believe that even if they didn't need captions that their student colleagues who did need captions had a fundamental right to have those captions and the university had a responsibility to provide.

And it was like, all played out in front of our eyes again with people stuck at home with distractions.

JP: Yeah, you sort of mentioned this before I think your argument you had with your husband about whether to have captions or not. And I had the same thought I put this question up at the very beginning, just so people would know that they're on the right spot on Slido, but is there a distinctive age or gender profile for people who use captions more than others. I mean my kids are in their 20s and their friends tend to use it. I don't want to be distracted by it, but, you know, is there some sort of a distinctive cohort who are more or less likely to use captioning or more likely to use audio description? I think it could be something different but I imagined it is the younger people who use them more, I don't know why.

KE: Because it's on tik tok because it's on social media. Yeah, I think this can be traced back to when Facebook introduced their autoplay function on videos.

Remember how it used to be able to look at your Facebook and you'd have to press play if there was a video, and then all of a sudden they just started playing automatically and you might be at work, could be anywhere and this video can start playing so people will, you know, turn off the sound on their Facebook and just reading the captions that were coming up on the autoplay and I think it is from then that captions start being considered. You know visual clutter on screen that I mentioned earlier in the talk, and it was a useful tool. So there are a lot of captions coming up in different sort of social media of bonuses that the younger generations are using and then that fit into our university research so that people are saying you know captions are available, you know these other places, social media video on demand TV. It should be available at university lectures as well.

JP: Okay.

Annabel again, says that YouTube doesn't allow you to upload transcripts up on that channel, okay.

As I said, these talks are on the YouTube channel Curtin, and they tend to have, they have the trend that the transcript on the screen, whether we can separate them out and download them as a separate document I'm not sure but looks like we can, so we'll look into that.

Anonymous says it is not that long ago transcription was very expensive. Is audio transcription software considered a disruptive technology - I mean basically what's happening with them.

KE: It is now pretty much available at not too prohibitive an expense for most companies and captioning has really reduced cost. Yeah, this thing that audio description is, it's still expensive it is still an expensive thing because at the moment we do really need humans to be involved at every single stage of the creation of the audio description life cycle. So that hasn't gone down in cost.

But if you might get if you make it more available perhaps it would remain compulsory everybody has to spend the money anyway so you get a competitive advantage that one, that you know, audio description has great performances and can be used by so many different groups which I didn't really talk about in this talk but we have done other research on other groups like people with autism, parents of young children who are multitasking, people that like audio books, the aging community, you know so audio description. There's a market out there for sure.

JP: Is there any research on the satisfaction of captioning accuracy and engagement.

Because we all know, you can watch plenty of videos on YouTube with ridiculous captioning.

Don't get the right accents and look at the words wrong.

Is there any research on how that's going?

KE: Yeah, so there's, there's been lots of research on this across, probably about a decade of having an environment where we can do automatic captioning.

Hopefully it's getting better, but people do get very irritated about lack of accuracy, that's still a problem that's a big problem and, and hopefully with technological advancement it's something that can be improved so certainly the students that I spoke to, in my uni study on transcription captions, they felt optimistic and positive that technology would evolve to the point where accuracy would be acceptable.

JP: Just a couple more here.

Someone says I've got a physical disability and had a standard subscription and would like more keyboard access and shortcuts, just sort of going back to what we mentioned at the beginning that you need to have things at the very beginning, so you know how it works, rather than having to search for ages to find it.

KE: Yeah and, and also I think different ways of accessing, you know keyboard shortcuts for this person is obviously very important.

And it should be something that Stan and the other video on demand providers are talking about it will also be good if apps could remember where you're finished watching last time it would be good.

Obviously if you didn't do that last time, I mean, that's the case for all sorts of things but clearly. That would be good for captioning as well, and for audio description.

JP: Someone else mentioned that the fact that the university hasn't yet provided audio captioning collections is disgusting to me. So where are we at with universities and audio capturing, are we doing that?

KE: Yes, I mean, I think it's coming.

JP: Okay. Is that again a thing that's going to be across the sector or is it going to be individual universities will use it as a marketing tool or a number of universities are already doing this?

KE: Yeah, so it depends on whether a university likes to turn it on technology there, we can access the technology and other universities have turned this on.

JP: So, this is a bit of your industry versus government issue I mean, on the one hand you could argue that some universities might use this as a competitive advantage to try and attract students with disabilities.

And you could just argue it's a right and government could just insist upon it, is that correct.

KE: Well yeah, we could argue all those things it's, it's a learning tool.

It's not a competitive advantage, it is a human right.

Look, I think it is still viewed predominantly as a, an accessibility feature that is retrofitted or retrospectively turned on, but the technology does exist for universities to turn on automatic captions which can then be corrected if necessary.

And I know some universities are doing this as a competitive industry to attract an audience.

JP: The universities are often at the forefront of some of those, you know, equity, equity issues is one of those ones you think that they would be up front and do this as opposed to having to be dragged kicking and screaming.

Last couple of questions or comments, was a question was, is it in your research – how long does it take your brain to get used to captions and not see them as distracting?

KE: I have no idea that's an interesting one.

It sounds like an interesting humanities engineering faculty research project.

JP: Yeah. Okay. Good point.

And someone also mentioned that YouTube allows you to upload vtt, and other caption files which are then used to create a written transcript document, but not in YouTube, there is nowhere in YouTube to say that a transcript of the video is available, ok so again we're sort of getting along the way, they have it we aren't quite there yet.

What's next?

KE: I want to do some research around the pandemic in communications with people with disabilities. And these kinds of accessibility features being available now in things like press conferences and on social media, health communications, that's, that's what I'd like to do next, because I think, you know, during the pandemic it was a really digital environment, and some of the universal design features to make this environment accessible to people with disabilities were really embraced, really important and really valuable to us as an entire community, just say that you know people with disabilities, people without disabilities, we're all part of the same community and we in that situation and ongoing, we went through something big.

And the accessibility features were really important to making sure that we're informed.

I've got a report I can send you. There might be an idea when we do upload the PowerPoint, maybe at the end you may want to put that up on the record. That'd be great.

JP: Well, look that's fantastic, it's about 10 past five so a good time to stop and can I say once again on behalf of everybody thanks very much for finding the time and presenting to us it was great.

KE: Okay, thank you so much. And for everybody else thank you for logging in and watching.