

Shame! The 'technical glitches' that hit Game of Thrones could limit other popular live-streamed events

Written by Marc C-Scott, Lecturer in Screen Media, Victoria University



Not everyone got to see Cersei Lannister (Lena Headey) and Jaime Lannister (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau) in the opening season seven episode of Game of Thrones. [HBO](#)

Winter was coming with the first episode of the new Game of Thrones series this week, but the real freeze was a technical one.

Many fans across the world were unable to watch the much anticipated season opener using legal streaming services, such as [Foxtel Now](#) in Australia.

Foxtel [issued a statement on Monday](#) saying the problem was due to “technical glitches around the world”.

This technical glitch is extremely concerning, not just for fans of Game of Thrones but for the future of streaming video of major events and programming.

The focus on streaming

It was only last month that Foxtel launched its new logo and rebranded its Foxtel Play streaming service as Foxtel Now.



New logo for Foxtel Now. [Foxtel](#)

The company’s [announcement](#) of the new service promised Game of Thrones fans – and those of other programs – that they could now enjoy their favourite shows in high definition for as little as A\$15 per month.

Previously, the only way to access Game of Thrones legally in Australia was via Foxtel’s “[prohibitively expensive Pay TV offerings](#)

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This restricted access had seen Australians become some of the world's leaders in [illegally downloading](#) previous seasons of Game of Thrones.

Even with the cheaper access via Foxtel Now, a [Finder.com.au survey](#) showed that more than 30% of people said they would be illegally downloading the new season.

The glitch this week will create headaches for Foxtel, and raises questions over the viability of its cheaper streaming alternative to its premium pay TV service.

Many Australians vented their frustration on social media via the hashtag [#FoxtelFail](#) and on [Foxtel's community board](#).

But while Australians targeted their anger at Foxtel, the glitch was global.

A global problem

In addition to Australia, fans in the [United States](#), [Latin America](#) and [India](#) also faced the same frustrating technical issues.

[Hotstar](#), an Indian online streaming service, had been [promoting](#) an "Hours Before Torrents" promise. Its advertising used the phrases "Torrent Morghulis" and that "torrents must die", both based on popular Game of Thrones phrases.



Advertising ahead of Game of Thrones premiere on Hotstar. [Hotstar](#)

Unfortunately the creative marketing campaign will now be laughed at as torrents of the premiere program were reportedly [available illegally](#) 45 minutes before the episode was

available on Hotstar.

An unexpected surge

Foxtel has redirected the blame for the technical glitch towards both its own customers – thanks to a [40% surge in new subscriptions](#) in the 48 hours before episode one's screening time – and to Game of Thrones' [US production company HBO](#) .

Level 3 Communications is HBO's partner in delivering its HBO Go streaming service. Diane Tryneski, chief digital officer at HBO, [had said ahead of the season premiere](#) that Level 3 was pivotal in its “ability to stream Game of Thrones and other HBO programming to our customers”.

Laurinda Pang, Level 3's regional president for North America and Asia Pacific, added that with more viewers and devices accessing HBO GO content, “the importance of relying on a network optimised for media delivery cannot be overstated”.

But it appears that the anticipated numbers of people simultaneously accessing the Game of Thrones opening episode were underestimated. This is a situation to which Australians can relate – a similar congestion-based crash contributed to last year's [census debacle](#) .

It is hard to acknowledge that viewer estimates for this popular series could be so wrong, given its [ratings success at the end of series six](#) in 2016.

Global streaming future

But this latest technical glitch raises some bigger questions.

There is continual evidence in [the US](#) and [Australia](#) that audiences are changing their viewing behaviours.

There is a global shift from traditional television broadcast to online services, streaming and

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video-on-demand services. So can these services handle the future loads that are anticipated?

This is not just in reference to prerecorded content such as Game of Thrones, but also to live content in which technical issues, buffering and low quality video will impact the viewing experience. There was [evidence of these types of issues](#) last year with the Rio Olympic Games streaming content.

Streaming video will only continue to grow with predictions it will be 82% of all [consumer internet traffic](#) by 2021.

The growth of video will not just be via IP data, but also mobile. It's estimated that almost 80% of [global mobile data](#) will be video by 2021.

What's bigger than Game of Thrones?

With this in mind, could the internet handle major events such as a Superbowl television audience?

Last year its [TV audience](#) was more than 111 million in the US alone – far more than the 16 million [reported](#) to have watched the latest episode of Game of Thrones.

Even adding the [Australian](#) and [UK](#) figures of 1.5 million and 2.8 million respectively, it was far from a Superbowl TV audience.

The Superbowl online audience question was presented to a panel of experts in the US in May this year, with some interesting responses. The [experts' consensus](#) was that a live stream of the event over the internet to match the regular TV audience figure would be possible, but not until about 2023.

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