

'I can't afford what I used to': how the cost of living has changed viewing habits

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Which of these activities would you give up in order to save money? Put them in order from 1–6, with 1 being the activity you would be most likely to give up and 6 being the least likely. Give reasons for your choice.

- subscribing to a streaming service
- going on a foreign holiday once a year
- using the car to get to work or school
- having a shower once a day
- being a member of a gym or fitness club
- keeping your house or flat at a temperature of 20 degrees Celsius in winter

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

bare bones
outgoings

boost
rocket

ditch
spree

inflation
subscriber

make the most of
untapped

1. The economic process in which prices increase so that money becomes less valuable is known as _____.
2. A _____ is someone who pays money in order to receive something regularly.
3. A _____ is a short period that you spend doing a particular activity, especially something that you enjoy such as shopping.
4. If you _____ something, you get rid of it because you no longer like or need it.
5. The _____ are the most basic features or details of something.
6. The amounts of money that you have to spend regularly, for example on your rent or fuel bills, are your _____.
7. If something such as a market is described as _____, it is not being used yet but could bring profits or benefits in the future.

'I can't afford what I used to': how the cost of living has changed viewing habits

Level 3: Advanced

8. If prices _____, they go up very fast.
9. If you _____ something, you help it to increase, improve, or become more successful.
10. If you _____ something, you use a good situation to get the best possible result.

'I can't afford what I used to': how the cost of living has changed viewing habits

Level 3: Advanced

Four people tell how rising living costs have pushed them to cut back on luxuries like streaming services

Gemma McSherry and Clea Skopeliti
23 July, 2022

- 1 The UK inflation rate hit a 40-year high of 9.4% recently and economists warned of a potential increase to 12% by October, 2022. With the average UK food bill rising by £454 a year, the cost-of-living crisis has led to many people finding ways to cut back on expenses.
- 2 One area includes streaming services. Netflix is continuing to see subscriber numbers fall, with one million subscribers lost in the second quarter of 2022.
- 3 We spoke to four people about how the rising cost of living has affected their viewing habits.
'I haven't watched it in ages'
- 4 Kate, a retired 71-year-old living in Bristol, says she is on a subscription-service cancelling spree. "I cancelled Netflix today and will be doing Prime later," she says.
- 5 "It was that crazy thing where you think, I haven't watched it for ages, what am I paying for? I had a note in my calendar to cancel it recently and then forgot to."
- 6 Kate says she decided to ditch the streaming services partly due to the cost. "I've been trying to cut down on weekly spending – it's not a lot but, when you start adding up the odd 10 quid, it does add up. There's no point if you're not making any use of the service."
- 7 She adds that she could see herself going back to Netflix in the autumn, "if they have some interesting shows," but has mostly been watching series on BBC iPlayer and ITV. "They've got some damn good shows on at the moment," she says.
'I've had to cut back on the things that previously weren't luxuries'
- 8 Jess, from Bury St Edmunds, has cut back on streaming services to save on living costs.
- 9 Jess, 30, lives with disabilities that mean she is unable to work. "Because I can sometimes struggle to get out of the house, I enjoy making my home a cosy and fun space," she says. "But I've had to cut back on the things that previously weren't luxuries but *are* now – streaming services being one of them."
- 10 Jess has seen her monthly bills increase – "and that's during summer; I don't know what's going to happen in winter," she says.
- 11 For all of the streaming services Jess was using, which included Netflix, Amazon and Disney+, as well as her TV licence, she paid nearly £40 a month.
- 12 "I only have Netflix now, as it's the one I watch the most. I've been unable to work for two years, and universal credit and personal independence payments are only covering the bare bones of my outgoings. My food shop has gone up, too. I just can't afford the things I used to."
'My pension is not going up'
- 13 The cost-of-living crisis has made 72-year-old Ted Cardwell in Kent look over his monthly outgoings. Cardwell, who is retired, has decided to cancel Netflix and Amazon Prime to save money.
- 14 "We've also cut down on Sky because, with the cost of living and pensions not going up, it's crazy," he says, adding that he would return if they offered a discount rate for pensioners.
- 15 "I think a lot of them discount pensioners because they think we don't use streaming services, but lots of my friends do. I think it's an untapped market."
- 16 Explaining that he's recently started looking at what to cut back as his wife is retiring, he says the reason is financial rather than because of worsening services.
- 17 "We're doing pretty well – not using a food bank, things like holidays – we're not in a bad place at all, but you've got to be conscious and cut," he says. "It's income over outgoings. The cost of living is going up and my pension is not going up with it."

'I can't afford what I used to': how the cost of living has changed viewing habits

Level 3: Advanced

'We decided to rationalize our outgoings'

- 18 "My wife and I are extending our home and when we got the quote for building costs, we saw just how much prices have rocketed," says John, 41, an industrial engineer from Cambridge.
- 19 "We decided to boost our savings and reassess our finances. As I have a free Amazon Prime subscription, we decided to save money on other streaming services."
- 20 John now only joins and leaves services when there is a particular show he wants to watch.
- 21 "We dropped Netflix, but recently re-joined for *Stranger Things* and cancelled again after two months. We joined Disney+ to watch the *Star Wars* films, but I'm thinking of cancelling it too."
- 22 John and his wife were not making the most of their subscriptions, which were costing nearly £50 a month. "We have work and two young kids, so there's little time to get into a new box set."

© Guardian News and Media 2022

First published in *The Guardian*, 23/07/2022

'I can't afford what I used to': how the cost of living has changed viewing habits

Level 3: Advanced

3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Why do many people in the UK need to cut back on their expenses?
2. Apart from saving money, why is Kate considering cancelling Netflix?
3. Under which condition might she consider going back to Netflix in the autumn?
4. Why is Jess unable to work?
5. What does Jess think streaming services are?
6. Under what circumstances would Ted consider going back to streaming services and Sky?
7. What, according to Ted, is 'an untapped market'?
8. Why is John keeping Amazon Prime?
9. How does he save money on other streaming services?
10. Why were he and his wife not making the most of their subscriptions?

4 Key language

a. Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make phrases from the text.

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1. inflation | a. costs |
| 2. universal | b. set |
| 3. monthly | c. services |
| 4. streaming | d. rate |
| 5. living | e. engineer |
| 6. ten | f. credit |
| 7. industrial | g. bills |
| 8. box | h. quid |

'I can't afford what I used to': how the cost of living has changed viewing habits

Level 3: Advanced

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "It's simply not worth paying money to use streaming services."
- "The best way to save money is to stay at home."
- "Who needs streaming services? There's so much to see on the internet."

6 In your own words

- a. Open an internet search engine. Find out the comparative inflation rate in your country and two other countries in your region. Find out which everyday items or services have increased in price the most in each of the three countries and compare them.
- b. Report your findings to the class.