

BOOK REVIEW

TELEVISION COURTROOM BROADCASTING: DISTRACTING EFFECTS AND EYE-TRACKING

Paul Lambert

Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2012, 223 pp, £45, ISBN 978-1-84150-647-0

The debate surrounding television courtroom broadcasting (TCB) is one that has been going on for several decades. The questions surrounding the desirability of allowing TCB have been debated in many jurisdictions, especially in the US where TCB is more common. The debate has become highly topical in the UK with the (partial) lifting of the ban on cameras in the courtroom in England. Though courtrooms have largely been open to the public (and journalists), there has been a long-standing ban on broadcasting courtroom proceedings. Now that this ban has been (partially) lifted, proceedings in the Court of Appeal were filmed and broadcast for the first time in October this year.¹

There are many different questions in the TCB debate on the effects of TCB both inside and outside the courtroom. Paul Lambert focusses in his book *Television Courtroom Broadcasting* on one focal point of the debate: whether allowing television cameras into courtrooms will adversely affect or distract those involved in the proceedings. There is a lack of coherent empirical research on this issue, as has been pointed out by the US Supreme Court. Lambert argues this can be addressed by empirical research making use of eye-tracking technology, which will provide valuable data on where individuals in the courtroom are looking and for how long and thus, ultimately, whether they are distracted by cameras.

Television Courtroom Broadcasting starts with defining TCB and reviewing a number of US Supreme Court cases, which have considered the use of cameras in courtrooms as well as empirical and general research into this issue. Lambert considers the different forms TCB can take, noting that previous research has not provided a definition. Lambert proceeds to define TCB as: “television cameras in the courtroom, filming courtroom proceedings for live and/or contemporaneous television push broadcast to the general public”. In considering previous empirical and general research into TCB, the author notes that not only is the number of studies undertaken in this area limited, there is also a lack of coherent approach between the studies, with little attempt at replication and verification of results and follow-up studies. None of the studies makes use of eye-tracking technology nor do they suggest it as a potential method of study. Lambert proceeds to make a compelling case for the value of the technology in this field of research throughout his work.

¹ BBC, “TV cameras allowed into Court of Appeal” *BBC News*, 31 October 2013, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-24744684>.

Lamberts notes that previous research has largely been conducted through self-report and opinion studies, taking a lead from the field of legal-psychology he argues neither are sufficient to answer the questions in the TCB debate, whereas eye-tracking technology can provide far more detailed and more objective information. The later chapters set out a detailed proof of concept, considering the major players in the courtroom such as the judge, the witness, the solicitor/barrister/lawyer as well as the issues posed by the location of cameras in relation to the players.

This work is mostly aimed at providing the initial step in employing eye-tracking technology to further research the distraction argument in the TCB debate. It does well in emphasising the need for further empirical research in this area and the valuable role eye-tracking technology can play in this debate. *Television Courtroom Broadcasting* provides detailed information and diagrams, which may form the basis for further study and sets out a compelling argument for the use of eye-tracking technology to significantly improve our knowledge of the adverse distraction effects of TCB.

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