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Children and parents:
media use and attitudes report 2022

Welsh overview available

Published 30 March 2022

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Overview

This report looks at media use, attitudes and understanding among children and young people aged 3-17.

It also includes findings on parents' views about their children's media use, and how parents of children and young people aged 3-17 monitor and manage their children's use. The report is intended to provide a comprehensive picture of children's media experiences in 2021 as a reference for industry, policymakers, academics and the general public.

The Communications Act 2003 places a responsibility on Ofcom to promote, and to carry out research into, media literacy. We define media literacy as '*the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts*'. This report forms part of our wider Making Sense of Media programme.[1]

What we have found

Online access and attitudes

- **Nearly all children went online in 2021 (99%);** the majority used a mobile phone (72%) or tablet (69%) to do so.
- **More than a third (36%) of primary school-age children did not always have access to an adequate device for online learning at home,** compared to 17% of secondary-age children. One in ten primary-age children rarely or never had access (11%), compared to 3% in secondary school.

Online behaviours

- **Using video-sharing platforms (VSPs) such as YouTube or TikTok was the most popular online activity among children aged 3-17 (95%);** while the majority chose to watch content on VSPs, 31% posted content they had made themselves, especially those aged 12-17.
- **Among all types of online platforms, YouTube was the most widely used by children;** 89% used it, compared to half using TikTok. But TikTok was more popular for posting content.

[1] More information on Ofcom's Making Sense of Media programme is available on our website.

Online profiles

- **A majority of children under 13 had their own profile on at least one social media app or site;** 33% of parents of 5-7s said their child had a profile, and 60% of 8-11s said they had one.
- **More than six in ten children aged 8-17 said they had more than one profile on some online apps and sites (62%);** the most common reason, overall, was having one profile just for their parents, family or friends to see.
- **Just four in ten parents of 3-17s knew the minimum age requirement for using most social media;** 42% correctly said 13. Four in ten parents of 8-11-year-olds said they would allow their child to use social media (38%).

Content consumption

- **Children still watch live television but are more likely to watch paid-for on-demand streaming services;** 78% watched services like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Disney+, compared to 47% watching live TV. Scotland had the largest decline in broadcast viewing.
- **Despite almost six in ten teenagers saying they used social media for news, it was the least trusted or accurate news source;** 12-15s preferred to trust their family (68%) or the TV (65%) for news.

Parental concerns about children's content consumption

- **Seven in ten parents of children under 16 were concerned about the content their child saw online;** the aspects of greatest concern were age-inappropriate content such as violence, bad language and disturbing content and sexual or 'adult' content.
- **Parents had fewer concerns about the TV content their child watched than about online content:** 46% were concerned about their child seeing bad language, violence or disturbing content on TV.
- **Parents in Wales were more likely than parents in the other UK nations to be very concerned about some aspects of their child's media use**, such as their child giving out personal details to people online or seeing age-inappropriate content online or on TV.

Online gaming

- **Six in ten children aged 3-17 played games online in 2021**, increasing to three-quarters of 12-17s.
- **More than a third of 8-17s who gamed online played with people they didn't know (36%)**; overall, 16% of 8-17s chatted to people they didn't know, via the messaging/ chat functions in games.

Critical understanding of fake vs real online

- **The majority of 12-17s were confident that they could tell what is real and fake online**, but only 11% correctly selected, in an interactive survey question showing a social media post, the components of the post which reflected that it was genuine.
- **Children in Wales were more likely than those in the other UK nations to pick out only reliable identifiers in the misinformation scenario**: 22%, compared to 8% to 11% in other nations.
- **More than a fifth of 12-17s were unable to detect a fake online social media profile (22%)**; a quarter of these thought that the profile picture and posted photos proved that it was real.

Understanding the internet as a commercial landscape

- **Nine in ten children aged 12-17 were confident that they could recognise advertising online**, but less than four in ten (37%) correctly identified the links at the top of a search engine page as sponsored ads.
- **Seven in ten children aged 12-17 were able to correctly identify that an influencer was promoting a product because of a paid partnership**; of these 42% stated this as the only reason, with the remainder suggesting it was due to other reasons such as the influencer simply liking the product.

Online wellbeing

- **Children aged 13-17 were more likely to feel positive than negative about their online use**: 53% said that being online was good for their mental health, with a minority disagreeing with this (17%).
- **Eight in ten children aged 13-17 used online services to find support for their wellbeing**; both Google search and online videos used for sleep, relaxation and good mood emerged as key sources for support among children.

Negative experiences and coping strategies

- **More than a third (36%) of children aged 8-17 said they had seen something 'worrying or nasty' online in the past 12 months;** six in ten said they would always tell someone about this (59%).
- **Children were more likely to experience being bullied via technology than face-to-face:** 84% of 8-17s said they had been bullied this way (i.e., via text or messaging, on social media, in online games, through phone or video calls, or via other aps and sites) compared to 61% being bullied face-to-face.
- **Nearly all children aged 12-17 were aware of at least one safety feature to help keep themselves safe online (94%);** 84% had put these into practice. Blocking people on social media was the behaviour with the highest levels of awareness and use.

- **But more than a third had used behaviours that are potentially risky (35%):** a fifth had either surfed in privacy or incognito mode (21%) or deleted their browsing history (19%).
- **Only a third of children knew how to use online reporting or flagging functions (32%);** and just 14% had ever used them.

Parental attitudes and mediation strategies

- **Parents in Northern Ireland were less confident about their ability to keep their child safe online (72%)** than parents in either Scotland (82%) or Wales (81%).
- **Parents had high awareness of safety-promoting technical tools and controls (91%)**, but only seven in ten had used any of them (70%). The tools most likely to be used were parental controls built into a device's software (31%).
- **The majority of parents felt their child had a good balance between screen time and doing other things (63%)**, but 40% said they struggled to control their child's screen time.

Media use by age: a snapshot

3-4

17% have their own mobile phone

To go online: **39%** use a mobile phone, **78%** use a tablet and **10%** use a laptop

89% use video sharing platforms
32% use live streaming apps/sites
50% use messaging sites/apps
21% use social media and **24%** have their own social media profile

18% play games online

81% watch TV or films on any type of device other than a TV set (**85%** on a TV set)

47% watch live TV vs **72%** who watch SVoD[1]

5-7

28% have their own mobile phone

To go online: **50%** use a mobile phone, **83%** use a tablet and **27%** use a laptop

93% use video sharing platforms
39% use live streaming apps/sites
59% use messaging sites/apps
33% use social media and **33%** have their own social media profile

38% play games online

74% watch TV or films on any type of device other than a TV set (**88%** on a TV set)

48% watch live TV vs **77%** who watch SVoD[1]

8-11

60% have their own mobile phone

To go online: **71%** use a mobile phone, **79%** use a tablet and **55%** use a laptop

95% use video sharing platforms
54% use live streaming apps/sites
84% use messaging sites/apps
64% use social media and **60%** have their own social media profile

69% play games online

79% watch TV or films on any type of device other than a TV set (**90%** on a TV set)

51% watch live TV vs **76%** who watch SVoD[1]

32% have seen something worrying or nasty online

32% were able to correctly identify sponsored search results

12-15

97% have their own mobile phone

To go online: **94%** use a mobile phone, **54%** use a tablet and **63%** use a laptop

98% use video sharing platforms
73% use live streaming apps/sites
97% use messaging sites/apps
91% use social media and **89%** have their own social media profile

76% play games online

87% watch TV or films on any type of device other than a TV set (**84%** on a TV set)

44% watch live TV vs **82%** who watch SVoD[1]

37% have seen something worrying or nasty online

11% picked only reliable indicators that a social media post was genuine;
83% picked at least one unreliable indicator

64% were able to correctly spot a fake profile

38% were able to correctly identify sponsored search results

39% were able to correctly identify sponsored content posted by an influencer

16-17

100% have their own mobile phone

To go online: **98%** use a mobile phone, **50%** use a tablet and **63%** use a laptop

98% use video sharing platforms
79% use live streaming apps/sites
99% use messaging sites/apps
97% use social media and **94%** have their own social media profile

73% play games online

85% watch TV or films on any type of device other than a TV set (**82%** on a TV set)

44% watch live TV vs **79%** who watch SVoD[1]

42% have seen something worrying or nasty online

13% picked only reliable indicators that a social media post was genuine;
81% picked at least one unreliable indicator

65% were able to correctly spot a fake profile

44% were able to correctly identify sponsored search results

48% were able to correctly identify sponsored content posted by an influencer

[1] SVoD refers to subscription video on-demand services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Disney+

Among those who go online Among search engine users

Sources

The report draws largely on our quantitative Children's and Parents' Media Literacy Tracker[2], which has been running since 2005, and is supported by other Ofcom research: our qualitative Children's Media Lives[3] research, our annual News Consumption Survey[4], our Children's Audio Survey[5], our Wellbeing quick poll[6], and a CATI[7] omnibus survey conducted to provide us with key statistics on digital access.

We have also included insight and data from the UK's television audience measurement body, BARB[8], as well as from research agencies CHILDWISE[9] and The Insights Family[10].

Methodology: Ofcom Children's and Parents' Media Literacy Tracker

As in 2020, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic made face-to-face interviewing impossible during 2021. With this in mind, and with our already planned intention to refresh our approach to researching children's media literacy, we took the opportunity in 2021 to launch our redesigned children's surveys. These were refreshed and restructured to better suit the ever-changing media landscape.

As a result, the previous face-to-face once-a-year survey moved to a suite of three surveys across the year, conducted via online panels and post-to-web surveys:

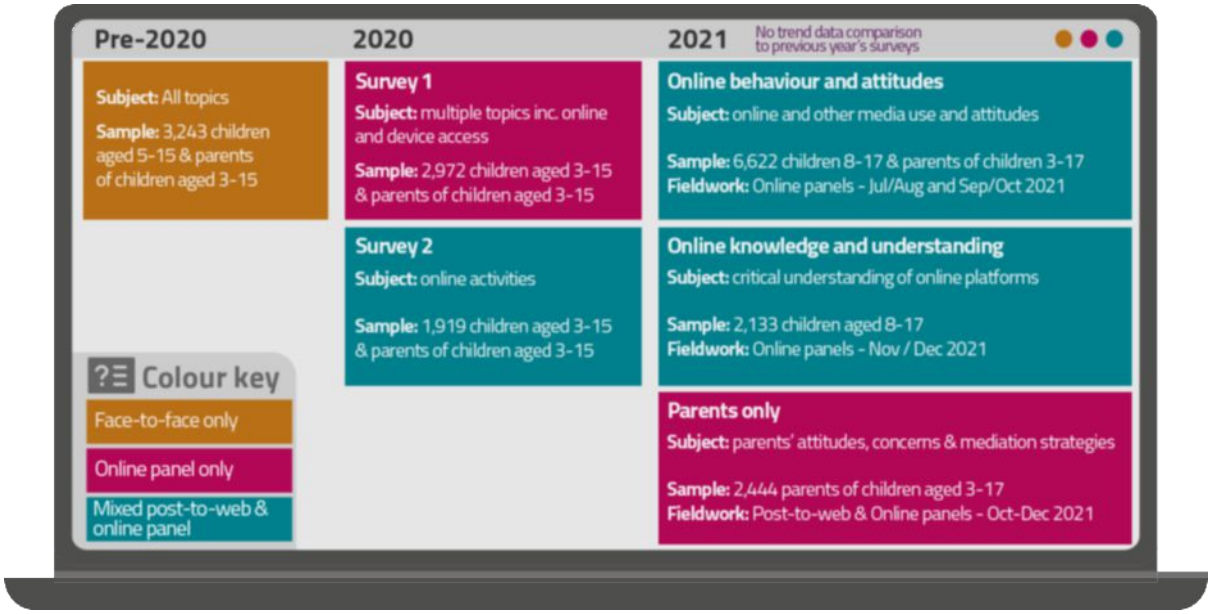
- **Online behaviours and understanding:** Two waves a year, delivered via online panels, with a sample of c. 3,300 children per wave aged 8-17 and parents of children aged 3-17. This survey was conducted across two waves so that we could capture children's use of rapidly changing media, such as social media, live streaming and video-sharing platforms. The fieldwork for the first wave was conducted in July-August 2021[11], and for the second wave in September-October 2021.

[2] Children's and Parents' Media Literacy Tracker surveys, data tables and technical reports are available on our statistical release calendar.
[3] Ofcom's latest Children's Media Lives report: Children's Media Lives: Wave 8 findings
[4] Ofcom's latest News Consumption Survey is available on our website.
[5] Ofcom's audio research among children and parents.
[6] Ofcom's Wellbeing Poll Questionnarire. Ofcom now has its own dedicated online research panel that can be used to facilitate a range of research, including brief quick polls, to further understand aspects of online use. The panel includes c. 5,000 online users aged 13+.
[7] CATI = Computer Assisted Telephone Interview. Surveys, data tables and technical report for the CATI survey are available on our statistical release calendar.
[8] BARB data based on the full year of 2021: BARB | Broadcasters Audience Research Board
[9] CHILDWISE data based on fieldwork conducted September-November 2020: CHILDWISE: http://www.childwise.co.uk/
[10] The Insights Family data based on fieldwork conducted 20 September-20 December 2021, to broadly align with our media literacy fieldwork: https://theinsightsfamily.com/solutions/kids-insights
[11] The wave 1 fieldwork in 2021 was delayed, hence the short time period between the two waves. The plan for 2022 and beyond is to have wave 1 in early summer (May/June) and wave 2 in the autumn, so we can measure changes between the two.

- **Online knowledge and understanding:** One wave a year, delivered via online panels, with a sample of c. 2,100 children aged 8-17. The fieldwork was conducted in November-December 2021.
- **Parents Only:** One wave a year, delivered via a mix of online panels and post-to-web surveys, using a sample of c.2,400 parents of children aged 3-17. The mixed methodology enabled us to reach a broader sample of respondents. The fieldwork was conducted in October-December 2021.

Another change to our research is that for the first time we have expanded our children's sample to include 16-17-year-olds.[12] We have done this to mirror the legal definition of a child as being under 18.[13]

Where the data relate to 3-7-year-olds, the responses were given by parents on behalf of their children. Data for 8-17-year-olds are taken from the children's own responses, apart from the Parents Only survey.



Impact on trend data

Due to the substantial methodology changes compared to previous years, we cannot compare the 2021 data with previous waves. Indicative comparisons with data from 2020 should be treated with particular caution as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, which is likely to have had a substantial impact on children's and young people's media habits.

[12] 16-17-year-olds are also included as part of the sample of Ofcom's Adult's Media Literacy Tracker. For more information see Adults' Media Literacy Tracker data tables and related documents on our statistical release calendar.

[13] Legal definition of a child according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): Children and the law | NSPCC Learning

If conditions do not allow face-to-face fieldwork during 2022, we plan to continue with the 2021 methodology (online panels and post-to-web surveys) in order to produce trend analysis going forward.

We can, however, note the trends that relate to our CATI omnibus survey on digital exclusion, because the survey methodology was consistent across the 2021 waves.

Approach to reporting

In addition to the key findings noted in this report, a comprehensive set of data points from the Children's and Parents' Media Literacy Tracker can be found in the interactive dashboard accompanying this report[14]; the data tables and files were published in February 2022.[15]

Our primary focus for analysis within this report is on statistically significant differences by age group, gender and UK nation. Although we have integrated pre-schoolers aged 3-4 into our analysis throughout, we highlight the differences between pre-schoolers and children of school age, where these exist. This is to recognise that pre-schoolers are at a different life stage to older children, with significantly less autonomy, and more parental supervision.

Data which has moved to other Ofcom surveys

The review of the 2021 media literacy surveys resulted in two measures being moved to other Ofcom surveys, where they are of particular relevance.

- **Representation on television programmes and films:**
  These measures will be included in our Cross-Platform Media Tracker, reflecting the views of children aged 13+.[16] We will, however, continue to measure data relating to television viewing in our media literacy surveys, principally as a counterpoint to online attitudes and behaviours.
- **Potential online harms experiences and reporting behaviour:**
  Measures such as encountering hateful content online, and actions taken when this is seen, have been moved to our Online Experiences Tracker, which interviews more than 6,000 children and adults aged 13+. The results of this survey will be included in Ofcom's Online Nation report in May 2022.

Reporting on vulnerable children

In 2020, the Children's and Parents' Media Use and Attitudes report included analysis of vulnerability for the first time: this comprised those in financially vulnerable households, and those with a condition(s) which impacted or limited their daily activities (see below). We have continued this supplementary analysis for 2021, and due to the complex interaction of vulnerability with other

[14] Children's and Parents' Media Literacy Tracker interactive dashboard.
[15] Children's and Parents' Media Literacy Tracker data files and tables are available on our statistical release calendar.
[16] Ofcom Cross-Platform Media Tracker will interview children aged 13-15, with 2021 fieldwork planned for late April to early June.

demographic factors, we have separated out our analysis of vulnerable children into its own Annex.[17] This allows us to set the data in its proper context.

Children in financially vulnerable households

Financial vulnerability is a measure we have devised to better understand the impact of income and household composition on the ownership and use of communications services. The analysis creates three distinct household types by combining household income[18] and household size (including the number of children):

- Most financially vulnerable households (MFV)
- Potentially vulnerable households (PFV)
- Least financially vulnerable households (LFV)[19]

In the annex we look at any relevant differences between those children who are most financially vulnerable (MFV) and those categorised as least financially vulnerable (LFV).

Children with a condition that impacts or limits their daily activities

In each of our children's quantitative surveys we ask parents whether their child has any condition which might limit or impact their daily activities, providing a list of these to select from.[20] Almost a fifth of our sample, across all surveys, reported having any type of condition from our list. This proportion provided us with a sufficient base to compare to those without any such condition.

We recognise that the potential barriers or difficulties will vary among individual children with impacting or limiting conditions. And our ability to draw inferences from the data in terms of different conditions is limited by the small base sizes and by overlaps in terms of the conditions experienced. We will keep under review the need to conduct bespoke research to add to our evidence base in this area.

[17] Children and parents 2022 report Annex 2 (Vulnerable Children).
[18] Among those agreeing to answer the income question.
[19] We believe that financial vulnerability may be a better measure to use than socio-economic groups for children's access and use; we will monitor this in future waves of the research.
[20] Parents are asked to select from: hearing, eyesight, mobility, dexterity, breathing, mental abilities, social/behavioural, mental health, other, none, or 'prefer not to say'. The full list of conditions within each of these can be found in the Annex.

Online life: access and attitudes

Online access and devices

Nearly all children went online in 2021, with the majority using a mobile phone or tablet to do so

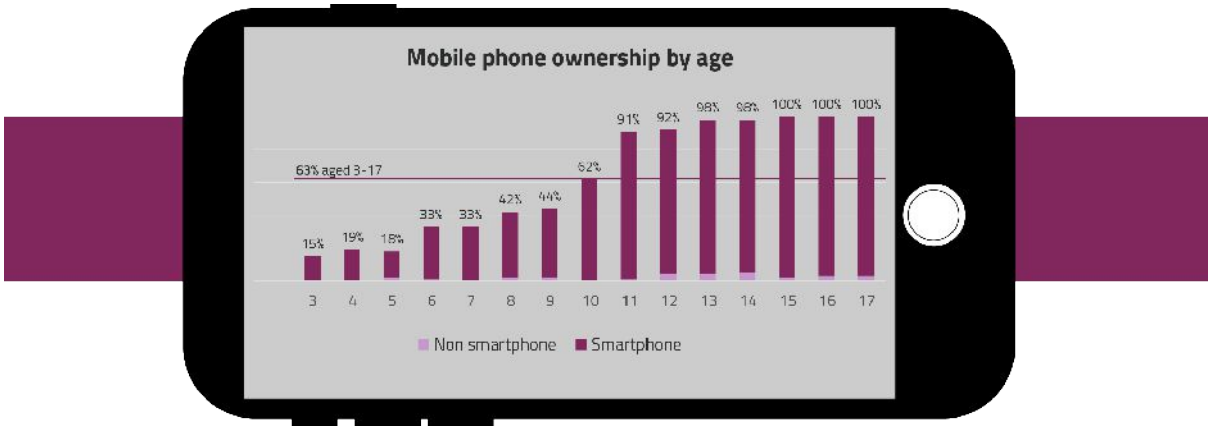
Our survey on digital access showed that during 2021, 99% of households with children (aged 0-17) had internet access and used it in the home. But this almost ubiquitous access to the internet was not necessarily matched by access to an adequate digital device for home learning needs (see overleaf).

Our media literacy research showed that mobile phones and tablets were the most-cited devices used to go online, used by around seven in ten 3-17-year-olds. However, use varied by age: younger children were more likely to use a tablet (around eight in ten), declining to about half of 12-17-year-olds. This older age group were more likely than 3-11s to use a mobile phone to go online, rising to more than nine in ten 12-17s.

Almost half (47%) of children aged 3-17 used a laptop or netbook to go online, and 17% used a desktop. Use of more personal and portable devices was more common, with more than four in ten children (43%) saying they only used any device other than a laptop, netbook, or desktop to go online.

Nine in ten children owned their own mobile phone by the time they reached the age of 11

The likelihood of using a mobile phone to go online was almost certainly influenced by the increased likelihood of children owning their own smartphones as they got older. More than six in ten (63%) children aged 3-17 had their own mobile phone in 2021, almost all of which were smartphones (61% compared to 2% with a non-smartphone). The crucial years for acquisition of a mobile phone were between 9 and 11 years old: 44% rising to 91%.



Data from The Insights Family shows that a fifth of children spend more than two hours on their mobile phone on a school day, rising to three in ten at the weekend. CHILDWISE found that among 7-16s with a smartphone, more than six in ten (62%) had access to their phones at all times, and that the smartphone was the device that children were most likely to say they couldn't live without.[21]

But mobile phones aren't always adequate for online needs

Our research found that a minority of children went online exclusively via either a mobile phone (5%) or a tablet (11%). For the latter, this was due to the higher proportion of 3-4-year-olds using only this device (39%).

Being able to use the internet on mobile devices only can potentially negatively affect children's online experiences. They may find that some content is more difficult to view on a smaller screen, or that some web forms and tasks are not suitable for completing on a phone, and those relying on mobile data for their internet access may be limited by the amount of data they can use.

Primary school-age children were less likely than secondary-age children to have access to an appropriate device for their online home-learning needs

The Covid-19 pandemic considerably impacted children's education over the past two years, forcing many to do their learning at home via online school services. Considering this, we asked parents during 2021[22] if they felt their child had adequate access to an 'appropriate device' in the home for their online schooling needs.[23]

More than a third of parents (36%) said their primary school-age children did not *always* have access to such a device in the home. This compared to just 17% of parents of secondary school-age children. Within these groups, 11% of primary-age children *rarely* or *never* had access, compared to just 3% of those in secondary school.

The proportion of children with access to appropriate devices *all the time* declined between the two waves of research[24]; from 80% to 70%. It is important to keep in mind that each UK nation was

[21] CHILDWISE; 41% of 5-16s said that they could not live without their mobile phone. This increased with age from a fifth of 5-10-year-olds to seven in ten 13-16-year-olds.
[22] CATI = Computer-assisted telephone interview. Surveys, data tables and technical report for the CATI survey can be found here: Statistical release calendar 2022 - Ofcom
[23] The definition of an 'appropriate device' was left to parents' interpretation in the survey.
[24] CATI research wave 1: February-March 2021; wave 2: November-December 2021

subject to Covid-19 restrictions in February and March 2021 (during the first wave of research), with the majority of children doing online learning at home. The number with access to appropriate devices may have been elevated, as many devices were lent to pupils by schools or charities.

Among those whose child did not have access *all the time*, the most common management method for home learning was to share a device with others in the household (65%). Much lower proportions managed this situation by either borrowing a device from a school or other organisation (13%) or by using a less appropriate device (5%).

One in twenty children without an appropriate device said that they were not able to do schoolwork as a result (6%) or had to choose to pursue alternative educational activities (4%).

Nearly all children had access to a broadband connection at home, with a very small minority only using a 3G, 4G or 5G mobile connection to go online

Our Parents Only survey data showed that 1% of 3-17s had access to the internet at home *only* via a 3G, 4G or 5G mobile connection.[25]

Accessing the internet via a mobile network rather than a broadband connection can make it more difficult to get the full benefit of the internet. Children in this situation may need to limit the time they spend online or choose less data-heavy content to consume, such as reading websites and viewing images rather than watching videos or streaming television programmes and films. In some cases, having limited access to the internet may lead to a child feeling 'left out', not just online but in 'real-life' conversations, given the increasingly blurred lines between children's online and offline lives. We saw one example of this in our Children's Media Lives study:

"Yeah sometimes I'm not able to watch them [YouTube videos]… sometimes I just tell them [her friends] that yeah I did watch it, it's really cool, but then in the end I will make sure I watch it later so it's fine"– **Amira, 11**

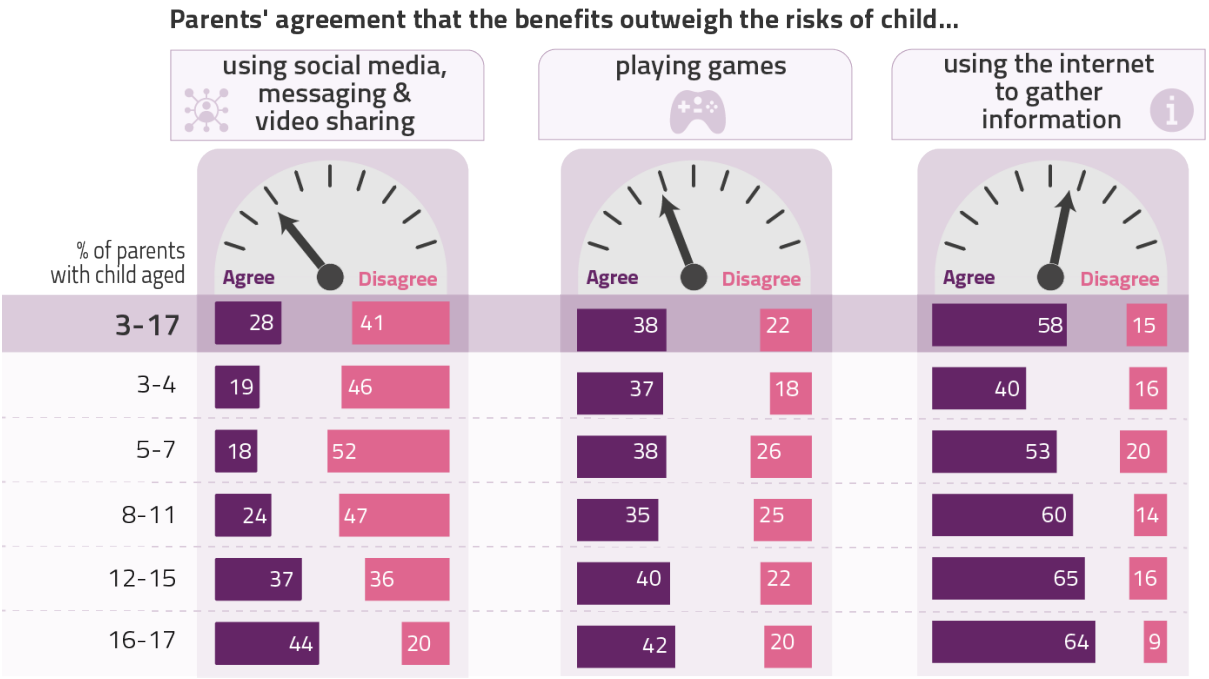
Online attitudes

Parents' views towards the benefits of being online versus the risks for their child varied greatly by the type of online activity

Parents of 3-17s were more likely to be positive about their child's use of the internet to gather information than they were about other social and entertainment activities. Almost six in ten parents agreed that the benefits of using the internet to gather information (for example using search engines, Wikipedia or news websites) outweighed the risks (58%). This compares to just four in ten who agreed that benefits outweighed the risks in relation to gaming (38%), and three in ten who agreed the same in relation to social media, messaging and video sharing (28%).

While there were no differences by age group for gaming, parents of 12-17-year-olds were significantly more likely than parents of younger children aged 3-11 to feel that the benefits outweighed the risks for both information gathering and social media, messaging and video sharing.

[25] This figure relates *only* to children who use a mobile connection but do not have access to broadband at home. Children who have access to a broadband connection at home may also be using a mobile connection to access the internet at home.



Children were broadly positive about the benefits of being online but also recognised the negative sides

Six in ten children aged 8-17 who used social media or any messaging/ voice/ video calling apps/ sites felt that these types of platforms made them feel happy (59%) or closer to their friends (61%) *all* or *most* of the time. Girls were more likely than boys to agree with both statements, while boys were more likely to say they felt this only *sometimes* for both.

Girls aged 12-17 were also more likely to use this form of media to send supportive messages to their friends if they were having a hard time (75% compared to 47% of boys this age).

This feeling of closeness to their friends extended beyond their use of social media and messaging. Almost two-thirds of children aged 12-17 (64%) said that being online helped them to build and maintain friendships – again, more likely among girls than boys.

But children are also aware of the negative aspects of using these platforms. Eight in ten children aged 8-17 (78%) said they had felt, at some point, that people could be mean or unkind to each other on them. As with the positive side of social media, girls were more likely to say this than boys (81% vs 75%).

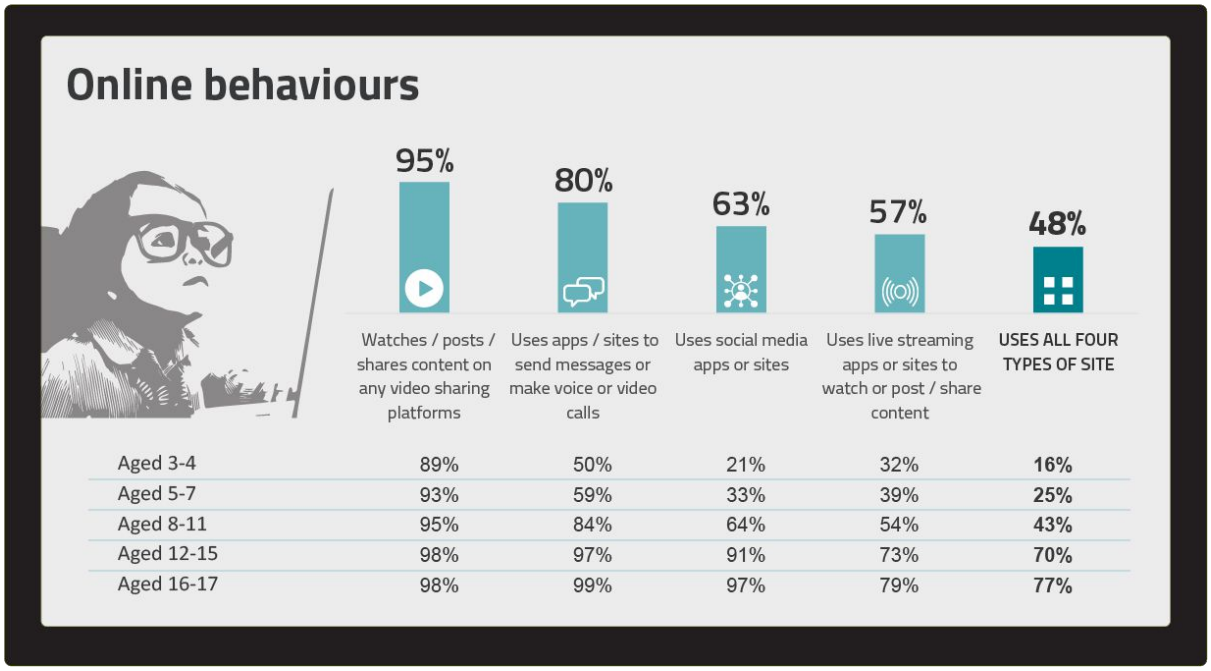
Nine in ten 8-17-year-olds (89%) said they had ever felt pressure to be popular on these platforms, with no difference by gender.

Online behaviours

Video-sharing, messaging, social media and live streaming

Nearly all children use video-sharing platforms

Rather than being overwhelmed by the amount of choice on offer, almost half of children aged 3-17 said they went online for *all* the activities listed below (48%). Use of all four activities increased with age, from 16% of 3-4-year-olds to more than three-quarters of 16-17-year-olds (77%).



Use of video-sharing platforms (VSPs) was the most-cited activity among all children aged 3-17 (95%). While more than nine in ten children in each age group used VSPs to *watch* content, much lower proportions claimed to *post* videos that they had made themselves (31% of 3-17s). The likelihood of posting content increased with age, from one in ten 3-4-year-olds to four in ten 12-17s.[26]

Whilst posting videos was popular among some children, our Children's Media Lives study found that posting online has become less appealing among our participants than it used to be. They are

[26] The responses for 3-7-year-olds are taken from parents answering on behalf of their children. Therefore, it is worth considering that for the proportion posting video content it is possible that parents could have misinterpreted this question as relating to videos they themselves uploaded with their children in it (rather than children uploading videos themselves).

seeing less content from their peers, and more from brands and celebrities, so they are competing with more professionalised content. As a result, some of the children's aspirations have changed; for example, seeking to be an online brand ambassador rather than being famous online for its own sake.

"I do have my own [TikTok] but I don't post on it anymore. It is a private account that nobody follows me on." – **Zak, 12**

"I just feel like there is no real need to [post a picture of myself on social media] because I can't be asked [sic] to look great and stuff." – **Ben, 14**

The next most-cited online activity by children (by eight in ten 3-17-year-olds) was using messaging apps or sites to send messages or make video and voice calls. The likelihood of their doing so increased with the age of the child: from half of 3-4s to almost all 12-15s (97%) and 16-17s (99%).[27]

Age played a similar role in the likelihood of a child using a social media app or site. More than six in ten 3-17s (63%) used social media overall, but proportions varied considerably by age (from 21% of 3-4s to 97% of 16-17s).[28]

While use of live streaming apps and sites were not as high as use of social media among the older age groups (55% of 8-11s and 79% of 16-17s), it was higher than social media use for the younger children: between three and four in ten children aged 3-7 used these types of platforms. And as with VSPs, proportions differed between watching and posting content. Six in ten children aged 3-17 (57%) used live streaming platforms to watch content, while a much lower, but significant, proportion live-streamed their own videos (15%).

Learning, being creative and improving skills online

Being online helps children to be creative, learn new skills and find out more about the world

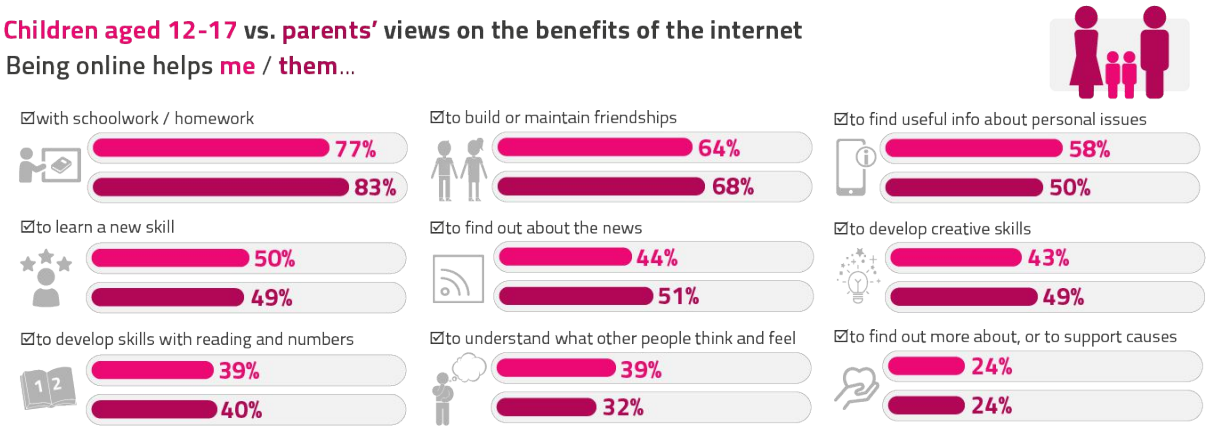
In addition to keeping children connected and entertained, being online can help them to learn and develop new and existing skills. More than three-quarters of children aged 12-17 said that being online helped with their school/ homework (77%), while half said it was useful for learning new skills. Around four in ten said it can be used to develop creative skills (43%) or help with reading and number skills (39%).

The internet is, of course, a source of information, with 44% of this age group using it to find out about the news. And some have also used it as a source of support, with almost six in ten using it to find information about problems or issues they may have (58%). Four in ten 12-17s also said that they went online to understand what other people think and feel about things (39%).

Parents of 12-17s agreed that being online could help their child with being creative and learning: more than eight in ten (83%) said that it helped their child with schoolwork. But parents were more

[27] WhatsApp was the most used messaging app among our sample (53%), followed by 35% using Snapchat and 32% using FaceTime.
[28] The minimum age for using most social media sites and apps is 13.

likely than children to feel that the internet helped their child to build or maintain friendships (68%) and to find out about the news (51%).



Using social media and messaging apps can also help children engage with social, civic and political issues

Interacting with others through social media and messaging apps and sites can also help children to develop as citizens, and to express and explore their political and social interests. Of the children aged 12-17 who used social media or messaging app/sites, nearly a quarter said that they used these platforms to follow activists or campaigners who discuss causes that they care about (23%). A fifth said that they write their own posts about causes they care about (21%), and more than one in ten said that they use these app/sites to follow or interact with political parties or campaign groups (12%).

While there were no differences by age in doing any of these things, in general they were more likely to be done by girls than boys. For example, almost three in ten girls aged 12-15 said they followed activists and campaigners (27%), compared to half this proportion among boys this age (15%). Girls aged 12-15 were more likely than boys this age to write their own posts about causes they cared about.

Some of the participants in our Children's Media Lives study became aware of social issues when influencers that they followed on social media posted about them. One of Shriya's (17) favourite accounts to follow on Instagram was Bella Hadid, a model and influencer. She particularly liked her because she also posted about current issues.

"A lot of people do [share posts] to influence people when they see them [being posted by influencers] I do it myself, if something comes up and I feel like strongly about it, I'll post it" – **Shriya, 17**

Social media profiles

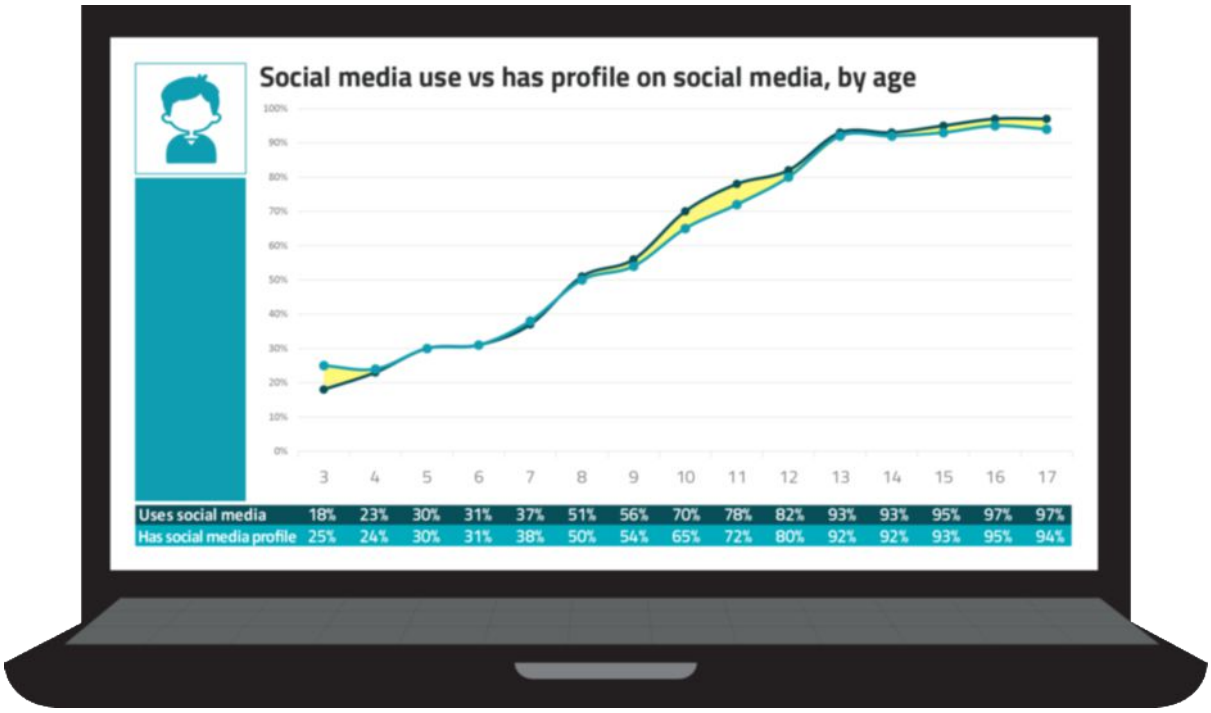
On most social media and video-sharing platforms, it is not necessary to have a profile to access 'public' content. Having a profile, however, allows users to follow accounts they like, post content themselves and comment on, or like, content posted by others. All these behaviours then shape and influence the type of content that is recommended to them by the platform or curated for them on

personalised feeds such as TikTok's 'For You Page' (FYP), Instagram's 'Feed' or YouTube's home page.

This section focuses on platforms used for posting, commenting on, and liking content (whether images, text, pre-recorded video, or live-streamed video) on which users may be asked to choose a username, password and/or profile picture and which are typically signed up for using an email address. For the purpose of this section, we refer to these platforms collectively as 'social media'. In this section we are not referring to messaging apps or sites as these are typically geared towards one-to-one or group communication rather than accessing 'public' content.

The likelihood of children having their own profile on social media increased with age, but significant minorities of even the youngest children had profiles

More than six in ten children aged 3-17 (62%) had their own profile on at least one social media app or site in 2021, rising to more than nine in ten (94%) 16-17-year-olds. Despite being under the minimum age requirement (13 for most social media sites), 33% of 5-7s and twice as many 8-11s (60%) said they had a social media profile.



The likelihood of children having a profile varies by platform and intersects with age. For example, Instagram is the most likely app/site for older children to have a profile on; 55% of 12-15s and 70% of 16-17s. But children aged 8-11 were more likely to have profiles on TikTok (34%) and YouTube (27%).

Among those who had a profile but were under the minimum age requirement (that is, aged between 3 and 12), significant minorities of the younger children claimed to have set up their social media profiles themselves.

A fifth of 8-11-year-old children with a profile claimed this, as did 6% of parents of 5-7s and 3% of parents of 3-4s. As the parents answered on behalf of the 3-7s, it is possible that their answers

might have mistakenly referred to their own profiles, or to a profile they had set up for their child, but which was managed and controlled by the child.

Unsurprisingly, significantly higher proportions of children aged 12-15s said they had set up their profile themselves (52%).

Just a third of parents are aware of the correct minimum age requirement for social media use

Around three-quarters of parents, irrespective of the child's age, said they were a friend or follower of their child on social media. But not all were aware that their child might be using sites before they reached the required age.

Overall, eight in ten parents of 3-17-year-olds said they were aware that there was a minimum age requirement for having a social media profile (81%). But of these only 42% could give the correct age (13). This equates to a third of all parents of 3-17-year-olds (34%).

A fifth of the parents who claimed to be aware of the minimum age thought it was 12 or younger, while a third thought it was 14 or older.

Significant minorities of parents said they would allow their child to have a profile on social media before they reached the minimum age; this ranged from 22% of parents of 3-4s to 38% of parents of 8-11s. More than four in ten parents (44%) of children aged 11 or 12 said they would let their child have a profile before they reached the minimum age.

Awareness of this requirement was lower among the children themselves. Just over seven in ten children aged 8-17 (72%) knew there was a minimum age requirement, with awareness increasing by age, from 66% of 8-11s to 80% of 16-17s. Yet just 28% of these correctly stated the requirement as 13 years old. Again, this awareness increased with age, up to around a third of 12-17s (34%).

The younger children who were aware of a minimum age requirement were more likely to cite the age as 12 or under: 21% of 8-11s said this, declining to 10% of 16-17s. But a similar proportion of 8-11s said it was 14 or over (21%), with the oldest age group being more likely to say this (36% of 16-17s).

Multiple profiles were most likely to be used by 8-11-year-olds, and the most common reason for doing so was to have a separate profile just for their parents and family to see

Some children choose to have multiple profiles on the same social media app or site. When children aged between 8 and 17 with any profiles were asked about this, six in ten said they had more than more than one profile on at least one app/site. The younger children, aged 8-11, were the most likely to claim this (64%) compared to almost six in ten aged 12-15 (59%) and 16-17 (57%).

Among those with multiple profiles, almost half of 8-11s said that they had an account just for their parents or family to see (46%), with much lower proportions of 12-15s (25%) and 16-17s (22%) saying this. The older age group of 16-17s were the most likely to have one account for their closest friends and another for everyone else (40%), decreasing to 34% of 12-15s and 24% of 8-11s.

Meanwhile, across each age group, up to a quarter said they had one account to show the 'real me' and another containing edited or filtered posts or photos.

As outlined above, some children are keen content creators, and this is reflected in those who had a profile purely for this purpose. A fifth of children aged 12-17 with multiple profiles (17%) said they had different accounts for sharing and/ or posting their own content and for following other people, although this was less likely among 8-11s (12%).

Meanwhile, some choose to have separate profiles dedicated to a hobby such as skateboarding, gaming or photography. A fifth of 16-17s with multiple profiles said this (20%), compared to 16% of 12-15s and 14% of 8-11s.

Children's content consumption

The convergence of online content

In previous years, we have presented separate findings relating to social media and video-sharing platforms (VSPs). While this reflects differing regulatory responsibilities and Ofcom-wide classifications, the findings from our qualitative Children's Media Lives study show that children and young people make increasingly little distinction between different types of online platforms. Furthermore, we see an increasing convergence in the functionalities of various online platforms as the market matures. For example, Instagram, a site traditionally classed as social media, is increasingly used to share short-form video. YouTube, traditionally seen as primarily a video-sharing platform, is now frequently used to watch and host live stream events. To reflect these developments, we have structured our report in such a way as to discuss content consumption in general. Where appropriate, we still distinguish between different types of platform or online activity, and we continue to separate gaming due to its distinct character, but in general we look at online activity in the round.

'Content' can be images, video, audio or text

In this section, 'content' can mean textual, aural, or visual content that is available for children to access, view and potentially share online. This may be via their own personal 'curated' online space (for example, their TikTok 'For You Page') or in a more open, 'public' space, such as when they use the search function on YouTube. Content may be accessible 'permanently' (in that it remains online until the user or platform removes it) or may be accessible in its original format for only a limited time ('ephemeral'), as is the case on platforms such as Snapchat and features such as Instagram Stories.

Children may also be creators of content, either by originating their own text, images, video, or audio, or by sharing content that has been originated by another user.

Although most of children's content consumption now takes place online, some consumption still takes place through more traditional and offline methods, such as watching broadcast television or listening to the radio. We include analysis of offline content consumption in this chapter primarily as a point of comparison.

How children are consuming content

In this section we focus on the ways in which children are consuming content, including the devices they use, and the services they are using to access TV, videos, images, textual content and other types of media.

Our qualitative research showed that children were often 'multi-screening'; that is, using multiple devices at the same time

Multi-screening refers to where a child might be on social media on their phone at the same time as watching something on a television set, or gaming on one monitor screen while they watch YouTube on another. Multi-screening was common among the children in our Children's Media Lives sample. With so much content on offer, and via so many different platforms, it is understandable how this has come about. When children were watching long-form content (such as a film), some of them felt that they *had to* be on other devices while watching such content. For some, this was because they found it hard to pay attention to just one activity.

"Sometimes when I am playing [on my PS4] I like to just watch a YouTube video. Obviously, I can't really focus on it [when gaming] but during the waiting times it is already on so I can watch it and wait." – **Isaac, 16**

For others, it was more of a compulsion, to the point that they avoided situations where they wouldn't be able to multi-screen.

"[If I'm multi-screening] I'm actually really paying attention because if I'm on my phone it makes it easier for me to focus on the film. I can't just sit and watch a film. I love the idea of going to the cinema but literally 20 minutes into the film I'm bored and I want to go home. I like watching movies at home so I can be on my phone."

– **Josie, 17**

The Insights Family also found that only 4% of children aged 3-17 say they *never* do anything else while watching TV. Around three in ten children said they watched TV while chatting with friends (33%, increasing to 40% of 13-17s) or using their mobile phone (29%, increasing to 49% of 13-17s). Fifteen per cent of children claimed to watch TV while also doing their homework, 11% while using a laptop and 7% while using a console.[29]

[29] The Insights Family asked children 'What else do you do whilst watching your TV?'. The most cited answers were to eat or drink (54%) and to chat (33%).

Devices used for watching TV content

TV sets were still the most common device on which to watch television and films, but eight in ten children also watched TV on a device other than a TV set

Our research found that as in previous years, most children still chose to watch TV programmes and films on a TV set (86% of 3-17-year-olds). About half watched on a portable device such as a tablet (55%) or a mobile phone (47%). As with the devices used to go online, the younger children were more likely to use a tablet, while older children were more likely to use a mobile phone.

Around a quarter said they also used gaming consoles and players, or computers, to watch TV content (27% and 24% respectively).

Overall, 81% of children watched TV content on a device other than a TV set, which demonstrates the prevalence of independent, rather than shared, viewing among children.

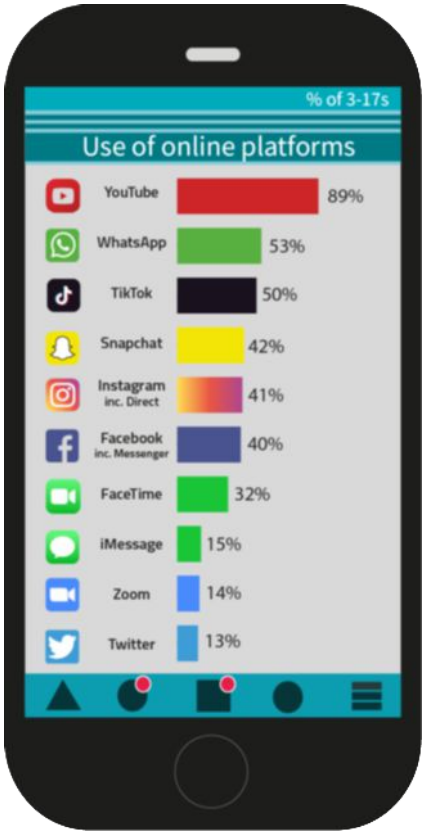
Use of online platforms

Alongside analysis of other services, in this section we focus particularly on two platforms: YouTube and TikTok. Across the data sources analysed, these platforms stood out as playing a particularly significant role in children's content consumption in 2021. As shown below, they not only had particularly high use but also had a high level of popularity – that is, children were not just using these platforms at a high rate, but also reported that they enjoyed doing so. Our focused approach is not to diminish or downplay the use or popularity of other platforms, but to recognise the significance of YouTube and TikTok to children.

YouTube was the most widely used platform of any type among children

Our research found that, overall, YouTube was the app or site used the most by children aged 3-17 (89%), ranging from 84% of 3-4s to nine in ten 5-17s.[30] The majority used it to watch videos, although 13% used it to post their own videos – more likely among boys than girls.

[30] In our survey, we asked four questions relating to platform use on different platform types: video-sharing, social media, messaging and live streaming. Some platforms appeared on multiple lists: for example, TikTok appeared in both the video-sharing and social media lists. We have aggregated these answers to determine the most commonly used platforms overall.



YouTube also offers a dedicated app, aimed at children up to the age of 12, which is designed to allow them to consume content more safely (YouTube Kids). A minority of YouTube users aged 3-4 *only* used this dedicated app (40%), falling to 33% of YouTube users aged 5-7 and 18% of 8-11s.

Data from The Insights Family showed that children were more likely to watch YouTube than on-demand or live TV. When asked which they had watched more of in the past week, 44% of children aged 3-17 said YouTube, 36% said Netflix, and just 16% said live TV.

Children also told The Insights Family that YouTube was their favourite app (14%) and their favourite social site or network[31] (31%); boys were more likely than girls to say this for both measures.

CHILDWISE data showed that children aged 7-16 estimated that they spent just under two hours[32] on YouTube in an average day in 2021. Boys spent more time on this (just over two hours[33]) than girls (just under one and a half hours[34]).

TikTok was the third most-used platform, used by half of children

TikTok is a video-sharing platform like YouTube, but it allows users to watch and share only short-form video content. Half of children aged 3-17 used TikTok in 2021, making it the third most-used

[31] The Insights Family first asked: 'Which of these sites and social networks do you use?', followed by 'Which is your favourite?'.
[32] CHILDWISE data stated 1.8 hours, which equates to 1 hour 48 minutes.
[33] CHILDWISE data stated 2.1 hours, which equates to 2 hour 6 minutes.
[34] CHILDWISE data stated 1.4 hours, which equates to 1 hour 24 minutes.

platform overall.[35] Use ranged from less than a fifth of 3-4s (16%), to half of 8-11s (51%), to three-quarters of 16-17s (74%).

CHILDWISE data showed that four in ten 5-16-year-olds used TikTok on a daily basis. Girls were more likely than boys to use TikTok regularly; one in three boys (34%) were daily users compared to half of girls (48%).

Our own research found that the fourth, fifth and sixth most-used platforms overall were Snapchat (used by 42% of 3-17s), Instagram (41%) and Facebook (including Messenger; 40%). Unlike YouTube, where use was comparable by age, use of TikTok, Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram increased with age.

What TV content are children consuming?

Children still watch broadcast television, but are more likely to watch programmes or films via paid-for on-demand services

The trend we have seen in recent years, for children to watch TV content on paid-for on-demand services rather than on live or broadcast TV, has continued. Almost eight in ten children (78%) aged 3-17 watched content on services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Disney+, compared to less than half (47%) who said they watched live TV.

But content from TV broadcasters was not necessarily missed by children, just watched at another time, rather than 'live'. Almost half watched content via PSB catch-up services[36] such as BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub or All4 (48%), while 35% caught up using recorded TV content. And just over half (55%) chose to watch TV content on websites such as YouTube, Facebook Watch and Vimeo.

Our research findings are echoed in BARB data. According to BARB, 63% of children aged 4-15 watched any live broadcast TV, on average per week, in 2021.[37] Their viewing of live TV per week averaged just under four and a half hours, just under an hour less than in 2020.

However, when catch-up viewing watched on BVoDs[38] and recording devices is included, reach increases to 81% of children, and average viewing per week goes up to just under six hours a week.

BARB also measures viewing of non-broadcast content such as paid-for on-demand content and video-sharing platforms watched on the TV set. Although children's viewing of this declined in 2021 (by just over an hour, to 10 hours 9 minutes), it still exceeded their live TV viewing.[39]

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[35] TikTok was the third most commonly used of *all* platforms that were asked about, including messaging platforms. YouTube ranked first (89%) and WhatsApp second (53%).
[36] Also known as BVoDs – see explanation below.
[37] BARB, children aged 4-15. Live and 28-day consolidated viewing. Reach criteria: 3+ consecutive minutes.
[38] BVoD stands for 'broadcaster video-on-demand' services and in this instance could be free or paid for. Examples include BBC iPlayer, All4, ITV Hub, My5, ITV Hub+, Sky Go, UKTV Play etc. These services offer more than just broadcast catch-up viewing, but viewing of content that has not been broadcast on a TV channel is not included in the figures here.
[39] This is often referred to as 'unmatched viewing'. It is when the TV set is in use, but the content cannot be audio-matched or otherwise identified. It includes viewing of gaming, viewing DVDs/box sets/archives, SVoD, VSPs, time-shifted viewing beyond 28 days, apps on smart TVs and navigation around EPG guides where there is no in-picture broadcast content.

What audio content are children consuming?

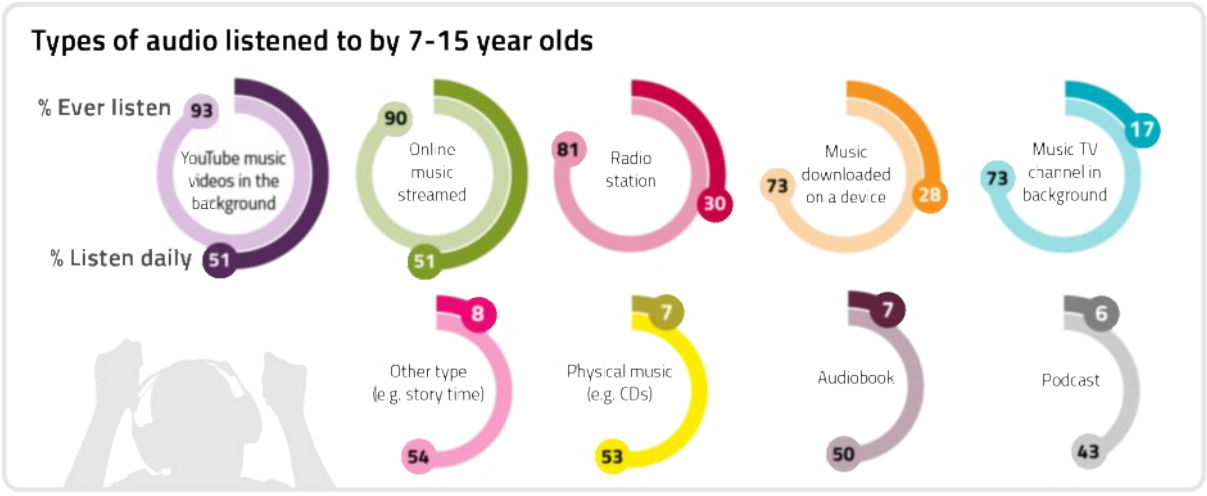
Children prefer to listen to streamed audio content, but the use of traditional radio should not be underestimated

With so much of children's media moving online, it is no surprise that their audio listening habits are following this pattern. A survey conducted by The Insights Family among 7-15-year-olds found that YouTube music videos and online music streaming services were the top two types of audio content listened to by children weekly (78% and 76% respectively), with half listening every day.[40]

Both these types of audio were most likely to be listened to on a smartphone (50% YouTube videos, 53% online music), demonstrating children's preference for audio content on a personal device. Online music was also listened to via a smart speaker (52%); music was the most-cited use of this device.

Such proportions listening to online content might suggest that there is no longer an appetite for traditional radio listening, but this is not the case: eight in ten children listen to the radio, 30% daily.

Children's radio listening may have more to do with parental choice, rather than that of the child. The car radio was the most-cited medium for radio listening (52%), especially among 7-9-year-olds, with the most likely times of day being the school run (47% compared to 32% at weekends, and 16% at other times of the day).



Podcasts did not get as much attention from children as other types of audio

In contrast to radio listening, podcasts are a more personal audio experience, with listeners choosing what audio content they want, and listening to it whenever is convenient. They can be both entertaining and informative, and are also a useful alternative activity for children, without the screen-time concern for parents.

However, research by The Insights Family showed that podcasts were the least likely type of audio content to be consumed by children aged 7-15 (43%). Listening via a smartphone was the most popular way (53%) to listen to podcasts.

[40] In terms of overall listenership, daily listens and favourite audio.

The frequency of listening to podcasts was much lower than listening to radio or online music. Children were more likely to listen to podcasts weekly (13%) or monthly (10%), with less than one in ten listening daily (6%).

Smart speakers were very popular among children for music and information; a minority of parents had concerns about their access to inappropriate content

More than eight in ten children said they used a smart speaker (83%), with the most-cited use being to listen to music (78%). However, half also took advantage of the accessibility and responsiveness of smart speakers, using them to search for information or ask general questions. A fifth also said they used smart speakers to listen to audiobooks (22%) or podcasts (20%), and almost three in ten used them to listen to radio stations (28%).

Around one in ten parents whose child used a smart speaker (12%) had concerns about their child's use of the device. Among these, the overriding concern was that the smart speaker would misunderstand the instructions given and might play inappropriate content to the child (37%).

Three in ten were concerned that their child would ask the smart speaker for inappropriate content (31%), or that the device would collect recordings of their child (28%).

This latter concern was echoed by almost a quarter who were worried about smart speakers listening to their child's conversations or who believed that the device was collecting data on their child (both 23%).

Parents were also concerned about other aspects of their child's use of smart speakers: 26% of those whose child used the device were worried that their child would buy products without parental consent, and 14% worried that their child would make calls from the device without their parents' knowledge.

This lack of control over their child's use was endorsed by a fifth of parents who felt that there were not enough parental controls on smart speakers.

Parents influence their children's audio habits

Almost nine in ten children (86%) said their parents know what they were listening to, half said their parents chose how they listened to music and other audio, and 43% said their parents choose what stations and music genres they listened to. Each of these measures were higher among parents of 7-9-year-olds.

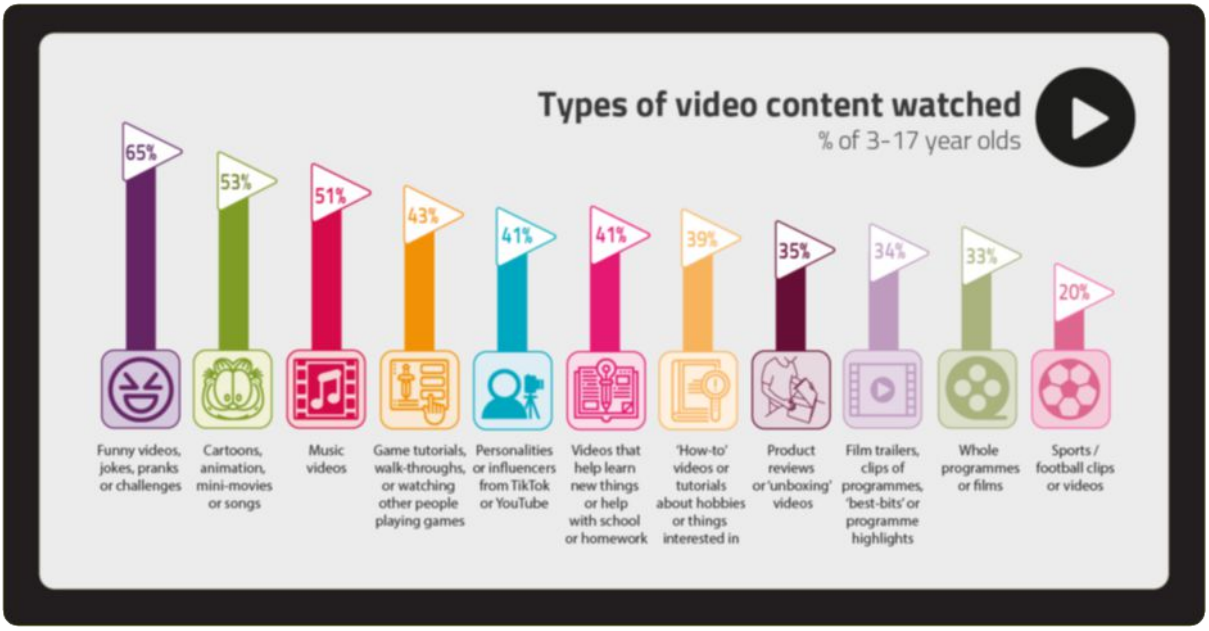
The older children, aged 13-15, were more independent in their listening. Nine in ten said they listened to whatever they wanted and chose how they accessed music and other audio.

What online content are children consuming?

Funny videos were the most-watched type of video content

Overall, the most-watched type of content on video-sharing platforms was 'funny videos' (including jokes, pranks, and challenges), watched by 65% of children aged 3-17 who watch videos online. While this content was most likely to be watched by older children (around seven in ten of 8-17s), it was also watched by six in ten 5-7s and four in ten 3-4s.

This was followed by around half watching cartoons and animations (53%), especially among the younger age groups (up to 78% of 3-4s and 70% of 5-7s); or music videos (51%) – more popular among the older age groups (up to 72% of 16-17s).



There were some differences by gender: boys were more likely than girls to watch gaming-related videos and sports-related content, while girls were more likely to watch music videos, personalities and influencers, how-to videos or tutorials, videos that help them learn new skills or help with their schoolwork, whole programmes/ films, and product reviews or unboxings.

Short-form video was also popular among children

Half of children aged 3-17 used TikTok, making it the third most commonly used app among our sample.[41] Use increased by age, ranging from 16% of 3-4s, to half of 8-11s (51%), to three-quarters of 16-17s (74%).

Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook were all used by around four in ten children (42%, 41%, 40% respectively) and, as with TikTok, use increased by age.

The growth of TikTok in 2021 came as children consumed more short-form content. Its videos last between 15 seconds and three minutes[42], and the platform places a heavy emphasis on personalisation. As a user interacts with videos by watching, skipping, liking, commenting or sharing, TikTok's algorithm learns what the user is interested in, and uses that information to recommend content to the user's personalised 'For You' page.' Users also have the option to search for content or follow accounts. Content discovery on other platforms is typically driven by search functions and side bar recommendations (for example, the YouTube 'recommended' video function) or is delivered via a feed, but this feed is often influenced by the accounts a user has actively chosen to follow (as is the case for Facebook and Instagram). TikTok is notable for the way it combines these two elements:

[41] The most popular app or site of all was YouTube (89), followed by WhatsApp (53%).
[42] TikTok videos were originally a maximum of 15 seconds long but were expanded to 60 seconds and then to three minutes in July 2021. As at March 2022, videos of up to ten minutes were available.

effectively delivering recommended content that the algorithm predicts a user will like, but through a tailored feed.

TikTok was popular among our Children's Media Lives sample, who spoke favourably of the ease with which content recommendation can be tailored to the interests of the user. The automatic serving of content in TikTok was also appealing, as it removed the need for the participants to make any decisions or actively look for things to engage with.

"On YouTube you have to decide what to watch all the time and sometimes I can never think what to pick… But on TikTok it just comes up for you." – **Zak, 12**

"I don't really use You Tube…I think TikTok's taken over… on YouTube there's a lot of stuff to watch, but you have to find it whereas on TikTok it's just there. It's just easier to scroll through" – **Shaniqua, 18**

Online content: professional and influencer

Professionalised content produced by influencers and brands make up an increasingly large amount of the content that children consume

Our research found that four in ten children aged 3-17 who watched videos online said that they watched content created by influencers on sites such as TikTok and YouTube. The Insights Family reported that 33% of children aged 10-17 said they trusted influencers, a higher proportion than those who trusted newspapers (26%), social media (29%) or celebrities with an offline claim to fame (28%).[43]

The importance of influencers is part of a more general trend towards the increasing 'professionalisation'[44] of children's online space. The findings from our Children's Media Lives research showed that an increasing proportion of the content that our sample consumed was produced by either companies or organisations, or people who were monetarily benefiting from their content in a way that was either professional or semi-professional. That is, being online has become less about following people whom children know, and more about engaging with commercial content, either as a form of entertainment or to influence their behaviour as consumers of brands and products.

"[My feed is] normally celebrities talking about their channels and other celebrities, like Mike Tyson… they're normally promoting their business." – **Isaac, 16**

[43] Question: 'How much do you trust the following?' on a scale from 1 'I don't trust' to 5 'I trust a lot'. The figure of 17% is made up of 12% who gave an answer of 4 and 6% who gave an answer of 5.
[44] The Children's Media Lives study found that the content that children in the sample were seeing was a mix of professional content by established brands and content from influencers who appeared to have adopted the visual styles and techniques used by many commercial brands in their online communications. This made the influencer content appear more 'professionalised'.

Josie (17) also reflected on the fact that a lot of the content that she saw on social media was from brands. She described how she now preferred engaging with this type of content rather than seeing content posted by her friends.

"I love my friends, but there's only so many times I could see their face… I love having pictures with my friends, but I don't think I could look at pictures of them constantly."– **Josie**

Children as content creators and interactors

Three in ten children uploaded their own videos online in 2021

As seen in the Online behaviours section, the proportion of children uploading videos online that they had made themselves (31%) was much lower than the proportion who simply watched videos (95%).

While YouTube was consistently the most-used platform for watching videos and clips, across all age groups, TikTok was the platform where school-age children were most likely to *upload* content: 18% of all 3-17-year-olds uploaded videos on TikTok, compared to 13% on YouTube, and 11% on both Instagram and Snapchat.

A similar picture emerged for live streaming: compared to the 57% who watched live streams, only 15% of 3-17s live-streamed their own videos in 2021. The platforms used most to watch live streams were, again, YouTube and TikTok. The proportion watching content on live-streaming app/sites rose steadily by age, from a third of 3-4s to eight in ten 16-17s.

Differences by gender were seen among the 5-7 age group; boys were more likely than girls to watch content on these live-streaming platforms. But among 12-15s the reverse was true.

Some children have become more passive in their use of social media, and are starting to reassess the viability of becoming an 'influencer' themselves

In our Children's Media Lives research, we saw a notable decrease in children's aspirations to become professional or semi-professional streamers and influencers, and in many cases, a shift towards reassessing how realistic it was to expect to make money from their online activities.

For example, Suzy (10), who in a previous wave of research had been posting on TikTok multiple times a day and was hoping one day to become TikTok famous, was now hoping to become an interior designer or architect when she grew up. Now she posts on TikTok more 'for fun' and has disabled the option for people to comment on her videos, due to concerns about being teased at school about her posts.

"It's more fun just doing it [posting TikToks] than wanting more followers because if you don't get that amount of followers you want, you just get a bit upset because you don't get that many." – **Suzy, 10**

Suzy had also witnessed the drama that often surrounded her favourite TikTokkers, such as people trying to cancel[45] Addison Rae. This had made Suzy reflect that being famous wasn't necessarily all that it was initially made to seem.

"You see all these influencers who have millions of followers and are verified[46], and you think oh I want that, but really I don't care that much anymore because like anything you do if you're big and famous, you actually get a lot more hate than likes and followers and stuff." – **Suzy, 10**

However, data from The Insights Family shows that 4% of children aged 3-17, mainly the 8-11s, still said that their preferred job would be a YouTuber or vlogger.

News consumption

Over four in ten children aged 12-17 went online to find out about the news in 2021

Our media literacy research found that in 2021 more than four in ten 12-17s (44%) said that going online helped them to find out about the news, and that the majority trusted what they saw on news apps and sites (see Understanding the online space section).

Our 2021 News Consumption Report also found that just under six in ten 12-15s claimed to be either *very* or *quite* interested in news (57%), the most cited reasons were that it was important for them to know what is going on, and to help them learn about or find out new things.[47]

Among those not interested, almost half (47%) claimed it was because news was 'too boring', and a fifth said it 'all sounds the same'. A minority said it was because they found it 'too upsetting' (8%).

When asked about their interest in different types of news, the highest level of interest was in news about music and musicians (53%), followed by celebrity news (45%), animals and the environment (44%) and serious things going on in the UK (43%).

When asked which they were *most* interested in, celebrity- and hobby-led topics dominated: sports and sports personalities (22%), music and musicians (15%) and celebrities (12%). Twice as many 12-15s were interested in sports news as were interested in serious things going on in the UK (10%) and more than ten times as many as were interested in politics or current affairs (2%).

Family and the TV were the most-used sources for news among teens

Our News Consumption Survey also found that the most common ways for teens to find out about news were through talking to family (68%) or via the TV (65%). However, just under six in ten said they used social media (57%) and just over half got their news by talking with friends (53%),

[45] Being 'cancelled' on social media usually means that people turn against you and post negative content about you and try to make your account less popular by unfollowing it.
[46] Being verified on TikTok means that a blue tick appears by your username. TikTok describes it as a stamp of approval which can build credibility and increase exposure.
[47] Ofcom, Children's News Consumption Survey 2021. Fieldwork period: November-December 2020 and February-March 2021. Data for 2021 will be published in May 2022.

compared to around three in ten who used radio, search engines, or other sites and apps[48]. Less than a fifth used newspapers (16%).

The source used also very much depended on the type of news content being sought. The TV was most likely to be used for more serious content, such as politics and current affairs, serious issues in the UK, and international news, whereas talking to the family was more likely to be about local news and events.

Social media was predominately used for less formal types of news: about music, celebrities, and fashion and beauty.

TV was claimed to be teens' most-used news source, but when teens were asked which services they actually used, just three broadcaster TV channels (BBC One/Two, Sky News and ITV/STV) appeared in their top ten sources; the rest were all social media platforms.

As in previous waves of our Children's Media Lives survey, most of the participants in 2021 reported hearing about the news and what was going on in the world through social media. And most came across it passively when it appeared on their feeds, rather than seeking it out.

"Honestly, I don't really see any news, unless it is celebrity news. If it is really, really bad or it is really popular like the Black Lives Matter protests then I'll see that." – **Isaac, 16**

Despite being widely used, social media is not trusted or seen as an accurate source of news

Family, radio, podcasts and TV were considered to be the most accurate and truthful sources of news information among 12-15s: eight in ten believed that news from family was *mostly* or *always* truthful and accurate. Three-quarters believed that this was true of radio, and seven in ten thought the same of podcasts and TV.

Social media was considered to be the least truthful of all, with only a third of 12-15s considering it truthful or accurate either *always* or *mostly*. Over half of 12-15s (52%) said that they thought it was difficult to tell whether news stories on social media were true or not.

This distrust of news within social media was also demonstrated by some participants in our Children's Media Lives study. At the time of research, a key news story was the death of ten people at Astroworld, an annual music festival in Texas run by the rapper Travis Scott.[49] Reporting of this featured heavily in content shared on their social media feeds, including a range of different theories about exactly what had happened.

[48] 'Other sites and apps included any internet source, excluding social media and search engines, but including podcasts.

[49] At the 2021 Astroworld event, 10 people died as a result of a 'crowd surge', with many more sustaining serious injuries. There was particular controversy as Travis Scott continued performing despite the developing situation.

While some children did question what was true in relation to the event, the quantity of the content posted about the event made Shaniqua (18) and Shriya (17) feel that there might be some truth to the rumours that there was something more sinister going on.

"I kind of believe it like because he was just watching all these people die in vain and everything." – Shaniqua, 18

"I don't fully believe all of it but like I do think he probably is part of the illuminati.[50]" – Shriya, 17

Children sometimes actively engaged with current affairs issues, but did not always understand their own motivations for doing so

Some of the children in the Children's Media Lives sample demonstrated limited active participation in news and current affairs. They reported reposting news content on social media to 'raise awareness' but were not always certain why they did this.

"[I want to] raise awareness because I know a lot of people who aren't aware about issues at all. It's not forcing... but as long as people know... then they know." – **Shriya, 17**

"That was to do with remembrance... I just wanted to do it out of respect really' – **Jack, 17**

Others gave reasons which related to the impact that posting such content would have on their own online reputation or persona. Bobby (15), for example, described sharing a black square on his Instagram on Blackout Tuesday[51] as something he 'had to do' because his peers were doing it.

Parents' views on children's content consumption

Parents were concerned about various aspects of their child being online, including exposure to adult, self-harm and extremist content

When asked about how concerned they were about various aspects of their child being online, seven in ten parents of 3-17s expressed concern about the possibility of their child seeing 'adult' or sexual content online (71%),[52] and within this group, around four in ten parents of children under the age of 16 said they were *very* concerned.

The same proportion, 71%, expressed concern about their child seeing other age-inappropriate content such as bad language, violence, and disturbing content. Parents of 3-11-year-olds were

[50] The Illuminati was originally a Bavarian secret society formed in 1776 by intellectuals who opposed religious influence. Modern mentions of the illuminati are typically linked to conspiracy theories about an exclusive group of powerful individuals supposedly controlling parts of the government, media, business and other areas of power. 'The accidental invention of the Illuminati conspiracy' (bbc.co.uk)

[51] Blackout Tuesday was a day-long movement in June 2020 sparked by the death of George Floyd. Led by the music industry, it called for normal business to be 'paused' and for there to be a day of reflection on racism in the US. On social media, many people posted a black square with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter to participate in this.

[52] We refer to 'parents' throughout this section as a form of shorthand, but acknowledge that guardians and other adults in a caring role may have answered this survey on behalf of the children in their care.

more likely to be concerned about this (just under four in ten) declining to almost a quarter of parents of 16-17s (23%).

Almost two-thirds (64%) were concerned about their child seeing content which might encourage them to hurt or harm themselves, peaking at 71% of parents of 8-11s. And just over half (52%) said they were concerned that their child might be influenced by extreme views online, whether political, social, or religious. Parents of 8-11s were more likely to feel this (63%), but there was no difference by age group among those who were *very* concerned (about a fifth).

Most parents had at least some rules in place about when and/or how their child consumed content online

More than nine in ten parents had (any) rules in place regarding their child's online activity (92%) – increasing to 100% of parents of 8-11s. This declined to 68% of parents of 16-17s.

The most common rules (used by around two-thirds of parents) were: the types of websites the child could use (67%), the type of video content they could watch online (66%), whom they could contact online (65%), what information they could share (64%), and rules about spending money online (64%).

Two further rules in place, for around half or more of parents, were in relation to the child's time online: 57% had rules about how much time their child could spend online, while 49% had rules about when their child could go online.

Parents had less concern about the TV content their child watched than about the content they were consuming online

Just under half of parents (46%) were concerned about the content of the television programmes their child watched, in terms of bad language, violence, or disturbing content, significantly lower than the 71% of parents who were concerned about their child seeing the same content online. But parents of the oldest age group (16-17s) were more likely to be unconcerned (42%) than concerned (33%) about this this type of TV content.

This differs from the same metric when asked in relation to online consumption, where more than half of parents (52%) of even the oldest children were concerned about bad language, violence, or disturbing content online.

Fewer parents had rules in place about television and film watching than about online use, but a large majority had at least one rule in place

While more than eight in ten parents had rules in place about the TV programmes or films their child watched (83%), this was lower than the 92% of parents imposing rules relating to online use. The most common type of rule about TV content was about what the child watched (69%), although proportions varied greatly by age. Around eight in ten parents of 3-11s imposed this rule, compared to a quarter of parents of 16-17s.

Around half of parents had rules about how much time their child spent watching TV programmes and films (52%) and when they could watch (48%). For both types of rules there was little variation by age group among 3-15s, but for parents of 16-17s this decreased to 24% who had rules about time spent watching TV, and 19% about when they could watch it.

A quarter of parents had rules about their child being supervised when watching TV or about who they watched it with. Again, there was little variation among the younger age groups (around three in ten for 3-11s), but this rule seemed to be relaxed when hitting teenage years, with just over one in ten having this rule for 12-17s.

Gaming

Gaming among children

Six in ten children played games online in 2021, the proportion increasing with age

Three-quarters of 12-17s played games online (75%), compared to 69% of 8-11s, 38% of 5-7s and 18% of 3-4s.

Boys were significantly more likely to play games online than girls, but gaming was still common among both (66% of boys; 51% of girls). Data from CHILDWISE also showed that boys were more likely to be intense gamers, playing for nearly four hours a day on average, while girls played for half this time, at just over two hours on average.

Children were most likely to play games on a games console, followed by a mobile phone

A games console/ player was the most-used device by children to play games in 2021 (59%). Children aged 8+ were more likely than the younger age groups to use one, and overall, boys were more likely than girls (75% vs 44%).

More than half of children (54%) gamed on a mobile phone, again more likely among those aged 8 and above (63%). While half gamed on a tablet, this was more likely among the younger children: almost two-thirds of 3-11s used a tablet compared to a third of 12-17s.

Three in ten played on a desktop computer, laptop or netbook, one in ten through an app on a smart TV and one in 20 using a virtual reality (VR) headset.

While most children play games online with people they know, some play against strangers and chat with them while gaming

Among children aged 3-17 who played games online, the most-cited way of playing was against someone they knew (72%), compared to two-thirds who played on their own, and a third who played against people they didn't know or hadn't met in person.

Of this latter group who played against people they did not know, 12-17s were the most likely to do this, at around four in ten, but it was also being done by 31% of 8-11-year-olds and 22% of 5-7s.

Boys were likely than girls to play in all the ways mentioned above, including playing against people they did not know.

Three-quarters of 8-17s who gamed online said that they chatted during the game with other people who were playing, either through messaging or using a headset. Whilst they were more likely to chat to friends or someone they knew outside the game (67%), a third said that they chatted to people

they only knew through the game (33%). As with playing against strangers, the likelihood of chatting with them increased with age: from 25% of 8-11s to 45% of 16-17s.

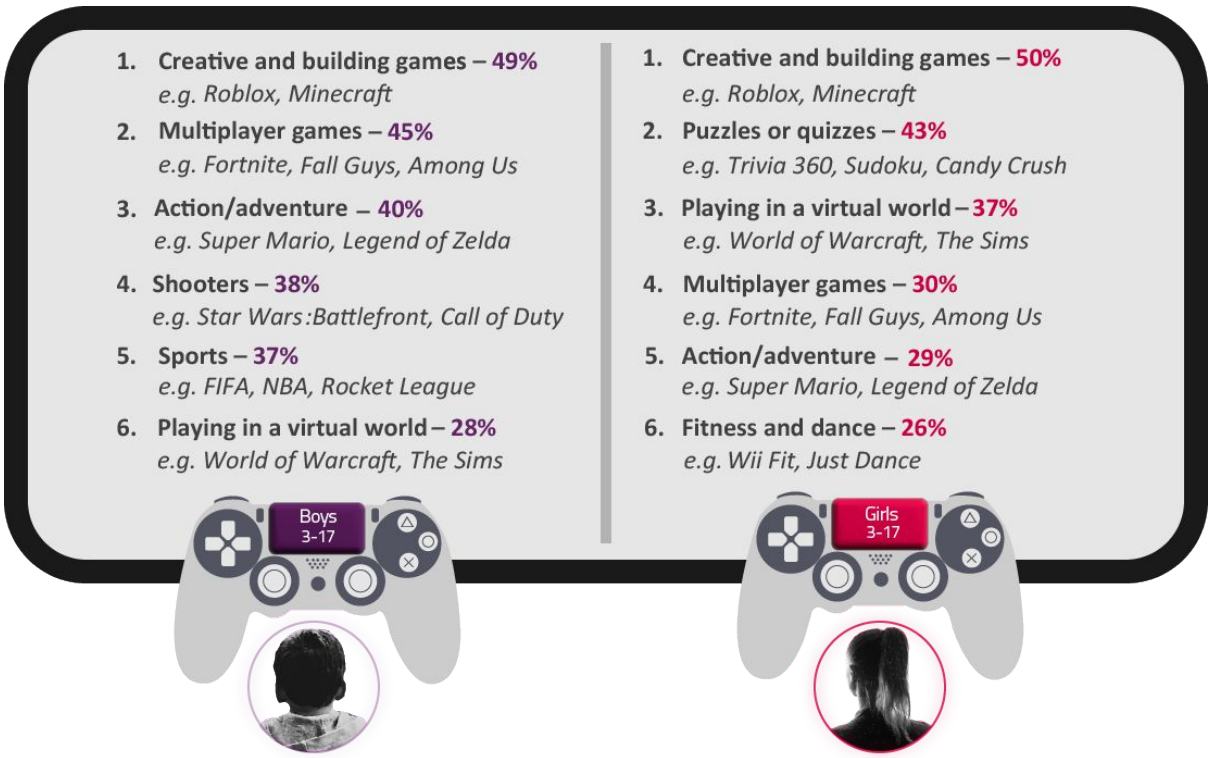
The overall proportion chatting to strangers within games equated to 16% of 8-17s.

Unlike the other measures, girls who chatted in games when playing online were just as likely as boys to chat to strangers within the game.

Younger children were more likely to play creative and building games, whereas older children were more likely to play shooting and sports games

Among all 3-17-year-olds who played games (both on and offline[53]), the most-played types of games were creative and building games like Roblox[54] and *Minecraft* (played by 49%).[55] This rose to almost six in ten among children aged 5-11 (56%).

This finding is echoed by CHILDWISE data. Children were asked what games they had played in the last week, and Roblox games and *Minecraft* were the top two cited. According to this data, boys were more likely to play *Minecraft*, and girls Roblox games.



[53] Our survey question did not specify whether this was online or offline, so types of games could cover both.
[54] Roblox is a platform which gives children access to a catalogue of games created by other users, in the same way that YouTube gives access to other user-created videos. Children are able to play these games, and to interact and chat with other players while they do so.
[55] Minecraft is an 'open world' 'sandbox' game: that is, a game where players have access to a whole virtual landscape, rather than progressing through specific levels, and wherein a user can create their own experience depending on their interests.

Parents' views on children's gaming

Among parents of children who play games, there was a high level of uncertainty about whether the benefits of gaming to children outweighed the risks

When asked whether the benefits of their child playing games outweighed the risks, the most common answer given by parents was either neutral or unsure (40%). A similar proportion, almost four in ten (38%), said they agreed that the benefits did outweigh the risks[56], while 22% disagreed.

When asked about their concerns in relation to their child's gaming, the highest level of concern among parents was the possibility of their child talking to strangers within the game (59%). Almost half of parents (48%) of children who played games said that they were concerned about the content of the games their children were playing, in terms of violence, bad language or disturbing content. Similar proportions were concerned about the pressure on children to make in-game purchases (51%) or about the possibility of them being bullied while gaming (52%).

Within our Children's Media Lives study, we saw evidence of a parent being aware of the potential for harm within their child's online gaming. Having talked to other parents, Angus's (9) mum felt that playing *Fortnite* could put Angus at risk of unwanted contact from strangers and of spending too long gaming. Therefore, she decided to draw up a 'contract' for how Angus would have to behave on *Fortnite*. If he broke this even once, he wouldn't be allowed to play again.

"When we first got Fortnite, I drew up a contract… because I'd heard things about Fortnite and children's behaviour. Angus has to abide by the rules or that's it. Maximum two hours, not after half past seven, and no speaking to people you don't know" – **Angus's (9) mum**

Nine in ten parents of children who game had rules in place about how and when they could do so

Almost nine in ten parents of 3-17s who played games had at least one rule in place about the games their child played (87%), with the likelihood of this decreasing with age. Almost all parents of 5-11s had at least one rule in place, but by the age of 16-17 less than six in ten parents did so (56%). Parents of girls in the oldest age group (16-17s) were more relaxed about their gaming, with just over half having no rules at all in place (55%) compared to 35% of parents of boys of the same age having no rules. This may be due to boys, in general, being more likely to play games than girls, and online games even more so (70% of boys compared to 56% of girls), leading parents to feel they need more rules.

Across all age groups, the type of rule most commonly in place among parents whose child aged 3-17 played games was about purchasing or downloading games, or in-game purchasing (65%).

More than half of parents had rules in place about each of the following: their child only playing games with appropriate content (no violence, nudity, swearing, and so on), how much time their

[56] The survey question did not specify what the benefits or risks might be, so this was down to parents' interpretation.

child could spend playing games, only playing games with an age-appropriate rating, and when their child could play.

While half the parents played games online with their children, this was more likely among the younger children

As previously mentioned, more than seven in ten children who played games online said they played with or against someone they knew (72%); this was more likely among those aged 8+, and in particular among 12-15s (80%).

However, it seems that these older age groups are referring to playing with friends rather than with their parents. Half of children aged 3-17 play with their parents when gaming online. This was more likely among the younger age groups: 3-7s. Eight in ten 3-4-year-olds played this way, falling to four in ten 12-17s.

Understanding the online space

'Critical understanding' is a core component of media literacy; it enables children to understand, question, and manage their media environment. This is important if they are to get the benefits that the internet and other media can offer while avoiding potential risks or harms.

Overall, our research found that media literacy skills improve with age, suggesting that children become better equipped to navigate their online environment as they get older. However, there was still a significant minority of children, even in the oldest age groups, who could not identify advertising or fake profiles when their skills were tested in a scenario question, or who wrongly identified potentially misleading factors of a post as a marker of authenticity.

Gathering and checking information

One in ten children aged 8-17 think that everything they see on social media is true, while a majority think that only some of it is true

The internet can be a useful source of reliable, accurate information from a range of trustworthy sources, and going online can have a positive effect on everyone's learning, particularly among children. However, some information online is neither trustworthy nor reliable, and a media-literate child needs the skills which allow them to try to gather evidence and assess the validity of what they see. Part of this involves approaching information online with a degree of healthy scepticism.

Overall, our research suggested that most children are finding this balance. The majority of 8-17s who use social media thought that only some of what they see on social media is true (63%). However, one in ten believed that everything they see on social media is true (12%).

Children were also sceptical about news apps and sites, although a fifth believed that all they see on these is true

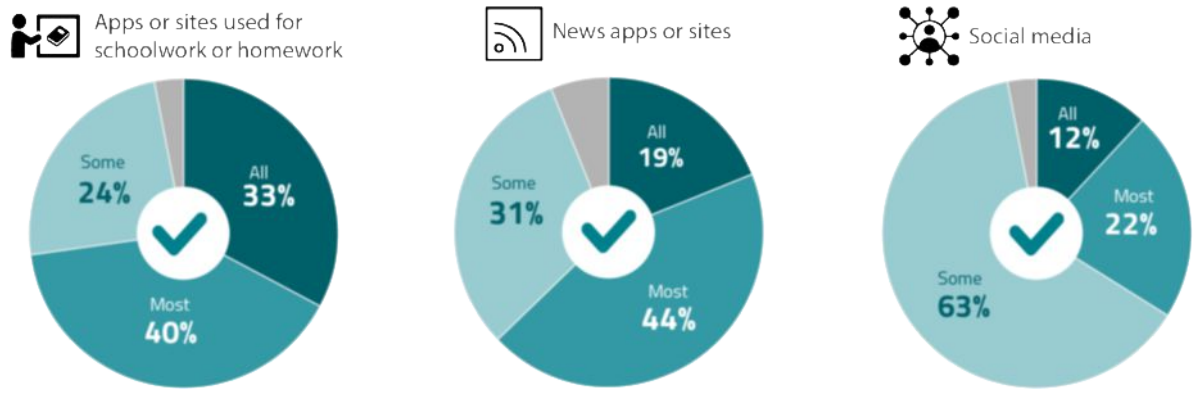
There was relatively little consensus about the extent of the truth and reliability of information on news apps and sites. A fifth of 8-17s who use news apps and sites (19%) believed that *all* the information on these was true, compared to more than two-fifths (44%) who thought that *most* was true and 31% believing that only *some* of it was true. The likelihood of selecting the *'all'* option decreased with age.

Children were more trusting of apps and sites used for school and homework

A third of children aged 8-17 who use apps and sites for school or homework believed that everything they saw on these apps or sites was true – higher than the proportion who thought this of social media or news platforms (around a fifth for each). However, mirroring their views of news

platforms, 40% thought that most of what they saw on school and homework apps and sites was true, while a quarter (24%) thought that just some of it was true.

Children's assessment of whether info on an app/site is accurate and true



Most children think about the trustworthiness of the information they encounter when they are using apps and sites they have never used before

A key skill in assessing the accuracy and reliability of online information is knowing when and how to use 'checking behaviours'; that is, behaviours that assess the accuracy and reliability of online sources and the information they provide. It is important to note, however, that checking behaviours do not always guarantee good outcomes. Reliance on aesthetic indicators like the look of a website, for example, could lead to false assessments of reliability. This is illustrated in practice by how the children responded to our misinformation scenario (see below).

The majority of children aged 12-17 (92%) who use apps and sites they have not used before in a typical week said they think about whether they can trust the truth and accuracy of information on these apps and sites. This figure was consistent across age and gender.

Children's checking behaviour often relied on aesthetic indicators or the overall impression of the platform

The most common checking behaviours employed by children aged 12-17 when using apps or sites they had not used before were: checking the general look of the website (45%), seeing if it was a company they had heard of (44%), and asking others if they had used the app or site before (42%).

Almost four in ten of these children checked information across multiple websites or checked how up-to-date the information on the site was (39% and 37% respectively). Checking behaviours can help a child to reach a more informed and rounded view of the site's trustworthiness and accuracy, either by assessing the information itself or by critically assessing the reliability of the source. They are not, however, a watertight way of guaranteeing that information is accurate. The most effective way of assessing the trustworthiness of a source would combine a variety of methods rather than relying on any particular one.

Assessing what is real and what is fake online

Three-quarters of children aged 12-17 claimed to be confident in their ability to judge what is real and what is fake online

Confidence does not just follow from good media literacy skills but intersects with it in a way which can either bolster or undermine good critical understanding. A child whose confidence is not matched by ability in practice may be more likely to make mistakes which could lead to harm. Conversely, a child who has good critical understanding skills but is not confident in them may not trust their own good judgement, which could lead them to feel unsure or unsafe in an online environment. More than seven in ten children aged 12-15 (72%) said that they were confident in judging what is real or fake online, compared to one in ten (12%) who said they were not. The older age group (16-17s) were more likely to be confident than 12-15s (78%), with boys aged 16-17 most confident of all (82%).

But more than eight in ten children aged 12-17 chose unreliable identifiers of information on a social media post

The importance of critical skills in assessing information, and identifying possible misinformation[57], has been made starkly clear during the Covid-19 pandemic. Our News Consumption Survey found that two-fifths of 12-15s said they had seen a deliberately untrue or misleading news story online in the past 12 months, but still more may be encountering misinformation without recognising it. Half of 12-15s who were surveyed said that they found it difficult to tell whether news on social media was accurate or not.

In 2021, we introduced online scenario questions in our media literacy surveys of children aged 12-17. One such scenario was created from a genuine NHS Instagram post relating to Covid-19 vaccinations. Respondents were shown the post as it would appear to them on their phone screen and were then asked to pick out features or identifiers which suggested that the information on this post was accurate and reliable (our 'misinformation' scenario). The features which were classed as 'reliable' identifiers of authenticity are shown below. It is important to note that features which are marked as 'unreliable' are not always identifiers of a fake or misleading profile; for example, a genuine account may indeed have many followers. However, these features are not always identifiers of authenticity. A spam account, for example, could easily use a logo from a trusted organisation and could attract many followers, and sensational posts which include misleading information may attract many likes.

Just one in ten children aged 12-17 (11%) chose *only* the reliable identifiers from the misinformation scenario, with no differences by age. More than eight in ten (82%) chose at least one unreliable indicator.

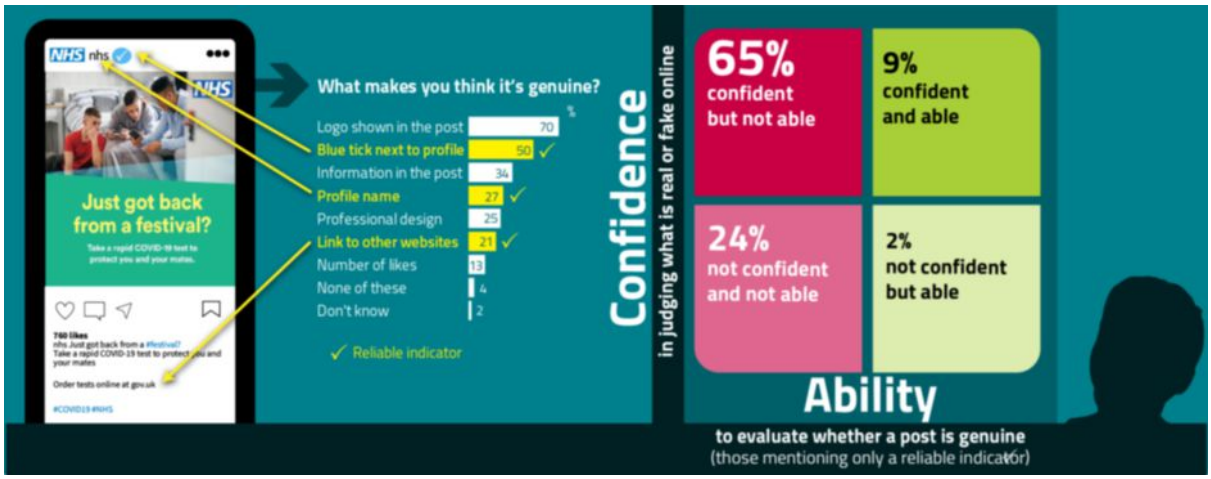
In line with the prominence of checking the 'look' of a website, the most commonly chosen unreliable indicators of authenticity were aesthetic. The majority of children (70%) incorrectly

[57] Misinformation can be defined as information which is widely acknowledged to be false or misleading, whether intentionally or mistakenly. It is important to note when considering self-reported incidences of misinformation, that one person's definition of misinformation may differ from another's, depending on their views and beliefs. To recognise this, and to avoid inadvertently spreading false information, we have chosen to feature a genuine piece of content in our misinformation scenario.

thought that the logo shown in the mocked-up post suggested that the post was genuine, suggesting that well-designed fake apps and sites could be successful in misleading children, even if checking behaviour is in place.

The majority of 12-17s claimed to be confident in their ability to spot misinformation, but most were unable to do so in practice

We can plot reported confidence against performance in the misinformation scenario to give a picture of overall levels of critical understanding in relation to misinformation. Our data shows that three-quarters of children aged 12-17 (74%) had confidence in their ability to spot fake information; however, less than one in ten demonstrated both confidence and ability in this type of critical understanding.



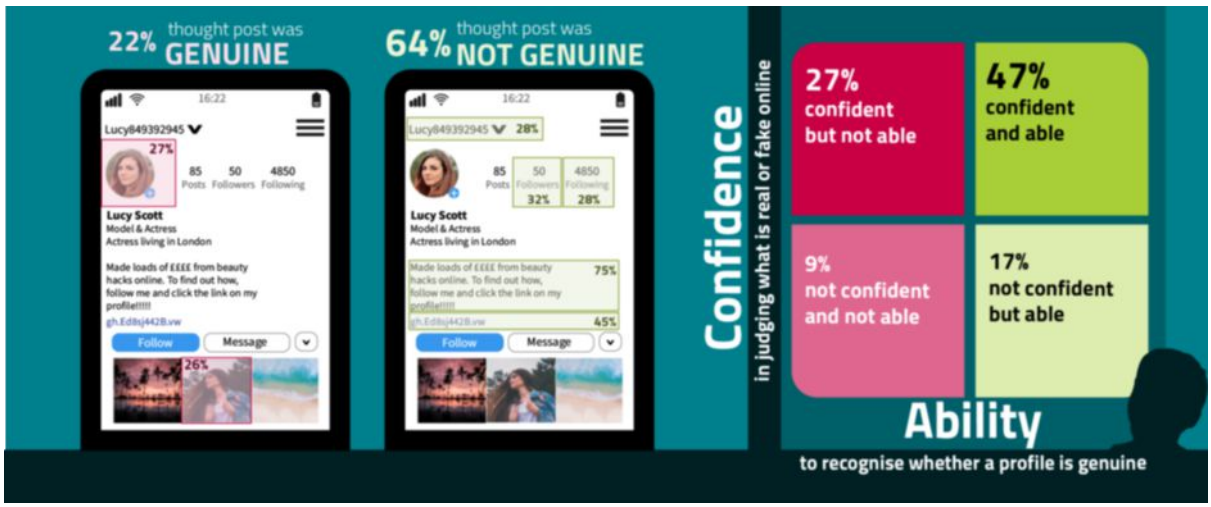
When shown a fake social media profile, more than a fifth of 12-17s identified a fake profile as a genuine one

In addition to our misinformation scenario mentioned above, we asked 12-17s to take part in a scenario question involving a fake Instagram profile, and to judge whether they thought the profile was real or fake. They were then asked to pick out identifiers which influenced their decision using a 'heat map' technique. For example, they might choose the user's profile picture, the information in their 'bio', the number of followers or the username.

When presented with this image, the majority (64%) realised it was a fake profile. However, more than a fifth (22%) thought it was real, while 14% were unsure. There were no differences in these proportions between the two age groups, 12-15s and 13-17s. But boys were significantly more likely than girls to be unsure about whether the profile was real (17% vs 12%).

The most frequently chosen *unreliable identifiers* on this fake profile were the profile picture and the posted photos: more than a quarter of the children who said that they thought the profile was real identified these as evidence of this. Again, this suggests an over-reliance on aesthetic indicators which can be easily faked to boost perceptions that a profile is genuine.

One in ten of this group (11%) selected the number of followers[58], which is slightly more difficult to fake but is still not a reliable indicator of authenticity (particularly as followers may sometimes be 'bought', despite platform guidelines preventing this).



Among those who thought the profile was fake, the majority felt this because of the details in the bio (75%), and just under half thought it because of the link in the description (45%).

In contrast to those who thought the profile was real, those who did not believe this were more sceptical of the number of followers on the post; a third of them felt that this was evidence of a fake profile.

Children aged 12-17 were much more likely to have confidence *and* ability in recognising a fake social media profile than in a misinformation post

Plotting children's confidence in spotting what is real and fake against their performance in the fake profile scenario, we see in the above graphic that children performed better in spotting a fake profile than they did in assessing indicators of authenticity in the misinformation scenario. Almost half the children were both confident and able in the fake profile scenario, compared to just over a quarter who were confident but *not* able.

Understanding the internet as a commercial landscape

Good online critical understanding can also help users to navigate the commercial incentives at play in the online landscape; for example, by understanding the role of funding sources, and recognising and understanding advertising.

Children are consuming content and accessing services in an increasingly complex funding landscape

The media landscape has always combined a range of funding models, from the licence fee to subscription services to advertising-only models. Advertising is the most common revenue stream for online platforms. However, this is increasingly being supplemented or combined with other types of funding models; for example, Google offers software services such as cloud storage and YouTube

[58] Note that this figure is not shown within the graphic.

and Spotify now offer 'ad-free' subscription services, and many platforms are also involved in the monetisation of user data. Similarly, complex pictures are emerging in relation to streaming platforms: some paid-for on-demand services are funded by subscription alone (like Netflix), some by a combination of subscription supplemented by advertising (such as NOW), and some by advertising supplemented by subscription (All 4, ITV Hub).

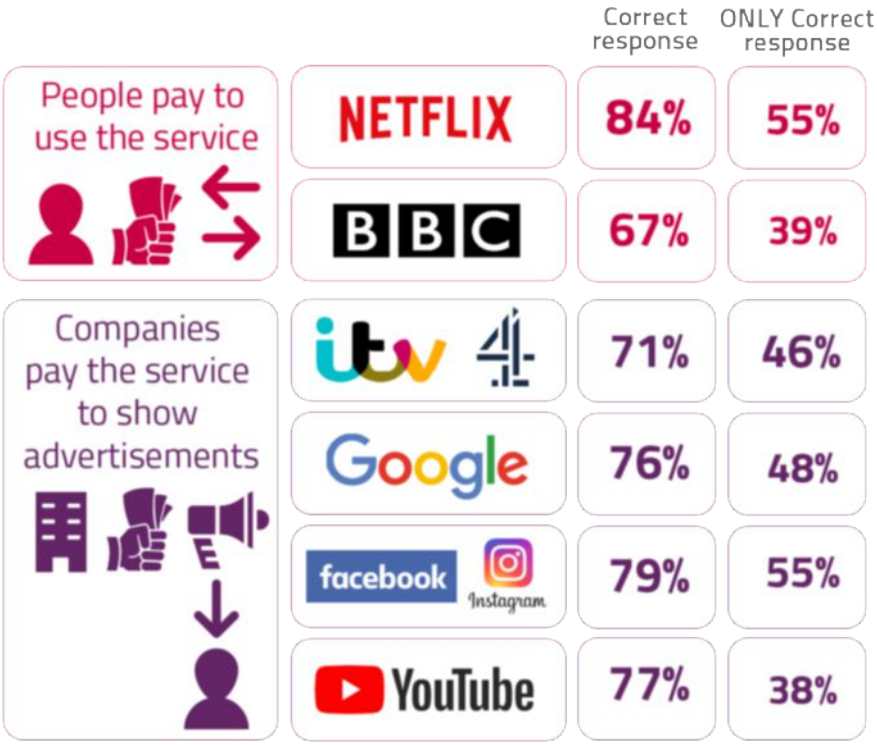
It is important to acknowledge this increasingly complex picture when we discuss children's awareness of funding models. However, broadly, most platforms – both online and offline – have one revenue stream which drives their funding model. The main funding sources of the platforms and services that we covered in our Online Knowledge and Understanding survey are set out below.

Children aged 12-17 were more likely to know the correct funding source for Netflix than for broadcaster television channels

Our research found that awareness of funding methods increases with age but remains relatively low overall.[59] Children aged 12-17 were the most likely to give *only* the correct response to questions about the funding of Netflix (55%). They were also more likely to correctly identify the primary funding method for Netflix than for all other services, although this includes children who also chose another, incorrect, source. The high level of correct answers for Netflix may reflect the fact that the Netflix funding model is arguably the simplest of all the platforms and services surveyed. Netflix primarily makes revenue from subscriptions and does not show advertising on its service.

Seven in ten children aged 12-17 correctly identified the primary funding of ITV and Channel 4 (71%), compared to 67% for the BBC. However, only 39% chose *only* the correct answer for the BBC, compared to 46% in relation to ITV/Channel 4. Three in ten children thought that the BBC makes money from advertising. However, this was much lower than those saying the same of ITV and Channel 4 (71%), which suggests that some children were able to distinguish between commercial and licence-fee-funded television channels when answering, even if their responses for each type of service were not always correct.

[59] Our research gauged awareness of the following: the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 (i.e. commercial public service television), Netflix, Google, Instagram and Facebook (i.e. advertising-funded social media) and YouTube. One question was asked for each platform, except in the case of ITV/Channel 4 and Facebook/Instagram, where respondents were asked about a pair of services with the same funding model, e.g. 'Where do you think Instagram or Facebook mainly gets its money from?'



Awareness of funding methods for online platforms was higher than for television channels

Overall, there was higher recognition of the correct funding methods for online social media platforms and search engines. When asked where services mainly got their money from, nearly eight in ten children aged 12-17 correctly identified advertising for Instagram or Facebook (79%), YouTube (77%) and Google (76%). However, the percentages who chose *only* the correct primary mode of funding were much lower: 55% for Instagram/Facebook, 48% for Google and 38% for YouTube.

The older age group of 16-17 were more likely than 12-15s to correctly identify advertising as the main source of funding for Instagram/Facebook (83% vs 77%), YouTube (82% vs 74%) and Google (81% vs 74%).

Children aged 12-17 report a high level of confidence about spotting advertising online, but this is not always matched by their behaviour

A media-literate child will be able to recognise when they are being advertised to, so that they are aware of what is shaping their decisions as consumers. In the online space, advertising is sometimes harder to identify than it is offline, because of the seamless nature of the online experience.

Overall, children aged 12-17 claimed a high level of confidence about their ability to spot advertising online. More than nine in ten (92%) said that they were confident that they could recognise advertising, and this figure was consistent across age groups. However, confidence was not matched by performance, particularly among younger users aged 12-15.

Just over half of search engine users aged 8-17 correctly identified sponsored links on a search engine results page, but three in ten mistakenly identified these as the 'best results'

When presented with a scenario question asking them to explain why a set of sponsored links appeared at the top of a search engine results page (see graphic below), more than half (54%) of children aged 8-17 who use search engines correctly identified the links shown as adverts.

However, a small proportion of this group *also* thought the ads were there for other incorrect reasons (17%), while some children chose *only* these incorrect reasons. Overall, 38% incorrectly said that they thought the ads were there because they were the most popular results, while 30% thought it was because they were the 'best results'.

Less than four in ten (37%) *only* chose the correct reason (the ads being sponsored links), with proportions increasing with age: from 32% of 8-11s to 44% of 16-17s.

When we compare performance in this scenario against confidence, we find that over a third of children (36%) were both confident in their ability to identify advertising and able to do so in the Google sponsored results scenario. However, 57% of children were confident but *not* able.

Seven in ten children aged 12-17 were able to correctly identify that an influencer was promoting a product because of a paid partnership

Awareness of advertising is particularly important in relation to influencers. These individuals are increasingly prominent in children's experience of social media, and many children turn to them or are influenced by them when making purchasing decisions.

Evidence from the Insights Family shows that more than four in ten children aged 6-17 said that the endorsement of a celebrity or influencer was an important factor in their shopping decisions (42%).[60] As such, it is important that children can recognise the commercial and other incentives behind what an influencer may be recommending to them.

There are several reasons why an influencer could be motivated to mention or recommend a product or service: they might be being paid to advertise it, they could have received the products

[60] Question: 'How important are the following when you are looking to buy a brand or product? Code: 'A celebrity or influencer I like/follow endorses it'

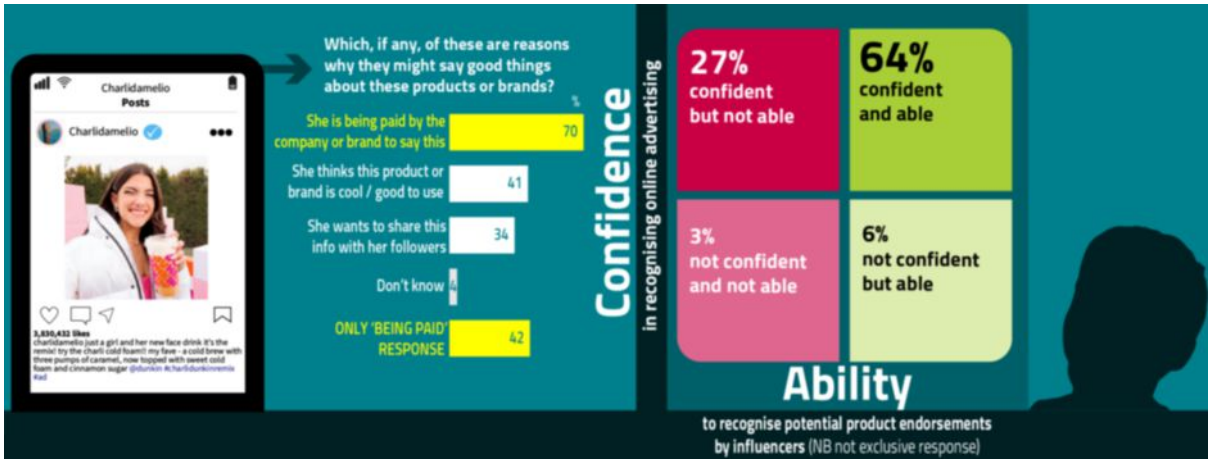
free on an either tacit or explicit understanding that they would then feature them in their content, or they might be receiving no financial benefit and merely wish to promote a product they like to their followers. Often, even the biggest influencers will mix these motivations across their content, which can make it difficult to tell the different levels of promoted content apart. In recent years, the Advertising Standards Authority has tightened its rules on influencer advertising, and guidelines are now in place which set out how influencers can ensure that they clearly and fairly mark 'paid partnerships' and sponsored content.[61]

We explored this via another scenario in our Online Knowledge and Understanding survey, in which we presented 12-17s with a real social media post shared by online influencer Charli D'Amelio[62], in which she was promoting a branded product, and had indicated this using a hashtag: '#ad'. Respondents were then asked why they thought the influencer was promoting this product.

Seven in ten children aged 12-17 correctly identified that the influencer was being paid to promote the product shown (see graphic below). Older children performed better in this scenario: three-quarters of 16-17s (76% compared to 67% of 12-15s).[63]

However, a much lower proportion *only* chose this option: 42% said this was the only reason that she was promoting the product, again with 16-17s more likely to say this (48% vs 39% of 12-15s).

A quarter of 12-17s (26%) thought it was for a reason other than product endorsement. Although some did select this option, they also chose others: four in ten (41%) thought she was promoting the product because she thought it was 'cool' or 'good to use', and a third (34%) thought she just wanted to share the information with her followers.



[61] Influencer advertising is covered by the ASA'S UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising and Direct & Promotional Marketing (CAP Code): CAP Code (www.asa.org.uk). The ASA has also released specific guidance for influencers, available here: 'An influencer's guide to making clear that ads are ads' (www.asa.org.uk)

[62] Charli D'Amelio is a 17-year-old social media star with over 47 million followers on Instagram and over a billion likes on TikTok. She rose to prominence for sharing viral dance routines, lip-syncs and original choreography, and now shares lifestyle, fashion and beauty content with her followers.

[63] Influencers may also promote products because they like them or want to share them with their followers. However, in this case, where a 'paid partnership' was clearly indicated, we considered the 'correct' answer to be the one which recognised this financial incentive.

Children showed scepticism towards offers to become influencers themselves

Several of the girls in our Children's Media Lives study were approached on social media to become a 'brand ambassador'. This is another term used to describe influencers who are paid to promote or endorse a brand's products. The girls were contacted via direct messages or by comments left on posts they had made on Instagram, which mentioned pictures on the girls' profiles and framed the offer as a chance to collaborate on something or to receive free products.

However, some of the messages received felt age-inappropriate or 'dodgy', which led to some of the girls being sceptical and choosing to ignore or delete them.

"It's a scam." – **Bryony, 13**

"It'll be from someone really random, like really random." – **Alice, 16**

Taylor (13) was also engaging with the messages she got to 'collab' with or be an ambassador for brands. She explained that when she was younger, she was excited to see the messages and had thought it was her opportunity to "become famous". She had also bought jewellery and posted an image with it as a result of one of the messages she received. But after buying the jewellery she had never heard from the brand again.

"When I first started getting them I would like message back, but then I realised it was like a triangle kind of system, a scam sort of thing" – **Taylor, 13**

Understanding data collection and use

There are two main ways in which sites collect and store information from users: first, users may input data such as name, birth date, email address and location when they sign up for a service; second, they share information with apps and websites through their browsing behaviour and interactions.

This second type of information-sharing sometimes has points of consent (for example, consent to share location, or consent to allow cookies on a website when browsing) but data collection is also sometimes included as part of the terms and conditions of using a platform or a service on the platform.

Most parents of 3-17s whose child goes online (63%) said they were at least fairly concerned about companies collecting information about what their children were doing online.[64]

The complex nature of data collection creates challenges for research, particularly with children, who may not always be aware of the types of information they are sharing. When asking our

[64] This question related to the second type of data gathering. The question asked how concerned parents were about 'Companies collecting information about what [children] are doing online (e.g. what they have been looking at online/ sites they have visited etc.'

question about sharing information, we specified the types of information shared with a site or app when it is first downloaded, or when a user first creates an account.[65]

Half of children aged 12-17 who go online said that they sometimes don't use apps or sites that ask them to share personal information if they don't feel comfortable doing this (49%). A fifth said they are never comfortable sharing their personal information (21%), and a further 14% said they always share information even if they are not comfortable doing so.

[65] The question was worded as follows: 'Sometimes when you want to download a new app or use a new website you are asked to share your personal information. This could mean entering details like your name, age, email address, and so on. Which one of these answers matches how you feel about sharing personal information to get access to a new app or use a new site?'

Harmful or risky experiences

In previous years, the children's media literacy survey has included questions related to potential online harms, such as the awareness and use of reporting functions. As part of the redesign of the 2021 surveys, it was decided that these questions would be best placed within our new Online Experiences Tracker (OET). The OET will have two waves a year, conducted among adults and children aged 13+. The data for the latest waves of this research will be published as part of our *Online Nation* report, scheduled for May 2022.

Data in this section is therefore sourced primarily from our Children's and Parents' Media Literacy Tracker surveys and the Children's Media Lives study. This includes data relating to the negative side of being online: the pressures felt on social media, seeing worrying content online, and different types of bullying experience, both on and offline.

Negative experiences among children

Four in ten users aged 8-17 felt that people are mean to one another on social media and messaging services

Our research showed that children are aware of the potentially negative aspects and impacts of being online, and this increased with age. Four in ten children aged 8-17 (39%) who use social media, or any messaging apps and sites, agreed that people are mean or unkind to each other on these platforms either most (23%) or all (16%) of the time.

An even higher percentage of children using these services agreed that there is pressure to be popular online: nine in ten (89%) felt this at least *sometimes*, and one in ten (11%) believed that there was this pressure *all the time*.

More than a third of children aged 8-17 had encountered worrying or nasty content online, and some may inadvertently be sharing it further

Over a third of children aged 8-17 (36%) said they had seen something 'worrying or nasty' online in the past 12 months. The youngest age group (8-11s) was significantly less likely (32%) than 16-17s (42%) to say that they had seen something that worried them.

In some instances, children can contribute to the potential harm to other users through their actions online. This may be done with a degree of intentionality, for example through peer-on-peer cyberbullying or sharing 'edgy' humorous content which may offend others, or it could be done unintentionally.

A child with limited media literacy skills may, for example, share a piece of misinformation which they have mistakenly viewed as reliable. In addition to this, children may unwittingly contribute to the amplification of content (that is, its recommendation to other users through algorithms) by sharing or commenting on a piece of content. Even when this is done with the intention of

denouncing or correcting the content, it contributes to the likelihood of that content being shown to others.

Our *News Consumption Survey* found that 15% of 12-15s said they would leave a comment on a piece of misinformation identifying it as 'fake news', and 14% would share it with people to tell them it was not true. By doing this, children may unwittingly be spreading this potentially harmful content further.

Two participants in our *Children's Media Lives* study also talked about sharing content which could be harmful. They recognised that the content could be offensive but shared it because they thought it was funny. Nathan (15) regularly shared offensive content, or content involving violence, on his Instagram. Sean (12) had shared a meme that included offensive content about people with learning disabilities.

When asked about this content, neither Nathan nor Sean felt that it was particularly offensive or had thought about why some of it might be upsetting to others. Nathan saw dark humour as part of his online personality and said that he was known among his group of friends for making 'out there' jokes.

"It's a controversial joke... I think I saw it and reposted it from somewhere. They know it's a joke so they wouldn't take offence." **– Nathan, 15**

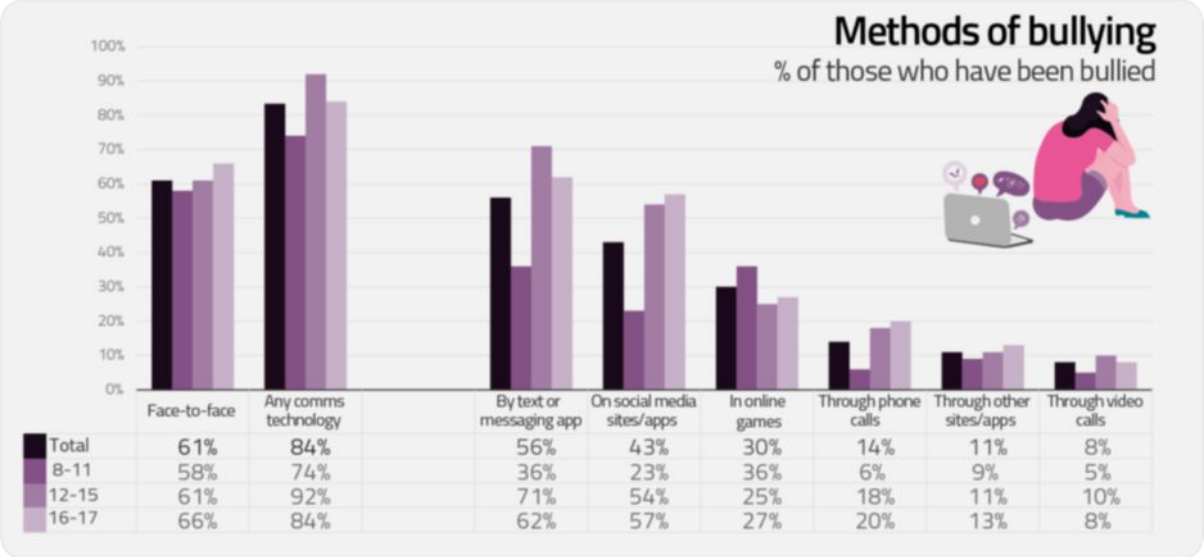
Among children aged 8-17 who have experienced bullying, more than eight in ten experienced it through a communications device such as a phone or laptop

Two-thirds of parents of 3-17-year-olds said that they were worried about their child being bullied online. Concern about online bullying was highest among parents of 8-11s (76%) and 12-15s (71%).

Four in ten children aged 8-17 (39%) said that they had experienced some sort of bullying[66], whether online or offline. Among these, being bullied through communications technology[67] was more prevalent than in person or face-to-face (84% vs 61%). Of those bullied via technology, the most common way was via text or messaging apps (56%), followed by 43% who said it had happened over social media.

For the youngest age group (8-11s) and the oldest (16-17s), being bullied face-to-face was the most likely method. However, for 12-15s it was via text or messaging apps (71% compared to 61% bullied face-to-face in this age group).

[66] Within the survey, we ask children aged 8-17 if they are happy to answer questions about upsetting things that may have happened to them while using mobile phones or going online. Among those who agreed to answer these, we then asked if anyone had been nasty or hurtful to someone they knew, or to themselves, and in what way it happened. For the purpose of this report, we have termed this as 'bullying'.
[67] 'Communications technology' includes bullying over: text or messaging apps, social media sites, voice and video calls, video games, online games and any other websites/apps.



Likelihood of telling someone

More than nine in ten children aged 8-17 said they would tell someone if they encountered something upsetting online, especially 8-11s

The vast majority of children said that they would tell someone if they saw something worrying or nasty online: 93% said they would do this at least sometimes, and six in ten (59%) said they would always tell someone. The proportion of children saying that they would tell someone decreased with age, from 96% of 8-11s and 92% of 12-15s to 86% of 16-17s. Children aged 8-11 were also more likely to say they would *always* tell someone (71%) than either 12-15s (54%) or 16-17s (44%).

Girls were significantly more likely than boys to say that they would *always* tell someone about something worrying or nasty that they had seen (62% vs 56%). Boys were three times more likely than girls to be unsure, or to say they didn't know if they would tell anyone (6% vs 2%).

All age groups were most likely to say they would tell a parent (85% of 8-17s) – highest among children aged 8-11 (92%). Three in ten would tell a friend, and a quarter would tell a teacher. Only 8% of children and young people said they would tell the app/site where they saw the worrying content, rising to 15% among 16-17s. The oldest children were much more likely than any other age group to say they would tell a friend (43% compared to 20% of 8-11s and 36% of 12-15s).

A fifth of parents of 3-17s said their child had told them about something upsetting they had seen online

In 2021, a fifth of parents of 3-17s said their child had told them about something they had seen online that had scared or upset them in the past 12 months, with little difference across the age groups. The youngest children (aged 3-4) were less likely than all older children to have told their parent about something scary or upsetting (12%), but among the older age groups the percentages were between 20% and 23%.

Among those whose child had told them, the most common action was to talk with their child about their experience (89%). Other actions taken were advising their child to stop using the app or site (59%) or advising them to block the people/ content concerned (55%). Three in ten (31%) reported

the content to the platform where their child had seen it, a quarter set up filters or parental controls, and just under a quarter (23%) sought advice on how to handle the situation from other sources.

Online wellbeing activities

The relationship between children's online life and their wellbeing is complex, particularly given that online and offline wellbeing are rarely separated, and what happens online (whether positive or negative) may continue to affect a child once they have logged off. Being online can also pose risks to children such as bullying or exposure to inappropriate content[68] which may affect their mental and physical health. However, being online can also have clear benefits for children's social life[69] and their learning[70], which may improve their wellbeing overall. In addition, there are a wealth of online apps, sites and other resources which children can use to actively improve their wellbeing.

To research children's attitudes, specifically regarding the impact that being online can have on their wellbeing, we conducted a quick poll among 13-17-year-olds, using Ofcom's Online Research Panel.[71]

Attitudes towards the internet and children's wellbeing

Children aged 13-17 were more likely to feel positive than negative about the effects of being online on their mental health and self-esteem

Our research found that more than half of 13-17-year-olds agreed that being online was good for their mental health (53%), with 14% strongly agreeing with this, and a minority felt that being online was bad for their mental health (17%).

Respondents were also twice as likely to say that they felt more relaxed online (43%) than they did offline (21%). Similar proportions said that being online made them feel better about themselves or improved their self-esteem (38%), while less than half of this group said that being online made them feel worse about these things (17%).

But where children felt most positive about the internet was in relation to their friends and peers. Seven in ten said that it made them feel closer to their friends and peers, with 30% strongly agreeing with this. This chimes with our media literacy survey data, which showed that two-thirds of children aged 12-17 (66%) felt that being on social media or messaging apps and sites made them feel closer to their friends.

However, children also showed a relatively high level of neutrality when answering these questions. Three in ten were neutral in their levels of agreement on whether being online was good or bad for their mental health, and 36% were neutral when considering how relaxed being online or offline made them feel.

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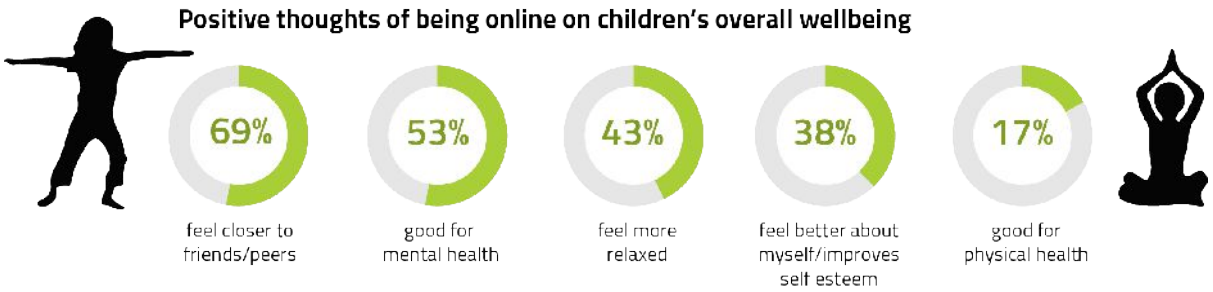
[68] See the 'Harmful and risky online experiences' section
69 See the 'Online attitudes' section of the 'Online life: access and attitudes' section
70 See the 'Learning, being creative and improving skills online' section of the 'Online behaviours' section
[71] Fieldwork for the quick poll was conducted 28 February – 3 March 2022 among 251 respondents aged 13-17.

The largest measure of uncertainty was in relation to whether being online made them feel better or worse about themselves or improved or worsened their self-esteem (44% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement).

And despite the majority of children feeling that being online made them feel closer to their friends and peers, one in ten said that it made them feel isolated or alone, with more than a fifth being neutral about this (22%).



Children also recognise that being attached to screens is not always beneficial. Less than a fifth felt that being online was good for their physical health (17%), compared to almost half feeling it was bad for this (48%). One in ten strongly agreed that it was bad for their physical health (10%).

Online sources used to help with children's wellbeing

Eight in ten children used online services to find support for their wellbeing

The online arena can provide numerous forms of support to those who need it, equipping children with tools to actively improve their wellbeing, both on and offline. Our poll found that about eight in ten of our respondents aged 13-17 were using online services to help them with various aspects of their wellbeing.

A third used the internet to help them relax or feel happy – the latter was more prevalent among 13-15s than among 16-17s (39% vs 19%). The older age group (16-17s) were twice as likely as the younger group to use the internet to look up health symptoms (50% vs 24% of 13-15s).

A quarter went online to learn about healthy eating or to get help with 'growing-up issues' like relationships and puberty. And a fifth used the internet to follow fitness programmes and health trackers, or to get help when feeling sad, anxious, or worried. About one in ten went online to help with sleep issues, to meditate, or to help them feel energised. There were no differences by age for any of these reasons.

There were two areas where girls were more likely than boys to use the internet for support: to look up health symptoms (40% vs 25%), and to get support when feeling sad, anxious, or worried (25% vs 14%).

Both Google and online videos were seen as key sources for support

Where children went for support online differed according to their support needs. Our survey provided a list of methods to choose from: watching influencers, joining support forums on social media, watching/ listening to videos to feel calm and help them to sleep, watching videos to make

them feel happy, using dedicated apps and sites, listening to wellbeing podcasts, using Google to find out more about particular topics, or using online therapy.[72]

Google emerged as a frequently used source for online support information. Among those who said they used the internet to help them with their wellbeing, 78% said they used Google to look up health symptoms, 74% to get help with 'growing-up issues', and 63% to learn about healthy eating.

Online videos were another important source: about two-thirds used these to help them relax (68%) or to make them feel happy (66%), and six in ten to help them feel energised (59%).

Influencers were cited as a source of support by around four in ten respondents: 46% used them to help them feel happy, 41% to feel relaxed, and 40% to learn about healthy eating.

A fifth of respondents used wellbeing podcasts to help them feel happy (23%), to feel relaxed (21%), or to learn about healthy eating (18%).

Online therapy services were used by around one in ten to help with feeling happy or relaxed (both 12%), to learn about healthy eating (10%) or for help with growing-up issues (9%).

Dedicated apps and sites were used mainly to follow fitness programmes or health trackers (63%), although a third also used them to learn about healthy eating.

The wellbeing app *Calm* was the most used among respondents

Among those who had used dedicated apps and sites in the past year, the most cited was *Calm*[73], used by 34% of respondents, followed by 29% using *Headspace for Kids*[74], and 23% using *BBC Own It*[75]. Meanwhile, just under a fifth used *Mindful Powers*[76] (19%) or *DreamyKid*[77] (17%). Smaller proportions used *Push2Play* (14%), *GoNoodle Kids* (14%), *Focus on the Go* (13%), *Positive Penguins* (11%), *Worrinots* (10%) and *JoyPop* (10%).

[72] Sample sizes for those who used the internet for the following were below 50, and so have not been included in our analysis: using the internet to help with sleep (31), meditation (19), feeling energised (28), or to get support for feeling sad, anxious or worried (48).
[73] Calm is an app used for sleep, meditation and relaxation: Calm (calm.com)
[74] Headspace for Kids is an app to help children be healthy and happy: Headspace (headspace.com)
[75] BBC Own It is designed to support, help and advise children: Own It (bbc.com/ownit)
[76] Mindful Powers is a kid-first, holistic approach to helping young minds learn and practice mindfulness: Mindful Powers (mindfulpowersforkids.com)
[77] DreamyKid is a meditation app for children: DreamyKid (dreamykid.com)

Preventative and safety measures

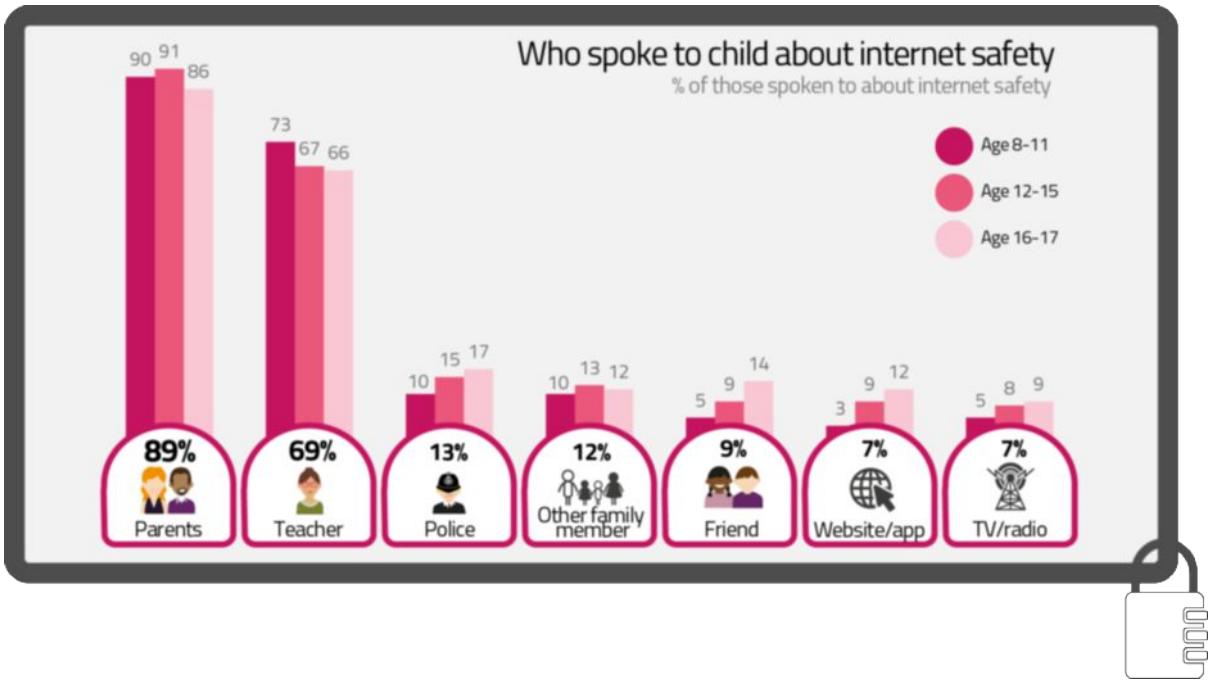
Good critical understanding among adults has the potential to help children avoid harms online. One of the ways in which adults, including parents and carers, can help children build their critical understanding is by talking to them about online safety, making them aware of safer ways to use the internet, and by using technical controls and settings within services and devices.

Measures among children

Nine in ten children have been spoken to about online safety, most likely by a parent or teacher

Nine in ten children aged 8-17 who go online have had someone speak to them about how to use the internet safely; 8-11s are the most likely group to have had this (94%).

These children were most likely to say they had been spoken to about internet safety by a parent (89%), followed by a teacher at school (69%). Children aged 8-11 were the most likely to say they had been spoken to about internet safety by a teacher.



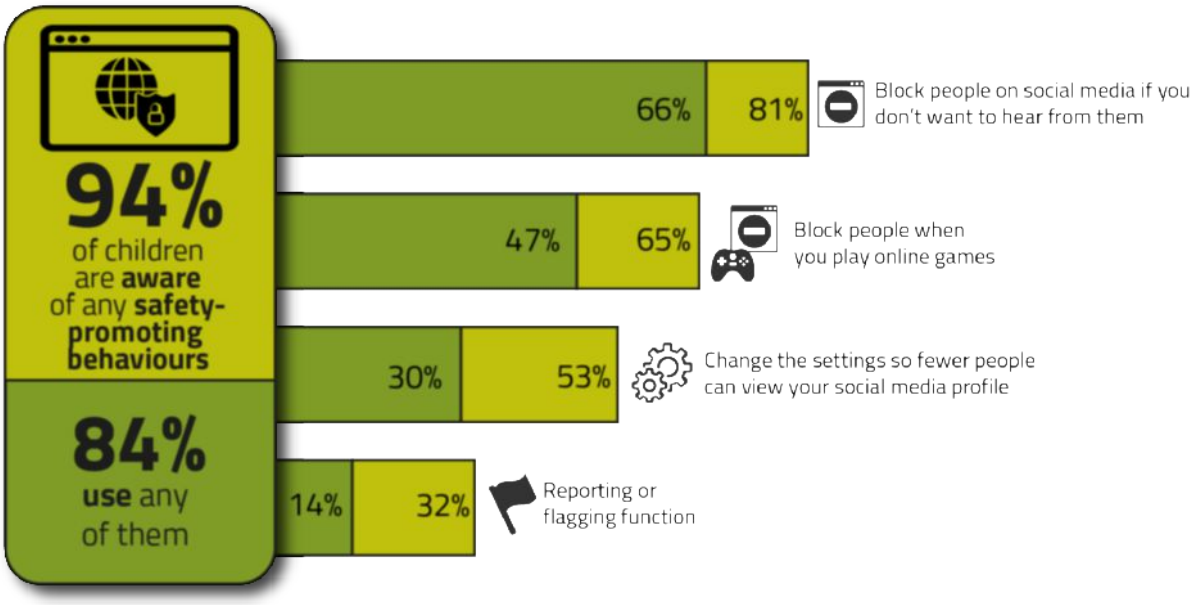
Nearly all children knew how to carry out at least one safety-promoting behaviour online, and more than eight in ten had put their knowledge into practice

Nearly all children aged 12-17 were aware of at least one safety-promoting behaviour (94%). And a lower, but still substantial, proportion of children (84%) said they had carried out or used at least one.

Blocking people on social media was the safety-promoting behaviour with both the highest awareness (81%) and the highest use (66%) – both more likely among 16-17-year-olds than 12-15s. While girls were as likely to be aware of this behaviour as boys, they were more likely to use it in practice (70% vs 62%).

Two-thirds of 12-17s were aware of how to block people within online games (65%), with boys being more likely than girls to be both aware (74% vs 56% of girls) and to use (59% vs 36% of girls) this feature.

Girls were also more likely than boys to be aware of and to use settings in social media so that fewer people could see their profile (56% of girls were aware, vs 49% of boys, and 33% of girls do this, vs 27% of boys). Older children (16-17) were more likely to do this than the 12-15s, with 53% of 12-17s overall being aware of this feature and 30% using it.



Awareness of online reporting or flagging functions was low among children, and only a minority had actually used them

A third of 12-17s said that they knew how to use a reporting or flagging function (32%), but only 14% said they had used any of them.[78] Unlike many other behaviours, features and technologies, neither use nor awareness of the reporting or flagging function varied with age or by gender.

[78] This figure of 14% is the proportion of *all* children who had used the reporting function, regardless of whether they had needed to or not. Among those who had experienced something which upset or worried them, use of the reporting function may be higher.

This relatively low level of use is consistent with the findings of our Children's Media Lives study: children in our sample expressed hesitancy about using the reporting or flagging function(s), suggesting that doing so was getting involved in something which was "*none of their business*". Even if they saw content that they personally didn't like, they didn't feel it was their responsibility to act on it. In Bobby's (15) case, content would have to be 'really bad' in order for him to report it.

"It's none of my business so I'd just keep scrolling. If it's really bad I may report it, but I don't do that very often… You see videos of people in other countries getting their heads cut off – stuff like that is a bit far isn't it." – **Bobby, 15**

"I don't think [I have reported anything] … If it's not harming anyone else… I suppose it's none of my business really." – **Jack, 17**

Meanwhile, Peter (16) doubted whether reporting inappropriate content that he saw on Instagram would actually lead to it being removed.

"I don't really believe that [reporting] does anything." – **Peter, 16**

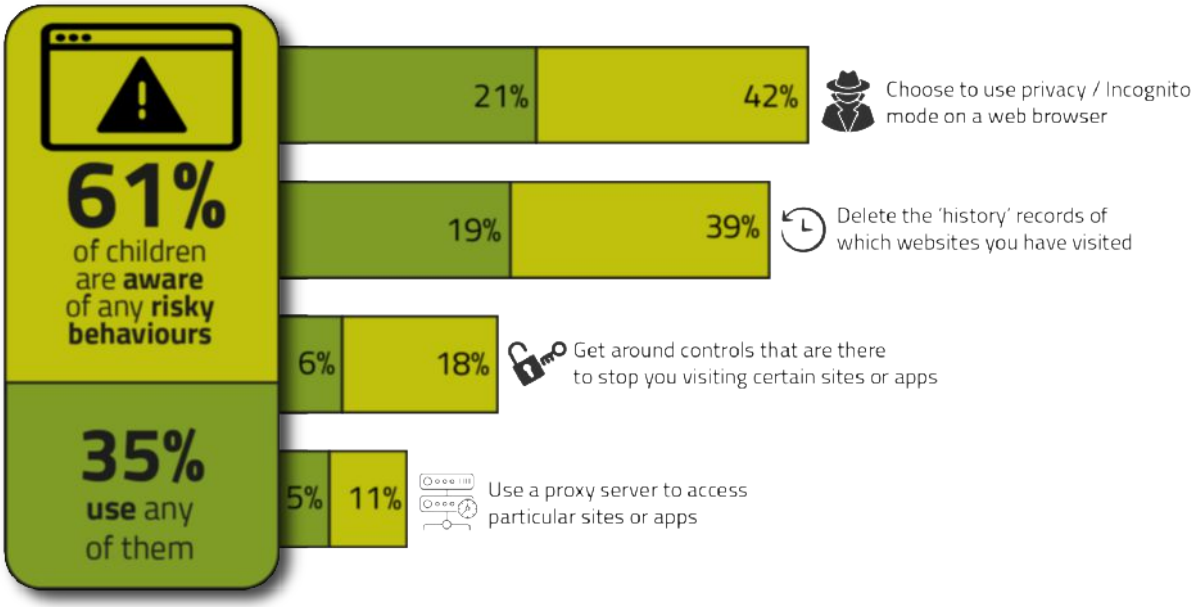
Despite these attitudes towards reporting and flagging, our research showed that 41% of children aged 12-17 disagreed with the statement: "*I think it is important that people can say what they want online, even if it upsets or offends other people*", compared to 28% who agreed. Children aged 16-17 were more likely than those aged 12-15 to agree in this way that free speech online is important, even when what is said upsets or offends others (32% vs 26%).

Some privacy-promoting measures may have the effect of making children less safe online

In addition to features, behaviours and technologies which promote online safety, many platforms, device manufacturers and software companies offer options to promote privacy. While these have a valid and potentially positive role in the online lives of adults, when they are used by children, online safety may be compromised. For example, if a child uses private or 'incognito' browsing or deletes their browsing history, a parent may not be able to check on their online use and identify or report instances of potentially harmful content or behaviour.

When asked which measures they used to protect themselves online, more than a third of children aged 12-17 (35%) reported using measures which might in fact have put them more at risk, because they could enable them to come across potentially harmful content.[79] This included a fifth who had surfed in incognito mode (21%), had deleted their browsing history (19%), and one in twenty who had circumvented parental controls put in place to stop them visiting certain apps and sites (6%), or used a proxy server to access particular apps and sites (5%).

[79] Children were shown a randomised list in which all features, behaviours and technologies were shown side by side without being identified as either 'safe' or 'risky'. Classification of measures into 'safety' and 'risky' was done later, as part of our analysis.



Four in ten children aged 16-17 (42%) reported that they had carried out one or more of these behaviours – higher than the proportion of 12-15s (31%). This included a quarter of 16-17s who had surfed using privacy mode (25%) or who had deleted their internet history (24%).

Parents' attitudes and mediation strategies

There are various ways in which parents can influence and mediate their child's content consumption and communication activities. They may put rules in place, as seen previously within this report. They may also mediate without imposing rules, for example through supervision or checking up on what their child is doing online.[80]

Three-quarters of parents feel they know enough to keep their children safe online

Three-quarters of parents of 3-17s (76%) agreed with the statement *"I feel I know enough to help my child to stay safe online"*. While 13% disagreed with this, a further 10% were undecided, perhaps reflecting the struggle that some parents have in this area. Parents of girls aged 12-15 were more likely than nearly all other age and gender demographics to disagree with this: a quarter disagreed, compared to one in ten parents of boys of the same age.

Half of parents speak to their child about online safety every few weeks

The vast majority of parents (86%) said they had spoken to their child at least once about staying safe online. This included discussing the potential dangers of things like content on apps or sites that might be unsuitable for their age, sharing too much information online, or contact with people they don't know personally.

[80] Further details about rules relating to gaming, online activity, mobile phone use and television/film watching can be found in the relevant sections of this report.

While half of these parents (50%) said they would talk to their child about this at least every few weeks, about a quarter did so only every few months (27%), and 17% less often than that. One in 20 (5%) said they had spoken to their child once, but not since.

Parents' awareness of safety-promoting technical tools and controls was high, though use was lower

There are various technical controls available to parents to monitor or control their children's online activity. Examples of controls asked about in our research include:

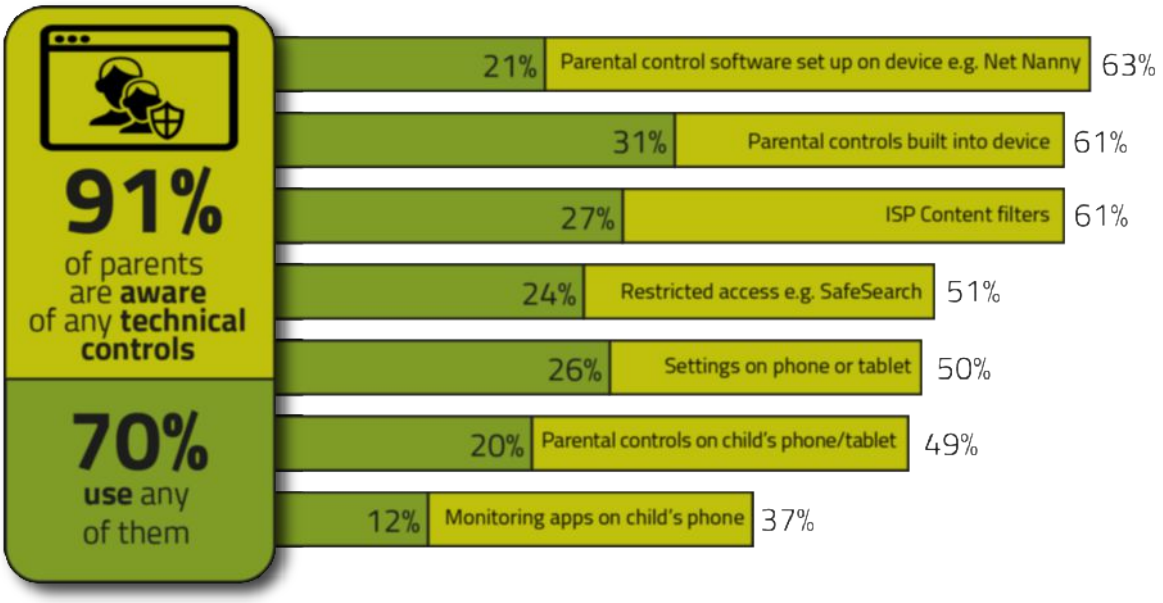
- parental control software set up on a particular device used to go online, such as Net Nanny, McAfee Family Protection or Open DNS FamilyShield;
- content filtering options provided by internet service providers (ISPs), which apply to all devices connected to the household's broadband service;
- service-specific filtering options such as Google SafeSearch, TikTok Family Safety Mode and YouTube Restricted mode; and
- apps which can be installed on a child's phone to monitor which apps they are using and for how long.

Our research found that nine in ten parents of children aged 3-17 were aware of at least one technical tool or control that could help manage their child's access to online content – although a lower proportion, seven in ten, used any of them. The most popular type of tool used (cited by 31% of parents) was parental controls built into the device software by the manufacturer (such as Windows, Apple, PlayStation, etc.).

Just over a quarter of parents used content filters provided by their broadband supplier, where the filters apply to all devices using that service (27%). A much larger proportion (61%) said they were aware of this feature, showing that not all parents are adopting this potentially useful control.

Among those who were aware of, but did not use, this technology, the most common reasons were that they trusted their child to be sensible or responsible when online (45%) or that they preferred to supervise their child's online use by talking to them and setting rules (44%). Up to a fifth questioned their usefulness: 18% said that filters block too much or get in the way, while 11% said they don't block enough. And while 17% said they were too complicated to use, a further 7% said that their child could find a way to get around the filters.

About a quarter chose to use more localised types of controls: changing the settings on the child's device to stop apps being downloaded or in-app purchases (26%) and using 'safe modes' within platforms to restrict access to inappropriate online content, such as Google SafeSearch or the TikTok Family Safety Mode (24%).



Use of technical tools was more common among parents of younger children, although a quarter of all parents said they had no controls in place. Parents of 16-17-year-olds were the most likely to have *no* technical tools/controls in place (48%), nearly twice as likely as parents of the other age groups.

The most common type of supervision behaviour among parents was asking their child what they had been doing online

In addition to imposing rules about their children's online activities[81], parents may mediate their child's online activities through supervision. Nearly nine in ten parents of 3-17s (87%) said that they had some type of supervision in place when their child went online. Almost all parents of 5-7s said they did this (98%), decreasing significantly to just over half of parents of 16-17s (53%).

The most common form of online supervision was to ask what the child had been doing while online (60%), followed by being nearby and checking what the child was doing (53%). Parents of the oldest age group (16-17s) were significantly less likely to supervise by being nearby (15% compared to 39% to 74% of parents of 3-15s).

A third of parents of 3-17s said they supervised their child's online use by checking their browser or device history (34%), and this type of supervision was particularly common among parents of 8-11s (49%).

Slightly over a quarter of parents (27%) said that they supervised by sitting beside the child and watching them while they were online. The proportion of parents supervising this way understandably decreased with age, from two-thirds of parents of 3-4s to less than one in ten (6%) parents of 16-17s. Data from CHILDWISE found a similar pattern: between the ages of 7-10, 17% of children went online only in a family room, while 71% went online in their own room for at least some of the time. These margins widened even further for the older children: among 11-16s, only

[81] See 'Parents' views on children's content consumption'

6% went online *only* in a family room, while 90% went online in their own room at least some of the time.[82]

CHILDWISE also found that six in ten 7-16s with their own mobile phone said that their parents checked up on how they were using it. More than a quarter (27%) said that their parents used an app on their child's mobile phone to keep track of where they were.

The majority of parents felt their child had a good balance between screen time and doing other things, but four in ten found it hard to control their child's screen time

In addition to concerns about their child's online use, parents may also be concerned about, or intervene in, the amount of time their child spends on screens in general.

However, the majority of parents agreed that their child had a good balance between screen time and doing other things (63%), rising to 78% of parents of 3-4s. A lower, but substantial proportion agreed with the statement that they "*find it hard to control [their] child's screen time"* (40%). This was particularly true for parents of the older age groups, rising to half of parents of 16-17-year-olds.

Parents' claims to struggle with their children's screen time may be supported by data showing time spent online by their children. Data from CHILDWISE showed that children aged 7-16 estimated they spent an average of just under three and a half hours a day online in 2021. However, this was lower than the average time spent in 2020 (just under four hours a day) which may be as a result of children returning to 'normal' lives following the pandemic lockdowns.

More than eight in ten parents had at least one rule in place about their child's mobile phone use

More than eight in ten parents (84%) whose 3-17-year-olds had their own mobile phone had at least one rule in place about their child's mobile phone use. Younger children, aged 3-11, were much more likely to have rules in place – up to 97% of 8-11s; while less likely among parents of 16-17s, this was still the case for the majority of these parents (59%).

Parents were most likely to have a rule about who their children could contact using their mobile phone

Overall, the most common rule among parents related to whom their child could contact on their mobile phone (56%), and this rule was most common among parents of 8-11s (80%).

About half of parents had rules about how much money their child could spend on their phone (51%), not downloading apps to their phone (50%), not taking their phone to bed (49%) and how much time their child could spend using their phone (47%).

Children aged 8-11 were more likely than any other age group to have rules in place about not downloading apps to their phone or not taking their phone to bed.

[82] 7-10 year-old boys: 17% go online at home in a family room only; 72% go online in their own room at all. 7-10 year-old girls: 17% go online at home in a family room only; 70% go online in their own room at all. 11-16 year-old boys: 7% go online at home in a family room only; 88% go online in their own room at all. 11-16 year-old girls: 5% go online at home in a family room only; 72% go online in their own room.

Just over a third of parents of children with a mobile phone had a block in place on the phone to prevent access to adult content

Some major mobile phone networks in the UK offer a block on 18+ or 'adult' content (for example, pornographic sites) when going online via a mobile connection such as 3G, 4G or 5G. This requires users to go through an age verification process before this content can be unblocked and accessed. In some cases, mobile networks turn this block on by default.

Our research found that almost six in ten parents (56%) of 3-17s who had a mobile phone said that they were aware of this offer. However, just over a third (35%) said that the adult content blocker was in place on their child's mobile phone.

Children in the UK nations

Our approach to reporting on the UK nations' data

As children's media use moves increasingly online and the online space becomes gradually more dominated by professionalised content[83], some geographical and national differences in the media landscape are being eroded or exerting less influence. However, even in today's online world, each nation of the United Kingdom still has its own distinct character. As well as the demographic and cultural differences between the nations, other concrete factors may influence media use and attitudes (including media literacy): offline regional programming, the language spoken by a child (for example, if English is not their first language), nationally-targeted media literacy or online safety campaigns or interventions, and differing school curriculums.

In this section[84] we note the key themes which arose when comparing data for each nation, without seeking to cover all significant differences. However, it is important to note that these differences may be due to factors other than geographic location.

Online access and attitudes

The majority of households in every UK nation had internet access in 2021

Our digital access survey showed that more than nine in ten (94%) UK households had access to the internet in 2021. Access in Northern Ireland (98%) was higher than the other UK nations (94% in England, 93% in Scotland, 91% in Wales).

There was little variance between nations in the devices used by children aged 3-17 to go online: 72% used a mobile phone, 69% a tablet, 47% a games console or player, and 17% a desktop. However, children in Northern Ireland were less likely (38%) than the UK average (47%) to use a laptop or netbook to go online, and less likely than children in England (47%).

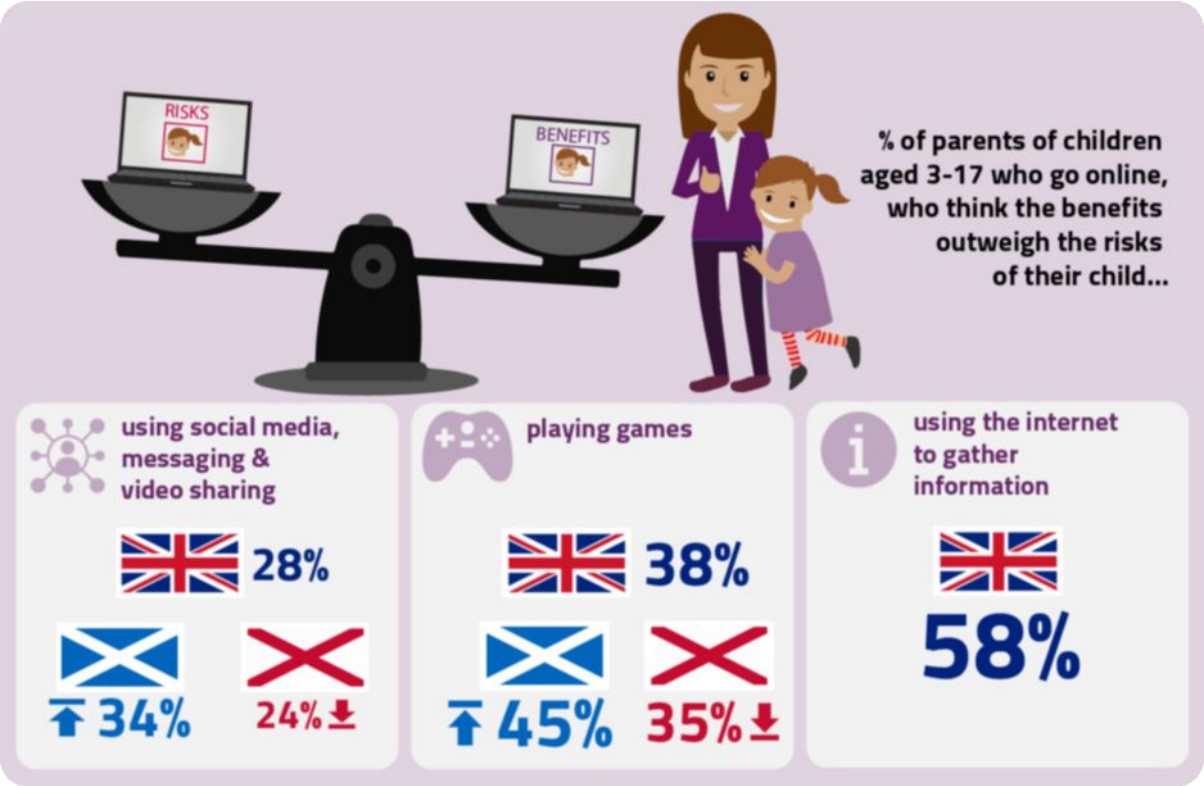
In fact, children in Northern Ireland were more likely (51%) than the UK average (43%) to *only* use a device other than a computer including laptop, netbook, and desktop, and also more likley than children in England (43%).

Parents in Scotland were more likely than those in Northern Ireland to feel that the benefits of their child using social media or online gaming outweighed the risks for their child

Parents were asked in our survey if they felt that the benefits of their child using certain online services outweighed the risks. Overall, 28% of parents of UK children aged 3-17 who went online said they agreed with this in relation to their child's use of social media, messaging and video sharing. Four in ten (38%) parents agreed with this in relation to their child's online gaming. Parents in Wales were more likely (13%) than the UK average (8%) and the other nations to *strongly disagree* with this.

[83] See the 'Online content: professional and influencer' section of the 'Children's content consumption' section
[84] This section will not include nations' data from three of our supplementary surveys, due to sample sizes for each nation being too small to report on: the CATI digital access report, the Wellbeing survey, and the Audio survey.

The online activity for which parents were most likely to agree that the benefits outweighed the risks for their child (at 58%) was gathering information (such as using search engines or news sites). Parents in Wales were more likely than those in Scotland to *strongly disagree* with this (8% vs 3%).



The majority of parents felt that being online helped their child in some way (96%), with little variation by nation across the various benefits mentioned in our survey. For example, 77% felt that the internet helped with their child's schoolwork and homework, 58% thought it helped in developing their reading and number skills, and 46% in building or maintaining friendships.

There were just two differences by nation. Parents of children in Scotland were more likely (40%) than those in Northern Ireland (30%) to say that the internet helped their child find out about the news while parents in Wales were more likely than the UK average to say that the internet helped their child understand what other people think and feel about things (31% vs 24% UK average).

Online use and content consumption

Six in ten children in each UK nation used social media, with differences by platforms used

Across the UK, more than six in ten children aged 3-17 used social media apps and sites (63% UK average, comparable across nations). Children in Wales were more likely (39%) than children in England (34%) and the UK overall (35%) to use Snapchat, and more likely to have a profile on this platform (32%) than children in England (28%) or the UK overall (29%) – but equally as likely as those in Scotland (34%).

Children in England were more likely (at 35%) than the other nations to use Instagram (33% in Scotland and Wales, 30% in Northern Ireland). They were also more likely than children in Northern

Ireland to have a profile on this platform (30% vs 24%), as were children in Scotland (29%) and the UK overall (30%).

Six in ten children aged 8-17 across the UK said they had more than one profile on social media, VSPs or live streaming apps and sites. Children in both England (62%) and Northern Ireland (61%) were more likely to have multiple profiles than those in either Scotland (52%) or Wales (48%). When asked why, those in England and Northern Ireland (20% each) said they had one account for their closest friends and another for everyone else (compared to 13% for Scotland and 17% for Wales). Children in England were also more likely than those in Scotland to have different accounts for sharing or posting their own content and for following other people (11% vs 7%).

Children in Scotland aged 12-17 who used social media or messaging apps and sites were more likely to do two specific activities on social media that we asked about. A quarter wrote their own posts about causes they cared about (24%, higher than 12% of children in Northern Ireland), and 18% followed or interacted with political parties or campaign groups (higher than those in England or the UK average; both 12%).

Children in Northern Ireland were less likely than those in the other nations to use messaging apps and sites

Three-quarters of children in Northern Ireland used messaging apps and sites (73%), lower than the other nations where proportions rose to eight in ten. WhatsApp was the most-used app for this, reaching 53% of UK children, higher in England (55%) than the other nations (47% Scotland, 49% Wales, 48% Northern Ireland).

Use of the video-sharing platform TikTok, and having a profile on this service, was higher among children in Scotland

Almost all UK children aged 3-17 used video-sharing platforms to watch video content (95%). YouTube was the most-used app or site for this (84%), similar across nations. But use of TikTok was higher among children in Scotland (46%) than the UK average (41%), and they were also more likely to have a profile on TikTok (37%) than children in England (32%), Wales (31%) and the UK average (32%).

Children in Wales were the least likely to use live streaming apps and sites

Overall, almost six in ten UK children aged 3-17 (57%) used live streaming apps or sites. The only difference by nation was that children in Wales (52%) were less likely to do this than the UK average and less likely than children in England (57%).

Children in England were more likely than children in the other nations to live stream their own videos (at 16%), but were in line with the UK average, at 15%, and with Scotland and Northern Ireland (both 12%; Wales 13%). They were also more likely to use Instagram Live for this purpose (8% in England) than children in Scotland and Wales (both 4%).

There were no differences by nation in the proportions of children who played games, or the ways in which they played

Overall, six in ten children aged 3-17 across the UK played games online, comparable by nation. There were no differences in the way they played: whether on their own, against others they knew,

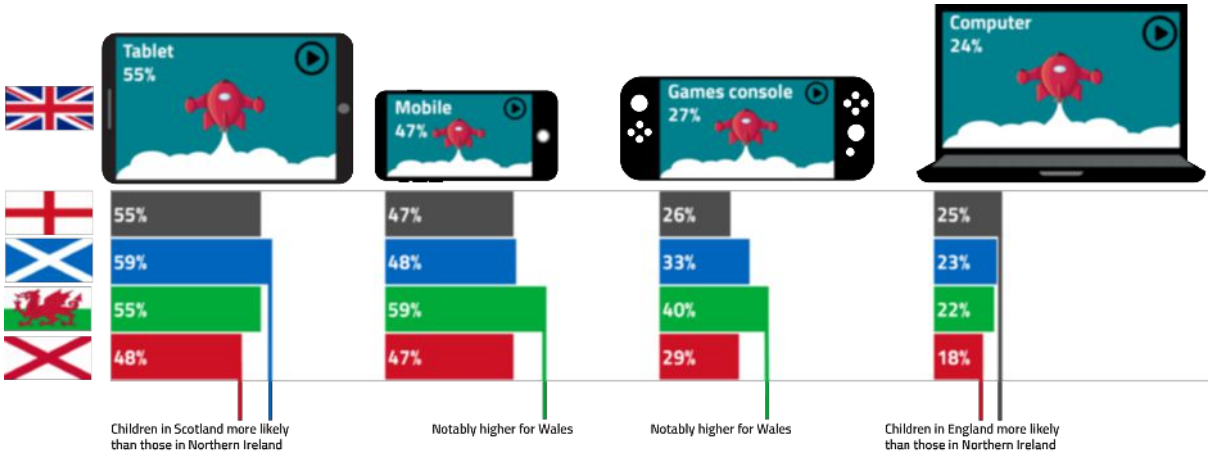
or against people they did not know. There were also no differences in the proportions who used the chat and messaging functions within online games, or that chatted to people they did or did not know through these. (See Gaming section for more details).

The main difference in the types of games that children played was in Wales. Four in ten (40%) said they played action and adventure games (such as *Super Mario Odyssey* or *Legend of Zelda*), higher than children in each of the other nations and the UK average (34%).

Children in Scotland led the way in the decline in viewing broadcast TV

Almost nine in ten children (86%) aged 3-17 across the UK used a TV set to watch TV programmes or films, comparable by nation. There were some differences by nation in the other types of devices used to watch TV content.

Overall, 55% of UK children used a tablet to watch TV content, almost half (47%) used a mobile phone, more than a quarter (27%) used a games console or player, and 24% used a computer (desktop, laptop, or netbook).



Overall, almost half of children (47%) aged 3-17 across the UK watched live TV as it was broadcast – comparable by nation. But when it came to watching paid-for on-demand services like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video or Disney+, children in Scotland were more likely to watch these (84%) than the UK average (78%) or children in England (77%).

The likelihood of watching paid-for on-demand content in preference to live TV is also indicated in data provided by BARB, among children aged 4-15 (see Children's content consumption section for full details). According to BARB, UK children's viewing of live TV per week in 2021 averaged at just under four and a half hours, less than half of the time spent watching non-broadcast content like paid-for on-demand content and VSPs[85],which amounted to just over ten hours of viewing.

[85] This is often referred to as 'unmatched viewing'. It is when the TV set is in use, but the content cannot be audio-matched or otherwise identified. It includes viewing of gaming, viewing DVDs/box sets/archives, SVoD, VSPs, time-shifted viewing beyond 28 days, apps on smart TVs and navigation around EPG guides where there is no in-picture broadcast content.

BARB also reported a decline among children in viewing of both broadcast TV[86] (of almost an hour and a half) and non-broadcast content (like paid-for on-demand) (just over an hour) since 2020. Scotland had the largest decline in broadcast viewing, with a two hour drop since 2020. Wales followed, with a one hour 52 minutes decline, while England and Wales had slightly lower declines of one and a half hours and one hour 17 minutes respectively.

Parents' views on children's content consumption

Comparable proportions of parents in the UK nations cited the minimum age requirement for most social media as 13

Parents of children aged 3-17 in Northern Ireland were more likely than those in England to be aware that most social media apps and sites have a minimum age requirement for users to have a profile (84% vs 81% parents in England and the UK). But they were no more likely than those in the other nations to know what this age was (34% of parents across the UK provided the correct age: 13).

Parents in Scotland were more likely than parents in Wales to think the minimum age was under 12 (18% vs 13%) and were more likely to agree that they would allow their child to use social media before they had reached the minimum age requirement (38% vs 33% of parents in Wales), also higher than the proportion of parents in England agreeing to this (34%).

Meanwhile, parents in Wales were more likely than those in England (and the UK average) to think the minimum age was over 14 (32% vs 27% of parents in England, and across the UK). But children in Wales aged 8-17 were the least likely either to be aware that there is a minimum age requirement (67% vs 72% UK average) or to be unsure about this (30% vs 23% UK average). There were no differences by nation in the proportions who cited the correct minimum age, or who thought it was either lower or higher than 13.

More than eight in ten parents in the UK nations had rules in place about their child's use of TV, being online, online gaming, and using their mobile phone

TV: More than eight in ten parents (83%) of children aged 3-17 who watched TV, in each nation, had rules about their child's TV viewing, use of each rule having comparable proportions by nation (see Children's content consumption section for more details on these rules).

Online: Overall, more than nine in ten parents (92%) of UK children who went online said they had rules in place about their child's online use (see Children's content consumption section for more details on these rules). The only difference by nation was that parents of children in England were more likely than those in Wales to have rules about whom their child could contact online (66% vs 58%).

Mobile phone: The majority of parents of children with their own mobile phone had rules about their child's use of this (84%) – each rule being comparable by nation, apart from not allowing their

[86] Broadcast TV refers to content that was broadcast on linear TV channels and watched either live, as it was broadcast, or on catch-up / recorded viewing on the TV set. The figures referred to here include catch-up and recorded viewing up to 28-days after the initial broadcast.

child to take their phone to bed. Parents of children in Wales were less likely (at 37%) to have this rule, compared to 50% of those in England, 53% in Scotland, and the UK average (49%).

Gaming: Almost nine in ten parents (87%) of UK children aged 3-17 who played games had rules in place about their child's gaming – each rule having comparable proportions by nation.

Parents in Wales were more likely to be very concerned about certain aspects of their child's media use

TV: Overall, almost half of parents (46%) of UK children aged 3-17 who watched TV were concerned about the content that their child sees on TV, in terms of violence, bad language, disturbing content, and so on. The only difference by nation was that parents of children in Wales were more likely than those in Scotland to be *very* concerned about this (21% vs 13%).

Online: Overall, comparable proportions of parents of children aged 3-17 who went online, across the UK, had concerns about their child's online use (89% overall). However, there were some differences by nation in the proportions who were *very concerned*.

Parents in Wales were more likely to be *very concerned* about:

- their child giving their personal details to inappropriate people (40% compared to 31% of parents in Scotland);
- their child being bullied online (45% compared to the UK average of 37%, and 36% of parents in England);
- their child damaging their reputation now or in the future (32% compared to 22% of parents in Scotland, 24% of parents in England, and the UK average of 24%);
- their child seeing content which encourages them to hurt or harm themselves (43% compared to 31% of parents in Scotland); and
- the pressure on their child to spend money online (28% compared to the 19% UK average, and higher than each nation).

And parents in both Wales and Northern Ireland were more likely than parents in Scotland to be *very concerned* about:

- the possibility of their child being influenced by extreme views online (28% Wales, 25% Northern Ireland, compared to 16% in Scotland); and
- their child seeing any type of content which is not appropriate for their age (in terms of violence, bad language, disturbing content, and so on): 40% in Wales, 38% in Northern Ireland, 28% in Scotland.

Mobile phone: Almost six in ten parents (56%) of UK children aged 3-17 who had their own mobile phone had any concerns about their child's use of the phone – comparable by nation. However, as with both TV and online concerns, parents in Wales were more likely to be *very concerned* about the two aspects mentioned in our survey:

- who their child is in contact with when using their phone (23%, compared to 14% of parents in England, 11% of parents in Scotland, and 14% UK average);
- their child being bullied via calls, texts, or messages to their mobile phone (31% vs 20% of parents in Scotland).

Online gaming: More than seven in ten parents (72%) of UK children aged 3-17 who played games said they had concerns about their child's gaming – comparable by nation. However, as seen with children's other media activities, parents in Wales were more likely to be *very concerned* about some aspects.

Around three in ten parents in Wales were *very concerned* about:

- the possibility of their child talking to strangers while gaming (34%) – higher than parents in Scotland (22%);
- the possibility of their child being bullied by other players (32%) – higher than parents in Scotland (19%) and higher than the UK average (25%);
- the content of the games their child plays (28%) - higher than the UK average (20%) and parents in both England (20%) and Scotland (18%); and
- the pressure on their child to make in-game purchases (27%) - higher than parents in Northern Ireland (18%).

Assessing what is real and fake online

Ability to recognise reliable identifiers of real online posts was much lower than confidence, among children in each nation

Three-quarters of children aged 12-17 said they were confident about judging whether what they see online is real or fake. Children in both England (74%) and Scotland (78%) were more likely than those in Wales (73%) to say this. However, when presented with our misinformation scenario (a replica of a genuine NHS post)[87], children in Wales were more likely than those in any other nation to pick *only* reliable identifiers (22% compared to 8% to 11% in other nations). Meanwhile, children in England were more likely than those in Wales to pick *any* unreliable identifiers (83% vs 74%).

Children aged 12-17 in Northern Ireland were the least likely, among the UK nations, to identify *any* reliable identifiers (50% vs 67% UK average).

Children in Northern Ireland were more likely than the UK average to recognise a fake social media profile

When presented with a fake social media profile, more than a fifth (22%) of UK children aged 12-17 thought it was a real profile – more likely among children in England (23%) than those in either Wales (13%) or Northern Ireland (11%). But children in Northern Ireland were more likely (77%) to recognise that it was a fake profile, compared to 63% of children in England or 64% across the UK.

Among those who thought the fake profile was a genuine one, children in Scotland were more likely than those in England to cite several incorrect identifiers: 24% cited the number of followers (compared to 9% of children in England), 21% cited the number of posts (vs 5%) and 12% cited the name in the biography (vs 3% in England).

[87] For more information on the misinformation scenario see the 'Assessing what is real and what is fake' section of the 'Understanding the online space' chapter

Understanding the internet as a commercial landscape

Children in Scotland were more likely than those in other nations to incorrectly think that certain platforms were funded by the government

Whilst the majority of children aged 12-17 across the UK understood that the BBC is funded by the licence fee (67% UK average), and that ITV and Channel 4 are funded by advertising (71% UK average), there were some who gave other methods of funding for these.

In particular, children in Scotland were more likely than those in England (44% vs 35%) or Northern Ireland (29%) to think that the BBC is funded by the government giving money to the service, and more likely than those in Wales to think that ITV and Channel 4 are paid in this way (21% of children in Scotland, compared to 11% in Wales). But they were more aware than children in Wales to understand that Netflix is funded by subscriptions (88% vs 77%); more than eight in ten across the UK understood this (84% average).

However, children in Scotland were more likely than those in England to understand that Google is funded by companies paying to advertise on the platform (83% vs 75%), while those in England were more likely than those in Scotland to think that Google was funded by the government (15% in England vs 8% in Scotland).

Understanding of YouTube's funding was comparable by nation: three-quarters knew that companies pay the service to carry their advertising (77% UK average).

Overall, seven in ten children in each UK nation recognised that an influencer was being paid to promote a product

Nine in ten children aged 12-17 across the UK said they were confident in recognising what is advertising online and what is not – comparable by nation. And when assessing why sponsored ads appear in a Google search page, more than half in each nation recognised that the ads were sponsored/ paid to be there (54% UK average).

Overall, seven in ten stated that the personality in our influencer scenario was being paid to promote a product: higher among children in Wales (79%) than in England (68%). And those in England were more likely (35%) than those in Scotland (25%) to cite the incorrect reason that the influencer wanted to share the information with her followers (24% UK average). However, there were no differences between the proportions who realised that the only reason was that the influencer was being paid (around four in ten in each nation).

Harmful or risky experiences

Children in Wales were more likely than the UK average to feel pressure to be popular on social media

Around nine in ten children aged 8-17 who used any social media or messaging apps and sites agreed that using these platforms made them feel happy or feel closer to their friends – comparable across the UK. However, those in Wales were more likely (93%) than those in England or the UK average (89% for both) to feel that there is pressure to be popular on these sorts of platforms.

Children in England were more likely than those in Scotland to think that people can be mean or unkind to each other on these platforms (79% vs 74%).

Children in Northern Ireland were more likely to be 'bullied' via technology, while for children in Wales it was more likely to be face-to-face

Four in ten children aged 8-17 said that someone had been nasty or hurtful to them at some point, referred to as 'bullying' in this report. Among these, being bullied via communications technology was more prevalent (84% UK average) than in person or face-to-face (61% UK average) – proportions comparable by nation. But there were some differences in the types of technology used by nation.

For children in Northern Ireland, being bullied was more likely to be via text or messaging apps (75% vs 64% face-to-face) – higher than the UK average (56%).

For children in Scotland, around six in ten said they were bullied via social media (61% - higher than the UK average of 43%) or via text or messaging apps (also 61%). Both of these were comparable to the proportion bullied face-to-face (56%).

But for children in Wales, bullying was more likely to be face-to-face (59%) than via social media or text or messaging apps (both 49%). Each of these were comparable to the UK average.

Comparable proportions of parents in each UK nation were told by their child if they had seen something upsetting or scary online

Overall, 20% of parents of UK children aged 3-17 who went online said that their child had told them about something they had seen online that had scared or upset them – comparable by nation. And the ways that the parent dealt with this were also comparable (see Harmful or risky online experiences section).

Preventative and safety measures

Parents in Northern Ireland were less likely than those in either Scotland or Wales to feel they knew enough to keep their child safe online

Nearly nine in ten parents (86%) of children aged 3-17 who went online said they had spoken to their child about how to stay safe online – comparable by nation. The frequency in which they did so was also comparable (see main Preventative and safety measures section for more details).

Three-quarters of parents said they felt they knew enough to keep their child safe online (76%), higher among parents in both Scotland (82%) and Wales (81%) than those in Northern Ireland (72%).

The most likely source for children in each nation to hear about online safety was their parent

Nine in ten UK children said that someone has talked to them about how to use the internet safely (91%), comparable by nation. Overall, the most likely source was a parent, cited by 89% of children. However, children in Wales (24%) and Scotland (17%) were more likely than children in either England (11%) or the UK average (12%) to say that this had been via the police visiting their school to talk to them about it.

Among children aged 8-17, six in ten said they would always tell someone if they saw something online that they found worrying or nasty in some way (59%). Children in both England and Scotland (60% for each) were more likely than those in Northern Ireland (48%) to do this. Children in Northern Ireland were more likely than those in England, and the UK average, to say they would not tell anyone (7% compared to 3% England and the UK).

Almost all children in each UK nation knew about safety behaviours and online features promoting safe use

When considering safe online behaviour and features, almost all children aged 12-17 were aware of the ones listed in our survey (97%, comparable by nation). Actions such as blocking people in social media (66% UK average) or in online games (47%), changing settings to make social media profiles more private (30%) and using reporting or flagging functions (14%) were all comparable by nation.

Children in Northern Ireland were more likely than the UK average to use privacy or incognito modes online

In addition to features and behaviours which promote online safety, many platforms, device manufacturers and software companies offer options to promote privacy. While these have a valid and potentially positive role in the online lives of adults, when they are used by children, online safety may be compromised.

Children in Northern Ireland were more likely than children in other nations to be aware of:

- how to use privacy or incognito modes online (56%, higher than 42% in England);
- how to delete the history of sites they have visited (52%, higher than 34% in Scotland);
- how to get around controls that are there to stop them from visiting certain apps and sites (33%, higher than each other nation); and
- how to use a proxy server to access particular apps and sites (22%, higher than each other nation).

There was just one feature which children in Northern Ireland were more likely to use: 37% had used privacy or incognito modes online, higher than the 20% of children in England and Wales, and higher than the UK average (21%).

Parents' attitudes and mediation strategies

Parents in Wales were more likely than those in England to strongly agree that their child had a good balance between screen time and doing other things

Overall, more than six in ten parents (63%) of UK children aged 3-17 said they felt their child had a good balance between screen time and doing other things – comparable by nation. However, parents in Wales were more likely than those in England to strongly agree with this (38% vs 30%).

But four in ten parents felt that they struggled to control their child's screen time (40%); the proportions agreeing with this were comparable by nation.

There were differing views of the use of content filters provided by broadband services

Nine in ten parents (91%) of UK children aged 3-17 were aware of the different types of technical tools and controls mentioned in our survey, and seven in ten (70%) had used any of them – each

measure comparable by nation (see main Preventative and safety measures section for further details).

There were some differences by nation on the views of the content filters provided by a household's broadband internet service provider. Parents of children in Wales were less likely than those in Northern Ireland to trust their child to be sensible or responsible instead of using these (47% vs 33%). And parents of children in England were more likely than those in Northern Ireland to prefer to supervise their child's online use by talking to them and by setting rules (40% vs 29%).

Comparable proportions of parents in each UK nation were aware of, and used, blocks on their child's mobile phone

Almost six in ten (56%) parents of UK children aged 3-17 who had their own mobile phone were aware of a block on adult or 18+ content that can be put on their child's mobile, and more than a third (35%) had the block in place on their child's phone – both measures comparable by nation.

In summary

This research provides an insight into the media use and attitudes of children today. After the significant disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic, the data cited in this report goes some way to establishing the 'new normal' of children's online use and attitudes, albeit within a constantly changing media landscape.

Our research showed that nearly all UK households with school-age children had internet access in the home, and that use of the internet was an integral part of children's day-to-day lives, with increasingly little distinction between the worlds of 'offline' and 'online'. However, there remains a small but important minority of children who have limited access to adequate devices in the home for educational needs. Although the impact of limited online access and devices on schooling has lessened as home-learning has decreased, the extent to which children are going online to supplement their schoolwork and other learning activities shows the degree to which those without full and easy access to the internet may be missing out developmentally, socially and educationally.

Consumption of video content was almost ubiquitous in 2021, and was a cornerstone of children's online lives, suggesting that children were using the internet more for entertainment than for communication. Children were more likely to watch online video content on video-sharing platforms apps and sites than they were to watch paid-for on-demand services or to watch broadcast television. In fact, the proportion of school-age children watching video content online was twice that of watching broadcast television.

A minority of children were both consumers and creators of online video content, but our qualitative research shows that children are increasingly becoming relatively passive consumers of content, and that this content is becoming more 'professionalised' (produced by companies and influencers) as opposed to being generated by their peers. Similarly, although the majority of children use social media to comment, post or 'like' things, our qualitative research shows that children are becoming more passive in their use of social media as well, interacting mainly to influence their personalisation algorithms.

Critical understanding skills play an important role in enabling children to consume and interact with online and offline media safely. Our research shows that children are broadly confident in their ability to tell what is real and fake online, and to identify advertising online. However, this confidence was not always matched by ability when we tested these skills in scenario questions. Children were most likely to be both confident *and able* in identifying a fake social media profile, but least likely to be confident and able in relation to misinformation.

Set against the positive aspects of online life, there are risks and potential harms online: over a third of children had seen something online that worried or upset them, and a large proportion had experienced being bullied, either online through social media or gaming, or on messaging or video messaging apps.

Parents play an active role in monitoring and mediating their children's online lives, but this tails off with age. Although parents are broadly confident that they know enough to keep their child safe, a significant minority of parents simply don't know what to feel about the internet – for example, whether the risks of their child using it outweigh the benefits.

The Online Safety Bill will place new duties of care for users on tech firms, which Ofcom will enforce. When we regulate online safety, we will require companies to assess risk with the user's perspective in mind and explain what they are doing to protect children from harm. We will hold companies to account on how they ensure a safe experience for children.

This report forms part of our wider programme of work, Making Sense of Media (MSOM), which aims to help improve the online skills, knowledge and understanding of UK adults and children. We do this through cutting-edge research, and by bringing together organisations and individuals with expertise in media literacy to share ideas and to support their activities.

To find out more about our Making Sense of Media programme and for details on how to join our network, please visit our website.

For more information on MSOM, and Ofcom's other media literacy research, please visit our website.