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Ofcom Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes - Focus on Online Risks and Parental Mediation

Aims

Ofcom's media literacy research explores the extent to which people are able to use, understand and create media and communications. We began our children's research in 2005, and the latest reports were published in November 2017: *Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes,* an annual quantitative report providing evidence on media use, attitudes and understanding among children and young people aged 3-15; and *Children's Media Lives 2017*, the fourth year of a qualitative study following largely the same 18 children to provide in-depth insight into the role of media in their day-to-day lives. This year, the quantitative report also sets out findings from an additional online study with children aged 12-15.

Key Findings

Internet use

- 53% of 3-4s are online in 2017 (up from 41% in 2016), as are 79% of 5-7s (up from 67%), and 94% of 8-11s (up from 90%). Nearly all 12-15s are online (99%), unchanged since 2016.

Social media

- As in 2016, the likelihood of having a social media ("SM") profile increases with age: in 2017, 0% of 3-4s, 3% of 5-7s, 24% of 8-11s and 74% of 12-15s have a profile. Incidence climbs sharply from age 9, when 12% have a social media profile, to age 12, when half of children have one; and again at 13 when 72% have one.
- Less than half (40%) of 12-15s with an SM profile say that Facebook is their main social media profile (down from 52% in 2016), while Snapchat is twice as popular than in 2016 at 32%.
- One in ten (10%) 12-15s who go online have shared videos using a live streaming service such as Facebook Live, YouTube Live or Instagram Live. 35% have not shared content but have watched live streams.
- 13% of 8-11s and 17% of 12-15s say they play games online with people they have never met. Among those who play online games, 15% of 8-11s and 19% of 12-15s say they use chat features within the game to talk to people they only know through the game. Both are unchanged since 2016.
- Close to two in five parents of 5-15s (38%) whose child has a profile on Facebook or Facebook Messenger say they are aware that 13 is the minimum age requirement for setting up a profile, with awareness lower among parents whose child has a profile on Instagram (21%), Snapchat (15%) or WhatsApp (7%).
- 73% of 12-15s with a profile say there is pressure to look popular on social media, and 13% say this happens all the time. 91% say people are mean to each other on social media, and 10% say this happens all the time.
- However, in the qualitative research, we also saw that some children used social media or other online forums to challenge comments that they thought were hurtful or hateful, and that many of the children see social media as a powerful tool for spreading positive messages.

Children's experience of staying safe online

- Nearly all 8-15s who go online (97%) recalled being told about staying safe online, with this most likely to come from a parent, followed by a teacher.

Research Highlights for Children's Online Safety #129 May, 2018

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- Despite this, a small number of 12-15s said they had engaged in potentially risky online activities: 27% say they had deleted their history records, 20% amended the settings to use a web browser in privacy mode, and 6% disabled any filters or controls.
- One-in-six children aged 8-11 (17%) and three in ten 12-15s (29%) who go online say they have ever seen something online that they found worrying or nasty.
- 45% of 12-15s say they have seen hateful content online[1] in the past year (45%), up from 34% in 2016.
- 23% of 12-15s said they had been contacted online by someone they didn't know, 11% had seen or received something scary or troubling, and 9% said they had seen something of a sexual nature online.
- One in eight 8-11s (12%) and one-fifth of 12-15s (20%) say they have ever experienced any kind of bullying[2]. For 12-15s, this was as likely to have been via social media as face-to-face (12% for both), while 8-11s say they are less likely to have experienced bullying via social media (1%) than in person (6%).

Parental concern and mediation

- Parents use a combination of approaches to mediate their child's access to, and use of, online content and services, including: regularly talking to their children about staying safe online, using technical tools, supervising their child, and using rules. Sixteen per cent of parents of 3-4s who go online and 40% of parents of 5-15s use all four types of approach, and nearly all parents of 3-4s and 5-15s use at least one.
- Use of home network-level content filters has increased by six percentage points since 2016 among parents of 5-15s (from 31%), and by 16 percentage points since 2014 (from 21%).
- A quarter of parents of 3-4s (26%) and 85% of parents of 5-15s who go online say they have ever talked to their child about how to stay safe online; this likelihood increases with age.

Policy Context

This research helps policy stakeholders help children stay informed and safe when using media. An accompanying Research Highlight provides insight into levels of critical understanding among children. You can also find Ofcom's tips to help parents protect their children in the digital world here.

Methodology

The report draws primarily on the Ofcom Children's Media Literacy Tracker, a large-scale quantitative survey based on in-home interviews with children aged 5-15 and their parents/carers, and with parents/carers of children aged 3-4. We interviewed a total of 2,065 parents and children, from April to June 2017. Questions are tailored to the age of the child, so not all questions are asked of each age-group. The report also draws on a complementary online study with 500 12-15 years olds conducted in June 2017.

RH#129 has been produced by Ofcom for the UKCCIS Evidence Group

[1] Described as "something hateful on the internet directed at a particular group of people, based on, for instance, their gender, religion, disability, sexuality or gender identity".
[2] The presence of parents and sensitivity of topic may have resulted in some under-reporting for this question.