

Ofcom Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes – Highlights from Ofcom's 2018 Research 2

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 January 2019: *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 2018*, the fifth 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 looking at attitudes to, and consumption of, news among children aged 12-15.

Key Findings

Critical thinking

- When we asked online 12-15s which platform they 'ever' used for news consumption, TV came top (68%), followed by talking with family (64%), SM and talking with friends (both 56%). Despite its relative popularity, this group ranks SM as the least trustworthy and accurate of the possible news sources: 41% of SM news users rate it highly for providing trustworthy news 'all or most of the time' and 45% think it provides accurate news stories, while more than eight in ten of those who use TV for news consider it trustworthy (85%) and accurate (86%).
- 36% of SM news users aged 12-15 say they think about whether a news story they have seen on SM is accurate 'often or always', while just over half do this 'sometimes' (53%); and, a similar proportion (49%) said it was difficult to tell whether news on SM was accurate.
- Two in five (43%) 12-15s who go online say they have seen something online or on SM that they thought was fake news. Six in ten of those who were aware of fake news said they would undertake some action if they saw a fake news story online, with the most popular action being to tell their parents or other family member (32% of those who are aware of fake news).
- Half of 8-11s (50%) and 12-15s (55%) who use search engines are aware that some of the results returned by these sites can be trusted and some can't; awareness is lower than in 2017 among 12-15s.
- As in 2017, a minority of 8-15s who use search engines (23% for 8-11s and 33% for 12-15s) correctly identified sponsored links on Google as advertising and understood that this was the only reason the results were displayed.
- As in 2017, two-thirds (65%) of online 12-15s are aware that vloggers may be being paid to endorse a product.

Unwanted experiences online

- One in six children aged 8-11 (16%) who go online say they have ever seen something online that they found worrying or nasty; 12-15s are twice as likely to say this (31%). Nearly all 8-11s (96%) and nine in ten 12-15s (90%) say they would tell someone if they saw something like this online. Each of these incidences is unchanged since 2017.
- More than two in five 12-15s who go online (45%) say they have seen something hateful about a group of people online in the last 12 months, unchanged since 2017.

- Around one in ten 8-11s (11%) and one in five 12-15s (20%) who opted to answer the question said they had ever personally experienced some form of bullying; unchanged since 2017. One in eight 12-15s said they had been bullied either face to face (12%), or on social media (11%).

Parental attitudes

- Parents' agreement that they find it hard to control their child's screen time increases with the age of the child, from 19% of parents of 3-4s to 44% of parents of 12-15s. This is unchanged since 2017 except among parents of 3-4s who are more likely to say this than previously (19% vs. 12%).
- New questions this year show that seven in ten 12-15s who own a smartphone are allowed to take it to bed; for tablets this is six in ten – a factor possibly contributing to the difficulty of controlling screen time.
- Controlling screen time is seen as less of a problem among older children themselves (compared to their parents), but this year a third of 12-15s (35%) agreed that they found it hard to control their screen time, up from a quarter last year (27%). Despite this increase, just over six in ten (63%) considered they had 'a good balance between screen time and doing other things'.
- Parental concerns about the internet are rising, although parents are, in some areas, becoming less likely to moderate their child's activities. For example, there is lower awareness of content filters among parents of online 3-4s and 5-15s than in 2017 (from 66% to 51% for parents of 3-4s; and from 62% to 57% among parents of 5-15s); and, a substantial minority of parents whose child goes online agree they would allow them to use social media sites before they had reached the minimum age (25% of parents of 8-11s who go online, rising to 40% of parents of 12-15s who go online).
- Although parents whose children go online continue to be more likely to agree than to disagree that the benefits of the internet outweigh the risks, agreement continues to decrease among parents of 5-15s (54% vs. 58% in 2017; and down from 65% in 2011). Just under half of parents of online 3-4s agree (47%).

Policy Context

This research helps policy stakeholders understand children's media environment and provides insight into the risks and rewards for children in going online.

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 2,060 parents and children, from April to June 2018. 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 news study with 1001 12-15 years olds conducted in two waves; November/December 2017 and March/April 2018.

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