

Children's Media Lives: Year 1 Findings - Advertising, Content Creation and Funding

Aims

Ofcom's Children's Media Lives study was set up in 2014 to provide a small-scale, rich and detailed qualitative complement to Ofcom's quantitative surveys of media literacy. It is a three-year study, tracking, as far as possible, the same 18 children, aged 8-15 in wave 1. The first of three waves of ethnographic research was conducted in autumn 2014. Subsequent waves will be conducted in 2015 and 2016. The study provides an in-depth understanding of how this illustrative sample of children are thinking about and using digital media, and how this differs and is influenced by age, life-stage, family circumstances, peers and wider society. It will explore how digital media use evolves over time as children develop, and in response to external changes, such as new schools, friendships and access to new technology.

Key Findings

Content creation and funding

- **The role of advertising in content funding was not understood.** Although lots of the children understood that advertising was a way of making money for an organisation, they did not understand the role of advertising in funding content. They were unaware that the channel or site displaying the advert would have been paid to do so.
- **The children had rarely given thought to how or why content is created.** They mostly took its existence for granted. However, sometimes an interest could be triggered, for example through 'The making of...' programmes.
- **Few knew that the BBC had a different source of funding to other media organisations.** The children did not think much about how different kinds of content were funded and most were not aware that the BBC had a different source of funding to other media organisations. Some had been told that the BBC was different in some way, but weren't able to explain how.

Advertising

- **Advertising was seen as a mark of credibility and trustworthiness.** Particularly online, sites displaying advertising by familiar brands that were popular among their friends and family were the most trusted. If a site had lots of adverts it was seen as a sign that those brands considered the site trustworthy and the children could do so too.

- **Traditional television adverts were the most likely to be recognised and understood.** Many of the children could also recognise the online adverts that bore most resemblance to TV adverts, like short video adverts at the start of a YouTube video. Most of the older children were also aware of adverts that pop up on websites or are embedded in the website content.
- **Product placement was almost completely invisible to the children.** Children rarely recognised product placement in television programmes, films or in YouTube vlogs. Nor did children playing video games like FIFA recognise as advertising the in-game sponsorship and advertising around the edge of the football pitch.
- **There was no awareness or understanding of personalised advertising.** The children found it difficult to understand how the process would work, or why companies would want to target them, particularly as they were not normally the ones making the purchases.

Policy Context

The Children's Media Lives research project enhances the substantive body of quantitative research Ofcom conducts into the trends in the media usage patterns of children and young people. This research helps policy makers understand how children are using and engaging with media and to identify which elements of media literacy to develop and promote.

Methodology

Researchers spent three to four hours with each child and young person, in their home, interviewing and developing an understanding of their behaviours, attitudes and understanding in relation to digital media. The interviews on which this analysis is based were informed by a topic guide, but the researchers allowed the child to determine the general flow of the conversations. Stimulus material was used to prompt discussion in areas of the topic guide that were less top-of-mind for children, such as the role of online advertising. The ethnographic interviews were supplemented with short interviews with parents and siblings, to better understand the household dynamics and access to digital media.

Source www.ofcom.org.uk/medialiteracyresearch (published June 2015)

Research Team ESRO/Ofcom

Contact information emily.keaney@ofcom.org.uk, Alison.preston@ofcom.org.uk

RH #87 has been produced by Ofcom for the UKCCIS Evidence Group

Research Highlights for
Children's Online Safety #87
October 2015

