

Ofcom's Children and Parents Media Use and Attitudes – Highlights from Ofcom's 2022 Research

Aims

Ofcom's media literacy research explores the extent to which people are able to use, understand and create media and communications. The latest reports were published in March 2022: [Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2022](#), an annual quantitative report providing evidence on media use, attitudes and understanding among children and young people aged 3-17; and [Children's Media Lives Year 8](#), a qualitative study following 21 children aged 8 to 18 to provide in-depth insight into the role of media in their day-to-day lives. The quantitative report also sets out findings from a range of additional sources including Ofcom's own Technology Tracker and News Consumption Surveys, Children's Audio Survey, wellbeing poll and supplementary CATI omnibus data on digital exclusion, as well as insights from external sources such as BARB, The Insights Family and CHILDWISE. This year, for the first time, we have presented separate analysis into the behaviour and attitudes of vulnerable children in a dedicated annex.

Key Findings

Online access and attitudes

- **Nearly all children went online in 2021 (99%);** the majority using a mobile phone (72%) or tablet (69%).
- **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.
- **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, and eight in ten use online services to support their wellbeing.

Online behaviours and content consumption

- **Using video-sharing platforms (VSPs) such as YouTube or TikTok was the most popular online activity among children aged 3-17 (95%).** Among all types of online platforms, YouTube was the most widely used by children (89%), compared to 53% using WhatsApp and 50% using TikTok.
- **A majority of children under 13 had their own profile on at least one social media app or site;** a third (33%) of 5-7s had a profile, doubling to 60% amongst 8-11 year-olds.
- **More than six in ten children aged 8-17 said they had more than one profile** on some apps and sites (62%); the most common reason overall was having one just for their parents, family or friends to see.
- **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 outside of the game (36%).
- **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.

Critical understanding

- **The majority of 12-17s were confident that they could tell what is real and fake online (72%),** but an interactive survey question found that only 11% correctly selected the components of a genuine social media post.
- **Nine in ten children aged 12-17 were confident that they could recognise advertising online (92%),** but only 37% 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 (70%);** 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.

Negative experiences and coping strategies

- **Six in ten children aged 8-17 (59%) said they would always tell someone if they saw something ‘worrying or nasty’ online;** and more than a third (36%) said they had actually seen something of this nature online in the past 12 months.
- **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 compared to 61% being bullied face-to-face.
- **A third of children knew how to use online reporting or flagging functions (32%);** just 14% had ever used them.

Parental attitudes, concerns and mediation strategies

- **Just four in ten parents of 3-17s (42%) knew the minimum age requirement for using most social media is 13.** 38% of parents of 8-11-year-olds said they would allow their child to use social media before they reached the minimum age requirement.
- **Seven in ten parents of children aged 3-17 were concerned about the content their child saw online (71%),** rising to 79% amongst parents of 8-11s. **The majority of parents aged 3-17 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.

Policy Context

Ofcom has a statutory duty to promote media literacy, as set out in section 11 of the Communications Act 2003. We also have a duty to carry out research into media literacy matters, as set out in section 14(6)(a) of the Communications Act 2003. These research reports are reference documents which help policy stakeholders understand children’s media environment, and support Ofcom’s [Making Sense of Media](#) programme.

Methodology

The quantitative report draws primarily on the Ofcom Children’s Media Literacy Tracker 2021, made of:

1. **Online behaviours and understanding survey:** 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.
2. **Online knowledge and understanding:** One wave a year, delivered via online panels, with a sample of c. 2,100 children aged 8-17.
3. **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.

Source <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/childrens> (published March 2022)

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