

## Ofcom Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Focus on Critical Understanding, Attitudes & Parental Controls

### Aims

Ofcom's media literacy research explores the extent to which people are able to use, understand and create media and communications. The children's strand of this research, published in November 2016, includes:

- *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 parental approaches to mediating children's media use.
- *Children's Digital Day*, a diary study charting children's media use across the day.
- *Children's Media Lives 2016*, the third year of a qualitative study following the same 18 children to provide in-depth insight into the role of media in their day-to-day lives.

### Key Findings

#### **Making judgements about online information**

- The extent to which children apply critical understanding skills changes depending on the circumstances. Our qualitative research found children were more likely to apply critical thinking skills when circumstances demanded it, for instance for homework or important information, rather than just entertainment.
- There are some indications that children's internet use is becoming narrower: 66% of internet users aged 8-11 and 53% aged 12-15 said that in a normal week they only use websites or apps they have used before, and this had increased since 2015 for 12-15s.
- 12-15s are cautious about the data they provide about themselves: only 17% of 12-15s agreed that 'I will give details about myself to a website or app to be able to get something that I want,' compared to 60% who disagreed. However, 58% of 12-15s who go online agreed with the statement: 'I can easily delete information that I have posted about myself online if I don't want people to see it,' and 11% had added people to their friends list that they only know online, up from 7% in 2015.
- More 12-15s turned first to Google for 'true and accurate information' than in 2015 (30% vs. 17%), and more than one in four 8-15s who use search engines believed that if Google lists information then it can be trusted.

#### **Awareness and understanding of advertising**

- Too many adverts was one of the most common dislikes for both 8-11s and 12-15s across TV, the internet and social media. The number of internet users aged 12-15 who said this about online advertising increased between 2015 and 2016 (52%, from 40%).
- Awareness of personalised advertising and vlogger endorsements increased: more than half of 12-15s who go online (55%) were aware that other people might see adverts online that are different to those they see, up from 45% in 2015. There was also an increase in the proportion of 12-15s who were aware that vloggers may be being paid to endorse a product they say good things about (57% vs. 47% in 2015).
- In contrast, despite their being distinguished by a box with the word 'Ad' in it, only 24% of 8-11s and 38% of 12-15s who use search engines correctly identified sponsored links on Google as advertising.

#### **Children's experience of staying safe online**

- Over nine in ten 8-15s said they had been given information about staying safe online, with this most likely to come from a parent, followed by a teacher. Despite this, a small number of 12-15s said they had engaged

in potentially risky online activities: they were more likely than in 2015 to say they had deleted their history records (17% vs. 11%), amended the settings to use a web browser in privacy mode (10% vs. 6%) and disabled any filters or controls (3% vs. 1%).

- 10% of online 8-11s and 19% of online 12-15s said they had seen something online in the past year that was worrying or nasty, 8% of all 12-15s said they had been contacted online by someone they didn't know, and 4% said they had seen something of a sexual nature, either online or on their mobile phone, all unchanged since 2015. Also, 34% of 12-15s who use the internet said they had seen hate speech online.
- 12-15s were as likely to be bullied via social media or group chat or text message services as face to face (6% for all three), while for 8-11s face to face bullying was more likely (at 6%, compared to 2% via social media, and 1% via group chat or text messages).

### **Parental mediation**

- Screen time gets harder to manage as children get older: 41% of parents of 12-15s said they find it hard to control their child's screen time, compared to 16% of parents of 3-4s, and 35% said that their child's screen time gets in the way of family time, compared to 11% of parents of 3-4s.
- Parents of 5-15s use a combination of approaches to mediate their child's access to, and use of, online content and services, including using technical tools, regularly talking to their children about managing online risks, supervising their child, and having rules (about access to the internet and/or behaviour while online). The majority of parents whose child goes online at home or elsewhere used at least one of these approaches (99% of parents of 3-4s and 96% of parents of 5-15s); 15% of parents of 3-4s and 34% of parents of 12-15s used all four. The number of parents of 5-15s who do not mediate their child's internet use in any of the ways mentioned above has decreased from 6% to 4% since 2015.
- Use of ISP content filters has increased among parents of 5-15s since 2015 (31% vs. 26%), though this was unchanged for parents of 3-4s (33%).
- More than a quarter of parents of online 3-4s (27%) and 84% of parents of 5-15s had talked to their child about managing online risks. This was an increase since 2015 for parents of 12-15s (92% vs. 86%).

### **Policy Context**

This research helps policy stakeholders help children stay informed and safe when using media. An accompanying Research Highlight provides insight into children's media take up and use.

### **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 2,059 parents and children, from April to June 2016. Questions are tailored to the age of the child, so not all questions are asked of each age-group.

**Source** [www.ofcom.org.uk/medialiteracyresearch](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/medialiteracyresearch) (published November 2016)

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**RH#107 was produced by Ofcom for the UKCCIS Evidence Group**