

Ofcom Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes - Focus on Critical Understanding

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 and portable devices

- More 3-4 and 5-7s are online than in 2016, with increases of more than ten percentage points for both age groups. Half of 3-4s are now online (53% from 41% in 2016), as are four in five 5-7s (79% vs. 67%). More than nine in ten 8-11s (94%) are online in 2017, up from 90% in 2016. Nearly all 12-15s are online (99%), unchanged since last year.
- The increase in the number of internet users is driven by increased use of a tablet to go online among 3-4s (43% vs. 30% in 2016), 5-7s (58% vs. 45%) and 8-11s (67% vs. 57%). Compared to last year, 3-4s (71% vs. 62%) and 5-7s (63% vs. 53%) are now more likely to 'mostly' use a tablet to go online.
- 5-7s are also more likely than in 2016 to use a mobile phone to go online (26% vs. 20%), as are 12-15s (78% vs. 71%). In 2017, half of 12-15s (49%) nominate a mobile phone as the device they mostly use to go online.
- Smartphone ownership is higher among 5-15s compared to last year (46% vs. 41%), with this increase evident among 5-7s (5% vs. 2%) and 8-11s (39% vs. 32%). Tablet ownership has also increased among 5-15s overall compared to 2016 (49% vs. 44%), although this is not attributable to any particular age group.

Attitudes to news among older children

- Half (49%) of 12-15s say they are at all interested in 'reading, watching, listening to or following news', with one in ten (8%) very interested.
- However, interest in news rises to almost all (96%) 12-15s once they are asked to choose from a list of 11 types of news, on topics including music, celebrities, sports and 'serious things going on in the UK'.
- Four in ten (37%) 12-15s say that they actively look for news, rather than just coming across it, and a similar proportion (41%) say they either look for, or get, updates about any type of news they are interested in more often than weekly.
- The most popular sources of news among 12-15s interested in any type of news are TV (64%), social media (56%) and friends or family (48%). Around one in five say they read paper copies of newspapers (17%) or magazines (14%) for news.
- Three-quarters (73%) of 12-15s who go online say they are aware of fake news. And, almost two in five say they have seen something online or on social media that they thought was fake news.

- Of those who say they are aware of fake news, six in ten say they would do something about it, while 37% either wouldn't or don't know if they would do anything about it.
- Nine in ten 12-15 year olds using social media for news say they ever think about whether a news story is true; one in ten say they always think about this, while 10% either never think about it or don't know.
- When prompted with a list of checks to make on a news story on social media, more than 4 in 5 (86%) say they would potentially make any of the checks listed – including: checking whether the news story came from either a trusted or a known organisation, checking if the same news story appears elsewhere, checking the comments, or, thinking about whether the person sharing the story can be trusted.
- Close to half (46%) of 12-15s using social media for news say they find it difficult to tell whether news stories are true, and only 1 in 5 (18%) say they find it quite or very easy.

Awareness and understanding of advertising

- While the majority of 8-15s who use search engines (52% of 8-11s and 62% of 12-15s) say they are aware that not all Google results can be trusted, 26% of 8-11s and 24% of 12-15s think that if Google has listed a result it will be trustworthy; and, around one-in-ten from each age group don't think about this at all.
- Despite their being distinguished by a green box with the word 'Ad' in it, only a minority of 8-11s (28%) and 12-15s (43%) who use search engines correctly identified sponsored links on Google as advertising, consistent with our 2016 findings; with a smaller proportion of 8-15s understanding that this was the only reason the results were displayed (22% for 8-11s and 32% for 12-15s).
- In contrast, more than half of 12-15s who go online (58%) are aware of personalised advertising and, six in ten (62%) are aware that vloggers may be being paid to endorse a product they say favourable things about, both measures are unchanged since last year. However, the qualitative research suggests that children can find it difficult to identify these adverts in practice, especially on social media where they may look similar to other kinds of content.

Policy Context

This research helps policy stakeholders understand the extent to which children understand their media environment. An accompanying Research Highlight provides insight into online risks for children and parental mediation. 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.

Source www.ofcom.org.uk/medialiteracyresearch (published November 2017)

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