

REVEALING REALITY



Children's Media Lives - Wave 6

A report for Ofcom

February 2020

Contents:

- **Introduction** 2
- **Summary of key findings** 4
- **About this study** 8
 - New research techniques used this year 8
 - Meet the sample 11
- **The content children like and how they watch it** 15
- **Social media** 29
- **Critical understanding and online safety** 43
- **Glossary** 55

Introduction

The media landscape changes quickly. For children growing up in this changing landscape, there are always new trends, platforms and behaviours to keep up with. For parents, teachers and regulators, it can be hard to stay abreast of the latest advancements and the newest risks faced by children online.

The Children's Media Lives study provides an in-depth understanding of how a sample of 18 children, aged eight to 18, are thinking about and using digital media, and how this differs and is influenced by age, life stage, family circumstances, peer groups and wider society. It explores how digital media use evolves over time as children develop and respond to offline factors such as new schools, friendships, and access to new technologies.

This is the sixth wave of this longitudinal study into children's media lives. The unique ability to review analysis, dating back to 2014, allows us to identify structural shifts in children's media use and to explore the drivers behind new and emerging patterns of behaviour.

The sixth wave of research was completed in summer 2019, following the previous five: in summer 2018, summer 2017, summer 2016, spring 2015 and autumn 2014.

The research draws on the filmed interviews and ethnographic techniques used in previous waves (such as observation of children in their home context doing activities like using social media, viewing content online and interacting with their family), and supplements these with screen recording, social media tracking and 360-degree filming techniques. These techniques variously use software to record the mobile phone screens of the participants; track their social media posting; and capture a complete picture of their environment. This enables the research to get beyond what children say to provide evidence of what they are actually doing.

The research examined a number of core themes across the six waves of research, including the content children like and how they watch it, social media, critical understanding and online safety. While all of these topics are covered, the emphasis shifts year on year. In 2018 there was weighting towards understanding risks and harm online, privacy and security in more detail. This year, we uncovered more about online identity and how children seek attention and perceive influencers online.

Revealing Reality has a strict ethics and safeguarding policy in place to ensure that respondents are not placed under any undue risk, stress or discomfort during the project. This policy has been reviewed to ensure that it is in line with all industry standards, including the Market Research Society and the Government Social Research Service. Core features of the approach relating to this project include:

- obtaining informed and ongoing consent, both from adults and from children under the age of 16;
- allowing the parent to be present during interviews if they wish;
- allowing the parent to review all research materials and incentives prior to the research;
- taking special care when discussing anything that might be sensitive or upsetting to respondents, and signposting to further support if necessary; and
- researchers reporting to the relevant authority if a child is at risk of harm or abuse.

Revealing Reality's full ethics and safeguarding policy can be found in [Annex I](#)

Top-line findings

This research has found that in 2019:

- Some children are emulating influencers on their social media profiles, and some of these have a sense that their own following is a form of influence.
- Children tend to keep their online profiles minimal, but some are provoking attention online by posting questions and gamified or sexualised content¹.
- Several children in our sample have seen upsetting content online at some point, but some claim to be resilient to this and have coping strategies to deal with it effectively.

We have seen several themes develop throughout each wave

Some of these developments include:

- An increasing consumption of **on-demand content** in favour of live content.
- Children moving from watching content with families to increasingly **consuming content alone**.
- The rise and development of **'star' YouTubers**.
- **New trends in social media** that show elements of gamification and increased self-consciousness about how children represent themselves online.
- The development of new **in-game purchasing mechanisms**, including 'loot boxes'².

¹ Sexualised content' in this context refers to images children were sharing of themselves or other users in underwear, often in sexually provocative poses, or with comments or emojis indicating sexualised undertones

² Loot boxes are a consumable virtual item which can be redeemed to receive a randomised selection of further virtual items, or 'loot'

Observing change over five years of research

	World events	Technology & Content	Our sample
2015	<p>Paris terror attacks November</p>	<p>Snapchat has 100 million active users May</p> <p>First series of Love Island aired on ITV June</p>	<p>Wave 1 and 2 key trends:</p> <p>Netflix and YouTube increasingly popular</p> <p>Widespread smartphone ownership</p>
2016	<p>UK voted to leave EU June</p> <p>President Trump elected November</p>	<p>Instagram enables users to switch easily between multiple accounts February</p> <p>Snapchat 'memories' launched, for users to find older content they posted July</p> <p>'Instagram stories' launched where users can post photos and videos that disappear after 24 hours August</p> <p>Amazon Echo available in UK September</p>	<p>Wave 3 key trends:</p> <p>'Snap streaks' popular</p> <p>Viewing of live TV restricted to 'appointment to view' shows</p> <p>Many children watching YouTubers</p>
2017	<p>#MeToo movement October</p>	<p>Snapchat launches location sharing with Snap Map June</p> <p>Fortnite released, free to play September</p>	<p>Wave 4 key trends:</p> <p>'Snap streaks' no longer popular</p> <p>Children increasingly watching content alone</p>
2018	<p>Greta Thunberg starts School Strike for Climate protests August</p>	<p>Instagram launches IGTV video platform June</p> <p>Musical.ly acquired by TikTok and users are transferred August</p>	<p>Wave 5 key trends:</p> <p>Introduction of screen-recording and social media tracking techniques</p> <p>Increased use of TikTok</p> <p>Fortnite extremely popular with boys</p>
2019	<p>Climate Emergency declared in Europe November</p>		<p>Wave 6 key trends:</p> <p>Some following and emulating 'micro-influencers'</p> <p>Some children were provoking attention from other users on social media</p>

Summary of key findings

The key themes we explored in this wave are:

- The content children like and how they watch it
- Social media
- Critical understanding and online safety

The content children like and how they watch it

As in previous years, the children in our sample preferred on-demand platforms to live television services and tended to consume this content alone.

- Most had access to a YouTube and a Netflix account, and watched content on these platforms daily, with one watching on free streaming apps that 'torrent'³ movie files.
- Children watched the majority of the content they consumed alone, and rarely shared viewing time with a friend or family member.

Children liked YouTube⁴ in particular because it gave them total control and choice over what they watched and gave them access to content that wasn't available on terrestrial channels.

- Some said they liked YouTube because it gave them more choice over what they watched and was less 'random' than live television.
- Younger children were still watching a range of over-exciting and highly stimulating content on YouTube⁵, but some appeared to have transferred their loyalty away from big-name influencers to those providing similar content but to a smaller audience.
- YouTube was still used by some children to pursue their interests and better understand a topic.

Most children could identify adverts on a range of platforms, but younger children were not aware that these might be targeted.

- Most saw adverts in the content they watched, on social media and in games.
- At the younger end of the spectrum, respondents could easily identify adverts, but most believed these were random and were not aware of targeted advertising.
- There was one example of a child (Jasleen, 16) watching adverts so she could get more 'coins'⁶ for gaming.
- A couple of children had seen adverts for more adult content, such as online gambling sites.

³ A torrent is any file sent via the BitTorrent protocol. These streaming apps operate in a 'grey area' in which the apps themselves may be legal, but the means they use to access content may break copyright infringement laws – such as through torrenting of pirated film files.

⁴ See our report *Life on the Small Screen* for a more in-depth analysis of children's use and perceptions of YouTube : <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/what-children-are-watching-and-why>

⁵ Markers of this type of video are the use of a loud, fast or over-excited presentation style and often a lot of background colour or noise. The main point is for everything to appear exaggerated and over-the-top.

⁶ 'Coins' refer to credit earned which can be used to unlock special features or extra levels within games. They are a common phenomenon in modern gaming

Children were generally aware that online influencers make money through the content they post but were not always clear how this works in practice.

- Children were generally aware that influencers could make money through sponsorship or “receiving a lot of likes”. However, the nuance of how this might affect influencers’ behaviour, or the content they posted was rarely understood by children.
- Some of the younger children assumed that YouTube and other platforms paid influencers directly. Some of the older children made a link between making money and sponsorship, although it was not always clear to them how this worked in practice.

Watching game-play videos was popular, and there were examples of children spending and making money in online games.

- Fortnite remained popular and children in the sample reported a rise in interest in watching other gamers online.
- Some children were spending money in games and on equipment for games, and in one case making money through gaming.
- Some boys were making in-game purchases such as FIFA packs⁷, and some watched others opening FIFA packs on YouTube.

As in previous waves, most children in the sample did not appear to be engaging with national news stories, but an increasing number in this wave followed informal gossip or local news.

- Some children regularly absorbed news from informal sites and social media such as Instagram and Snapchat.
- Some were also keen to keep up with local news stories on social media or in neighbourhood groups.

Some children were using smart speakers, but not on a regular basis or for in-depth tasks.

- Some children had access to smart speakers, but primarily used this for humour or on an ad-hoc basis.

Social media

YouTube and Snapchat were the most popular apps in the sample.

- Our recording of children’s device use suggests that many were using YouTube and Snapchat daily
- Snapchat was particularly used by older girls in the sample.
- TikTok, an app often used for creating lip-syncing music videos, was popular with younger children.

The line between the general public and online influencers was increasingly blurred this year; some children were more likely to post content mimicking influencers.

- Children were following an increasing number of peer-to-peer or local influencers alongside big-name ‘stars’⁸.
- Some children were posting imagery or videos emulating content they had seen influencers post online.

⁷ FIFA packs are collections of ‘rare’ players or game-features available for purchase to gamers.

⁸ Please see either the Social Media section or the glossary below for a definition of the different types of influencers, and how many followers they might be expected to have.

- Specific platforms, like TikTok, encouraged children to follow a set template to create content, which was promoting copycatting behaviour.

Most children wanted the status and reputation that having a positive image online could bring.

- Some children talked about how becoming 'known' online was desirable as it could give you 'clout' (i.e. influence) both online and offline.
- Most were concerned with signifiers of popularity online, such as the amount of 'likes' received, number of friends, or 'follower-to-following ratio'.
- However, there was pushback against being too 'visible' from some in the sample, and some reported that it wasn't 'cool' to be seen to be trying too hard.

Some children were keen to avoid anything that might detract from their online image, which led to a number limiting the content on their online profiles.

- Some children in the study kept content on their online profiles to a minimum, and several of these curated this content by deleting old images or those without enough 'likes'.
- As in previous years, some children had multiple social media accounts which they curated for different audiences.
- Some used dedicated apps to change their appearance online. These had moved on from the 'funny' and 'glamorised' filters seen in past waves to more hyper-real imagery that augmented their face in specific ways.

Despite keeping their profiles minimal, several children in our study were using a range of strategies to provoke attention online. A smaller number were also sharing more sexualised content⁹.

- Children were posting content on social media, such as 'polls' or 'countdowns' deliberately to invite attention from other users.
- Some users were attracting attention online through posting or sharing sexualised content, sometimes using online tropes such as 'shout-outs for shout-outs'¹⁰.

Critical understanding and online safety

Several children had seen upsetting content online such as violent or self-harm videos. Some said they had coping strategies to deal with seeing this type of content, for example talking to adults or searching for advice from trusted sources online.

- Some had seen violent content or self-harm videos and images circulating on social media. Several said they were able to cope with this, and some of these took action such as talking to an adult or searching for advice from trusted sources online.
- Some children had received mean messages or unsolicited sexual images.

Most children felt that people should treat one another well online. There were, however, some instances of mean or bullying behaviours, including teenagers getting 'revenge' on one another online.

- Most children felt that children should treat each other online as well as they would expect to be treated offline.

⁹ 'Sexualised content' in this context refers to images children were sharing of themselves or other users in revealing clothing or underwear, often in sexually provocative poses, or with comments or emojis indicating sexualised undertones.

¹⁰ See glossary for full explanation.

- However, a couple of participants could recall mean comments or online bullying they had seen or been involved in.
- There were some examples of teenagers they knew getting revenge online after falling out, by posting secrets online or setting up fake accounts.

Most children felt safe online and knew who to go to if anything made them uncomfortable. However, some had self-contradictory ideas about how to stay safe online.

- Many children said they would talk to an adult if they saw anything alarming online, although some reported not telling anyone when they saw something that made them uncomfortable.
- Children reported ways of staying safe online that they sometimes contradicted in practice—for example, reporting that it was risky to post images showing their school uniform on social media, but then posting these images anyway.

Parents tended to be responsive rather than proactive with regard to monitoring their children’s online behaviour as they grew up.

- At the younger end of the sample, parents were still monitoring their children online, through checking devices and using parental control apps such as Family Link.
- As their children grew up, parents were less likely to monitor their devices regularly or use parental control apps, and more likely to intervene in one-off events.

As children have grown up, some have shifted their social media settings from ‘private’ to ‘public’ in order to gain more followers and a wider online network, although one or two are more conscious of online privacy.

- Younger children emphasised how their settings were generally set to private for most social media.
- Some teenagers were more ambivalent about keeping their social media private, and some had multiple accounts and weren’t always sure about their privacy settings.
- A couple, however, were more conscious of online privacy and avoided certain social media platforms as a result.
- Some children in the study had given out personal information in order to gain access to games or video content online, although a number had given out fake information in these circumstances.

Findings from the data capture also provided some interesting insights

How children are under-reporting their social media use and the adult content they see

Screen-recorded data and social media tracking provides information about how children are actually behaving online. This provides context to the self-reported behaviours uncovered in interviews. Although we have seen children become increasingly open over the years about their online behaviours, we are still seeing a mismatch between what children say and what is revealed in behavioural data. We can see this in two main areas:

1. Children are downplaying the amount of sexualised content they see and share on social media

- Some of the girls in the sample are open about how they receive unsolicited explicit photos from boys and some have seen instances of nude imagery passed around at school.
- However, many are not reporting the extent to which they see other forms of sexualised content or share this themselves.
- For example, screen recording of an image gallery on a smartphone revealed how one girl was sharing sexualised images of herself in a swimsuit on social media, and another showed how imagery of lingerie, vibrators and adverts for 'penis enlargement cream' had been saved and perhaps shared with friends.
- In another example, social media tracking of a young male showed how he was re-sharing sexualised imagery posted by female users and posting interactive quizzes on Instagram in which he revealed that his favourite website was Pornhub.

2. Children are under-reporting how much they use social media, and how much they care about their online representations

- Children report being concerned about some markers of online popularity, such as the amount of 'likes' received for posts or their 'follower-to-following ratio'.
- However, some children also say that it is not 'cool' to be seen to care too much about their online image, and some downplayed the extent of their social media use in interviews.
- For example, one child reported that he hardly ever used Instagram, but in fact he regularly created Instagram stories, and social media tracking showed that he often posted content that emulated what he had seen others post.

“I don’t really mind how people show themselves online. It’s their life and it’s up to them. Some people just do it for attention, I’m not really interested... I don’t feel any pressure.”

– Jack, 14, suggested during interviews that he did not care a great deal about his online profile. However, social media tracking revealed he put a lot of effort into portraying himself a certain way.

While children in the study were cautious about how they reported their behaviour, it was evident that they were not trying to hide their behaviour from researchers, given that they willingly gave permission to view their profiles in interviews and in follow-up tracking. This suggests that they felt somewhat removed

from their online audience and felt less awkward about posting things online than they did about discussing or analysing them in their offline lives.



About this study

The 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.

Ofcom has a statutory duty, under The Communications Act 2003 to promote and to carry out research in media literacy across the UK. Ofcom's definition of media literacy is: "the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts".

The report forms part of our wider programme of work, *Making Sense of Media*, which aims to help improve the online skills, knowledge and understanding of UK adults and children. We do this through cutting-edge research, and by bringing together organisations and individuals with expertise in media literacy to share ideas and to support their activities.

To find out more about our *Making Sense of Media* programme and for details on how to join our network, please go to <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research>.

The project follows, as far as possible, the same 18 children, aged eight to 15 at the beginning of the study, interviewing them on camera each year about their media habits and attitudes. It provides evidence about the motivations and the context for media use, and how these media are part of daily life and domestic circumstances. The project also provides rich details of how children's media habits and attitudes change over time, particularly in the context of their emotional and cognitive development.

This document provides analysis of the findings from the sixth wave of the study¹¹, as well as a brief overview of the key trends we have seen develop since the study started.

¹¹ The research materials used in this project can be found in [Annex 2](#) and [Annex 3](#)

Innovative techniques to go beyond self-reported behaviour

Our research hinges on our ability to get beyond what people *say they do*, to reveal what they *actually do*. In the context of online research with children, collecting reliable data on online behaviours is a challenge. So, over time, we have developed new methods to explore and analyse the behaviours and attitudes of children online. These techniques allow us to triangulate and sense-check self-reported behaviour, as well as to uncover additional details and build up a rich understanding of the context in which the digital behaviours of children sit.

Last year, we introduced three new elements to our approach which we continued to use this year: screen recording, social media tracking and 360-degree filming techniques. This has enabled us to build our insight into the behaviours and attitudes of the children in the sample.

Screen recording

We used screen recording software to record the mobile phone screens of children in real time during the interviews as they talked us through their online lives. This allowed us to collect a recorded bank of data from the interviews which illustrates what respondents were showing us. We revisited this data after the interview to review certain behaviours in more depth. This gave us greater insight into certain digital behaviours that was not initially evident to the interviewer.

Not all phones had the requisite supporting software, and not all children had phones, so screen recording was conducted with only some of the children.

Social media tracking

We also asked children and their parents if we could befriend them on social media, using bespoke accounts set up by researchers for social media tracking. For those who agreed, we gained valuable insight into what, when and how often they were posting, as well as into how they interacted with others in semi-public spaces online.

Tracking of this nature allowed us to look back and review how posting behaviours had changed over time, revealing valuable insights into how children are controlling their online presence and self-image.

360-degree filming

360-degree filming was conducted with children in and around their homes, in addition to more typical filming techniques using a DSLR camera. 360-degree film captures a three-dimensional shot, which can then be viewed using a virtual reality headset. 360-degree filming techniques capture the detail of a space and are increasingly used in research to explore context and to generate empathy with certain audiences. We used 360-degree techniques to guide our analysis process, screening shots of the children's road, living room and bedroom to the wider team to contextualise data and reveal the spaces in which children are enacting their digital lives.

Meet the sample

The number of participants in the study is relatively small, but these children have been chosen to reflect a broad cross-section of UK children in terms of age, location, ethnicity, social circumstances and access to technology. The main sampling characteristics focused on the following variables:

- Age (spread across 8 to 15 at the time of Year 1 recruitment)
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Location, including urban and rural areas, and all four nations
- Family setup, including a mixture of different sibling and parental relationships
- Access to devices (including smartphones, mobile phones, tablets, smart TVs, games consoles)
- Usage levels
- Parental approaches to managing media use
- Parental confidence with digital media

As children age out of the sample, we introduce new children at the younger end of the spectrum to keep the age spread balanced. Despite our best efforts to keep the sample consistent, some children may also drop out of the research due to personal circumstances. Each year we replace any dropouts with a child representing similar demographic factors and behaviours. This year's sample included:



Arjun, 8 (new to the study)

Arjun lives with his mum and dad in a suburb outside a large town in the north-west of England. The family lives in a bright modern house with three bedrooms and a small garden. An only child, both his parents work full-time in healthcare. Because of this, he spends every night of the week at after-school clubs or engaging in other activities. Arjun is extremely active, and enjoys playing a range of sports, such as cricket, badminton and football.



Freddie, 8 (new to the study)

At the time of interview, Freddie had just moved to a new house in a large town in the north-west of England with his mum, older sister, and younger brother. His parents are separated, so his time is split between his mum's and his dad's house, which is close by. Freddie loves playing football. He plays most weekends and says he's good enough to play in a local league but decided he didn't want to.



Suzy, 9 (new to the study)

Suzy is an only child living with her mum in a three-bedroom house in a suburb outside Glasgow. She is very active, and enjoys swimming, jiu-jitsu and gymnastics, which she is beginning to take quite seriously. She says she'd love to get bars or mats to practice on at home, and already has a beam that she practices on in her kitchen.



Bryony, 10

Bryony had just had her last day at primary school at the time of the interview and was nervous about moving on to secondary school. An only child, she lives on a farm in Wales with her mum and grandparents, and her new horse, Arthur. She rides for the Welsh riding squad, which means regular training and occasional weekends away. Her mum has reduced her hours at the beauticians' parlour where she works in order to support her daughter on these trips away.



Zak, 10

Zak is pleased to have the biggest room in the house after moving into a new home in South Yorkshire with his mum and dad this year. He is an only child, and when he's not on one of his many devices, Zak plays out in the local neighbourhood with his friends. He also enjoys trampolining and cubs after school during the week. At home, he enjoys watching YouTube, especially videos made by DanTDM¹². Zak also posts his own videos.



Emma, 10

As in previous years, Emma, who lives in rural Northern Ireland, still loves her horses and spends most of her free time with them at the stables. She lives with her mum, stepdad and older sister, while her older brother currently lives with her grandma. When she grows up, she wants to be a professional rider. Although she used to use it, Emma has gone off Snapchat this year, but still uses her mum's account to talk to her friends. She also borrows her mum's phone to play Candy Crush from time to time.



Ben, 11

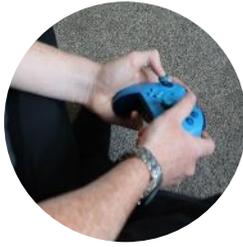
Ben, from London, started secondary school this year and has enjoyed the step-up from primary, which he said he found boring and repetitive. He has an older brother and sister – both teenagers. His favourite subjects are PE and maths, and he already has his sights set on becoming an engineer. On his Xbox, Ben enjoys playing Fortnite and FIFA19, but says he always finishes his homework before playing on weeknights.



Ahmed, 13

Ahmed lives on an estate in London with his mum and four younger brothers, occasionally travelling to Birmingham where his dad lives. He has been receiving extra support at school after being diagnosed with ADHD last year. He has a PS4, which is currently broken, and has been through five phones in less than a year. They break either because he drops them or because he throws them when he gets angry. He says he enjoys being out on his bike with friends in the local area.

¹² Daniel Robert Middleton, known online as DanTDM, is a British YouTube personality, professional gamer, and author



Peter, 14

Peter lives in a detached house with his parents and younger sister (an aspiring YouTuber) in a town in the West Midlands. Keen on sports, Peter plays football, cricket and racquetball each week. He also has a season ticket at Birmingham City FC. On the Xbox, he enjoys FIFA20, and plays for two to three hours on weeknights, and sometimes longer at the weekend. This year he is starting his GCSEs.



Alice, 14

Alice's parents got divorced this year, so she is now living with her mum and older brother in a small house in the south of England that is close to her old home. After watching the Cowspiracy documentary and 'slaughter house videos' on YouTube she became a vegetarian and has started doing a lot more cooking for herself. She is doing well at school and has been predicted top grades for her GCSEs.



Jack, 14

Jack lives with his mum, stepdad, and younger stepbrother in a village in the West Country. This year, he has experienced some 'ups and downs' at school, linked to some degree to his ADHD. Jack enjoys riding and working on his bike, which he takes to the local skate park. When he's bored, he spends a lot of time in the garage fixing and modifying bike parts.



Josie, 14

Josie is an only child who lives with her mum in a small town in the west of England. She is starting her GCSEs in September and is most excited about doing drama. She had just come back from a rehearsal for the school's latest musical production at the time of the interview, for which she's part of the backstage crew. Josie has electric, acoustic and bass guitars, on which she teaches herself songs from rock bands, and has recently discovered a love for Bob Dylan.



Shaniqua, 15

Shaniqua lives in a flat in North London with her mother and three younger brothers, with whom she shares a small room. Shaniqua started her GCSEs this year and is enjoying art, although she doesn't think her teacher is very good. She enjoys going to watch films with her mum and was looking forward to a trip to Morocco at the time of the interview. She says she is "well-known" in her local area and that lots of people know her name when she goes out locally.



William, 15

William lives with his parents and four of his five siblings in a busy house in the Midlands. He enjoys playing on his Xbox and football with friends. During the time of the interview he had been playing his Xbox for nine to 10 hours a day, and occasionally uses the gameplay streaming platform Twitch to view videos that his friends are streaming.



Shriya, 15 (new to the study)

Shriya is from Birmingham, where she lives with her mother, father and two younger brothers. When hanging out with her close friends, she likes listening to music and watching movies on Netflix. Although she is wary of the dangers of social media and guarded about the content, she is happy to post online, Shriya is a frequent Snapchat user. She also enjoys watching makeup tutorials on YouTube.



Sarah, 16

Sarah lives with her mum and dad in an urban area of Manchester. She has an older sister who lives nearby with a child of her own. She spends a lot of time hanging out with friends locally and is currently training to become a youth worker. When we spoke to her, she was looking forward to going on an NCS (National Citizen Service) weekend, where she was hoping to meet new people and spend time outdoors.



Jasleen, 16

Jasleen lives with her mum and two older sisters in a two-bedroom house in Bradford. At the time of the interview, she had just finished her GCSEs and was hoping to go on to do A-levels from September. Jasleen continues to spend a lot of time on social media and has a public profile on Snapchat. She has a close-knit friendship group that she values highly.



Grant, 17

Grant lives in London with his parents, sister and younger brother. He did well in his first year of A-levels and has decided he wants to study accountancy or investment banking at university. Revision was a big priority for Grant when we spoke to him. Outside school, he is busy working part-time at WH Smith, and is a regular gym-user.



The content children like and how they watch it

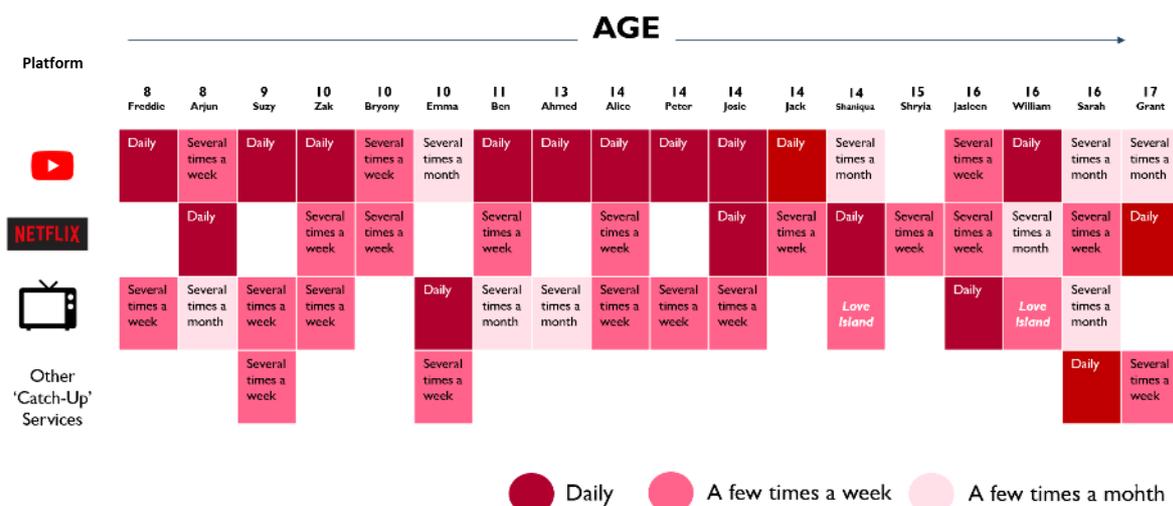
Summary

As in previous years, children in our sample preferred on-demand platforms to live television services and tended to consume this content alone.

- Most had access to a YouTube and a Netflix account, and watched content on these platforms daily, with one watching on free streaming apps that 'torrent'¹³ movie files.
- Children watched the majority of the content they consumed alone, and rarely shared viewing time with a friend or family member.

¹³ A torrent is any file sent via the BitTorrent protocol. These apps operate in a 'grey area' in which the apps themselves may be legal, but the means they use to access content may be breaking copyright infringement laws – such as through torrenting of pirated film files.

The table below shows children’s viewing behaviours:



As the table shows, most children chose to stream on-demand content and tended to choose this over live content. Almost all had access to YouTube and Netflix and tended to watch content on these platforms on their own. YouTube was particularly popular as a streaming platform, and most used this to access types of content different to that which they consumed on Netflix¹⁴.

Ten-year-old Bryony’s family had bought a Chromecast this year, which she was using to stream content from her phone onto the family television, and occasionally the television set in her bedroom. She primarily consumed content on Netflix, YouTube and Spotify, and her favourite shows were *Heartland* (a show about horse-riding on Netflix) and *Actually Happened*, a show on YouTube where people recall personal stories in the form of animations. She watched the majority of this content alone, although as in previous years, she occasionally joined her grandmother watching *Coronation Street* on the family television set.

Arjun, 8, Josie, 14, and Shaniqua, 15, all said that Netflix was probably their most-used platform for viewing content, and each watched this via a streaming platform on a television set more frequently than live broadcasts. Ben, 11, said he preferred watching content on Netflix rather than live content because of the advertising.

“They [adverts] take too long and waste programme time, plus they also cut scenes from the show you’re watching.”

| Ben, 11

Jack, 14, had recently watched the latest season of the popular fantasy drama, *Stranger Things*, on Netflix, and said he “never” watched live TV. Those consuming live content as it was broadcast tended to be watching ‘appointment-to-view’ content, such as ITV’s *Love Island*, at the time of the research.

¹⁴ The popularity of YouTube is explored in the following section.

Some children were using other streaming platforms and providers. For example, Alice, 14, used her household's Now TV box, a Sky-owned video-on-demand platform. Josie, also 14, watched content on the UK-based video-on-demand service, UKTV Play.

Grant, 17, who has historically used free apps like Show Box to stream torrented content on his phone, was this year using the app Movie House, also to stream torrented content for free, which he watched by himself. His app-usage data showed that he had spent 13 hours 38 minutes on the app in the week before the interview. The interview took place during the summer holidays when the children had a lot more time to themselves. However, it is worth noting that Grant said he also watched content during school hours.

“Even at school, I was watching movies, watching movies, watching movies. You name it, I’ve watched it.”

| Grant, 17

Building on previous insight:

A trend towards streaming content alone on personal devices (like mobile phones or tablets), rather than watching content on shared devices (like a shared TV set) with family or friends

Over time, we have seen an increasing trend towards streaming on personal devices. In wave 4, we saw how on-demand platforms like YouTube and Netflix were increasingly popular with children, and in wave 5 most were watching on-demand content on a daily basis. We have also seen a decline in consumption of live content. In wave 4, viewing live content was still considered a family activity or routine that some children felt helped them to bond with their family. However, by wave 5, viewing of live content had declined to just a few categories or occasions, such as sport, or popular, serialised ‘must-see’ shows like *Love Island*¹⁵.

This year, we are seeing the continuation of the trend, with fewer examples of family viewing and lower consumption of live content in general.

Summary

Children liked YouTube¹⁶ in particular because it gave them total control and choice over what they watched and gave them access to content that wasn’t available on terrestrial channels.

¹⁵ Markers of this type of video are the use of a loud, fast or over-excited presentation style and often a lot of background colour or noise. The main point is for everything to appear exaggerated and over-the-top.

¹⁶ See our report *Life on the Small Screen* for a more in-depth analysis of children’s use and perceptions of YouTube: : <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/what-children-are-watching-and-why>

- Some said they liked YouTube because it gave them more choice over what they watched and was less “random” than live television.
- Younger children were still watching a range of over-exciting and highly stimulating content on YouTube¹⁷, but some appeared to have transferred their loyalty away from big-name influencers to those providing similar content but to a smaller audience.
- YouTube was still used by some children to pursue their interests and better understand a topic.

Most children used YouTube daily, and for some it was their most-used app on their personal device. This was the case for Zak and Ben, aged 10 and 11 respectively, whose weekly app usage data showed that they spent 78% and 76% respectively of their online time on YouTube. Fourteen-year-old Jack’s data usage also revealed that he spent the majority of his time online on YouTube – 25 hours during the week of his interview.

Several children explained they preferred the content available on YouTube to that on live television or subscription-video-on-demand (SVoD) services such as Netflix. For instance, Zak, 10, said he found there was more content on YouTube that aligned to his interests, such as the YouTuber, Dan TDM.

“I use YouTube more [than Netflix] by quite a bit... I prefer watching Dan TDM and stuff - it’s more like videos that I want to watch because it’s more like gaming and stuff I like to do.”

| Zak, 10

Emma and Ben, both 11, described TV as “random” compared to YouTube. Suzy, 9, explained that she preferred the choice available on YouTube.

“I don’t really like the TV because you can’t pick what channels are on it.”

| Suzy, 9

Others felt that the YouTubers and content produced on YouTube were more relatable and wanted to show them support. For example, William, 15, said he preferred YouTube over Netflix because “it’s made by normal people”. He particularly liked “commentary channels” where he could watch content producers watching and reacting to other videos they found online, such as the YouTuber JaakMaate. In a similar vein, Jack, 14, estimated he watched YouTube every day for one to two hours. He said that while watching he liked to subscribe to a lot of content providers as he felt this would “help the YouTubers” who were creating the content he enjoyed.

Most children in the sample were consuming content on YouTube alone, often on personal devices. For example, Peter, 14, whose family did not have Netflix, was watching YouTube regularly on his iPad. He primarily enjoyed watching clips about football and the video game FIFA, including watching videos of FIFA

¹⁷ Markers of this type of video are the use of a loud, fast or over-excited presentation style and often a lot of background colour or noise. The main point is for everything to appear exaggerated and over-the-top.

gameplay. Similarly, Alice, 14, explained it felt harder to share the experience of watching content on YouTube with others.

“I feel like Netflix is easier [than YouTube] to watch with other people.”

| Alice, 14

Among the younger viewers, several were watching over-exciting and highly stimulating, fast-paced content on YouTube. Last year, younger girls were following the YouTuber and TV personality Jojo Siwa. This year, she was not considered to be in fashion with the girls in the sample, and some reported finding her “annoying”. However, the content they were consuming was similar in style.

“She’s [JoJo Siwa] a girl on the internet who’s really annoying like – makes high-pitched noises.”

| Suzy, 9

For example, nine-year-old Suzy had stopped watching Jojo Siwa but was now watching similar YouTubers. These included Just Ameerah, a YouTuber with 2.59 million subscribers¹⁸ who posted fast-paced content about making ‘slime’¹⁹, and Azyland, a YouTuber with over 10.5 million subscribers who posted content like ‘Try not to say wow challenge videos’ that show the YouTuber reacting to surprising content online and trying not to say “wow”. Bryony, 10, had similarly moved on from enjoying Jojo Siwa, and this year was spending more time watching the YouTuber This Esme who posted content about horse-riding.

Suzy also enjoyed videos from the Teen Stories channel, which focused on real-life anecdotes with moral lessons presented in cartoon form. On a similar note, Emma was watching an animated series on YouTube called *Actually Happened*, in which users submitted anecdotes to the channel creators, who created a voiceover and animation. The stories did not have a clear moral message, but instead presented users’ experiences about a range of issues, such as friends, relationships and family. These often alluded to more mature themes, such as parental relationships, getting pregnant, or in some examples, sexual abuse.

As we have seen in previous years, there was also some interest in children watching sensory videos, such as those showing YouTubers making ‘slime’ or eating food. Some children were using YouTube as a practical tool to help with certain tasks or to better understand a topic. For example, Alice, 14, had recently become very interested in the meat industry and had decided to become a vegetarian after watching the feature-length documentary *Cowspiracy* on Netflix. She had explored this topic further on YouTube to learn more about the meat industry and vegetarian diets online. She had also started watching ‘slaughterhouse’ videos on YouTube, which strengthened her desire to become a vegetarian. While she was learning from this content, there was also a risk that it could potentially have a negative effect on attitudes towards diet and body image. Alice had started to be recommended content in her YouTube feed relating to food and diet, such as YouTubers completing food-related challenges like ‘24 hours as a vegan’ and ‘24 hours trying this model’s diet’.

There were some other examples of children using YouTube for informative or educational purposes. Grant, 17, had used the platform to look up reviews for products when he decided to buy some Apple EarPods, and Shriya, 15, had looked up make-up tutorials in the past. Jasleen, 16, had also used YouTube to look up explanatory videos on solving maths problems when she was revising for her GCSE exams this year.

¹⁸ At the time of this research

¹⁹ Slime is a gooey, sticky substance, manufactured and sold to children as a play item. Originally marketed to children in the 1970s, it became popular again after YouTubers posted videos of themselves making it at home.

“I used YouTube for maths when I was revising for my GCSEs.”

| *Jasleen, 16*



Suzy, 9

Suzy lives in a suburb of Glasgow with her mum, who works full-time training Navy cadets. Her parents split up a few years ago and she doesn't see much of her father. As a result, Suzy has quite a lot of time to herself. She does a lot of after-school activities - including gymnastics, swimming and jujitsu, and trampolining in the back garden.

She also watches YouTube every day. Although she was given her first smartphone this year, she primarily watches content on her iPad. She used to enjoy watching the YouTuber and TV presenter Jojo Siwa, but this year she has begun to find her "annoying" and is less keen. Instead she watches different personalities positing similar content, such as Azzylund and Just Ameerah.

"I watch YouTube on Safari, not on the app. Sometimes I bring my iPad outside to watch when I'm bouncing on the trampoline"

Summary

Most children could identify adverts on a range of platforms, but younger children were not aware that these might be targeted.

- Most saw adverts in the content they watched, on social media and in games.
- At the younger end of the spectrum, respondents could easily identify adverts, but most believed these were random and were not aware of targeted advertising.
- There was one example of a child (Jasleen, 16) watching adverts so she could get more virtual 'coins'²⁰ for gaming.
- A couple of children had seen adverts for more adult content, such as online gambling sites.

Many of the children saw adverts in the content they watched, on social media and in games, and could recognise these as advertising content. However, although there were some exceptions, younger children and early teenagers tended to be less aware than their older counterparts that advertising could be targeted. For example, Freddie, aged eight, had very little awareness of why adverts were promoted or that they might be tailored to his interests, believing they were designed to “make you be patient”.

“Adverts make you be patient and make you wait and also entertain you while the video buffers if it has a bad connection.”

| Freddie, 8

Emma, 10, was also unsure about targeted advertising, believing that adverts were shown so that “the company could make money”, but not fully understanding that these might be personalised. However, she was aware that her mum (a horse rider like Emma) was seeing a lot of adverts from Harry Hall, a retailer selling equestrian products. She wondered if that was because “we always search for it”.

Ben, 11, was more sceptical in general about advertising, and aware that not everyone saw the same adverts. He had heard about some cases of false advertising in which companies had been fined for overclaiming the benefits of their products. He believed that adverts were pushed to people based on content they had previously consumed.

“They [advertising promoters] know what you’re watching.”

| Ben, 11

Ahmed, 13, Jack, 14, and Peter, 14, all noticed they saw adverts relating to their interests from time to time but hadn't thought about why this might be the case. For example, Ahmed saw adverts for clothes or games he liked, but hadn't thought about whether others might also see the same adverts. Jack suggested that seeing adverts relating to his interests, such as bikes and bike gear, was better than seeing adverts that were totally random, given that this was more entertaining. Jasleen, 16, felt that everyone saw advertising for the same products, but thought that they might see different video clips based on who they were.

²⁰ 'Coins' refer to credit earned which can be used to unlock special features or extra levels within games. They are a common phenomenon in modern gaming.

Sarah, 16, had some intuition that advertising might be linked to her Google search history and said that she didn't click on advertising any more as "they're trying to get us to buy stuff". She said she saw a lot of advertising on Snapchat and Instagram for items such as lip balm, deodorant and holidays abroad. She also saw several adverts in games she played on her iPhone. These adverts were generally for other games, but screen recording also revealed that she was seeing adverts for gambling, specifically the online bingo provider Wink Slots. William, 15, and Grant, 17, also saw advertising for the bookmaker William Hill on Instagram and YouTube.

Jasleen, 16, who played a variety of games on her iPhone, said she regularly saw pop-up adverts which filled the whole screen while she played, and meant she had to click an 'exit' button to continue playing. She also played some games that required her to watch adverts in order to gain more virtual 'coins'²¹ that she could use to progress in gameplay.

Summary

Children were generally aware that online influencers make money through the content they post but were not always clear on how this works in practice.

- Children were generally aware that influencers could make money through sponsorship or "receiving a lot of likes". However, the nuance of how this might affect influencers' behaviour or the content they posted was rarely understood by children.
- Some of the younger children assumed that YouTube and other platforms paid influencers directly.
- Some of the older children made a link between making money and sponsorship, although it was not always clear to them how this worked in practice.

Children were familiar with YouTubers and online influencers, as many watched or had watched these regularly in the past. Most felt that YouTubers and other online influencers had become wealthy from the content they posted online, although not every child had thought in detail about how they might have made their money. Emma, 10, said she knew that the YouTuber and TV personality she sometimes watched on YouTube, Jojo Siwa, was "rich", but she didn't know how she had become rich. Similarly, Jack, 14, showed very little awareness of the idea that personalities he was following online might be promoting products.

The younger children in the sample who had thought more about this tended to assume that YouTube paid influencers directly. Bryony, 10, thought that YouTube paid vloggers for content once they started getting a lot of followers. Similarly, Ahmed, 13, said that YouTube paid influencers once they reached 10,000 subscribers.

"With YouTube, if you have over 10,000 subscribers you start getting paid."

| Ahmed, 13

Nine-year-old Suzy was also unclear that online influencers may promote products online for financial gain. She had seen videos in which the YouTuber James Charles was talking about make-up brushes in one of his videos, and how much they cost, but thought this was because he was "rich and a show-off".

Some of the older children were more aware of sponsorship and product placement, although they could not always clearly articulate how this worked. For example, Alice, 14, knew that influencers made money by "going to restaurants and making posts or videos about them" or showing products in their content, but she hadn't thought about how this could make them money.

²¹ 'Coins' refer to credit earned which can be used to unlock special features or extra levels within games. They are a common phenomenon in modern gaming.

Most were unphased, however, by the idea that influencers made a lot of money. For instance, Peter, 14, said he knew people got paid for content on Instagram, but said he “wasn’t bothered” as he felt they entertained people, so should be paid in return.

Shaniqua, 15, was less clear, recognising that influencers made money through advertising, but was not sure exactly how this worked.

“[YouTubers make money] with videos. They post a video – I think you get paid for the views and I think you get paid when there’s an advert on the video, but I don’t know how the advert gets on to the video.”

| Shaniqua, 15

Building on previous insight:

Recognising adverts and sponsored content

Previous waves have shown that children who follow YouTubers have an understanding of sponsorship and product endorsement, especially if they hope to make money themselves through posting content online or know people who do this. This was a theme in wave 3, where many respondents had started following big-name YouTubers like Zoella and Alfie Dayes. Respondents were not always able to spot these endorsements in practice, however, and wave 4 showed they were also often likely to miss ‘native ads’²² in their social media feeds.

Historically, children have not been aware of targeted advertising. In this wave, as in the previous wave, we saw that many did not know that advertising could be personalised and were not able to guess how Facebook might make money.

Summary

Watching game-play videos was popular, and there were examples of children spending and making money in online games.

- Fortnite remained popular, and children in the sample reported a rise in interest in watching other gamers online.
- Some children were spending money in games and on equipment for games, and in one case making money through gaming.
- Some boys were making in-game purchases such as FIFA packs, and some watched others opening FIFA packs on YouTube.

²² A type of advertising designed to blend in with the platform or site on which it appears.

“I’m playing Xbox so much I don’t really have time to watch Netflix.”

| William, 15

The majority of the boys in the sample used gaming devices on a regular basis. For example, Arjun, 8, had a Nintendo Switch device on which he enjoyed playing Super Smash Bros. Freddie, also 8, and Peter, 14, both played FIFA daily on their Xbox devices, and Jack, 14, estimated he played PS4 every couple of days. At the more extreme end, William, aged 15, guessed he had been playing on his Xbox for nine or ten hours a day over the summer holidays. Fortnite, a popular multi-platform game in the last wave, was still popular in this wave of research, although not as dominant in the gaming landscape, with boys also playing games like FIFA, Crew 2 and Destiny 2.

Younger girls also played games, although these tended to be games available on mobile phones as opposed to bespoke gaming devices. For example, Emma, 10, played Candy Crush on her mum’s iPhone and had reached level 900; Suzy, 9, downloaded the games Piano Tiles and Aqua Park, after seeing these advertised in other games; and Bryony, 10, had a whole selection of free games which she had downloaded on her phone and played from time to time, such as Helix Jump, Jumping Horse, Sniper 3D, Crossy Road, Subway Surf, Hoppy Frog 2 and Garage Band.

Gameplay videos, showing other players completing games, were popular online, with many watching these on YouTube or the games-streaming platform Twitch. Peter, 14, was watching videos of FIFA gameplay on YouTube, and William, 15, said he enjoyed watching gameplay videos of Destiny 2 on Twitch, as these gave him “help with games”. He and his friends occasionally streamed their games on the platform, and William said he would always watch their games to support them. He had recently tried streaming one of his own games but had only got one viewer. The platform Twitch incentivised the watching of gameplay videos to some extent, through offering in-game bonuses on the platform to those watching the videos.

Some children were spending money on games and gaming equipment. For example, Peter, 14, had a gaming headset and chair, and Ben, 11, had been given a gaming keyboard after hearing about it on YouTube.

“I found out about [the gaming keyboard] on YouTube. Everyone is talking about it.”

| Ben, 11

Ben also said he spent £100 he was given last year in Fortnite, which he converted to ‘V-Bucks’—an in-game currency – that he could use to purchase ‘skins’ (avatar costumes) and ‘axes’ (weapons) in the game. Ahmed, 13, knew of a friend who had spent £400 on his mother’s credit card to purchase V-Bucks over a period of time. He said he would never do the same, as his mum was careful about lending her card out since his younger brothers ran up an £80 debt on it, purchasing ‘skins’ in Fortnite last year.

William, who had spent a large amount of time during his summer holidays playing games, had earned money online. He had been paid by other players to ‘level up’ their avatars on Destiny 2. This involved spending time on the game to earn points through killing other players or gaining in-game resources. William said he had charged £10 on three separate occasions to level up other players, making a total of £30.

Some boys were purchasing ‘FIFA packs’ when playing FIFA. These were packs containing random rewards, such as players or club items that could boost the performance of a team. Some boys bought these themselves using ‘FIFA points’, which could be earned or bought with standard currency.

“Every Christmas I get £20 to spend on FIFA points. But you don’t have to buy them to be good.”

| Peter, 14

Peter and William were also watching videos on YouTube of other people opening FIFA packs and filming their reactions.

Building on previous insight:

Online gaming and in-game purchasing

Fortnite was immensely popular last year and most boys reported playing it several times a week. This year, the popularity of the game had declined somewhat, although many were aware of the Fortnite World Cup, which took place in July 2019 and earned the winning solo player \$3m dollars²³. As in the previous wave, in 2019 several of the boys watched YouTube videos to boost their gameplay and learn new tips.

Some also gained randomised in-game rewards in the games they played and bought in-game elements (either to boost their game or for superficial reasons) using real or in-game currency.

²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortnite_World_Cup



William, 15

William lives in a rural area in the midlands with four of his five siblings. He has lots of friends at school, and this year hosted a party to celebrate the end of term, in which his friends camped over in the back garden.

Over the summer holidays, however, he has not been going out much, and instead, has been spending nine to ten hours a day playing games on his Xbox. His new favourite game is Destiny, and he has also been watching YouTube videos and live streaming content of gameplay on the gaming platform Twitch to improve his understanding of the game. He reports that he is now “pretty good” and has even been paid by other users to ‘level up’ their avatars – charging £10 on three separate occasions for this.

Summary

As in previous waves, most children in the sample did not appear to be engaging with national news stories, but an increasing number in this wave followed informal gossip or local news.

- Some children regularly absorbed news from informal sites and social media such as Instagram and Snapchat.
- Some were also keen to keep up with local news stories on social media or in neighbourhood groups.

“I’m not bothered about news.”

| Zak, 10

Most children in the sample were not regularly checking major news providers or keeping up with national and international news stories. At the younger end, children like Zak (quoted above), admitted that they didn’t really find traditional news sources interesting or entertaining. For example, Ben, 11, said he didn’t like live news on television which was “a bit boring” and “always negative”, featuring sad events such as stories of people dying. A number had some knowledge of current affairs because they had picked this up from their family. Emma, 10, was aware that Boris Johnson was the prime minister because her sister had told her. However, she felt that she hadn’t learnt this from news broadcasts because she didn’t really watch them.

Some of the older children in the sample seemed more likely to pick up ‘news’ from social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat. Fifteen-year-old William, for example, followed Just News TV on Instagram and YouTube. The content featured was a mixture of African political news, human interest stories and celebrity gossip, as well as featuring female models and some provocative sexualised imagery. William was also well-informed about gossip among YouTubers, explaining the latest news in their circles, such as James Charles being “exposed as a predator” and subsequently having his uploads ‘cancelled’, or Logan Paul filming a dead body in the suicide forest in Japan, which William explained “triggered a lot of backlash”.

He also enjoyed watching content posted by the YouTuber WillNE, who posted videos called ‘This week on the internet’ summarising recent online activities and featuring other well-known YouTubers. However, it is worth noting that he did not consider these sites to feature ‘news’ as such and claimed he didn’t really see news on YouTube.

“I’m sure there is news on YouTube, but I don’t see it.”

| William, 15

Others were more engaged with local news. For example, Sarah, 16, kept up to date with local neighbourhood groups and gossip through Instagram stories, where residents in her area publicly posted items about recent events and screenshots of other local stories. She also followed residents’ associations and the Greater Manchester Police page for her local area on Facebook. There was a sense that Sarah felt she should stay abreast of local issues and crime in order to stay safe when she was out and about with her friends in public spaces.

Alice, 14, along with Shriya, 15, was one of the few children in the sample who were more interested in larger issues and news stories. She has historically been quite engaged at school and with extra-curricular activities and has maintained an interest in the wider world and issues she encounters in her social life, such as religion

and mental health. She explained that she looks up specific items, such as terror attacks, if she hears about them and wants to learn more or check facts. Alice generally trusts news reported by the BBC or the Guardian and used these sources to check whether stories are ‘fake’.

Building on previous insight:

Disengaged from the news

In wave 4, we had a particular focus on children’s attitudes towards the news. We found that most children were not engaging with the news in general, and some were actively avoiding it due to perceptions that it was boring and unengaging. However, we did find that some children were actively following certain types of news, such as sports updates, without themselves classifying this as news. We saw this trend continue in wave 5.

As we have seen this year, in previous years children were absorbing most of their news from social media, such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat Stories, and most felt that this provided them with a good understanding of the events they were interested in.

Parental and school influence were important factors in whether children were engaging with news. Some of the children most actively engaged in the news came from homes where news was considered to be important. Looking at levels of trust, most were more likely to trust bigger news stories which they had heard about in several places. Understanding of the term ‘fake news’ varied, and most could not understand why people might invent news stories, although we do not know how attitudes towards fake news have shifted in recent years.

Summary

Some children were using smart speakers, but not on a regular basis or for in-depth tasks.

- Some children had access to smart speakers, but primarily used this for humour, or on an ad-hoc basis.

The children who had access to smart speaker technology were primarily using Alexa, a cloud-based voice service provided by Amazon, on a household Amazon Echo speaker. Most used smart speakers on an ad-hoc basis for one-off tasks or fun, as opposed to doing so for routine or in-depth tasks.

For example, Suzy, aged nine, said her household inherited an Alexa when her aunt decided to get rid of hers. She said her mum barely used it, and that she used it from time to time, either to “tell her jokes” or to help her with one-off questions she had during homework, such as checking the spelling of a word or times tables.

Similarly, Jack, 14, said his household got an Alexa Echo last Christmas, but admitted that he rarely used it, and only then for basic practical questions such as checking the date and time. Seventeen-year-old Grant’s family primarily used his household’s Echo to instruct it to play music for his dog, Pumpkin, when the family went out, so she wouldn’t get too worked up or lonely.

“I tell it [Alexa] to put on music for the dog when I go out, but that’s about it.”

| Grant, 17



Social media

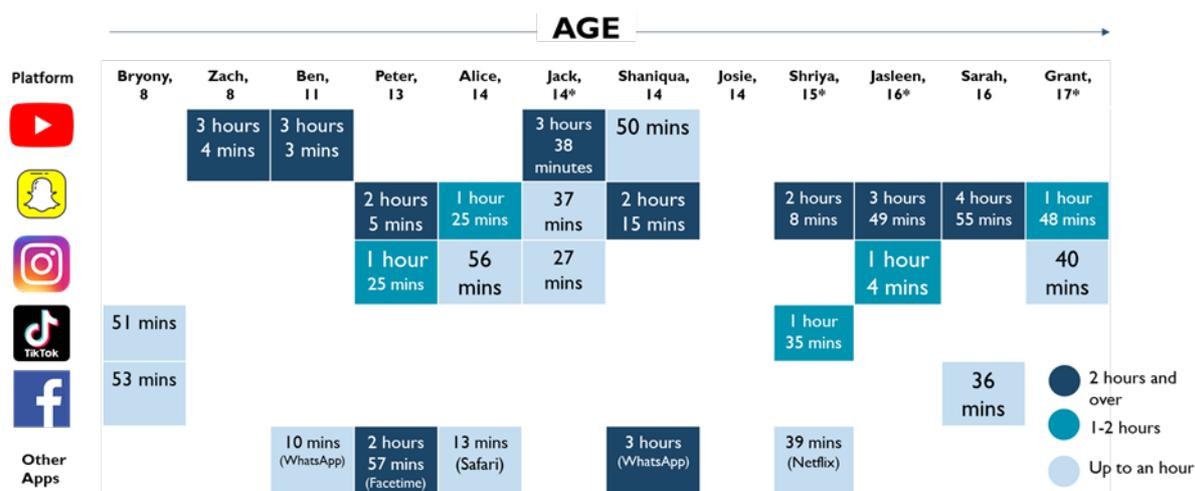
Summary

YouTube and Snapchat were the most popular apps in the sample.

- Our recording of children's device use suggests that many children were using YouTube and Snapchat daily
- Snapchat was particularly used by older girls in the sample.
- TikTok, an app for creating lip-syncing music videos, was popular with younger children.

Screen-recording techniques revealed daily app usage data from each child's three most-used apps, which are shown in the table below.

Daily data usage from the children’s most popular apps on personal devices²⁴



*Figures come from screen record data. Different devices display this in weekly or daily calculations. To enable comparison we have estimated the daily amount from those with weekly data-sets. NB this data was not available for every child, depending on their device settings.

As the table above shows, YouTube and Snapchat were the most popular apps across the sample, and most of the children used these apps daily. As discussed above, younger boys liked YouTube, whereas Snapchat was particularly popular with older girls in the sample. On personal devices, Snapchat was the most-used app for Alice, Shriya, Jasleen, Josie and Sarah, with screen-recorded data revealing that Sarah, aged 16, had spent 29 hours on Snapchat in the past week, and Jasleen, 16, had spent 26 hours. It is worth noting that this was during the summer holidays, when the girls had more time on their hands than in term time.

Alice, 14, said her main social media platform was Snapchat, and she explained that the imagery she saw on this app was different to that she saw on Instagram.

“On Instagram you post nicer pictures of yourself where you’re all ready to go out. People don’t really post pictures of themselves on Snapchat. They’ll post a picture of a friend or some food; they’ll show where they are.”

Alice, 14

She especially liked Snap Maps – a feature on Snapchat where a user can share their live location with other users. At the time of the interview it was the summer holidays and she enjoyed seeing people she knew all over the world.

²⁴ Such as mobile phones or tablets

“It’s nice to see where people are at [using Snap Maps].”

| Alice, 14

Shaniqua, 15, also used Snapchat regularly, although her main messaging app was WhatsApp. She said she preferred Snapchat to Instagram mainly because of the impermanence of the images. She felt that the temporary nature of Snapchat, which deletes photos after they have been viewed, made the app more fun to use.

Ahmed, 13, also used Snapchat regularly, and had downloaded a related app called Yolo, which allowed him to put questions to his friend-base on the app, from which answers fed back to him in anonymised form. He could then share these with his Snapchat friends if he liked.

“There’s this app called Yolo. If you go on your [Snapchat] story and swipe up, you can get anonymous messages.”

| Ahmed, 13

Some children, especially younger children, were interested in using TikTok, the video-sharing app in which users create short-form videos, often of themselves lip-syncing to audio provided in the app. Bryony, 10, used it after friends at school convinced her to make a video for a joke, and she realised she liked it and the attention she received as a result. She primarily made videos to share with her friends, and sometimes used a related app, Zoomerang, which helped her create the videos to fit templates set by TikTok, and later share them on TikTok or Instagram.

“On TikTok you can do street dancing to different music. I normally just scroll down it and make a few.”

| Bryony, 10

Zak, 10, also downloaded TikTok and began using it after talking to friends at school and wanting to find out what it was.

“They started talking about it and I didn’t know what it was so I asked them what it was, and they said it was this cool app where you can friend each other. So, I downloaded it.”

| Zak, 10

Building on previous insight:

Previous uses of Snapchat and TikTok (then called Musical.ly)

In Wave 4, a new trend spread through the sample in which children were using Snapchat to maintain a daily 'streak'²⁵ with their contacts. Many of the children were maintaining their 'streak' through sending daily photos to their friends, sometimes containing just a blank image or the letter 's'. Some were heavily invested in maintaining and maximising their 'Snapstreaks' and were keen to collect the numerical and 'emoji trophy' awards they could accrue through increasing their 'streak'. Others rejected the Snapstreak trend, including a few who had previously been invested but now felt it to be a waste of time.

By the following year, there had been a significant decline in the popularity of Snapstreaks, and the majority of children were no longer sending these. This year, no child reported sending Snapstreaks to their friends.

In Wave 5, several girls in the sample started to use TikTok (then called Musical.ly). Most were watching content on the platform, which, as now, consisted of a random stream of videos posted by other users, many of whom strangers. This user-generated content was unpredictable, and could contain strange or unexpected themes, which could potentially make children feel uncomfortable if they came across something they didn't like or understand. One or two uploaded their own content as well as watching content uploaded by others. This app has become more widely known and used within the sample than in previous years, although it is still predominantly used by girls.

These examples highlight the speed at which children adopt new services, and older services fall out of favour.

Summary

The line between the general public and online influencers is increasingly blurred; some children were more likely in this wave to post content mimicking influencers.

- Children were following an increasing number of peer-to-peer or local influencers alongside big-name stars.
- Some children were posting imagery or videos emulating content they had seen influencers post online.
- Specific platforms, like TikTok, encouraged children to follow a set template to create content, which was promoting copycatting behaviour.

The research found that there was not such a clear divide this year between 'YouTubers' and the general public as in previous years. Instead, there was a broad spectrum in which children followed many types of influencer, ranging from big names to the general public.

For the purposes of this report, we have labelled these 'influencers', 'micro-influencers' and 'nano-influencers'. These are terms used elsewhere, and there is some overlap and discrepancy in how the numbers are used, both by respondents and in wider discourse. In general, the terms are used to define the below:

- **Influencers:** Influencers are generally social media users with more than 1,000,000 followers who exert influence over the digital and material consumption habits of their audience. 'Influencer

²⁵ A Snapstreak (often called a 'streak' by children in the sample) occurs when two people have exchanged Snapchats back and forth for more than three consecutive days. The streak denotes the number of days the two parties have exchanged messages. In past years, having many high streaks was something of a status symbol for children.

Marketing' is now a well-established advertising technique, where 'expert' influencers promote a product through public use of it on their channel.

- **Micro-influencers:** Micro-influencers are individuals with social media followings of between 1,000 and 1,000,000 people, who are considered influential in a particular niche – for instance, cookery, fitness, or fashion. These smaller-scale influencers tend to be more amenable to direct engagement with their followers.
- **Nano-influencers:** Nano-influencers are social media users at the lower threshold for micro-influencers, with followings of between 1,000 and 5,000 people, who are influential at a local level. They are usually trying to build a profile as a public figure.

While children in the study still followed some of the big-name YouTubers who they had followed in previous years (such as Zoella with 1.2 million followers and Kylie Jenner with 145 million followers), they were increasingly following less well-known names with smaller followings and sometimes more niche interests. Through social media tracking and screen recording, the research found that children were sometimes posting copycat content from the influencers they followed. And as most had personal devices, they could post content without adults intervening, which meant adults had very little oversight of what they were sharing. There was also an element in the study that some children were aware that they could monetise their online following, or transfer this into status of some kind, and one or two had given themselves professional titles in their online profiles.

For example, one male respondent was following Wheelie Kay on Instagram – a micro-influencer posting about bikes with 139,000 followers at the time of this research. Wheelie Kay had recently posted a video of himself riding recklessly through a busy London street on his bike. Sometime after this video was posted, the boy uploaded a similar video of himself riding his bike (the same model as Wheelie Kay) through the roads in his home town²⁶. The boy tagged Wheelie Kay in this post, and several other posts in which he was posting about bikes or cycling. On his own online profile, the respondent referred to himself as a “local business”, although he could only think of one example of a business transaction he had engaged in personally: selling a bike part online.

Some of the children knew people who were in some ways an ‘influencer’. For example, Jasleen, 16, said her best friend was a beauty influencer, and screen-recorded data showed that this friend had over 25,000 followers on Instagram. Jasleen reported that her friend had started making money by posting images of products and tagging them. Jasleen, who herself had 3,900 followers at the time of the research, had started to emulate some of these behaviours. Like the boy labelling himself a “local business” in his profile, Jasleen referred to herself as a “public figure” in hers.

Even at the younger end, children were emulating the online behaviours of those they followed. For example, Zak, 10, was a big YouTube fan, and especially liked the YouTuber Dan TDM, whom he had met at a YouTube convention this year. The letters TDM in Dan TDMs name stand for ‘The Diamond Minecart’—a reference to the game Minecraft. Zak had his own YouTube channel, and in it he had added the letters ‘TDM’ to the end of his name in reference to his favourite YouTuber, despite not really posting anything about Minecraft.

²⁶ Revealing Reality’s ethics and safeguarding policy requires researchers to intervene in the case of immediate or ongoing risky behaviours witnessed during interviews. No action is required for one-off or historic risky behaviours, although any signs of ongoing risky behaviour will be reported to parents for children under the age of 16. The full ethics and safeguarding policy can be found in [Annex I](#) and further details are on page 3.

Building on previous insight:

The development of YouTuber and ‘influencer’ culture

YouTube has been a popular source of content for children throughout all waves of the research, and while some participants were already watching YouTubers in waves 1 and 2, they became extremely popular in wave 3, with many older children watching daily vlogs from their favourite YouTubers. The research explored how some YouTubers were seen to be living aspirational lives, how watching promotional videos from YouTubers increased awareness among children of product endorsement and sponsorship to some extent, and how some children had been influenced to make purchases after seeing these products endorsed by the YouTube personalities they watched.

In wave 4, we saw a decline in popularity of YouTubers, in particular among older viewers, although YouTube as a platform was still extremely popular for most children in the sample, and younger children still enjoyed watching YouTubers. In wave 5, this had not shifted much, although it was found that children were specifically using YouTube to seek out content to which they related. And as we have seen already, in wave 6 peer-to-peer influencers are increasingly popular alongside prior big-name influencers.

‘I don’t follow them [YouTubers] as much as I used to.’

Alice, aged 12, in wave 4

Summary

Most children wanted the status and reputation that having a positive image online could bring.

- Some children talked about how becoming ‘known’ online was desirable as it could give you ‘clout’ (i.e. influence) both online and offline.
- Most were concerned with signifiers of popularity online, such as the amount of ‘likes’ received, number of friends, or ‘follower-to-following ratio’.
- However, there was pushback against being too ‘visible’ from some in the sample, and some reported it wasn’t ‘cool’ to be seen to be trying too hard.

Most children felt that garnering a recognised online presence could gain them status, both online and offline. Some children spoke about the concept of ‘clout’ as a name for the influence you could gain from becoming known. For example, Shaniqua, 15, explained that people might do certain things online for ‘clout’ – for example ‘shout-outs’ on Snapchat, where her friends would publicise or promote her profile to their network by posting their profile onto their Snapchat Story. She explained that if someone did a ‘shout out’ for her, then she would receive a lot of friend requests or ‘adds’ from new people in her friends’ wider networks. She said that gaining this type of following would earn you ‘clout’.

“People do shout-outs. Say someone was to shout me out, then I’d get adds [people adding me] from that. [You do it] to get more views. They do it for clout, to be known.”

| Shaniqua, 15

This was not just a localised term: Shriya, also 15 but living in Birmingham, also brought up the concept of ‘clout’. She spoke about how ‘clout’ could be used as a form of influence online and explained that people would primarily earn this by gaining followers. She estimated that having over 3,000 followers would be enough to gain someone ‘clout’.

This desire to be known and gain influence could encourage people to keep their profiles public and accept requests from people they did not know. As Shaniqua explained:

“People might be public [online on social media] for clout.”

| Shaniqua, 15

However, there was some pushback against being too public, and Shaniqua explained that there may be risks involved. Living in an inner urban district in north London, Shaniqua, who reported having 500 followers on Snapchat, said that she was well-known in her area, and that people would sometimes shout her name out when she walked down the street. She couldn’t explain what she had done to become well-known, or whether her reputation was more positive or negative, but indicated that some people might have reservations about spending time with her, thereby implying that there was some risk involved.

“I’d rather not be known than be known – I’m quite known now and everyone’s like, ‘I don’t want to go out with you, too many people know you’. Whenever I go out after school, people always shout my name and people get scared because you know if people have ops, like enemies, or people that want to kill them or beat them up, it tends to be with boys and if someone shouts my name, they get scared thinking they’re coming for them too.”

| Shaniqua, 15

Shriya was more cautious about being known and explained that she deliberately didn’t use Instagram because she wanted to avoid having a permanently public profile. Instead, she used Snapchat to communicate with friends by sending photos that she said were more “temporary”, given they were automatically deleted after a while. She kept offline photo albums, printing off images and adding these to scrap books to record memories.

“I just don’t like the concept of Instagram. I don’t want a page of me just out there.”

| Shriya, 15

She went on to say that she was also keen to avoid the “drama” she heard happening between people she knew on Instagram.

“In secondary school people like to create dramas and stuff and a lot of that happens over Instagram. A lot of people have fights because that picture was posted... I don’t want drama like that.”

| Shriya, 15

While most accepted that having a large number of online followers was “cool”, some reported that it was not cool to be seen to be trying too hard or to be considered to be too “fake”. For example, Josie, 14, explained she “hated” people being “fake” online and Sarah, 16, was critical of her peers’ attempts to portray themselves like influencers online.

“They are trying to be promoters by tagging lots of people because if you get to be one you can get money for it. I don’t think this will ever happen and everybody knows that. They just want the attention.”

| Sarah, 16

Shaniqua explained that some children might be so driven by the desire to become known online that they might alter the way they portrayed themselves online.

“People always want to look good for other people so that people don’t judge them. I feel like people are different and have two personalities – one that they show online and one that they show in real life.”

| Shaniqua, 15

She said that some choose to buy likes by exchanging currency. However, she said these would be “fake”, given that the likes would not be earned through merit and would not therefore be an accurate representation of someone’s influence or ‘clout’.

“[If someone buys likes] it’s a bad thing. It’s basically being fake. Likes show how known you are in a way.”

| Shaniqua, 15

The younger children were aware that people might be fake online, but did not indicate that their motives might be to become well-known. Suzy, nine, explained that some people might lie to change how tall they looked, and that this wouldn’t be “cool”.

“If they’re doing something fake and you can see its fake then that’s just not cool.”

| Suzy, 9



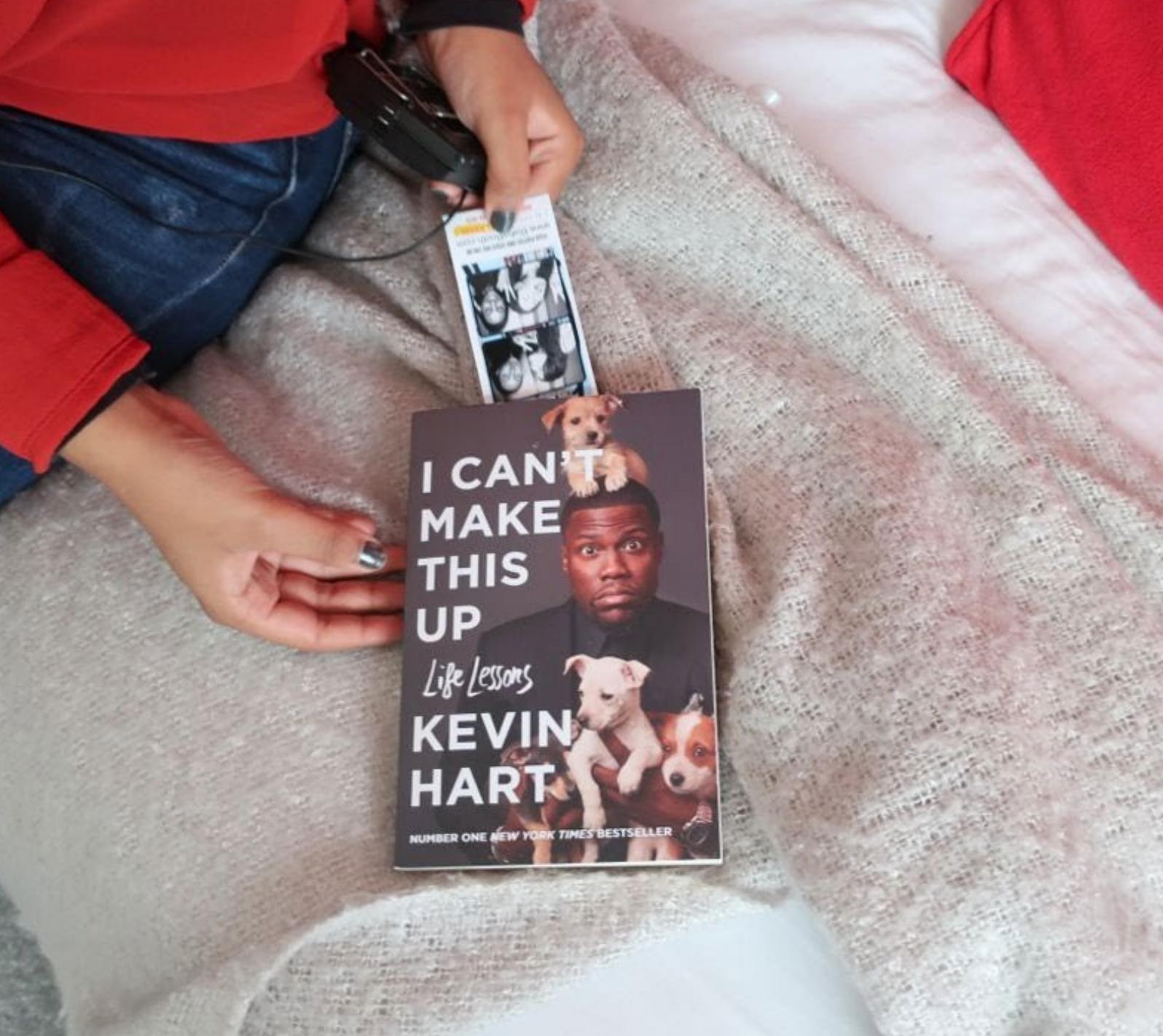
Jack, 14

Jack lives with his mum, stepdad and stepbrother in a small town in the south of England. He will do his GCSEs next year, and his mum reported that in the past year he had had 'ups and downs', mainly relating to his behaviour.

He is interested in bikes and mechanics and spends a lot of time out riding in his local area. During interviews he reported that he used Snapchat, but although he had Instagram and Facebook, he didn't really use either platform often, as he was too busy with his bike. However, later screen-recorded tracking revealed he did in fact use Instagram frequently to post and follow content he found interesting.

He reported not really feeling any pressure to portray himself in a certain way on social media, but social media tracking showed he was emulating content posted by his favourite influencers in order to develop his own posts.

"I don't really care what others do on social media – they can do what they like."



Shriya, 15

Shriya lives in Birmingham with her parents and two younger brothers. Her mum is a teacher and has spoken to Shriya openly about staying safe online.

Shriya likes sending pictures to her friends via Snapchat and will sometimes use a face-editing app called YouCam Makeup to smooth out her skin and alter the shape of her face. However, despite caring about her image in photos sent to close friends, she is vigilant about not sharing these images more widely and does not use Instagram for that reason. She explained that she is worried about the implications of anyone being able to find out who she is by looking on the platform, and also mentioned that she finds the permanence of the images shared on the platform off-putting (in comparison with Snapchat, in which images are automatically deleted after being viewed).

"I don't like the fact that [on Instagram] you post a picture and it stays there forever."

Summary

Some children were keen to avoid anything that might detract from their online image, which led to a number limiting the content on their online profiles.

- Some children in the study kept content on their online profiles to a minimum, and several of these curated this content by deleting old images or those without enough 'likes'.
- As in previous years, some children had multiple social media accounts which they curated for different audiences.
- Some used dedicated apps to change their appearance online. These had moved on from the 'funny' and 'glamorised' filters seen in past waves to more hyper-real imagery that augmented their face in specific ways.

Children were keen to avoid anything that might detract from their online image, which meant that some were keeping content on their online profiles to a minimum and were risk-averse about the content they were posting. This is a trend we have seen evolve over time, and it was more pronounced this year, with some children's profiles featuring no online images.

For example, William, 15, had only a few images posted on his Instagram profile at the time of his interview. These showed him and his friends at their post-exam parties. During the two weeks of social media tracking that followed, he deleted some of these. It was unclear why William deleted these images, although Grant, 17, showed similar behaviour and explained that he tended to delete images he posted online if they didn't get enough 'likes'. In the previous year, he had deleted images of his Year 11 prom for this reason, and during the interview this year he did not have images on his Instagram profile, although he did have a couple of photos stored on his archive page, suggesting that he had shared these at some point and chosen to remove them. Grant explained that when calculating the amount of likes he expected to get, he would think about the number of followers he had. The likes received should be a significant proportion of these; otherwise it would suggest that the majority of his online friends didn't like the image shared. He was also concerned to maintain his 'follower-to-following' ratio, as he felt it wouldn't look good to be following many more people than the number who followed him back.

Shaniqua, 15, explained that getting 'likes' was something that many people she knew cared about. She explained it was important to get a lot of 'likes', and that a reduction in the amount of 'liked' images might look suspicious, with other users perhaps suspecting that the initial 'likes' were bought in exchange for money.

“Say they were to post a picture, and one day they get 400 likes and the next day they get like 10 likes. I feel like that would annoy people because [the likes] go down and people say, ‘Oh, you bought your likes’, so that would put a bad reputation on them.”

| Shaniqua, 15

Fourteen-year-old Alice's Instagram profile was similarly sparse, showing only two images, both of which were of her. When asked about this she said that her friends posted more images of themselves than she did, sharing pictures of themselves at parties or birthdays.

As in previous years, some children had multiple social media accounts on the same platform, which they curated for different audiences. For example, Bryony, 10, still had multiple Instagram accounts—"one for me and one for horses"—where she shared content about her life and content specifically related to her interest in riding for the Welsh Riding Squad. Similarly, Josie, 14, had two Instagram accounts, "a main one and a private one for close friends". Peter, 14, had recently set up a second 'joke' account on Instagram, where he

posted memes and jokes about the owner of his favourite football team, Birmingham City. He was proud of this account and used his own personal account to follow the second one and like the content he posted.

Several children in the sample were concerned about how they portrayed their physical appearance online, and some were using dedicated face-editing apps to alter their appearance. For some, this was primarily for fun, with younger girls in particular using filters or apps to change their face entirely. For example, Suzy, nine, was using the app Monster High to alter her face and make it look more like a “monster doll” through changing the face shape and adding in new elements through filters.

Some girls had been using filters throughout several waves of the research, although their engagement with these has changed over the years. For example, Jasleen still enjoyed the ‘fun’ filters available in Snapchat. She said she preferred the Snapchat filters to those available on Instagram, as the ones on Instagram made her face look “too big”. On Snapchat, she said she mainly used the ‘dog’ filter, which was her favourite.

“It [the dog filter on Snapchat] just looks cute.”

| Jasleen, 16

However, Sarah, who at 16 was the same age as Jasleen, said she felt she had “grown out of” these novelty filters on Snapchat. In previous years she had particularly liked the more glamorised ‘angel’ filter, which was formerly very popular with many of the girls in the sample. However, this year she said that not many people her age still used these filters, and she felt that they were “young and immature” as they “don’t make you look old”.

There was some evidence that older girls were using more aesthetically-focused face-editing apps to alter their appearance. Shriya, 15, for instance, was using the app YouCam MakeUp to alter her face before sharing images on Snapchat. She was private about sharing her online image on Instagram, and cautious about what she shared more publicly, but did share images with friends on Snapchat. The app, which she demonstrated during the interview, enabled users to apply digital make-up, altering the colours of their lips, skin and eyeshadow, as well as adding shadows and contouring lines to change the shape of her face and features.

There are other face and body editing apps available, although it was not clear if any of the children were using these. Many of these other apps explicitly market certain functionalities such as ‘amazing abs muscles’ or altering face ‘parameters’ to create more ‘beautiful’ selfies.

Building on previous insight:

Curating online profiles

In previous waves of research, we explored how children curated their profiles on social media. In early waves (2 and 3) children were primarily removing images that might be specifically embarrassing or might have received very few likes. In waves 1 and 2, for example, we saw how Alice, now 14, chose to delete videos of herself doing gymnastics and dancing that she had previously posted on YouTube. She subsequently felt she looked “weird” and decided to delete them.

In wave 5, however, the content exposed on social media platforms tended to be reserved for the images that the children especially liked or which had received a lot of likes. This is a trend we have seen continue this year.

We also explored in wave 3 how some children chose to curate their Instagram profiles by choosing to post images of a particular theme or colour. By wave 5, many of the respondents in the sample had multiple profiles on the same social media platform, which they intended to be seen by different audiences.

Summary

Despite keeping their profiles minimal, several children in our study were using a range of strategies to provoke attention online. A smaller number were also sharing more sexualised content²⁷.

- Children were posting content on social media, such as ‘polls’ or ‘countdowns’ deliberately to invite attention from other users.
- Some users were attracting attention online through posting or sharing sexualised content, sometimes using online tropes such as ‘shout-outs for shout-outs’²⁸.

Some children were deliberately posting things to provoke attention from other users online. In some cases, this was through using gamified elements available on the social media platforms themselves. For example, one boy posted online polls to other users on Instagram and publicised the results to all his network. In one, he asked users ‘What’s my favourite website?’ He listed multiple-choice responses, including Pornhub, YouTube and General Searcher. In a later post, he said that everyone who guessed ‘Pornhub’ had guessed right. On the top of his profile, he had also pinned a digital countdown to his upcoming birthday.

In another example, the same boy had re-shared an image on Instagram of a young girl wearing just her underwear with her face obscured. He had also re-posted the caption ‘DM her for SFS’. DM in this context meant ‘direct message’ and SFS meant ‘shout-outs for shout-outs’. This meant that if a user was to send her a direct message and ‘shout-out’ her image (by posting this on their profile as this boy had done), she would do the same for them.

Other children admitted they sometimes posted things online to get a reaction from other users. For example, Josie, 14, explained that when she found a mug she thought she had lost, she decided to post this on her Snapchat stories because she was bored, and she wanted to see what people would say.

There was evidence that some users were attracting attention through sharing sexualised content online. For example, Alice, 14, explained that some of her friends posted “slutty” photos, such as some where they had “half of their boob out” in order to get attention and comments from boys. She said one of her friends was recently caught doing this by her mum, and was grounded as a result, which she thought was funny.

One older girl had stored photos in her online gallery which looked to have been shared online on her Instagram account. The photos were somewhat provocative, showing the girl dressed in a swimsuit, but with her face obscured. It was likely that these had been shared online, given that they were screenshots that included an online poll available on Instagram. In this, users could rate how good they thought the photo was, while an interactive scale on the picture displayed the amalgamated results²⁹.

²⁷ ‘Sexualised content’ in this context refers to images children were sharing of themselves or other users in revealing clothing or underwear, often in sexually provocative poses, or with comments or emojis indicating sexualised undertones

²⁸ See glossary for full explanation

²⁹ Revealing Reality’s ethics and safeguarding policy requires researchers intervene in the case of immediate or ongoing risky behaviours witnessed during interviews. No action is required for one-off or historic risky behaviours, although any signs of ongoing risky behaviour will be reported to parents for children under the age of 16. The full ethics and safeguarding policy can be found in [Annex 1](#) and further details are on page 3.



Critical understanding and online safety

Please note, some of the findings set out below contain sensitive content that may be distressing for some readers.

Summary

Several children had seen upsetting content online such as violent or self-harm videos. Some said they had coping strategies to deal with seeing this type of content, for example talking to adults or searching for advice from trusted sources online.

- Some had seen violent content or self-harm videos and images circulating on social media. Several said they were able to cope with this, and some of these took action such as talking to an adult or searching for advice from trusted sources online.
- Some children had received mean messages or unsolicited sexual images.

Several children in the study could recall instances where they had been upset by something they had seen online. Some said that they felt able to cope with these by avoiding this type of content or talking to their parents about what they had seen. In some cases, they had been upset by fictional content. For example, one girl in the study reported that she was scared of the online character Momo, a fictional character at the centre of an internet urban legend starting in 2018. In other cases, it seemed that the content was of real-life events, or was made to look as if it was real.

‘The Momo Challenge’ (2018)

‘The Momo Challenge’ was an internet urban legend in which there were reports of children receiving private messages on WhatsApp encouraging them to commit acts of self-harm, violence or suicide³⁰. The claims of these reports were later found by the UK Safe Internet Centre to have been faked, with no cases of children receiving these messages verified. Several reports about ‘The Momo Challenge’ bore similarity to the ‘Blue Whale Challenge’³¹ reported in 2016 by a Russian news provider, with claims that seemingly unrelated suicides could be linked as they all belonged to the same social media group on the Russian social media platform VK. These claims were also found to be unsubstantiated.

However, the images of the character central to the story, Momo, were widely circulated, showing a sculpture of a woman with bulging eyes and a bird’s body, which was later found out to have been made by the Japanese special effects company, Link Factory³².

Due to the high media coverage received by ‘The Momo Challenge’, many children saw the image and some in our sample reported finding Momo “scary”.

Several children in the study had seen violence that they believed was real. For example, the girl who had been scared by the Momo character described seeing a video in which some children were beating up another child. She couldn’t remember where she’d seen the video but remembered in quite graphic detail the content she had seen.

“Some kids were beating up another child and then nearly shoving a wooden stick with nails in it down his throat.”

An older girl in the study had also seen violent and upsetting content online, including stabbings and real violence involving people she knew. For example, in one Snapchat story she had seen a boy from her school being beaten up. Other videos she had seen were less violent but still highly upsetting; for example, a video in which a singer had been involved in a car crash and had been filmed as they died.

³⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/feb/28/viral-momo-challenge-is-a-malicious-hoax-say-charities>

³¹ <https://cyberbullying.org/blue-whale-challenge>

³² <https://web.archive.org/web/20180820204911/https://heavy.com/news/2018/08/momo-challenge/>

“You see a lot of fight videos. A lot of stabbings that people record. People getting fought in the street...It’s really horrible to watch. I think what the hell did I just see?”

Even more concerning was a Snapchat video described by the teenager who saw it as “torture”. She did not know who had posted or shared the video but remembered the details vividly.

“The torture I saw was on someone’s story. It was like there was a boy on the floor and he was just getting tortured by some other person. They cut him up. They cut his ears off and his tongue off then sliced his neck...I felt sick, it’s not nice.”

This girl said that she tried to avoid this type of content after seeing it the first time, and looked for the ‘sensitive content’ label on Instagram. However, she indicated this was not sufficient to prevent younger children from seeing inappropriate content on the platform³³.

“There are sometimes videos on Instagram but it always says ‘sensitive content’. You have to press it to watch it, but all you have to do is press the button. You could be like 10 years old.”

Two of the boys had seen the ‘dead body’ video³⁴ posted by the YouTuber Logan Paul from his visit to the ‘suicide forest’ in Japan. One said that it had a content warning on the video, but he had clicked it anyway as it had what he called “a clickbait title”.

The other explained that he had been especially upset after stumbling upon videos of animal abuse online. He saw an image of a man punching a dog in the face and another of someone flushing a hamster down the toilet, which made him cry. He said on this occasion he talked to his mum who comforted him, and he did not report any long-standing effects from seeing the content. The videos were originally posted on TikTok but had subsequently been shared on Instagram.

Two girls had seen images of self-harm online. One said she knew of this happening at school and on three or four occasions had been sent images of people she knew cutting themselves or showing their cuts on Snapchat. She said she felt out of control in these instances because she was not with them and couldn’t intervene. In

³³ In line with Revealing Reality’s ethics and safeguarding policy, researchers are careful that respondents know they are not able to give professional advice or health or mental health assessments, although information sheets signposting to further support from relevant professional bodies are provided at the end of each interview. The ethics and safeguarding policy requires researchers to intervene in the case of immediate or ongoing risky behaviours witnessed during interviews. No action is required for one-off, historic risky behaviours, although any signs of ongoing risky behaviour will be reported to parents for children under the age of 16. The full ethics and safeguarding policy can be found in [Annex 1](#) and further details are on page 3.

³⁴ This widely-shared video shows Logan Paul – an American YouTube star -- at the Aokigahara forest at the base of Mount Fuji, known to be a frequent site of suicides. In the video Paul shows footage of a dead body, as well as his reaction to it. The video received negative press attention after it was felt the YouTuber was insensitive.

order to learn more about the issue and what she could do to help she went on to the NHS website to see what she could learn.

“It [self-harm content on Snapchat] goes around my whole school. It’s such a common thing... you don’t really learn about it at school— [or when] you do, but it’s not that helpful.”

She was worried that she would upset her friends by telling an adult about the self-harm content, so instead she looked online for advice on how to deal with the situation. The other girl was similarly unsure what to do about the self-harm content she had seen.

“I saw [self-harm] on Snapchat. I saw some girl—she had her arm up and she was crying, and she had slices all down her arm. It’s sad—I don’t know why she did it.”

A few of the children reported being exposed to sexualised content online, such as pornographic imagery, nudity or provocative images. The mum of one of the younger boys explained how her son and some of his friends at a birthday party had accidentally seen pornographic imagery after typing ‘bra’ into Google as a joke.

Two girls in their teens each explained that they had received sexualised imagery from people on Snapchat. One said that she sometimes received explicit photos from boys at school. She didn’t know whether her friends had received these as well. She estimated that she received them about once a month. The other also said she was being sent pictures of people’s “private parts” but that she did not know who these came from. She had a public Snapchat account, and said that when this happened, she just blocked the people sending them.

Building on previous insight:

Upsetting content online and the report button

In wave 4 we explored children’s perceptions of the report button, and whether they were likely to use it in real-life circumstances. It was found that most of the children were aware of the report button and how to access it on all the social media platforms they used.

Many of the children had seen content that might need to be reported, such as explicit photos or examples of hate speech, but most had not reported it. The report button was not seen as an effective way of policing online content and the children felt it was more effective to reply to the message themselves or ignore it. Few respondents felt that clicking the report button would be an effective way of preventing online abuse, and some clicked it to report friends as a joke.

‘You can report stuff, but I’ve never actually done it myself.’

Grant, aged 15, in wave 4

As we have seen already, in this wave some children in the sample have adopted their own strategies for coping with this type of content to an even greater extent than in previous waves.

Summary

Most children felt that people should treat one another well online. There were, however, some instances of mean or bullying behaviour, including teenagers getting ‘revenge’ on one another online.

- Most children felt that people should treat each other online as well as they would expect to be treated offline.
- However, a couple of participants could recall mean comments or online bullying they had seen or been involved in.
- There were some examples of teenagers they knew getting revenge online after falling out, by posting secrets online or setting up fake accounts.

Most children felt that people should treat one another well online, and said they tried to treat others in this way. However, some could recall instances when they had seen people be mean to each other online. For the boys this was primarily hostile comments they had heard or read while gaming. For example, Freddie, eight, had previously owned a headset to play online games with. He had started arguing with a school friend while playing Fortnite, which led to further arguments at school, and Freddie leaving the boy out of their gang of friends. When his parents found out the two had been saying nasty things to one another online, they confiscated the headset.

William, 15, reported he had sometimes heard the ‘n-word’ while gaming, but said that this hadn’t been aimed at anyone in particular. Jack, 14, said he deliberately muted people on the gaming mic and had not had any bad experiences with this online. Suzy, nine, had received mean comments in the chat on the game Roblox. She said some people she didn’t know had been mean to her on it, saying things like “Oh you’re fat, you’re ugly”. Ben, 11, had also seen some people being mean to one another in Roblox last year – for instance, people saying that someone was “a rubbish player”, but he said he would deal with this by reporting and blocking the other players and leaving the chats.

Other children had seen mean comments or bullying behaviours on social media platforms. For example, Sarah, 16, had seen examples of girls being mean to one another and posting “mean-spirited posts” or “edited” screenshots on Snapchat. She regarded this as “pathetic” and “not very respectful”.

“Sometimes girls send messages to each other saying ‘I’ll pull out your hair’.”

| Sarah, 16

Alice, 14, had seen nasty comments on some YouTube accounts like “go kill yourself”. She appeared to be fairly resilient to these and said she imagined people posted comments like that because they had nothing better to do with their lives.

Ahmed, 13, living in North London, had also seen examples of cyber-bullying among groups of boys at school. In some cases, these had spilled out into the offline world and become aggressive or even violent. He described an incident he had been involved in this year at school in which someone made a group chat on Instagram with “everyone” in the year, including Ahmed. Many people in the group started making mean comments to one boy in particular. These included comments like: “Why do you have an Instagram account? You don’t deserve it”; “Why do you have a phone you can’t afford?”; “Go hang yourself”. Ahmed did not explain how the incident was resolved, or whether adults were involved.

“Sometimes someone would push him [the boy being bullied] in school, but most of the bullying was done on Instagram.”

| Ahmed, 13

Jasleen and Sarah (both 16) each gave examples of people being mean to others online as “revenge”. For example, Sarah, explained how after a girl she knew “went with” another girl’s boyfriend, lots of other girls online changed their statuses to explicitly name this girl and call her a “slag”.

Jasleen said she had seen instances where people made accounts public after falling out with a friend with the express purpose of embarrassing them by posting photos that the person had initially shared privately – for example, less-flattering or “silly” photos. She had also been on the receiving end of some mean and racist comments, calling her “rat” and a “terrorist” because she wore a headscarf.

Shriya, 15, had also seen how friends could turn against each other online, and cited this as one of the reasons she didn’t use Instagram. She said someone at school had created a “rumour account” where they posted gossip about others. She added that one of her friends had been featured on the rumour account, with comments saying she “snaked” on other friends (told teachers about misdemeanours or shared personal information about others). Shriya said this was not true. She had also heard of incidents in which two friends fell out and deleted all of their shared photos, or dramas unfolding after one person chose to unfollow another.

Building on previous insight:

Mean and bullying behaviours and how children define them

In wave 3 some children were finding subtle ways of being mean online after becoming increasingly aware that their online behaviour could leave traces; for example, through adding or deleting people from group chats in order to exclude or hurt them. This type of behaviour was likely to come from outside friendship groups rather than from within them.

We also saw how, even in extreme cases, young people did not use the term ‘bullying’. Instead, they tended to use words like ‘banter’ to explain mild teasing between friends, and ‘harassment’ to refer to more severe cases. Children tended to resolve cases of ‘banter gone too far’ between themselves and were unlikely to involve an adult unless the case was severe enough to be labelled harassment. We did see a severe example of harassment in which an older girl (no longer in the sample) had been the victim of an ongoing, targeted online attack. She was instructed to close down her online profiles by the police after the school reported the incident.

Since then, children still do not tend to use ‘bullying’ and instead refer to people being ‘mean’ online. Most could cite cases in which they saw people being mean to others online, and there are examples of group chats still being used for this purpose.

Summary

Most children felt safe online and knew who to go to if anything made them uncomfortable. However, some had self-contradictory ideas about how to stay safe online.

- Many children said they would talk to an adult if they saw anything alarming online, although some reported not telling anyone when they saw something that made them uncomfortable.
- Children reported ways of staying safe online that they sometimes contradicted in practice; for example, reporting that it was risky to post images showing their school uniform on social media, but then posting these images anyway.

Most children had received clear messages from school and parents about how to stay safe online, and the majority knew what to do if anything made them feel uncomfortable. However, some reported rules of thumb for staying safe online which they then contradicted in practice, at least some of the time.

For example, Bryony, 10, explained that it would be risky to share details about her address or school on social media. On the last day of primary school, however, she posted many images of herself and her friends in their school uniform in which she named both their primary school and the secondary school they were going on to attend after the summer.

Some children said they avoided reading comments or engaging with other users on social media or gaming platforms. For example, Zac, 10, said he avoided engaging in chat functions on the game Roblox.

“You can speak to people [on Roblox] but I disabled it. Some people on it can be mean to you and naughty, so it’s just better to have it off because you can’t even see them.”

| Zak, 10

Similarly, Jack, 14, said he stayed safe online by only talking to people he knew, although social media tracking revealed that he was following a range of celebrities and YouTubers he didn’t know personally. He also said he never read the comment sections in YouTube.

Alice, 14, said she dealt with unwanted attention online by blocking other users. For example, she said she sometimes had older men adding her on Instagram and saying “hey”. When this happened, she said she’d block them. She also knew of some instances where her friends went into London to meet online friends but said she personally wouldn’t take a risk like that.

For Alice, living in a relatively small town on the outskirts of London, there were not many observable risks to sharing her location. She was one of the few respondents who used Snap Maps, and did not worry about others being able to see where she was.

“If I’m at a restaurant, [using Snap Maps] you can swipe with the location, so then people just know where you are and what you’re doing.”

| Alice, 14

In contrast, both Sarah, 16, in Manchester, and Shaniqua, 15, in North London were much more concerned about the perceived dangers of others knowing where they were, and both had switched off the maps function

on Snapchat.

Building on previous insight:

Rules for staying safe online

In previous waves of research, children were familiar with certain maxims or rules, notably those that applied online and offline, such as “don’t talk to strangers”. In most cases, children knew what to do, but couldn’t say exactly why, with most younger children supposing they might be “kidnapped” or have “something bad” happen to them.

We have seen in previous waves that as children age, they tend increasingly to break or bend these rules in favour of other things they value, such as keeping their account public in order to gain more friends or followers. We have also seen some examples of children entering personal details such as names or email addresses in order to gain access to free content such as streaming or online games. Findings from this year are discussed in the section below.

Summary

Parents tended to be responsive rather than proactive with regard to monitoring their children’s online behaviour as they grew up.

- At the younger end of the sample, parents were still monitoring their children online, through checking devices and using parental control apps such as Family Link.
- As their children grew up, parents were less likely to monitor their devices regularly or use parental control apps, and more likely to intervene in one-off events.

Parents of younger children were keen to know what their children were up to online and had devised strategies for checking up on them. For example, Arjun, aged eight, was not allowed to use the iPad out of sight of his parents, as his mum explained she liked to keep an eye on him to see what he was doing. Freddie, also eight, had a similar situation, and his parents had set house rules to limit time spent online and on devices.

Freddie had asked his mum specifically about whether it was ok to join games with strangers on the online game Fortnite. Together, they had agreed it was important to take time to play other users in a public game before accepting invitations to play direct games.

Nine-year-old Suzy’s mum had installed the Google app Family Link, which enabled her to monitor her daughter’s screen time, as well as which apps she’d used and for how long. It also allowed her to block or approve the downloading of certain apps. Suzy was not fully aware how well-monitored she was online, but she did know she wasn’t supposed to be watching “inappropriate” content.

“My mum doesn’t really care what I watch unless it’s inappropriate. I don’t know what inappropriate means; I just know I can’t watch it.”

| Suzy, 9

As children reached secondary school age, parents were less likely to regularly monitor their children online and were more likely to operate on a basis of trust, hoping their children would bring up anything problematic and intervening in one-off events. For example, 14-year-old Peter’s younger sister (aged 11) had been posting a lot of self-made content on YouTube over the past year, much of it copycat content she had seen from other

Youtubers. After reviewing the initial videos last year, her mum had largely left her to post content, and only watched the videos from time to time. However, she had intervened recently when her daughter had started to receive some mean comments under the videos which threatened to hack her if she didn't remove them.

Other children indicated that they were generally trusted to go online without a great deal of supervision, instead raising issues with their parents as they arose. For example, 11-year-old Ben's mum, a teacher trained in internet safety, said she mainly tried to "keep up an ongoing discussion" with her children. Ahmed, 13, explained that his mum trusted him online and did not need to monitor him too much.

"She [my mum] knows I don't just click on anything."

| Ahmed, 13

Building on previous insight:

Parental supervision online

Findings this year tally with those from last year: parents monitored their children online to some extent, but also explained that it was important to have open conversations and trust their children to make safe decisions online.

While parents were not overly worried about the information or content their children were sharing online, many had strategies for keeping up to date with what their children were doing. This year, we have seen this decline slightly; parents of secondary-school-age children are being less hands-on with online monitoring.

Summary

As children have grown up, some have shifted their social media settings from private to public in order to gain more followers and a wider online network, although one or two are more conscious of online privacy.

- Younger children emphasised how their settings were generally set to private for most social media.
- Some teenagers were more ambivalent about keeping their social media private, and some had multiple accounts and weren't always sure about their privacy settings.
- A couple of them, however, were more conscious of online privacy and avoided certain social media platforms as a result.
- Some children in the study had given out personal information in order to gain access to games or video content online, although a number had given out 'fake' information in these circumstances.

At the younger end, children were generally more 'private' online. Suzy, nine, Zak, 10, and Emma, 10, all had their TikTok profiles set to private, so only their friends could view the videos they made. Emma admitted that some of her friends had made their profiles public, but that she did not see the point in doing this herself.

"They [my friends on TikTok] are all public—whatever keeps them happy. It's probably bad, I guess."

| Emma, 10

Some children were cautious about sharing their personal information online in general, although their reasons for this differed. Arjun, eight, explained he knew not to give out his address online because "someone could find where you live and rob you or murder you". Others were more concerned about hacking; for example,

Peter, 14, knew that his grandmother's eBay account had been hacked recently and suspected this was because she had shared personal information in emails.

Teenagers in the sample were less cautious and more ambivalent about keeping their profiles private or sharing information online. For example, Alice, 14, said she thought her TikTok profile was private, but she wasn't too sure. She felt that she didn't have much ability to control her online privacy on Snapchat.

“Snapchat’s not really private, there’s no setting on it. People can add you as a friend, but they can only see you if you add them back.”

| Alice, 14

Jack, also 14, was similarly unsure about how private his social media was. He claimed he didn't really care about checking as he didn't use Instagram or Facebook much anyway, although social media tracking revealed he was updating his Instagram on almost a daily basis. William, 15, said he would accept almost anyone adding him on Snapchat, but said if someone he didn't know messaged him, he would ask how they knew him.

Shaniqua, 15, said she wasn't really sure how her privacy settings worked on Snapchat, but that it didn't bother her as she thought she was already on private and was by now used to how the app worked.

“I hear it all the time [about online safety], but I feel like I know what I’m doing so I don’t need to take note. My account’s already on private and I know who the people are that I talk to.”

| Shaniqua, 15

However, Shaniqua's mum revealed that she wasn't as private as she might claim, and relayed a story in which Shaniqua had recently given out her Snapchat details to an Uber Eats driver in exchange for free McDonalds.

Jasleen, 16, had a public account on Snapchat. Recently, she had created private stories on the account which she shared with 35 of her friends (all female). She removed family members from this feed if she was posting something she didn't want them to see.

Most children claimed they did not ever share personal details in exchange for other things. However, there were a couple of examples of children giving out details in order to access online features, although in some cases the information they supplied was fake.

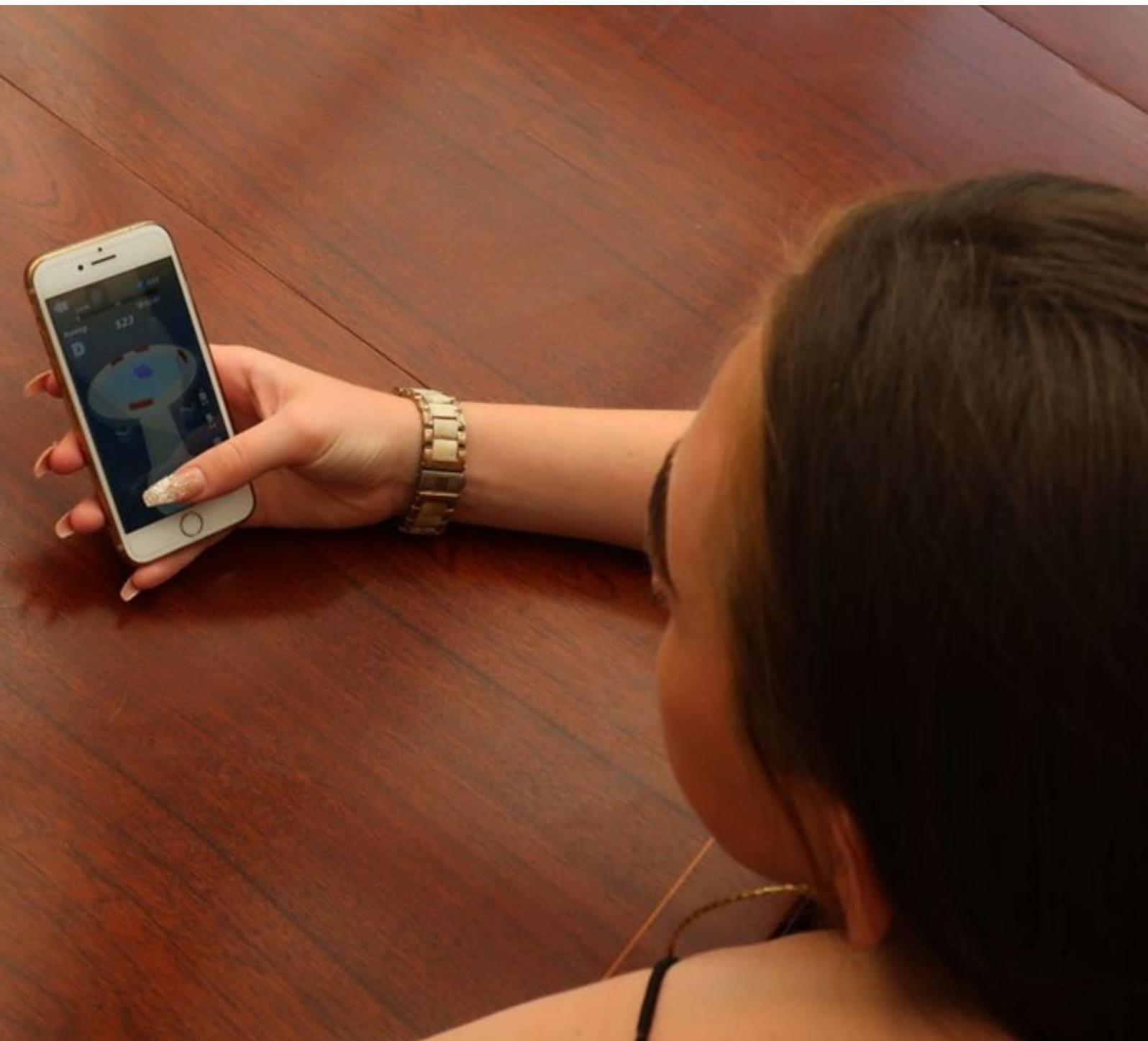
Emma, 10, and Jack, 14, both explained that they knew not to give out personal information online. Jack claimed he wouldn't do this, even in exchange for information or online services. Ben, 11, said he had given out his email address to get a YouTube account, but had checked this with his mum first. Emma said she often gave out fake ages and fake names online in order to avoid giving out personal information.

Building on previous insight:

Staying public online

Last year, we saw how some children kept their profiles public or let people add them without knowing who they were, which meant they were open to the risk of being contacted by strangers. Some children had developed their own strategies for assessing whether it was safe to accept other users as 'friends', based on certain pieces of information they could see on their profile or account. Often children were concerned about accepting 'fake' accounts as friends and were looking to ensure that the people they were 'friending' online were real.

Previously, we have seen examples of children critically reflecting on their own behaviour. In wave 3, for example, Alice had just had a talk at school about accepting unknown contacts online. After this, she reviewed her Instagram profile and realised she was accepting people she didn't know. She went through and systematically deleted anyone she didn't know from Instagram and reviewed her privacy settings.



Sarah, 16

Sarah lives in an urban area in Manchester. She has a large group of friends who live in the local area, and they often go to McDonalds or sit by the canal nearby. They talk about 'gossip' in their wider group, which usually relates to relationships and indiscretions, as well as their plans for the future – such as jobs or apprenticeships. A friend of hers has just had a child, which is a big topic of conversation.

She says she has seen a few different types of 'mean' behaviour online over the years, citing one instance on Facebook where a friend was targeted with mean comments calling her a 'slag' after she 'went with' another girl's boyfriend. She says she thinks this kind of public arguing is unnecessary as it doesn't need to be shared widely. She also reported a few years ago there were incidents of explicit pictures being sent around Snapchat, although she thinks this is no longer happening.

Glossary

Alexa: A cloud-based and voice-activated ‘assistant’ manufactured by Amazon that can be used on multiple devices, including Amazon Echo speakers.

Body-editing apps: Applications, usually accessed through smartphones, that allow users to edit pictures of themselves before posting on social media.

Clickbait: Internet content, the main purpose of which is to attract attention and encourage visitors to click on a link to a particular web page.

Clout (on social media): A user’s level of influence and status on social media. Users might post photos, stories, or videos with the intent of increasing their ‘clout’.

Coins (in-game): An ‘in-game’ currency either bought with money or ‘earned’ through watching advertising content.

Commentary channels: Usually broadcasting on YouTube, these are channels where users offer comment and criticism on various topics, such as sport, current events, or fashion.

DM: DM stands for ‘direct message’. The phrase refers to messages sent privately on various social media channels.

Emoji: “A small digital image or icon used to express an idea or emotion in electronic communication” (Google dictionary, 22/10/18).

FIFA: FIFA20 is the latest in a series of popular football video game, available on all major consoles. It was especially popular with boys in the sample.

FIFA pack: FIFA packs are collections of ‘rare’ players or game-features available for purchase to gamers.

Filters: An overlay that can be used when taking a photo of oneself. Popular overlays include dog ears and nose, which are overlaid onto the user’s face, and map onto their movements. Filters are regularly updated on Snapchat and Facebook and are also programmed into camera settings on some Android phones.

Fortnite: A multiplayer online game which can be played for free on multiple gaming platforms (e.g. Xbox, Play Station). The game pits players against each other to be the last survivor on an island, which is being attacked by enemy monsters. It is rated 12.

Gameplay videos: Gameplay videos are those in which a person uploads or streams a video of themselves playing a game for others to watch.

Gamification: The application of game-design elements and game principles in non-game contexts.

Influencers: Influencers are social media users with more than 1,000,000 followers who exert influence over the digital and material consumption habits of their audience. ‘Influencer Marketing’ is now a well-established advertising technique where ‘expert’ influencers promote a product through public use on their ‘channel’.

In-game purchases: Items or points that can be bought by a player for use in the game’s virtual world.

Lifestyle vlogs: Lifestyle vlogs are a type of video blogging in which the person videos their day-to-day life, letting viewers know things such as what they eat, what they buy, how they furnish their homes, etc.

Likes: This feature allows users to express their like of a particular post on social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook, by either giving it a ‘thumbs up’ (Facebook) or clicking the heart (on Instagram). Instagram allows other users to look at what you have liked.

Lip-syncing videos: Lip-syncing videos are those in which a person mimics singing to a pre-recorded soundtrack.

Loot box: Loot boxes are a consumable virtual item filled with mystery ‘goodies’ that could be useful to the player in the game. To gain a loot box, the player must either use in-game or real currency or win them via completing challenges.

Love Island: A reality dating show in which single contestants ‘couple up’ to compete to be crowned the best couple and win a cash prize. The show was popular with children in the sample both this year and last year.

Meme: A meme is an image, video or piece of text, typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users, often with slight variations (Google dictionary, 22/10/18).

Momo: The ‘Momo Challenge’ was an internet hoax where children and adolescents were encouraged, on social media, to perform dangerous tasks by a user named Momo.

Micro-influencer: Micro-influencers are individuals with social media followings, generally of between 1,000 and 1,000,000 people, who are considered influential in a particular niche—for instance, cookery, fitness, or fashion. These smaller-scale influencers tend to be more amenable to direct engagement with their followers.

Nano-influencer: Nano-influencers are social media users with followings at the lower threshold of micro-influencers - generally between 1,000 and 5,000 people, who are influential at a local level. They are usually trying to build a profile as a public figure.

Native ads: A type of advertising designed to blend in with the platform or site on which they appear

Nintendo Switch: A games console released by Nintendo in 2017, which can be used as a stationary or portable device. ‘Switch’ games use motion sensing and tactile feedback.

Musical.ly: Musical.ly (now merged with the Chinese social media platform TikTok and known by the same name) is a social network app allowing users to create videos and share them with a wider network.

Personal vlogs: A video blog in which the person vlogging informs viewers of their personal thoughts, hobbies, likes and dislikes.

Pirated content: Pirate content is content which is an unauthorised copy of copyrighted material. It is usually of a lower quality than the original and sold for far lower prices.

Post: A post is an image, comment or video uploaded by the user to a social media platform.

PS4: This is a popular gaming console manufactured by Sony. Gamers are able to play against one another online and can also access TV streaming services through the console.

Re-post: A repost is where a user posts an image or video that was initially posted by another user.

Roblox: Roblox is a free, user-generated, multi-player online game which allows players to create their own avatar, build their own games, chat and play games made by other users. As the game is user-generated there is huge variety in terms of what children can play, ranging from fashion shows to racing to building.

Selfie: A photograph taken by the user of themselves, typically with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media.

SFS: This stands for ‘shout-out for shout-out’, a phrase used on Instagram. The phrase is used to describe the sharing of another user’s image on one’s profile in return for a reciprocal share.

Share: Sharing is an action in which a user can choose to make a certain post from another user available to people they may follow, or their own followers.

Skins (in Fortnite): Skins, in Fortnite, are outfits/costumes that can be bought in-game using the in-game currency ‘V-Bucks’, allowing users to change the appearance of their character.

Slime: Slime is a gooey, sticky substance, manufactured and sold to children as a play item. Originally marketed to children in the 1970s, it became popular again after YouTubers posted videos of themselves making it at home.

‘Snake’ (inf.): Used to refer to someone who behaves in a dishonest or duplicitous way. If someone talks behind the backs of others, it might be said that they are ‘snaking’.

Snapstreaks: A Snapstreak is an activity in which users of Snapchat continuously send each other snaps everyday over a period of days, appearing as a corresponding number next to the name of the person they have kept up the streak with. In 2016, this activity became particularly popular amongst children, who tried to keep up the streaks for as long as they could.

Snap Maps: A feature on Snapchat in which a user can share their live location with other users.

Stories (Instagram/Snapchat): Stories allow users to post photos and videos for their followers to see that last for 24 hours on the platform before vanishing.

SVoD: Subscription video on demand. Refers to services such as Netflix where users pay a regular subscription to access content whenever they like.

Torrent: A torrent is a file sent via the BitTorrent protocol. It can be any type of file, such as a movie, song, game, or application.

TikTok: TikTok is a video-sharing social networking which is used to create short lip-sync, comedy, and talent videos.

Theme (on Instagram): A theme is a type of visual aesthetic (often a colour scheme) adopted by users on Instagram to give their profile a cohesive feel. Sticking to the theme can dictate which images are posted on the profile as users aim to keep the theme coherent.

Twitch: This is a live-streaming video service that mainly focuses on the live-streaming of gameplay videos. It will often broadcast competitions between different players.

V-Bucks (in Fortnite): V-Bucks are an in-game currency in Fortnite that allow players to buy items from the shop. V-Bucks can be purchased by players using real money or can be won in-game by gaining victories or daily login rewards.

Vlogger: A vlogger is someone who video blogs, otherwise known as 'vlogs'. This means that they upload diary-style videos online.

Xbox: An Xbox One is the latest in a line of consoles manufactured by global manufacturing giants, Flex. The Xbox One is primarily a gaming console but can also be used to stream TV programmes and access social media.

Xbox Live: The online gaming option available through the Xbox One where gamers are able to play interactively with other users around the globe.

YouTuber: A YouTuber is a person that uses, produces and uploads video content to the video sharing platform, YouTube. Children in the sample have generally differentiated between vloggers and YouTubers, according to how popular and well known the personality is, with YouTubers generally referring to famous personalities who make a living from their vlogging.