ESRO

Ofcom
Children's Media Lives:
Year 1 Findings

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1. About this report

This document provides analysis of the findings from Ofcom's Children's Media Lives study. This was begun in 2014 to provide a small-scale, rich and detailed qualitative component to Ofcom's quantitative surveys of media literacy. The project follows 18 children, aged 8-15 in the first year of the study, over three years and interviews them on camera each year about their media habits and attitudes.

The study provides evidence about the motivations and the context of media use, and how media is part of daily life and domestic circumstances. It also provides rich detail of how media habits and attitudes change over time, in particular linked to children's emotional and cognitive development.

The Communications Act 2003 placed a responsibility on Ofcom to promote, and to carry out research into media literacy. This report contributes to Ofcom's work in this area.

2. Executive Summary

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. It is a three-year study, tracking, as far as possible, the same 18 children, aged 8-15 in wave 1. The first of three waves of ethnographic research was conducted in autumn 2014. Subsequent waves will be conducted in spring 2015 and spring 2016.

The study provides an in-depth understanding of how this illustrative sample of children are thinking about and using digital media, and how this differs and is influenced by age, life-stage, family circumstances, peers and wider society. It will explore how digital media use evolves over time as children develop, and in response to external changes, such as new schools, friendships and access to new technology.

We examined a number of core themes in this first wave, including: children's use of devices, their activities, the dynamics in the family, knowledge of how content is created and how it is funded, advertising, online safety, and parents' concerns and mediation. The main findings are set out below.

2.1 SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

DEVICES

Apps and portable devices meant parents and children were not always sure when children were online.

Going online now happens on a range of devices, including tablets, phones and games consoles, and often through apps and games rather than via a browser. It is often seamlessly integrated into the functionality of the game, app or service. This meant that both children and parents were sometimes unclear about when the child was online and how much time they spent using the internet.

Many of the children shared access to devices with siblings or parents.

Many of the children shared access to some media devices. Sharing could be between siblings, between a parent or parents and one or more children, or between all family members. This was most common for younger children, who often shared access to mobile phones or tablets with parents and/or siblings.

Tablets and the iPod Touch were children's access point of choice for most activities.

Tablets and the iPod touch appealed to the children for a number of reasons. They were a convenient size, easy to use, and portable so children could use them in different locations in the house. For some of the older children smartphones also played this role.

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Lots of the children had 'hand-me-down' technology.

The children were often given old devices when parents upgraded. They were using parents' old smartphones and were given access to unwanted laptops or desktops as parents switched to faster models. Some families also had a range of second-hand devices.

ACTIVITIES

The boundaries between social media and gaming were blurred.

The children were using the chat functionality provided by online games to talk both with friends and with people they didn't know. Also, many of the younger girls were engaged in 'social gaming', like Animal Jam or Farmville, in which the purpose of the game was socialising and interacting with others. It had therefore become increasingly difficult for the children to disentangle where the 'gaming' element ended and the 'social media' element began, as the two were often seamlessly integrated.

YouTube was the go-to place for video and search.

Internet browsers and search engines were used for school work, researching purchases and comparing prices, but YouTube was the primary source for other kinds of information. YouTube was also frequently used for distraction or amusement, with children moving from one video to the next using the recommended or suggested videos displayed by the site or searching for new videos themselves.

On-demand and YouTube video clips were the preferred means of accessing audio-visual content.

'On-demand' TV viewing and video clips on YouTube were the most popular means of viewing content for the children. YouTube vloggers (online video diaries) were particularly popular, watched on a weekly, and in some cases daily, basis. Being able to watch their preferred content, often repeatedly, at the time of their choosing was important to the children and they were quick to turn to other devices and services when they did not find live TV engaging.

The TV set played an important role in family viewing.

Viewing on the television set was a valued way for the children to spend time with their parents. This was often live, 'occasion' viewing, but could also be via catch-up or DVD for favourite programmes and films.

FAMILY DYNAMICS

Parents did not always agree on what kind of content was appropriate.

Parents did not always have the same view about the kinds of content that was appropriate for their child or children. This was particularly the case with parents who did not live together. There were several examples where the non-resident parent had introduced content the resident parent did not approve of; such as 18-rated computer games.

Children with younger siblings watched younger content.

Parents often required that shared content accessed on shared devices was appropriate for the youngest child. This meant that some of the children in the sample were watching a lot of content aimed at younger children.

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Older siblings introduced the children to new content.

Older siblings often introduced new types of content and provided opportunities to access it. This content could be both inspiring and educational but also more adult than they might otherwise have been exposed to, with examples among the younger children including horror movies, 'kissing' and Miley Cyrus.

CONTENT CREATION AND FUNDING

The role of advertising in content funding was not understood.

Although lots of the children understood that advertising was a way of making money for an organisation, they did not understand the role of advertising in funding content. They were unaware that the channel or site displaying the advert would have been paid to do so.

The children had rarely given thought to how or why content is created.

The children, particularly the younger ones, did not think about the fact that content is created by people for a particular purpose or audience. They often took its existence for granted. However, sometimes an interest could be triggered, for example through 'The making of…' programmes.

Few knew that the BBC had a different source of funding to other media organisations.

The children did not think much about how different kinds of content were funded and most were not aware that the BBC had a different source of funding to other media organisations. Some had been told that the BBC was different in some way, but weren't able to explain how.

ADVERTISING

Advertising was seen as a mark of credibility and trustworthiness.

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

Traditional television adverts were the most likely to be recognised and understood.

Children were familiar with, and most easily able to identify traditional television adverts. Many of the children could also recognise the online adverts that bore most resemblance to TV adverts, like short video adverts at the start of a YouTube video. Most of the older children were also aware of adverts that pop up on websites or are embedded in the website content.

Product placement was almost completely invisible to the children.

Children rarely recognised product placement in television programmes, films or in YouTube vlogs. Nor did children playing video games like FIFA recognise as advertising the in-game sponsorship and advertising around the edge of the football pitch.

There was no awareness or understanding of personalised advertising.

Children were completely unaware of personalised advertising online, as were some of the parents. They found it difficult to understand how the process would work, or why companies would want to target them, particularly as they were not normally the ones making the purchases.

The children found it easiest to think of physical dangers that might come from being online

When children were asked to explain what might be dangerous about being online, all ages tended to focus on physical dangers, such as being stalked or kidnapped. Issues connected with online bullying, for example, or posting information or images that they might regret as they got older, were less top of mind.

The children did not always apply safety messages consistently in different contexts.

While the children could all repeat the safety messages they had learned, they did not always apply them consistently, or across different platforms or services. For instance, rules about not accepting friends on social media they didn't know in real life would be adhered to on that platform, but not when gaming. Similarly, although children knew not to use their real names on gaming and social media sites, many were using the same easily identifiable username across multiple sites.

The children did not always understand the reasons behind online safety messages.

While all the children could repeat messages about online safety learned at home and school, and explain what they were or were not supposed to do online, they did not always understand the reasons behind these messages. This was most pronounced among the younger children and was partly because adults often felt that the children were too young to have detailed information about the nature of the risks involved.

PARENTAL CONCERNS AND MEDIATION

The reality of day-to-day life could undermine parents' attempts at mediation.

Parents found that implementing mediation techniques consistently could be a struggle. A range of factors could make mediation more difficult, including the layout of the home, the amount of time the parent was able to be with the child, and the need to keep up with changing technology. Some parents were also unaware of the range of devices through which their children were able to access the internet, and as a consequence were not mediating all of their children's online activity.

Technical solutions were not always flexible enough.

Parents sometimes found it difficult to strike the right balance between protecting their children and ensuring they were able to get the benefits that media can offer, and technical solutions were not always flexible enough to facilitate this. Some of the parents had to remove content filters because they were blocking access to necessary content, including school and homework websites, and to content that the parents felt was acceptable and which their children were keen to access, such as Minecraft videos on YouTube.

Parents were concerned about children's exposure to inappropriate content and behaviour online.

When asked about their concerns about their children's internet use, parents highlighted: exposure to inappropriate or upsetting content; exposure to bad behaviour by others; such as online bullying, and risky behaviour by children themselves; such as speaking to strangers online or posting inappropriate photos. Parents of girls were more likely to express concerns about exposure to inappropriate, sexualised imagery, and parents of boys more likely to express concerns about violence and swearing.

PINs, passwords and software were not updated as children's skills developed and device use changed.

On first getting or setting up devices, many parents had put in place PINs or passwords, or set up parental controls. However, this initial investment became less effective over time as children used different devices, used them in different ways or became advanced enough to work out the passwords or work-arounds.

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3. Introduction to the study

3.1 ABOUT THE 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 conducts annual surveys among children and adults that seek to quantify, in a statistically robust way, media access, awareness, skills and understanding. Children's Media Lives aims to put a human face to the data. It complements the Adults' Media Lives study, a similar programme of qualitative research, running since 2005.

Children's Media Lives will be a three-year study, tracking, as far as possible, the same 18 8-15 year olds. The first of three waves of ethnographic research was conducted in autumn 2014. Subsequent waves will be conducted with the same children in spring 2015 and spring 2016.

3.2 TOPIC AREAS

This study will endeavour to provide an in-depth understanding of how the children are thinking about and using digital media, and how this differs, and is influenced by, age, life-stage, family circumstances, peers and wider society. It will explore how digital media use evolves over time as children develop, and in response to external changes, such as new schools, friendships and access to new technology.

A wide range of topics were covered in the first wave of research. This report draws these together into some key themes, set out in the following sections:

- **Section 5: Cognitive development and its role in understanding and perceptions of media,** drawing on both the children's responses and the researchers' understanding of developmental research.
- **Section 6: Media and device access and preferences,** covering the devices children have access to, the extent to which these devices are shared and with whom, which devices children are using for which activities and which devices they prefer.
- **Section 7: Media activities**, covering why children are using media, social media, gaming, YouTube and TV viewing.
- **Section 8: The role of siblings**, including competition for access, the impact of younger and older siblings on content consumption and preferences, and the role of non-resident parents on access to content.
- **Section 9: Critical understanding: content creation, funding and advertising**, covering children's awareness and understanding of how content is created, how different kinds of content are funded and whether children recognise and understand different kinds of advertising.
- **Section 10: Children's understanding of risk**, with a particular focus on what children know and understand about online risks.
- **Section 11: Parental approaches to mediation**, including concerns that parents have about their children's media use, the techniques they use to mediate it, and the challenges in trying to implement these techniques.

3.3 METHODOLOGY

Researchers spent three to four hours with each child and young person, in their home, interviewing and developing an understanding of their behaviours, attitudes and understanding in relation to digital media. The interviews on which this analysis is based were informed by a topic guide, developed jointly between ESRO and Ofcom, but the researchers allowed the child to determine the general flow of the conversations. A copy of the topic guide is included as an appendix.

Stimulus material was used to prompt discussion in areas of the topic guide that were less top-of-mind for children, such as the role of online advertising. Copies of the stimulus material are also included as appendices.

The ethnographic interviews were supplemented with short interviews with parents and siblings, to better understand the household dynamics and access to digital media.

Interviews were filmed and photographs were taken. However, in order to protect the anonymity of research participants, these are used only in presentations to illustrate the findings.

3.4 SAFEGUARDING

All researchers involved in interviewing the children had advanced DBS clearance and adhered to the ESRO safeguarding policy, available as Annex 9 on the Ofcom website. Researchers were careful to ensure that discussions about risks and adult content were conducted in an age-appropriate manner. These discussions were child-led so that the research did not introduce new or inappropriate issues or content to the children.

3.5 SAMPLE

The number of participants in the study is relatively small, but these children have been carefully 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 around the following variables:

- Age (spread across 8-15)
- Gender
- Location, including children in urban and rural areas and in all four nations
- Family set-up, 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

More details of the sampling and recruitment criteria can be found in Annex 2 on the Ofcom website.

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4. Meet the children

The children within the sample covered a broad range of different living and media situations. The following short summaries provide an indication of the variety of ages, family set-ups and media preferences. All names used in this report are pseudonyms.

8 YEAR OLDS

- Lily lives with her mum, dad and younger sisters in a small town in East England. She spends most of her time using her Google Nexus tablet, but is only allowed to do so in the communal spaces (e.g. lounge and dining room) where mum and dad can see.
- Ahmed lives with his mum, older brother and three younger half-brothers in London. Ahmed has ADHD and learning difficulties. Ahmed plays lots of games across multiple devices (laptop, Nintendo DS, Blackberry, PlayStation and Wii).

9 YEAR OLDS

- Nadia lives with her parents and two sisters (one older and one younger) in a town in the North of England. She spends a lot of time in the lounge, either watching the TV set or watching YouTube videos on the desktop computer.
- Peter lives with his parents and younger sister in a rural town in the Midlands. He shares a 'playroom' with his sister, next door to the main lounge, where they play Minecraft on the Xbox 360, iPad or laptop.
- Alice lives with her parents and older brother in a small village in the South of England. Alice is very entrepreneurial for her age, selling her loom-band creations at school, which enabled her to contribute to the purchase of her own iPad.

10 YEAR OLDS

- Jack is an only child living with his mum in a new house in the Midlands. He's a keen gamer, playing games he inherited from his father (who died last year) on his Xbox, as well as other games on his desktop PC and iPod.
- Josie is an only child who spends most of her time living with her mum in a small town in the West of England. She is skilled at entertaining herself, spending a lot of time outside in her garden. When she's online her mum lets her shut herself away in the study where she plays games on the desktop PC.

11 YEAR OLDS

- William lives with his busy parents and four siblings in a large house on the south coast. He doesn't really like the same TV shows as his three younger sisters, and tends to find a space for himself in another room to play computer games or watch movies.
- Sarah lives with her mum and dad and one of her two older sisters in a busy area in the North of England. Her dad is very worried about her accessing inappropriate content, so he has installed various parental controls on the family PC, so that she can access only four websites.

12 YEAR OLDS

- Carmen is an only child who lives with her mum, aunt and grandmother in Manchester. She is very mature for her age, and mostly uses her iPad to monitor her pocket money, do Spanish homework on a range of apps, and talk to her friends over FaceTime.
- David lives with his mum, older sister and younger half-brother in a small town in Wales. His dad has been 'in and out' of his life, and often brings technology and media content with him. His mum recently sold a number of his devices after discovering he was accessing sexually explicit content on YouTube.

13 YEAR OLDS

- Robert is an only child who lives with his mum in a Scottish town. He loves football and spends a lot of his time watching sports news on TV, accessing sports news on his smartphone and playing FIFA on his PlayStation.
- Minnie has four older siblings who no longer live at home, where she lives with her mum in the East of England. She bought herself an iPad with her own money, which she uses in addition to her iPod Touch to play games, watch YouTube and watch movies on Netflix and iPlayer.
- Calum lives with his older brother and parents in a large house on a suburban street in the Midlands. He spends most of his time in the 'snug' next to the kitchen playing FIFA on his Xbox or messaging friends on Facebook Messenger.

14 YEAR OLDS

- Eve lives with her parents just outside London and has an older sister who has recently gone to university. She spends a lot of time watching TV and is a keen Snapchat and Instagram user, frequently posting pictures of social activities with her friends.
- Ben lives with his parents and his younger brother on the east coast. His dad spends a lot of time working away, so when he's home Ben tries to spend time watching quiz shows with him, even though he doesn't really like them.

15 YEAR OLDS

- Brigit lives with her mum and three younger siblings, whom she helps to parent, in a small town in Northern Ireland. She is an avid social media user and has an account with almost all the major sites: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Ask FM, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube.
- Neil lives with his parents and one much older brother just outside London. He spends a lot of time on his laptop as he's recently started making YouTube videos about gaming.

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5. Cognitive development and its role in understanding and perceptions of media

5.1 EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Children's emotional and cognitive development underpins their media behaviour, understanding and attitudes. Understanding the typical progression of this development is therefore central to this research.

Academic research into children's cognitive and emotional development provides insight into their understanding of the world, and of themselves, and how this develops as they grow older. Typically, this understanding develops gradually, and it is not until they get older that they are able to grapple with ideas and concepts that are more abstract or outside their own direct experience.

Children's emotional development and sense of identity undergoes a similar transformation. Their understanding of their 'self' expands from one that is centred on their family, activities and abilities, to one which takes on board the views and influences of their peers and wider society. The development of empathy is an important part of this process, with children only gradually being able to understand that other people may see and experience the world differently from them.

5.2 UNDERSTANDING TECHNOLOGY AND THE INTERNET

To fully appreciate how digital media functions, the children in this research needed to understand that their own motivations, needs and intentions were different to those of others. Without this, the children were unable to fully comprehend that the media and content they consume was created by and populated with other people, and that those other people had a variety of motivations and perspectives. This was best illustrated in the way the children began to understand the internet. Each child sat along a spectrum with five main stages:

1. **'This screen lets me…'**- Some of the younger children had the most basic understanding, knowing that their device or screen enabled them to fulfil a certain activity, with little or no awareness of how content got onto the device or screen, or of the connection to the internet.

2. **'This screen is connected to the internet, so I can…'** – A few of the young children acknowledged the internet connection and were aware that this was the mechanism by which the screen or device enabled them to fulfil a certain activity.

3. **'My friends are on the internet so I can…'** – As children got older, they developed an awareness that the internet was a place to connect with friends, and therefore to understand that there were other people online.

4. **'There are some people putting things online so I can…'** – A few of the older children understood that much of the content online was posted by other people. Social

media and gaming, where messages and images were clearly linked to 'real' people, clearly demonstrated this link.

5. **'Everything online comes from other people so I should / can...'** – A minority of the children (one or two) had started to consider the notion that the internet was entirely created and populated by other people. A recognition of the 'people behind the screens' helped these children understand that they should consider who these people were and their personal motivations.

In our sample, age was the most important variable in determining children's understanding, with older children generally having a more sophisticated understanding of how digital media works and the role and motivations of others. For instance, Lily, eight, was at the most basic level of understanding. She saw her devices as no more than a mechanism for completing tasks and activities. This is illustrated by her relationship with her Kindle PaperWhite, on which Lily's mum managed the process of downloading books. How this worked was entirely mysterious to Lily and something that she had not previously considered in any detail.

In contrast, both the 15-year-olds in the sample had much better understanding of how digital media worked and of its social nature. Brigit's main motivation for going online was connecting with other people, which she did extensively through her use of social media. Neil also felt a strong desire to connect with other people online. He didn't have many offline friends and often turned to online activities, particularly gaming, to meet others and broaden his social circle.

Age was not the only factor to take into account. In some cases learning difficulties were a factor, such as for Ahmed, eight, who had ADHD and learning difficulties. Despite being in Year 4, he was at the educational level of a Year 1 child, and his ability to recognise agency and think about the world in an abstract manner was below that of an average eight year old.

Other children had a greater level of understanding than would be typical for their age. Alice, nine, and Carmen, 12, were both mature and knowledgeable, with a clear understanding of how different elements of the internet worked, and in particular that it could be understood as a 'collection of people'. This was in part a product of a more general maturity, and also related to the fact that both girls had parents who were keen to encourage them to explore how the online world could support their growth and development. In Alice's case her understanding was also influenced by her interests and activities. She loved recording videos, mainly of her dancing, and posting them on YouTube, where she had seven followers. This had increased her understanding of the internet as a means of connecting and sharing with other people and she was far more aware of the presence of other people online than most children her age.

Understanding of digital media was also shown to vary between siblings. Peter and Nadia, both nine, lived in two very different households at opposite ends of the country. They both had younger siblings (aged eight and six) who had a better level of understanding than their own when it came to how to use digital technologies and how they work. Nadia's younger sister, although only six, was frequently seen to teach Nadia how to search on the computer and how to use their mum's phone.

6. Media and device access and preferences

The extent to which children were accessing media content varied considerably across the sample. For some of the children, watching TV, browsing YouTube, playing games or using social media were their main leisure activities. Others were focused on other 'offline' hobbies or activities, and media use fitted in around these.

All of the children used some sort of media every day, but some were using it much more than others. The children had widely varying levels of freedom about their media use, ranging from children whose use was very restricted, with limited use of the internet and strict rules around watching TV, to children who were allowed a relatively free rein for accessing the internet, playing games, watching TV and using mobile phones. Most of the younger children were not allowed to use devices or access media content before school because it was deemed to cause a distraction. Most of the older children had more freedom and would sometimes spend time in the mornings accessing some kind of media content.

'There's no way we have the TV on before school. I'd never get her out of the door'

Lily's Mum, 8

After school and at weekends the picture was more mixed. Some of the children spent a lot of their time during the week doing after-school clubs or activities and pursuing other hobbies, maybe spending an hour or so before bed watching television, checking social media, watching YouTube or gaming. Similarly, at weekends they spent the majority of their time doing things with friends and family, and accessing media content would take up a relatively small proportion of their time. For a smaller number of children some kind of media use would be their main after-school or weekend leisure activity. In all cases, these activities would take place alongside homework, much of which was done with some online support.

'Well I have gymnastics on a Monday, and then Wednesday I have dance, and Thursday I have more dance, and then Saturday morning I go horseriding'.

Josie, 10

6.2 DEVICE ACCESS

The children in the research were recruited to ensure that there was a broad range of media devices across the sample. Devices available to some or all of the children included:

- Tablets (iPads, Nexus, Samsung, Kindle Fire).
- Smartphones (iPhones, Samsung Galaxy, Blackberry).
- Mobile phones that are not connected to the internet.
- Games consoles (Xbox, PlayStation, Wii).
- Laptops and desktop PCs.
- iPod Touch.
- TV and smart TVs (with Sky, Virgin Media, Freeview).

- E-readers (Kindle PaperWhite).
- Radios (predominantly digital radios, although with some analogue radio use linked to parents' use of analogue radios in cars or at home).

6.3 DEVICE SHARING AND HAND-ME-DOWNS

All of the households had multiple devices, including a mixture of old and new, many of which were shared. This could be between siblings, between a parent or parents and one or more children, or between all family members.

'I do catch up on quite a few things on mum's iPad. But only when I can borrow it'

Eve, 14

Across the board, TVs, laptops, desktops and games consoles were more likely than portable devices to be shared, with most of the older children having access to their own phone or tablet. However, the younger children frequently shared mobile phones or tablets with parents. Access to these devices was often used as a reward for, or to encourage, good behaviour. Many of the parents' devices therefore had a range of children's games and other apps installed.

Sharing devices between siblings meant that children weren't always engaging with their own choice of media content. They were frequently watching TV programmes or films, or playing games, chosen by siblings (and sometimes parents). In some cases this resulted in children accessing a wider range of content than they would have done alone.

'I watch Prison Break with my brother and dad. Only because they were watching it one day and I walked in the lounge and joined in.'

Calum, 13

Given that TV sets in the living room were most often shared by multiple family members, these tended to be the focus of the most negotiation over access and content.

Lots of the children also had 'hand-me-down' technology and devices which were passed between different family members depending on both their desirability and the needs of different family members. In many cases children were using hand-me-down smartphones and given access to unwanted laptops or desktops once parents upgraded to faster models.

This was the case in families with a range of income levels. For instance, William, 11, came from an affluent family and was one of five siblings. They had a lot of 'hand-me-down' technology and at the time of interview he had been given his mum's old iPhone. This had unlimited data allowance and he had changed it significantly to better suit his media behaviours (mainly by adding more games).

'It's my mum's old phone. I changed it all and got rid of her stuff. Now it's just full of my apps."

William, 11

Ahmed, eight, came from a less affluent background but also lived in a house with a large number of devices (so that everyone could 'get their turn'). There was a high turnover of devices too, with his mum frequently buying and selling second-hand devices to access better deals and make a little bit of money.

For many children in the sample, smartphones, tablets and the iPod Touch were the access point of choice for most activities.

'The iPad is my best friend'

Carmen, 12

'For my 11th birthday, I'm getting an iPhone 4S, because they're the best, they do the highest gigabyte, and I know how to use one.'

Jack, 10

They were popular with children for a number of reasons. They were seen as a convenient size, easy to use, and portable, so children could use them in different locations in the house. Ben, 14, often used his iPhone, although he also watched TV and sometimes (but infrequently) used the Xbox. He hardly ever used the 'family laptop' as he found it less accessible and less portable than his iPhone. Lily, eight, had access to several devices, including a laptop and TV, but her most frequently-used devices were her Google Nexus tablet and her Kindle Fire.

Most of the children were allowed to use these devices in both private and communal spaces around the house. Lily and Ahmed, however, the two eight-year-olds in the sample, and Nadia, nine, were restricted to using these devices in communal spaces such as the living room and dining room.

'I'm allowed my Kindle up in my room but I can't take my tablet up there. I have to use that down here'.

Lily, 8

Portable devices also appealed because they felt more personal to the children, enabling high levels of individual interaction with the device. PCs and TVs, in contrast, were used more for shared interaction and contact. For those who had their own devices, the intimate nature of the device was enhanced by the scope for personalisation, which could take a variety of forms. Children customised the photographs they had as background, the content they downloaded, the kinds of apps they had on the device and how they were organised, when they received alerts and notifications and how these sounded. Brigit, 15, had different categories of apps arranged on different pages, while Calum, 13, organised his apps by frequency of use and Lily, eight, kept hers in alphabetical order.

Shared devices tended to be less tailored to the tastes of the child, although some of the children were clearly the dominant users. Carmen, 12, had access to a 'family iPad' but she was by far the greatest user. Her mum had negotiated a folder for 'mum's apps' on an iPad that was principally personalized to Carmen's taste and navigational preferences.

Two children in the sample, Alice, nine, and Minnie, 13, had also purchased, or contributed to the purchase of, their own tablets. This further enhanced the sense of 'ownership' of the device. Not only could it become exclusively 'theirs' and be personalised solely to their preferences and behaviours, they also felt a sense of pride and achievement in having saved for it. For parents, this slightly changed the dynamics around monitoring use. It made strategies like imposing restrictions or confiscating the device more challenging and required them to rely more on discussion with the child. The children who had purchased their own devices were also quite emotionally mature, and conversations about responsible use were therefore easier.

'Well mum tried to ban me from using it, but I bought it, it's mine. So she can't really do that'.

Minnie, 13

6.5 GAMES CONSOLES FOR GAMING AND ONLINE ACCESS

Games consoles were widely used among the boys, but were also popular with some of the girls, such as Josie, ten. As well as traditional gaming, consoles were often used for searching online, most often for accessing content related to gaming, like YouTube videos in which games were discussed or demonstrated. Several of the children were playing games online against their friends or against people they didn't know, and were using the in-game chat functionality to discuss the game as they played. In some cases children used headsets but more often they used text.

'I want to get a headset with my birthday money so that I can chat to my friends'.

Peter, 9

These consoles were mostly used in more private spaces. Calum, 13, had his in the snug and Neil, 15, had his in his bedroom. Online gaming and chat therefore tends to take place away from communal areas and from parents.

6.6 THE IMPACT OF INTERNET-ENABLED DEVICES

It was difficult for both the parents and the children to recognise what was and was not online. This was partly due to the range of devices children were using (particularly tablets, smartphones and connected games consoles) where 'going online' happened far more frequently through apps and games than via a browser. 'Going online' felt seamlessly integrated into the functionality of the game, app or service without any need for a conscious decision to connect.

One of the consequences of this was that all the parents and children underestimated how much time the children spent online. Ben, 14, regularly played lots of online games on apps on his smartphone, but struggled to distinguish which games were online and which were offline. The result was that he did not consider this to be using the internet, and described himself as rarely going online, despite playing these games every day.

Many of the parents in the sample associated going online with using internet browsers. Some did not realise that their child could access the internet through other devices, or that when their child was using particular games or apps, they were online. David, 12, had ongoing access to YouTube in his bedroom through his Xbox, despite the fact that his mum had banned him from going online for bad behaviour. David's mum felt the Xbox was for playing games and hadn't fully acknowledged its online capabilities.

'I actually found out today that he's been watching YouTube on his Xbox. I didn't know that!'

David (12)'s mum

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7. Media activities

As we might expect, given the diversity of the sample, there was a wide range of media activities among the respondents. But there were some common themes, set out below.

7.1 WHY CHILDREN WERE USING MEDIA

Children's media activity broadly served three main purposes:

1. **Entertainment/distraction**: Children accessed media content as an activity in itself, as a means of keeping themselves entertained.
2. **Substitution**: Children accessed media content as an alternative or substitute for an offline activity, behaviour or relationship. Carmen, 12, was an only child and lived quite far away from her school friends. Her mum was concerned about her being socially isolated and was therefore happy for her to use social media services on her iPad, including FaceTime, What's App and Kwik, to keep connected with her friends.
3. **Augmentation**: Children accessed media content that enabled them to enhance their knowledge or skills to complete a task, hobby or activity. Alice, nine, and Minnie, 13, both loved making loom bands and frequently looked for designs that were better and more complicated than those made by their friends. Both girls searched YouTube for video after video that showed them how to improve their designs. Calum, 13, decided to download the Instagram app after he got a camera for his 13th birthday. Instagram enabled him to continue to think about and develop his photography even when he didn't have his camera with him.

These categories are not mutually exclusive. Many of the devices, channels and platforms that children used served several purposes. For instance:

- FIFA was both a form of entertainment in its own right and a substitute for playing football with friends.
- Vloggers, such as Zoella, were used as entertainment but were also used to augment children's knowledge of beauty techniques and products.
- Instagram could act both as a substitution for face-to-face contact with friends, and to augment a child's interest in design or photography, as we saw with Calum, above.

YouTube played a key role in all three 'uses' of the media and provided plentiful opportunities for entertainment, substitution and augmentation.

7.2 SOCIAL MEDIA AND GAMING

Use of the more traditional social media platforms varied by age, with Facebook accounts, in particular, more common among the older children in the sample. Most of the children with Facebook accounts claimed not to be using them, and younger children showed minimal interest in joining the network. Twitter was also seen as less interesting or relevant to many of the children in our sample.

'I don't actually use Facebook any more because, I don't know, no one's really on it. I have Facebook Messenger because you can have a massive group all talking to each other but without actually going on Facebook.'

Eve, 14

In contrast, Instagram and Snapchat were both very popular, and most of the children across the age range used them frequently. Eve, 14, and her friends communicated using Instagram or Snapchat. Instagram is a more public-facing site, while Snapchat was used to communicate with close friends in an unselfconscious way. Eve also used Snapchat to communicate with her sister, who had recently moved to university. Interestingly, despite this, Eve did not see herself as a 'social media user'.

'Instagram, you don't put up weird photos because people, you know, popular people, they see it as well.'

Eve, 14

Part of the popularity of Snapchat stemmed from its perceived privacy. The app allows users to send pictures and videos to contacts, which are deleted a few seconds after being read. The children were using it to communicate only with their existing circle of friends and enjoyed the intimacy and sense of fun that it provided. Many also liked the fact that the content was shared only with the people it was sent to, so they could be less concerned about being judged by those outside their immediate social circle, and were able to keep the content private from their parents.

'I don't mind Snapchat. Everyone uses it because it's only going to your friends, so it's very private.'

Minnie, 13

The ephemeral nature of the service was undermined by the fact that some of the children, or people they knew, took screen shots of the images, which could have a longer life and wider audience than originally intended. However, this was not of great concern to the children; most had not made the connection between taking screen shots and a potential reduction in privacy.

In contrast to the intimacy and immediacy of Snapchat, Facebook and Twitter were seen by many of the children as part of the adult world and slightly outdated. They were often seen as not targeted at younger people and therefore not somewhere they could claim their own space.

For some of the children, the idea of social media in general felt uncomfortable. Minnie, 13, did not have Facebook and had no interest in signing up for a profile as she found the idea of social media too 'exposing'. She was engaged in an ongoing battle with her mum, who continued to post photos of Minnie on social media despite the fact that Minnie had asked her not to do this.

It was also clear from the research that the boundaries between social media and gaming are blurring, with social media elements a common aspect of online gaming. This includes chat functionality both within and around the games, through headsets and text chat. This was often the case for FIFA, which was a very popular game for the boys. Headsets would be used to discuss the game as it was played, and conversations were predominantly focused on the game.

Calum's behaviour, 13, provided a good example of this. FIFA provided an alternative to being outside playing football, especially during the winter months when the evenings were dark and he couldn't go out with his friends. Instead, he played online against his friends, using a headset to discuss the game via the in-game chat function. Calum also frequently

played against people he didn't know but never spoke to them. He felt it was normal and unremarkable, but would have found it 'weird' if any of them had tried to talk directly to him.

Peter, nine, was also a keen game player and liked to play against his friends. He did not have a headset, but was saving up for one. In the meantime he communicated either by using the text chat available on his games console or by using instant messaging or FaceTime on his iPod Touch.

Many of the children, particularly the younger girls, engaged in 'social gaming', in which the purpose of the game was socialising and interacting with others. Examples included Animal Jam, Farmville and Minecraft. These games are played across a range of devices, including games consoles, tablets, smartphones and on PCs or laptops.

'My favourite game is Farmville. I play this one the most. These are all my friends who I help and who help me build my farm'.

Lily, 8

Josie, ten, frequently played Animal Jam unsupervised in her mother's study. The purpose of the game was to create and customise an animal character and den, but it also allowed her to chat with friends and explore the in-game world. Josie talked to several of her school friends who also played within the game, as well as a number of Animal Jam 'friends' whom she had not met in real life.

'Most of the people I talk to on Animal Jam are friends from school, but some people I've met because they have a really cool den.'

Josie, 10

Neil, 15, saw gaming as a vehicle for social interaction. He often played games online with people he didn't know. He actively searched for those people across other games-related fora, such as YouTube discussion threads. This was made possible because it was common for children to use the same usernames across their different gaming and social media platforms.

7.3 YOUTUBE, VLOGGERS AND VIDEO SEARCH

YouTube use was prevalent among the children, and for many, YouTube was the go-to place for both video and search. Internet browsers and search engines were used infrequently. If the children wanted to find out information, whether it was about how to improve their gaming, how to make new loom-band creations, how to achieve the latest hair or make-up styles or how to bake a cake they turned to YouTube, and video instructions, first.

'I normally learn how to do my looms on my iPad [using YouTube]'

Alice, 9

The exception to this was when they needed to search for information for school work or if they were researching a purchase. In these situations, they were more likely to use a traditional search engine such as Google.

YouTube was also where the children sought distraction or amusement, moving from one video to the next using the recommended or suggested videos that appear around the video currently being viewed. As with other media, children's engagement with YouTube was content-led, looking for topics, characters or programmes that they liked and were interested in. This behaviour was the closest these children got to traditional browsing, and video search was dominant for this kind of less-purposeful online activity.

YouTube was heavily integrated into much of the children's gaming activity. Many of the children watched YouTube videos about gaming. This could be to improve their own play; for

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instance to find out how to finish a particular level or complete a specific task, or it could be to watch other people play. Minecraft was an extremely popular game across our sample and this was particularly prevalent here, with several of the children spending large amounts of time watching Minecraft videos on YouTube and contributing to discussion threads linked to those videos.

Neil, 15, was taking this a step further. He had started making his own YouTube videos in which he included footage of his own game play as well as hints and tips about the games and more general chat. He believed that this could be a route to fame and fortune, like the gaming vloggers that he admired.

> *'Yeah, I really want to get money on this, and then when I earn money I'll probably become famous on YouTube.'*
>
> *Neil, 15*

The children watched an array of vloggers on YouTube and they were popular among all age-groups. A vlog is a video diary that is shared online (mainly on YouTube). At the time of the research there were a handful of highly successful vloggers in the UK aimed at a teen or pre-teen audience that were popular among the children. They had substantial numbers of YouTube followers (in most cases a million plus) and many seemed to make their living out of vlogging and associated activity, working with youth-oriented brands on promotion and sponsorship activities. Although there are also U.S. vloggers, the ones that the children in this research were following were all from the UK.

Popular vloggers among the children in this research included:

- **Zoella**, who started off vlogging about fashion and beauty products but has since extended her activities, publishing a book in 2014, *Girl Online,* and appearing on the *Comic Relief Great British Bake-Off.*
- **Joe Weller,** who vlogs about pranks, 'lad culture', sport, FIFA, exercise and gym behaviour. His blogs can occasionally include some strong language and explicit images.
- **Stampylonghead**, who blogs about Minecraft and other games.
- **MGH,** who blogs about FIFA.

The children in the sample were watching vloggers on a weekly and in some cases daily basis, waiting for their favourite's most recent videos to go online and watching them as soon as possible.

> *'MGH is the only one I watch because he uploads a video every day.'*
>
> *Robert, 13*

William, 11, was a fan of Joe Weller and subscribed to his YouTube channel. He regularly watched his latest videos in bed on his iPhone before going to sleep. He had free rein on YouTube even though he wasn't allowed to watch 'adult-ish' shows on TV.

> *'It came up on recommended saying do you want to watch Joe Weller and I just clicked on it once and then I've watched lots of his videos.'*
>
> *William, 11*

Peter, nine, was a big Minecraft fan, along with his sister Sarah, eight. They both played every day on their Xbox and shared iPad, and both subscribed to Stampylonghead's YouTube channel, as well as other Minecraft vloggers.

> *'We watch Stampy's videos as soon as they come out'*
>
> *Peter, 9*

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Children's interests and the devices and services available to them strongly influenced the type of audio-visual content the children sought out. For instance, if the child was interested in loom bands, they would be most likely to turn first to YouTube, on whichever device was available to them, to seek out 'how to' loom-band videos. If the child was interested in FIFA or Minecraft, they would be likely to turn first to the games console or other device on which the game was available, and then to YouTube to watch games-related content. If they were interested in Tracy Beaker they would probably look for Tracy Beaker episodes via their on-demand service or, if they didn't have access to on-demand, they might see if Tracy Beaker was on the TV, look for episodes on YouTube or even read the book.

TV viewing was still prevalent among the children, although levels of viewing varied according to personality, parental attitudes and factors like access to other devices.

When the children watched live TV they were fairly intolerant of programmes that they did not find engaging, and would quickly turn to other devices and services. Being able to watch their preferred content at the time of their choosing was important to them. This meant that their preferred means of accessing audio-visual content was not via traditional live viewing but instead through short-form, YouTube-style video clips and on-demand viewing, where they were able to watch the same episodes repeatedly or 'binge' on a whole series of episodes, at a time of their choice.

'Now I barely watch TV any more. Most of the time I'm on YouTube or something.'

David, 12

'I finished it about two weeks ago, Prison Break. I watched it every night for a few months.'

Calum, 13

Live TV did continue to play an important role as family viewing. In particular, key shows were used as an opportunity for families to sit down and view together. For example, Eve, 14, often watched documentaries with her parents, who were keen to watch and discuss more 'challenging' topics with her.

'Me, mum and dad, if we all sit down together it's usually for some kind of documentary. Sounds kind of sad, but I like them.'

Eve, 14

Ben, 14, also watched live TV with his dad. Ben's dad travelled a lot and when he was home Ben watched quiz shows and sports programmes on the TV with him as a way to spend time together, even though these programmes were not necessarily those that he would have chosen himself.

'Me and my dad watch football together, because my brother doesn't support Liverpool. He supports Chelsea, for some reason. So, it's good to watch it with family members.'

Ben, 14

Films and DVDs also played this role for some children.

'My favourite [movie] at the moment is Pitch Perfect. That's my dad's favourite as well and we watch it together.'

William, 11

8. The role of siblings

The presence of siblings had a significant influence on media consumption and behaviour in a number of ways. It inevitably meant that there was more competition for devices and more negotiation required over content preferences. In addition, the presence of younger siblings influenced parents' decisions about the content that was appropriate on shared devices and in shared spaces, and older siblings sometimes acted as a route into more adult content.

8.1 COMPETITION FOR ACCESS

In some households, competition for access to content and devices could be fierce. Nadia, nine, and her younger sister, Alisha, six, shared access to all of the household's devices: the TV in the lounge, the desktop PC, the TV in their bedroom, and their mum's iPhone. They often argued about what to watch on the main TV in the lounge, with one sister frequently sitting on the remote control to prevent the other from changing the channel.

> *'Whenever I try and watch my TV programmes I hide the remote under the pillow and when I go to the toilet she [sister] always comes and gets it and changes the programme, so I have to come and get it and she annoys me.'*
>
> *Nadia, 9*

Similarly David, 12, shared his Xbox and his bedroom with his younger brother. They regularly competed over the games console and their mum often had to intervene to persuade them to play together. This competition was inevitably stronger in households where more devices were shared, but it was also influenced by the relationship between the siblings more generally and how prone they were to this type of competitive behaviour.

8.2 YOUNGER SIBLINGS' INFLUENCE ON SHARED CONTENT

The presence of younger siblings tended to have an impact on the type of content that the children engaged with, as parents often set rules that communal content, accessed on shared devices, had to be appropriate for the youngest child. This meant that older siblings engaged with media content, especially television programmes, films and computer games, that was aimed at the age group of their youngest sibling.

Lily, eight, spent a lot of time with her younger sister Rose, five. Lily and her sister watched CBeebies on TV together most days after school, as this content was appropriate for Rose. Lily actually quite enjoyed this, although she thought the content was too young for her.

> *'CBeebies is a bit childish really, but secretly I quite like it!'*
>
> *Lily, 8*

Similarly Ahmed, eight, had three younger half-brothers aged one to five. They dominated the main TV in the lounge, watching cartoons aimed at them. He tended to sit with them, but often felt bored by the content and would play games on his BlackBerry instead of watching the TV.

These issues were less pronounced when siblings were closer in age. Peter, nine, shared a playroom with his younger sister, Sarah, eight. Because they were only a year apart in age, they found that generally they had a lot of shared media interests. They were both big fans of Minecraft and happily played for hours together on the Xbox, or watched vloggers talk about it on YouTube on their shared iPad.

8.3 OLDER SIBLINGS AS A GATEWAY

Older siblings also had an impact on media viewing and engagement. They often introduced the children to new content, apps, games, devices, channels and brands. In some cases this could be inspiring and educational, with older siblings a key source of inspiration for different types of content and different ways of engaging with content. Calum's older brother, 16, introduced him to Instagram when he got his camera for his birthday. As well as following friends, Calum used Instagram to follow photographers. Minnie, 13, had also been introduced to a wide range of content by her big sister.

> *'My big sister, she influences me quite a lot. She finds some good programmes and tells me about them and I watch them with her.'*
>
> *Minnie, 13*

For middle children, their older siblings provided an escape from younger siblings and a way to define themselves as more adult, especially in situations like those described above, where communal content was often dominated by the youngest child. William, 11, had two much younger sisters who liked to watch cartoons he considered 'babyish'. He felt driven out from the family space and instead spent increasing amounts of time in the snug with his 15 year-old sister watching Hollyoaks.

Content introduced by older siblings was sometimes more adult than that which children might otherwise have been exposed to. Calum's older brother had inspired Calum's love of Family Guy, a cartoon, but containing some quite adult themes. Minnie, 13, loved horror movies, many of which were 18-rated, something she shared with one of her older sisters, Carrie, 20. Her mum wasn't concerned about Minnie watching horror movies as she felt she had a mature attitude to them, found the stories interesting and never had nightmares about them.

In other cases the content was part of a wider tendency for siblings to bend the rules together, and would not have met the parents' approval. Nadia, nine, really liked to spend time with her older sister, Amina, 16, who had more freedom than Nadia, and a TV and smartphone of her own. Nadia and Amina regularly watched music videos together in Amina's room, out of sight of their mother, who was not keen on Nadia being exposed to 'kissing' and Miley Cyrus, both of which made regular appearances in the videos they watched.

8.4 THE ROLE OF NON-RESIDENT PARENTS

A number of the children in the sample had fathers who were not living in the family home. In some cases these non-resident parents played a similar role to older siblings by introducing children to content that the resident parent did not approve of.

Both Jack, ten, and David, 12, had been introduced to 18-rated games by their fathers. David's dad came in and out of his life. When he was around he would often bring with him 18-rated games like Call of Duty, playing them with David and then leaving them behind when he left again.

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Jack's father died the year before the interview. Jack had been left a collection of 18-rated games that he used to play at his dad's home. Jack's mum wasn't happy about finding out that he'd been playing 18-rated games, but tolerated it as they were important to Jack as a way of remembering his dad.

'I used to be allowed to play the 18 games with dad. But mum made me sell a lot of them but I still have some.'

Jack, 10

9. Critical understanding: content creation, funding and advertising

Children's ability to understand how content is created and the motivations of different content providers, and to recognise when they are being advertised to, is crucial to their ability to navigate the media landscape. The research therefore looked in detail at the extent to which the children understood how different types of content are funded, and how different types of advertising work. Stimulus material was used to help facilitate these conversations, which can be seen in Annexes 4 and 6 on the Ofcom website.

Cognitive development and an understanding of the motivations of others, as set out in section 5 above, of course underpins the children's ability to understand these issues. As a result the older children were better able than the younger ones to grasp these issues. But even among the older children in the sample, these issues proved difficult to understand.

9.1 UNDERSTANDING CONTENT CREATION

How or why content is created was not generally top of mind for the children. The younger children mostly accepted the existence of content without fully considering how it might have been created. The older children were more easily able to understand the notion that content was created by other people, often working for a particular brand or company. That said, it was not something any of the children had thought about a great deal.

Some programmes or types of content triggered greater interest in and understanding of content creation. Nadia, nine, had recently started watching 'The making of…' for her favourite TV show, *Wolfblood*, on CBBC. She loved watching how they did the make-up, turning people into werewolves. It was also teaching her about the production of TV content, and the fact that TV programmes are created by whole teams of people for a specific purpose. Before this, she had never considered how and why TV shows were made.

Messages from school about the use of Wikipedia also drew some of the children's attention to issues around content creation, and had implications for what content they trusted. Teachers had stressed that Wikipedia should not be trusted for homework because anyone can edit its content. This message had increased awareness among the children that content can be created by individuals. In regard to Wikipedia, many of the children believed that its content was less trustworthy than that created by large organisations or individuals who were accredited or trained in some way. Carmen, 12, had been told that it was 'bad' that 'anyone' could edit Wikipedia. She believed that BBC Bitesize was more reputable and trustworthy than Wikipedia because the content was created by people with formal training in the different subjects.

This distinction was predominantly used to assess content that the children used for homework, and did not mean that the children saw user-generated content more widely as untrustworthy. They placed considerable trust in the vloggers they followed, and in the user-generated content they used to source information on games and hobbies.

9.2 UNDERSTANDING FUNDING MODELS

Content funding models were not top-of-mind for the children in the research. Few knew that the BBC had a different source of funding from other media organisations.

Moderator: 'Do you know why the Disney Channel might have adverts and CBBC might not?'

Nadia: 'I think because the Disney Channel, if it's a movie, you have to take a break, because if it's filmed right now they might be exhausted.'

Nadia, 9

Moderator: 'How do you think the BBC gets its money?'

Sarah: 'Because they do have people sponsor them, they have a lot of, they have CBeebies and CBBC and BBC One and BBC Two.'

Sarah, 11

Some of the children, such as Calum and William, had been told in the past that the BBC was different, but weren't able to explain how. Eve, 14, had the most accurate understanding of all the children in the sample.

'I know the BBC you have to pay a yearly or annual subscription I think, because that's why they don't have advertising, because we pay for it, but ITV and E4 definitely have advertising.'

Eve, 14

Most of the children in the sample were able to grasp the basic mechanism of advertising; that an advert was a way of an organisation making money. For most children the clearest example of this was an advert encouraging somebody to go into a shop and buy something.

However, the role played by advertising in the funding and creation of content was not understood by the majority of the children. While they understood that an advert on TV or the internet made money if somebody made a purchase online or in a shop as a consequence, they were mostly not aware that the channel or site displaying the advert would have been paid to do so. Carmen, 12, was one of the few children who had some understanding that the process of displaying adverts could in itself be a way for organisations to make money. However, she did not understand who would pay whom. When asked about an advert for LG on her free Spotify account, she suggested that Spotify would have paid LG to post an advert on its platform, as having adverts for well-known brands and companies on your site was a mark of credibility.

This view - that advertising was a mark of credibility and trustworthiness - was common among the children. This was particularly the case online, where sites displaying advertising by brands familiar to the children and popular among their friends and family were the most trusted. Many of the children explained that if a site had lots of adverts from familiar brands then the company were big enough and reputable enough for those brands to trust them with their adverts, and that meant the children could trust them too.

9.3 AWARENESS OF ADVERTISING

Traditional television adverts were the adverts most often recognised and understood by the children of all ages. Lily, eight, regularly watched the Disney Channel with her sister Rose. She always saw TV adverts for the Disney Store on the channel, and these had helped her choose some of the things she wanted for Christmas. She knew that they showed you these adverts so that she could know what was in the Disney Store and go to the store to buy it.

'They have to have adverts on the Disney Channel so you can see all the dolls and dresses and other stuff and go to the Disney Store to buy it'

Lily, 8

Many of the children were able to identify some kinds of online adverts as advertising, particularly those that bore most resemblance to TV adverts, like short video adverts at the start of a YouTube video. Most of the older children were also aware of the adverts that pop up on websites or are embedded in the website content.

Many of the children, particularly the younger ones, failed to notice less traditional styles of advertising. Peter, nine, was a regular user of YouTube, watching videos daily, and had been exposed to online advertising. However, he often did not recognise banner adverts as advertising. When asked during the research, he could not guess how these adverts came to be on the sites where he was browsing, or how the site might make money from them being there.

Another kind of 'hidden' advertising is product placement. Whether this was in television programmes, films or in YouTube vlogs, it was almost completely invisible to the children. Those playing video games like FIFA also failed to recognise the in-game sponsorship around the edge of the football pitch as advertising, viewing it as part of the realism inherent in the game.

The children were oblivious to the fact that vloggers and celebrities might be promoting or advertising products or brands. They were shown examples of vloggers prominently displaying brands, or discussing where they purchased products, and of celebrities tweeting to endorse brands and services. Even after prompting, the only motivation the children could think of was that the vlogger or celebrity personally liked those products or brands, with no idea that this might be paid promotional activity.

There was no awareness or understanding of personalised advertising among the children, and awareness was not universal among the parents either. Eve, 14, spoke about her favourite shops as being New Look, Topshop and Urban Outfitters, and she regularly looked at the websites for new items. When asked about the different adverts she saw online, the ones she remembered seeing most frequently were for New Look, Topshop and Urban Outfitters. She thought it was just a coincidence that they came up a lot, as they are popular brands that 'everyone' likes, and even with some prompting could not think of any other reason.

When the concept of personalised advertising was discussed with the children they could not see why companies would want to target advertising at them, or the mechanism by which companies would be able to do so.

'I don't understand why I'd have different adverts to anyone else.'

Calum, 13

Many of the children did not perceive themselves as the natural recipients of advertising anyway, so the idea that companies might target them seemed particularly strange. David, 12, didn't see himself as the audience for any advertising online or through other media channels because he wasn't the person in the household who went to buy new products; that was his mum. As such, he couldn't understand why any organisation would want to target him. When pressed, children attempted to come up with reasons why they might see different adverts from their friends or families, with suggestions including the idea that you might see different adverts if you were in a different country, playing a different level of the same game, or that websites might have a suite of adverts on rotation.

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Moderator: 'Do you think you get the same adverts as everyone else?'

Carmen: Yeah, mostly. If you go on to, say, Tesco, and a friend goes on to it, it is probably the same, but maybe if it was in a different country it might not, because they have different things in their country.'

Carmen, 12

Other more innovative types of advertising also left the children mystified. Minnie, 13, had recently discovered the new U2 album on her iPod Touch, a result of the 'push' advertising deployed by Apple for this album. She hadn't downloaded it herself and wasn't sure where it had come from. Her first reaction was that her dad must have bought and downloaded it, and therefore it synced to her iPod. But she didn't think it was his type of music. She was mystified as to how else it could have got on her device.

10. Children's understanding of risk

The children in the sample had received a range of messages about online safety from both home and school, with these being more frequent among the older children. In almost all cases the children could repeat those messages and explain what they were and were not supposed to do online.

> *'We had a whole section on internet safety at school. We have a talk every month it seems. It's probably less often.'*
>
> *Eve, 14*

However, during the research it became clear that the children did not always understand the reasons behind those messages. This was in part because parents deemed some of the reasons too adult for children of their age. For instance, fully explaining why children should take care with privacy settings requires adults to explain concepts like grooming and paedophilia, which are difficult conversations to have in an age-appropriate way.

This was exacerbated by the fact that until the children fully understand the potential agency and motivations of others, it is difficult for them to comprehend the nature of the risks. Many of the children had therefore learned the 'what' but had filled in the 'why' for themselves. Alice, nine, had been told by her mum that she shouldn't show too much skin in the YouTube videos she created and posted. For Alice, the only reason she could think of was that she might be judged by other people for her skin colour.

Even when children did have some understanding of the actual nature of the danger, they generally conceptualised it in an offline or directly physical context, as that was what felt most tangible to them. The more subtle issues, such as online bullying, or posting information or images that they might later regret, were less top-of-mind for them.[1]

Nadia, nine, had been told many times at school that she shouldn't post personal information online, in particular not posting her address. She wasn't completely sure where she might be asked to post her address, but she was certain she wouldn't be doing it. When asked why she shouldn't do this she suggested that she might be kidnapped.

> *'If you put your name and address on it they'll come to your house and it's dangerous because you don't know them and they might kidnap you'*
>
> *Nadia, 9*

William was aware that he shouldn't be socialising online with people he didn't know. When asked why not, he suggested that this could lead to him being murdered.

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[1] All conversations about the potential risks and dangers online were conducted with care to ensure that children were only asked questions about areas with which they were already familiar. Copies of the topic guide and stimulus material, as well as ESRO's safeguarding policy, are available as annexes to this report.

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'Socialising with people you know is all right. Socialising with people you don't know is not very good… They could murder you.'

William, 11

Eve, 14, had been told by her teacher to turn off her location settings on her iPod. She believed that this was because someone could stalk her by tracking her movement. And Robert, 13, had recently become aware of all his friends posting holiday photos online. He understood that if someone else saw that he was on holiday, based on a post on social media, they might know the house was empty and burgle them.

In most cases these were not issues that concerned the children greatly. While they knew that their parents and teachers were concerned, and knew that they should be thinking about it, they found it difficult to relate these messages to their own online activity. This was because, while the children or their friends may have faced risks online, they rarely knew anyone who had experienced anything they felt was particularly traumatic or severe.

While the children knew the safety messages, they did not always apply them consistently in different circumstances or contexts. While Josie could easily state, and understood, that she should not accept friend requests online from people she did not know, she nevertheless had a number of friends she did not know in real life on her Animal Jam game.

Josie: 'I only talk to [my friends]. I don't talk to anyone else; I just have loads of random friends.'

Mum: 'But you shouldn't have.'

Josie: 'Ok, I'll delete everybody.'

Josie, 10, and mum

Similarly, several of the children knew that they should not use their real names on gaming sites. However, they used the same pseudonyms across all their social media and gaming profiles, many of which contained personal details which made it easy to track and identify them across a range of sites.

Some of the children seemed more likely than others to engage in riskier behaviour online. There were various reasons for this, including the child's personality, whether they were more or less likely to push boundaries and seek out new experiences, the extent to which the children had open and trusting relationships with their parents or other adults in their lives, whether they were living in chaotic or unsettled family environments, and the level of supervision in place.

In the research there were children with very little supervision and others who were heavily supervised by parents. Both these approaches seemed to have some potential risks associated with them. For those children with very little supervision, it was easier to access inappropriate content. The children who were heavily supervised by parents were more naïve about the dangers online and lacked experience of and confidence in how to deal with potentially risky online situations.

11. Parents' approaches to safeguarding and enabling

As well as talking to the children, the researchers spent time talking to the parents about their attitudes towards their child's media use, what concerned them and how they managed that use.

11.1 PARENTS' CONCERNS

Parents were asked whether there was anything that concerned them about their children's media use. While most of the parents were fairly comfortable, they identified a range of issues as being of concern.

Some of these were issues that parents were aware of from the media or from conversations with family and friends, but which did not preoccupy them on a day-to-day basis. For example, some of the parents raised issues around 'privacy'. They were aware from the mainstream media that 'privacy' was a potential problem, but they were not completely sure what it meant or how it might apply to their child. As a result, they didn't think much about on a day-to-day basis. Similarly, while some of the parents talked about the importance of monitoring the amount of 'screen time' their children were allowed, they were reasonably relaxed if this was exceeded now and again.

Some of the other issues the parents raised were of more immediate concern; these were the risks they focused their attention on and tried to supervise and control. Their greatest concerns differed according to their values and worries, the perceived 'immediacy' of the danger, the age, and in some cases the gender of the child. The extent to which parents were anxious about these issues was also influenced by how anxious they were generally. The parents who were worried about a wider range of issues online and offline were more likely to be more concerned about, and take more action on, the perceived risks online. In some cases this could be related to parents' confidence with technology; those who were less confident were more likely to feel anxious about it.

The issues raised included concerns about the kind of content their children were exposed to, the kinds of behaviour their children might be exposed to or enact, particularly online, and the degree of control they had over their children's media consumption and behaviour.

Concerns about content included:

- swearing;
- violence;
- sexually explicit scenes or images;
- horror films and other forms of 'scary' content;
- content that presented ideas and topics they didn't want their child to know about yet, for instance war or death, particularly dramatisation of the death of parents or family members; and
- content that presents impossibilities as 'real'.

Jack, ten, watched a lot of TV shows and videos on YouTube. His mum, Janet, was quite concerned about Jack's understanding of what was 'real' in the content he watched. For example, he watched a lot of movies and TV shows where actors appeared to jump off buildings and generally put themselves in positions that would be dangerous in real life. Janet was conscious that she needed to ensure that Jack understood that such things weren't possible 'in reality', so that he didn't try them himself.

Concerns about behaviour included:

■ online bullying by either friends or strangers;
■ speaking to strangers online or meeting them in person;
■ posting inappropriate photos; and
■ spending money they don't have.

Sarah, 11, was made very aware by her dad of the dangers of talking to people online. He was in control of her online use, ensuring that an adult was in the room when she was online and blocking access to most websites. His principal concern was that she might meet and talk to strangers online. The key distinction for him was that, unlike offline friends, these could be people that neither he nor Sarah would know anything about, and they had no means of judging whether or not they were trustworthy.

Concerns about the reach of their control included challenges such as their children hiding things from them, and that they didn't have enough knowledge about what their children were doing and watching, particularly online. Parents wanted to feel confident that their children were not being exposed to the kind of content risks set out above, and that they were not learning behaviours or attitudes that the parents didn't approve of.

These concerns can be loosely grouped into three main categories of risk to the child:

■ **Risk to the child's development:** Content or behaviour that could have a negative impact on the child's emotional wellbeing, self-image or views of others, such as accidental or deliberate access to inappropriate images or messages.
■ **Risks caused by the child's own online behaviour:** The child spending money they don't have, posting inappropriate photos of themselves online or bullying other people.
■ **Harm from outsiders:** Harm to the child coming from their contact with other people online, e.g. cyber-bulling or grooming.

These were not mutually exclusive; some behaviours that concerned parents sat across more than one of these categories. For instance, children posting inappropriate images of themselves online could result in harm from outsiders.

While most of the risks were not felt to be gender-specific, the parents of girls in this research were more conscious of the danger of their daughter posting inappropriate imagery on social media, while the parents of boys were more concerned about the degree of violence and swearing in the content they were watching.

11.2 PARENTAL APPROACHES TO MEDIATION

Parents' approaches to mediation were influenced by the main issues that concerned them, their approach to parenting generally, and the kind of relationship they aspired to have with their child/children. The more anxious parents tended to take quite a lot of action to monitor their children's use, and were careful to try and protect their children from online risks. Other parents had a more relaxed parenting style and imposed fewer rules and restrictions, even around the issues that most concerned them.

The kind of relationship parents had, or wanted to have, with their children was important, with some parents keen to allow their children the space to make judgements and learn about

risk, even if those judgements might sometimes be wrong, and others more inclined to make the decisions on their children's behalf.

'I tend to be quite flexible with them. I want them to learn for themselves, so you've got to give them some space to make mistakes don't you. They're sensible kids. I trust them'.

Peter (9)'s mum

The approaches parents took to managing their children's media use were centred on three main areas:

- **Control over content:** Monitoring and assessing which platforms, channels and content children engaged with.
- **Control over time:** Setting rules and boundaries about when children were and weren't allowed to engage with media.
- **Control over location:** Rules around where in the home and outside the home the children were allowed to use their devices.

Some of the techniques used by parents included:

- Only allowing children to use devices in communal areas of the home, or within sight of parents, so that parents were able to monitor what they were doing.
- Not allowing children to use devices after a certain time, and removing devices before bedtime.
- Digital friendship and 'following' between children and parents (such as being friends on social media).
- Preventing children from having social media profiles until they reached an 'appropriate' age
- Setting PINs and passwords on TVs to restrict content access.
- Applying age restriction settings on devices and digital stores to ensure children were accessing only age-appropriate content.
- Watching challenging content with the child to ensure they could either talk about difficult topics, or to 'check it out' before allowing the child to watch it alone.
- Having regular conversations about online risks.

Calum's mum did a 'tech sweep' before he and his brother went to bed, removing their smartphones and games consoles so that Calum, 13, and his brother, Tom, 16, didn't have their sleep disturbed by media use.

Eve's parents were keen to watch engaging and challenging content with her. This was so that Eve could learn about the world around her and so they could have conversations with her about difficult topics. They placed a lot of emphasis on the importance of understanding her as a person and how technology fitted in with her life.

'When it comes down to policing technology I think it's more important that you know your children, you know their peer group, you know their values, you know their behaviours and you also know what their normal behaviour is, so that you can spot a change.'

Eve's dad

Sarah, 11, had her media use closely monitored by her father, who had a lot of concerns about her using the internet by herself. He was in charge of the approach to mediation, with her mother supportive but less engaged. He had an array of passwords and PINs across a range of websites, and Sarah had access to just four websites at home: BBC Bitesize, My Maths, Wikipedia and Simple Wikipedia. Sarah was not allowed to use these websites unsupervised, and he ensured that he or her mother were always around to monitor her internet use.

Most of the parents used more than one of the techniques set out above. Lily's mum focused a lot of energy on the settings of the children's devices so that Lily, eight, and her sister Rose, five, were kept safe while still being free to explore online. She had set PINs and passwords on the children's Nexus tablets, as well as age restriction settings on the Google Play store. She also had rules about the girls using internet-enabled devices only within the communal living area of the house.

Calum's parents also used a suite of measures.

'We all have passwords on our phones; on our TV we have a password for films that are over a certain age. It's an automatic one that we've put on, a parental guard on there… I have an electronic sweep every night so that everything's out of the room.'

Calum's mum

Rules and restrictions were not always set in stone, and parents used access to or restriction of 'screen time' as a reward for good, or punishment for bad, behaviour. Both David and Jack had recently had devices confiscated because of bad behaviour.

'My Xbox, iPod and computer, when one of them gets banned they're all banned.'

Jack, 10

William was allowed to play games online for *'Two hours a day, but sometimes I'm allowed three, if my mum's in a good mood.'* (William, 11).

11.3 THE CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE MEDIATION

While many of the parents had developed a range of tools or approaches to help them mediate their children's media use, the reality of day-to-day life sometimes undermined these or made them difficult to apply. A range of factors made keeping on top of their children's media use difficult, including practical factors, such as the layout of the home or the amount of time parents were able to devote to this; more philosophical issues, such as how to strike the right balance between protecting their children and ensuring they can reap the benefits that media can offer; and the need to keep up with changing technology and the changes in their children's development and abilities.

The layout of the family home could influence the approach to mediation that parents took and its effectiveness. The homes that the children lived in came in various shapes and sizes, from small flats to large detached houses. The size of the home and the way the space was laid out affected the ways in which the children were able to use media, and the extent to which parents were able to supervise this use.

Where children were predominantly confined to smaller communal spaces, parents were more able to use direct supervision, keeping an eye on what they were doing. In houses where there were private spaces for media use, like playrooms, snugs or studies, or where children had media in their own bedroom, supervision was more difficult and children were more inclined to hide themselves away with their technology and get lost in a book, watch their favourite YouTube videos or play time-intensive games.

An example of this is the contrast between Josie and Lily. Josie, ten, was allowed to use the desktop PC, located in the study, to go online. She frequently shut herself away here to play Animal Jam and other games, or to watch videos on YouTube. Lily, eight, lived in a relatively small house with her parents and two younger siblings. The open-plan living and dining space downstairs was the only part of the house where the children were allowed to use their Google Nexus tablets, so that their parents could keep an eye on what they were doing.

Other factors that had an influence on the measures parents were able to put in place included their working patterns and the extent to which they were able to be present in the household. Robert, 13, lived with his single mum in a small house. His mum worked long hours, which meant that Robert spent quite a lot of time alone at home. He regularly let himself in after school and whiled away hours watching sport on TV. His mum trusted him, but struggled to work out how to parent a child whom she spent quite a bit of time away from.

Many of the parents also struggled with how to balance safeguarding and enabling. Parents wanted their children to reap the social and educational benefits offered by the internet, and worried that their efforts to protect their children might prevent this. William's parents found this balance difficult to strike. William had largely unrestricted access to media content and devices, and this was in part because his parents were concerned that if they blocked anything he would be prevented from accessing the things he needed to do his homework. Carmen's mum worried about restricting her daughter's access to the internet because, as she was an only child, she was concerned about her being socially isolated.

> *'Once she's done her homework, because she's an only child, I don't really stop her from communicating with friends because otherwise I'd be closing all the doors, so I say to her you can talk to people we know.'*
>
> *Carmen's mum*

The tools available to parents were not always subtle enough to allow parents to strike the right balance between protecting children and allowing them access to useful and educational content. Jack, ten, and Peter, nine, both had parents who regularly set up PINs, passwords and age-appropriate settings on devices and platforms. In both cases however, their parents had recently had to remove some restrictions because they were blocking access to necessary content, including school and homework websites, and to content which the parents felt was acceptable and which their children were keen to access, such as Minecraft videos on YouTube.

Another difficulty for parents was keeping track of technology upgrades and updates, as well as their children's ability to use the technology.

For a number of the parents, when they thought about their children accessing the internet they tended to think about this as through a laptop or PC, but in fact many of the children were also going online through games consoles, smart TVs, tablets and mobile phones. This tendency to equate online access with the PC or laptop meant that parents did not always invest as much time or effort in monitoring use through other devices, and in some cases this could undermine the parents' efforts to control their children's use. David's mum had recently discovered that David, 12, had been accessing sexually explicit content through YouTube on his mobile phone. As a result she had sold his smartphone. However, she was not aware that he was able to access the same content through his games console in his bedroom.

Even for more adept parents, technology could still create unexpected problems. Calum, 13, and his brother Tom, 16, both had iPhones which were synced to the same iCloud account. This meant that when Tom downloaded apps onto his iPhone, they automatically showed on Calum's. Some of the apps that had shown recently included the Driving Theory test, bingo and other gambling apps. Parents therefore had to be vigilant, not just about what the individual child was accessing, but also how content could be automatically shared across devices and accounts used by different family members.

Many of the parents had made an initial 'upfront investment' in safeguarding, putting in place PINs or passwords or setting up parental controls, after which they felt that the job had been done. However, this initial investment became less effective over time as children used different devices, used them in different ways or became advanced enough to work out the passwords or work-arounds. Ben's dad was a lorry driver and was often away for extended periods of time. He had installed a range of parental locks, passwords and PINs on the TV,

laptop computer and household iPad. However, Ben, now 14, had in the preceding years worked out the range of passwords needed to access the content that he wanted to see. His dad had yet to find out what Ben was now capable of doing.

David's mum had set up a PIN on the television so that David, 12, could only access TV shows and films rated 12 or under. However, she had left the PIN at the factory setting of '1234', which David, unbeknown to his mum, had quickly figured out. Ever since he had been regularly watching whatever content he wanted.

Calum's mum had allowed Calum, 13, to get a Facebook account when he went to secondary school, and originally sat down with him to set up the privacy settings together. She also made sure that she was his 'friend' on Facebook, so she could keep an eye on his behaviour through the site. A year later, during the research, she found out that Calum had 'de-friended' her so that she wasn't able to see his profile, something she hadn't noticed until then.

'Have you defriended me? I thought he was my friend and that was one of the reasons I let him have it.'

Calum's mum

These examples reflect the fact that the busy nature of everyday life meant that parents were not always proactive in thinking about safeguarding practices, or assessing what might need to change. Once that initial investment was made they felt reassured that they had put safeguards in place, only reacting when something went wrong, or when it was inadvertently revealed that the measures they had put in place were no longer working.

12. Next steps

Children's Media Lives is a three-year project and fieldwork for wave 2 of the research was conducted in spring 2015.

As far as possible, wave 2 will consist of interviews with the same 18 children featured in this report. It will explore what has changed in the lives of these children, and whether and how this has changed their media use and attitudes. The impact of any changes in their family circumstances, their friendships, interests and hobbies will all be explored. The research will also identify whether the children are using their existing devices, services and content more or less than in wave 1, whether any new devices or services have been acquired by the child or their family, and how this has influenced patters of use.

The research will continue to monitor children's knowledge and understanding of content creation and funding, advertising, and the risks of being online. While there will inevitably be a small research effect associated with asking the children questions again about these issues, we also hope to identify whether and how their knowledge expands with age and experience.

Wave 2 will also explore in more depth some of the areas touched on in wave 1, including:
- how and when the children are accessing television content;
- their gaming behaviour;
- whether and how they use media and technology in school and the relationship to use at home;
- their approach to and understanding of search, and the differences between Google and YouTube; and
- the relationship between media and the children's identity formation, including whether they see themselves, or people like them, reflected in the media they use, the role of friendships and peer pressure, and the role of digital media in self-expression and creativity.

A report setting out the findings from wave 2 of Children's Media Lives will be published on the Ofcom website in due course.

REVEALING REALITY