
Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2020/21

Annex: Background and methodology

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A1. Background

- A1.1 The promotion of media literacy is a responsibility placed on Ofcom by Section 11 of the Communications Act 2003. Under Section 14 (6a) of the Act we have a duty to make arrangements for the carrying out of research into the matters mentioned in Section 11 (1).
- A1.2 Media literacy enables people to have the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to make full use of the opportunities presented both by traditional and by new communications services. Media literacy also helps people to manage content and communications and protect themselves and their families from the potential risks associated with using these services. Ofcom's definition of media literacy is: "*the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts*".
- A1.3 The **Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2020/21** is designed to give an accessible overview of media literacy among children aged 5-15 and their parents, as well as an overview of media use by children aged 3-4. Where possible, within the sample of children aged 5-15 and their parents, demographic analysis is conducted by age (of the child interviewed), gender and nation. Where differences exist by demography these are commented on in the report. In previous years analysis by socio-economic group has been included, but in this report we have instead included analysis by financial vulnerability. Further details on this can be found in para A2.12.
- A1.4 This 2020/21 report provides an update to the reports on children's media literacy published in 2006, 2008, and annually since 2010.¹
- A1.5 This 2020/21 report forms part of Ofcom's wider programme of work, *Making Sense of Media*, which aims to help improve the online skills, knowledge and understanding of UK adults and children. We do this through providing cutting-edge research, and by bringing together organisations and individuals with expertise in media literacy to share ideas and to support their activities. To find out more about Ofcom's *Making Sense of Media* programme and for details on how to join the network, please go to www.ofcom.org.uk/making-sense-of-media.

¹ [Children's Media Use and Attitudes - Ofcom](#)

A2. Research methodology and analysis

Children's and Parents' Media Literacy Tracker

- A2.1 The Children's and Parent's Media Literacy tracker is an annual quantitative tracking survey which has been running since 2005.²
- A2.2 The key objectives of this research are to:
- provide a rich picture of the different elements of media literacy across the key platforms: the internet, television, games, and mobile phones;
 - provide a focus on data about children's internet habits/opinions, and parents' strategies to protect their children online; and
 - identify emerging issues and skills gaps that help to target stakeholders' resources for the promotion of media literacy and the development of wider policy.
- A2.3 Up to 2019, this survey was conducted face-to-face in the home using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). In 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and in common with other Ofcom tracking studies with an element of in-home interviewing, it was not possible to conduct the research in this way. Therefore, eligible households were encouraged to complete the survey online, through a combination of post-to-web and online panel interviewing.
- A2.4 To adapt the 2019 in-home CAPI questionnaire to an online approach it was necessary to split the survey into two parts: a 'main' online study (Survey 1) and a supplementary online study (Survey 2). The questions that had previously been asked of all children, rather than those who go online, tended to be retained on Survey 1, while questions that had been asked of children who go online were incorporated into Survey 2.³
- A2.5 The number of interviews achieved over the last three years are noted in the following table. These years correspond with the data provided in the chart pack, which includes findings from 2018, 2019 and 2020 only, to reduce data overcrowding.

² This survey was not conducted in 2006 or 2008.

³ Further details on this can be found in the technical reports for Survey 1: [Ofcom's Children's Media Literacy 2020 Technical Report \(Survey 1\)](#) and Survey 2: [Ofcom's Children's Media Literacy 2020 Technical Report \(Survey 2\)](#)

Year of survey	Number of interviews with parents of 5-15s and children aged 8-15	Number of interviews with parents of children aged 3-4
2020/21 (October 2020- January 2021)	Survey 1: 2,190 Survey 2: 1,658	Survey 1: 782 Survey 2: 261
2019 (April-July 2019)	2,343	900
2018 (April-June 2018)	1,430	630

A2.6 As in previous surveys, the analysis in the 2020/21 report is based on responses from parents of 3-4s and 5-15s, and responses from children themselves aged 8-15.

Significance testing and trend data

A2.7 Significance testing at the 99% confidence level was carried out, both year-on-year and within demographic groups. This means that there is only a 1% or smaller probability that the difference between the samples is by chance.

A2.8 For the 2020/21 report and the accompanying chart pack no statistically significant year-on-year differences are shown. This is due to the change in methodology in 2020; direct comparisons between the current and previous waves are not possible.

A2.9 However, within the 2020/21 report there are references to substantial changes or trend direction, where we are confident that the changes reflect a genuine shift in behaviour.⁴ The measures may also have been affected by the fact that the fieldwork was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic; this is likely to have had a considerable impact on media use, behaviour, and attitudes, among both parents and children. In addition, some changes may have been driven by the change in methodology; we include commentary on changes that we believe are driven primarily by this.

⁴ Variations in data compared to previous years may be a permanent shift and part of a trend that will continue; this may be reflected in future waves of fieldwork when lockdowns are not in place.

Nations' analysis

- A2.10 Analysis of the data by UK nation focuses on the 2020/21 data and does not include commentary on trends over time. As with the UK overall, the change in methodology may have affected the results. The 2020/21 report includes analysis where there are differences between the UK nations.
- A2.11 The breakdown of the sample by nation is as follows: England 83%, Scotland 9%, Wales 5%, and Northern Ireland 3%.

Vulnerable children

A2.12 In the 2020/21 report, Ofcom's Children's and Parents' Media Literacy Tracker 2020/21 datasets have been used to create two categories of children who may be vulnerable: *those in financially vulnerable households*, and *those with an impacting or limiting health condition*. This research has not been specifically designed to provide robust analysis on vulnerable children of any specific category. However, following analysis of the data and the response rates to existing survey questions, we are confident that we can provide insight into the two categories below.

a) Children in financially vulnerable households

- i) Financial vulnerability is a measure that has been devised by Ofcom to better understand the impact of income and household composition on ownership and use of communications services. The analysis creates three distinct household types by combining household income⁵ and household size (including the number of children): *most financially vulnerable households* (MFV), *potentially vulnerable households* (PFV) and *least financially vulnerable households* (LFV).⁶
- ii) The next table shows how these variables are combined for the three different groups. For example, a single parent who is earning £37,000 would be allocated to the 'least financially vulnerable' category if they have one child, but if they have more than three children they would be classed as 'most financially vulnerable'.

⁵ Among those agreeing to answer the income question within our surveys.

⁶ We believe that financial vulnerability may be a better measure to use than socio-economic-group for children's access and use; we will monitor this in future waves of the research.

Most financially vulnerable	Potentially financially vulnerable	Least financially vulnerable
Household income under £10,399 All respondents		
Earning between £10,400 - £25,599 1 adult, 2+ children 2 adults, 2+ children 3+ adults, 0+ children	Earning between £10,400 - £25,599 1 adult, 0-1 child 2 adults, 0-1 child 3 adults, no children	
Earning between £26,000 - £36,399 1 adult, 4+ children 2 adults, >3 children 3 adults, 2+ children 4 adults, 1+ children 5+ adults, 0+ children	Earning between £26,000 - £36,399 1 adult, 1 to 3 children 2 adults, 0 to 3 children 3 adults, 0 to 1 child 4 adults, no children	Earning between £26,600 - £36,399 1 adult, 0 children
Earning between £36,400 - £51,999 1 adults, >3 children 2 adults, 3+ children 3 adults, 3+ children 4 adults, 2+ children 5+ adults, 0+ children	Earning between £36,400 - £51,999 1 adult, 2-3 children 2 adults, 1-2 children 3 adults, 0-2 children 4 adults, 0-1 child 5 adults, 0 children	Earning between 36,400 - £51,999 1 adult, 0-1 child 2 adults, 0 children
		Household income £52,000+ All households

iii) The proportions within each category from our survey are shown in the table below:

	Survey 1	Survey 2
Proportion of children in 'most financially vulnerable' households (MFV)	28%	32%
Proportion of children in 'potentially financially vulnerable' households (PFV)	35%	43%
Proportion of children in 'least financially vulnerable' households (LFV)	20%	15%
Proportion who preferred not to say (that is, did not answer the household income question), or did not know	17%	10%

- iv. The 2020/21 report includes analysis of differences between those children who are categorised as most financially vulnerable (MFV) and those categorised as least financially vulnerable (LFV).

b) Children with a condition that impacts or limits their daily activities

- i) In Ofcom’s Children’s and Parents’ Media Literacy surveys, parents are asked to state whether their child had any impairment or condition that impacted or limited their daily activities. Parents were provided with a list of conditions to choose from, grouped into social/behavioural, mental abilities, mental health, mobility, dexterity, eyesight, hearing, breathing, or other. Therefore, sample sizes in this category were determined by the perception of the parent.
- ii) Analysis in the 2020/21 report is based on measures among children with an impacting or limiting condition (i.e. who have one or more condition) compared to children without a condition. We recognise that some conditions may have a more severe impact than others on daily activities; however, it is not possible to analyse the data by individual type of condition due to insufficient base sizes.
- iii) The proportions within each category are shown in the table below:

	Survey 1	Survey 2
Proportion of children with an impacting or limiting condition which affected their daily activities	18%	19%
Proportion of children with no condition	74%	75%
Proportion of parents who preferred not to say, or did not know	8%	6%

- iv) The table below shows the breakdown by type of condition selected by parents for each survey and the proportion who indicated that their child had no impairments or conditions, or preferred not to say.

	Survey 1	Survey 2
Breathing? Breathlessness or chest pains	2%	2%
Hearing? Poor hearing, partial hearing, or are deaf	2%	2%
Mobility? Cannot walk at all/ use a wheelchair or mobility scooter etc., or cannot walk very far or manage stairs or can only do so with difficulty	1%	2%
Dexterity? Limited ability to reach/ difficulty opening things with their hands/ difficulty using a telephone handset/ television remote control/ computer keyboard etc.	1%	1%

Other illnesses/ conditions which impact or limit their daily activities	1%	3%
Nothing – no impairments or conditions that impact or limit their daily activities	74%	75%
Prefer not to say	6%	4%
Don't know	2%	2%

A3. Additional Ofcom research

Children's Media Lives

- A3.1 Children's Media Lives⁷ is Ofcom's qualitative longitudinal study of children's digital media use. Since 2014 this study has been tracking, each year, the online behaviours and experiences of 18 children aged between eight and 18. Interviewing these children annually has allowed Ofcom to gain insight into how different factors affect children's media use, including age, family, social life, and society as a whole.
- A3.2 This seventh wave of the study was completed in February 2021, following the Covid-19-specific wave of the study: *Life in Lockdown*.⁸ Due to the travel and distancing restrictions in place during the pandemic, all the interviews for wave 7 were, like those for *Life in Lockdown*, conducted remotely via a video-calling platform. New research methods were used this year to understand the children's experience of using media during a pandemic. These new techniques provided Ofcom with more insight into the children's online lives than ever before. This phase included the following:
- a) **An initial interview** with each child and their parent.
 - b) **A media diary:** Following the interview, children kept a detailed diary over a two-week period, including a description of what they did each day. They also submitted six screen-recorded videos showing how they used their devices, and giving tours around their favourite social media apps and influencers.
 - c) **Social media tracking:** In addition to the material that the children recorded for the study, it was also possible to follow them on social media for the same duration, allowing us to see how they acted online.
 - d) **Follow-up interviews:** During follow-up interviews, researchers were able to explore what the participants had uploaded and shared on their social media profiles, as well as specific topics of interest raised during their first interview.

Technology Tracker 2021

- A3.3 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the existing face-to-face methodology of Ofcom's Technology Tracker had to be adapted this year, and an approach of post-to-web and post-to-paper was adopted for the main survey (results from this survey will be published in May 2021).
- A3.4 In addition to the main Technology Tracker survey, a supplementary CATI (computer-assisted-telephone-interview) omnibus survey was commissioned, to provide Ofcom with statistics that are not easily gathered using other methodologies: this is the study referenced in the *Children and parents: media use and attitudes 2020/21* report. The CATI

⁷ [Children's Media Lives - Ofcom](#)

⁸ Ofcom's Life in Lockdown report: [Children's Media Lives: Life in Lockdown report](#)

omnibus survey was conducted with c. 3,100 adults aged 18+ living in the UK, and the data was weighted to the profile of UK adults. It provides data on:

- a) access to devices;
- b) access to the internet;
- c) the number of each type of device in the household;
- d) the extent to which children in the household had access to appropriate devices for their schooling requirements; and
- e) how children's lack of access to appropriate devices was managed.

News Consumption Surveys 2020 and 2021

A3.5 Alongside Ofcom's annual News Consumption Survey, conducted among adults aged 16+, a further 1,007 online interviews were carried out with children aged 12-15. The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of older children's interest in and attitudes towards news, and the sources and platforms used for news.

A3.6 The online interviews for the 2020 study were conducted through a research panel in two waves (November-December 2019 and April 2020), and combined for reporting. The initial approach is to the child's parent (the panel member) to gain their permission to interview the child aged 12-15, before gaining permission from the child. Quotas are set by age, gender and nation.⁹

A3.7 In November-December 2020 the first wave of the 2021 News Consumption Survey was conducted, with 503 online interviews carried out with children aged 12-15. The data referenced in the *Children and parents: media use and attitudes 2020/21 report* are from wave 2 of the 2020 study (i.e. April 2020) and wave 1 of the 2021 study (i.e. November-December 2021).¹⁰

⁹ A full discussion of the methodology and findings from the adults' and children's news consumption research is available here: [News Consumption in the UK: 2020 \(ofcom.org.uk\)](https://www.ofcom.gov.uk/consult/condocs/newsconsumption/newsconsumption2020/)

¹⁰ Covid-19 news and information: consumption and attitudes report: [Covid-19 news and information: consumption and attitudes - Ofcom](https://www.ofcom.gov.uk/consult/condocs/covid19news/covid19newsandinformationconsumptionandattitudes/)

A4. External research sources

The Insights Family¹¹

- A4.1 The Insights Family collects data in a linear manner via an online survey of 3-18 year-olds. At least 410 responses are collected every week, equating to 5,325 per quarter and 21,300 annually in the UK. The sample is nationally representative regarding both age and gender.
- A4.2 To collect data, The Insights Family works with research panels across the world, with offices in Europe, North America and Asia, and which comply with GDPR, COPPA, the EU Safer Internet programme and all ESOMAR guidelines.
- A4.3 The survey data collected are uploaded to a real-time data portal, which allows users to view, analyse and interrogate the data by age, date and gender.
- A4.4 The Insights Family carries out two children's surveys, each focusing on a different part of their lives:
- a) Survey 1 focuses on children's digital ecosystems, identifying the latest trends in their attitudes to the digital world, their digital behaviour and consumption.
 - b) Survey 2 focuses predominantly on children's non-digital lives, such as hobbies, interests, and what products they are buying and consuming.
- A4.5 The data used in the *Children and parents: media use and attitudes 2020/21 report* have been taken from Survey 1, with the data collected between 1 October and 31 December, in both 2019 and 2020. The sample sizes for these periods were c.2,800 each.

CHILDWISE¹²

- A4.6 The CHILDWISE Monitor Report 2021 is based on data collected from September to November 2020, from 1,976 children and young people aged between 5 and 16 years, from 55 schools across the UK.
- A4.7 Schools were drawn from the CHILDWISE Schools Panel and selected to give a representative mix of demographics (e.g. urban/ suburban/ rural, level of deprivation, Ofsted results).
- A4.8 Children completed online surveys in school, lasting for 20-25 minutes, and focusing on children and their media, the child as a consumer, and children's attitudes and activities.
- A4.9 Final data were weighted to restore representation by age and gender and grossed to be indicative of the total number of 5-16 year-olds in the UK (in 1,000s).

¹¹ The Insights Family: <https://theinsightsfamily.com/>

¹² CHILDWISE: <http://www.childwise.co.uk/>

BARB¹³

- A4.10 To complement our research we include findings from BARB, the UK's television audience measurement body. BARB has two sources of data: the BARB panel, and device-based census data for online TV viewing.
- A4.11 The BARB panel is made up of 5,300 homes (including 200 broadband-only homes) that are representative of household type, demographics, TV platform and geography. There are over 12,000 people living in these homes. All the panel's viewing on the TV set (through any device attached to it) is measured, as well as their viewing to BVOD services (broadcaster video-on-demand) on PCs/laptops and tablets.
- A4.12 BARB also collects device-based census data whenever anyone in the UK watches a BVOD service on a PC/laptop, tablet or smartphone. These data provide granular evidence of how online TV is being watched.

¹³ BARB: <https://www.barb.co.uk/>