

REVEALING REALITY

Ofcom  
Children's Media Lives –  
Year 4 Findings

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# 1. About this report

This document provides analysis of the findings from the fourth year of Ofcom's Children's Media Lives study. This research began in 2014 as a way of providing a small-scale, rich and detailed qualitative complement to Ofcom's quantitative surveys of media literacy.

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 manage content and communications, and protect themselves and their families from the potential risks associated with using these services. 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.

The project follows, as far as possible, the same 18 children, aged 8-15 at the beginning of the study, interviewing them on camera each year about their media habits and attitudes. It provides evidence about the motivations and the context for media use, and how these media are part of daily life and domestic circumstances. The project also provides rich details of how children's media habits and attitudes change over time, particularly in the context of their emotional and cognitive development.

## 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. Taking the form of annual in-depth interviews, the study tracks, as far as possible, the same 18 children, aged 8-15 in year 1. The fourth wave of research was completed in summer 2017, following the previous three, in autumn 2014, spring 2015 and summer 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, peer groups and wider society. It explores how digital media use evolves over time as children develop, and in response to offline factors such as new schools, friendships, and access to new technologies.

We examined a number of core themes in this fourth wave of research, including TV-watching behaviour, reflections on news content, critical thinking (the extent to which children critically assess their media environment), social media, with a particular focus on Snapchat, risky behaviours/online safety, and positive uses of the internet. The main findings are set out below.

## 2.1 SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

### CONTENT VIEWING BEHAVIOURS

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**Some of the older respondents were watching less of the YouTubers they had enjoyed last year. YouTube was, however, still a popular way of consuming media and pursuing interests and hobbies.**

YouTubers were less popular this year among the majority of our sample, with most children watching fewer videos from their favourite YouTubers, and some stopping following certain YouTubers altogether. However, YouTube personalities were generally still popular among younger respondents, and YouTube remained a popular platform for media consumption across the sample, including as a source of children's content for the younger participants and a way of pursuing interests like beauty, music or politics for the older ones.

**Most of the children were spending more time streaming programmes from Netflix than in previous years.**

This was generally in addition to existing consumption of live TV, pre-recorded shows, DVDs and short-form content on YouTube. Most tended to switch between these sources depending on their mood, habits and the type of content they were looking for. The children were likely to watch media from several of these sources over the course of the day.

**Family viewing on the TV set was still an important part of the children's watching routines, although some were spending more time than in previous years on portable devices, watching content that they had chosen themselves.**

Family viewing on the TV set was still valued, and could be centred around either a particular programme or a particular time slot. However, children were also watching more content on portable devices. This was generally content that family members were less likely to be interested in, and in some cases, less likely to approve of. For some of the children this was part of a deliberate strategy to carve out some space away from the oversight of parents. For others, it was a way to pass the time when alone during the day, such as during downtime, school breaktimes, or journeys to and from school.

**The children found content in a range of ways, with high-profile programmes widely watched and discovered through social media, or by buzz at school.**

There were a few popular programmes at the time of the research that were widely watched and known throughout the sample. As with other content, children watching these tended to hear about them through word of mouth at school or via social media discussions or adverts.

**The design of some streaming services meant some children were being exposed to potentially inappropriate content or were watching for longer than intended.**

A number of respondents explained that they found new content accidentally, through built-in features of some platforms, such as 'recommended for you' suggestions, auto-complete search functions and autoplay features on Netflix or YouTube. Features which automatically start playing the next video or episode can also lead to children watching more than they intended, and some children described incidents where content had started playing that was not necessarily appropriate for them.

**While many of the children had watched some high profile violent or risky content, the older respondents were more likely than the younger ones to consider some of this inappropriate.**

Most older children in the sample had watched violent or sexual content. While few thought they themselves had been impacted by viewing these scenes, they did express concern about the suitability of this kind of content for peers and younger children. While some of the younger children had also watched this kind of content, they were less likely to consider it inappropriate, either for them or for others like them. A few of the younger children had seen little or no violent or sexual content. Their perception of 'inappropriate' content focused on content containing swearing or sexual imagery, and most said they would avoid content like this.

**Some children were finding relatable characters in content aimed at older audiences.**

The ways in which children in our sample related to characters and content were complex and nuanced. While some related to content because it was set in locations close to their home, or was seen as 'realistic' because it portrayed people in similar circumstances to them, others were more likely to be exploring aspirational or alternative identities through more niche content such as anime or features on indie musicians. In some cases, children were relating to characters who were on the surface quite different from themselves, but who had certain characteristics or attributes that were meaningful to them.

## REFLECTIONS ON THE NEWS

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**Most children were not engaging with the news, and some were actively avoiding it.**

Most children expressed a lack of interest in 'the news' in general, and said it was boring. However, some children were actively following certain types of news, such as sports updates, without classifying this as 'news'. For some of the younger respondents, it was easier to engage with local news stories as these felt closer to home, and they were therefore more likely to see the relevance to their lives.

**Parental and school influence were important factors in whether children were engaging with news.**

Some of the children most actively engaged with the news came from homes where news was considered to be important. In some cases, family habits had built the news in to regular viewing schedules, and some parents encouraged their children to reflect on what they saw by asking them what they understood about some news stories, and how they felt about them. School was also influential, with some children engaging with more news content after being encouraged to do so by teachers.

**Most were more likely to trust bigger news stories they heard about in several places.**

Most of the children had a sense that not all news stories were completely trustworthy, although there were varying levels of confidence among the children about how to judge which stories were likely to be reliable. Children unsure about the trustworthiness of the news tended to trust bigger news stories they had heard about through known sources or from multiple places. Some felt that if the story had a big reach (e.g. had gone viral) it was more likely to be true. For some, a story was more likely to be true if it had an observable impact on their life, because they felt it must be true if it was believed by and affecting people around them.

**Some children were absorbing most of their news from social media, and most felt that this provided them with a good understanding of the events they were interested in.**

Some children were accessing the majority of their news through social media platforms, such as Facebook or Instagram, with some using specific social media features, like Snapchat Stories. Some were absorbing news through these platforms without intentionally seeking it out. On these platforms, content, including gossip, news, games and advertising, was often presented in an homogenised fashion, which made it harder for some respondents to differentiate between different types of content.

**Understanding of the term ‘fake news’ varied, and most could not understand why people might make news stories up.**

Most children did not have a set definition of what ‘fake news’ might mean, although they tended to assume this meant news stories that were untruthful. Most younger respondents could not understand why people might be motivated to make news stories up. Older respondents tended to have a more nuanced and critical understanding of this, with many believing that people made stories up to benefit themselves or those close to them.

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## TRUST AND ADVERTISING

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**Most were able to spot adverts online - especially if these interrupted their online activities.**

The children were most likely to notice adverts if they interrupted their media activities, both online and when watching broadcast TV. However, they were less likely to spot more subtle ‘native ads’ (i.e. ads in the format of the site on which they are hosted) on social media sites, such as Instagram or Snapchat, and often missed these or assumed them to be non-advertising content. Many of the children had developed their own techniques to assess whether adverts were likely to be trustworthy, including whether it was an organisation they had heard of, whether it looked in keeping with the surrounding content and whether it looked like it had cost a lot to produce. Some of the children felt advertising was more trustworthy than the news, as people who purchased a product would be able to spot any lies that had been told about it.

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## SOCIAL MEDIA

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**Social media was widely used across the sample, although the platforms the children used varied by age.**

Most of the children had adopted more platforms as they grew up. Some social media platforms were more likely to be used by older respondents in the sample. This was particularly the case with Instagram and Facebook, as these enabled them to network with more people outside their immediate social circles, something the younger children were less likely to be interested in. Other social media platforms – like Snapchat – were popular across all ages.

**Snapchat was the most popular social media platform among the children, superseding the use of social media group chats dominant last year.**

In contrast with WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, which were the most used social media services among the children last year, this year Snapchat was the most widely used social media platform among the children. For them, the functionality of Snapchat has superseded the multi-way dialogue and discussion that characterised their use of group chat services. This

year, children were mostly sharing snippets of ad-hoc information about themselves, such as sending selfies, rather than engaging in ongoing conversations.

**'Snapstreaks' were very popular across the sample and many of the children were invested in the game-like elements of Snapchat.**

Many of the children were sending daily photos, or 'streaks', to their friends via Snapchat in order to build and maintain a 'Snapstreak' (when two people on Snapchat have 'snapped', or sent an image to each other every day over consecutive days). Some were heavily invested in maintaining and maximising their Snapstreaks, and were keen to collect the numerical and 'emoji trophy' awards they could accrue through increasing their streak. Others were rejecting the 'Snapstreak' trend, including a few who had previously been heavy users but now felt it to be a waste of time.

**Snap Maps were unpopular and most respondents were on 'ghost mode'.**

During the research, Snapchat revealed the new Snap Maps function, which maps out where users were at the time of their latest Snapchat. Most respondents viewed this unfavourably, and had set their privacy settings to 'ghost mode', to opt out of appearing on a map for their online friends to see. Some parents were aware of this latest function and had ensured that their children were on 'ghost mode'.

**Social media was being used to broaden horizons and develop independence, as well as enabling some to switch off and escape sometimes stressful family demands**

For some children, gaining access to social media allowed them to develop their independence by connecting with friends or exploring alternative viewpoints they were not exposed to day-to-day at home and at school. For others it was a way to stay in touch with people outside their immediate friendship group, or their home town. Additionally, some respondents in more chaotic or stressful home situations described how social media, and going online more generally, could be a way to relax.

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## RISKY BEHAVIOURS AND ONLINE SAFETY

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**Some of the older children had heard about other people at school being involved in sexting, although none said they had been involved themselves.**

Most respondents had heard about sexting happening among people at school. Some talked about incidents in which pictures of peers at school had been shared widely, and where authorities had been involved. Some explained that their peers did not always see how passing an image on might be considered hurtful to the person in the image.

**Most of the children understood the concept of hate speech but had not experienced hate speech directed at them or people they knew.**

Most of the children understood the concept of hate speech and had seen examples online or on social media, but this was rarely directed at them or people they knew. However, a couple of the children had seen more direct examples of racism or homophobia online aimed at peers at school.

**Most of the children were aware of the report button and how to access it across all social media platforms they used. However, they were unlikely to use it and were more likely to ignore an incident, or to respond directly.**

Few respondents felt that using the report button would be an effective means to prevent online abuse, and some used it to report friends as a joke. Respondents tended to be more likely to reply themselves to state their disagreement, or to ignore the message altogether.

**Most of the children were using the internet to learn about new things and to help with homework.**

The majority of the children said that they felt the internet was a useful tool for checking facts and finding out new information – in particular to help with homework. Others were also using YouTube tutorials to learn new skills, such as learning the piano.

**Some children were proactively going online to explore new interests.**

Some of the children proactively explored niche or alternative content online, giving them access to information and worldviews they might not be able to find out about elsewhere. Some children with more mainstream interests were also able to develop these through proactive use of the internet.

**Some felt they could use social media as a means of expressing solidarity for certain causes.**

Some of the children described using social media as a means to express solidarity – for example by sharing commemorative messages on Snapchat in the wake of the Manchester bombings. While for most of the younger children this was generally just about sharing supportive messages, some older children could articulate feeling empowered by the internet to make a positive change – for example by signing online petitions.

# 3. Background and introduction

## 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 provide 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 is a longitudinal study, using annual interviews to track a group of young people who, at the start of the study, were aged 8-15.

The fourth wave of ethnographic research was conducted in summer 2017 with 18 children aged 8 to 18, 15 of whom were the same as in the previous year (completed in summer 2016). Every effort is made each year to include the same sample of children, but where individuals have dropped out, they have been replaced with new children, keeping the sample balanced in age, gender and location.

The longitudinal nature of the project allows the research to track changes in children's understanding over time. The sample includes children with a range of devices, family situations and locations across the UK, including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

## 3.2 TOPIC AREAS

Year on year, this study endeavours to provide an in-depth understanding of how the children think about and use digital media, how this differs and how it is influenced by age, life-stage, family circumstances, peers and wider society. The longitudinal element of the research design also allows us to explore how digital media use evolves over time, and in response to external changes (for instance new schools, friendships and access to new technology).

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

**Section 4: Introducing the sample**, introducing two new recruits in this year's respondents, noting any circumstance changes and including brief notes on changes in the digital media landscape.

**Section 5: Content viewing behaviours**, exploring children's tastes and habits when consuming content, including broadcast TV and online content such as Netflix and YouTube. (Building on *New Preferences in Content* explored in Year 3 and *The Role of TV* explored in Year 1 and Year 2)

**Section 6: Reflections on the news**, investigating how, if at all, the children are engaging with news content, their understanding of current events and of the term 'fake news' (new to Year 4).

**Section 7: Trust and advertising**, investigating the ways in which children apply critical thinking to their online behaviour and their understanding of how advertising works online and offline. (Building on *Changes in Critical Thinking* explored in Year 3 and *Factors that Shape Trust* in Year 1 and Year 2)

**Section 8: Social media**, investigating current trends and ways in which children are communicating with each other online. (Building on *Social Media and Groups* chats explored in Year 3).

**Section 9: Risky behaviours and online safety**, to understand how children are currently protecting themselves online and to highlight current behaviour trends that may be perceived as ‘risky’ (Building on *Changes in Parental Regulation* explored in Year 3 and *Learning about Risk* explored in Year 1 and Year 2)

**Section 10: Positive use of the internet**, exploring the ways children believe the internet can be used to a positive effect (new to Year 4).

### 3.2.1 TRACKING MEASURES

For this longitudinal study, we have tracked some core elements of the children’s lives in order to understand changes over time. These core measures are focused on the children’s circumstances, development and critical thinking, and include:

- Devices and access to technology
- Cognitive and personal development
- Understanding of advertising
- Understanding of digital organisations
- Understanding of digital funding mechanisms

### 3.3 METHODOLOGY

Throughout the elapsed time between years 3 and 4 efforts were made to keep the children engaged and positive about the research, including birthday cards and Christmas gifts sent to all the children. Contact was also made with parents at least once in the interim, to check for any update in contact details or change of address.

The researchers spent three to four hours with each child and young person in their home, interviewing and understanding their behaviours, attitudes and knowledge of digital media. The interviews on which this analysis is based were informed by a topic guide, developed jointly by Revealing Reality and Ofcom, but the researchers allowed the child to determine the general flow of the conversation. A copy of the topic guide is included in Annex 1. Data capture and stimulus material was used to prompt discussion in areas of the topic guide that were more complex for the children, such as online advertising. Copies of the data capture and stimulus material are included in Annex 2.

The ethnographic interviews were supplemented by 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.

As detailed above, the methodology for Year 4 of this research was broadly the same as for the previous three years, with some changes to the topic guide and the data capture/ stimulus materials to allow us to develop and enhance our understanding by building on the knowledge gained from earlier visits.

### 3.4 SAFEGUARDING

All the researchers involved in interviewing the children had advanced DBS clearance and adhered to the ESRO safeguarding policy, available as Annex 3. The researchers were careful to ensure that discussions about risks and adult content were conducted in an age-appropriate manner. The 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 chosen to reflect a broad cross-section of UK children in terms of age, location, ethnicity, social circumstances and access to technology. The main sampling characteristics focused on the following variables:

- Age (spread across 8-15 at the time of Year 1 recruitment)
- Gender
- Location, including urban and rural areas, and 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 4.

# 4. Introducing the sample

## 4.1 SAMPLE CHANGES & NEW CHILDREN

Despite all efforts, three children dropped out of this year's research: Lily (10), Llysha (13) and Calum (15). We recruited three more children Emma (8), Ben (8) and Shaniqua (13) in order to bring the number back to 18 respondents.

## 4.2 YEAR 4 SAMPLE

The final sample for year 4 of this research, in age order, is:

**Emma, 8**, lives on a farm with her mum and step-dad. She has two older siblings (an 18 year old sister and 15 year old brother). She is a keen horse rider, owning two ponies and insisting on going riding for at least two hours a day. She predominantly watches children's TV, such as CBBC, but will go on YouTube and sometimes Netflix if bored.

**Ben, 8**, lives with his mum and dad and two older siblings (an 18 year old brother and 13 year old sister). He is an avid football fan supporting Liverpool FC and is a fan of the Harry Potter series. He watches a lot of Netflix content which he browses on 'kids mode' to find a variety of shows such as Pokémon and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*.

**Ahmed, 11**, lives with his mum, older brother and three younger half-brothers in London. Ahmed has ADHD and learning difficulties. He is continuing to socialise after school playing football or basketball in the street. Ahmed still plays lots of games on his PS3 and now his iPad.

**Peter, 12**, lives with his parents and younger sister in a rural town in the Midlands. He still plays with his sister, sometimes creating YouTube videos together for fun. Sports still play a large role in his life. When not playing cricket or football, he enjoys playing FIFA on the Xbox or following the latest football news on the BBC sports app.

**Alice, 12**, lives with her parents and older brother in a village in the South of England. Alice has now started secondary school which she is enjoying and prefers to her primary school. Alice still uses social media such as Instagram and Snapchat, the latter being her favourite and the one she spends most of her time on.

**Nadia, 12**, lives with her parents and two sisters (one older and one younger) in a town in the North of England. Nadia now has a mobile phone which she uses to call her mum for lifts from school, take photos and socialise with a small group of friends on Snapchat and WhatsApp.

**Jack, 12**, still lives with his mum and spends time with her boyfriend's son, who is a couple of years younger than Jack. Jack still loves playing Minecraft but now that his computer is broken mainly plays it on his iPad. He now has a phone and his favourite social media app is Facebook, where his friends are extended family and peers from school.

**Josie, 12**, is an only child who lives with her mum in a small town in the west of England. She spends a lot of her time in her room watching content on YouTube and Netflix and has two good friends she spends time with. Josie's mum prohibits her from having any social media, which is a source of tension between them.

**Shaniqua, 13**, lives in a flat in North London with her parents and three younger brothers, with whom she shares a room. She often finds herself retreating to social media to have time alone. Lately she is becoming more rebellious, ‘acting out’ at school and coming home late at night.

**William, 13**, lives with his busy parents and four of his five siblings (two older and two younger) in a large house in the Midlands. William no longer does any extra-curricular activities, but does go out after school to play football with his friends.

**Sarah, 13**, lives with her mum and dad and sister in a busy area in the North of England. She now spends less time watching make-up tutorials on YouTube, preferring to use it to listen to music. She still continues to go out regularly with her friends after school.

**Grant, 15**, lives in London with his parents and younger brother. He goes to an all-boys school nearby, and takes his work seriously. He spends a lot of time watching videos on YouTube on the family computer, and chatting to friends on WhatsApp using his smartphone. He is Christian, and prays every morning, as well as going to Church and youth groups at the weekends.

**Carmen, 16**, is an only child who lives with her mum, aunt and grandmother in Manchester. The family is religious and practise Islam. Her interest in YouTube continues to grow as she spends time after school watching ‘routine’ videos and Alfie Deyes, though her interest in Zoella has waned.

**Minnie, 16**, lives with her mum in the East of England. She has four older siblings who no longer live at home. She still doesn’t own a phone and uses her iPod Touch, iPad or laptop to go online. She had developed a greater passion for music, her favourites being Pulp and Declan McKenna.

**Robert, 16**, is an only child who lives with his mum in a Scottish town. He still loves football but has developed an interest in politics, following Jeremy Corbyn and other political figures on Twitter. He is also now more interested in music and uses YouTube to listen to interviews with his favourite artists.

**Eve, 17**, lives with her parents just outside London and has an older sister who is at university. Eve watches news two to three times a day and uses social media like WhatsApp to talk with her friends about politics.

**Irfan, 17**, lives in South Wales with his mum, dad, and brother. He is now an uncle as his sister has recently had a baby. His mum is a practising Muslim, although his dad is not. Irfan has the same close-knit friendship group as in previous years and admits that, out of his group, he watches the most content on Netflix and YouTube.

**Brigit, 18**, lives with her mum and four younger siblings, whom she helps to parent, in a small town in Northern Ireland. She has left school, spent some time travelling and will be attending university from the start of the next academic year.

### 4.3 AN EVOLVING DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

This year we observed some changes in children’s media habits that are worth outlining here in order to contextualise the findings of this report. There were two media habits that were common across the whole sample this year and that we explore in more detail below.

**Searching/finding content:** Streaming services, such as Netflix, were more widely used by the children than in previous years and the search/related-content recommendations had a significant impact on what content children were watching.

**The emergence of Snapchat:** Most of the children in the sample were now using this social media platform as their primary way of communicating with friends online.

### 4.3.1 SEARCHING FOR/FINDING NEW CONTENT

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This year streaming services such as Netflix and YouTube were having an impact on what content children were watching and/or finding. Netflix was particularly widely used by the children to browse and find new content, more so than in previous years.

Features of these sites such as ‘Recommended for you’ or ‘Because you watched this you may enjoy...’ allow users to easily find content that they may be interested in. Combined with other features such as the ability to browse for content by category, this gave the children easier access to a range of content that they might not have found otherwise. Although word of mouth and recommendations were still influential in what content children chose to watch, these features widened the range of the content that was easily available to children. The autoplay functions also meant that some of the children were watching this content for longer than they might have intended.

### 4.3.2 THE EMERGENCE OF SNAPCHAT

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Snapchat is a social media app that was launched in 2011, allowing its users to send messages, photos and videos or ‘Snaps’ to friends. All the content sent via Snapchat is deleted after a short amount of time, so users must save any images they wish to keep before sending or screenshot messages from others they want to see again. Snapchat also enables users to have groups, in which they can send messages to selected friends in that group.

Snapchat was overwhelmingly popular with the children this year, with the majority using the ‘Snapstreaks’ feature of the app daily. ‘Snapstreaks’ or ‘Streaks’ are chains of messages shared with a friend over consecutive days.

The Snapstreaks feature include a series of emojis that appear next to a user’s friends, quantifying the nature of their friendship with that person. For example, a smiley face would denote that friend is one of their best friends on Snapchat, defined by the fact that they send messages to each other regularly.

Below is an outline of some of the Snapstreak emojis and the meanings of them:

Emoji (appears next to friends name on Snapchat)	Meaning
	You have just become friends with this person
	One of your best friends is one of this person’s best friends. (Meaning you both send a lot of messages to a mutual friend)
	A yellow heart means this person is your #1 best friend and therefore the person you send the most messages to.

	Your best friend is the same as their best friend, e.g. you send the most snaps to the same person that they do.
	You are one of this person's best friends but they are not one of your best friends, e.g. you don't send them many snaps but they send you a lot.
	This person is a best friend of yours but not your number one best friend

In addition to building 'Streaks' with friends there are other incentives to keep using the app regularly. Users are rewarded with a 'Snap Score' based on how active they are on the app. There are also a range of other emoji trophies (pictures of icons that appear on the app) which can be earned by increasing the Snap Score or through other activities on the app.

### 4.3.3 SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The below table gives an overview of which respondents were using which social media platforms.

Platform	Brief explanation/ summary	Who was using it in 2016?	Who was using it in 2017?
<b>Snapchat</b>	A mobile app used for sharing photos, videos and text messages that are deleted once the recipient of the message views them. Snapchat has 166 million daily active users. <sup>1</sup>	Alice (12) Sarah (12) William (12) Llysha (13) Carmen (15) Irfan (16) Brigit (17)	Emma (8) Ahmed (11) Nadia (12) Jack (12) Peter (12) Alice (12) Shaniqua (13) Sarah (13) William (13) Carmen (16) Grant (15) Minnie (16) Robert (16) Eve (17)

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/o/owns-snapchat-created/>

			Irfan (17) Brigit (18)
<b>Instagram</b>	Social media platform originally developed for sharing photos, now with inbuilt functionality to chat to other users privately and in a group chat setting. Bought by Facebook in 2012 <sup>2</sup> .	Alice (12) Calum (15) Irfan (16) Brigit (17)	Ahmed (11) Nadia (12) Peter (12) Alice (12) Shaniqua (13) Sarah (13) Grant (15) Carmen (16) Irfan (17) Brigit (18)
<b>Facebook</b>	Social media platform that allows registered users to create a profile, upload photos and videos and send messages. Used by over 1 billion people worldwide.	Calum (15) Robert (15) Eve (16)	Jack (12) Minnie (16) Carmen (16) Robert (16) Eve (17) Irfan (17) Brigit (18)
<b>WhatsApp</b>	A messaging app using the internet to transfer information via smartphones. In 2016 WhatsApp became the most popular messaging application, with 1 billion users <sup>3</sup> . Bought by Facebook in 2014 <sup>4</sup> .	Alice (12) Llysha (13) Grant (15) Irfan (16) Eve (16)	Nadia (12) Peter (12) Alice (12) Shaniqua (13) Carmen (16) Eve (17)

<sup>2</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/technology/2012/04/facebook-buys-instagram-for-1-billion/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.wired.com/2016/04/forget-apple-vs-fbi-whatsapp-just-switched-encryption-billion-people/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://newsroom.fb.com/news/2014/02/facebook-to-acquire-whatsapp/>

Twitter	Social media platform that allows users to post short messages (limited to 140 characters) publicly.	Robert (16)	Carmen (16) Robert (16)
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## 5. Content viewing behaviours

### 5.1 CONTENT CHOICE AND DISCOVERY

Some of the older respondents were watching less of the YouTubers they had enjoyed last year. YouTube was, however, still a popular way of consuming media and pursuing interests and hobbies.

- Some of the older children in our sample were watching fewer videos from their favourite YouTubers and some had stopped following some YouTubers altogether.
- However, YouTubers were still popular among many of the younger children.
- Despite this, YouTube was still a regular platform for media consumption and was used by many to pursue interests and hobbies.

#### BUILDING ON PREVIOUS INSIGHTS

In Wave 3 of the research we distinguished between YouTubers and vloggers: YouTubers refers to well-known (at least within their target market) personalities who make an income through their YouTube videos and associated activity, while vloggers is a more general term referring to all those who post video blogs.

Last year, both YouTubers and vloggers were hugely popular among the sample, with many watching their favourite YouTuber daily, and being most familiar with the most famous YouTubers, such as Zoella. YouTubers were providing an important source of teen content, with some including advice on social issues among their content. They were also aspirational figures for some of the children, and some wanted to make videos like this themselves.

In previous waves of research, we saw that YouTube was not only a place to consume content, it was also a source of inspiration for children seeking to develop their creative hobbies or to learn more about current interests. This remains an important function for YouTube this year.

YouTubers were less popular this year. Some of our respondents were not watching them as often as they had done previously, while some had stopped watching them altogether.

*"I used to watch Zoella but one day I just stopped."*

*Shaniqua, aged 13*

Sarah (13) had previously loved watching hair and make-up tutorials and had been a huge fan of Zoella. Now she predominantly used YouTube to listen to music. When asked why she had stopped watching these tutorials she said it was because she was confident enough to do things herself without further instruction. She said this was the same for her group of friends who had also stopped watching Zoella's videos.

Alice (12) still occasionally watched YouTubers, depending on her mood, namely 'PointlessBlog' and 'Graveyard girl', and still enjoyed videos of people trying new make-up products. She detailed a current trend in videos showing people testing cheap products - like \$3 prom dresses from eBay - which she described as "satisfyingly weird" to watch. However, she explained that these days she tended to watch Netflix more than YouTube. She suggested that part of the appeal of Netflix for people her age was that they could watch series from "the past" (content from the 90s and 2000s, like *The Fresh Prince of Belair*) that were not currently airing on TV. She felt that people tended to watch less YouTube and more Netflix as they got older.

*"I don't follow them [YouTubers] as much as I used to."*

*Alice, aged 12*

YouTubers were still popular among many of the younger children in the sample – with gaming, football and prank videos especially popular with the boys. Ahmed (11) still watched gamers and prank videos on YouTube. He chose to watch football challenges and vlogs on his iPad every day for around an hour, only stopping when his mum intervened by turning off the internet. His favourites included 'MiniMinter', who shared videos of himself playing FIFA. He also liked 'Toby Jizzle', and his favourite YouTuber, who was recommended by a friend, was Ben Phillips, who pranked people. Ahmed said he was "the best", although his mum was not so keen, branding him a "complete moron" who inspired Ahmed to carry out tricks on her. She thought this was dangerous as the makers of the videos had often not considered the consequences of their actions, and she was worried Ahmed would copy them. She said she would ban Ahmed from watching it, but didn't feel like she could enforce the rule as he spent so much time online unsupervised while she was looking after his younger siblings.

Peter (12) estimated he spent about an hour a day on YouTube, and generally enjoyed watching people playing FIFA, as well as 'Vlogger Spencer C' ("he does everything to do with football") and 'Vlogger Morgz' ("he pranks his mom").

Jack (12) was also still watching YouTubers. He liked watching Minecraft tutorials, phone comparisons and pranks. He frequently used the 'recommended videos' function, and believed that "recommended videos is basically what I should watch". His recommended videos included 'eating PlayStation 4' and '100 layers of Oreos'. On average, Jack thought he watched YouTube at least once a week.

Some of the girls in the sample were also still enjoying YouTube and YouTubers. Carmen's (16) love of YouTube had grown since the previous year and she now spent at least an hour a day on her phone watching content (although she admitted that she sometimes exceeded an hour). She still watched a lot of beauty vloggers but now watched 'routine' videos and had started to follow 'Alfie Deyes' who was popular among her school friends. Zoella was no longer her favourite beauty vlogger and she watched little of her content, although she still watched a wide variety of beauty and make up vlogs. She explained that she watched the majority of her content on YouTube and did not really consume either live or pre-recorded TV content:

*"I'm not much of a TV person"*

*Carmen, aged 16*

Josie (12) was also enjoying following YouTubers, and said her favourite was ‘Shane Dawson’, who had inspired an interest in conspiracy theories, as well as doing “really dumb stuff that he probably shouldn’t do, like blow stuff up in the microwave”. Josie said she found him “very amusing”.

Minnie (16) was using YouTube to watch music videos and to find new music, through the recommended section and by browsing popular channels. Along with classic rock hits, she was seeking out music by young and relatable contemporary musicians like Declan McKenna – whom she recently saw live.

*“Listening to music cheers me up. I mainly just click on random music videos and see what comes up.”*

*Minnie, 16*

Across the sample, children still used YouTube more generally for a variety of reasons. For the youngest, it was seen to be a valuable source of children’s content. For example, Emma (8) was using YouTube Kids to access cartoons like *Horrid Henry* and *SpongeBob Squarepants*.

Some older children were choosing to look up tutorials on YouTube; for example, Grant (15) had learnt some new songs on piano via YouTube, and Brigit (18) would occasionally consult it for a make-up tutorial:

*“If I’m really bored or need a tutorial – like a make-up tutorial - I’ll watch YouTube.”*

*Brigit, aged 18*

Both Eve (17) and Robert (16) also used it from time to time to broaden their interests and understandings of some issues, with Eve looking up political content, and Robert searching for interviews with musicians such as Liam Gallagher.

### **Most of the children were spending more time streaming programmes from Netflix than in previous years**

- Most of the children were spending more time streaming programmes via Netflix this year.
- This was generally in addition to a mix of live TV, pre-recorded shows, DVDs and short-form content on YouTube, which meant that most were consuming media from a broader range of sources.
- Most tended to switch between these sources depending on their mood, habits and the type of content they were looking for.
- The children were likely to watch media from several different sources over the course of the day.

As in previous years, the children in our sample watched a range of content from multiple sources and on multiple devices. This year, many were spending more time streaming programmes than they had in previous years, although for some this was at the expense of shorter-form content such as YouTube videos.

Netflix was hugely popular among the sample, and most were using it to access films and series. At the older end of the sample, Eve, Irfan and Brigit all used Netflix regularly, and accessed the majority of their content there.

Eve (17) was using Netflix on her laptop via her own mini-profile on her friend’s account. At the time of the interview, she was mainly watching *The Thick of It*, ‘binge-watching’ for hours on the weekend, and describing this as her “perfect kind of day”. She used Netflix mainly as a means of watching BBC-produced series (aware that they had been made by the BBC), although sometimes she also used it to watch a ‘chick-flick’ with her sister. Eve would also use

Netflix if she wanted to start watching something new. She explained that this was due to the wealth of content and the viewing flexibility:

*"Netflix has just got so much stuff on it – and you can watch it whenever you want. And they do a lot of teenage things, which all my friends have seen, like 13 Reasons Why or Riverdale."*

*Eve, aged 17*

Like Eve, Irfan (17) and Brigit (18) both enjoyed Netflix as it gave them access to entire series they could 'binge-watch'. Irfan had watched all the episodes of *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* multiple times. On the day of the interview he was planning to watch some of the episodes again on his phone before bed. *13 Reasons Why* had also caught his attention and he had watched the whole series in just a few days.

Similarly, Brigit regularly consumed whole series on Netflix, both alone and with her father. She had recently watched the high school drama series *Riverdale* as well as other recent high-profile series, including *13 Reasons Why*, *GLOW* and *The Walking Dead*.

Younger children in our sample were also accessing Netflix, although this was often part of a more varied viewing portfolio. Many were switching between platforms such as YouTube and BBC iPlayer to find the content that suited their mood and circumstances at the time.

Josie (12) was spending more time in her room watching programmes alone on her iPad this year. She had access to a Netflix account that was not really monitored by her mother, and she enjoyed the freedom this gave her to explore shows she wouldn't normally watch with her mum on live TV. She was enjoying watching *RuPaul's Drag Race* on Netflix and had tried *13 Reasons Why* – but said she had stopped because she found it boring. She tended to swap between YouTube and Netflix, and chose what to watch based on the show's content and her mood. She explained that if she was happy, she would normally watch YouTube.

Others in the sample explained that they tended to choose their media activities according to habit, rather than mood. For example, Grant (15) said that when he had free time, he tended to watch YouTube and go on social media on his phone. He said this would probably be the same no matter what mood he was in:

*"If I was angry, I'd go on YouTube... If I was happy, I would do the same thing."*

*Grant, aged 15*

Alice (12) admitted she didn't watch live TV content much these days, only joining her mother to watch the occasional show like *Dance Moms*. Alice preferred instead to watch YouTube and Netflix. Her favourite thing to watch at the time of the interview was also *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

*"RuPaul's Drag Race is so dramatic – it's hilarious"*

*Alice, aged 12*

The youngest in our sample were also accessing Netflix, although they were using this less often than other media platforms such as YouTube or live TV on the TV set. Ben (8) explained that he would only look at Netflix if there was "nothing on TV". He was generally satisfied with the choice available on broadcast TV, regularly watching BBC or Channel 4 with his parents, and felt that Netflix was a good back-up option because he could always find something to watch. This was easy on Netflix because he used 'kids' mode' with different category options, mainly watching *Pokémon*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, and superhero shows. He also noted there was a varied choice of shows for boys and girls and for younger children as well as his own age group.

Our other youngest respondent, Emma (8), also enjoyed Netflix, but this was not her preferred media platform:

*“Most things are on YouTube, but if it doesn’t work I look on Netflix.”*

*Emma, aged 8*

While she tended to watch children’s shows on YouTube (like *SpongeBob Squarepants* and *Horrid Henry*), on Netflix she normally looked for films. Recently she had started watching the film *Free Rein* about “a weird horse called Bob”. She also spent most days at her grandma’s house nearby, where she had access to a box of DVDs, and she was allowed to watch these as long as they were rated with a U (not a PG) certificate.

**Family viewing on the TV set was still an important part of the children’s watching routines, although some were spending more time than in previous years on portable devices, watching content that they had chosen themselves.**

- Family viewing on the TV set was still important, and could be centred around particular programmes or particular timeslots, either at the weekend or on a weekday evening.
- Content children chose to watch on mobile devices was generally content that family members were less likely to be interested in, and in some cases, that they were less likely to approve of.
- For some of the children this was part of a deliberate strategy to carve out some space away from the oversight of parents.
- For others, it was a way to pass the time when alone during the day, such as during downtime or journeys to and from school.

## **BUILDING ON PREVIOUS INSIGHTS**

In Year 3 we saw that although children were consuming a significant amount of content alone on their personal devices, watching the TV set was a valued family activity. In some cases, family members had a shared viewing routine based on when their favourite shows were broadcast, although favourite family shows were also watched on catch-up services. When not watching the TV set with their parents, children were likely to be watching it with their siblings. This was in contrast to their use of tablets and phones for consuming content, which was largely a solitary activity.

While this collective family viewing is still evident in this year’s research, the solitary consumption of content on personal, portable devices has increased.

Family viewing was important for most respondents across the sample and, as in previous years, many had an established routine around this. For example, Eve (17) outlined how her family watched shows together, usually from 9-10pm on most days, particularly Sunday nights, with *Poldark*, *Broadchurch* and *Downton Abbey* being family favourites. They tended to exclusively watch live content on BBC One, ITV and Channel 4.

Shaniqua (13) also had a regular routine with her family, generally watching *The Simpsons* and *Hollyoaks* followed by “whatever looks interesting”. Channel 4 and E4 were her favourite channels, although she often watched CBBC with her younger brothers (aged 2, 8 and 11).

Grant’s (15) activities and free time were heavily managed by his mother, who had drawn up a timetable for him, and was keen he didn’t waste too much time throughout the day. This meant he had relatively limited time for watching content, and this tended to be at predictable points in the day (although, as discussed later, he was finding time to view content on the app ‘Showbox’ on journeys to and from school). At weekends, Grant tended to watch content with his mum, such as nature documentaries or “one-hour movies” on Channel 5. These were usually murder mysteries and they liked guessing the murderer together. With his sister, Grant

occasionally watched *Hollyoaks* on E4 and with his younger brother he occasionally watched the YouTuber 'MoVlogs'.

Once a week, the family visited Grant's aunt, where he would see a lot of his younger cousins. The group tended to watch children's shows together like *Samurai Jack* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Grant explained he used to enjoy watching CBBC alone too, but had recently stopped as he found it to be "too kiddy" these days.

Brigit (18), who described herself as "such a big daddy's girl", watched a lot of content on Netflix with her dad, as she had done last year. The two worked together at a local restaurant, both working long shifts – sometimes from 11am to 11pm. She said that on these days she would most likely come home with her father and binge watch a series on Netflix, often until late at night. Family watching – especially with her father – seemed to be a hugely important bonding ritual for Brigit, and the two actively looked for new series to watch together, sharing suggestions on social media by tagging one another in trailers on Facebook:

*"Our thing is to watch a series together."*

*Brigit, aged 18*

Although Brigit also watched content with her siblings and mum, this was not as integral to her daily routine. Evenings were a special time for her and her dad, as with a big family and many siblings and pets coming and going it was one of the few quiet periods they could share. She explained that they were likely to 'kick-off' if one skipped ahead in a series without waiting for the other; and she was concerned about certain seasons of favourite series coming out when she was intending to be at university next year – even considering coming home to watch them with her dad. She knew that new seasons of *13 Reasons Why*, *The Walking Dead* and *Peaky Blinders* were all set to come out around Halloween, when she was going to be away.

For the youngest in our sample, too, family viewing was considered an important bonding experience. Emma (8) would watch shows with her mum such as *Circus Kids* and *Dance Moms* which she enjoyed. For the sake of spending time together, she would even watch *MasterChef* with her mum, even though she did not enjoy it.

As we saw last year, some children enjoyed watching more adult programmes with their parents, even though they did not entirely understand the content they were watching. For example, Nadia (12) had developed a strong interest in drama, as these were the shows she would watch with her mum while her mum prepared dinner. She enjoyed programmes like *Coronation Street* on ITV, *EastEnders* on BBC One and *Ackley Bridge* and *Hollyoaks* on Channel 4. However, it seemed a lot of the nuance of these shows was going over her head, and Nadia's mum was worried some of the themes (such as homosexual relationships) might not be appropriate for her daughter.

Watching content together could also be a way for siblings to spend time together away from parents. Ben (8) explained how he would wait for his two teenage siblings to come home from school so he could go and spend time with them in their bedrooms. This was a way for Ben to watch new content, but also to bond with his older siblings. He tended to watch things with them on their computers, and recently his brother put on a Harry Potter film for him. Sometimes he would watch whatever his sister was watching on Netflix in her room.

Despite the prevalence of family viewing, many children were spending more time than in previous years watching content alone. This was often content they felt their family would not enjoy, or approve of. For example, Ben (8) felt his family would not really want to watch *Pokémon* with him, so he was watching the second series alone on his iPad.

This was the same for Emma (8), who felt her family would not be interested in the ‘kids stuff’ she wanted to watch. Emma’s parents had a TV set for themselves and a TV for Emma, where she would watch content by herself on CBBC.

*“I normally watch CBBC and all that alone”*

*Emma, aged 8*

For the teenagers in our sample, viewing alone was seen to be an important chance to explore content away from other family members. For example, Josie (12) explained how she woke up at 6am each morning so she could watch content alone on her iPad in bed. This was generally content like *RuPaul’s Drag Race* on Netflix, or anime she was streaming online, which she knew would be of little interest to her mum.

Grant (15) and Shaniqua (13) were both streaming content online on apps on their phone (Showbox and 123 Movies, respectively). Grant said he liked the Showbox app as he could download recent releases. He said he usually downloaded a film in the morning and slowly watched it in segments, during breaks throughout the day.

He also liked watching series on this app, and was watching *The Walking Dead* and *Prison Break*. He explained he was drawn to the ‘action’ and ‘fighting’ in these shows, as well as ‘the zombie factor.’ In some cases this was content he knew his mum wouldn’t approve of him watching, as she was strict with the age restrictions on content: *The Walking Dead* and *Prison Break* were both rated certificate 18. Though he did not state it, Grant seemed aware he had more freedom in his content choices on his phone than when watching content on the TV with his family.

**The children found content in a range of ways, with high profile programmes widely watched, and discovered through social media, or by buzz at school.**

- There were a few popular programmes at the time of the research that were widely watched and well known throughout the sample.
- Children watching these and other content tended to hear about them through word of mouth at school or via discussions on social media or social media adverts.

At the time of the research, there were a number of high-profile programmes that were the subject of much discussion in the media and at the children’s schools: *Love Island*, *13 Reasons Why* and *The Walking Dead*. Almost all the children were aware of these programmes and many of them had watched them, although not everyone in our sample liked them.

*“Love Island needs to go – it’s all anyone ever talks about at school”*

*Josie, aged 12*

The main ways children heard about these and other programmes were through recommendations from a friend, people talking about them at school or on social media or through social media adverts.

Alice (12) explained how she had started watching *RuPaul’s Drag Race* after it was recommended to her by a friend. She felt the programme had an addictive quality, and she tended to binge-watch five or six episodes in a row, as did many of her friends.

Shaniqua (13) watched *13 Reasons Why* on Netflix because everyone on Snapchat was talking about it and she “wanted to see what the fuss was about”, while Robert (16) watched the series because he had been recommended it by a female friend.

In some cases, respondents were aware of a series but had not yet watched it themselves. For example, William (13) was aware of *13 Reasons Why* because girls at his school were talking about it and it was advertised on Netflix.

Respondents said they found this kind of hype around programmes either annoying or useful, depending on whether they were actively seeking recommendations. For example, Brigit (18) would often use Facebook to scope out new series by reviewing trailers and recommendations posted by her contacts, and would tag her dad in trailers on Facebook so he could scope with her. However, she initially put off watching *13 Reasons Why* as she felt she did not usually enjoy ‘typical teen flicks’, and it was too ‘hyped up’ at school. Once she started watching the series, she felt she had to avoid Facebook as she was worried about seeing spoilers on there, especially since so many of her friends were talking about it.

Eve (17) also felt that the buzz on social media could get annoying. She was not watching *Love Island*, whereas a lot of her friends were. She said whenever a new episode aired her group chats on Facebook became full of notifications as friends began to gossip about the episode. She found this annoying and would turn off message notifications or mute the chats whenever this happened.

In addition to word-of-mouth recommendations, some children were using features such as recommendations on YouTube to find new content to watch. For example, Ahmed (11) would find new YouTubers to watch by clicking on the ‘Random Category’ tab on the YouTube website to get content recommendations.

## 5.2 RISKY VIEWING BEHAVIOURS

**The design of some streaming services meant some children were being exposed to potentially inappropriate content or were watching for longer than intended.**

- A number of children explained that they found new content unintentionally, through ‘recommended for you’ suggestions, auto-complete search functions and autoplay features on Netflix or YouTube.
- Features which automatically start playing the next video or episode lead to children watching more than they intended.
- Some children described incidents where content had come on that was not appropriate for them.

Several of our respondents described how they stumbled upon content unintentionally, as a result of the ‘Recommend for you’ section or search function on Netflix. For example, Emma (8) explained how once when she was searching for a film she knew, she typed in a key word ‘reign’ and – possibly after misspelling the word - a film (*Free Rein*) was suggested – so she decided to watch that.

In some instances, this could lead to children watching potentially inappropriate content, or more content than they intended. Ben (8) explained that occasionally he had encountered inappropriate content when not using YouTube Kids or kids’ settings on Netflix:

*“Sometimes swearing comes on and I just switch it off.”*

*Ben, aged 8*

However, others proactively used these features to discover new content. For example, as mentioned above, Ahmed (11) said he tended to find new YouTube channels to watch via the ‘Random Category’ tab on the site. Ben explained how he normally found new content to watch by going to ‘Top Picks’, and choosing what was recommended for him. Josie (12) also explained that Netflix could facilitate exploration:

*“You see it on Netflix, so you click on it.”*

*Josie, aged 12*

Many of the children were regularly watching more content than intended due to the ease of finding content online, and the auto-play functions that play the next episode or video on Netflix or YouTube immediately after the previous one has finished. Younger respondents, like Josie, as well as older respondents, like Brigit (18), could recount instances when they had intended to stop watching (for example, before school or late at night), but had been encouraged to keep watching a series by this feature.

**While many of the children had watched some high-profile violent or risky content, the older respondents were more likely than the younger ones to consider some of this inappropriate.**

- Most older children in the sample had watched violent or sexual content. While few thought that they had themselves been affected by viewing these scenes, they did express concern about the suitability of this kind of content for peers and younger children.
- While some of the younger children had also watched this kind of content, they were less likely to consider it inappropriate, either for them or for others like them.
- A few of the younger children had seen little or no violent or sexual content. Their perception of ‘inappropriate’ content focused on content containing swearing or sexual imagery, and most said they would avoid content like this.

Most older children tended to think certain types of content were unsuitable for younger peers, but were not generally concerned about the affect it would have on themselves.

*“My brother worries watching some things might make him ‘bad’ but I know I’m older and can handle it.”*

*Grant, aged 15*

Similarly, both Eve (17) and Robert (16) felt they were at an age where they could cope with most things.

Many respondents hinged discussions of inappropriate content on the recent Netflix show *13 Reasons Why* – a show about teenage suicide which had caused some controversy at the time of the research. For example, Eve explained that she chose not to watch this show, despite many of her friends watching, because she had seen an interview which claimed that it glorified teenage suicide and was an inappropriate representation of mental illness.

Brigit (18), who did watch the series, felt it was unnecessarily graphic, particularly its portrayal of rape and suicide. She said it was a “bit gory” and this concerned her as she knew a lot of younger people were watching it.

*“I’m still a bit scarred by that [13 Reasons Why] - it was a bit messed up. I didn’t think they needed to bring it as far as they did.”*

*Brigit, aged 18*

She had watched a behind-the-scenes documentary explaining the making of the series, in which the series producers justified the need to show graphic imagery, by claiming that all other TV shows tended to shy away from it. This explanation had gone some way to mollifying her concerns, and she explained that there was perhaps merit in it being so violent, but that there should have been more of a disclaimer, to warn viewers ahead of time and to explain the directors’ intentions.

Irfan (17) was also concerned about the show, and had heard of ‘copycat suicides’ as a result, from stories his friends had circulated on Instagram. He thought overall that the content was inappropriate for some audiences because of the depiction of bullying and suicide.

Eve also thought that some other programmes, such as *Love Island* and *Geordie Shore*, although not as inappropriate as *13 Reasons Why*, could “give a bad message” about body image and what constituted a normal relationship. She felt that some of her friends in relationships felt pressured to behave similarly to characters in programmes like this.

Many of the younger children had a more simplistic understanding of what might constitute ‘inappropriate’ content, focusing largely on swearing or sexual imagery. Josie (12) suggested that some of the dramas she watched with her mum could be considered inappropriate because of the swearing they contained. Ahmed (11) considered scenes of a sexual nature to be age-inappropriate, and said if he was inadvertently exposed to this he would “turn it off and try not to think about it.”

William (13) recounted how he once saw a sex scene on *Big Little Lies* when watching with his parents, and said it must have been inappropriate as he was not allowed to continue watching the series after this. However, William explained that he felt able to handle some shows that were probably aimed at older audiences. He regularly watched *Love Island*, which he thought was aimed at 16 year olds due to the prevalence of swearing. He felt that seeing these shows at his age “doesn’t matter”, though thought they might be inappropriate for those younger than 10.

### 5.3 RELATABLE CONTENT

#### Some children were finding ‘relatable’ characters in content aimed at older audiences

- The ways in which children in our sample related to characters and content were complex and nuanced.
- Some related to content because it was located close to their home, or was seen as ‘realistic’ because it portrayed people in similar circumstances to them, while others were more likely to be exploring aspirational or alternative identities through more niche content such as anime or indie music.
- In some cases, children were relating to characters who were, on the surface, quite different to them, but who had characteristics or attributes that were meaningful to them.

The children related to content for a variety of different reasons. Some sought characters ‘like them’ in some way. Others related to characters and character traits that appeared in content that was aimed at older audiences.

Sarah (13) had recently developed an interest in ‘real stories’ after watching the BBC drama *Three Girls*. This documentary covered an abuse and grooming case of young girls of a similar age to her in Rochdale, an area close to where she lived. She discovered the programme on catch-up, after a recommendation from friends at school. Although she recognised it was primarily aimed at adults, she did not think an age restriction would put her off watching similar programmes. She had since developed an interest in other documentaries and dramas based on true events.

Shaniqua (13) explained that her favourite film was *Adulthood*, a certificate-18 film depicting violent scenes of gang life in inner-city London, an area similar to the estate in London where she lived. She had this film on DVD and explained that it seemed “real” and “up-to-date”, and that she felt able to relate to the characters and drama in the film. She said she would like to watch more content about crime and everyday life, and that she sometimes preferred content for older audiences.

Nadia's (12) favourite characters were mainly from programmes on the Disney Channel, and she aspired to having similar characteristics to them. They included Maya from *Girl Meets World* because of "her fashion sense"; Hettie in *Hettie Feather* because she is "mischievous" and; Evie in *The Descendants* because she is "fair", "fierce and courageous", "sassy" and "says what's on her mind".

In some cases, children were exploring aspirational or alternative identities through more niche content. Josie (12) was consciously exploring music and content that she knew were not considered to be mainstream. She was enjoying the anime *Black Butler*, a gothic horror drama set in Victorian England with a predominantly teenage male cast. She explained how she and her friends believed she had the personality of Alois Tracy, the antagonist in the show. Josie liked to download and store pictures of the show's characters on her phone. She also enjoyed listening to Panic! At The Disco; Fall Out Boy, and "some Japanese anime theme songs", which she knew were not considered to be popular amongst her peers. Josie seemed to take pride in exploring things that were a bit different from the interests of her peers:

*"Not many people like what I like in music".*

*Josie, aged 12*

Minnie (16) had continued to develop a love for folk and rock music, influenced by her dad who was a music fan. She felt that she could relate to some of the lyrics in Bob Dylan and Tom Petty songs and looked up to these musicians, despite them being musicians from her dad's generation.

*"They don't have to look like you or be the same age as you to be relatable."*

*Minnie, 16*

## 6. Reflections on the news

### 6.1 ATTITUDES TOWARDS NEWS CONTENT

**Most respondents did not engage with the news and some actively avoided it.**

- Most respondents expressed a lack of interest in ‘the news’ in general, and said it was boring.
- However, some children were actively following certain types of news, such as sports updates, without classifying this as ‘news’.
- For the younger children, it was easier to engage with local news stories as these felt closer to home, and they were therefore more likely to see the relevance of these to their lives.

Many respondents in our sample explained that they were not interested in the news. They perceived it to be boring, or not for them, although a few of the children were interested and actively sought out news content.

Shaniqua (13) was aware, from messages at home and school, that the news was something she was supposed to engage with. However, she was reluctant to do this, and tended to avoid it if possible.

*“The news is boring – I don’t care about it.”*

*Shaniqua, aged 13*

Jack (12) was also uninterested in the news, believing that it bore little relation to the events that directly affected him in daily life.

*“I don’t really care about news or sports or weather, or science or nature - as long as it’s not affecting anybody I know or my family, I don’t want to know.”*

*Jack, aged 12*

William (13) explained that he only saw the news in passing when his dad watched it. In these instances, he would choose to leave the room and watch something else, because he found it so boring.

Even among some of the older respondents, the news was often perceived to be something that adults should engage with, but could be avoided:

*“Sometimes I’ll catch the [BBC] News at 10, but I’ll not purposefully be like – oh I’m gonna watch the news.”*

*Brigit, aged 18*

*“It’s not really my thing – it’s just there.”*

*Grant, aged 15*

In some cases, children said that they were interested in the news, but in reality, consumed very little news content. For example, Irfan (17) explained he was interested in current affairs, in part owing to an interest in the Middle East conflict. This interest had grown out of his volunteering work at a local charity supporting victims and raising awareness of the conflict. However, despite his active involvement, he tended to rely on his friends sharing stories in his

newsfeed on social media, rather than proactively looking for content himself. If a friend sent him a link, that piqued his interest, or posted one on Snapchat or Instagram, Irfan might later pursue the stories further by visiting websites such as WalesOnline or the BBC – sites he trusted.

Some children were interested in particular types of news story, such as sports or beauty/entertainment news, but did not categorise this as ‘news’. They would seek this content out while avoiding other types of news, such as political or business stories, which they perceived to be more serious and less interesting.

Some of the boys in the sample were interested in sports content. For example, Ben (8) was interested in football news. He knew that the transfer window was open, and was especially concerned to hear any updates relating to his favourite team, Liverpool. He would regularly watch sports news with his dad, although he said he would lose interest when the presenters started talking about politics, which he found boring and hard to follow. Ben would also occasionally flick through his parents’ newspapers - such as the Sunday Times - but was only interested in the sports pages.

While Peter’s (12) mum said they watched the news together, when asked to reflect on this Peter could only give examples of stories that were sports-related. Peter had both the BBC news and Sky News apps on his iPad. Here he followed football news, and explained a recent story he had read on the BBC news app about the footballer Rodriguez being loaned to a different club. He explained that he looked at the news apps most days, and would typically look at highlights before reading in more detail.

*“I watch the news on TV once a week, when I’m bored.”*

*Peter, aged 12*

Some of the children were more interested in local news stories, as they found that they were better able to relate to these, and imagine how these might affect their lives. For example, Sarah (13) began reading the Manchester Evening News online after the Manchester bombings. She read this on the website and via an app on her phone, which she had set up to receive notifications about breaking news stories.

Irfan (17) had followed a story about an attack in Finsbury Park on the BBC Wales news site once it came to light that the attacker had come from his local area in Wales. This had given the story more relevance for him and had been considered important by some of his peers.

Shaniqua’s (13) mum encouraged her to consume local news stories as a cautionary tactic, to encourage her to stay safe when out and about. Living in a rough area on the outskirts of London, Shaniqua’s mum worried a lot about her daughter hanging around on the street outside. When knife crime began to rise in London and a family friend was stabbed, she showed these stories to Shaniqua to deter her from taking risks and staying out too late. Shaniqua understood the relevance of these stories, as she knew the family friend who had been stabbed.

On a very local level, our youngest respondent, Emma (8), had personal experience of being in the news. Living in a rural area in Northern Ireland, she had been featured in the local newspaper twice in stories of community interest – once when she got a new guinea pig, and again when she won first prize in a riding competition on her new pony. She was interested to see herself featured, but did not consider news content as something fun to engage with in general.

*“My newspaper career started in nursery when I got a guinea pig.”*

*Emma, aged 8*

Some children felt that they could get the majority of their news through their social media activities. For example, Robert (16) used Twitter as a way of searching for and discovering new information. He followed many different news agencies and political figures on Twitter and would get updates on current affairs through this social media platform.

*“I don’t see the difference between sitting down and watching the news for half an hour to me being on twitter for the same amount of time”*

*Robert, aged 16*

**Parental and school influence were important factors in whether children were engaging with news.**

- Some of those most actively engaged in the news lived in homes where news was considered to be important.
- In some cases, family habits had built the news into regular viewing schedules, and some parents encouraged their children to reflect on what they saw by asking them what they understood about some news stories, and how they felt about them.
- School was also influential, with some children engaging with news content after being encouraged to do so by teachers.

Children who engaged with the news tended to do so after being encouraged by their family at home, or by teachers at school. For example, Eve (17) was one of the children who was consuming the most news content, watching it two or three times a day and reading *The Times* and *the Guardian* at the weekend. In general, her parents had always encouraged her to show an interest in current affairs, and had talked openly about news stories with her. Consuming news content fitted into a daily routine they had developed together as a family, in which they watched BBC Breakfast in the morning, Channel 4 7 o’clock news and the BBC 10 o’clock news in the evening. She had also downloaded the BBC news app on her phone, with a personalised newsfeed. In personalising a news feed, Eve had had to choose subjects she was interested in – but due to her broad interest in all news she thought she had selected all of them. Politics was her favourite type of news content, however, and she also enjoyed watching *Dispatches*, an investigative current affairs series on Channel 4.

Eve was also able to reflect on the differences in style between the providers of the news content she consumed:

*“ITV looks quite game-showey. I like the presenters on BBC and Channel 4 – Jon Snow and Cathy Newman are more interesting because they are more savage and forceful.”*

*Eve, aged 17*

The BBC’s coverage, in contrast, she found more “balanced”. Eve had also identified sources that she did not want to engage with. She avoided papers such as *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* due to their political leanings; and ITV news and Sky news due to their ‘game-showy’ nature.

Minnie (16) was also beginning to identify the differences between news sources. The BBC was her ‘go-to place’ for news as she found it ‘factual’ and ‘concise’. She used the *Guardian* app “maybe every other day” and said that in comparison to the BBC, its content was more opinion-oriented and generally “had more details”. She did not trust news stories from Twitter as “everyone can put stuff on it”.

Other children explained how parents, wider family and peers could be a key influence in determining how they engaged with news content. Alice (12) explained that she watched the news every night because her mum put it on, and while this was not something she would necessarily have chosen for herself, she said she found it “interesting” and “beneficial” because it was something her peers tended to discuss at school.

Grant's (15) parents also made time for the family to watch the news together in the evenings, so Grant was familiar with the news on a few different channels. In his opinion, the coverage of the major events was "all the same", although there were some small stories which differed from channel to channel. Grant explained that his dad often asked him to reflect on the content he watched on news programmes. He said he tended to tune out of business and economic news, or anything about Brexit, but might pay attention to big stories, such as the recent terror attack in Manchester. This was also something he might talk to his friends about on social media.

School was also an influential factor affecting young people's engagement with news stories, with some respondents engaging more because they had been told to directly, or because they were able to see how news content was relevant to the things they were learning.

For example, Minnie (16) had primarily been using the BBC news app, which she got "a long time ago" as her go-to place for news, and consulted for reading up on breaking news.

*"I like it [the BBC news App] because it is factual and quite concise."*

*Minnie, aged 16*

More recently, Minnie had also installed the Guardian news app, after being recommended to do so by a teacher, who said that reading articles on the Guardian could help with Minnie's English language GCSE.

Similarly, Nadia (12) was encouraged to watch the news as part of her Citizenship class at school. She said she especially enjoyed watching *Newsround* on CBBC as it wasn't too difficult to understand:

*"It gives you all the information that kids need to know."*

*Nadia, aged 12*

Some parents spoke of the benefits of watching shows such as *Newsround* with their children as it gave them a shared language in which to speak to their children about news. William's (13) mum mentioned that *Newsround* gave tips to parents about discussing news with their children, which she found helpful when trying to engage her children with news.

At the older end of the cohort, children could see how paying attention to the news could benefit them and impact their performance in particular subjects at school. For example, both Eve and Robert explained how consuming news content was beneficial for them in their politics and modern studies lessons, respectively.

## 6.2 TRUST AND THE NEWS

**Most of the children were more likely to trust bigger news stories they heard about in several places.**

- Most of the children had a sense that not all news stories were completely trustworthy, although there were varying levels of confidence among the children about how to judge which stories were likely to be reliable.
- Children unsure about the trustworthiness of the news tended to trust bigger news stories that they had encountered through known sources or in multiple places. Respondents felt that if the story had a big reach (e.g. had gone viral) it was more believable.
- Some felt that a story was more likely to be true if it had an observable impact on their life and was believed by, and affecting, people around them.

The majority of the children in our sample were aware that not all news content is necessarily trustworthy. However, Nadia (12) demonstrated no awareness that this might be the case. One of the younger respondents, she has always been less critical than some of her peers, and more likely to take information at face value. She explained that the two main news sources she had come across – the Manchester Evening News and Daily Mail – were obliged to “get the stories to the people”, and that therefore they must be telling the truth.

*“Facts aren’t fake.”*

*Nadia, aged 12*

The other children in the sample were more critical of their sources, and felt that they could trust only some of them. In general, these tended to be the bigger news providers that were familiar to them. For example, Sarah (13) explained that stories on the BBC or Manchester Evening News (her local news provider) were more likely to be trustworthy than unknown or unfamiliar brands, and Ahmed (11) explained that he trusted BBC News because it was “the biggest company”.

*“They [BBC News] can’t lie otherwise they will get in big trouble.”*

*Ahmed, aged 11*

Similarly, Brigit (18) explained how the BBC was more likely to have the ‘real facts’, in comparison to other outlets such as The Sun and the online news site Lad Bible. She explained how she was generally suspicious of ‘clickbait’ stories with hyperbolic headlines and tended to avoid clicking on these. If she was unsure about a story, she would look it up further to find out more about it.

Others were more likely to think a story was legitimate if they had encountered it in multiple places. For example, Ben (8) suggested that news was likely to be trustworthy if it was a ‘popular’ story that everyone was talking about (he was not able to recall any untrustworthy stories). Others were similarly of the opinion that news stories were more likely to be true if they were widely disseminated and discussed:

*“If you read through [the news] and there is lots about it you think it’s true but if there is not much of it then it’s probably not true.”*

*Sarah, aged 13*

Some children took a more cynical approach, and were more likely to accept only those stories that they could sense had an observable impact on their life. For example, Josie (12), who had a keen interest in conspiracy theories, was suspicious of news content in general.

*“The news lies about everything... They are definitely lying about the weather.”*

*Josie, aged 12*

However, she also thought stories were more likely to be true if “everyone was talking about them”. She also suggested that stories about terrorism must be true, as her school had started doing ‘lockdown drills’, to train them about what to do in the event of an attack or emergency. The fact that she could see so many people altering their behaviour as a result of this news story made her feel it was more likely to be a legitimate story:

*“Terrorism is not fake because you cannot fake something this big.”*

*Josie, aged 12*

Similarly, Alice (12) felt able to trust the ‘bigger’ stories, such as the story about the Grenfell fire, as she thought people would have to know the correct facts to be able to report on these. She said she could differentiate between stories she could and could not trust, as “you can just

tell”. She distrusted some purportedly scientific reports, such as one stating “you will grow taller if you eat an egg a day”, which she thought are likely to be featured on the news to gain attention and publicity.

**Some children were absorbing most of their news from social media, and most felt that this provided them with a good understanding of the events they were interested in.**

- Some children were accessing the majority of their news through social media platforms, such as Facebook or Instagram, with some using specific social media features like Snapchat Stories.
- Some were inadvertently absorbing news through these platforms, without intentionally seeking it out.
- Content on these platforms, including gossip, news, games and advertising, is presented in a homogenised fashion, which made it harder for some respondents to differentiate between different types of content.

Some children were accessing news content primarily through their social media platforms, via newsfeeds on Facebook, or the ‘stories’ features on Snapchat and Instagram.

*“If anything happens like terrorism, you see it first on Facebook... I don’t really need to watch the news – it’s all on social media anyway.”*

*Brigit, aged 18*

For some, absorbing ‘news’ content through this more informal platform was part of the appeal. For example, although not classifying it as ‘news’, Shaniqua (13) explained how she liked to see “what was going on” through Snapchat ‘stories’, and Nadia (12) explained how she enjoyed following her four favourite celebrities on Instagram. She was particularly eager to see Ariana Grande’s reaction to the Manchester bombing attack, and paid a lot of attention to her Instagram activity around this time, as Nadia had been planning to attend the concert and her friend lost their cousin to the attack.

*“I was shocked and I thought what was Ariana Grande thinking at the time the bombing happened.”*

*Nadia, aged 12*

She was also very moved by Grande visiting the victims at Manchester Children’s Hospital – an event documented by her Instagram account – and Grande’s charity concert following the attack – in which Nadia’s two friends participated as choir girls.

Robert (16) enjoyed engaging with events as they unfolded via Twitter and was the most active user of Twitter in our sample. He explained how he spent an average of 5-7 hours per week on Twitter, which he believed to be comparable to the amount of time most people spend watching TV news. He didn’t see the difference between consuming news via Twitter to watching it on TV. He had 137 followers on Twitter and was following 205 accounts, including BBC news, Sky news, Celtic fans and most Celtic players, as well as Jeremy Corbyn, whom he says is “catching the attention of young people”.

*“If I see something I like, I like it, if it’s very interesting I’ll retweet it”.*

*Robert, aged 16*

### Understanding of the term ‘fake news’ varied, and most participants could not understand why people might make up news stories.

- Most children did not have a set definition of what ‘fake news’ might mean, although they tended to assume this meant news stories that were untruthful.
- Most younger respondents could not understand why people might be motivated to make up news stories.
- Older respondents tended to have a more nuanced understanding of this, suggesting that people make stories up to benefit themselves or those close to them.

Most children did not have a set definition of what ‘fake news’ might mean, although they tended to assume this meant news stories that were untruthful. For example, while Alice (12) hadn’t heard of the phrase ‘fake news’, she guessed it meant “news that isn’t actually true”. She theorised that this probably occurred quite often as people fabricate stories to secure more views, motivated by the fact they could get money if people view their page.

Carmen had heard the phrase ‘fake news’ online but was not entirely sure what it meant. She said she would not be entirely sure how to identify ‘fake news’ from real news, but believed some news sources to be more trustworthy, such as the BBC, which she followed on Twitter, and newspapers, because they are in print.

Ahmed (11) explained that sometimes he saw news stories that he was certain were fake, naming far-fetched examples like ghosts coming into his town and Hitler being resurrected. Ahmed believed that only true news stories went viral, whereas fake news would be much less far-reaching. Ahmed also reflected that he might sometimes be convinced by fake news stories, and gave an example concerning Afghanistan ‘fighting back’ and invading the UK - though he explained he realised it was fake when he and his friends couldn’t find anything out about it when they searched online.

In general, younger children tended to have a fairly basic understanding that fake news was news that wasn’t true, but a fairly limited conception of why somebody would make up a news story. The older children were beginning to have a more nuanced understanding of the potential motives that might underpin the creation of fake news stories, suggesting that someone might make a story up to benefit themselves or a friend, but most could not provide much detailed explanation of this.

Some of the children had some suggestions for possible motivations. For instance, Josie (12) suggested that some people online would post fake news in order to make money, but believed that she would not see this on the BBC, which “takes news extremely seriously”.

*“Some people do it [post fake news] so they will be paid more.”*

*Josie, aged 12*

Grant (15) suggested that people were likely to make fake news as a joke. He had experienced some cases where his friends had been experimenting with a fake news app, which generated stories as if they were made by a media company. One of his friends had sent around an article which said that another of his friends had been arrested, which Grant said was obviously a joke, and no-one took it seriously. In order to work out if a source was trustworthy, Grant would look for facts, figures and named brands. If there was too much ‘waffle’, or if the wording was not accurate, he would be likely to think it was fake.

Sarah (13) suggested that fake news sometimes existed to undermine real news.

*“Sometimes you think it’s fake but it isn’t.”*

*Sarah, aged 13*

Eve (17) said that she thought of fake news as “not untrue but exaggerated”, found on sites such as BuzzFeed or in the tabloid press. She also explained how in her politics class the term ‘fake news’ had become a commonly used term that people referenced sarcastically:

*“Any time anyone says anything in my politics class everyone shouts ‘fake news’ – it’s become a joke.”*

*Eve, aged 17*

A couple of the children suggested political or editorial bias as reasons for publishing fake news. For example, Robert (16) suggested that fake news was a term for biased sources, and that this was most likely to have a political motivation behind it.

*“Fake news is publishing lies to support your friends”*

*Robert, aged 16*

Minnie (16) suggested that fake news was likely to be biased writing, although she could not think of a time where she had seen material like this. Her rule of thumb was:

*“You can tell that stuff is not trustworthy if it is one-sided or has strong opinions”.*

*Minnie, aged, 16*

# 7. Trust and advertising

## 7.1 CRITICAL THINKING

**Most were able to spot adverts online - especially if these interrupted their online activities**

- The children were most likely to notice adverts if they interrupted their media activities, both online and when watching TV.
- They were less likely to spot the more subtle ‘native ads’ on social media sites such as Instagram or Snapchat, and often missed these or assumed them to be non-advertising content.
- Many of the children had developed their own techniques for assessing whether adverts were likely to be trustworthy, including whether they were from an organisation they had heard of, whether they looked in keeping with the surrounding content, and whether they looked as though they had cost a lot to produce.
- Some of the children thought that advertising was more trustworthy than the news, as people who purchased a product would be able to spot any lies that had been told about it.

### BUILDING ON PREVIOUS INSIGHTS

In Year 3 most respondents were aware of product endorsements, due in part to their increased viewing of YouTubers and vloggers, although they were not always able to identify this in practice. They could also spot advertising fairly easily on YouTube, as it interrupted their viewing experience, something that is also evident this year.

As in previous years, the children were most able to spot adverts that interrupted their viewing or gaming activities. For example, Ahmed (11) said he saw adverts most often when he was gaming or watching YouTube. He normally skipped them, though said some of the gaming ones interested him; he had originally bought the game ‘Roadblocks’ after seeing it advertised online. However, most children did not feel that the adverts they saw applied to them and were not interested in them.

*“Adverts on TV seem to be longer for some reason. They’re so boring.”*

*Alice, aged 12*

Some had developed general rules for assessing whether an advert was trustworthy, especially if they were looking to buy things themselves. For example, Grant (15) explained that he thought an advert would be trustworthy if it was a well-known company. He always made sure to check a company by searching for it online before buying something, such as clothes or trainers, as he tended to use his parents’ credit card to buy things.

Although the majority of respondents could easily spot an advert that interrupted their online activities, they were less likely to spot the more subtle ‘native ads’ (adverts designed to blend in with the site on which they are hosted) on social media or other online sites they were using regularly.

For example, both Brigit (18) and Sarah (13) tended to skim over adverts on Instagram, and neither seemed aware of how much advertising they were seeing on the social media they consumed.

Nadia (12) could identify some obvious advertising on Facebook, but found it more difficult to pinpoint product placement on YouTube vlogs and Instagram images. She could more easily point out product placement if the person was holding a product, particularly if it was from that person's own product line, but otherwise would be unaware they were advertising anything. She tended to trust adverts, believing that all adverts were true as long as they displayed credible brands and had a "little information at the bottom".

Jack (12) said he assessed online adverts by checking whether posts or images were related to the website content. If they were not, he concluded they must be adverts. He believed that an advert is trustworthy "if it's designed well" and if "the picture is good quality".

*"If it [an advert] says 'Find out more' you can almost guarantee it's real"*

*Jack, aged 12*

Children sceptical of the news tended to be much more trusting of adverts. Most said that while adverts probably exaggerated, sellers were unlikely to get away with lying about a tangible product, as they would be quickly caught out once people started buying it, whereas there was not an obvious mechanism for testing the validity of news stories. This was an opinion held by both Alice (12) and Josie (12), who assumed most adverts were truthful because false ones would be quickly found out.

*"It's hard to lie about something everyone can buy - if you do, you'll have loads of angry people writing adverts and hunting you down and spamming you with hate comments."*

*Josie, aged 12*

Alice thought that products advertised on the TV were likely to be trustworthy as they had cost money to broadcast. She correlated the quality and frequency of the advert with the quality of the product. Similarly, Ahmed (11) explained that although he didn't feel he could be certain about whether an advert was trustworthy, he thought most adverts he saw on TV were probably true because they had cost money to be shown.

In some cases, the way social media brings together different kinds of content, including editorial and advertising, could be confusing. Brigit (18) explained how she was not always sure, on Instagram, whether something was posted in order to advertise a product, or because a celebrity or social media personality she was following liked it. Similarly, Sarah (13) was unable to identify some adverts when showing researchers her Instagram account during the interview. This was despite the fact she had bought some of the items advertised there, such as a charcoal face mask and some clothes.

# 8. Social media

## 8.1 SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

**Social media was widely used across the sample, although the platforms the children used varied by the child's age.**

- Most of the children had adopted more social media platforms as they got older.
- Some social media platforms were more likely to be used by older respondents in the sample. This was particularly the case with Instagram and Facebook, as these enabled the child to network with more people outside their immediate social circles, something the younger children were less likely to be interested in.
- Other social media platforms, like Snapchat, were popular across all ages.

Most of the children in the sample were using a wider set of social media platforms as they got older, with Facebook and Twitter particularly likely to be used by the older children in the sample. Brigit (18) and Eve (17) both regularly used Facebook, and Robert (16) spent several hours a day on Twitter.

Many of the younger respondents perceived these as more 'adult' or 'boring.' Alice (12), otherwise a heavy social media user, did not use Facebook as she was not allowed to by her mother, but neither did she feel any particular interest in it, as few of her friends and peers used it.

Shaniqua (13) also suggested that Facebook was a means for parents to connect with their children. Her mother used it and she assumed it must be for the older generation:

*"Facebook is boring".*

*Shaniqua, aged 13*

**Snapchat was the most popular social media platform among the children, and its use had superseded the use of social media group chats, dominant last year.**

- In contrast with group chat services like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, which were the most used social media services among the children last year, Snapchat is now the most widely used social media platform among the children.
- The functionality of Snapchat means the multi-way dialogue and discussion that characterised the use of group chat services has been superseded, with the children mostly sharing selfies and snippets of ad-hoc information, rather than engaging in ongoing dialogue.

### BUILDING ON PREVIOUS INSIGHTS

In Year 3 we observed that group chat services, like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, were increasingly popular and far more prevalent than in previous waves of research, with children often having multiple group chats running simultaneously. This had been a big shift in social media use among the young people in the research. This year, behaviour has shifted again. While some of the sample were still using these platforms to communicate with one another, the image-sharing function on Snapchat had become far more popular with the sample, and the majority of the children were now using this as their primary way of communicating online.

Almost everyone in our study was using Snapchat, and the majority were using it as their primary social media platform.

*“Snapchat - I’m always on it”*

*Brigit, aged 18*

In some cases, the children explained that they felt compelled to join, as most of their peers were on it. Grant (15) explained that although he preferred Instagram, he felt he had to get Snapchat to connect with his friends, and he even got a new phone (a Samsung Galaxy G3) as he could download Snapchat on it (his previous windows phone did not host Snapchat).

Carmen (16) and her friends’ social media communication was mainly through Snapchat, which they all used daily to share photos. In contrast, Carmen’s interest in Instagram and Facebook had dwindled since we spoke to her last year, and she now posted only a few photos on these accounts each month. She had recently started a microbusiness selling hampers that she made online. Her mum was encouraging this new interest; she helped Carmen put the hampers together and sell them. Carmen was now predominantly using Instagram and Facebook to advertise and sell her hampers, using a business profile, and rarely used her personal account.

Alice (12) explained how Snapchat was her favourite social media.

*“I don’t actually get off [Snapchat]”.*

*Alice, aged 12*

She explained that Snapchat was the main way she communicated with her friends, preferring this over other platforms like WhatsApp, and enjoying sending ‘stupid’ selfies back and forth. She suggested that whereas Snapchat was for fun, WhatsApp was now only for practical use, such as arranging pick-up times with her dad and events with her friends.

Eve (17) also identified Snapchat as “just being for fun” – a place to send funny pictures to her group. However, she was not using it as her primary way of communicating with friends, instead using Facebook messenger to discuss more serious topics with them.

Some of the parents of the younger Snapchat users monitored or controlled their use quite heavily. Emma (8), as the youngest in the sample, had had an account set up so she could stay for periods of time alone at the stables without her mum getting anxious. She explained that she had 23 friends on the platform, to whom she was able to send text messages, but her strict privacy settings (set up by her mum) prevented her from sending any pictures:

*“I just text my friends, I don’t post any pictures.”*

*Emma, 8*

Nadia’s (12) parents also monitored her Snapchat use. Her mum downloaded Snapchat and made Nadia add her as a friend, so that she sees all the messages that Nadia receives, to monitor her daughter’s behaviour. Nadia does not see this as encroaching on her private space and only communicates with a small group of friends.

## 8.2 SNAPCHAT FEATURES

**'Snapstreaks' were very popular across the sample and many of the children were invested in the game-like elements of Snapchat.**

- Many of the children were sending daily photos, or 'streaks', to their friends via Snapchat in order to build and maintain a 'Snapstreak' (when two people on Snapchat have 'Snapped', or sent an image to each other every day over consecutive days).
- Some had invested heavily in maintaining and maximising their Snapstreaks, and were keen to collect the numerical and 'emoji trophy' awards they could accrue through increasing their streaks.
- Others were rejecting the 'Snapstreak' trend, including a few who had previously been heavy users but now felt it was a waste of time.

Many children in the sample were sending 'streaks' - daily messages to their friends on their contact list on Snapchat - which enabled them to create and maintain a 'Snapstreak'; a feature of Snapchat which records the total number of consecutive days two people have been in touch.

*"It's like a record of how long I've been using the software for."*

*Grant, aged 15*

Most of the children were sharing 'streaks' on a daily basis, although they were engaging with the phenomenon in different ways. The primary function of Snapchat is to share images with friends, although many children were taking pictures of nothing (e.g. a black background) and writing messages over the top of this. Grant (15) explained how every morning he sent 'Snapstreaks', which normally consisted of a blank background, with the word 'streaks' written over the top. He would generally send these out to all of his contacts indiscriminately, sending it to some friends even if they were in the middle of an argument. He explained that he sometimes feared losing a streak, and if it was getting to the end of the day and a friend had not returned the streak, he might send them a more personal message like 'save the streak' to encourage them to reply.

William (13) explained how a 'streak' picture could be of anything. He messaged his friends on Snapchat every day, taking a picture of anything and sending it to someone each day, normally at break or after school. His highest streak was 199 with a friend from primary school. He thought having a streak 'looks cool' and explained how different types of streaks would unlock different types of emoji on the Snapchat account.

Peter (12) explained that streaks were his favourite thing about Snapchat, he had three streaks at the time of the interview, and his highest score was 256:

*"I feel an urge to do it [send Snapstreaks]. I would be annoyed and a bit angry if I lost them"*

*Peter, aged 12*

Shaniqua (13) also said she would be upset if she couldn't maintain her streaks. She described an incident in which she was banned from her phone, so gave her login details to a friend who could keep up the streak for her. She explained that she might have a high streak count with someone she didn't necessarily know well, as she sent these out to a big group of online acquaintances, and that therefore high streaks didn't necessarily translate to a close offline relationship. It did, nonetheless, entail high emotional investment, and her mum commented that losing her streaks had resulted in Shaniqua being moody, as Shaniqua felt she had lost the time invested in building up her streak, and would now have to start again.

Brigit (18) also had several streaks going with friends from different social circles, and her highest streak was 407 with her best friend. However, unlike the younger respondents in the

sample, she was not indiscriminate about who she had streaks with, and she would not send photos of nothing to continue a streak. She explained that she would maintain Snapstreaks by sending meaningful messages to her friends, and felt that it was an important reminder to check up with friends whom she didn't necessarily see often:

*"We talk most days anyway, but it reminds you to check in."*

*Brigit, aged 18*

Like Shaniqua, when Brigit went away on an exchange trip to China, she gave her best friend her user-name and password so she could maintain the streak in her absence. She suggested that she didn't take her streaks as seriously as some of her peers, but reflected that she did still care about them - perhaps more than she would like.

*"I wouldn't try to start one [a Snapstreak], but once it starts I get compelled to keep it going. Streaks become important at about 35 and once it hits 50 it's a big deal. If I lost them all, I would be kind of annoyed, but I'd get over it."*

*Brigit, aged 18*

However, some in our sample were rejecting the 'Snapstreak' trend. For example, Alice (12) explained how she used to send Snapstreaks, but stopped because she felt it was taking up too much of her time:

*"They [Snapstreaks] were boring and irritating, and hard to maintain."*

*Alice, aged 12*

She said she was unsure why she took them up in the first place, and resented the fact that they had begun to dominate her morning routine. Some friends were still sending these to her, and she said she would still sometimes partake in them for a short time if it was with a close friend - although was not bothered about keeping them for very long.

Irfan (17) also used to send Snapstreaks regularly, but began to find them 'pointless', and on the day he reached a streak of 400 with his girlfriend he stopped it "for a laugh". He said at first she was annoyed but he explained he did not think it was meaningful. He still had a couple of streaks going but neither were long and he was not particularly invested in either.

Minnie (16), who has always been more resistant to using social media than others in the sample, explained that she was not particularly interested in Snapstreaks:

*"I don't actually get the point of it". "[A friend] sent it to me and I didn't want to tell her that I don't really want to do it [in the first place]"*

*Minnie, aged 16*

She explained that she had a couple of Snapstreaks with some girls at school, but these were not close friends, and she only maintained them because she found it embarrassing to explain to them that she didn't particularly want to send these messages. She says her highest score was "maybe 11" and she didn't care if she lost them. Similarly, Eve (17) admitted that she "hated" Snapstreaks, labelling them "the most ridiculous thing ever". She acknowledged that this differed from some attitudes among her peers, and recalled an incident in which a friend was on the brink of tears when she lost her phone, being at risk of losing a 200-day streak.

### **Snap maps were unpopular and most respondents were on ghost mode.**

- During the research, Snapchat revealed the new Snap Maps function, which maps where users are at the time of their latest snap chat.
- Most respondents viewed this unfavourably, and had set their privacy settings to 'ghost mode', to opt out of appearing on a map for their online friends to see.
- Some parents were aware of this latest function and had ensured that their child was on 'ghost mode'.

Most children were unimpressed by the new Snap Maps function on Snapchat which mapped out the location of users automatically and displayed these to their contacts. The majority had put themselves on 'ghost mode' – a setting whereby their location would not show up automatically to their friends.

Robert (16) was critical of Snapchat's map function. He did not want other people to know his location at all times and was therefore using the 'ghost mode' setting.

Some schools were actively ensuring that their students were using the 'ghost-mode' setting on the map function. Jack's (12) mum had been phoned by his school to make her aware of this new feature and she sat down with Jack and made sure he had his setting on 'ghost mode'.

*"I can see where people live [on Snap Maps]"*

*Jack, aged 12*

Peter (12) had also set his settings to ghost mode after an assembly at school about it. His mum was aware of the new map function and had insisted that both her children show her that they had set the app to 'ghost mode'. She monitored her children's mobile activity by downloading the apps her children wanted and 'testing' them before allowing them to download them.

However, not everyone rejected it. Brigit (18) explained that she felt it could be useful on a night out:

*"I just use it out of nosiness – but it might be useful if you were all on a night out. I don't think it is a bad thing – at least not for me and my friends. We are all at least 18. For young people maybe it's worse."*

*Brigit, aged 18*

## 8.3 SOCIAL MEDIA BEHAVIOURS

**Social media can help to broaden horizons and develop independence, as well as being a way of switching off and escaping the demands of family**

- For some respondents, gaining access to social media allowed them to gain independence by connecting with friends or exploring alternative viewpoints.
- For others it was a way to stay in touch with people outside their immediate friendship group.
- Some respondents in more chaotic or stressful home situations described how social media and going online more generally could be a way to relax.

Most of the children saw social media as a positive way of connecting with and staying in touch with their friends and family. For Brigit (18) who had recently made friends outside Northern Ireland on an exchange trip to China, social media was an ideal and easy way to keep in touch with them and maintain these new relationships.

For some children, being able to use social media led to more freedom. Emma (8) used Snapchat to be alone at the stables with the horses. Her mum could keep in touch with her very easily this way, which allowed Emma to spend time with her ponies alone, increasing her independence.

Shaniqua (13) used social media to get some “peace and quiet” in her busy family home. Part of her routine was spending time with friends on Facetime after school. She shared a bedroom with four of her brothers, so she went online to get personal space and time. Shaniqua distances herself from her family on social media, declining her brother’s request to follow her on Instagram, and sees replying to her mum as ‘effort’, preferring to keep her online world private. This can sometimes be a source of frustration for her mum, who would like Shaniqua to spend more time focusing on her studies rather than being ‘distracted’ by her friends. William (13) and Josie (12) also often choose to retreat to their rooms for some time online away from the pressures of family life.

A few of the children acknowledged some of the negative effects social media could have. Josie (12), who was not allowed on any social media, felt left out of social circles at school and was unable to join in or understand what peers in her class were discussing. This led to her harbouring resentment towards her mum for forbidding her to use it.

Carmen (16) spent a lot of her time on a variety of social media platforms, talking with friends and following her favourite celebrities on Instagram. She was one of the few children to reflect that social media may not always be positive; it sometimes left her feeling anxious and as if her time was being taken over by it, when she should be focusing on other things.

*“Socialising online is not always great; it can take over and you spend all day worrying about things. It takes away your attention”*

*Carmen, aged 16*

Some parents also expressed concern about the distracting effects of social media. Grant (15) spent time before and after school on social media, sending a Snapstreak every morning to his friends and socialising generally. His mum was concerned about the amount of time Grant spent on social media and worried that it would lead him to becoming socially isolated and to stop communicating with people in real life.

Eve (17) had confiscated her own phone by giving it to her mum to look after during the week throughout her exams so as to not get distracted by social media. She admitted she

found the time away from her phone ‘dull’ but acknowledged that it had helped her focus on her work.

*“All my friends found it ridiculous, but it helped. I missed my phone on Thursday and then it just became normal.”*

*Eve, 17*

# 9. Risky Behaviour and Online Safety

## 9.1 EXPERIENCES OF SEXTING

Some of the older children had heard about other people at school being involved in sexting, although none said they had been involved in sexting themselves.

- Most respondents had heard about sexting happening among people at school.
- Some had experience of pictures of their peers at school being shared widely, causing incidents in which the authorities became involved.
- Some explained that their peers did not always understand how passing an image on might be considered hurtful to the person in the image.

The majority of the older respondents in our sample were aware of what sexting was and the risks of sharing private information and pictures with others. Children had heard stories or gossip relating to classmates or peers sharing this kind of material, and in some cases schools had led assemblies that informed the children of the dangers.

None of the sample shared stories of direct experiences of sexting, and for the most part were quite coy when asked about the subject and uneasy about discussing it at length. However, those who had heard examples of this happening at their school could articulate the consequences and emotional harm that sharing private messages or photos could have. They also understood the importance of not passing these messages on, and the responsibility of others not to share them.

One of Irfan's (17) female friends at school had shared private pictures with a boy who had then shared them publicly with fellow classmates. Irfan was aware that these images were circulating around the school, refused to share them and tried to dissuade those who were from doing so. During this time he supported his friend who was very upset, and the police eventually became involved in the matter.

*"I didn't want to share the images on"*

*Irfan, aged 17*

A girl at Minnie's (16) school had recently had private images shared around the school, generating a lot of gossip. Minnie had discussed the matter with her mum and the school had held talks to highlight the severity of the matter. Minnie reflected that she did not think pupils at her school, even after being spoken to, "understood how serious it was" and felt great sympathy for the victim.

*"It's one of those things that will always be attached to her, at least in this school"*

*Minnie, aged 16*

For the younger and more sheltered respondents there was an awareness that people shared private messages or images, but they were unsure what these could be, or why they might be problematic.

Nadia (12) had a small social network online and believed that she would not come across, or be sent, inappropriate messages, as her friends are “nice people”. We did not talk specifically about sexting to her, but asked about what types of content she thought might not be appropriate to share online. She thought that children her age shouldn’t see “swear words or rude pictures” on the internet. She was aware that sharing personal images and messages could be a bad thing, but she was unsure what types of private messages people might send and why they would do it.

Alice (12) had never been made aware of the term ‘sexting’ by her parents or school but could guess what it was. However, she believed that if images or messages were shared privately between a ‘group’ of friends on social media, the content of the messages would remain private, and was unaware of how this situation could escalate.

William’s little sisters (6, 10, 11) had also heard a story of peers sending/sharing messages of a sexual nature but were aware that it was a topic that they shouldn’t be talking about as it was not age-appropriate.

## 9.2 ONLINE HATE SPEECH

**Most of the children understood the concept of hate speech but had not experienced hate speech directed at them or at people they knew.**

- Most of the children understood the concept of hate speech and had seen examples online or on social media, but this was rarely directed at them or people they knew.
- However, a couple of the children had seen more direct examples of racism or homophobia online, aimed at peers at school.

### BUILDING ON PREVIOUS INSIGHTS

In last year’s wave of research, we found that most of the children could provide examples of others being mean online or using social media group chats as a means of excluding people. However, they were unlikely to use the term ‘bullying’ even in extreme cases of this kind of behaviour, preferring to use terms such as ‘banter’ or ‘harassment’.

In this wave the children continued to provide examples of this kind of bullying and harassment. When prompted, most respondents could identify how hate speech might be different to this behaviour, and could see how it related to a particular characteristic of an individual or group.

The majority of the children understood the concept of hate speech, and were aware what types of comments this would include. They thought these messages were “bad” and that the best way to respond to them was by directly talking to the perpetrator of the hate speech or by just ignoring the message.

Most of the children had not experienced hate speech themselves. Irfan (17) had several rivalries with groups outside school, who would sometimes message him through social

media, threatening violence or insulting him. Irfan intimated that these comments had racist undertones, pointing out that this particular group of rivals were all white and targeted his group specifically. However, he did not consider these interchanges to be 'hate speech', dismissing the messengers as "idiots". He said he normally replied "whatever", and maintained that despite the threats, the perpetrators wouldn't actually do anything to him.

The majority of the children had not seen hate speech directed at anyone they knew. However, Carmen (16) had seen peers at school posting and sharing comments making fun of children at her school with disabilities. Carmen was uncomfortable with the remarks the other children made and how they talked about children with disabilities on social media, describing the comments as "not very nice", although she did not refer to this as 'hate speech'.

Most of the children had examples of seeing hate speech on social media and anonymous forums, directed more generally, or at individuals they did not know personally. For example, Brigit (18) had seen homophobic comments left under online posts about Pride, from people she assumed had religious objections to homosexuality. She thought homophobic people purposely targeted these forums to post hateful messages, though did not know anyone personally who was the victim or perpetrator of such posts.

Robert (16), who was a keen Twitter user, had seen comments on Twitter with racist undertones. He was aware of a few friends who were following former English Defence League leader Tommy Robinson on Twitter, and had seen some of the anti-immigrant tweets that he was posting. He felt that online it was easy to access and see racist commentary through sites such as Twitter

*"[On Twitter] there can be a sort of hatred towards minorities"*

*Robert, aged 16*

Sarah (13), although not a victim of hate speech herself, could articulate the impact that these comments might have on a victim. She had seen hate speech on Snapchat that was directed towards Muslims and South Asians, and felt that this could have an impact on their self-esteem and confidence, and they would feel as if everyone hated them, which she was clear is not the case.

*"I think it does have an impact on people who are Muslims and Asians and stuff because they are going to feel bad about themselves because they will think everyone thinks that about them when they don't"*

*Sarah, aged 13*

### 9.3 REPORTING INAPPROPRIATE MESSAGES AND POSTS

**Most of the children were aware of the report button and how to access it, on all the social media platforms they used. However, they were unlikely to use it and were more likely to ignore an incident, or to respond directly.**

- Few respondents felt that using the report button would be an effective means of preventing online abuse, and some used it to report friends as a joke.
- Respondents tended to ignore posts or messages they thought were inappropriate, or reply personally to state their disagreement.

The children were generally very familiar with the sites and apps they used and were proficient at knowing where to find different types of information and functions. Most could easily locate the report button on multiple social media sites and apps, though very few had actual experience of using it.

Many of the children had seen content that might need to be reported, such as explicit photos or examples of hate speech, but most had not reported it. The report button was not seen as an effective way of policing online content and the children felt it was more effective to reply to the message themselves or ignore it.

*“You can report stuff - but I’ve never actually done it myself.”*

*Grant, aged 15*

Ahmed (11) questioned the usefulness of reporting someone, as it could take a long time until the perpetrator was blocked from the site. Ahmed assumed that for the most part mean comments would just be a joke anyway, and that if he knew someone who was a victim of a mean comment they would feel the same.

Irfan (17) also did not see the report button as resulting in serious consequences for people posting inappropriate posts and messages. He and his friend would often report each other’s Instagram posts as a joke, knowing it would result in them being banned from the site for a limited time, which they saw as a mild annoyance rather than a serious sanction.

Sarah (13) cited an example of a ‘successful’ response to inappropriate content on social media. After the terror attacks in Manchester one of Sarah’s peers had posted a racist remark on Snapchat. A large group of classmates, including Sarah, responded to this message by telling the commenter that this post was not okay, leading to the removal of the remark. Sarah, like other respondents, believed that the consequence of reporting comments, a ban from social media, was not severe enough to be effective.

The children were even less likely to report inappropriate content if it was not aimed at or posted by someone they knew. In these instances, the most likely response by the children was to ignore it.

Alice (12) was aware of the report button but had never used it. She said if she saw unkind comments online she would not do anything unless she knew the victim personally. In the case of knowing the victim, Alice said she would tell her mum rather than using the report button.

Minnie (16) admitted she had forgotten that the report button was there. She too did not see the need to act on inappropriate content or unkind comments unless she had a personal connection to the person posting the content, or the victim of mean comments.

*“I usually just leave it. Unless it was someone I knew and it was really bad, I wouldn’t do anything about it. I forgot that you could report it”*

*Minnie, aged 16*

# 10. Positive uses of the internet

## 10.1 POSITIVE USES OF THE INTERNET

Most of the children were using the internet to learn about new things and to help with homework.

- The majority of the children said that they felt the internet was a useful tool for checking facts and finding out new information – in particular to help with homework.
- Others were using YouTube tutorials to learn new skills.

### BUILDING ON PREVIOUS INSIGHTS

In previous waves, we have seen how respondents often make positive use of the internet, specifically turning to YouTube for help with creative offline hobbies, such as art or music or even making a terrarium. In this wave, respondents were continuing using the internet to support their offline lives in positive ways.

Most of the children struggled to reflect on the positive ways in which they used the internet. For most of them the internet itself was not something they thought about, rather a tool that facilitated large parts of their day-to-day lives. As it is in the background, they found it hard to think about it in the abstract. They found it easier to talk about the benefits of particular apps, services or activities that they used the internet for.

As we saw above in Section 8, many of the children could see the positive benefits of social media for relaxation, escape, and friendship, although it also brought some anxiety for some of the children and their parents. Another common response the children gave to this question was that the internet enabled them to learn about new things, and that it helped with their homework. Eve (17), Grant (15) and Robert (16) were just some of the children who were using various sites to inform them of current events and enable them to learn new facts.

Eve reflected that the best thing about the internet was the speed at which people can acquire information, gaining a fuller picture of news stories and politics, which might otherwise be unbalanced. She also felt that the internet widened her cultural horizons, allowing her to explore information and stories she encountered in the news, and elsewhere, in more depth.

Grant described the internet as a library through which he accessed a wide range of information and media daily – which is an attitude he also expressed last year. As a positive, he cited using the internet to search for inspiration for creative projects, for example using YouTube videos to learn new songs on the piano.

*“You name it you can do it [on the internet]”*

*Grant, aged 15*

### **Some children were proactively going online to explore new interests.**

- Some of the children proactively explored more niche or alternative content online, giving them access to information and world views they might not be able to find out about elsewhere.
- Some children with more mainstream interests were also able to develop these through proactive use of the internet.

Many of the children were going online to nurture existing interests, such as Grant using YouTube to learn songs on the piano. Others were going online to explore new interests and develop new passions.

Carmen (16) has started her own small business, designing and making hampers with sweets inside, and selling them online. She has recently started Instagram and Facebook pages to market her hampers online, giving the majority of the money she made to charity, and keeping a little of the income for herself.

Josie (12) had begun to search online for anime cartoons that very few of her peers were accessing. She had recently started searching for anime conventions to further explore this emerging passion, and had even looked into attending them, although she was disappointed to find that “hardly any of them are in Britain”. This echoes findings from previous years, suggesting that children are often exploring things online that they would hope to later explore in their offline lives.

Minnie (16) was going online to broaden her musical knowledge. A lot of the music Minnie listened to was not popular among her peers, and she had begun actively looking for live events where she could see her favourite musicians.

Not all of the sample were involved in using social media to explore interests that were not shared by their peers. Many of the children used recommendations from their friends and schoolmates, either in person or via social media, to find new content, and were happy to follow trends and enjoy what was popular with their peer group, rather than seeking out alternatives. For instance, Sarah (13) enjoyed consuming media recommend to her via friends at school, watching shows such as *Three Girls* and *13 Reasons Why*, the latter being popular among many in the sample.

### **Some used social media as a means of expressing solidarity for certain causes.**

- Some of the children described using social media as a means to express solidarity with a cause – for example by sharing commemorative messages on Snapchat in the wake of the Manchester bombings.
- While for most of the younger children this was generally just about sharing messages, some older children could articulate feeling empowered by the internet to make a positive change to society – for example by signing online petitions.

Another positive use of the internet cited by children was the use of social media to bring people together around a cause. Many of the children had used Snapchat and Facebook to express their support for a cause by liking or sharing posts.

This was particularly evident in the wake of the recent Manchester terror attack. Sarah (13), Grant (15) and Irfan (17) had all seen statuses or images calling for solidarity in the wake of the attack and had shared or liked them to show support. Many of their friendship groups had been doing the same thing.

*“It’s good that people talk about these things like the Paris attack and the Manchester attack. It shows people care”*

*Sarah, aged 13*

Some of Sarah's friends had been at the concert that was the site of the Manchester attack, which had occurred a week before the interview with her. She first heard news of the attack through Snapchat. Although she found the content upsetting she thought it was positive that people were sharing their tributes to those affected by the attack. Sarah herself shared tributes to the victims via Snapchat.

Alice (12) had seen mentions of the hashtag 'Pray for Manchester' on her social media accounts, and although she hadn't shared it herself, friends of hers had posted the slogan.

A few of the respondents felt that sharing these images or statuses was a bit tokenistic, and didn't really change anything. However, they still felt there was some merit in them. For instance, Sarah said that although she was unable to do anything to help in these situations, it was "nice to show you care".

Some of the older children were using the internet to support causes in a way they felt had more of a direct impact on events. Brigit (18) followed political debates, and sought out and signed petitions online for causes she supports. For example, she recently signed a petition for a 24 hour drop-in centre for suicidal people in Northern Ireland, which was subsequently built.

Irfan (17) had recently come across an app for fundraising, which allows the easy transfer of money to fund good causes. He and his friends spend time working at an Islamic relief centre which raises money for those who have been victims of attacks in the Middle East. He wants to get the app so he can help fundraise for the same cause, and also thinks the internet can help raise awareness of important causes around the world.

# 11. Glossary

**Native ads:** Advertises in the format of the site on which they are hosted.

**Showbox:** A movie app that allows the user to stream movies or TV shows for free.

**Snapchat stories:** A montage of all the images/messages a person has shared with friends in a day posted on the main Snapchat feed. The user gets to choose what images/messages make up their 'story' and it is available for 24 hours before being deleted.

**Snapchat trophy:** An emoji that gets added to a user's 'trophy case'. Accumulated through use of the app. The more you use the app the more trophies you will gain.

**Snapstreaks:** Sharing an image or message with the same person for a number of consecutive days.

**Vlogger:** Someone posting video blogs, usually on YouTube.

**Wikipedia:** An online encyclopaedia that anyone can add to or edit, and which is reviewed by the online Wiki community, aiming to provide an element of quality control and accuracy of information.

**YouTuber:** Someone who making a living by posting videos online. The term suggests a professional or celebrity status. Only famous vloggers, with many subscribers and a clear source of income from vlogging, were understood by our sample to be YouTubers.

**123 Movies:** A website that offers the free illegal streaming of movies and TV shows.

Thank you

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