



# Children's media lives - Wave 5

A report for Ofcom

January 29<sup>th</sup> 2019

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# Introduction

As children grow older and technology advances, their consumption of media and attitudes around this inevitably change.

Some changes are more obvious than others. Widespread fads, such as playing Fortnite, using ‘angel’ filters on selfies, or watching Love Island<sup>1</sup>, can rapidly take hold of swathes of young people, but just as quickly pass away.

Understanding these fads is important because they demonstrate what young people value in the online world, and what they believe will give them social currency. They can also be wide-reaching, affecting so many young people in a short space of time.

However, subtler changes, while harder to detect, may be even more significant, because they can be indicators of longer-term trends and shifts in the underlying drivers of behaviour.

This qualitative research, incorporating the latest techniques for observing children’s media behaviours, enables us to uncover both these high impact ‘fads’ and subtler, potentially longer-term changes.

This, the fifth wave of the Children’s Media Lives study, draws on filmed interviews and ethnographic techniques as used in previous waves, and supplements these with screen recording, social media tracking and 360 filming techniques. These enable the research to get beyond what children say to provide evidence of what they are doing.

This research has found that in 2018:

Children are **consuming media** in ways that are:

- **More solitary** than ever – children are spending more time watching content alone on their own devices, sharing less family viewing and watching less and less TV content
- **More self-regulated** – some of the young people from their mid-teens are starting to demonstrate an awareness that too much social media could distract them from other things, and are developing strategies to manage their own time spent online, specifically on social media

The **content children post** is more **curated**:

- Children appear to be **more reserved about what they post online** - limiting their online profiles to just a few images or posts, and spending more time ‘re-posting’ content from others, rather than posting their own self-generated content
- Some appear to be more **image-conscious** this year, using specific filters with aesthetic, rather than funny effects

Children also seemed to **discuss the inappropriate content** they were seeing **more openly with researchers than in previous years**’.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see glossary on page 58 for definitions and clarifications



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## Executive summary

The study provides an in-depth understanding of how a sample of 18 children, aged 8-18, are thinking about and using digital media, and how this differs and is influenced by age, life-stage, family circumstances, peer groups and wider society. It explores how digital media use evolves over time as children develop, and in response to offline factors such as new schools, friendships, and access to new technologies.

The fifth wave of research was completed in summer 2018, following the previous four, in summer 2017, summer 2016, spring 2015 and autumn 2014.

The research examined a number of core themes across the five waves of research, including content preferences and watching behaviours, social media, and critical understandings and online safety. While all of these topics are covered, the emphasis shifts year on year. In 2017 there was weighting towards understanding children's behaviours around the news and trust and advertising, while this year we investigated risks and harm online, privacy and security in more detail. The main findings are set out below.

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## Summary of key findings

In summary, the research found:

### Content preferences and viewing behaviours

*Children were exerting more control over their viewing this year, watching content alone, and using streaming platforms that allowed them greater choice over what and when they watched.*

#### **Consuming content was more of a solitary activity this year, with most children watching the majority of videos, TV programmes and films on their own phones**

- Most children chose to watch content alone on their own devices rather than on a shared TV set
- In the majority of cases, this was so they could watch what they wanted, rather than having to compromise with family members
- Many also found their phones easier to use and navigate.

#### **Children often ‘multi-tasked’ with different devices and media when watching content**

- Some children multi-tasked by using their phone whilst watching content on another device
- Others watched content on their phone, and multi-tasked by flicking in and out of social media platforms whilst they watched content.

#### **Most were watching on-demand or streamed content every day. TV viewing at the time of broadcast was even more sporadic than in previous years and tended to be limited to live events or ‘appointment to view’ programmes**

- Overall children were using platforms such as Netflix and YouTube in preference to broadcast TV channels and other on-demand platforms
- Almost all children in the sample had access to a Netflix account that they used regularly
- Some also had additional streaming apps, such as Showbox, that they used to watch content on their phones or other devices
- Several of the children also watched content via broadcaster on-demand platforms, such as BBC iPlayer or All 4
- Those watching content at the time it was broadcast tended to be doing so for ‘appointment to view’ TV programmes such as live sport or widely popular, must-see shows such as ‘Love Island’.
- These ‘appointment to view’ live TV programmes were those most likely to be watched with family members

#### **Children preferred watching YouTube or Netflix over live TV programmes and other broadcaster on-demand platforms, as it felt more ‘personalised’**

- Children generally said they preferred watching content on YouTube or Netflix over live TV as they could watch it when they liked.
- Most said this was because content on these platforms felt more relevant to them, or ‘personalised’
- When choosing what to watch, most children were driven by content, rather than TV channel

### **Younger children especially seemed drawn to content involving characters and personalities they related to**

- Most related to characters who had interests similar to theirs, although age and gender were also important elements.
- In some cases, the children had purchased merchandise linked to characters they liked or related to, and some children could recall products such as games or gadgets that their favourite YouTubers had recommended

## **Social media**

*Children were curating their profiles on social media by carefully selecting the images they posted. Some were also self-regulating and limiting the time they spent on social media, in order to spend time on revision.*

### **Children were still using the same social media sites they used in previous years, but most preferred to keep their profiles highly curated**

- Most children were still using the same social media platforms they used in previous waves
- However, from online tracking we observed that children were not posting status updates or pictures as often as they had in previous waves, with most keeping self-generated content on their profiles to a minimum
- Children who did post on their profiles were generally re-posting content from others, as opposed to generating original content themselves.

### **Some children had multiple accounts on the same social media platforms, some of which were more self-consciously curated than others**

- Some children had multiple accounts on the same social media platform, and curated the content posted on their profiles depending on who they allowed to see each one
- More visible accounts tended to be highly curated, showing a 'picture perfect' self, whilst less visible accounts tended to be used to show their 'real-self' to more carefully controlled circles of their close friends
- Some children also felt that it was more important to curate certain social media platforms over others, depending on how 'permanent' or 'public' they were perceived to be

### **Some of the girls in the sample chose to portray themselves in more 'aesthetic' ways than in previous years**

- Girls were choosing more 'glamorised' or aesthetic Snapchat filters over the 'cute' animal faces they had used in previous waves
- 'Mirror pictures' (full body pictures in front of the mirror, where faces are covered by the flash) were popular amongst the older girls

### **Some older children reported strategies for managing or deleting social media to concentrate on revision**

- Some older respondents saw spending time on social media as a less compelling activity than in previous years, and several reported strategies for managing their time on social media to focus on school work.

- Some younger respondents, however, had still been keen to get social media, and feared feeling left out if they couldn't use it

### **There has been a significant decline in popularity of Snapstreaks since last year**

- Whilst last year most children were sending 'streaks' on Snapchat daily to keep up their Snapstreaks (a continuous thread of snap pictures between contacts), this year, the majority of children were no longer doing so.

### **Musical.ly<sup>2</sup>, was an app used by some girls in the sample, which could potentially expose them to content that might make them feel uncomfortable**

- Content on Musical.ly consists of a random stream of videos posted by other users, many of whom are strangers. This user-generated content was unpredictable, and could contain strange or unexpected themes, which could potentially make children feel uncomfortable if they came across something they didn't like or understand
- Younger girls in the sample were more likely than in previous years to be using Musical.ly
- Some older girls were also using Musical.ly, and a couple uploaded their own content as well as watching content uploaded by others

### **Fortnite was a popular game, played by most boys in the sample this year**

- Almost all boys in the sample played Fortnite on a daily basis
- Of these, several were watching gameplay videos on YouTube to learn gaming tips and strategies

### **Some of the games the children in our sample were playing had 'loot boxes' or mystery prizes, giving children opportunities to win randomly selected items. This meant they did not know what they might win from playing.**

- Some children said they thought these randomised rewards were exciting elements of the game
- Some games played by the children in the sample offered in-game purchases, and a couple of the children had bought items in the games they played

## **Critical understanding and online safety**

*Overall, children were more open than in previous waves about discussing inappropriate content they had seen. Some were choosing to keep their profiles public, despite knowing that they should not 'talk to strangers online'. In most cases, parents trusted their children to make sensible decisions online.*

### **Children were more blasé about discussing inappropriate content than in previous years**

- Children were more open than in previous years when discussing content that might be considered inappropriate

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<sup>2</sup> Called Musical.ly at the time of this research, the platform was bought by the technology company 'Bytedance' in August 2018 and merged with the platform 'TikTok' into a single app, also called 'TikTok'.

- In some cases, inappropriate content was signposted by YouTubers or other influencers, which meant children were likely to come across it after following recommendations from a YouTuber they followed

**Children were aware that they should not ‘talk to strangers’ online, but some were exposing themselves to contact from strangers by keeping their profiles public**

- Most children were familiar with warnings from school or parents about not ‘talking to strangers’ or sharing personal information about themselves online
- However, some children kept their profiles public or let people add them without knowing who they were, which meant they were open to the risk of being contacted by strangers.
- Some children had developed their own strategies for assessing whether it was safe to accept other users as ‘friends’, based on certain pieces of information they could see on their profile or account

**Many were inspired by YouTubers or skilled contributors to Musical.ly and aspired to create content like them**

- Some were regularly posting their own content on YouTube or Musical.ly, inspired by other content they had seen
- Some had the sense they might get ‘discovered’ by posting this content, in part fuelled by their perception that the content produced by YouTubers was accessible, often including ‘bloopers’ or presented in a casual attitude. Content children posted on YouTube therefore tended to mimic other YouTube content.

**Parents generally trusted that their children knew how to stay safe online, however most did monitor their children to some extent**

- Overall, parents trusted their children to make safe judgements, and were not overly worried about the information or content their children were sharing online, although some did have some concerns
- Parents were generally supportive of their children posting on YouTube or social media

**Like last year, many were not aware of the existence of personalised adverts and did not know how Facebook might make money**

- Most did not know about advert personalisation, and could not imagine how Facebook made money
- However, as in previous years, many of those who followed YouTubers, or other influencers, had an understanding of how they might make money as they were familiar with ideas like sponsorship and product endorsement.





## About this study

This is the fifth wave in an ongoing longitudinal study exploring children's media lives.

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.

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.

This document provides analysis of the findings from the fifth year of the study<sup>3</sup>.

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### New research techniques used this year

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

This year, we introduced three new elements: screen recording, social media tracking and 360 filming techniques, which gave us new data and insight into the behaviours and attitudes of the children in the sample.

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<sup>3</sup> The research materials used in this project can be found in Annex 1 & 2

## **Screen record**

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

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

## **Social media tracking**

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

Tracking of this nature supported our longitudinal investigation, allowing us to look back and review how posting behaviours had changed over time, revealing valuable insight into how children are controlling their online presence and self-image.

## **360 filming**

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

## **Building on previous insight – key findings from last year’s study**

Each year, the study builds on insights uncovered in previous waves in order to develop a longitudinal understanding of how attitudes and behaviours change over time. Last year, key findings centred around the following points:

### **Snapchat was the go-to platform for the majority of the children:**

Many children used Snap Chat as their primary social media, and the majority were sending ‘streaks’ daily. ‘Streaks’ consisted of short messages, sometimes just the word ‘streaks’ or the letter ‘s’ overlaid over often a black or blurry photo, which children sent to everyone in their contacts list each day. This allowed them to maintain a ‘Snapstreak’ – a function in Snapchat counting how many consecutive days each user ‘snapped’ with another user. Each user would therefore maintain different streaks with different contacts.

Snapchat also featured a series of emojis appearing next to a user’s friends, quantifying the nature of their friendship with that person. For example, a smiley face would denote that friend was one of their best friends on Snapchat, defined by the fact that they send messages to each other regularly. These gamified elements of Snapchat were appealing to the majority of the children in the sample, although some were critical of the trend, or felt they had ‘grown out’ of it.

### **There was a decline in the popularity of YouTubers:**

In previous waves some Youtubers and vloggers, such as Alfie Deyes and Zoella, were extremely popular amongst the sample. However, last year, there was a significant decline in children watching these vloggers, as well as the overall amount of time spent watching YouTubers by those who did still watch them occasionally.

YouTube remained popular overall, in particular with younger viewers, but many of the top YouTube stars had decreased in salience or influence with some of the children in the sample.

### **Fad programs on popular platforms like Netflix spread widely:**

Last year there were some programs that were widely watched across the sample, even amongst children of different ages, in different locations or different family situations. Examples that contained potentially distressing or inappropriate themes for children included ‘Love Island’ and ‘13 Reasons Why’.

### **Family watching was still an important ritual for some viewers**

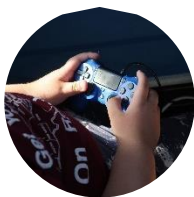
Whilst there was an increase in the amount of time spent watching content alone, some children had established daily or weekly routines around some specific shows and enjoyed bonding over them with particular family members. Sometimes family members would bond by watching series together, and would hold each other to account, to prevent either one from skipping ahead alone.

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## Meet the sample

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

- Age (spread across 8-15 at the time of Year 1 recruitment)
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- 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



### **Zak, 8**

Newly recruited this year, Zak is an only child living in Sheffield with his parents. He loves technology and has been posting some of his own content on YouTube. He says when he is older, he would like to be a YouTuber like his favourite vlogger, DanTDM.



### **Bryony, 9**

New to our sample this year, Bryony lives on a farm with her mother and grandparents in rural south Wales. She has 8 ponies and spends most of her time looking after them. She has recently been picked up for the Welsh riding squad and is receiving lessons every other day. She has Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, and in her spare time she likes watching YouTube.



### **Ben, 9**

Lives with his mum and dad and two older siblings in London. He is an avid football fan supporting Liverpool FC and is a fan of the Harry Potter series. He watches Netflix on 'kids mode' and a lot of YouTube, where he prefers football highlights and gaming videos. He recently got an Xbox, where he mostly plays Fortnite and FIFA.



**Emma, 9**

Lives on a farm in rural Northern Ireland with her mum and step-dad. She has two older siblings. She is a keen horse rider, and in addition to her ponies she's now 'crazy' about Roxy, her new horse. She predominantly watches children's TV, such as CBBC, but also watches her Netflix kids account and YouTube, where she recently started following a couple of vloggers.



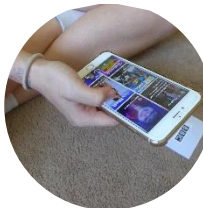
**Ahmed, 12**

Lives in London with his mum, older brother and four younger half-brothers - the youngest of whom was born this last year. Ahmed has ADHD and learning difficulties which have been formally diagnosed this year, and he is receiving additional support at school. He spends a lot of his spare time playing Fortnite and FIFA on his Xbox, as well as playing with his new baby brother.



**Peter, 13**

Lives with his parents and younger sister in a rural town in the Midlands. Sports still play a large role in his life, and he plays for two different cricket teams as well as the school football team. When not playing sport, he enjoys playing Fortnite and FIFA on the Xbox, and watching football with his dad on TV. His younger sister has started her own YouTube channel, and says she wants to be famous.



**Alice, 13,**

Lives with her parents and older brother in a village in the South of England. Alice has consolidated her friendships and is enjoying secondary school more. Alice still uses Instagram and Snapchat to communicate with her friends. She also watches a lot of YouTube videos, mostly make-up tutorials – a new passion of hers – and lifestyle vlogs.



**Nadia, 13**

Lives with her parents and two sisters 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. In terms of TV content, she likes to watch re-runs of old shows, and movie clips and trailers on YouTube.



### **Jack, 13**

An only child, living in Taunton with his mum, her partner and his son. This year he got two new bikes and now spends a lot of time after school going to the skatepark with his mates. He loves playing Fortnite on his PS4 and going on Snapchat to message his friends. His favourite thing to watch on Netflix is Love Island, which he knows is inappropriate for his age, but he likes the personalities and how funny they are.



### **Josie, 13**

An only child who lives with her mum in a small town in the west of England. The two have just moved to a new house, and this has coincided with her grandma going into hospital, so her routine has been a bit disrupted this year. Josie has 'come out' and is part of the LGBT community at school; has joined the drama club and has made lots of friends. She has also been allowed on social media for the first time and enjoys Instagram which she uses daily.



### **Shaniqua, 14**

Lives in a flat in North London with her mother and three younger brothers, with whom she shares a room. She started to go out more and seems to have found her space. Her mum is concerned about Shaniqua's use of social media as she's not able to supervise her Instagram or Snapchat accounts, and is worried she might be taking risks by accepting people she does not know.



### **William, 14**

Lives with his busy parents and four of his five siblings in a large house in the Midlands. William doesn't do any extra-curricular activities, but often goes to the park after school to play football with his friends. He uses Snapchat as his main means of communications, although he also chats to his friends on his Xbox, while playing games.



### **Sarah, 15**

Lives with her mum, dad and sister in a busy area in the North of England. Sarah now has more of an idea of what she wants to do in the future and is hoping to either go into the police force, become a psychotherapist or a social worker. As such, she is keeping her head down at school and is arguing less with her teachers. She continues to go out regularly with her friends after school.



### **Jasleen, 15**

Newly recruited this year, Jasleen lives with her mother and two older sisters in a two-bedroom house in Bradford. She doesn't like to go out much and spends most of her time on her phone on social media and watching TV with her family. Jasleen loves photography and taking pictures of herself and her family.



### **Grant, 16**

Lives in London with his parents, sister and younger brother. He finished his GCSEs last summer, and although he found these stressful he is confident that he has done well. The highlight of the year was his end of year prom. After this, his parents bought him a pet dog which they saw as a tactic for ensuring Grant stayed at home over the summer. When he isn't too busy revising for his exams he spends a lot of time watching shows on Netflix- which he watches solely on his iPhone.



### **Carmen, 17**

An only child, living near Manchester with her mum. The family practise Islam, and Carmen recently started wearing a hijab. She continues to spend a lot of time on YouTube and social media, although she limited her time online while studying for her GSCEs. Carmen has decided she will study media, science and health and social care next year, and plans to be a physiotherapist when she grows up.



### **Robert, 17**

An only child who lives with his mum in a Scottish town. Robert has had a difficult year at school, finding exams and deadlines particularly stressful. Supporting Celtic remains a big part of his life, but he doesn't play football as much as he used to. His interest in music has continued to grow and he now enjoys going to live gigs and listening to his favourite artists on Spotify. After school Robert likes watching Netflix or scrolling through Twitter for down time. For his birthday he got the new Spiderman 4 DVD and Curb Your Enthusiasm DVD



**Minnie, 17**

Lives with her mum in the East of England. She has four older siblings who no longer live at home. Minnie has just completed her GCSEs, for which she spent a lot of time revising. In order to concentrate she deleted social media and has not got it back since. She plans to go to the school sixth form and is enjoying her long summer break on holiday with a friend.





# Content preferences and watching behaviours

*Children were exerting more control over their viewing this year, watching content alone, and using streaming platforms that allowed them greater choice over what and when they watched.*

## **SUMMARY:**

**Consuming content was more of a solitary activity this year, with most children watching the majority of videos, TV programmes and films on their own phones**

- Most children chose to watch content alone on their own devices rather than on a shared TV set
- In the majority of cases, this was so they could watch what they wanted, rather than having to compromise with family members
- Many also found their phones easier to use and navigate

Most children chose to watch content alone, on their own devices rather than on a shared TV set. Emma (aged nine) for instance, regularly watched a few clips on YouTube, in her room, on her phone, before going to bed. Whilst she enjoyed watching some programmes with her mum on TV, such as 'So Awkward' on CBBC and 'Dance Mums', she was often busy looking after her two horses, and so tended to prefer to watch something of her own choice, when she had spare time. Similarly, Zak (aged eight) watched Netflix and YouTube on his iPad, or the TV set in his playroom. Zak's mum also allowed him to watch one Netflix show in bed, on his bedroom TV, before he went to sleep. This would normally be either an episode of 'Horrid Henry' or 'Alvin and the Chipmunks'. Grant (aged 16) also spent several hours watching his favourite Netflix shows most days - in particular during the summer holidays. He generally watched Netflix on his phone whilst he was in bed and often fell asleep while he watched.

In the majority of cases, children enjoyed watching content alone, as this enabled them to choose what they wanted, rather than having to compromise to share with family members. For example, Josie (aged 13) almost entirely watched content alone, preferring to avoid the shows her mum chose (often romantic films, such as 'Pride and Prejudice') unless her mum insisted. Her mum had previously encouraged Josie to watch dramas or the news with her, but Josie was pushing back more than in previous years, preferring to watch content she liked, alone in her room, rather than to compromise.

Zak also preferred to watch content alone, saying he didn't watch things with his parents, as '*I don't like what they watch sometimes*'. Instead he preferred to watch content he liked on his phone or iPad. On YouTube he could watch videos relating to his favourite game, 'Fortnite', and he was a fan of Youtubers (like 'DanTDM') who played the game. He said he only watched content on his mum's TV set, if he couldn't find anything to watch on YouTube.

Children explained that their phones and tablets were more readily available than the TV set, and so they often watched content on their own devices. For example, Grant (aged 16) always had his phone in his pocket or by his bed; and watched content on his phone on journeys to and from school and at breaktimes. He said he preferred his phone to his laptop, as it was portable and small, so he could watch content on it anywhere. This meant he did not have to show his mum, brother or sister what he was watching, and did not have to choose something more family friendly.

Alice (aged 13) had also started to use her phone to watch videos on YouTube, or series such as 'Ru Paul's Drag Race' on Netflix. Last year she had used her iPad, but this year she said she thought the smaller device was more comfortable to use and she preferred it to the other devices in the house. Carmen (aged 17) also had a Netflix account installed on her phone and used this to watch teen dramas and other programmes she knew were 'suitable' for her (such as 'Free Reign').

#### **SUMMARY:**

##### **Children often 'multi-tasked' with different devices and media when watching content**

- Some children multi-tasked by using their phone whilst watching content on another device
- Others watched content on their phone, and multi-tasked by flicking in and out of social media platforms whilst they watched content.

Children sometimes multi-tasked by using their phone whilst watching content on another device. Some said they preferred to consume content in this way, as it meant they could keep track of social media whilst watching content. An example of this was Josie (aged 13), who multi-tasked by watching content on her iPad whilst simultaneously chatting to friends on her phone via WhatsApp and Instagram. She said she preferred consuming content like this, as it calmed her down to know what was going on. She regularly had several group chats going on at once in Instagram, and during the interview felt compelled to check and re-check these as the conversations developed in each. As she had set up some of these groups herself, she wanted to keep up with group chats and felt a sense of missing out if she didn't monitor them.

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*"I can't just do one thing...I'm probably replying to people. I do both things so one cancels the other out. It makes me chill."*

| Josie, aged 13

Similarly, Sarah (aged 15) liked to talk to friends on social media whilst she watched episodes of 'Coronation Street' every night when she came home from school. She said she did not consume much content on her personal TV at home, she preferred using her mum's laptop and this meant she could watch the programme at a time of her choosing, pausing the show if she liked, whilst simultaneously monitoring social media on her phone. Robert (aged 17) also used his phone whilst watching live football matches on TV, so he could scroll through Twitter at the same time. He said he liked to read through the most recent tweets about the game while the action happened, although he would never tweet anything himself.

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*“During a football game Twitter is the place to be because everyone’s opinions go on there - especially with the introduction of VAR”*

| Robert, aged 17

Shaniqua also admitted she scrolled through her social media while watching certain programmes on TV - especially if they didn’t catch her full attention. If she felt her attention waning she explained she would usually take out her phone, rather than changing the channel to find something more interesting. However, she said she would not do this if she was enjoying the programme she was watching.

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*‘I won’t [use my phone] if I’m really focused on what I’m watching... if it catches my attention’*

| Shaniqua, aged 14

Others multi-tasked using their phone, by flicking in and out of social media platforms whilst they watched content. Children generally did not log out of their social media accounts on their phones, and would monitor notifications, or reply to messages as soon as they popped up on the screen. For example, when Sarah (aged 15) watched Netflix on her phone, she would switch in and out of the Snapchat app in order to reply to messages from friends while she watched. Alice (aged 13) also received social media notifications while watching YouTube on her phone. She said she didn’t mind that her social media interrupted the videos, as she felt she could do both activities at the same time.

## **Building on previous insights: moving away from family viewing**

In recent years the research has seen an increase in solitary viewing, over family viewing. In Year 3, whilst children were consuming a significant amount of content alone on their personal devices, the research found that 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. 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.

In wave 4 the solitary consumption of content on personal, portable devices had increased. Family viewing was still important, but was rarer and more planned, conceived of as more of a one-off ritual, whereby particular family members would choose to watch a specific programme together. This was an important bonding activity for some people, such as Brigit and her dad (no longer included in the sample).

This year there was a further decline in family viewing, with children spending more time watching content alone on their personal devices

## SUMMARY:

**Most were watching on-demand or streamed content every day. TV viewing at the time of broadcast was even more sporadic than in previous years and tended to be limited to live events or ‘appointment to view’ programmes**

- Overall children were using platforms such as Netflix and YouTube in preference to broadcast TV channels and other broadcaster on-demand platforms
- Almost all children in the sample had access to a Netflix account that they used regularly
- Some also had additional streaming apps that they used to watch content on their phones or other devices
- Whilst less popular than Netflix and YouTube, several of the children also watched content via broadcaster on-demand platforms, such as BBC iPlayer or All 4
- Those watching content at the time it was broadcast tended to be doing so for ‘appointment to view’ TV programmes such as live sport or widely popular, must-see shows such as ‘Love Island’.
- These ‘appointment to view’ live TV programmes were those most likely to be watched with family members

Overall, children were using platforms such as Netflix and YouTube in preference to broadcast TV channels and other broadcaster on-demand platforms. For example, Carmen (aged 17) watched a series of teen dramas, including ‘Free Reign’ and ‘Alex & Katie’, on her Netflix account, which was installed on her phone. She also really liked YouTube, where she said she could spend hours on end, watching videos and clicking on the ‘recommended’ options after each video clip finished. In particular, she liked keeping up with the YouTuber’s ‘Zoella’ and ‘Alfie Deyes’ (Zoella’s boyfriend) by watching their ‘lifestyle vlogs’<sup>4</sup>. She said she felt that YouTube contained content that was more relatable than content she found on broadcast TV.

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*“YouTube is made from people my age for people my age”*

| Carmen, aged 17

Josie (aged 13) had a Netflix account installed on her iPad. She said she almost never watched live TV content on the TV set and saw this as something her mum would do. Instead, she preferred browsing YouTube or Netflix for shows she knew she would find interesting. Most mornings, before school, she woke up early and streamed content on her iPad in bed.

Emma (aged nine) said she did not watch much live content on the TV set because she felt she was always busy with her horses and other activities, and so was never available to watch a programme at the time of broadcast. She liked that she could take her phone anywhere and watch things at a time of her choosing - even when these shows weren’t available on live TV. She especially enjoyed watching cartoons on YouTube. She searched for content she liked, such as ‘Dennis the Menace’ and ‘Arthur’, then generally let it ‘auto play’<sup>5</sup> on to the next video, rather than actively browsing the recommendations or searching again.

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<sup>4</sup> Lifestyle vlogs are a type of video blogging in which the person videos their day to day life, letting viewers know things such as what they eat, what they buy, how they furnish their homes etc.

<sup>5</sup> Auto play is a feature on YouTube in which content is generated for the user, based on their previous watching history, and plays automatically, without any action from the user once the video they have been watching ends. This feature is also present on Netflix, and Instagram videos. Auto play functions can be turned off by the user.

Almost all children in the sample had access to a Netflix account that they used regularly – for some this was a family account they had access to, whereas others had their own profiles with age-restricted access to child-friendly content. Like Josie and Carmen, Minnie (aged 17) regularly watched Netflix. She especially liked to watch documentaries and horror movies, which she mainly watched on her iPad in her room, as these were not shows her mum enjoyed watching with her. She had her own account (which she'd had for several years) and had recently used to it watch the most recent series of 'Black Mirror', a dystopian sci-fi series. She enjoyed using Netflix to find new content too; and said she had used the platform to find 'teen movies' such as 'The Breakfast Club' and 'Edge of Seventeen'. She tended to scroll through the different programme categories on Netflix, rather than searching for something specific.

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## *“Normally I just scroll what’s on popular”*

| Minnie, aged 17

Sarah's family shared a Netflix account, and each family member had their own profile. Sarah (aged 15) had recently started watching old episodes of 'Love Island' on her profile, whilst simultaneously watching the newest episodes as they were broadcast on ITV. As previously mentioned, Grant (aged 16) also had a Netflix account installed on his phone. During the summer holidays he said he watched shows on the platform for four to five hours a day. He explained that on school nights he would normally watch Netflix in bed, after dinner - watching until he fell asleep.

In most cases, children were using a Netflix profile belonging to another family member. For some of the younger viewers, this meant that the account was not limited to 'child' settings, so they could potentially be exposed to adult content. For example, Emma (aged nine) used Netflix to re-watch her favourite old episodes of 'SpongeBob Square Pants'. However, she was aware that she was using her brother's Netflix account, and said she had to be careful because she knew it was not set on 'kids mode'<sup>6</sup>. As a result, she was cautious about the content she accessed, and tried to select only programmes she felt would be suitable. Similarly, William (aged 14) used his older sister's boyfriend's Netflix account to watch comedies. There he had watched 'Pineapple Express' and 'This Is the End', both of which were rated 15 for their strong language. Ben, aged 9, was an exception, as he watched Netflix using a 'Kids'<sup>7</sup> account, and therefore was restricted in the types of content he could access.

Some also had additional streaming apps that they used to watch content on their phones or other devices. For example, whilst Grant (aged 16) was primarily streaming via Netflix, he also had other streaming apps installed on his phone. He occasionally used 'ShowBox' (an illegal streaming app he had used more frequently last year) to watch newly released films. Using ShowBox, he could also watch shows from Netflix, as well as other film and TV viewing platforms. He particularly liked Marvel and DC film adaptations featuring his favourite comic book heroes and looked on Showbox to find content like this which was not available on Netflix.

Nadia (aged 13) enjoyed watching trailers, clips and full movies on YouTube; and also accessed a lot of this content on other online streaming platforms such as Vimeo and Daily Motion. She also often used Kodi (a TV streaming app) to watch new movies on the family TV set in the living room.

Those watching content at the time it was broadcast tended to be doing so for 'appointment to view' TV programmes such as live sport or widely popular, must-see shows like 'Love Island'. The research took place whilst the 2018 World Cup was underway, and most respondents reported watching some of these matches live. For some, this was something of a special event, in which the family got together to see the game unfolding in real time. For example, Minnie's older brother and nephew, who no longer lived at home, had

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<sup>6</sup> Kids mode on Netflix allows parents to set up controls, by creating a 4-digit pin, to stop their children watching content above a certain maturity rating, of which they can select.

<sup>7</sup> Netflix have a 'kids' account option, appearing as a separate account profile on the home page, which features TV shows and movies they consider to be appropriate for children (rated U)

joined her and her mother for the Russia vs. Spain World Cup match. Minnie (aged 17) and her mother recollected that this was unusual - as they did not usually get together as a family to watch live TV. They said it was exciting to watch the game together, and a good opportunity to bond with others – ‘because people were talking so much about it’.

For those who liked sport, watching games live was an important part of their viewing schedule. For example, Peter (aged 13) and his dad both supported Birmingham Football Club, and watched the matches live on TV together regularly. Both liked to remind one another when a match was on, so they could look forward to it and plan their schedule accordingly. Similarly, Ben (aged nine) and his dad would also watch football updates together, such as ‘Soccer AM’ and ‘Match of the Day’. Robert (aged 17) also loved to watch live football matches on TV, and this was one of the few things he watched at the time of broadcast.

Apart from sport, the types of content children tended to watch live were ‘must-see’ programmes popular with their peer groups. These tended to be contemporary shows that were talked about at school and in their peer groups, such as ‘Love Island’: a reality dating show, in which single contestants ‘couple up’ to compete to be ‘crowned’ the best couple and win a cash prize. It was especially popular this year and watched by both boys and girls, and across both older and younger children in the sample. It was also well-known: even those who weren’t watching it were familiar with the show, having heard about it from friends or family.

For William (aged 14), Love Island was a topic of conversation with his friends at school, and he watched it every evening. At the time of the interview, he was also catching up with previous series on Netflix. Sarah (aged 15) had also been watching old episodes of Love Island on Netflix whilst the new series aired. She watched the live episodes together with friends at her friend’s house; however, said she didn’t enjoy it as much as the previous seasons because she found the characters to be all the same. She felt the content was appropriate for secondary school students, but suggested it the swearing made it inappropriate for younger children.

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### *‘I wouldn’t want my kids to watch it’*

| Sarah, 15

At the younger end of the sample, Jack (aged 13) watched ‘Love Island’, despite saying it was probably not appropriate for his age. He said he liked it for the characters and the drama. In contrast, Ben, aged nine, and one of the youngest in the sample, had seen fragments of episodes with his 19-year-old brother who generally watched the show alone, upstairs in his room. Ben said he didn’t understand why people liked it, as it seemed to be about ‘people always talking and having dinner with candles’. It did not appeal to him and he was not interested in watching it again, but he valued the time spent with his older brother, so would watch it if his brother chose to put it on.

‘Appointment to view’ live TV programmes were those most likely to be watched with family members. In addition to live sports and must-see shows like ‘Love Island’, children also enjoyed watching some TV programmes live with their family. In some cases, children were still watching the same programmes with specific family members as they had in previous research waves. These tended to be competition shows like ‘The X Factor’, ‘Britain’s Got Talent’, ‘Dance Moms’ or ‘Strictly Come Dancing’, or family dramas children liked with their parents. For example, Alice (aged 13) watched ‘The Split’ – a BBC drama about divorce lawyers – each week with her mum, a divorce lawyer herself. Similarly, Nadia (aged 13) watched TV dramas and soaps like ‘Riverdale’, ‘EastEnders’ and ‘Hollyoaks’ with her mum when they aired on TV. She said she enjoyed the murder mysteries and suspenseful plot lines but indicated that she mainly watched these shows because her mum liked them and wouldn’t have necessarily chosen them herself.

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### *“I watch soaps because my mum is into soaps”*

| Nadia, aged 13

Unlike most in the sample, William (aged 14) enjoyed watching TV programmes more than a lot of the content available on YouTube. He occasionally watched the reality TV series, ‘First Dates’, and the superhero crime

drama, 'Gotham' once a week on E4. He started watching the latter after a suggestion from a friend and kept following it as he particularly liked superhero origin stories.

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*“I like programmes on TV because the stories are better and there is more choice”*

| William, 14

In addition, Bryony (aged nine), who lived with her grandparents, sometimes watched Coronation Street live with her grandma. She said she liked the show for its drama. Whilst she didn't plan her schedule around it, she said she would join her grandma if she happened to hear it was on.

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*“If I hear it on I stop what I'm doing and rush into the room to watch it”*

| Bryony, aged 9

Jasleen (aged 15) also preferred to watch some types of content on TV with her family. Her favourites were Indian dramas and soaps like 'Hollyoaks' and 'EastEnders', but she also enjoyed programmes like 'Britain's Got Talent' and 'Take Me Out' if she happened to catch them. She said she did not like to watch this type of content alone because *“then if it's funny I laugh alone...”*.

A few of the children also watched content via broadcaster on-demand services, such as BBC iPlayer or All 4. For example, Minnie (aged 17) liked to browse iPlayer for documentaries and had set up her own account so she could keep track of what she was watching. She had recently watched a documentary about the Grenfell Tower fire, which she found interesting. She said she would check iPlayer if she was looking for something interesting to watch and did not feel like looking on Netflix. Minnie had also recently discovered the comedy, 'Peep Show' on All 4, and enjoyed watching it on her iPad when her mum was not around - as her mum did not enjoy the humour. Minnie tended to choose episodes at random, rather than watching the show chronologically. This was a habit she had developed during her revision period, when she had felt that time was limited, and so had only watched one episode at a time. Not watching the show in chronological order allowed her to avoid getting sucked into the series and 'binge watching' when she felt she should be revising.

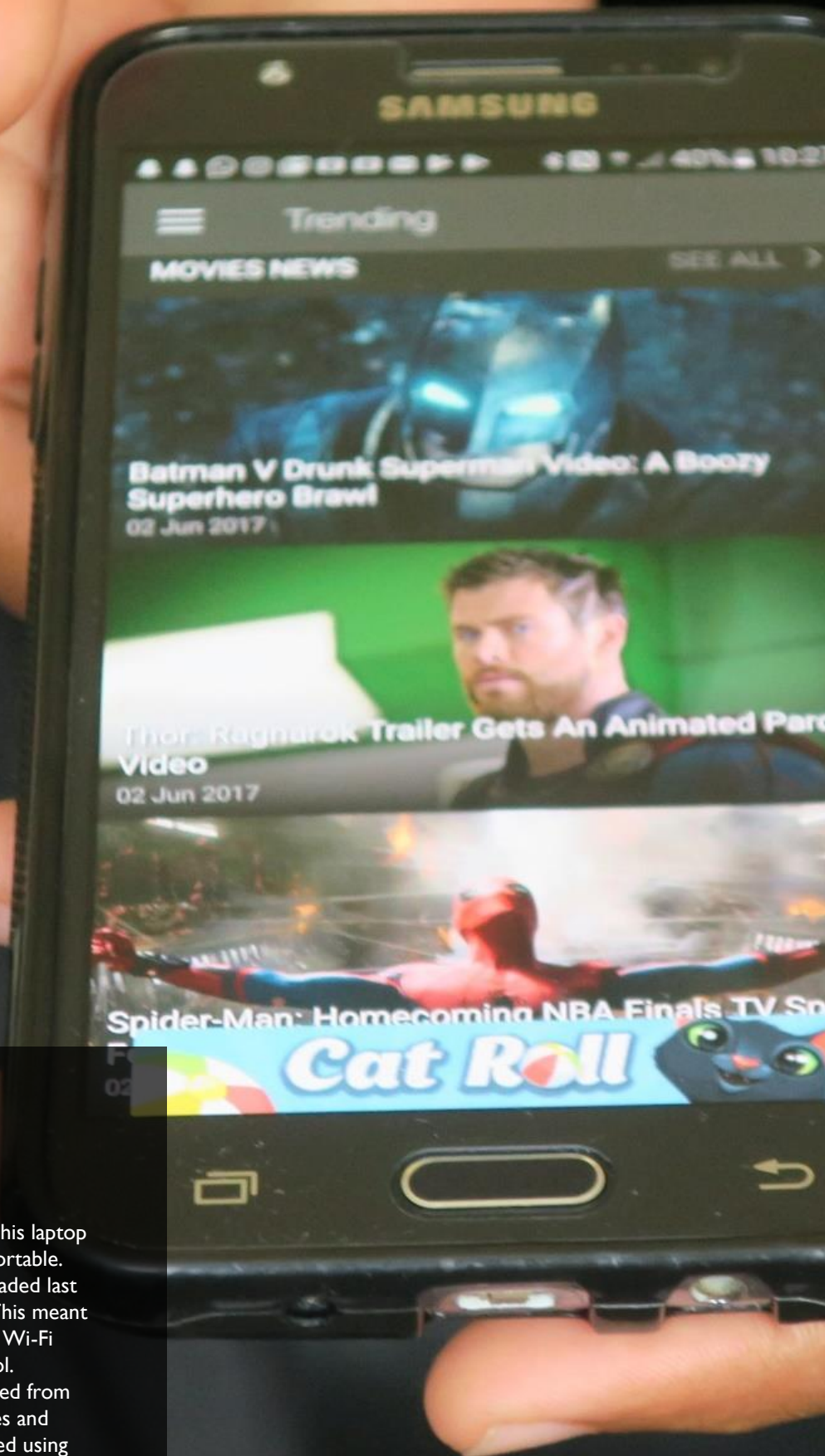
Carmen (aged 17), who was passionate about food and cooking, liked to use iPlayer to watch episodes of 'The Great British Bake Off'. She had installed the iPlayer app on her phone in preparation for the start of the new season. Ahmed (aged 12) also preferred watching content on broadcaster on-demand services, rather than on live TV. He said on live TV he often caught the end of a show, but if it was a show he liked, he would go to catch-up services, so he could watch from the beginning of a programme or series. He especially liked watching 'Jamie Johnson', a drama series about a schoolboy becoming a professional footballer, on BBC iPlayer upstairs, by himself.

### **Building on previous insights: Live TV watching has declined over time**

Throughout previous waves of research, there has been a decline in the amount of live TV content watched by children in the sample. Last year, children were spending more time streaming programmes from platforms like YouTube and Netflix than in previous years. Children were also consuming content from a broader range of sources than in previous years, including watching live TV, pre-recorded shows, DVDs and short-form content on YouTube. In addition, children were likely to watch media from several different sources over the course of the day.

*“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, in Wave 4 (aged 17, no longer included in the sample)*



**Grant (aged 16)**

Grant preferred using his phone rather than his laptop to watch content because it was small and portable. He often used 'Showbox' (an app he downloaded last year) to store all his videos offline for free. This meant he could watch content when he didn't have Wi-Fi access, such as on the bus to and from school. Showbox allowed him to view content he liked from Netflix such as Marvel originals, and TV series and shows from many other platforms. Grant liked using the Showbox app to keep up to date with all the latest TV shows, by using the 'trending' feature. Despite being easily downloadable for android and IOS devices, Showbox is illegal. Grant was not concerned about this, and it is possible he did not know.



## SUMMARY:

### Children preferred watching YouTube or Netflix over live TV programmes and other broadcaster on-demand services, as it felt more 'personalised'

- Children generally said they preferred watching content on YouTube or Netflix over live TV as they could watch it when they liked.
- Most said this was because content on these platforms felt more relevant to them, or 'personalised'
- When choosing what to watch, most children were driven by content, rather than TV channel

The children in our sample said that they generally preferred watching content on YouTube or Netflix over live TV as they could watch it when they liked. They liked having greater control over what they watched and when they chose to watch certain programmes, which gave them greater control over how they spent their time overall.

For example, Bryony (aged nine) lived on a farm with her parents and grandparents. She had eight ponies which needed feeding, grooming and exercising, and had recently been picked up for the Welsh riding squad, so was having regular one-to-one lessons. With so much of her time spent at the stables or at school, she said most of the time she only ever had a 'spare 30 minutes', which was not at a predictable or regular time. During these 30 minutes she would usually watch YouTube on her phone, as this meant she could choose what she wanted to watch, rather than relying on what happened to be on TV at the time.

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## *"I just love watching YouTube."*

| Bryony, aged 9

Children felt better able to navigate to programmes and content they liked, and that they felt was aimed at them, on YouTube and Netflix, as opposed to on live TV. Most said content on these platforms felt more relevant to them, or 'personalised', and they liked to watch content that was specifically tailored to their hobbies and interests. For example, Bryony enjoyed vlogs about horse-riding (which was one of her main passions). She would also supplement content she saw on live TV with related content she found on YouTube, such as 'behind the scenes' or 'preview' video clips for *Coronation Street* – one of her favourite shows. Alice (aged 13) also said she liked the 'behind the scenes' or 'real life' aspect of YouTube.

Peter (aged 13), William (aged 14) and Ben (aged nine) liked to watch 'gameplay highlights' videos on YouTube, which showed famous players playing online games. This allowed them to access advice and tips for how to play. In particular, they liked watching games about *Fortnite*, which was a popular new game this year. Peter said he especially liked content like this on YouTube over live TV because it was "*shorter*" and "*more for me*".

Some children referred to their age or the fact that they were looking for 'kids' content when comparing the different platforms. Ben said he particularly liked his Netflix Kids account, as it had "*the best kids' programmes*". He also preferred to watch Netflix programmes via the TV, rather than the live programmes he might otherwise find there.

Sarah (aged 15) said that she felt content on live TV was aimed at older people and reflected that none of her friends really watched anything there. Instead, they preferred to watch content on YouTube or Netflix, where they could choose something they felt suited them.

As previously mentioned, Carmen (aged 17) saw YouTube as providing more 'immediate' content, which was made by people her age for people her age. She regularly watched vloggers, such as *Alfie Deyes*, on YouTube, and would tune into their videos whenever they had uploaded something new.

When choosing what to watch, most children were driven by content, rather than TV channel, thinking more about the programmes they liked watching, rather than the channels where these programmes were shown. Most couldn't describe in detail what differentiated certain channels, apart from those which were obviously 'kids' channels, such as *CBBC* and *Cartoon Network*. Instead, children were more familiar with the differences

between different platforms (such as YouTube or Netflix) as opposed to terrestrial TV channels (like BBC 1, ITV or Channel 4).

Furthermore, children tended to be drawn to a channel because it was airing a programme they liked, rather than because they liked the channel itself. However, for the younger children, there were some exceptions, as they recognised certain channels as being more suitable for their age. For example, Bryony and Ben (both aged nine) enjoyed watching content on CBBC from time to time. Bryony said she watched CBeebies on her iPad sometimes, finding the content there *'a bit funny'*, but reflected that she might be getting *'a bit old for that'*. Ben said he didn't like the BBC and ITV because their programmes were not for children and said that he preferred Cartoon Network for this reason.

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*“It [Cartoon Network] has funny programmes made for kids. I used to watch it all the time when I was really younger”*

Ben, aged 9

When it came to describing channels he watched, Ahmed (aged 12) said he sometimes watched the Sky channel, 'Baby TV' with his new baby brother. He also liked one CBBC programme, 'Jamie Johnson', which he watched every Thursday on BBC iPlayer. However, when asked of his opinion on CBBC he admitted he only went on there for Jamie Johnson and did not really like the channel because *'everything else on it is boring'*.

Similarly, Peter (aged 13) said he sometimes watched CBBC with his younger sister, although overall, he thought there was more interesting content on YouTube. He felt that the content on TV was generally intended for a wider audience, in comparison with YouTube content which he saw as more directed to specific audiences. For example, he liked being able to connect with *"Fortnite people"* on YouTube and said the content there was *"funnier"*. He also specified that he liked that the content on YouTube was shorter, around '15 minutes long' compared to the '30 minutes or hour-long' content he might find on TV.

In stimulus testing<sup>8</sup>, where children were asked to talk about the differences between different channels and platforms, few children differentiated PSB content from non-PSB content. Most were not aware that channels like the BBC might have a different purpose to other channels, although some older children were familiar with PSB and the role of the BBC more broadly. For example, in previous waves Minnie (aged 17) was able to explain how the BBC was different from other channels after learning about it at school. In this wave, she still particularly liked documentaries on the BBC and consulted BBC iPlayer regularly if she was looking for something new to watch.

Despite this, most children seemed to perceive the BBC as 'more serious' than other channels, something that 'adults' watched, and often the main source of news in their household. For example, William (aged 14) felt that the BBC was mostly news and stated that he didn't watch the news "unless it's on". He went on to say that he found politics boring. This sentiment was echoed by Shaniqua (aged 14), who when questioned about the BBC answered:

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*“I don't really watch the news”*

Shaniqua, aged 14

Some boys watched sports on the BBC. For example, Peter (aged 13) watched football content, and Ben (aged nine) watched the World Cup on the BBC. However, both commented that they felt they didn't really watch much else on the channel, and Ben explained that he thought the programmes on there were not really made for children.

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<sup>8</sup> See Annex 2

Most children were learning from the content they consumed, regardless of whether it was PSB or not. Some learned practical tasks or skills by watching YouTube tutorials. For example, Grant (aged 16) used YouTube videos to learn the piano and had decided he was going to learn the saxophone too. He had not bought a saxophone yet but had started watching 'how-to' videos on YouTube to prepare for the day when he would get one. Shaniqua also used YouTube tutorials to learn beauty tips such as new hairstyles.

Others used online content for help with schoolwork. For instance, Jasleen (aged 15) had also used YouTube to go through maths exercises and Sarah (aged 15) used YouTube videos recommended by her teacher to study for her English literature exam. She found some videos which helped her to memorise poetry quotes by putting these to music. This meant she was able to better remember quotes she needed for her exams. At the older end of the sample, Carmen (aged 17) had watched revision tutorials on YouTube before her GCSEs to help her prepare, and Minnie (aged 17) also used media to help with her grades. She had been given a lot of homework to work on over the summer to help her prepare for beginning sixth form, and as part of this she had been given a reading list for psychology which included some film recommendations. She watched the 'The Stanford Prison Experiment' documentary on Netflix as part of her summer work.

Some children also felt they had learnt important life lessons or more emotional lessons from the content they watched. Bryony (aged nine) regularly watched YouTube vlogs from other horse riders, which she found inspiring. She said she watched one in which the vlogger talked about overcoming challenges in her horse-riding. Bryony said the video had inspired her at the time as she was really struggling in maths. She felt that she was able to apply some of the advice she learnt and said that maths was now her favourite subject.

Ben (also aged nine) reflected that he had learned about managing stress from 'Regular Show', a show he watched on Cartoon Network. He recalled an episode in which a character was trying to juggle too many tasks at once, and so consequently did not perform any of them well and became overwhelmed. He reflected that it was important to monitor his emotions and 'take a break' or 'go for a walk' if he felt himself becoming stressed.

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## *“Sometimes [the shows] have a moral to it”*

| Ben, aged 9

Alice (aged 13) said she felt that the content she watched on YouTube helped inspire her to think about what she wanted to do, or be like, when she was older. She said that the lifestyle and makeup tutorial videos she regularly watched on YouTube showed the kind of things she would like to do in future. Having developed an interest in makeup using YouTube, she had recently been asked by a family friend to do make up for some parties they were attending.

Nadia (aged 13) also felt the content she was watching had had an impact on her, and her understanding of certain things. She mentioned that the new reboot of 'That's So Raven' had involved Raven having children and being a divorced parent. She felt that content like this had helped her to understand some things she wouldn't have understood a year ago.

### **SUMMARY:**

#### **Younger children especially seemed drawn to content involving characters and personalities they related to**

- Most related to characters who had interests similar to theirs, although age and gender were also important elements.
- In some cases, the children had purchased merchandise linked to characters they liked or related to, and some children could recall products such as games or gadgets that their favourite YouTubers had recommended

Most related to characters who had interests similar to theirs, although age and gender were also important elements. For example, as Emma and Bryony (both aged nine) were keen horse riders, they both enjoyed watching vloggers posting about horse riding on YouTube. They also both enjoyed watching content from 'JoJo Siwa', a 15-year-old actress, dancer and singer appearing in a show on Nickelodeon. They also liked watching content from JoJo Siwa on her own YouTube channel, featuring a range of content including YouTuber-style vlogs in which she talked directly to fans. The content on the show was generally life-affirming and light-hearted, and aimed at girls of Emma's and Bryony's age.

Peter (aged 13) and Ahmed (aged 12) both enjoyed watching 'Jamie Johnson', a show on CBBC featuring a 12-year-old boy becoming a professional footballer. Both Peter and Ahmed were interested in football, and they enjoyed watching a show which featured a character of their age achieving something in line with their interests.

Josie (aged 13) had 'come out' this year and was an active member of the LGBT club at school. She said she particularly liked content featuring LGBT characters such as 'Everything Sucks', a high school American drama about a girl who realises she is a lesbian. Josie would specifically look for this kind of content on Netflix as she felt she could relate to it.

In some cases, the children had purchased merchandise marketed by the characters they liked or related to, and some could recall products such as games or gadgets that their favourite YouTubers had recommended. For instance, Zak (aged eight) asked his parents to buy him a PlayStation in order to play the online game 'Fortnite', because he had watched his favourite YouTuber, 'Dan TDM', playing the game and wanted to join in.

Similarly, both Bryony and Emma liked JoJo Siwa's style, which she promoted through her show and on YouTube, including branded clothes, sportswear and signature bows worn in her ponytail. Both girls had purchased the bows as well as some branded clothing, as they were fans of the show that JoJo had been in on Nickelodeon. Bryony often wore the bow she had bought and was wearing it during the interview.


## Building on previous insights – finding relatable content

Last year, we found that some children were finding 'relatable' characters in content aimed at older audiences. Furthermore, 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, such as similar interests.

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

*Minnie, Wave 4, aged 16*



### **Bryony (aged nine)**

Bryony spent most of her time looking after her eight ponies, but when she had half an hour spare between going to school or the stables, she watched content in her room on her iPad or phone. She liked watching JoJo Siwa (a child star who, after starring in the show 'Dance Moms'), had a programme on Nickelodeon and her own YouTube channel with over 8 million subscribers.

Bryony loved the Nickelodeon show, JoJo Siwa: My World, and had bought a branded bow from the show, which she wore for the interview, as well as a bag and some sports clothes.



# Social media

*Children were curating their profiles on social media by carefully selecting the images they posted there. Some were also self-regulating and limiting the time they spent on social media, in order to spend time on revision.*

## **SUMMARY:**

**Children were still using the same social media sites they used in previous years, but most preferred to keep their profiles highly curated**

- Most children were still using the same social media platforms they used in previous waves
- However, from online tracking we observed that children were not posting status updates or pictures as often as they had in previous waves, with most keeping self-generated content on their profiles to a minimum
- Children who did post on their profiles were generally re-posting content from others, as opposed to generating original content themselves.

Most children were still using the same social media platforms they used in previous waves. The table below shows how often each child used different types of social media, on average:

	Child	Age																		
	Zak	8																		
	Bryony	9																		
	Ben	9																		
	Emma	9																		
	Ahmed	12																		
	Peter	13																		
	Alice	13																		
	Nadia	13																		
	Jack	13																		
	Josie	13																		
	Shaniqua	14																		
	William	14																		
	Sarah	14																		
	Jasleen	15																		
	Grant	16																		
	Carmen	17																		
	Robert	17																		
	Minnie	17																		
Facebook			N	D	N	N	N	N	W	N	D	N	N	N	N	N	W	D	D	N
Twitter			N	N	N	N	N	W	O	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	D	N
Snapchat			N	M	N	M	W	M	M	D	M	O	M	M	M	M	D	M	D	N
Instagram			N	D	N	N	O	D	D	N	D	D	M	D	N	D	M	M	D	N
Whatsapp			N	N	N	N	N	M	M	N	N	N	M	N	N	D	M	M	M	N

Multiple times per day	M
Daily	D
Weekly	W
Occasionally	O
Never	N

However, from online tracking we observed that children were not posting status updates or pictures as often as they had in previous waves, with most keeping self-generated content on their profiles to a minimum. Some carefully curated their social media profiles by keeping images of themselves limited and deleting old pictures or posts they did not like any more. For example, William (aged 14) had between three and five select images on his Instagram profile, which showed him in poses or scenarios he liked - such as standing on a beach, or with a snowman he had built. During the online tracking period (which spanned several weeks), William deleted one of these images and replaced it with another, suggesting he updated the few images he felt best communicated his identity on an ongoing basis.

After his end-of-year prom, Grant (aged 16) had posted some images of himself and friends celebrating and posing in suits on his Instagram profile. However, he later removed them and said this was because he had 'only received around 90 likes'. For him, this number was too low, and he said he would have preferred to have received 'around 150 likes'.

Most of the girls in the sample also updated and reviewed their images regularly. Sarah (aged 15) had carefully curated her Instagram feed, and frequently deleted her old pictures to 'start again' by uploading new ones. Sarah's posts were primarily 'selfies' and each was edited using a filter. Peter's younger sister (aged 11) also changed the pictures on her Instagram page after a few weeks, limiting her page to around seven images at any one time.

Most social media activity observed in tracking was based on following or subscribing to other users, rather than posting content. Children who did post on their online profiles were generally re-posting content from

others, as opposed to generating original content themselves. For example, Peter (aged 13) re-tweeted posts from football fan pages such as 'SportsBible', 'Football Twats', and '888 Sport'. Retweeting comments from other users was the main form of activity on his Twitter page, and far outweighed the number of times he had posted his own tweets on the platform.

Grant (aged 16) had reduced the number of things he posted to Instagram, since feeling that his prom pictures had not received enough 'likes'. He said after this he *'didn't see the point anymore'*. However, he still used Instagram to follow other people's accounts. He said he especially liked watching 'famous people's' Instagram stories, such as Gucci Mane, Cardi B and Eminem. He also followed 'meme' accounts such as 'lmjustbait' and 'Memezard', who posted content daily. He said he liked looking at these memes because they made him laugh.

Grant's behaviour suggested that he was more comfortable in following and re-sharing content produced by others, as this could feel less risky than posting content himself which might not attract enough 'likes'; or which might even receive negative attention.

#### **SUMMARY:**

##### **Some children had multiple accounts on the same social media platforms, some of which were more self-consciously curated than others**

- Some children had multiple accounts on the same social media platform, and curated the content posted on their profiles depending on who they allowed to see each one
- More visible accounts tended to be highly curated, showing a 'picture perfect' self, whilst less visible accounts tended to be used to show their 'real-self' to more carefully controlled circles of their close friends
- Some children also felt that it was more important to curate certain social media platforms over others, depending on how 'permanent' or 'public' they were perceived to be

Some children had multiple accounts on the same social media platform, and curated the content posted on their profiles depending on who they allowed to see each one. More visible accounts tended to be highly curated, showing a 'picture perfect' self, whilst less visible accounts tended to be used to show their 'real-self' to more carefully controlled circles of close friends. Terminology for different accounts varied between children, with some calling different accounts 'real', 'fake' or 'professional' depending on how they referred to them amongst friends. However, overall most of the children felt that the more public an account was, the more curated it should be.

Minnie (aged 17) explained how while she did not use social media herself, a lot of her peers at school thought seriously about how to present themselves online. She described how some people she knew had 'fake' accounts - in contrast to their 'professional' accounts, which she described as a 'CV for friends'. In her experience, the 'professional' accounts were highly curated, and featured only the best images. Her friends tended to ask her opinion about whether a picture should be posted onto their 'professional account' before posting it. In contrast, 'fake' accounts, were seen to be more casual, as these were generally accessible to a small group of small friends. As a result, Minnie explained that people were less cautious about what they posted there, and content posted on 'fake' accounts might include funny pictures or more content.

Sometimes navigating these different accounts could cause social awkwardness. Minnie described an incident in which a girl at school had asked to be online friends with one of her friends on her 'fake account'. Minnie's friend had not wanted to give this girl access to her more personal, less curated posts, as she felt this girl to be a casual acquaintance rather than a friend. However, as she felt too awkward to decline, she accepted the request.

Even some of the younger children had multiple accounts on the same social media platform. For example, Bryony (aged 9) had only been allowed on social media in the previous year. She said she had 'begged' her mum to let her sign up to social media, as she was so worried about missing out with what her school friends were posting. At the time of the interview, she had Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook.



Bryony explained that she had three Instagram accounts, and used each one to post different content. She called one her 'regular account', one her 'horsey account' and the other was a 'secret account'. As she had so much content about horses, she felt that having the different accounts would make it 'easier' to divide up what content she was going to post in each. However, she admitted it could 'be a struggle' to divide her posts into these distinct categories, as she spent most of her time with her horses anyway and didn't have a great deal of additional content to share.

She had set up her 'secret account' after holding an 'opinion poll' (a one-question survey, only accessible to her Instagram friends) on her 'normal account' to see what colour trousers her followers thought she should buy, turquoise or white. They voted for white, but she preferred turquoise, so set up another account in secret, and gave it a turquoise 'theme'. She admitted that she had not yet posted anything on her secret account.

Some children also felt that it was more important to curate certain social media platforms over others, depending on how 'permanent' or 'public' they were perceived to be. For example, Sarah (aged 15) revealed that she had different concerns about what she was posting depending the social media platform she used. In general, she cared more about posts that did not automatically get deleted (unlike in Snapchat, where all posts were automatically deleted after 10 seconds) or those that would be seen by more people, (such as those on Instagram), than those that she saw as more temporary, or only shared with close friends. Even though she could delete a post from Instagram if she liked, the sense that it would not automatically be removed meant she felt a need to treat it as more permanent than images she shared on Snapchat.

As a result, she edited her photos to "make them look nice" before posting them on Instagram, using apps like Putagram and Instasize. She liked the 'contour' and 'brightness' features on these apps specifically and used them for posts on Instagram as she perceived these would last longer than her Snaps on Snapchat and would be seen by more people. By contrast, if she posted private Snapchats to her friends she didn't worry too much about her appearance. However, on Snapchat stories she wanted to look nice as she knew this would be shared more widely, with her whole set of Snapchat contacts.

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*"I don't post pictures on my Snapchat story unless I look pretty in them, like I've got my full face of make up on"*

| Sarah, aged 15

**SUMMARY:**

**Some of the girls in the sample chose to portray themselves in more 'aesthetic' ways than in previous years**

- Girls were choosing more 'glamorised' or aesthetic Snapchat filters over the 'cute' animal faces they had used in previous waves
- 'Mirror pictures' (full body pictures in front of the mirror, where faces are covered by the flash) were popular amongst the older girls

Screen record techniques allowed us to analyse the images posted by children in more detail than previously. We noticed that some of the teenage girls in our sample were taking self-portraits of themselves in a certain style. Overall, girls were choosing more 'glamorised' Snapchat filters over the 'cute' animal faces they had used in previous waves. This was consistent across children living in different cities, who had never met.

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*“I try to be as natural as possible, but I normally use a Snapchat filter for a picture”*

| Shaniqua, aged 14

For example, some of the glamorised Snapchat filters were popular as the ‘go-to’ across the sample, such as the ‘angel’ filter, which augmented the eyes and gave the face a glow, as well as a halo above the head. Carmen (aged 17); Sarah and Jasleen (both aged 15); Shaniqua (aged 14) and Nadia (aged 13) all used this filter on multiple selfie-images, and generally said they liked it because of its aesthetic qualities. For example, Carmen said she liked the fact that it enlarged her eyes, which made her feel ‘prettier’. Jasleen liked the fact that she received positive comments after posting the filter on her Snapchat, and Nadia noticed how it ‘brightened’ up her face, and made it look more slender.

When analysing screen-record and social media tracking data, we noticed a correlation in the types of images older girls were taking and sometimes sharing on social media. These were shots in which girls obscured their face (either with a hand, or by using the flash from their camera phones) but featured a full body shot in a full-length mirror. When asked about these pictures, Jasleen (aged 15) referred to them as her ‘mirror pictures’, explaining that she liked using them to make her look ‘nice’. Carmen (aged 17) and Sarah (aged 15) were also taking ‘mirror pictures’ of themselves, and Sarah had shared some of these on her Instagram profile.

## **Building on previous insights – curating an online profile**

In previous waves of research, we explored how children curated their profiles on social media. In previous waves, however, children were primarily removing images that might be specifically embarrassing or might have received very few likes. This year, conversely, the content exposed on social media platforms tended to be reserved for the ‘best’ images, that the children especially liked or that had received a lot of likes.

In wave 1 and 2, for example, we saw how Alice chose to delete videos of herself doing gymnastics and dancing that she had previously posted on YouTube. She subsequently felt she looked ‘weird’ and decided to delete them.

We also explored in Wave 3 how some children chose to curate their Instagram profiles, by choosing to post images of a particular ‘theme’ or colour. We found some evidence of respondents having multiple accounts on the same social media platform in Wave 3, but the trend was not as widespread as this year and last year was solely seen with older children in the sample.

This year, even some of the youngest respondents talked about the need to have a ‘personal’ and a ‘professional’ account, and children across the sample were more articulate about how they could curate these differently depending on the audience.

## **SUMMARY:**

### **Some older children reported strategies for managing or deleting social media to concentrate on revision**

- Some older respondents saw spending time on social media as less of a compelling activity than in previous years, and several reported strategies for managing their time on social media to focus on school work.
- Some younger respondents, however, had still been keen to get social media, and feared feeling left out if they couldn't use it

Some older respondents saw spending time on social media as a less compelling activity than in previous years, and several reported strategies for managing their time on social media to focus on school work. For example, whilst revising for her GCSEs, Carmen (aged 17) developed a strategy to limit the time she spent on Snapchat. She deleted the app during the day and re-installed it every evening. This was to prevent the beeping and flashing of her notifications interfering with her revision, whilst her friends chatted on Snapchat and WhatsApp. She explained she had also felt that she should spend more time in the 'real world' and suggested that spending less time on social media could help with that. Similarly, Grant (aged 16) gave up social media during his exams. He explained he had made this decision himself and hadn't been instructed to do so by teachers, classmates or his mum.

The same was also true for Minnie (aged 17). In previous waves Minnie was always a bit wary of social media, feeling a need to protect her privacy. She had previously argued with her mum when her mum posted pictures of Minnie on her Facebook account. This year, she was still critical of social media, and had decided to delete all of her social media accounts (Twitter and Snapchat) so she could revise for her GCSEs without being distracted.

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*“It kept beeping and even when it was on silent I wanted to check it”*

| *Minnie, aged 17*

Minnie said a lot of her friends did the same to revise for their GCSEs too. Her mum had not been aware that Minnie had deleted social media and was impressed to hear about it during the interview. After her exams, Minnie had not re-installed Twitter or Snapchat, and said she didn't really miss either platform, although she supposed she might re-install them if she felt 'really bored'.

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*“I don't really miss it. It was nice seeing what other people were doing but I don't mind it too much.”*

| *Minnie, aged 17*

One of the youngest respondents, Ben (aged 9) said he didn't feel the need to get social media at all. He was happy to communicate with his friends either in person at school or on the Xbox when playing games. He had seen his sister struggle with 'some problems' on Snapchat, and although he didn't fully understand these, he knew this had caused some issues at home. He concluded that Snapchat could create 'problems' and said he didn't see why he would ever get it.

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*“A lot of times it causes arguments and sometimes anyone can see it, so I don’t care about it. If anything, I’d stay away”*

| Ben, aged 9

Ben said that he felt it was important to spend time outside and was cautious with the time he spent on his iPad, taking breaks and sticking to the one-hour time limit his parents had set. He said that although this limit could be annoying, he understood it was sometimes better to go outside and get ‘some fresh air’.

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*“It’s smarter to spend less time on [the Xbox and iPad] even if it can sometimes be annoying. A lot of people forget about other things”*

| Ben, aged 9

Some younger respondents, however, had still been keen to get social media, and feared feeling left out if they couldn’t use it. As previously mentioned, when she started Year 5 and joined a new class, Bryony (aged nine) begged her mum to let her sign up for social media and made lots of different promises so that her mum would agree.

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*“If my friends have it [social media], I really want it as well! I feel left out if my friends have it and I don’t.”*

| Bryony, aged 9

The main stipulation was that she allowed her mum to review all of her friend requests, to prevent her from accepting friend requests from someone she didn’t know. She also let her mum review any of her messages and look at what she was posting. Bryony agreed to these conditions and she was allowed to set up profiles on Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram. Bryony said this was really important for her because she feared being left out from all the interesting things happening online amongst her classmates.

Similarly, Nadia’s mum agreed that Nadia (aged 13) could have social media as long as her mum had control of what she posted. Nadia’s accounts were also linked to her sisters’, so everything she posted could be seen by both her sister and mum. Nadia said her mum had asked her to take posts down in the past if she saw something she didn’t like but did not go into detail about what these might be.

Josie (aged 13) had not previously been allowed social media but was using it for the first time this year. Not being allowed on social media had been a big issue of contention between her and her mum in previous waves, and she had spent months arguing with her mum before finally persuading her to let her use it. Since then, she had signed up to Snapchat and Instagram, although not Facebook, which she felt was for ‘old people’ - like her mum. She had since stopped using Snapchat for the most part, but used Instagram daily, and was chatting in multiple group chats on Instagram during the interview.

**SUMMARY:**

**There has been a significant decline in popularity of Snapstreaks since last year**

- Whilst last year most children were sending ‘streaks’ on Snapchat daily to keep up their Snapstreaks (a continuous thread of snap pictures between contacts), this year, the majority of children were no longer doing so.

Last year most children were sending 'streaks' on Snapchat daily to keep up their Snapstreaks; this year, the majority of children were no longer doing so. In the previous wave, most children were interested in maintaining their 'snap streak' score, which showed how many consecutive days they had exchanged messages with another user. For most of the children, this became more about the score than the content of the messages, and most tended to send a blank photo, sometimes inscribed with a letter 's' or the word 'streaks' to everyone in the contacts, to build up their scores. However, this year, children were not as interested in 'streaks'. Sarah (aged 15) said she felt that Snapstreaks had just been a phase:

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*“It [Snapstreaks] used to be a big thing for us all but now I’m not that bothered”*

| Sarah, aged 15

She had recently lost a Snapstreak of 524 days with one of her old friends after they had grown out of the phase. Sarah explained that they had drifted apart long ago, but that she had kept up the streak anyway to maintain the score. She estimated they had chatted for about 380 more days after they realised they were no longer really friends. Sarah reflected that she probably wouldn't invest in keeping up a Snapstreak any more as she no longer felt it to be as important. This reflected earlier behaviours (aged 13) demonstrated last year. She had given up Snapstreaks, after keeping them up for a few months, saying that after a while she 'couldn't see the point' and so stopped doing it.

Amongst those still sending streaks, there was a sense that the children were not taking these as seriously as we saw last year. For example, Carmen (aged 17) and Jasleen (aged 15) were still maintaining existing streaks they already had going but said they wouldn't be too bothered if they lost them. Carmen also said she did not want to start any new streaks. Grant (aged 16) used to send a lot of Snapstreaks last year, and generally kept his streaks in the 100's. However, this year due to school work and exams he had found Snapstreaks distracting and stopped the majority of his streaks. His longest streak at the time of the interview was 24 days. This year, he also developed a preference for 'Instagram stories' – which meant that he didn't use the Snapchat stories feature, or Snapchat itself, as often.

William (aged 14) was one of the few children in the sample who still maintained his Snapstreaks. He checked his Snapchat every day and sent streaks to his contacts by sending just a black screen with an 's' on it to maintain the streak. Shaniqua (aged 14) also still loved keeping up Snapstreaks with her friends. She explained she felt annoyed if someone broke the streak, especially if it had been going for a period of months. For example, recently a friend had broken one that had been going for 200 days which had frustrated her. However, she did admit that she also forgot to keep them up sometimes and lost them as a result.

#### **SUMMARY:**

**Musical.ly, was an app used by some girls in the sample, which could potentially expose them to content that might make them feel uncomfortable**

- Content on Musical.ly consists of a random stream of videos posted by other users, many of whom are strangers. This user-generated content was unpredictable, and could contain strange or unexpected themes, which could potentially make children feel uncomfortable if they came across something they didn't like or understand
- Younger girls in the sample were more likely than in previous years to be using Musical.ly
- Some older girls were also using Musical.ly, and a couple uploaded their own content as well as watching content uploaded by others

Musical.ly (now merged with the Chinese social media platform 'Tik Tok' and known by the same name) is a social network app allowing users to create videos and share them with a wider network. The app does not

allow direct messaging, and content is screened by a moderation team, who will review content reported by other users and ‘take appropriate action’<sup>9</sup>.

When opening the app, children using Musical.ly were exposed to a series of videos posted by other users on their feed, many of whom were strangers. This user-generated content was unpredictable: while some videos showed rehearsed dance routines or lip-syncing videos, either made by amateurs or skilled contributors, children had the potential to see more random and unusual content such as clips filmed in real world settings or videos with sexual undertones. This meant that children had the potential to be exposed to something they might find unnerving or upsetting. Comments on some of these videos also contained strong language, inappropriate for young children, such as sexualised commentary or coded swear words which were not immediately picked up by the moderation team.

An example of this was Emma (aged nine) who had Musical.ly installed on her phone but had decided to delete the app after she saw some ‘inappropriate’ content (she did not want to explain what this was) on her feed and began worrying that this was because her account had been hacked.

Younger girls in the sample were more likely than in previous years to be using Musical.ly. For example, Bryony (aged nine) used Musical.ly to post videos of her own lip-syncing and dance routines, and had posted about 15 of these in total, although her settings ensured this could only be seen by friends. She was very conscious of the number of ‘likes’ she received on each video and she was proud of receiving 32 ‘likes’ on one of them.

Some older girls were also using Musical.ly, and a couple uploaded their own content as well as watching content uploaded by others. Jasleen (aged 15) also recorded videos of herself lip-syncing and dancing on the app, but she had not shared these with anyone, and did not have any public-facing content. In contrast, Carmen (aged 17) had uploaded videos of herself with her privacy settings ‘public’, meaning that her videos could be viewed by strangers. However, she primarily tended to use Musical.ly to watch other users’ videos rather than sharing her own.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://support.tiktok.com/knowledge-base/for-parents>

## Building on previous insights: changing preferences in social media over time

In Year 3 we observed a big shift in social media use; 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. In wave 4, behaviour shifted again, and whilst some of the sample were still using group chat 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 using this as their primary way of communicating online, with most sending ‘Snapstreaks’ on a daily basis.

This year, the popularity of Snapchat has fallen, and most are not sending Snapstreaks – although the platform is still often used in addition to Instagram and Facebook as a means to keep up with friends.

We also saw people using Musical.ly in previous waves. Alice, for example, enjoyed using the Musical.ly app to record videos of her lip-syncing and dancing to her favourite songs. However, she had since stopped using the platform as she felt she was too grown up.

## SUMMARY:

### Fortnite was a popular game, played by most boys in the sample this year

- Almost all boys in the sample played Fortnite on a daily basis
- Of these, several were watching gameplay videos on YouTube to learn gaming tips and strategies

Fortnite is an online game which has enjoyed significant popularity since its launch in 2017. This was partly due to the fact that it is possible to play for free on multiple gaming platforms (e.g. Xbox, Play Station). The game also allows players to play in various modes, in teams of up to 50 ('squads'), as couples ('duo') or 'solo'. The 'Battle Royale' multiplayer version was the most popular with boys in the sample this year.

Some of the popularity of Fortnite has been attributed to the fact that the game combines 'sandbox-building' (in which users can use in-game resources to manipulate the virtual environment around them and 'build' things) and 'third-person shooter' elements<sup>10</sup> (in which players shoot at other players or targets from a third-person perspective i.e. seen from behind the character's head). In 'Battle Royale', 100 players (randomly allocated from all over the world) are allocated to fight one another, and the last-man-standing is the winner. At the start of the game, players are parachuted onto an island where they can use resources gathered to build forts for protection and attempt to eliminate each other to complete and win the game. Whilst they play, the gameplay area gradually shrinks, meaning they are forced to come into contact with one another eventually.

During the game, players can communicate via headsets, or by typing in content which appears on the screen, meaning that the game can contain swearing from other players. Whilst the game includes a 'profanity filter' to censor the written language shared, this must be turned on in the game settings.

Almost all the boys in the sample played Fortnite on a daily basis. For example, Grant (aged 16) loved playing Fortnite and played it every day. He admitted that he didn't like it at first, but after his friends persuaded him to play, he played every day and described it as 'addictive'. He said he felt like he was entering another world when playing, immersing himself completely in the game.

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### *'I was a bit addicted to it'*

| Grant, aged 16

William (aged 14) also regularly played Fortnite on his Xbox, either 'solo' or in 'squads' with his friends from school. He also watched gameplay videos: videos posted by popular players showing their strategy and tactics on YouTube. William liked watching these to get tips and watch the games unfold. In addition, Ahmed (aged 12) loved playing Fortnite on the Xbox and enjoyed getting as many 'victories' on the game as possible (a 'victory' was gained by being the last man standing and winning the game). He also said he felt 'addicted' to the game and played it for at least two hours every day, generally in the afternoon after school. At the time of the interview, Ahmed said that all his friends had been playing the game for a period of several months. However, he said that his mum had recently threatened to take away his Xbox controller because he could sometimes become quite angry at the game and occasionally started shouting.

Similarly, Peter (aged 13) said he and his friends could get annoyed when they played the game. Peter said he sometimes threw the controller but that "afterwards I pick it up again and carry on playing".

Several boys were watching gameplay videos on YouTube to learn gaming tips and strategies. For example, Peter looked for tips and tutorial videos regularly on YouTube. He especially liked watching 'SXVXN', a

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/parents-ultimate-guide-to-fortnite>

Youtuber building 'interesting' things in Fortnite, such as a replica of the Titanic. He mentioned that he liked the new 'playground' mode which featured a much more building-focused model.

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*“You can build anything.”*

| Peter, aged 13

Zak (aged eight) was also watching videos about Fortnite, and was introduced to the game by his favourite Youtuber, DanTDM, and got his Play Station so that he could watch and follow DanTDM play. He seemed wary of using the chat feature on his games console to engage with other players and said he didn't like to speak to other people on Fortnite, only play with them, because *“some people on the headsets are mean”*. He had gathered this from watching YouTubers receive and exchange mean comments whilst playing Fortnite on YouTube and was worried about the same thing happening to him.

**SUMMARY:**

**Some of the games the children in our sample were playing had 'loot boxes' or mystery prizes, giving children opportunities to win randomly selected items. This meant they did not know what they might win from playing.**

- Some children said they thought these randomised rewards were exciting elements of the game
- Some games played by the children in the sample offered in-game purchases, and a couple of the children had bought items in the games they played

Loot boxes are virtual containers that assign random in-game rewards to players based on chance. The exact configuration of each 'loot box' depends on the game, but in some games, players pay real money to receive them. These randomised prize elements were present in many shooter and football videogames played by children in the sample (e.g. FIFA and Call of Duty).

Some children said they thought these randomised rewards were exciting elements of the game. For example, Zak enjoyed the feeling of suspense when waiting for randomised rewards in some of the games he played. He enjoyed playing a game on his iPad called 'Fidget Spinner', where he had to keep a virtual fidget spinner spinning in order to receive virtual in-game coins. The length of the spin determined how many coins he received, and these coins were then used to unlock different types of spinner. Zak said he found this element of the game 'exciting' as he liked to anticipate what type of spinner he would win.

Peter (aged 13) he said he would not buy 'packs' (a type of loot box) in FIFA because there were opportunities to win these for free by completing certain challenges. He said, however, that he too liked the randomised element of the prize: *“I like if it's a surprise”*.

Some games played by the children in the sample offered in-game purchases, and a couple of the children had bought items in the games they played. On Fortnite, in-app purchases could be made using 'VBucks', which were purchased online via credit or debit cards. VBucks could be used to purchase in game items, such as costumes/personas affecting the appearance of the allocated character; and decorative features, such as 'dances' in-game characters could do to show to other players that they were celebrating.

Ahmed liked the fact that he could customise his character on Fortnite and had bought a couple of 'skins' which he used to intimidate other players on the game. Whilst 'skins' didn't specifically affect the skills or stats of a given player, some boys felt that a good 'skin' would increase their chance of winning, as it affected how other players in the game perceived them.



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*“It’s better to look good because then people won’t attempt to kill you”*

| Ahmed, aged 12

Ahmed had also bought a couple of ‘dances’ on the game, which he played after he defeated an opponent. He said he used the dances to annoy other players and celebrate his ‘victory’. He often heard them swearing or get angry at him, but he didn’t take this too seriously.

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*“They just start screaming and swearing at me and stuff...I just laugh at it because I killed them and it’s funny”*

| Ahmed, aged 12

Peter was also aware of the ability to purchase skins on Fortnite. He said felt the ‘VBucks’ on Fortnite were expensive, but he had purchased a few skins because *“you don’t gain advantages, but you look a better player”*.

In contrast, Ben (aged nine) was much more cautious about spending his money on games. Whilst he was aware of loot boxes on FIFA and *mystery boxes on ‘Subway Surfer’*, he was not really interested in buying them. Whilst he would spend ‘in game’, virtual money to buy new players or features, he never considered spending real money to get them faster.

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*“It’s not about coins, it’s about actual money”*

| Ben, aged 9

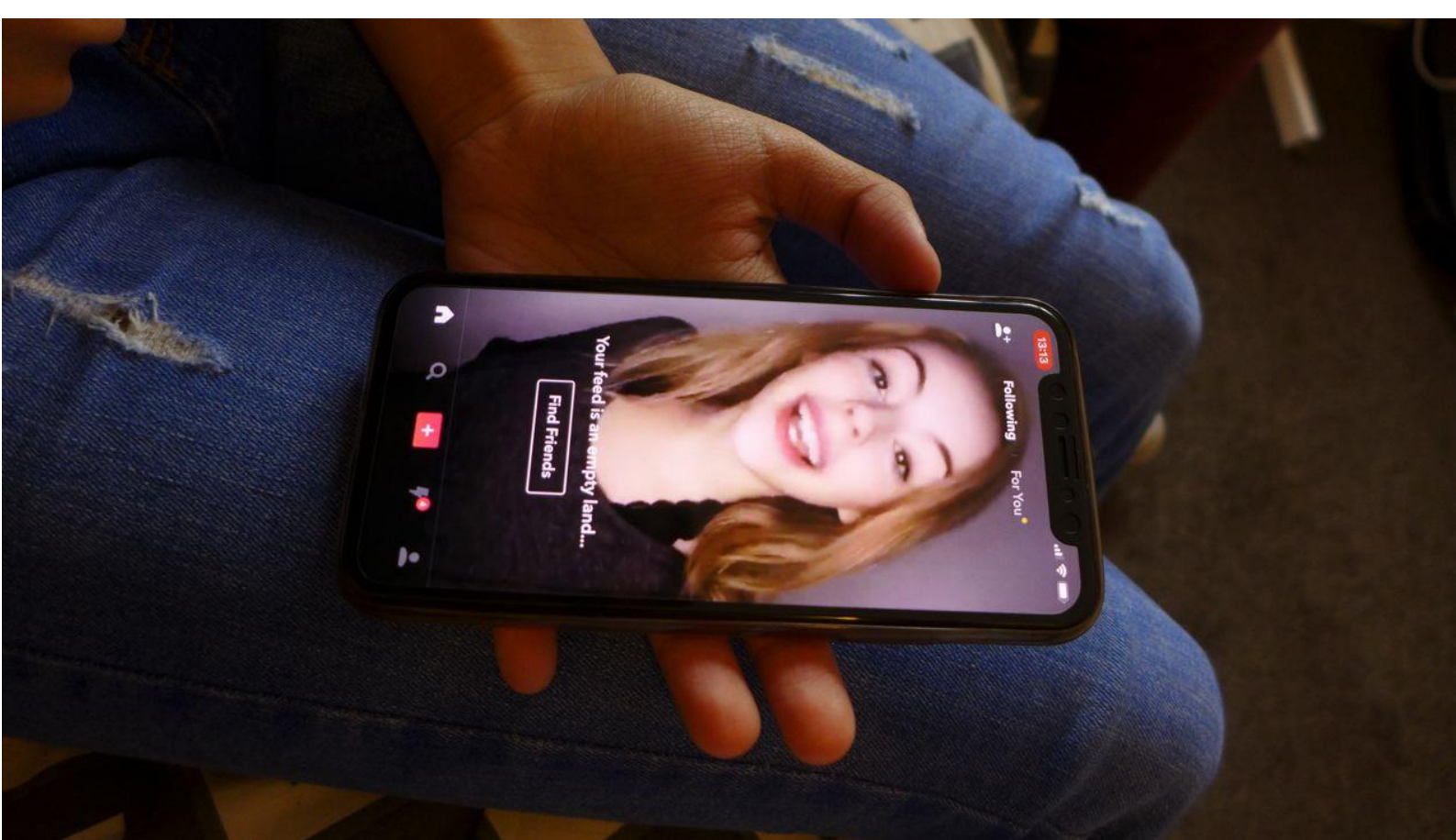


### Ahmed (aged 12)

Ahmed was often in trouble at school and received one-on-one support to discuss his behaviour. After school, if none of his friends were around, he would play Fortnite inside on his Xbox.

He estimated he played the game for at least two hours every day after school. He also made a few in-game purchases, buying 'Skins' for his character, and some 'dances' that he could use when defeating other players in the game.

He sometimes became quite angry playing the game, and his mum had threatened to take away the controller because of his shouting whilst playing.



# Critical understanding and online safety

*Overall, children were more open than in previous waves about discussing inappropriate content they had seen. Some were choosing to keep their profiles public, despite knowing that they should not 'talk to strangers online'. In most cases, parents trusted their children to make sensible decisions online.*

## SUMMARY

### **Children were more blasé about discussing inappropriate content than in previous years**

- Children were more open than in previous years when discussing content that might be considered inappropriate
- In some cases, inappropriate content was signposted by YouTubers or other influencers, which meant children were likely to come across it after following recommendations from a YouTuber they followed

Throughout all waves of research, conversations were 'child led', meaning that researchers discussed topics in the same language used by respondents, only broaching more sensitive topics if the child brought this up themselves. This year children were much more open than in previous years when discussing content that might be considered inappropriate. Alice (aged 13), for example, described how she had seen some inappropriate sexual content after her friend's Instagram account had been hacked, and the hacker had posted some pictures on her friend's profile. Alice had seen this content whilst scrolling through her Instagram feed, and had been a bit shocked. She said that seeing this had made her feel a bit uncomfortable, as it was unexpected, and inappropriate.

During the interview, Jasleen (aged 15) also spoke openly about some inappropriate pictures older boys sent her on Snapchat. She had kept her privacy settings open in order to get more friend requests, and as a result, her profile was publicly available meaning people she didn't know could send her snaps or messages. She

explained that she often received inappropriate pictures. She said she did not enjoy receiving this content and always talked to her older sister about it. Her sisters advised her to block the senders, which she did. However, she said she did not feel the need to review her privacy settings as she preferred to keep the profile open to get more friends.

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*“Sometimes guys send you pictures of you know... their private parts”*

| Jasleen, aged 15

Minnie (aged 17) was relatively open in previous waves, but generally avoided sharing too much detail about things that were inappropriate or unclear. In this wave, however, she discussed in detail a recent incident at school involving her friend. She and her friends had become concerned when an acquaintance revealed she was planning to go to stay in London with a man she had met online. Her friends had looked at his social media and felt ‘he looked a bit odd’ and there were ‘pictures of him with knives’. After talking to their parents, they decided to tell a teacher and the girl was prevented from going. Minnie had discussed this with her mum previously and was open to talking through the moral dilemma she had faced, concerns and actions during the interview.

Ben (aged nine) was also open with researchers about some mean comments he had seen online. When Ben was playing the game ‘Clash Royale’ with a friend, his friend’s older brother started playing against them. The older brother started being mean to the group by writing unkind comments on the group chat. However, the situation got resolved when Ben’s dad got involved.

In some cases, inappropriate content was signposted by YouTubers or other influencers, which meant they were likely to come across it after following recommendations from a YouTuber they liked. For instance, William (aged 14) came across ‘Blackpool Grime Media’ (BGM) content after a YouTuber he followed, talked about it in one of his videos. He found the BGM video inappropriate, as it involved 12-year-old children rapping about adult themes and using obscene language. William also started watching Jeremy Kyle clips on YouTube after another recommendation by a YouTuber he followed. He did not find the show ‘inappropriate’ but found the format of the show and some of the more adult themes ‘comical’ and said he couldn’t bring himself to watch a whole episode.

Peer groups at school could also influence children to watch inappropriate content. For example, Emma (aged nine) had been recommended the YouTuber, ‘Erika Costell’ by a girl at school. She had tried to watch a few videos, but found the content was not suitable for her as it consisted of ‘rude prank calls’ and made the decision not to watch that particular YouTube channel again.

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*“I just got off it and won’t be back there again”*

| Emma, aged 9

## SUMMARY:

### **Children were aware that they should not ‘talk to strangers’ online, but some were exposing themselves to contact from strangers by keeping their profiles public**

- Most children were familiar with warnings from school or parents about not ‘talking to strangers’ or sharing personal information about themselves online
- However, some children kept their profiles public or let people add them without knowing who they were, which meant they were open to the risk of being contacted by strangers.
- Some children had developed their own strategies for assessing whether it was safe to accept other users as ‘friends’, based on certain pieces of information they could see on their profile or account

Most children were aware of basic online safety guidelines and advice about sharing personal information online (e.g. don’t post content in your school uniform, don’t share your address), which they had generally been told at school as well as at home. Ben (aged nine) spoke of the dangers of giving personal information online, as he explained you could never know who might receive these details. A couple of his friends from school had YouTube channels, and whilst one friend was careful, another had shared videos of himself, his room and his street. His mum had shut down his channel because of this. Ben thought that his friend should have been more careful, as someone could have ‘found him’. In a similar vein, he was also aware that he should not give his own details away to people on the street.

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*“It’s not smart to be doing that [sharing personal details with strangers]”*

| Ben, aged 9

Zak (aged eight) also had some awareness of how to avoid dangerous or risky behaviour online. He said he had learned how to stay safe by watching YouTube videos, which told him what to look out for. As a result, he felt he should avoid sharing private information online such as email addresses or school names. He suggested this was so that people you didn’t know couldn’t contact you.

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*“People could be annoying and try and contact you, or write mean things to you”*

| Zak, aged 8

However, some children kept their profiles public or let people add them without knowing who they were, which meant they were open to the risk of being contacted by strangers. For example, Jasleen (aged 15) chose to keep her Snapchat profile public because she enjoyed being able to share her stories openly, and often received compliments for them. However, that also meant that she regularly received unsolicited, inappropriate messages from boys she didn’t know. She seemed to perceive as normal, and a somewhat inevitable consequence of keeping her profile open.

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*“I like it [keeping my profile public]. I like that everyone can see.”*

| Jasleen, aged 15

Shaniqua (aged 14) had also kept her profile on Snapchat publicly viewable. Her mum worried about this and explained that she was sometimes contacted by 'older boys' asking to meet her. It was not clear how often this happened, or how much older the boys were, but Shaniqua did admit to replying to these 'older boys', some of whom were friends of friends, and some of whom she did not know at all. While she did appreciate that it might not be a good idea, Shaniqua admitted she 'felt bad' for not replying or turning them down.

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*“Sometimes I get messages from older boys, trying to link (meet) me. Obviously, I wouldn’t do it, but, you know, you feel bad”*

| Shaniqua, aged 14

Some children had developed their own strategies for assessing whether it was safe to accept other users as 'friends', based on certain pieces of information they could see on their profile or account. Often children were concerned about accepting 'fake' accounts as friends and were looking to ensure the people they were 'friending' online were real. They generally based their decisions around how much activity they could see on the account, and how many pictures or followers the profile had. For example, when receiving friend requests on Snapchat, Sarah (aged 15) used the "Snapchat Score" (a number that is shown under a person's profile image, which increases relating to the number of times you send and open a snap) to see if an account was real, and to decide whether or not to accept the request.

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*“I just know that if it’s high then it means that you are actually real but if it is dead low then it’s either a new account or a fake account”*

| Sarah, aged 15

Jasleen (aged 15) also used this strategy, even if she didn't know the person adding her, Jasleen felt that she could tell they were real if they had a certain Snapchat score, and therefore accepted their request. Jasleen also said she was much more likely to accept a friend request with more followers.

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*“I’ll add them if they scored higher” “If it is lower than 100 I will block them because I think it is a fake account”*

| Jasleen, aged 15

Shaniqua (aged 14) was concerned to know if the people adding her seemed to be her age. She said when receiving friend requests, she looked at the pictures people had posted on their page and would accept them if they looked 'young'.

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*“By pictures you can kinda see how old they are... If they look really old, I would not accept it. But if they look around my age then I would probably accept them”*

| Shaniqua, aged 14

**SUMMARY:**

**Many were inspired by YouTubers or skilled contributors to Musical.ly and aspired to create content like them**

- Some were regularly posting their own content on YouTube or Musical.ly, inspired by other content they had seen
- Some had the sense they might get discovered' by posting this content, in part fuelled by their perception that the content produced by YouTubers was accessible, often including 'bloopers' or presented in a casual attitude. Content children posted on YouTube therefore tended to mimic other YouTube content.

Some were regularly posting their own content on YouTube or Musical.ly, inspired by other content they had seen. Zak (aged eight) created his own YouTube channel when he was seven and used it to post videos he made about gaming and technology, which he was really interested in. His mum was supportive: she liked that Zak watched content like this as she said, “*he really learns from watching things like that, we all do*”. She made sure that Zak showed her his videos before he uploaded them to YouTube and told him to let her know if he received any mean comments.

Some had the sense they might get ‘discovered’ by posting this content, in part fuelled by their perception that the content produced by YouTubers was accessible, as it often included ‘bloopers’ or presented in a casual attitude. Content children posted on YouTube therefore tended to mimic other YouTube content. For example, Peter’s younger sister (aged 11) joined YouTube in 2015 and had recently been trying to grow her own beauty channel on the site. She began posting regular content in June 2018 and began posting videos every few days. Her videos mimicked those on better known channels on YouTube, featuring content such as ‘slime videos’<sup>11</sup>, ‘back to school tips’, and ‘clothes hauls’<sup>12</sup>, as well as personal vlogs about her life.

She was keen to promote her channel and used her Instagram account to let her followers know when she had uploaded a new video, referring to herself in a tongue-in-cheek fashion as a ‘small YouTuber.’ She had managed to build up a following of 200 subscribers on YouTube, and 230 on Instagram via self-promotion and activities such as ‘make-up giveaway posts’ in which she offered her followers the chance to win free makeup if they followed ‘Forever cosmetics’ on Instagram. She also regularly asked her followers for feedback about what to post next.

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<sup>11</sup> Slime videos became popular on YouTube in 2017, featuring people filming their creation of, and playing with, different types of slime. It is thought the videos became popular because of their being ‘oddly satisfying’ <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/oddly-satisfying-videos-explained-psychology-youtube>

<sup>12</sup> Clothes hauls videos are extremely popular on YouTube, featuring the creator showing off their latest purchases from a number of high street or designer brands. The videos often contain affiliate links in the description box, so that the viewer can purchase the items shown, and the YouTuber can profit from the number of clicks on the link. <https://www.businessinsider.com/marketers-that-think-hauling-is-what-trucks-do-should-read-this-2013-4?IR=T>

## SUMMARY:

### Parents generally trusted that their children knew how to stay safe online, however most did monitor their children online to some extent

- Overall, parents trusted their children to make safe judgements, and were not overly worried about the information or content their children were sharing online, although some did have some concerns
- Parents were generally supportive of their children posting on YouTube or social media, although most did monitor what their children were posting to some extent

Most parents generally trusted that their children were sticking to common sense rules when online (e.g. don't post about your school or address in a public forum) and were not overly worried about the information or content their children were sharing online. Carmen's mum felt she could trust her daughter and had relaxed the rules around social media since Carmen had turned 17. She had tried to talk to Carmen about sexting this year, but said she felt Carmen already seemed informed on the subject, as it had been discussed at school.

William's mum was also not too concerned about her son's (aged 14) behaviour online. She described herself as "*liberal but with boundaries*", and felt her children had a good sense of where the limit was. She explained she thought she was quite strict when it came to the amount of screen time her children could access and did not let them sign up to social media before they were legally allowed. However, she did not supervise them when they went online, and did not tend to review the content they accessed or shared.

Sarah's mum generally checked up on what Sarah's younger siblings did online, but she felt that she did not need to check what Sarah (aged 15) did, as she was old enough to make her own decisions online. She explained that she felt there was no way of stopping Sarah having social media if she wanted it, as it would be easy for Sarah to log on to somebody else's computer and use it anyway. She felt that if her daughter did 'something wrong' on social media, it would 'come back to her' eventually, as she would hear about it from other members of the family or from Sarah herself.

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### *"I just have to trust her"*

| Sarah's mum

In contrast, Shaniqua's mum said she was concerned about what her daughter did online, particularly knowing that Shaniqua (aged 14) had been contacted by older boys on Snapchat. However, she felt she had no control over Shaniqua's behaviour on social media, as Shaniqua had blocked her on both Instagram and Snapchat, so her mum couldn't see what she was doing. Shaniqua's mum had resigned herself to the idea that she could not control her daughter's behaviour but hoped that Shaniqua would listen to her rather than taking undue risks.

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### *"All you can do is tell them and hope for the best"*

| Shaniqua's mum

She also felt that there was no way to limit the type of content Shaniqua accessed. Whilst she had set-up a pin number on the family TV-set to prevent Shaniqua's younger siblings from accessing inappropriate content, she felt that she couldn't restrict what Shaniqua watched as she had access to it via her other devices.

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### *"If I don't let her watch it, she'll go on her phone"*

| Shaniqua's mum



Josie's mum admitted to checking her daughter's social media without her daughter's permission. She wanted to make sure there was nothing worrying or inappropriate on them and was especially concerned about some of the ideas her daughter (aged 13) might get regarding her sexuality online. She explained she 'didn't care' if her daughter was gay but was concerned about 'some of the trans stuff' and the impact it might have on her daughter as she grew up.

Parents were generally supportive of their children posting on YouTube or social media. Peter's mum didn't mind her daughter (aged 11) having her own YouTube channel and uploading public videos on YouTube. She tended to watch her daughter's videos every so often, but she did not monitor every video posted. Zak's mum was also supportive of her son's YouTube channel, and Zak (aged eight) reported that all the comments on his YouTube videos were from his mum. She also helped him to film the videos.

However, she had set the privacy settings on Zak's account on the online game 'Roblox' to as private as possible without restricting his access to the game. She had also installed a safeguarding system called 'Ask to buy' on the app store which prevented Zak making any purchases without her consent. This was because of a previous incident in which Zak had clicked on an advert and accidentally made a purchase for a subscription service which charged her £100. Despite this, she trusted Zak and felt that she wasn't too concerned when it came to his media habits.

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### *"He's quite clued up on these sorts of things"*

| Zak's mum

Sarah's dad was in previous years very concerned about the content Sarah (aged 15) shared and accessed online. He used to monitor her in person whilst she was online to make sure he knew what was going on. However, he had relaxed over time and was now much less protective of his daughter's online life.

Minnie's mum trusted her daughter to look after herself and was not worried that her daughter might make any risky decisions, as, in her opinion, Minnie (aged 17) was generally sensible and measured in her behaviour. She did not monitor her daughter and was not aware that Minnie had given up social media to focus on revision until she overheard this during the interview. She was positively surprised and felt this was a sensible decision.

In contrast, Nadia's mum was quite concerned about her daughter's online safety and was strict about what she was allowed to post online. She had always been concerned about social media and had only agreed to let Nadia (aged 13) create accounts on Snapchat and Instagram on the condition that she would review and approve any post. Nadia's older sister, also helped monitoring her media.

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### *"She knows, it's my way or the highway"*

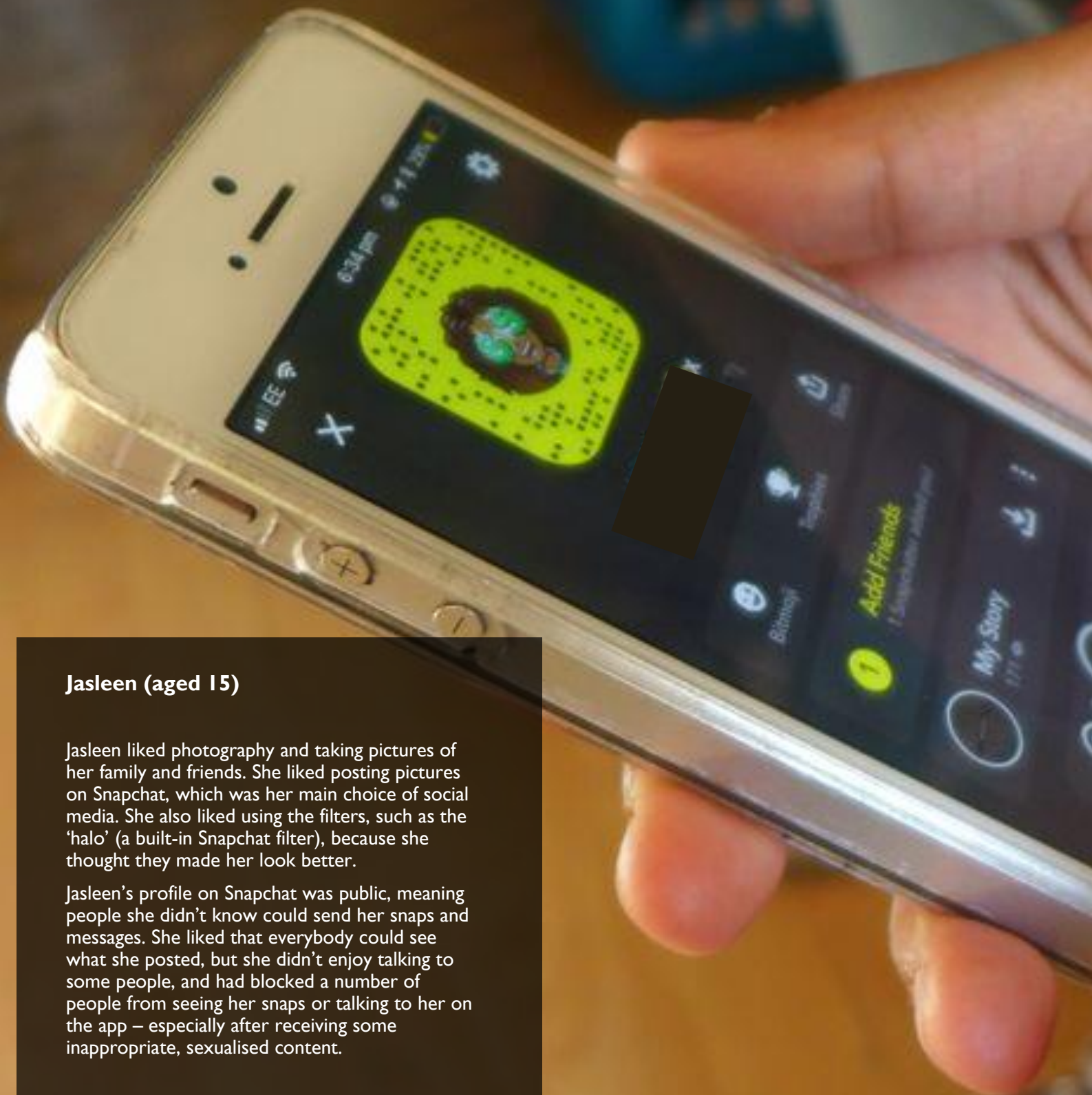
| Nadia's mum

## **Building on previous insights – risky behaviours online**

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

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

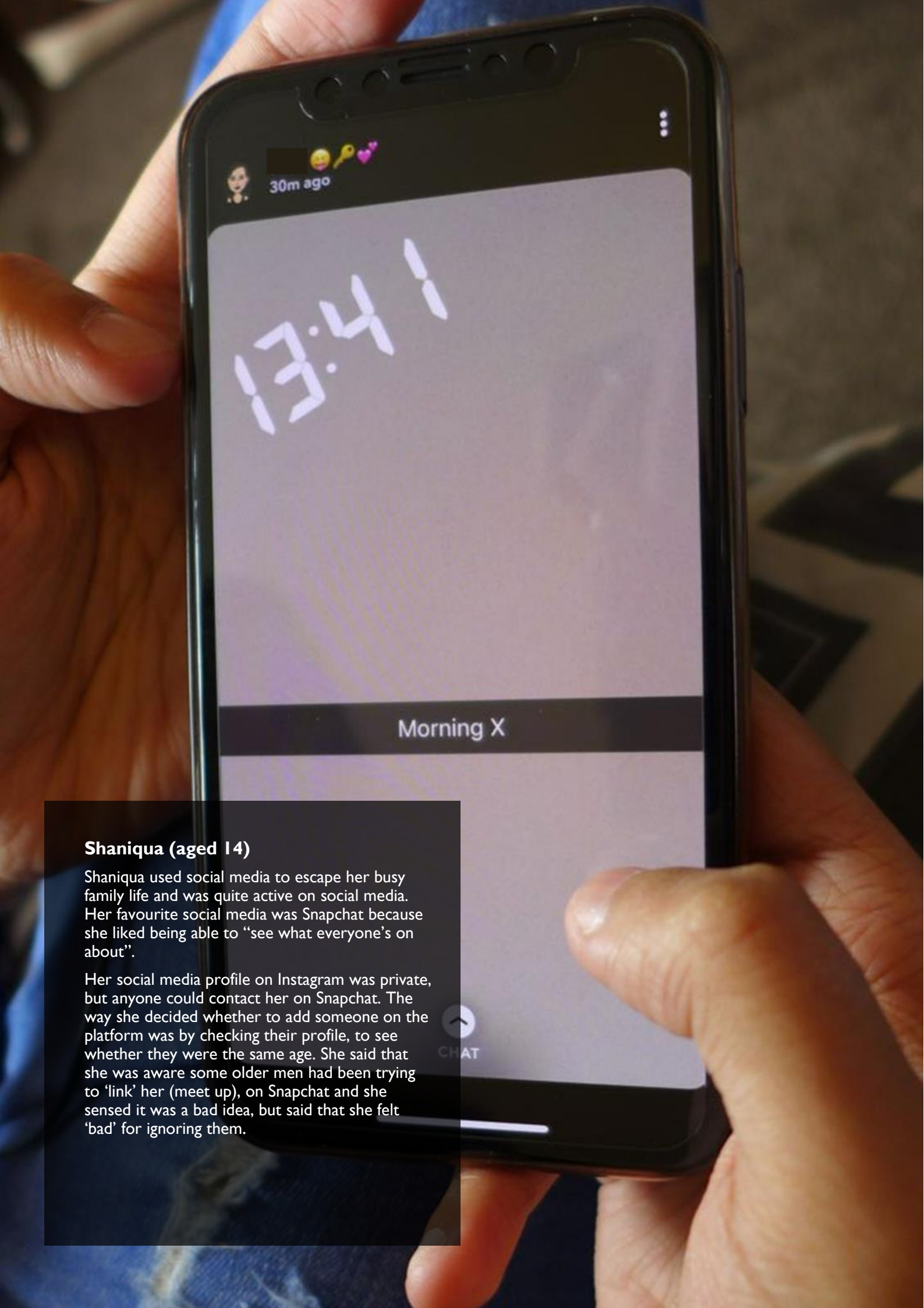
This year, we have seen some children are still keeping their profiles open, and taking risks around talking to strangers online.



### Jasleen (aged 15)

Jasleen liked photography and taking pictures of her family and friends. She liked posting pictures on Snapchat, which was her main choice of social media. She also liked using the filters, such as the 'halo' (a built-in Snapchat filter), because she thought they made her look better.

Jasleen's profile on Snapchat was public, meaning people she didn't know could send her snaps and messages. She liked that everybody could see what she posted, but she didn't enjoy talking to some people, and had blocked a number of people from seeing her snaps or talking to her on the app – especially after receiving some inappropriate, sexualised content.



### **Shaniqua (aged 14)**

Shaniqua used social media to escape her busy family life and was quite active on social media. Her favourite social media was Snapchat because she liked being able to “see what everyone’s on about”.

Her social media profile on Instagram was private, but anyone could contact her on Snapchat. The way she decided whether to add someone on the platform was by checking their profile, to see whether they were the same age. She said that she was aware some older men had been trying to ‘link’ her (meet up), on Snapchat and she sensed it was a bad idea, but said that she felt ‘bad’ for ignoring them.

## **SUMMARY:**

**Like last year, many were not aware of the existence of personalised adverts and did not know how Facebook might make money**

- Most did not know about advert personalisation, and could not imagine how Facebook made money
- However, as in previous years, many of those who followed YouTubers, or other influencers, had an understanding of how they might make money as they were familiar with ideas like sponsorship and product endorsement.

Most did not know about advert personalisation and could not imagine how Facebook made money. Bryony, Emma (both aged nine) and Sarah (aged 15) saw a lot of adverts pop up on their social media pages but did not think that the adverts they saw would differ from those seen by other people. Sarah described how she had seen adverts for online shopping sites and for modelling whilst on Instagram. When probed further she became more uncertain whether everyone saw the same adverts and said she did not know if boys might see different adverts.

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*“Maybe they see boy’s shopping sites”*

| Sarah, aged 15

When asked about how Facebook made money, some suggested this was tied to the number of users on the platform, or what they might be able to ‘buy’ from Facebook. For example, Shaniqua (aged 14) said she did not know how Facebook made money exactly but guessed that people might buy the Facebook app on the app store, which would make a profit.

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*“People can go on the app store and buy it”*

| Shaniqua, aged 14

When asked how he thought Facebook might make money, Ahmed (aged 12) was uncertain but had seen gift cards for Facebook and felt maybe they made a profit with these. However, he was unsure what these gift cards might be for, or how they worked in practice.

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*“I know there is gift cards for Facebook. I think it’s to buy friends”*

| Ahmed, aged 12

Similarly, Ben (aged nine), thought that Facebook made its money because of its large audience, but could not articulate exactly how this might work.

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*“So many people use it, and so many people use the app”*

| Ben, aged 9

Some children thought that ‘likes’ might factor into Facebook’s profits, although, again, they were unsure as to the exact process this might entail. For instance, Nadia (aged 13) said she thought it might be something to do

with people viewing and liking content. In particular, she believed that Facebook received a certain amount of money depending on the amount of likes a post generated, suggesting that each like might earn the equivalent of £1.

In a similar vein, Sarah (aged 15) was confident that Facebook made money through their users viewing and liking things on the site. She also felt the profits Facebook made were in some way correlated to the amount of 'likes' generated on certain posts – but could not exactly articulate how this might work. Carmen (aged 17) also suggested that Facebook made money based on the number of views received on each post. She also added that Facebook sold games, and imagined they made a profit from this.

Whilst children were unclear as to how Facebook made money, we saw this year as in previous years, that many of those who followed YouTubers had an understanding of how they might make money. This is because they were familiar with ideas like sponsorship and product endorsement that YouTubers discussed in their vlogs. For example, Zak (aged eight), who watched the majority of his content on YouTube, had an understanding of how YouTubers made money and explained that the adverts he saw on the videos they posted were a way for them to make money. He also felt confident he knew how to distinguish an advert from another type of video.

## **Building on previous insights – recognising adverts and sponsored content**

In Wave 3, most respondents were aware of product endorsements (due in part to their 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.

In Wave 4, most were able to spot adverts online - especially if these interrupted their online activities. 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.

In Waves 3 and 4 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 and disseminate any misinformation.

The trends overall show that some children are getting better at spotting certain types of advertising (e.g. product endorsements) but not others (e.g. native ads).

# Glossary

**Auto-play (on YouTube):** Auto play is a feature in which content is generated for the user to watch, via their previous watching history, and plays automatically, without any action from the user once the video they have been watching ends. This feature is also present on Netflix, and Instagram videos. Auto play can be turned off by the user.

**Clothes hauls:** Clothes hauls videos are popular videos posted by vloggers on YouTube, featuring the creator showing off their latest purchases from a number of high street or designer brands. The videos often contain affiliate links in the description box, so that the viewer can purchase the items shown, and the YouTuber can profit from the number of clicks on the link. <https://www.businessinsider.com/marketers-that-think-hauling-is-what-trucks-do-should-read-this-2013-4?IR=T>

**Dance (in Fortnite):** On Fortnite, 'dances' are available to be purchased through the in-game currency 'Vbucks' or by progressing throughout the game. These dances can be played during the game to taunt other players, and often feature famous dance moves by celebrities

**Daily motion:** Daily motion is a video sharing platform launched in 2005, in which users can upload content and browse content shared by others.

**Emoji:** "a small digital image or icon used to express an idea or emotion in electronic communication"  
(Google dictionary, 22/10/18)

**Fidget spinner:** A small toy comprising two or three prongs arranged around a central bearing, designed to be spun by the fingers as a means of improving concentration or relieving stress (Collins dictionary, 22/10/18)

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

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

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

**In-game purchases:** Referring to items or points that can be bought by a player for use in the games virtual world

**Kids mode (on Netflix):** A functionality on Netflix allowing parents to set up controls, by creating a 4-digit pin, to stop their children watching content above a certain maturity rating, of which they can select.

**Kodi:** A free content streaming platform allowing users to access a broad range of content. Whilst the platform itself is legal, it can be used in conjunction with other software to provide illegal access to copyrighted content

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

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

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

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

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

**Make-up giveaway posts:** A makeup giveaway post is a promotional post which allows the followers of a particular user to win make up, often gifted by a brand, if they like, share or follow that said account. Often this takes the form of an image, uploaded by the user themselves, or reposted from another person's account.

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

**Mirror pictures:** A mirror shot is a term used by some respondents in the sample to describe some types of photo, in which a person takes a full-length camera shot of themselves by facing the mirror, capturing themselves in the mirrors reflection

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

**Opinion poll (on Instagram):** A one-question survey, in which users can pose a question to their Instagram friends. The function is also used as a way for YouTubers to connect with their fans.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Slime videos:** Slime videos became popular on YouTube in 2017, featuring people filming their creation of, and playing with, different types of slime. It is thought the videos became popular because of their being 'oddly satisfying' <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/oddly-satisfying-videos-explained-psychology-youtube>

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

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

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

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

**Vlogger:** A vlogger is someone who video blogs, uploading diary style video logs online

**Victory (in Fortnite):** A victory, in Fortnite, is winning the game by being the last survivor on the Island.

**Vimeo:** Vimeo is a video sharing platform launched in 2004, in which users can upload content and browse content shared by others.

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