



Children's Media Lives 2024

Ten years of longitudinal research

A report for Ofcom

REVEALING REALITY

Foreword

By Revealing Reality

The difference a decade makes – 10 years of Children's Media Lives

When Ofcom first commissioned this longitudinal study 10 years ago, several of the children in this year's research weren't yet born. It was 2014, later dubbed the "year of the selfie"¹ in the wake of that year's ice-bucket challenge², the #nomakeupselfie³ and the "selfie that broke Twitter". A year of laughs, cold-water gasps, attempts at authenticity and a group of famous people who took their own picture at the Oscars.

Social media was a well-established force – already shaping culture as well as depicting it – for both children and adults. But among children, it was part of a mixed media diet. In 2014, most children had their own smartphone by the time they were 13.⁴ Many were on a pay-as-you-go contract, which limited how much media they consumed on them and what they used them for.⁵

Ten years ago, the children in this study still watched TV – sometimes alone in their rooms, sometimes in their living rooms with their families.⁶ Some of them used Snapchat, mostly to send selfies and messages to close friends.

Roll on four years and in 2018 we found that some of the girls in the study were using Musical.ly, "a random stream of videos posted by other users, many of whom are strangers".⁷ This user-generated content was "unpredictable" – ranging from "rehearsed dance routines or lip-synced videos, either made by amateurs or skilled contributors", to "videos with sexual undertones", "strong language" and "sexualised commentary", which we reported could "make children feel uncomfortable if they came across something they didn't like or understand".

TikTok: from dance routines to media dominance

Here we are another six years later and this "random stream of videos posted by other users" is now the dominant media in most children's lives. TikTok – as Musical.ly became – is where they go to learn about the world, about themselves, for culture and for comfort.

Now, most children get their own smartphone when they are nine or 10 and a quarter of three to four-year-olds have one.⁸ And on these phones, in this study we see children are mostly consuming media alone and via social media. In 2014, children reported to Ofcom they were spending 12 and a half hours a week online on

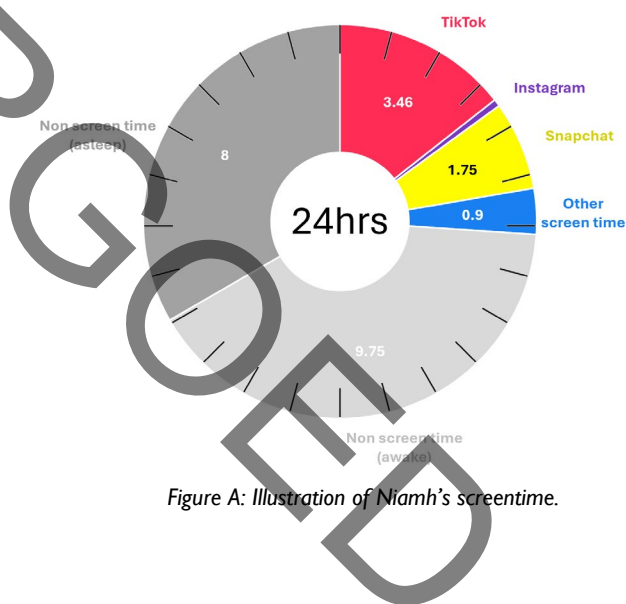


Figure A: Illustration of Niamh's screentime.

¹ [2014: The Year on Twitter, X \(then Twitter\) blog, December 2014](#)

² [ALS Ice Bucket Challenge](#)

³ [#nomakeupselfie trend raises over £8 million for Cancer Research UK](#)

⁴ [Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report](#), Ofcom, October 2014

⁵ [Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report](#), Ofcom, October 2014

⁶ [Ofcom Children's Media Lives: Year 1 Findings](#)

⁷ [Children's Media Lives Wave 5 report](#)

⁸ [Ofcom Media Literacy Tracker 2023: Core Parents Survey](#)

average.⁹ In this year's Children's Media Lives, we see many of the children are spending six, seven, eight hours a day on social media – often more.

Unlike the content they used to watch on TV, often overseen by their parents, the videos children are watching on social media are largely unmediated by their parents or the platforms – what they see might be true, it might not. It might be good for them, it might not.



Figure B: A screenshot from MrBeast's video "I gave People \$1,000,000 But ONLY 1 Minute To Spend It!"

Social media: visual, commercial, professional

Over the last 10 years we've seen social media become less and less social. Children are primarily looking at visual media – images and videos – not interacting with other people. The content they see in their feeds is increasingly professionalised and commercialised – as social media has become bigger and bigger business, it's changed the way people use it. Most of what children now see on social media was created by someone with the deliberate goal of capturing attention, garnering 'likes' or building a following – and it's often their job to do this. Some children are even emulating techniques by content creators to build their own following.

Video is the most popular media format and as we've seen this year, videos continue to get shorter, faster, more stimulating, and, in some cases, more intimate, all while what children are recommended on their feeds is ever more personalised.

Seeking out the sensory online

Of course, as with any experience in childhood, most children in our study can't imagine life any other way. Some thought they would feel lonely without social media or gaming – it's where they turn to satisfy their needs, meet their aspirations and feel connected to the world and other people.

Some of them go round to their friends' 'houses' on Roblox¹⁰ because it's easier than visiting them in person; they play football online; they get the instant gratification of watching dramatic short-form videos of people performing hyped-up challenges.

Children watch videos of slime, sludge, sand, hands playing with crayons, bubbles, food – mirroring but not directly experiencing the sensory and tactile nature of messy play and mud pies.

The role of role-play

This year we've seen more of the participants, especially the girls, watching 'Get ready with me', 'Point of view' and role-play videos. They tell us they are soothed by content creators who act like their best friends, their big sisters, their confidantes, who give them advice. The trend is towards heightened intimacy – often using ASMR tropes¹¹ – someone giving them the sense they are whispering in their ear, playing with their hair, stroking their back. The children say they watch

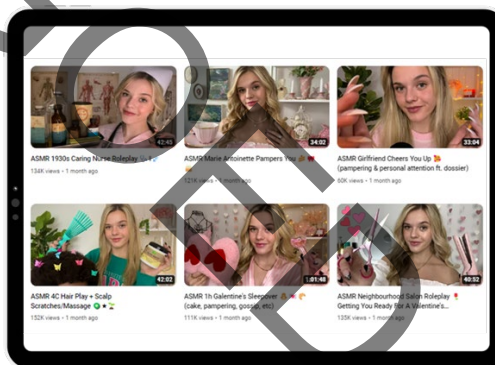


Figure C: A screenshot of Oceans ASMR's recent YouTube roleplay ASMR videos.

⁹ Ofcom's Media Literacy Tracker 2014, (self-reported data)

¹⁰ Roblox is an online gaming platform that allows users to access and play millions of games. Roblox includes a vast array of different genres in their games, and both single and multiplayer games.

¹¹ ASMR stands for autonomous sensory meridian response. It is a comforting feeling triggered by particular sounds and/or stimuli.

these videos to relax, or to help them go to sleep, but sometimes they stay up half the night watching one after another.

This is easy when the children's social media feeds give them more of what they 'want'. Platforms and content creators alike are extremely responsive to the trends that get them traction. Over the years, they have gone to greater and greater lengths to capture and keep users' attention, even as the children themselves tell us they find it increasingly hard to focus on one thing or for long – a whole episode of a TV programme, for example. Last year children were watching two unrelated videos at once within split-screen TikTok formats, this year for the first time we've seen a triple-split-screen video – three videos playing simultaneously.

'Watch to the end'

The children's attention is being caught by hyper-stimulating videos that are loud, bright, dramatic and dizzying. If their interest starts to fade, they're encouraged to wait for the 'big reveal', or they choose to watch the video at twice the speed so they can 'get to' the next one more quickly.

The children mostly say they enjoy the content they're watching. But it doesn't always look as though it's genuinely meeting their needs. Some tell us they are often lonely, bored or anxious. And the time children spend on social media is time they're not spending on other things. Over the years some have talked about the hobbies they've given up or the sports they've stopped playing, while simultaneously their screen-time has crept upwards, or they've shifted to scrolling social media alone in their bedrooms rather than watching TV with their family.

Truth, trust and the next 10 years

As in previous years, we also saw some of the children being quite clear they didn't think certain types of content were 'appropriate' on social media, and several others reflecting that they knew what they were seeing on social media was one-sided and trying to find additional perspectives. They didn't always know how or where to look, but some were trying to get beyond what they were being served on their feeds, work out what was true and where to find it.

Ten years ago, children's media lives looked very different than they do today – but by looking back we can often see how one trend led to another. What will the next 10 years look like? Will children's social media use peak? In another decade, the children in this year's study will all be adults. What will they want their own children's media lives to look like?

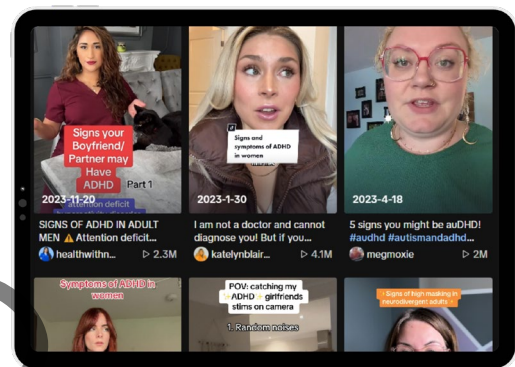


Figure D: A screenshot of the top results for 'ADHD' on TikTok.

About Revealing Reality

Revealing Reality is an independent social research agency, working with regulators, government and charities to provide rigorous insight into young people's online behaviours and experiences.

Studying how the digital world is shaping people's lives is something we do every day. We have been tracking children's media use and the impact it has on them for the past decade as part of Ofcom's Children's Media Lives research, and we've conducted some of the most detailed qualitative behavioural research on digital behaviours, observing how people really use digital products, services and technology.

Visit www.revealingreality.co.uk to find out more about our work or to get in touch.

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Introduction

Set up in 2014, Children's Media Lives is a longitudinal study tracking the media behaviours, experiences and attitudes of a group of children aged between eight and 17, from all over the UK and with a variety of backgrounds.

The aim has been to revisit the same children each year, replacing them only when they turn 18 or if they leave the study for other reasons. This provides an opportunity to explore and understand how the children's behaviour, experiences and attitudes change as they grow up and as the media landscape shifts around them.

This research is one element of the media literacy research Ofcom undertakes as part of its statutory duty under the Communications Act 2003 to promote and to carry out research into media literacy across the UK.¹² In turn, Ofcom's media literacy research forms part of its wider programme of work, Making Sense of Media¹³, which aims to improve the online skills, knowledge and understanding of UK adults and children.

Over the last 10 years, the study has featured 50 children altogether. The number of children taking part has increased over the years, to include a greater diversity of participants, and this year the group of participants stands at 21. They are introduced in 'Meet the participants'. Two of them took part for the first time this year, and the longest-standing participant in this year's group has been part of the study since wave 5 in 2018. Every year, as the children who turn 18 leave the project, they are replaced with younger children, maintaining as consistent and balanced a cohort as possible.

This rich, qualitative exploration of children's media lives complements Ofcom's [quantitative research on children's media literacy](#). This study is able to explore the motivations and context for media use that sit behind the headline numbers and provide context on the interplay between the children's use of media, their daily lives, and their domestic circumstances.

As it is the 10th year of the Children's Media Lives study, this year's report not only contains the annual 'snapshot' of what children are doing, seeing and thinking about the media they consume, but reflects on how the findings at this time show evidence of continuing – or contrasting – trends, behaviour and experiences that the research has uncovered over the last decade.

It considers how the media children are consuming has changed and explores how the children's¹⁴ online critical understanding – the extent to which they have the skills, knowledge and understanding to navigate the online world safely and productively – has changed, too.

The fieldwork for this wave was conducted during the last four months of 2023. An overview of the methodology is set out in 'About this study'. Revealing Reality, which conducts the research and reports on the findings, has a [strict ethics and safeguarding policy](#)¹⁵ to ensure, as far as possible, that taking part in research is a positive experience for children and that they are not placed under any undue risk, stress or discomfort during the project. This policy is reviewed regularly to ensure that it is in line with all industry standards, including those of the Market Research Society and the Government Social Research Service.

¹² The Online Safety Act 2023 clarifies and adds specificity to Ofcom's existing media literacy duties particularly around online safety. Amongst other things, it requires Ofcom to build public awareness about a range of media literacy and online safety issues, and to encourage the development and use of technology and systems that provide protection to online users.

¹³ To find out more about Ofcom's Making Sense of Media programme and for details on how to join its network, please go to [Making Sense of Media](#).

¹⁴ When this report describes what "the children" are doing or saying, this refers to the children who are participating in this study. It cannot be extrapolated to children in the UK more widely.

¹⁵ Please see Annex 5 to review Revealing Reality's ethics and safeguarding policy.

Summary of key findings

Each year, Children's Media Lives provides a qualitative exploration of the media the children in the study are consuming, creating or sharing and their media behaviours, experiences and attitudes. Now in its 10th year, this year's key findings are based on interviews with and observation of the 21 children which took place in late 2023 and early 2024, and set within the context of previous findings, shifting trends and further research into the content they are engaging with.

Interaction and play

Continuing a trend seen in this study over the last few years, the children's caution about what they shared publicly online had further increased, with social interaction now confined mostly to chat apps and gaming. Snapchat continued to dominate as a space to interact directly with friends and peers.

Children were particularly reluctant to share content they had created themselves with larger circles of people but found ways to share content in more selective or strategic ways. For example, they preferred to share posts temporarily (such as dance videos for 24 hours on their Stories¹⁶), with smaller circles (such as selfies on private social media accounts only followed by a select few friends) or they reshared other people's posts as a way of sending signals to other people (such as sharing someone else's post about relationship expectations, in the hope that the boy they fancy sees it and understands it is a coded message for him).

The minority of participants who do post more publicly to their social media profiles tended to have specific goals to grow their online 'following', such as wanting to get talent-spotted or sponsored by brands. These children were observing the content and activity that appeared to get the most engagement and adapting their posting behaviour accordingly. For example, one child had begun to post more frequently about setbacks than positive achievements – after noticing that negative posts attracted more likes and views.

Some of the children reported gaming less this year than previously, but those who were gaming appeared to place a greater importance on it as a means of connecting and socialising with friends. Some said they preferred playing with their friends via online games than spending time with them face-to-face.

Information, identity and influence

Children in the study continued to rely primarily on online sources for information, watching instructional videos or seeking help with homework.

However, engagement with news and current affairs was low, and almost exclusively via social media. Content that did touch on news and current affairs was typically seen by the children in the form of video clips cut and reposted without their original context and overlaid with commentary and reaction by various online content creators. Children struggled to work out what information they could or could not trust on social media, and many were relatively unmotivated to validate the information they were seeing. Some were keen to show solidarity with views their friends had expressed, without understanding much about the issues under discussion.

Notably, some of the older children in the study – most of whom are boys this year – were expressing greater awareness that social media sometimes presented a one-sided view of topics, and they were more proactive in seeking out alternative sources and voices on current affairs online. However, their main source of information was still social media.

The children were seeing a lot of videos posted by influencers and content creators about wider lifestyle topics. For girls, this was typically 'Day in the life' or 'Get ready with me' videos,¹⁷ which gave the viewer a window into influencers' often lavish lifestyles, and content relating to make-up, fashion, and mental health –

¹⁶ Stories allow users to post photos and videos for their followers to see that last for 24 hours on the platform before vanishing.

¹⁷ Usually on TikTok, Instagram or YouTube, 'Day in the life' and 'Get ready with me' videos immerse viewers in influencers' lives and routines. In 'Get ready with me' videos, the content creators typically talk through what skincare and make-up products they use, and the outfits they might wear that day. 'Day in the life' content shows viewers various events in an influencer's day.

including 'symptoms' that might indicate a diagnosis (such as a mental health or spectrum condition). For boys, videos about health, fitness, workout/ gym sessions and motivational advice were more popular.

Very few of the children reflected critically on the motives of these content creators, even when their profiles advertised products for sale, such as relationship courses or growth supplement 'gummies'. Many participants had, to varying degrees, been influenced by what they had seen posted by influencers, for example they had made purchases, taken exercise advice, or in one case sought a diagnosis of Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).¹⁸

A couple of the children were more critically reflective – indicating that while they found some of the advice they saw useful, that didn't mean they subscribed to all of the viewpoints attributed to the influencers presenting it, for example Andrew Tate.¹⁹

Attention and stimulation

The children continued to consume videos that were even more stimulating – shorter, faster paced, louder – than those they were watching last year. Short clips from longer TV programmes were cut and viewed out of context, videos were edited with fast, choppy styles, visual effects and sounds. Content creators adopted loud, dramatic, exaggerated personas. The content themes tended to centre on extreme challenges, large volumes of money, drama,²⁰ and shock value. Thumbnails²¹ and captions followed these trends, designed to grab attention and exaggerate the drama in the content, often accompanied by clickbait²² or suspense-filled messages to 'watch to the end'.

Like last year, children continued to view double split-screen videos – effectively watching two different videos simultaneously – and this year one child was observed viewing a triple split-screen video. Since last year, TikTok has introduced a fast-forward button for videos, which several children were using, racing through videos at double speed.

In contrast, there was a distinct increase in the number of the study participants compared to last year, specifically girls, watching ASMR videos on platforms including TikTok. These videos provided the children viewing them with tactile, sensory stimulation with an emphasis on immersive, crisp, clear audio at a much slower pace. Content ranged from disembodied hands manipulating materials like slime, soap, or wooden balls, or satisfyingly organising stationery, to more intimate, interpersonal 'point of view' videos in which the content creator appears to be whispering directly to the viewer, role-playing a friend stroking their hair or soothing them to sleep.

Further research found the range of this content can extend in just a few clicks into more bodily, adult and sexual themes. This included ASMR content focused on bodily fluids. One child had come across a trend called 'spit painting', in which the content creator spits on their fingers in a POV (point of view) style and then wipes the saliva on the screen to simulate painting the viewer's face with it, but she did not like this sort of content.

¹⁸ Bryony had received a medical diagnosis of ADHD since she took part in the study the previous year. In the interview this year, Bryony said that until last year she had not considered whether she had ADHD. But, after watching a video on TikTok describing the experiences of a couple (one of whom has ADHD), she identified with the behaviours described within it and this prompted her to seek a diagnosis.

¹⁹ At the time of Oscar's interview (November 2023) Andrew Tate and his brother were still awaiting trial on human trafficking charges "after a Romanian judge ruled they could travel around the country" ([Romanian judge loosens restrictions on influencer Andrew Tate, Reuters](#), 23 November 2023). Researchers did not discuss any of these ongoing legal proceedings, or the reasons for them, with the participant.

²⁰ Techniques such as teasers, cliff-hangers, big 'reveals', tension between the performers and high-stakes consequences are used to deliberately amplify the drama in the content, often in rapid succession and sometimes all at once.

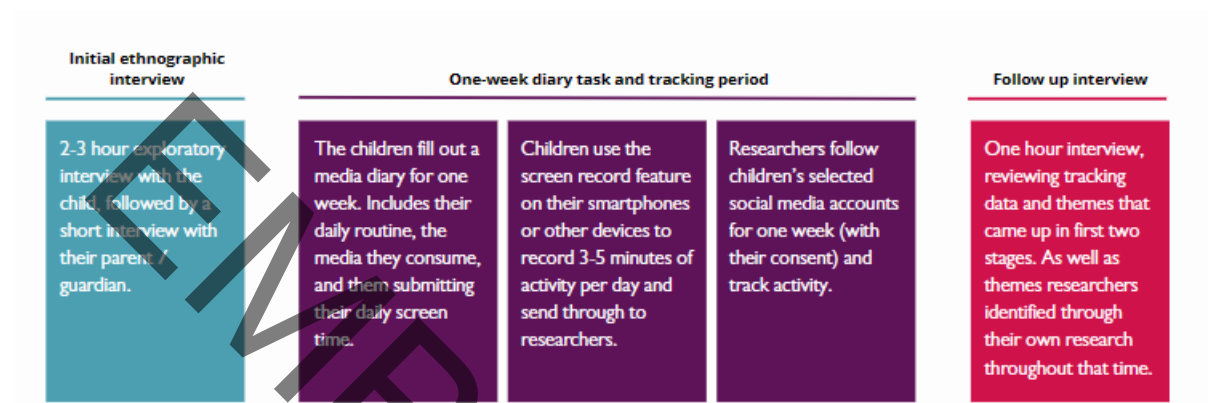
²¹ A thumbnail is the cover photo of a video that appears in search results and within channels on social media platforms such as YouTube. They can be clicked on to watch the video.

²² Clickbait usually refers to titles, captions or thumbnails that deliberately and often sensationally entice users to click on the link or video to which they refer.

About this study

Methodology

Children's Media Lives uses an in-depth, three-stage approach to investigate children's self-reported and actual behaviours,²³ as illustrated here.



Part 1: Initial exploratory interview

The initial exploratory interviews, conducted during October and November 2023, explored the full range of media behaviours that the children were engaged in, and included a brief interview with their parents to hear their perspectives on their children's media lives. The research team conducted these exploratory interviews digitally with 15 of the children and interviewed six of them face-to-face.

Part 2: Diary, tracking activities and further research

The children's media behaviour was recorded in three ways:

- **Media diary and 'screen time' data:** Children were asked to complete a six-day media diary, which captured how media activities fitted into their wider routine. This included a written diary of their activities each day, along with photos of what they had been doing, and daily 'screen-time'²⁴ data from their smartphones and other devices.
- **Screen recording:** Children with smartphones also completed a screen recording²⁵ task, which captured the content the children see on their phones and how they use features on social media platforms. Children were asked to record several 3 to 5-minute clips over six days scrolling through their favourite social media platforms.
- **Social media tracking:** With permission from the child and their parents, researchers 'friended' or followed²⁶ the children on social media for two weeks using bespoke social media accounts. This

²³ Introduced from wave 7 (early 2021).

²⁴ 'Screen-time' is a smartphone function which provides a breakdown of how much time a child has spent on different apps on their device that day.

²⁵ Screen recording refers to real-time recording of what the children are seeing as they use their phones.

²⁶ 'Friending' and 'following' refer to different ways of connecting with other users on social media platforms. A user is able to see the content shared by the individual they have 'friended' or 'followed'.

provided insight into what, when and how often they were posting, as well as how they interacted with others in public and/or semi-public spaces online.

- **Further research:** Throughout the fieldwork phase, researchers investigated further to understand platform functionality, terminology, and the content creators and media the children spoke about in their first interviews and submitted as part of their diary task.

Part 3: Follow-up interview

Of the 15 children who had taken part in a digital initial interview, 14 also took part in a follow-up interview (Oscar was the one child who did not). The children who had had face-to-face initial interviews in greater depth did not take part in a follow-up interview, with the exception of Bobby (17), with whom researchers did a face-to-face interview initially, and then a remote follow up, as was the case last year. During these follow-up interviews researchers shared their screens to prompt the children to reflect on their own media behaviours; using elements of content from their media tracking and screen record tasks, or aspects of their routine as seen in their screen-time data and written diary. This allowed the researchers to establish what the children understood about the content they had seen, and explore their critical thinking on specific features, trends, or topic areas. The second interviews also allowed researchers to explore any new questions that emerged over the course of the research.

Approach to fieldwork

Other than the exceptions outlined below, all interviews were conducted remotely:

- Researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with the two new participants who joined the sample this year: Willow (10) and Billy (8). These children also undertook the diary tasks but did not complete a follow-up interview, as the face-to-face element of the research allowed the researchers to explore the content of the follow-up interviews with the child during the initial visit.
- The research team also conducted face-to-face exploratory interviews with Amira (13) and Bobby (17), whose personal circumstances did not allow a fully remote approach to interviewing. Amira completed a face-to-face interview and a diary task, with no remote follow-up interview. Bobby struggled to engage in the exploratory phase of the research remotely, so researchers conducted a face-to-face exploratory interview. He then completed the diary task and was able to take part in a remote follow-up interview.
- Researchers also accommodated Amber's preference for a face-to-face interview.
- Ishak was recruited for the sample when he was 17 and was in his final year of education, but due to availability he was interviewed when he had just turned 18.

Exploring perceptions of the future

This year, researchers aimed to capture the children's perceptions of the future by exploring how media is shaping their ideas of the future, for themselves and for society. As observed in previous waves, children were increasingly looking to influencers for inspiration in various areas of life, including work, fitness, hobbies, and identity. They were also relying more on influencers for information about the world.

There were various topics explored this wave that touched on their attitudes towards the future. These included:

- How they think about the future
- Attitudes towards work and finance
- News and global events
- Their identity
- The people they look up to and why
- Growing up and what it means to be an adult
- The role of technology in their future
- Hopes and concerns

Guide to reading this report

This report is based on self-reported information and reflections from the children in interviews, observational data gathered by researchers during the social media tracking phase, and content included by the children in their media diaries and screen recording tasks. Researchers then conducted their own desk research that went beyond what had been directly seen or reported by the children. To reflect this, this report differentiates between three tiers of analysis and evidence:

1. **Data** collected directly from children's testimony, or from what researchers observed from their behaviour and media use.
2. **Further research:** insight from further research into platforms and content that the children mentioned or engaged with, or content that they didn't engage with but that was similar or related to that which they had seen.
3. **Researcher reflections:** a summary of researchers' reflections on what could be seen from this year's evidence and further research taken together, the continuation of trends or changes and hypotheses about how these might develop.

As mentioned above, **children's aspirations for the future and the influence of media on these aspirations was a key focus for this wave**. While there is no specific section dedicated to this theme, it is explored throughout the report wherever the children's reflections related to their future.

To ensure the participants' anonymity, the children have been given pseudonyms and personally identifiable information has not been included.

This is a longitudinal qualitative study exploring the media lives of 21 children from around the UK. Understanding the children's attitudes is a key objective of this research. Any opinions on public figures or specific social media platforms in this report are the children's own, and do not reflect the position of Ofcom or of Revealing Reality, unless stated otherwise, as in the labelled further research and researcher reflections sections.

Meet the participants

Twenty-one children took part in this year's study. This was the same total as in the previous wave. However, two of the participants are new to the study, replacing those who turned 18 and so are no longer in scope.

The [main sampling characteristics](#) focused on the following variables:

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Representation of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Location, including urban and rural areas, and all four UK nations
- Family set-up, including a mixture of different sibling and parental relationships
- Access to devices (including smartphones, tablets, smart TVs, games consoles)
- Use of devices
- Parental approaches to managing media use

About the children

To ensure the participants' anonymity, the children have been given pseudonyms and personally identifiable information has not been included anywhere in the report.

The profiles of the children below include graphics illustrating their estimated media and device usage. These are based on a combination of what they told the researchers and screenshots of their screentime sent through in the diary task phase. Screentime data was not available for some of the children, as there were some participants who did not have phones (and so it was not possible to measure screentime in the same way), and a couple of participants did not send through their screentime consistently during the diary task phase.

The graphic shows an estimate of non-screen time, split between waking and sleeping, with an assumed eight hours allocated to sleeping (although the amount the children slept each night on average varied widely and this won't be accurate in many cases).



Billy, 8 – Northeast England

Number of years taking part in Children's Media Lives: 1

It is Billy's first year being part of Children's Media Lives. He turned eight recently, and lives with his mum, her partner and his sibling. While sometimes shy, Billy is an energetic, positive and social child. He has lots of friends from his current and previous schools, and outside school, he goes round to his friends' houses, or they come to his. He said he plays outside a lot. At the moment, he particularly likes playing Spiderman. Billy also enjoys playing games on his Amazon tablet. He loves Minecraft²⁷ and has a lot of associated merchandise such as posters, a rug, and a hoodie. He plays after school for an hour or so, and more on the weekends. Recently he has been playing more Roblox as well, because his friends often play it, and he enjoys the exploration and world-building aspects of the game. He was recently given a smartphone so that he can call his dad, and to use homework apps for school. He does not have any social media.

²⁷ Minecraft is a creative computer game with blocky, pixelated visuals where players can explore their world, build structures, craft items, extract materials, and sometimes fight or cooperate with other players.



Frankie, 9 – Southeast England

Number of years taking part in Children's Media Lives: 2

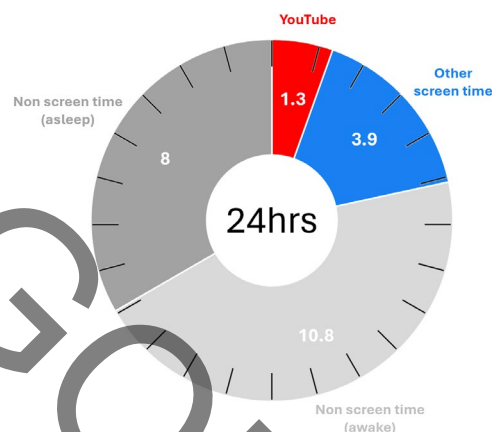
Frankie lives with her parents and younger sibling. Now in year 5, she changed schools at the start of the school year. She is inquisitive and chatty and says she feels more grown up than last year. She wants more independence and likes to walk to school on her own (with mum following closely behind) and is allowed to go to the local shop. Frankie is busy with football, gymnastics, and Brownies. She recently started cheerleading and music lessons at school. Frankie watches *Newsround* every morning before school and will catch up on missed episodes on iPlayer on her family TV or iPad. Like last year, her favourite TV show is *The Next Step* – a dance drama series on the BBC. She recently downloaded an app called JusTalk²⁸ on her iPad which allows her to message, call or video call friends and family. Frankie says that now she is older, she no longer wants to watch shows that are “make believe” and instead wants to watch shows based on truth. Frankie remains off social media, but her mum is thinking about giving her a non-smartphone when she starts year 6 next year.



Bailey, 9 – Yorkshire and the Humber

Number of years taking part in Children's Media Lives: 2

Bailey is an exuberant child who lives with his mum. He has been working hard to focus on his schoolwork and was proud to have been recently recognised with an award. He has also managed to get into the school football team. His mum is looking to get him learning support at school, and he has a pending autism/ADHD assessment. She feels he is struggling academically at school. Like last year, he watches lots of YouTube, focusing on creators such as IShowSpeed²⁹ and The Royalty Family.³⁰ He mainly watches YouTube on his mum's iPad and the family TV, and he spends around five hours on his devices per day. Bailey has also started posting a little bit on his own TikTok account and his mum's YouTube account with the aim of building followers, even though his account has been made private by his mum. Bailey is playing much less Xbox than he was last year, instead preferring to play Roblox on his mum's iPad. He enjoys trying out different games with friends he knows and making new ones on the platform.



²⁸ This app is similar in functionality to WhatsApp, enabling children to communicate with friends through video chat or messaging. However unlike WhatsApp, it does not require the user to supply a phone number. The app is described on the Google Play Store as a “safe messenger” app for children with chat and video call functionality, and some parental controls.

²⁹ IShowSpeed is a 19-year-old American streamer, YouTuber, and rapper with 23.1M subscribers on YouTube. His content predominantly focuses on football, gaming, and live streaming his experiences in different countries.

³⁰ The Royalty Family is a vlogging family of five with 23.2M YouTube subscribers. They are mainly known for their vlogs, funny sketches, and challenge-style videos. They also have an associated account called Royalty Gaming with 5.3M YouTube subscribers, where they mainly post videos of the son and the dad gaming.



Alfie, 9 – London

Number of years taking part in Children's Media Lives: 2

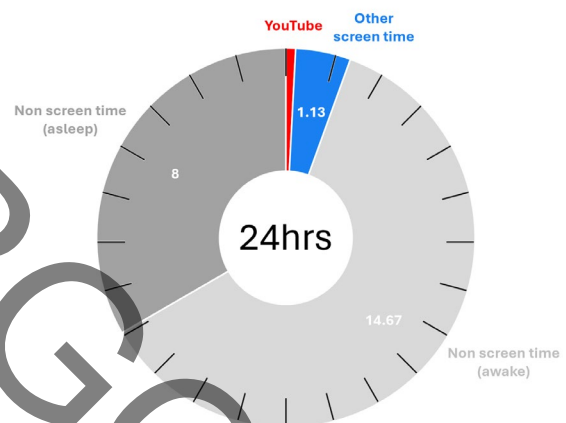
Alfie lives with his parents and younger sibling, and his main passion is sport. He plays football, rugby, basketball, and does mixed martial arts twice a week and recently got his purple belt. He has lots of friends and loves playing outside with them in his back garden or on the green nearby. On school days, Alfie spends between one and two hours on his devices. Alfie has a Nintendo Switch, on which he plays Pokémon,³¹ Minecraft, Mario games,³² and wrestling, as well as watching YouTube on it. He also has a PS5, and plays Minecraft, Fortnite,³³ Roblox, and EA Sports FC 24.³⁴ He loves the competitive element of gaming, and really enjoys playing Minecraft on his PS5. On YouTube, Alfie watches content mainly relating to Pokémon, Minecraft, and football. He watches longer YouTube videos rather than YouTube Shorts, but says he mainly watches YouTube instead of gaming on weekdays because it is easier to do in shorter stints.



Willow, 10 – Southwest England

Number of years taking part in Children's Media Lives: 1

Willow, who is new to the study this year, lives with her parents and younger sibling. She attends a school which focuses on child-led learning, but her parents are considering sending her to a different school next year. Willow loves to paint and make animals out of clay while playing audiobooks in the background using her Google Nest – she says likes to be able to do two things at once. Willow has recently been given an old iPad, which she uses as much as she can. Her parents have put timers on the apps, to manage the amount of time she spends on them, which she finds a bit frustrating. Her favourite apps are Roblox and YouTube, and she usually spends around one and a half hours between the two of them each day. She often plays Roblox with her friends and likes how many games there are available on it. Willow can't wait to get a mobile phone as this will enable her to always have access to her favourite apps, without any parental limitations.



³¹ Pokémon is a game and media franchise relating to creatures or 'pocket monsters' which accompany the characters or in-game players in battles and adventures.

³² Mario is a renowned Italian animated character, at the centre of a franchise of games such as Mario Kart, Super Mario Bros. and many more.

³³ Fortnite is a multiplayer online combat video game with six game modes, which can be played on multiple gaming platforms (e.g. Xbox, PlayStation). It is predominantly a combat game in which players can fight and cooperate with other players, collect and upgrade items and build structures and fortifications. In the most popular game mode, Battle Royale, the game pits players against each other to be the last survivor on an island.

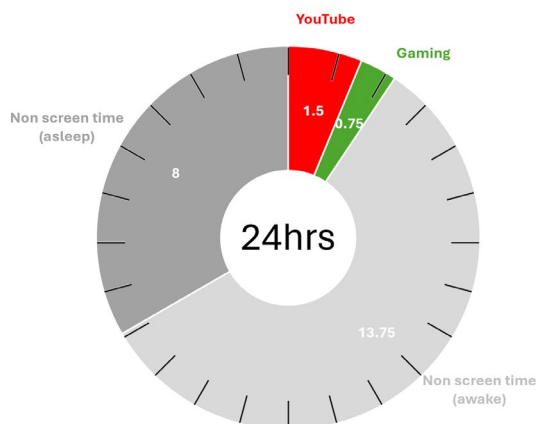
³⁴ EA Sports FC 24 is the first instalment of the rebranded series of popular football video games, the preceding version of which was FIFA 23. It is available on all major consoles. Players are able to play with and manage teams in-game and online, with different modes such as Career Mode for managing clubs and Ultimate Team for building dream squads online.



Lily, 10 – Yorkshire and the Humber

Number of years taking part in Children's Media Lives: 3

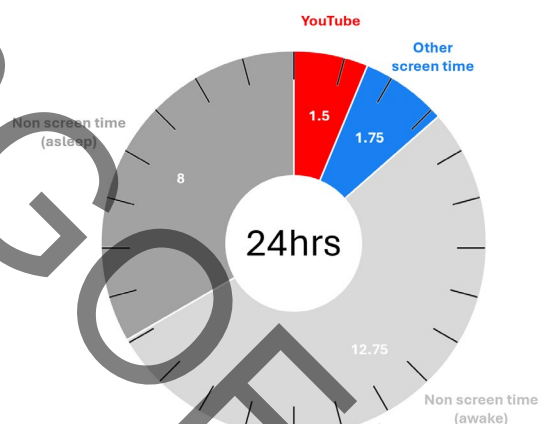
Lily lives with her parents and older sibling and is in year 5. Lily loves sports, playing football with her friends and several times a week at her school and a local club. She likes to mess around outside with her best friends. Last October, Lily started karate lessons, and she likes to test out her moves at home with her dad. She plays the new EA Sports FC24 on her PS5. Lily has her own laptop now but prefers to watch TV on the big screen in the living room, where she watches YouTube and films with her family. On YouTube she spends a couple of hours a day watching Stumble Guys³⁵ or YouTubers opening the new Premier League ADRENALYN XL 23/24 trading card pack.



Angus, 11 – Scotland

Number of years taking part in Children's Media Lives: 3

Angus, 11, lives with his parents and siblings. He is in his first year at secondary school, where he has made lots of new friends, and he spends his evenings and weekends doing lots of extra-curricular activities. Educationally, Angus is doing very well, receiving gold certificates for academic excellence and good behaviour. Compared with last year, he is spending much more time on consoles. He has bought a PS5 with birthday money, on which he plays FIFA 23³⁶, Rocket League,³⁷ and Fortnite – he does this for around two or three hours each night. While gaming, he'll speak with his friends. He says he really enjoys the competitive element of these games. He still doesn't have any social media accounts such as Instagram or TikTok, but he sometimes uses messaging apps like WhatsApp to communicate with his friends. Other than messaging, Angus uses his phone to watch animal videos, videos about Lego, and some content creators such as MrBeast³⁸ on YouTube, as well as playing phone games like Madfut.³⁹ Overall, he spends about three hours a day on his phone.



³⁵ Stumble Guys is a fun multiplayer knockout game with up to 32 players online. Players control jellybean-like characters navigating obstacle courses to be the last one standing.

³⁶ This was an earlier version of EA FC 24, as previously referenced.

³⁷ Rocket League is a video game combining football and cars, where players use rocket-powered vehicles to score goals against their opponents. This can be played both online with other people, and offline in a solo play mode.

³⁸ MrBeast is the most subscribed individual on YouTube with 244 million subscribers. He predominantly posts challenge-style videos, often including large sums of money.

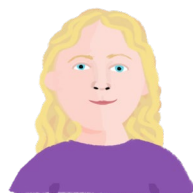
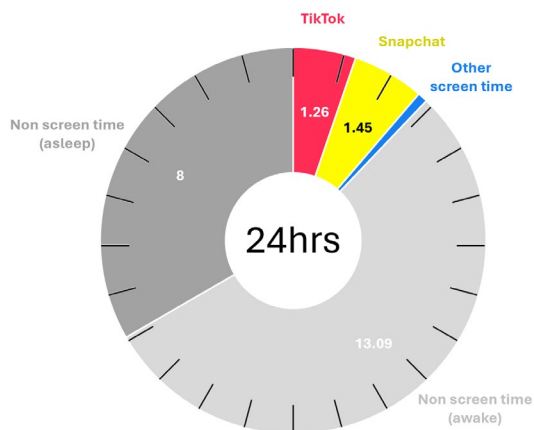
³⁹ Madfut is an app where one can collect packs of football players and draft players into their teams. It is similar to EA Sports FC games, but without the in-match gameplay.



Amber, 11 – Northwest England

Number of years taking part in Children’s Media Lives: 2

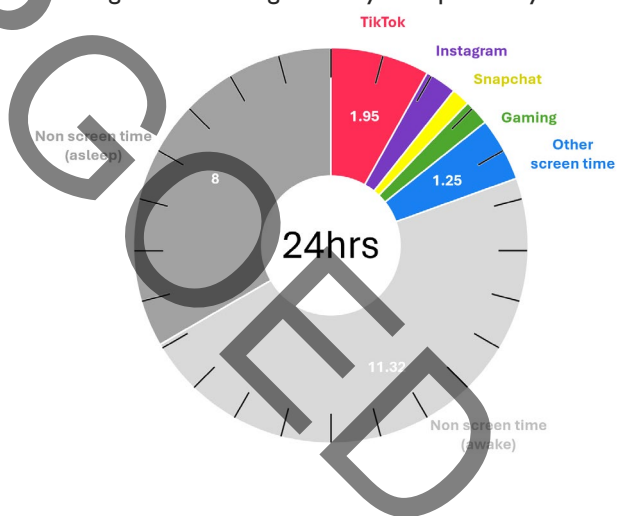
Amber lives with her parents and older sibling and has recently started year 7 in a local secondary school. Having fallen out with her friends at the end of last year, she has now found a new group of friends and thinks year 7 is much better socially and people are kinder. Like last year, Amber’s most used app was TikTok, which she spends around an hour and a half using on weekdays. She uses the app “for entertainment”, watching ‘POV’ (point of view) content about fictional scenarios such as meeting your soulmate, makeup tutorials, and fan edits of her new favourite celebrity, Leonardo DiCaprio. Amber also watches ASMR videos before bed. Her second most used platform was Snapchat, on which she talks to her friends for a couple of hours every day. While Amber does still play Fortnite and use YouTube, she does not use these as much as she did last year.



Suzy, 12 – Scotland

Number of years taking part in Children’s Media Lives: 5

Suzy lives with her mum and her mum’s partner. She is in S2 (equivalent to year 8) and is doing well at school, recently achieving top marks in her start-of-year assessments. Over the summer holidays, she started selling handmade bracelets at summer fairs with her friend, creating ‘business’ profiles on TikTok and Instagram to attract more customers. Suzy recently got an Amazon Alexa speaker and enjoys listening to Harry Styles, Taylor Swift, and Central Cee on Spotify, as well as the ‘Basically Besties’ podcast⁴⁰, which features a mother and daughter discussing a variety of topics. Suzy spends around four hours a day on her phone. Suzy is in a lot of Snapchat group chats, and sometimes sees videos of fights in local schools that are shared via these chats, though she does not share them herself. Suzy has recently started playing an app-based game called Coin Master⁴¹ with her friends after school. On social media, Suzy likes watching ‘Get ready with me’ videos of people who are similar in age to her. She will often buy the products they use.



⁴⁰ The Basically Besties podcast is a weekly podcast from influencers Kat and Latisha Clark who are mother and daughter. They talk about personal experiences, careers and relationships, and also host listener confessions to the podcast.

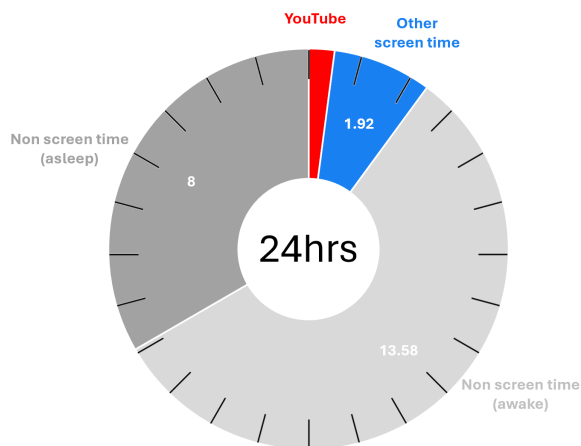
⁴¹ Coin Master is a free to play mobile game, the aim of which is to win coins and upgrade items to be able to develop the player’s own villages.



Arjun, 12 – Northwest England

Number of years taking part in Children’s Media Lives: 5

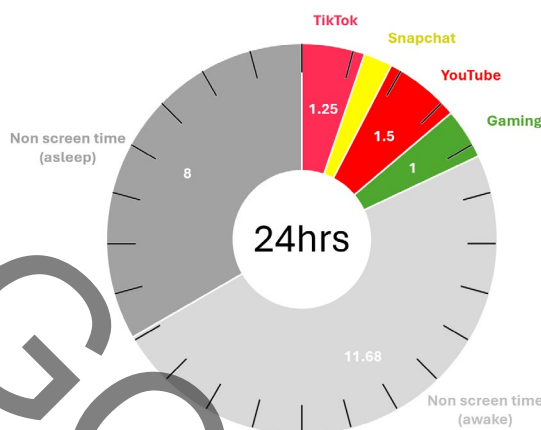
Arjun lives with his parents, and he is now in year 8 at his school. He has made lots of friends, and like he has been from wave 5, is involved in lots of sport, as well as music and other extracurricular activities, including the politics society. He enjoys debating and said he might want to be a lawyer when he gets older. YouTube is still Arjun’s main app of choice – he watches it every day, but not for long periods of time. Last year he had started to watch YouTube Shorts in addition to longer form content. This year, he is predominantly watching Shorts rather than longer form content. Most of the content he sees is related to FI. His screen-time at the time of interviewing was about two hours per day. He is also gaming more than last year. For example, he has started playing Fortnite because lots of his friends play it.



Amira, 13 – London

Number of years taking part in Children’s Media Lives: 3

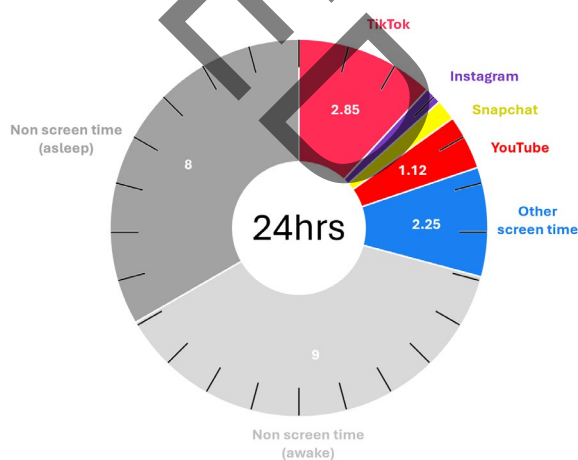
Amira is now the eldest sister to three siblings, and she has taken on more responsibility in the house helping her mum take care of her younger siblings. Amira says she feels older and more mature than last year, noting that her interests have evolved from playing outside to pretending to browse and shop for expensive things on the internet. She particularly likes looking at expensive cars and furniture. Since last year, Amira and her mum have installed wi-fi and Amira has now got her own phone, tablet, and laptop. Her favourite apps are TikTok and YouTube, and she spends at least an hour a day on TikTok. She enjoys watching content about cleaning and organising and ‘Day in the life’ videos so she can compare how different people in the world live. Amira also likes watching fan-created animated content.



Zak, 13, Northwest England

Number of years taking part in Children’s Media Lives: 6

Since last year’s study, Zak has started a new school, which he’s enjoying and where he’s made new friends. His favourite subjects are maths and engineering. When he joined the study in wave 5, Zak said he wanted to be a YouTuber. Now he says he’d like to go into engineering in the future. Zak has a PlayStation 5 and a Nintendo Switch, which he uses occasionally. More often he watches videos, either on his iPad or his phone, which he uses for about seven hours a day on average. When he’s not watching videos, he spends most of his free time playing Roblox online with his friends from his previous school. A lot of the content he watches on TikTok and YouTube is based around Taylor Swift – an interest he shares with one of his friends. He’s bought all her albums on CD and is excited to have got tickets to see her in concert in the summer with his mum. He no longer makes and posts his own videos



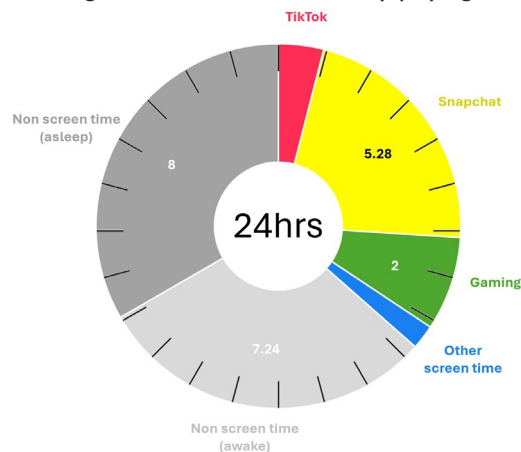
on social media, but he does repost content about Taylor Swift, often tagging his friend so she'll see it. He also volunteers for charity with his mum and does a shift each week in the local business where his nan works.



Freddie, 13 – Northwest England

Number of years taking part in Children's Media Lives: 5

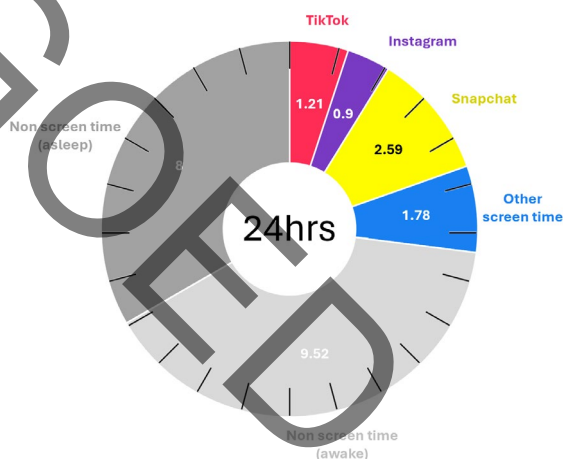
Freddie splits his time between his parents' homes. He is getting on reasonably well socially but is struggling somewhat with his studies. When Freddie joined the study in wave 6, he loved spending time playing football, and that hasn't changed - his life is dominated by playing football. He is still playing for a local academy, for which he trains several times a week. He also plays for his school team, and often in his free time with his mates. Freddie spends a lot of his leisure time out and about with his friends, and as a result he is watching less TV (especially Netflix) this year. He does still like to game online, mainly playing Fortnite and the new EA Sports FC24, and says he does this every night for around two hours, and more on the weekends. While he games, he is often on a video call with his friends on Snapchat, with whom he has a group chat. It is not uncommon for Freddie to spend around eight hours a day on his phone, with the majority of that time being on Snapchat. He also watches a lot of YouTube, predominantly watching The Side Men⁴² and affiliated channels.



Terri, 14 – Northwest England

Number of years taking part in Children's Media Lives: 2

Terri lives with her mum and is now in year 10. Terri feels that she has matured a lot between years 9 and 10 and she is more focused on doing well at school. To help her manage her autism, diagnosed during the pandemic, she carries a card at school to signal when she needs a break. Outside school, Terri attends dance school twice a week, hangs out with her mum, and watches TV in her room, and she sometimes sees her dad too. Terri has a new iPhone 14 and spends around six hours a day on it, with TikTok and Snapchat being her most used apps. She likes the upgraded camera for making dance videos for her Instagram account, on which she is keen to gain followers. She also has a new smart TV in her room on which she watches Disney+, YouTube, and TikTok. She uses TikTok search for viewing recommendations on Disney+ and had been enjoying its Halloween content at the time of fieldwork.



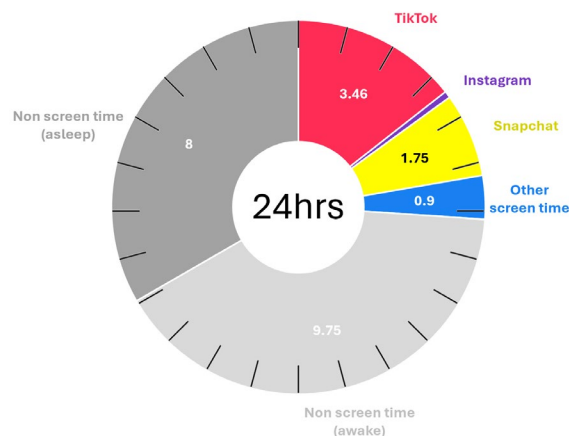
⁴² The Sidemen is a British YouTube group consisting of internet personalities KSI, Miniminter, Zerkaa, TBJZL, Behzinga, Vikkstar123, and W2S.



Niamh, 14 – Northern Ireland

Number of years taking part in Children’s Media Lives: 3

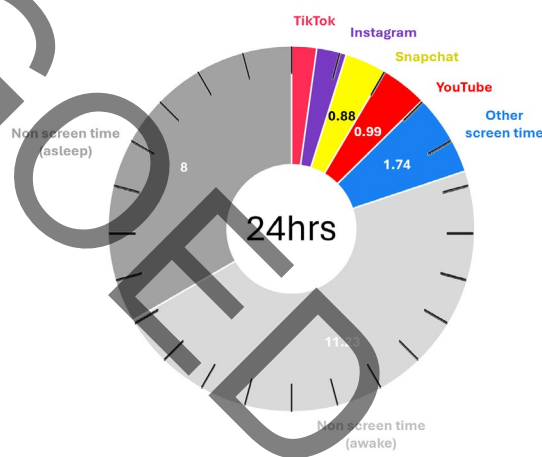
Niamh, 14, lives with her parents and older sibling and has started a new grammar school this year. Niamh is very close to her family and likes spending time with them. She has several relatives that live locally, and they get together on weekends to eat and watch sport. Outside school and family time, Niamh loves going on TikTok and says she finds it “addictive”. She spends around three and a half hours a day watching things like makeup tutorials and 'Get ready with me' videos on TikTok and is into travel-related content. Niamh is jealous of influencers who get paid to travel and stay at “fancy” hotels for a living. She aspires to do this herself but doesn’t really think it is a realistic goal. She also uses TikTok shop and recently bought hair oil after seeing several influencers post about it. Niamh was hoping to get a phone upgrade at Christmas and wanted the latest iPhone.



Bryony, 15 – Wales

Number of years taking part in Children’s Media Lives: 6

Bryony lives with her extended family, and is in her final year of secondary school, preparing for her GCSEs. Since last year, Bryony has been diagnosed with ADHD. To help manage her condition, Bryony now attends school remotely one day each week. She cites TikTok as a key motivator for seeking her diagnosis, which she did after seeing a video on the site from an influencer talking about symptoms of the condition. Bryony spends around five hours a day on her phone and enjoys watching Tarah and Barry,⁴³ a couple on TikTok who share their experiences of dating and living with ADHD. She says she likes how they show even potentially negative moments in their life, which she says not many people do online. She also enjoys whispering and roleplay ASMR content from creators such as Oceans ASMR.⁴⁴ She remains committed to building the online following of her equestrian accounts; she now has over 1,000 followers on her social media accounts, and this has motivated her to post more often about both her positive and negative experiences. She recently hosted a giveaway of various items on her account to thank her followers and build loyalty – an action she had seen various influencers take.



⁴³ Tarah and Barry are an online couple on TikTok who share videos about being in a relationship in which one of them (Tarah) has ADHD. They have 1.2M followers on TikTok.

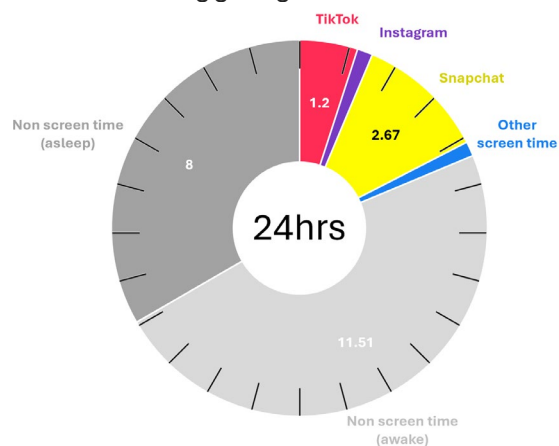
⁴⁴ Oceans ASMR is a YouTube influencer who posts ASMR content, specifically to do with role playing. She has 553K subscribers on YouTube.



Taylor, 15 – Southeast England

Number of years taking part in Children's Media Lives: 3

Taylor splits her time between her parents' homes. She has just started year 11 and has been working hard for her mock GCSEs. Her main device is her phone, which she spends around five hours a day using. Like last year, Taylor is committed to achieving good grades so she can attend a selective sixth form and as a result she watches a lot of study advice content. While she expresses some concerns about the responsibility of growing up, she enjoys what she describes as more 'realistic' content this year and thinks it is important to see everyday lives represented on social media or on the screen. Recently, Taylor has seen a lot of content about the conflict in Gaza on Instagram via her friends' Stories.⁴⁵ She says she does not know much about the issue and is therefore hesitant to reshare any content. However, on seeing something on Instagram about children being harmed in the conflict, she donated to a charity her friend had shared a link to.



Oscar, 16 – Northern Ireland

Number of years taking part in Children's Media Lives: 2

Oscar lives with his mum, stepdad, and younger sibling, and is at secondary school. He did half of his GCSEs last year and is doing the other half this year, and overall, is happy with his results so far. His plan is to join sixth form next year, and then get an apprenticeship. He plays a lot more basketball than last year, and he also goes to the gym five times a week, which he says makes him feel much more confident and comfortable in his body. Part of the impetus for him going to the gym has been seeing people such as online personality Andrew Tate⁴⁶, retired US Navy seal and athlete David Goggins, and podcaster and commentator Joe Rogan talking about the benefits of going to the gym – mainly on Instagram Reels. He also regards himself as more grown up, partly because he does not game anymore. In a change from last year, Oscar doesn't use TikTok much, saying that he no longer likes it, but he regularly uses Instagram and scrolls through Reels, mainly seeing gym-related content. He still plays guitar and posts videos to an Instagram account dedicated to his guitar playing.

⁴⁵ A Story is a feature that allow users to post photos and videos for their followers to see that last for 24 hours on the platform before vanishing.

⁴⁶ At the time of Oscar's interview (November 2023) Andrew Tate and his brother were still awaiting trial on human trafficking charges "after a Romanian judge ruled they could travel around the country" ([Romanian judge loosens restrictions on influencer Andrew Tate, Reuters](#), 23 November 2023). Researchers did not discuss any of these ongoing legal proceedings, or the reasons for them, with the participant.

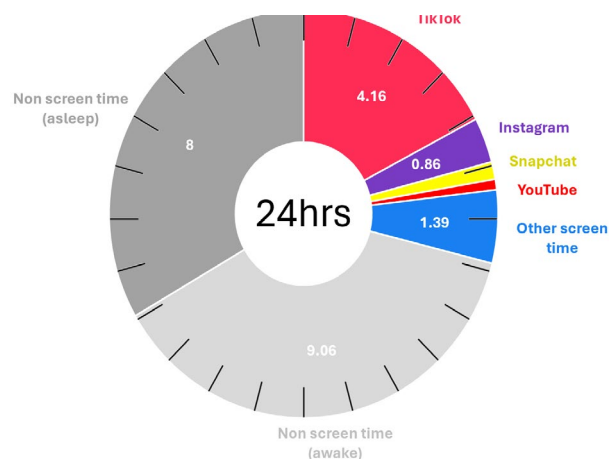


Ben, 16 – London

Number of years taking part in Children's Media Lives: 7

Ben is in the final year of his GCSEs, and lives with his siblings and mum. Like last year, his life revolves heavily around basketball, playing four or five times a week with club and school. This is also true of much of his media. On TikTok he watches people giving basketball tips and as well as longer basketball content on YouTube, such as people reviewing new basketball

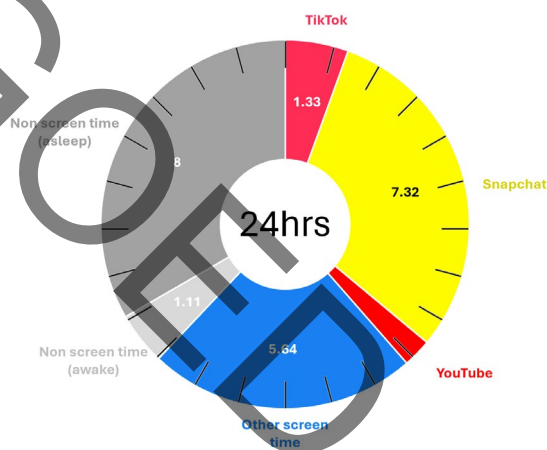
shoes, highlights of recent NBA games, or general commentary on basketball. He also watches gaming content, mainly on YouTube and sometimes on TikTok, as well as motivational videos on TikTok. He games far less than last year, saying that he does not really have the time. Instead, Ben prefers to watch short-form content on TikTok as he says it feels easier to fit this in with the rest of his day. Ben typically spends about seven hours on his phone a day, four of which are usually spent on TikTok. In the rest of his time, he sees friends and is going to open days to decide whether to move to a new college or stay at his current sixth form.



Bobby, 17 – London⁴⁷

Number of years taking part in Children's Media Lives: 3

In the last year, Bobby has moved from his previous care home to semi-independent accommodation elsewhere in London. Bobby is still not in any form of education, and while last year he was picking up some bits of cash-in-hand work, this year he has not done as much. His ambition for the last couple of years has been to qualify as a security guard and be a bouncer outside clubs. In his first interview this year he had the same ambition, but he has since been working with his PA (equivalent of a social worker) to try to get an apprenticeship at a garage. He spends his time buying parts for motorbikes and building them so he can ride them around. Bobby still spends a lot of time on his smartphone. His screen-time this year averaged around 15 hours a day (he was in hospital at the time which may have increased time spent). The platforms he uses most are Snapchat – which he uses to communicate with his friends – and YouTube – on which he watches Shorts. Watching YouTube Shorts has replaced his use of TikTok, which was frequent last year. He also follows a variety of YouTube accounts, often ones that make documentary-style videos of particularly dangerous unexplored urban environments (more on this in chapter 2).



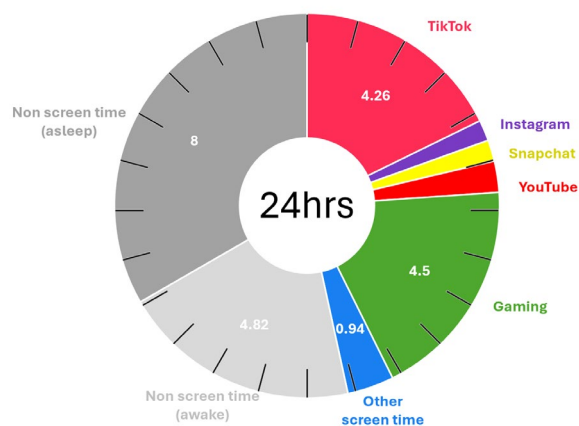
⁴⁷ Bobby was 17 at the time of the first interview this year, but he had turned 18 by the time his follow-up interview took place.



Ishak, 18 – Midlands⁴⁸

Number of years taking part in Children's Media Lives: 4

Ishak lives at home with his mum and siblings. He is still at college, while having a part-time job, but is no longer doing Animal Care. He has switched to doing vehicle maintenance, which he said might lead to a job that offers more money. In terms of his media, Ishak is gaming more regularly than last year. He likes to game whenever he is not at work or college, and his favourite game is Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Siege,⁴⁹ which he plays mainly with his cousins and friends online. He also uses TikTok, Instagram and YouTube regularly. Recently, he has been seeing a lot of content relating to Israel and Palestine. Ishak is always keen to understand what is happening with these big world events and tries his best to verify the information he is presented with, which predominantly comes from TikTok, on which he typically spends about five hours a day. When Ishak joined the study four years ago, he was hanging out with his friends in person and playing cricket less than he had when younger (and this was made worse by the pandemic). This trend has continued, and outside time at college and doing work experience, he spends very little time physically with his friends.



⁴⁸ Ishak was 17 at the time his first interview was scheduled to take place but, due to a delay, he had turned 18 by the time it took place.

⁴⁹ This is an online first-person shooter game with a variety of solo, co-operative, and competitive game modes, where players assume control of an attacking or defending player in different situations such as defusing bombs, rescuing hostages, and completing objectives.

Media the children used

Since the first wave of Children's Media Lives in 2014, the wider media landscape has changed enormously, and the researchers have observed how the children in the study have reacted and adapted to these changes year on year. Some TV shows, devices, and online activities that were popular one year were long forgotten waves later, while others endured, or morphed into the content, tech and trends that the children engage with today. It is often only with the benefit of hindsight that the longer-term significance of early precursors or small changes becomes clear, which is why exploring the detail of children's interaction with media is so important.

This section provides an overview of the devices and platforms the children were using in this wave of the study, and the media they were consuming. The themes introduced here relating to their usage and habits will be discussed further in the rest of the report. For a more granular breakdown of the devices and platforms the children were using, see Annex 2.

The children rarely watched live TV, instead preferring to stream shows online, usually alone

- Most of the children reported spending around one hour a day streaming TV content, such as shows and films, on demand.
- They mostly watched this streamed content by themselves on their personal devices. App-based streaming enabled the children to choose which device to watch content on.
- All the children lived in households with a TV, and some children had personal TV sets in their bedrooms. However, as in previous years, the children rarely watched live broadcast television.
- The minority of the children who said they sometimes watched live broadcast TV, often did so with family members.
- Some of the children described family 'film nights', when they streamed movies from services such as Netflix to a family TV.

Most of the children had their own phone and all had access to a device for media or games

- Of the 21 participants, 16 children owned their own smartphone. All the children in secondary school and college had their own smartphone. They used these mainly for social media, to speak to their friends, or in a few cases, to play games.
- 10 of the children owned a personal laptop, mostly used for streaming films or TV shows and doing homework.
- The younger children who did not have their own phones sometimes used their siblings' or parents' devices to play games or use social media. Some of these younger children also had their own tablets.
- Most of the children used their personal devices to consume media by themselves, both short-form content and longer form content such as TV shows and films. They were often unsupervised when using their devices.

Most of the time the children spent online they were using social media

- Most children spent between 3 and 6 hours a day on devices, and most of this was on social media apps.
- Among the children who had their own devices and used social media, TikTok and Snapchat were the most popular platforms.
- On TikTok, the children mostly scrolled through their For You Page⁵⁰ and watched short-form content that typically lasted under one minute. Few children created or posted their own content.
- The children also consumed short-form content on YouTube Shorts, but they more often tended to use YouTube to watch longer form content ranging from 5 minutes to 30 minutes.

⁵⁰ The 'For You' page is the main landing page or 'feed' on TikTok. It shows the user videos from creators they follow, and videos TikTok recommends for them.

- A few of the children had accounts on other platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, but said they used them less than TikTok, Snapchat and YouTube.

Some social platforms were predominantly used for chatting

- Many children said they spent multiple hours a day on Snapchat and predominantly used the platform for chatting and interacting with friends and peers in group chats, using 'snaps' (image-based texting), and texting.
- Most children also used WhatsApp, though this was mainly to interact with family members.
- A couple of the younger children used child-specific platforms aimed at children under 13, such as JusTalk Kids, as substitutes for platforms such as WhatsApp and Snapchat.

Few children listened to content online

- Most of the children said they only listened to the radio with their parents, though they rarely paid attention to the content.
- A small number of the children listened to audio content such as audiobooks and podcasts via Audible or Spotify.

Chapter 1: Interaction and play

While the children are spending a lot of time consuming content on social media, they're using it less to post their own content. When they do, they tend to re-post other people's content to signal their support or alignment or try to emulate some of the themes and techniques they've seen professional content-creators using. Using social media to chat with or message their friends is largely confined to Snapchat or other chat platforms.

Social media appears to be drawing more of the children's attention than gaming, although several of the children, mostly boys, say they enjoy the social aspect of gaming and feel it offers a wider range of activities than are available to them offline.

Public vs private: How children communicate with others

This year the retreat from posting in more open or public online spaces, such as on social media profiles, has continued. The children are concerned about how they are perceived by others online and over the years have grown more cautious about how they portray themselves. Communication is instead confined mostly to 'chats' on platforms such as Snapchat, which feel more private.

Most of the children used Snapchat to communicate with their friends

Sixteen children in the sample had their own phones. Billy, 8, was the only child under 11 who had his own phone, but he did not have any social media accounts, and used it mainly to contact his dad when necessary. The fifteen other children who had their own phones were all aged 11 and above. Those who also had their own social media accounts (the majority) rarely used platforms such as TikTok or Instagram to interact directly with their friends, beyond liking content that other people had posted, and occasionally sending them videos on TikTok or Instagram. These videos were usually posted by other content creators or were sometimes posts made by their friends. Instead, TikTok and Instagram were predominantly used to consume content posted by people they did not know, rather than their friends.

Most of the children favoured the chat functions on Snapchat as their primary way to message and communicate with friends. In addition to using it for one-to-one messaging, several of the children were in group chats, for example with friends from school, people from their area, or friends from their extracurricular interests.⁵¹



"I don't think I could live without Snapchat anymore. I used not be too bothered about it, but I absolutely love it now. I've got all my friends on Snapchat, and we have, like, group chats where we all call, like, all the time, and we text each other and Snap each other." – **Suzy, 12**

Snapchat was especially popular among the older girls in the sample, and several said it was essential to their social lives. Other communication platforms were rarely used except when communicating with family members.



"Instead of using WhatsApp or text message, a lot of people my age use Snapchat to text friends, so I am on that a lot – texting friends or face-timing on it." – **Niamh, 14**

⁵¹ The groups the children are in are sometimes small groups of close friends, but Snapchat groups can include up to 200 members. Depending on the settings assigned by the person who set it up, a Snapchat group can include people added by other members, including those who are not a direct contact on the app and messages posted in these groups can be seen by all members.

Willow (10) and Frankie (9) mentioned using JusTalk Kids, a platform which had not been mentioned by any participants before this year.



“This [JusTalk Kids] is one my biggest apps I use. It’s like WhatsApp but for children. It’s very helpful. I can talk to all my friends, and we have group chats for different things.” – Willow, 10

This app has functionality similar to WhatsApp, enabling children to communicate with friends through video chat or messaging. However, unlike WhatsApp, a phone number is not needed to access or use it. The app is described on the Google Play Store as a “safe messenger” app for children with both chat and video call functionality, and some parental controls.⁵² Safety features include a parental approval system using a four-digit passcode for any new contacts added, and allowing parents to set a passcode to prevent children from changing pre-set safety settings.

The children were cautious about what they shared more publicly on social media

Continuing last year’s trend, children in the study were posting very little original content on social media. Several girls were conscious of how they might feel in the future about what they shared now.



“I regret posting that stuff [from 2020], it’s cringey... just weird dances and all that. Just talking to the camera in gibberish. Even things I posted from last year, I think a lot that is cringey, all those lip-syncing videos. I saw some of the videos that I’ve saved on my phone and I’m like, ‘Why did I post that?’” –

Suzy, 12



“I’m a more private person with my TikTok. I don’t post anything because I feel like I’ll look back in a month or two and I’ll regret posting it.” – Taylor, 15

Suzy had a public TikTok account she shared with her best friend that they used to try to advertise and sell bracelets they’d made, however she kept her personal account private and only occasionally posted. When she did post, it was often as part of trends her friends took part in. For example, Suzy made a video that included a list of things she enjoyed, such as ‘shopping’, to the backdrop music of James Arthur and Chasing Grace singing “[There are certain things I adore](#)”. Suzy chose to make this video as her friends had posted similar videos.

Taylor still created photos and videos on TikTok, but now preferred to keep her content in ‘drafts’, instead of posting it on her account. Niamh, in line with last year’s behaviour, created content but chose not to share it with her broader social circle on her main social media profile:



“I don’t post videos that much, but if I’m going to a party with friends and I want to create videos with my friends, I can then post them [on my private account] without everyone being able to see them.” –

Niamh, 14

This mirrors findings from previous waves, with children becoming more conscious of how they appear online as they get older and seeking strategies to control more carefully which of their friends (if any) see their posts.

⁵² [Parents’ Guide to JustTalk Kids – Safe Video Chat](#), Common Sense Media Reviewer. The description of the app is “Slimmed-down version of adult chat app: use with caution”.

Some who avoided posting original content were 'reposting' other people's content as a way of interacting with and signalling to their peers

When using platforms such as TikTok or Instagram, some of the children were reposting content as a way of interacting with their friends, such as sharing posts on Instagram Stories or sending them through private messages. Sharing posts that were of interest to themselves or others sometimes appeared to be an alternative to messaging their friends directly or creating original content.



"One of my friends at my old school, she likes Taylor Swift a lot as well... I repost a lot and she reposts them as well, and she sees them and I see them, and then we repost each other's ones and stuff."
– Zak, 13

Some children talked about using reposting as a strategy to send more coded or subtle messages to their peers or to specific people. Taylor said:



"Sometimes I purposely repost things, and I know a lot of girls do that... they purposely repost stuff so then certain people will see them... I posted a screenshot [of someone else's post] on my TikTok about having 'standards' because the boy that I'm talking to right now and going on like dates and stuff [with], I mean, he's very sort of shy, not got a lot of confidence. I asked him out on the first date, so I've made it my mission that I'm not going to be the one to ask him out officially. I want him to do that. So, I'm trying to make it as obvious as possible that I do like him. I don't even know if he looks at them [Taylor's reposts], if he knows how to look at them, but it's there in case he does." – Taylor, 15

Sometimes reposting was described by the children in the study as a way of signalling that they either liked or approved of someone else's post. This was seen as similar to but more significant than a simple 'like' or comment on a specific post.



"If you like the video then you repost it. I 'like' and repost, but sometimes I just 'like' it if I don't like it that much." – Amber, 11

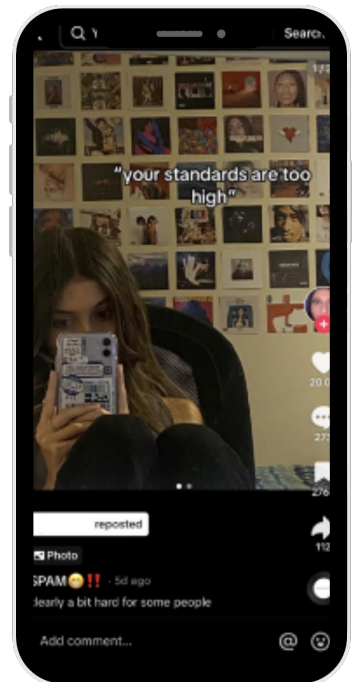


Figure 1: Content Taylor reposted on TikTok about relationship standards.

Reposting content on social media was also used by some of the older children as a way of signalling certain views and beliefs about topics and events happening in the world. Sometimes, it was used to show solidarity with a particular group or raise awareness about issues occurring in the world.

The intention to spread awareness by reposting content was something that Ishak spoke about in relation to a video he reposted on TikTok about how to 'boycott' Israeli products. He said:



"If I am reposting things then other people are able to understand what's going on. It's important for people to see the message being sent to us and encourage people not to use the products." – Ishak, 18

Among children who were sharing content they had created themselves, most preferred the temporary nature of posting stories on TikTok, Instagram, or Snapchat

A couple of the children mentioned they enjoyed feeling they were keeping their friends updated on interesting events in their lives on social media but were hesitant to post anything permanent on their profiles. They more commonly posted on their 'Stories', which by default were viewable by their friends for 24 hours only.



"It [Instagram Stories] disappears after 24 hours, so that's why I prefer it to posting stuff. I don't have to worry making mistakes or anything. It's not there forever, only for a couple of hours." – Terri, 14

Terri preferred using Instagram Stories to share dance content with her followers because it felt like a smaller commitment and lower risk and Ben held a similar view about sharing his basketball content.



“A post is more serious than a Story... maybe winning a real trophy or having a real achievement or something to be proud of I guess.” – Ben, 16

Ben posted some videos of himself playing basketball on his Instagram Stories, which he then saved to his profile so that it appeared whenever someone visited his profile:

“It’s just called ‘highlights’, having a photo like that to show people who I am because that’s something I enjoy doing.” – Ben, 16

A small minority of the girls were posting to actively build a following, and were often emulating the behaviours and techniques of others to increase engagement

Some of the children were emulating the style of content their peers were posting, for example, using the same template or songs.

Like Suzy, Amber had seen her friends and other young people on her TikTok For You page sharing videos listing things they liked to the song ‘Certain things’ by James Arthur featuring Chasing Grace in the background.



“My friends did it, I also wanted to do it... they give me, like, ideas so I kind of like do it. Sometimes I do have my own ideas but mostly I just do the same as them. I do kind of like it [having similar videos as friends] because we can both see what stuff we like.” – Amber, 11

After seeing her friend post a video as part of this wider trend, Amber used the template and posted her own version.

Bryony and Terri both had aims to build a social media following around their hobbies – which they hoped would be the basis of their future careers – and copied trends they saw succeeding for other social media users. Bryony was trying to build a following on social media relating to her horse-riding and hoped to make money by getting sponsored by equestrian brands. Terri was hoping to pursue dance as a career and was using social media to build a following to increase the likelihood of being talent-spotted.



“A lot of my dance friends make loads of videos and put different montages together. I see what they are doing, and then I make my own. I will normally show them and get their advice.” – Terri, 14

To create these videos, Terri used the app CapCut, a video editing tool with templates and automated editing features and would copy the formats and styles used by her friends.

These children also monitored which of their own posts seemed to gain the most attention and largest viewership, and then created and posted more of what seemed to work well.



“If you look at my posts, you’ll see I’ve got more likes on those ones [the negative posts]. I may not get as many on the other ones but at least I know people are seeing my posts.” – Bryony, 15

Bryony had noticed that her posts about more negative events or setbacks gained more attention in the form of likes and comments than those that were about positive achievements. As a result, she had decided to post a greater proportion of negative posts to try to capitalise on this.

Researcher reflections

Over the years, the children in this study have become increasingly self-conscious about what they share in more public spaces on social media – rarely posting their own content on feeds and increasingly confining interaction with their peers to private or semi-private chat platforms or groups.

But the desire to signal to their peers and get attention from a wider circle hasn't disappeared. Now, rather than creating and sharing their own original content and taking the risk of being exposed to the judgement of others, the children are putting out more subtle messages – which they hope others will pick up upon – by reposting specific content made by other people or posting only to temporarily viewable Stories.

Social gaming: How the children are playing on and offline

Over the years there have always been some children in the sample who spent a relatively high proportion of their time gaming, and this is still the case this year. The social role of gaming has grown over the last 10 years, especially during the period of the Covid-19-related restrictions and gaming is now relied upon as a means of feeling connected with friends by several participants, especially some of the boys, to the extent that for some it is a greater motivation for gaming than the enjoyment of the game itself.

Some of the children were gaming less than previous years, preferring to spend time watching content on social media.

Many of the younger children were playing free-to-play, offline games on their phones or tablets. Billy, who is eight and new to the project this year, had dozens of offline games downloaded on his Amazon tablet, for example, *Bendy and the Ink Machine*⁵³, which he plays after school and on weekends. *Bendy and the Ink Machine* is described as a first-person survival puzzle-action-horror game set in a fictional cartoon world in the mid to late 20th century. The main player aims to complete tasks involving combat, collecting objects, or solving puzzles to proceed to the next level.

Some of the older children who had previously been big gamers were spending less of their time playing games this year.



"It's kind of died. No one really plays it [Fortnite] anymore. I play less games now because I am getting older, I don't really play anymore." – **Terri, 14**



"I don't really game as much anymore because I just feel like I have less time... it's easier to just sit down for a bit and go on my phone rather than my Xbox, because I'd rather play on my Xbox for a longer period of time at once." – **Ben, 16**

Ben said he would rather fit shorter snippets of time watching TikTok in between his other activities than commit to longer periods of gaming.

However, some children in the study were still spending a lot of time gaming. Ishak, for example, spends "most of the time gaming when I'm not at college or watching YouTube". Ishak's screen-time (how long he is spending on apps on his phone) showed that he also spent a lot of time on TikTok, sometimes up to eight hours a day. Ishak often watched videos on YouTube or TikTok simultaneously while he was gaming, meaning that his high screen-time for both was often occurring at the same time.

⁵³ [Parents' Guide to Bendy and the Ink Machine](#), Common Sense Media Reviewer, 2018. This review suggests it is a 12+ game.

Several boys were also playing FIFA 23 or EA Sports FC24 (the latest, rebranded version of FIFA 23). Freddie, 13, for instance, regularly plays online with his friends.



“I’ve got the new one [FC24] and the old one [FIFA 23]. A couple of my mates don’t have the new one, so I go on the old one, but a couple have the new one, so we go on that.” – Freddie, 13

Those children who were gaming were often doing so as a way of interacting with their friends.

While some children were gaming a little bit less than in previous years, those who were still gaming mostly said they were doing so to spend time with their friends.

The social aspect of gaming has been present since wave 1 of Children’s Media Lives. However, in previous waves, most children who gamed also cited the fun of the game itself or the appeal of developing their skills as big motivators. This year, the role of gaming in maintaining contact with friends was mentioned more, and the other motives less.



“I’ve never really played it much before, but I’ve been pretty much playing it once or twice a day with my friends. Sometimes I’ll play for like 15 minutes... to practise. When I’m playing with them [her friends] I’m on call with them for like an hour or two. ... I’m not attached to the game. When everyone else stops playing I’ll stop playing.” – Taylor, 15

Taylor has had Fortnite for several years and played it a little bit in previous waves, but this year she started playing much more, mainly because her friends were doing so. Fortnite is an online combat video game, with several different game modes. The mode that Taylor and most other children in this project play most is called Battle Royale, in which the game begins with 100 players and finishes when only one remains, the rest having been killed. Children often form alliances, either with people they know or with strangers, to survive further towards the end of the game.

As part of gaming with their friends, some children enjoyed the ability to strategize and compete with their friends online, often communicating via audio headset.

Angus, 11, enjoyed playing Fortnite and Rocket League with his friends because he liked teaming up with them and being competitive online. Rocket League is a video game combining football and cars, in which players use rocket-powered vehicles to score goals against their opponents. This can be played both online with other people, and offline in a solo play mode.

Suzy, 12, played a mobile game for similar social motives:



“It’s a game called Coin Master and we all have it and have each other on it. You can like raid them for their money and attack their villages and all that. So, we all do that because it’s just funny. My friend started it.” – Suzy, 12

Coin Master is a free-to-play mobile game, and the aim is to win coins and upgrade items to be able to develop the player’s own villages.

A few boys reported that games offered a wider variety of activities than were otherwise available in real life, and they preferred this to spending time with friends face-to-face

Some boys who were gaming enjoyed it not just because it was a fun way to socialise with their friends, but also because it offered a greater variety of activities to do than in real life.

Angus, 11, had bought a PS5 since last year’s research using birthday money he had saved up and he had spent far more time gaming on it this year than he had previously on his Nintendo Switch.



“If he had any option, he would play 24 hours a day... He does quite a lot of activities, begrudgingly, and he likes them once he goes.” – Angus’s mum

"I like talking with my friends to team up to play against other people... Some games also have storylines, and it's more entertaining because it's more fictional." – **Angus, 11**

Angus said he prefers this to playing with his friends in real life.

Freddie, 13, played a lot of Xbox 360, spending most of his time on FC24, FIFA 23 and Fortnite.



"We'll [Freddie and his friends] all go on our Xboxes and play games and that... we'll go on a video call." – **Freddie, 13**

This is one of the main ways Freddie communicates with his friends. The screenshots of his screen-time that he sent through to researchers revealed he can often spend six or seven hours a day on Snapchat, which is the app through which he video-calls his friends while gaming.

Over several years, Zak, 13, has been a big Fortnite and Minecraft fan, enjoying the social aspects of both. This year he spent more time on Roblox because his friends also played. Roblox is an online gaming platform that allows users to access and play millions of games. Roblox includes a vast array of different games or experiences in their games, and both single and multiplayer games.



"Yesterday we were playing Bloxburg [a game on Roblox], and she's a higher level than me at cooking, and there's Halloween foods that I can't make. So, she came to my house [in the game], and we made them." – **Zak, 13**

Zak also said that he preferred online interactions over real-life play. He described how the online world opened a range of possibilities he felt were not feasible in person. In particular, he used platforms like Roblox where he and his friend visit each other's virtual houses and cook together. He described usually going to her house on Roblox, but he has never been to her house in real life.

Researcher reflections

The social aspect to gaming has been a central part of its appeal from wave 1 onwards. The hours spent gaming for some of the boys in the sample grew significantly over the years, peaking during the Covid-19 related lockdowns, and for some appear to have reduced slightly since then.

However, while some children are gaming less, this does not mean their overall screen-time is coming down, as social media appears to be filling that time.

Some children, boys in particular, continue to rely on gaming as a touchpoint with friends. For some it is starting to represent the preferred way of spending time with friends – with boys reflecting that the opportunities for competition, following a storyline, and doing different kinds of activities with their friends within games is appealing.

Chapter 2: Information, identity and influence

The children's frames of reference – how they think about the world and their place in it – are increasingly influenced by what they see on social media.

Most of the children don't actively seek out news or current affairs – though some of them see snippets of it in passing. When they do come across it, it is rarely from a traditional news source and frequently takes the form of commentary.

When other information reaches them, it is often via influencers, presented as aspirational or offering tips on health and self-improvement.

Like last year, a small number of the children are aware that some of the information they see may be one-sided, but they struggle to work out what is true. Most of them don't consider content creators' motivations, and how those might shape what they post.

Information: How the children are finding out about the world

Over the course of Children's Media Lives, we've reported on children's low level of engagement with the news, and the increasingly influential role that social media plays in what they do hear about. There has been an increased blurring of the lines between factual information, current affairs and other content on social media – for example advertising, opinions and influencers' posts.

Several children were learning about topics of interest from information online, often through social media

Some of the children had hobbies and interests and were reading or watching content online that supported those interests. As reported last year, children were increasingly turning to social media platforms for content relating to hobbies or interests, rather than search engines. This continued this year, with the children both seeking out, or being fed anything from updates about their favourite sports team, to tips to help with schoolwork on social media apps or sites.

Sometimes this came in the form of commentary or punditry videos on YouTube. This content tended to centre around facts and statistics.



“Before each race weekend, on YouTube I catch up on different stuff, like the big headlines that are coming out or stuff to do with my team [...] my team is Mercedes, so I want to get a grip about how my car is going to perform and if there are any upgrades to improve performance.” – Arjun, 12

Most children in the sample liked watching instructional videos, specifically those that taught them something or provided useful information about topics and hobbies they were interested in. Some of the children were particularly drawn to videos that gave tips and advice on how to perform a certain activity better, suggesting that they were not watching just for fun, but also to learn and improve their skills.

Ben was watching videos on TikTok that gave him tips for playing basketball better as well as drills to improve his technique. He said that he followed a lot of people on TikTok who made this type of content, such as [Hans Stone](#) (143.2K followers) and [Coach Ross](#) (485.7K followers).



“They post tips and tricks. They've played at a certain level, so they have more of an understanding and want to help.” – Ben, 16

Some of the girls were also engaging with instructional-style content for specific tasks or activities. Taylor, who is now in year 11 and completing her GCSEs, used YouTube to help her revise for exams, for example watching videos by [The GCSE Maths Tutor](#) (229K subscribers).



"I like him. He explains things really well. Some of his videos are really long but others are, like, half an hour. He just came up on my recommended feed." – **Taylor, 15**

Similarly, Lily, 10, used YouTube to learn how to solve a Rubik's Cube after seeing other children playing with them at school. She found a beginner's guide video on YouTube and followed it step by step, pausing the video while attempting to solve her Rubik's Cube in real time.

Some of the children also engaged with commentary and instructional-style content on gaming. Some watched gaming YouTubers who filmed themselves playing while giving accompanying commentary, others turned to videos that offered tips and hacks for improving their gaming skills.



"I use Scratch in my free time to create my own games. One time, I watched a YouTube video on how to make a tower defence game in it." – **Angus, 11**

Most of the children rarely engaged proactively with content relating to news or current affairs

In general, the children's engagement with news was limited. When they did encounter it, it was usually via social media, where they would see occasional snippets of news stories on TikTok or Instagram, usually on their recommended feeds, such as the For You Page on TikTok. They were very rarely motivated to explore these topics further.

Taylor followed [Dylan Page](#) (10.6M followers), an influencer on TikTok who summarised news stories, and preferred engaging with news in short snippets.



"It's just more engaging. It's quick and you get to the point [...] and I don't have to wait half an hour to actually hear the story that I want to hear like you would on the news [...] It comes up on my For You Page" – **Taylor, 15**

Most of the children showed little interest in keeping up with the news or current affairs at all, whether on social media or elsewhere.



"Honestly, I don't really care. I might sometimes look at the comments under posts but because I don't really care about it, I just scroll on." – **Niamh, 14**



"It would be nice to know what is happening in the world, but I mean, it's not like it's a big deal or whatever. As long as it doesn't affect me then whatever." – **Bryony, 15**



"I haven't done research myself. In history in year 9, we learned a bit about the conflict [in Palestine] and how it started, but I haven't really done any myself." – **Ben, 16**

Several of the children had seen content about the conflict in Gaza on social media, but not all in the form of traditional news

Given the timing of the fieldwork (September to December 2023), a lot of the news content that came up on the children's feeds was about the conflict in Gaza which at the time of interviews, was the dominant topic in the mainstream news. This pattern is consistent with last year, when a lot of the content coming up on the children's feeds was about the conflict in Ukraine – also very topical and dominating mainstream news at that time.

Amira had seen content on TikTok relating to the conflict in Gaza, and she was concerned by what she had seen. She found many of the videos she had seen upsetting, particularly those depicting more graphic scenes or sad events.



“I’ve seen clips of the bombings happening and stuff. It was kind of sad, because it could happen to anyone.” – Amber, 11

Taylor had seen reposted content about the conflict in Gaza on some of her friends’ Instagram Stories. One of their Stories included a link to a donation page.



“There was one going around on Instagram, I saw a link to help out the Palestine people [...] for the children, the children’s hospitals. A friend had a link in the story. [...] I just thought if I was the kid in hospital trying to get treated for something and I’d been bombed and died [...] I’d want everyone doing as much as they could to stop that from happening again.” – Taylor, 15

She made an anonymous donation, but unlike her friends, did not want to post anything about the conflict on her story.

“I haven’t really looked at the politics of it all. I don’t know the ins and outs so I wouldn’t [post] until I know every last detail of it. I’m not going to speak about it because you’ll just get shown up by other people. [...] I don’t really have a long enough memory to [pay attention]. I read it but it doesn’t stick. I don’t really know what’s happening with the whole thing and I don’t really watch the news.” – Taylor, 15

Taylor acknowledged that she was not always paying attention to content about Gaza and could not recall details about what she had seen. She was therefore hesitant to make her donation public or repost the content her friends were re-sharing because she felt she did not know enough about what was happening. She also hinted at the possibility of getting a backlash from other people online for expressing a particular view.

Amber and Niamh had both seen TikTok videos of a game-like filter⁵⁴ in support of the Palestinian cause:



“Someone made a filter and if you use it, some money goes to Palestine, but I don’t think it’s your money, but like people, like, donating. [...] People would go ‘Oh my god, it’s hard’ and some people try if it’s hard or not and then that’s how they donate the money.” – Amber, 11

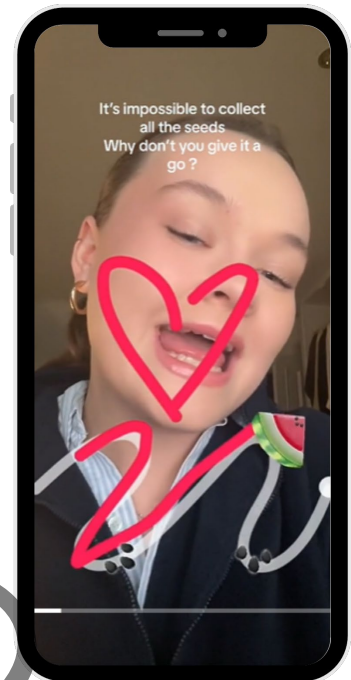


Figure 2: A game-like filter in support of the Palestinian cause.

The filter was a game that allowed the user to drag a watermelon emoji across the screen, and trace it on a squiggly line. Amber was not sure how money was raised or where it was sent, but wanted to use the filter and play the game to see what it was like.

“Everyone I know was playing it, so I just wanted to, like, obviously play it as well.” – Amber, 11

⁵⁴ TikTok filters are effects that can be applied to a TikTok video to enhance or augment certain features of the video, such as colour, appearance, or voice changing.

Further research: The watermelon filter

The watermelon filter was created by TikTok influencer [Jourdan Johnson](#) (219.4K followers) who is known for creating filters and effects on TikTok such as the 'beauty makeover effect' filter. In November 2023, Jourdan posted a video asking her followers to use a [new watermelon filter](#) she had created to "help the people of Gaza".

Jourdan created a gamified filter where the user had to drag a watermelon emoji across a squiggly line and aim to stay within the line.

In the caption of the original post, Jourdan said she was part of the Effect Creator Rewards program, which allowed selected influencers to earn money from creating effects and filters on TikTok, and "created this filter for good". She also said that filters and effects on TikTok can only start earning revenue if used by over 200,000 people and encouraged her followers to comment, share and save the filter to boost its engagement. She intended to donate the rewards from this filter "to charities providing aid in Gaza".

Jourdan has since made multiple posts using this filter.

In January, Jourdan made a [LinkedIn post](#) stating that the filter had over 3 billion views and had been used over 9 million times. She pledged "that every dollar earned from this filter will be donated to humanitarian aid".

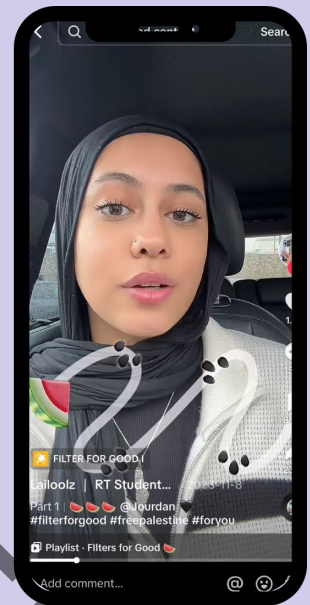
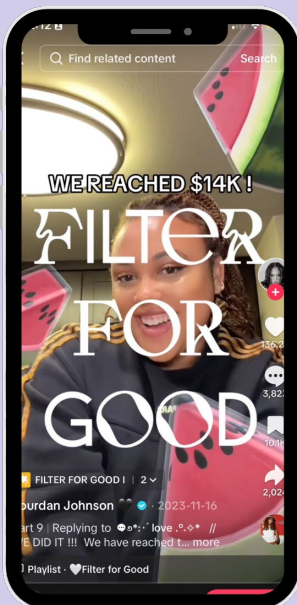


Figure 3a, 3b: Content creator, Jourdan, using and promoting the game-like watermelon filter she created on TikTok.

Figure 3c, 3d: Popular and widely followed TikTok accounts posting content using the watermelon filter.

The children recalled few examples of content relating to other news or current affairs stories

It was less common for children in the study to have recalled seeing content about other news stories. Terri, 13, had seen some stories about the lost Titan submarine from summer 2023 and could also recall a post about rising sea levels:



"I saw on TikTok that in the next 50 years – I don't know if it's Rome or something else – that a city might go underwater, but I'm not really sure... I wonder if it will actually happen." – **Terri, 13**

Terri acknowledged that news headlines like that did seem scary and made her think about the future of the world, but she had not done any follow-up research on this topic herself. She did not remember seeing any other headlines.

Some of the younger children were consuming the news in more traditional formats – on TV or in print – often with or when prompted by a member of their family or by a teacher. For example, Frankie, 9, had recently been given a subscription to *The Week Junior*, from which she said she could learn about a variety of news stories and about different places in the world. She also enjoyed watching *Newsround* each morning.



"I like watching Newsround because it inspires me to do new things. That's what got me into computing... they do a different thing every day – funny news, or stuff about the planet." – **Frankie, 9**

Similarly, Zak had recently seen coverage of the conflict in Gaza while watching *Newsround* during form registration at school. Angus did not generally engage with any news but did occasionally see it on TV when other members of his family were watching it at home.



"I recently saw something to do with the SNP and nurses and hospitals – my granddad was watching the news when he was here." – **Angus, 11**

While engagement with news was generally low, there were some topical issues that worried some of the children. These tended to be more serious global events or topics that felt more relevant to them and their lives, such as news about their education. For example, Bryony, 15, did not think most news was that relevant to her, but did pick out one issue of particular concern to her current education:



"I've seen on the news [on TikTok] that Rishi Sunak has made A-level maths compulsory. He's like, controlling our lives and what we can and can't do for the rest of our lives now." – **Bryony, 15**

This was particularly worrying for Bryony as she does not enjoy maths and does not think it is necessary for her future. However, she had not seen the original news clip detailing these events, only a content creator's commentary on Rishi Sunak's speech, which included only snippets from the speech itself.



Figure 4: Video from content creator Adrian Markovac providing commentary on a speech by Rishi Sunak.

Suzy also spoke about a piece of news from the US she had seen on her TikTok feed.



"I've seen the girl, like, Gypsy Rose Blanchard. She's getting released from prison, so people are saying things about that. Like 10 years ago, this girl's mum forced her to be in, like, a wheelchair and basically pretend to be sick. And then she [Gypsy] got her boyfriend online to come and kill her mum."

– **Suzy, 12**

Suzy had seen some videos appear on her For You Page which included clips from a news channel and people speaking about the topic.

Some of the older children in the sample, most of whom were boys, were seeing a higher volume of news-related content, particularly in relation to the conflict in Gaza

Some of the older boys were more aware of news stories than the rest of the children in the sample. Ishak, for example, was proactively searching for and following content creators who provided commentary on current affairs, such as information about the conflict in Gaza.

Several other older boys were also seeing news stories or commentary on certain news stories suggested to them in their social media feeds. Ben, 16, had noticed several posts about the conflict in Gaza appear on his TikTok feed. Some of this he saw through his friends' sharing of posts, and also through other accounts sharing their opinions about the conflict.



"I have some from friends from Palestine who are trying to raise awareness and also people just talking about the conflict that is going on there... they're saying that this is not acceptable, that innocent people are dying, and calling on people in power to do something."

– **Ben, 16**

Similarly, Oscar, 16, was seeing a lot of content about the conflict in Gaza on Instagram Reels. Being from Northern Ireland, Oscar reflected on comparisons with the history of conflict he was more familiar with: *"It's similar to when the Troubles happened in Northern Ireland."*

Due to some children turning 18 since wave 9 and leaving the project, the oldest children in the sample this year were mostly boys, so while this trend is fairly consistent across the sample, we're unable to suggest whether it's driven more by age or gender.

A few of the children proactively followed non-mainstream sources of news on social media

A small number of children, again mostly the older boys in the sample, were proactively engaged with specific sources on social media who discussed news-related topics. These sources were often either individual influencers on platforms such as TikTok or YouTube who were giving their own take on current affairs, or more niche news channels on social media that were not affiliated with traditional news broadcasting.

Ishak has, for several years, been interested in keeping up with topical and sometimes contentious issues. Last year he talked about joining rooms set up within Rec Room (a virtual reality game) on his Oculus headset to listen to debates. This year, he has closely followed two YouTube commentators, [Mohammed Hijab](#) (1.7M subscribers) and [Ali Dawah](#) (1.18M subscribers). Ishak said that he liked that these two men seemed very informed and spoke with authority about the topics they covered on their shows. As was the case last year, Ishak chose to not contribute to these debates, for example not adding comments on the videos, opting instead to just view the videos.



"It's important to be able to communicate passionately, but not like in a bad way. It's easier for them [the YouTubers] to do it though because usually they're on their own so it's not really a debate. They're more free [than me] with how they want to say it."

– **Ishak, 18**

"Ali Dawah does loads of things about what goes on in the world. He gives detailed reasons for why this stuff is happening...it's like the news as well for me."

– **Ishak, 18**

Ishak said that he liked the debate-style format of commentary content he viewed, which often involved tense debates about politically contentious topics.

"I remember seeing loads of clips of him [Mohammed Hijab] debating [things] Piers Morgan [had said], so that's how I came across him. He is very funny as well." – **Ishak, 18**

Reflecting on this area of interest, Ishak said he cared about finding out the truth and would sometimes search on his browser for more information about particular issues that were raised on these channels.

Further research: Mohammed Hijab and Ali Dawah

Mohammed Hijab (1.7M subscribers) and Ali Dawah (1.18M subscribers) are both Muslim commentators on YouTube. They typically commentate on topical issues, predominantly those that are religious or political in nature. A lot of their content consists of reaction videos – in which they show clips of other people talking, often on TV or other YouTube channels, and then react to those clips.

Mohammed Hijab and Ali Dawah often use provocative language. For example, near the start of one of Mohammed Hijab's reaction videos titled '[Ben Shapiro Refuted by Ben Shapiro](#)', he says "Welcome back... to the place where we humiliate, where we expose, where we roast, where we explicate, where we intellectually decapitate, intellectually discombobulate and dishevel our opponents".

This example is illustrative of the tone and style of some of both Mohammed Hijab and Ali Dawah's content, which is presented with an authoritative voice that seems to indicate the presenters' confidence in their own views, and usually claims to be correcting what the presenters regard as the false and/or sometimes prejudiced views of others.



Figure 5: Thumbnail from Mohammed Hijab's video titled 'Responding To Ben Shapiro on Israel'



Figure 6: Thumbnail from Ali Dawah's video titled 'STARBUCKS HUNTING FOR MUSLIMS'

As in the previous wave of this study, Bobby, 17, had been very engaged with much more localised news pages on social media – informal accounts that collated and posted about events and gossip from his local area.

This year, Bobby showed researchers a post shared via one of those accounts that depicted him in a motorbike accident, with video filmed from the top deck of a bus. The video showed him lying on the ground waiting for an ambulance, after injuring his leg. Bobby said that the video must have been filmed by someone who was there at the time, sent to the news page, and reshared to a local network. Bobby was evidently quite proud of the post, finding it funny that he'd featured on the page.

The page Bobby featured on had over 80,000 followers, and other recent posts included fights, traffic accidents, and comical videos, such as memes and videos submitted from people in the area. It also covered a variety of news, ranging recently from a small-time TikTok influencer justifying paying £120 for a haircut, to a news headline about King Charles being diagnosed with cancer.

All the children found it difficult to work out what was true on social media or online generally, and few were motivated to validate the information they were seeing

Most children were not motivated to verify the information they were being presented with on social media. Some, like Bobby, would only actively try to find out what was true if it would directly affect him, or “if I was bored and had time”. For instance, at the time of his first interview, he was very concerned about there being bed bugs on the London Underground. He was less interested in issues that felt more distant or global. In his follow up interview, Bobby cited a news story he had originally seen on Instagram (he didn’t know the source).



“The London Eye...It’s getting dismantled and moved to Scotland...have you not seen that, for real?”⁵⁵
– Bobby, 17

Bobby said he had Googled this afterwards but couldn’t recall the sources he’d used. He also looked it up during the interview using Google search and confirmed that it was a story and one that he believed. It wasn’t clear which sources he was looking at. He was scrolling through the Google search page.

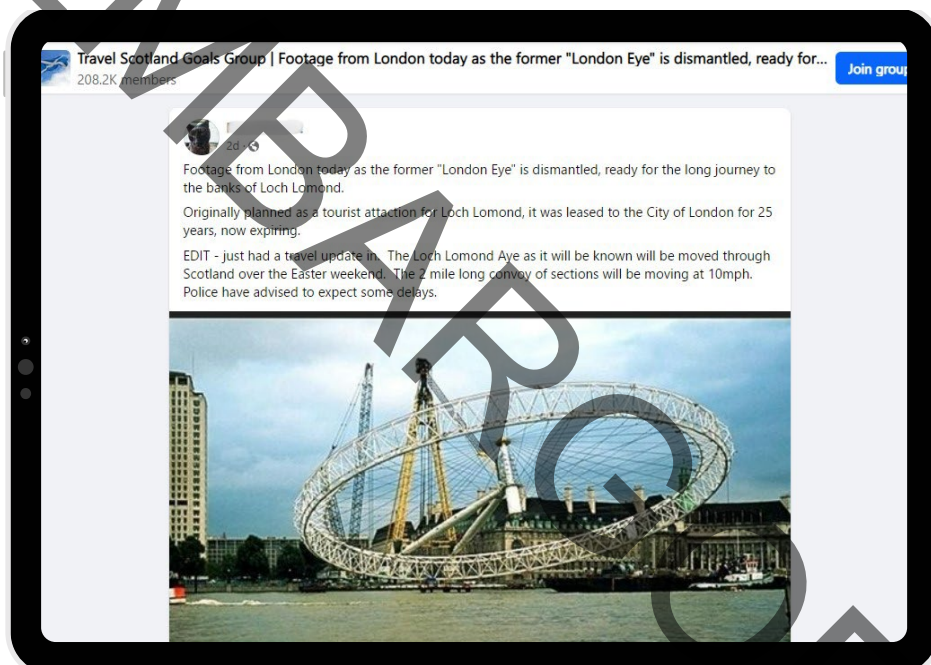


Figure 7: A piece of content Bobby saw on the London Eye being moved to Scotland.

“Obviously Google ain’t the most reliable source of information but it’s probably better than social media.” – Bobby, 17

Bobby sometimes tried to verify things, though according to him this was more from boredom than anything else. But he still found it hard to decide what was true.

“I’m not sure to be honest [how he would decide what was true using Google]. It depends where the news could be from. Like maybe the source could be, like, on the BBC or something, then it could potentially be true, but then some other websites don’t necessarily have to tell the truth all the time.” – Bobby, 17

⁵⁵ This was a faked story and images that circulated after a Facebook group posted a claim that the London Eye was getting dismantled and moved to Loch Lomond in Scotland. The post is archived here: <https://archive.ph/WqVsa> - several articles followed questioning whether this was true.

Similarly, while Ishak saw the value of finding out the truth for its own sake, he found it difficult to recall the provenance of any of the sources he was using, or to point to what he would consider a trustworthy or robust source.

Oscar was also sceptical about some news sources: *“I believe the BBC do tell us some right information but sometimes mislead or don’t tell us enough”*. But when probed, he couldn’t pinpoint any specific instance of this. He went on to say, *“I don’t have many strong beliefs,”* and found it difficult to articulate where he would look or what sources he would use, to try to find reliable and true information.

Reflecting on some of the videos she was seeing on her TikTok feed about Gaza, Amber also felt some of the content was not entirely true.



“Some people, like, lie about all different stuff. Like saying, like, ‘Palestine won’ or that it’s finished but it hasn’t yet... they can trick people into it I guess.” – **Amber, 11**

If Amber saw a video she thought was not genuine, she looked at the number of followers the content creator had.

“If they only had, like, two followers and three likes on the video, I feel like [videos made by] more famous people who actually go there and it will be more true because they go to Israel and stuff. [...] They might have more money because all the followers and likes and they could actually go there and see what it’s like and they actually know what’s happening.” – **Amber, 11**

Amber occasionally tried to verify content she saw using TikTok’s search bar function. For example, she searched *“What is happening in Israel”* but was not satisfied with the results as *“nothing really came up”*.

Some of the children, usually the older ones, occasionally reflected more critically on news-related information they were presented with on social media

While most children did not reflect much on the nature of the news they saw on social media, some of the boys who were noticing more news appear on their feeds thought that these stories often only showed one side to the story or favoured a particular slant.

Zak, 13, a big fan of Taylor Swift, watched a lot of content relating to her on social media, particularly on TikTok. When the researchers reviewed his screen record footage, almost all his reposts on TikTok were Taylor Swift-related content. He had recently watched a video documenting the drama between her and Kanye West at the VMAs in 2009.⁵⁶



“You have to know the different points of view about what happened... I don’t really like Kanye West from that... but it’s important to see his angle so you know why he did it. I still don’t think it was right for him to do that.” – **Zak, 13**

While Zak didn’t approve of Kanye West’s behaviour, he acknowledged that it was important to see more context about the event than is often shown on social media.

A couple of the older boys reported that they might only have been presented with one side of the story when it came to the news content they saw about the conflict in Gaza.



“Most of the stuff I’m seeing is saying Israel is doing this horrible stuff, and people need to raise awareness, and stop them from doing this, and raise awareness in any way they can.” – **Ben, 16**

⁵⁶ [How the Taylor Swift-Kanye West VMAs scandal became a perfect American morality tale](#), Vox, August 26 2019

Ben, 16, had seen lots of content on his TikTok feed about the conflict, either shared by friends or recommended for him. Most of this content was pro-Palestinian. Lots of his friends agreed with this stance, and Ben mentioned moments when the videos they had watched directly affected their behaviour.

"I don't really know the context behind it, but there's brands like McDonald's and Starbucks that support Israel and stuff... I was going to McDonald's the other day and my friends, and I were sitting in there and they didn't buy anything because there's stuff saying that they support Israel and stuff and they said they didn't want anything to do with that."

– Ben, 16

Unlike his friends, Ben thought that if he were to truly understand the conflict, he would need a lot more context than he was being provided with on social media to make an accurate assessment. Ben had had a lesson in year 9 about the conflict but said that he has not done his own research on it since.

Other older boys were also seeking alternative perspectives on topics in the news, turning to different sources on social media for additional information.



"I don't understand people who will follow blindly. I want to know what has caused things to happen."

– Ishak, 18

Often, Ishak would search a particular aspect of a topic on his browser to try to find out more about it. He was not able to say what sources he used but said he would typically look at three or four websites before deciding whether he believed what he had originally seen on TikTok.

Identity and influence: How the children are using media to learn about themselves

Over the years of Children's Media Lives, children in the study have engaged with content that has influenced them in various ways. For example, what they've found aspirational, products they've bought, or what they've posted themselves online. Increasingly, the children have turned to online sources for a wider variety of needs, and increasingly see social media as a source of information – in last year's wave we observed that some children were turning to TikTok as if it were a search engine. In turn, the areas of children's lives that are being influenced by the online world, and social media specifically, appear to have grown – and now include things like fitness and body image, personal identity, and medical diagnoses. As in previous waves, the children are rarely critical of the people they're watching on social media and most of them don't consider content creators' motivations or how those might shape what they post.

Most of the girls were watching lifestyle content using 'Day in the life' and 'Get ready with me' formats that they found aspirational

Most of the girls in the study, particularly the older girls, were watching TikTok and YouTube videos about influencers' lifestyles, often in the style of 'Day in the life' and 'Get ready with me' content. Much of the content they were watching showcased the content creators' lavish lifestyles and affluence, which appealed to them. The girls mentioned enjoying how these videos provided a glimpse into the lives of influencers living glamorous lifestyles that were vastly different from their own. In most cases, the girls were seeing this kind of content via their recommended feeds, for example their For You page on TikTok.



"I like watching other people's lives and comparing it to mine. It's so different and you get to see what other people do online. It's more fun to see what they're doing because other people's lives are boring."

– Amira, 13

A few of the girls talked about how their own aspirations were shaped by the lifestyles of influencers they observed.

Taylor followed [Anna Paul](#) (7.2M followers), an Australian influencer, on TikTok and enjoyed watching her 'Day in the life' videos. She reflected on the lifestyle Anna portrayed online:



"Even though I do love her... well, yeah. Watching her with all her money and stuff kind of gives you a bit of hope. Like, yeah, maybe I'll have that much money one day and be that rich." – **Taylor, 15**

Niamh watched a lot of TikTok videos of influencers on holiday and travelling to other countries, which she said motivated her desire to travel and visit places like Dubai and Monaco in the future.



"I've seen TikToks of different jobs that look really fun. There are people who get paid to travel and stay in five-star hotels. I'd really want to do that, but I don't know how realistic that is." – **Niamh, 14**

Other than Niamh, most of the children did not actively reflect on how realistic or attainable the lifestyles portrayed by influencers were in the videos they saw.

"Me and my friends were talking about going to school in America, because high school over there looks so fun. But we don't genuinely think we are going to do that. We aren't being serious [...] I think most people are aware that things like this won't happen. It's the same with buying expensive things." – **Niamh, 14**

Niamh's mum spoke about the impact influencers can have on children, and the role it can play in setting expectations for their future. She said her family often joked about Niamh's "obsession with fancy cars and big houses".

"Kids care more and more about material things because of what they are seeing on social media. Kids expect nice things now, but I try to remind them [her kids] that it's hard to get nice things. You have to work hard." – **Niamh's mum**

Some of the girls also mentioned purchasing products after seeing influencers use and endorse them in videos, particularly hair and beauty products. These were often items trending on TikTok.



"I just really like how they [influencers] do things probably because I like the things that they sell and how the way it looks." – **Amira, 13**



"Makeup and skincare have definitely become more viral on TikTok. You get to see new products and influencers tell you about them. They're interesting to watch. I have bought things that influencers use because it looks really good in their videos. I recently bought a [face] shimmer." – **Niamh, 14**



"I usually search 'Get ready with me for school' because I go to school and they're my age. If I like what products they're using, I'll ask my mum and she can get it for me. Or I'll copy what they're doing." – **Amber, 11**



"There's this one girl on TikTok and she does 'Get ready with me' videos with all the products she has, and I really want to get some of them [...] skincare and makeup and all that. There's some e.l.f makeup that she has that I quite like [...] like foundation, and primer and bronzer." – **Suzy, 12**

Bobby, 17, had also bought something from the TikTok shop. His girlfriend was scrolling through the shop and found a cuddly toy which was supposed to represent the bud of a marijuana plant with a smiley face. Bobby liked it and gave his girlfriend the £40 to pay for it.

The girls who had purchased products that they had seen influencers use were aware that these were often sponsored advertisements. Niamh, for example, had experience using TikTok shop and understood how it worked.



"Influencers can link videos they post to products being advertised on TikTok shop. They usually advertise deals and I click on them." – **Niamh, 14**

Further research: 'Day in the life' and 'Get ready with me' videos

'Day in the life' and 'Get ready with me' videos immerse viewers in influencers' lives and routines. In 'Get ready with me' videos, the content creators typically talk through what skincare and make-up products they use, and the outfits they might wear that day. 'Day in the life' content shows viewers various events in an influencer's day.

The creators range from big-name celebrities, through less well-known influencers who nonetheless are shown living a luxury lifestyle, to more everyday content creators, including teenagers. On YouTube, the videos tend to be longer – often around 20 minutes – while on TikTok they are usually very short snippets showing one particular moment.

Kylie Jenner's ['Day in the life'](#) video on YouTube has over 72M views and features moments in her day from 5:50am to 11:30pm. In the description, Kylie Jenner described the vlog as *"a glimpse into a typical day for me"*. The 20-minute video takes the viewer through Kylie choosing her outfit for the day, her make-up routine using luxury brands, her working day in her newly refurbished office, and a dinner party where she gifts one of her friends a diamond ring.

Other influencers displayed similar lifestyles, even those with fewer followers. For example, [Madison Sarah](#) (353K subscribers) posts 'weekly diaries' videos once a week. This focuses on her experiences in the week, such as ['staying at the ritz'](#), or buying ['cool new clothes'](#), and her ['hair transformation'](#).

These kinds of videos, in which the influencers are seen enjoying lavish experiences and luxury products, appear to be part of a growing trend observed by the researchers over the last few years towards more of the content making direct or indirect reference to the content creator's wealth.

As noted above, most of the girls in the study this year were watching 'Day in the life' and 'Get ready with me' videos.



Figure 8: Thumbnail of Madison Sarah's video "Weekly Diaries | Staying at the ritz, my boohoo collection + lots of fun evenings".



Figure 9: Thumbnail of Kylie Jenner's video "DRUNK GET READY WITH ME: KYLIE AND KENDALL".

Few of the girls were thinking critically about the motives of these lifestyle content creators

A few of the girls said that they judged whether claims made by influencers were true by looking at their social media posts, and the comments posted beneath. This tended to be in relation to the efficacy of beauty and skincare products promoted by some influencers.



“Obviously, if an influencer says that this skincare is good or this makeup is good and then they’ve got a spotty face, I won’t buy it.” – Suzy, 12

Similarly, some of the children assumed that the motivation of influencers who posted about certain topics, such as health and relationships, was solely to ‘raise awareness’ of an issue that they themselves had experienced and rarely reflected on possible additional or alternative motives, including commercial ones. Some of the girls mentioned that they ‘admired’ influencers for raising awareness about issues such as mental health.

For example, Bryony watched videos by the influencers [Tarah and Barry](#) (1.2M followers) who post about their relationship and lifestyle, especially in relation to Tarah having ADHD. Generally, Bryony did not question whether these videos might be staged or scripted, and when asked about this she implied that she believed the videos were a candid reflection of Tarah’s experiences:



“She’s [Tarah] going to know that he’s [Barry] filmed it because obviously he puts it up on TikTok. But I don’t think she realises when she’s going to be filmed.” – Bryony, 15

Further research: Tarah and Barry

This year, Bryony enjoyed watching Tarah and Barry (1.2M followers), an online couple on TikTok who shared videos about being in a relationship in which one of them (Tarah) has ADHD.

Researchers looked through some of the videos on Tarah and Barry's profile and observed that many of them seemed to involve Barry appearing to 'set up' a camera with the implication being that Tarah doesn't know she is about to be filmed, and recording Tarah's ADHD behaviours and her conversations with him.

The top three pinned videos on their profile were videos of [Tarah and Barry](#) talking about a particular topic or doing a specific activity, and Tarah becoming distracted. One of these was titled 'POV [point of view]: You are eating with your *ADHD* girlfriend' and involved Tarah getting distracted from eating their dinner and instead carrying out different tasks off camera or complaining about the flavour of the meal. Barry would then roll his eyes jokingly and laugh when she was off camera.

Tarah and Barry's profile also included a link to their Linktree page through which viewers can purchase ADHD relationship courses, e-books, and become members of paid for community groups relating to content and advice around ADHD and intimacy.

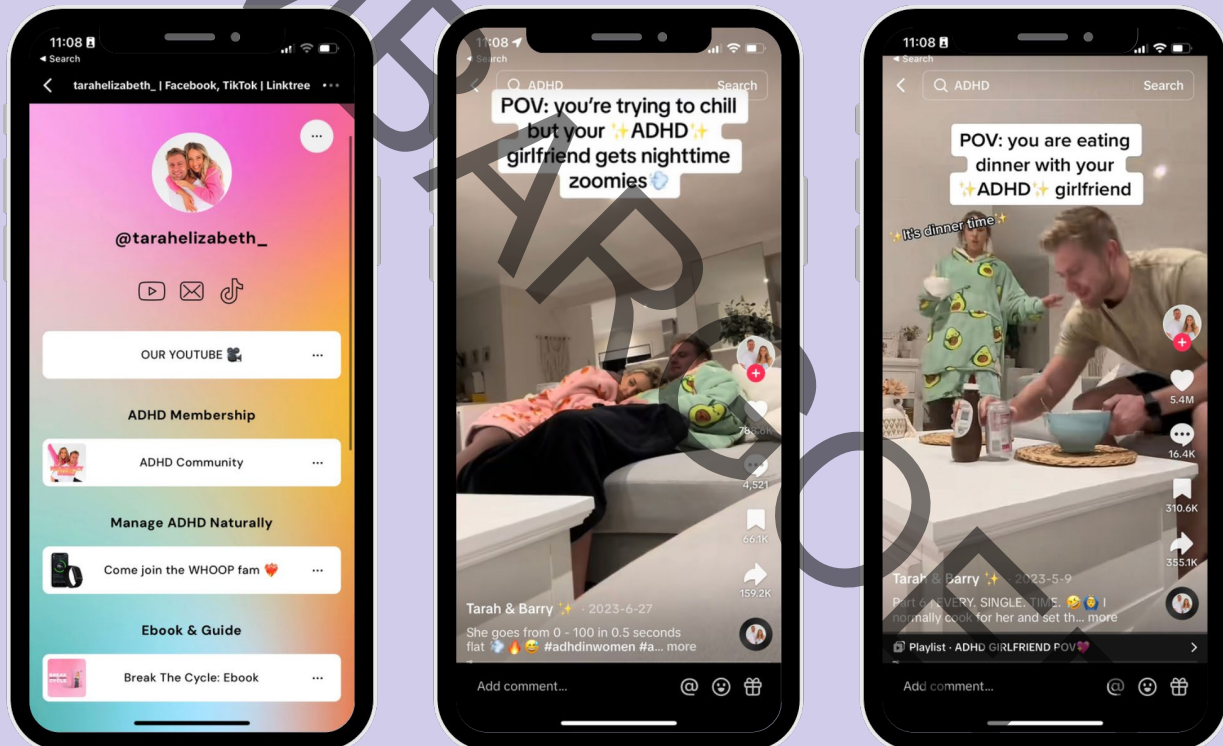


Figure 10a: An image of Tarah and Barry's Linktree page signposting their YouTube, their membership-based community and products they are selling.

Figure 10b and c: The following two images are of pinned TikTok videos in the style of "POV".

A couple of the boys watched content focused on motivation and self-improvement, which they sometimes found aspirational

Some of the older boys were watching motivational videos on self-improvement topics, particularly related to health and fitness. Some of these videos often took on a more instructional and functional approach, like the content described above that Ben was watching on improving his basketball skills. However, Oscar gravitated towards more motivational style content, particularly as it related to his newfound interest in going to the gym. He said that this had boosted his confidence, both physically and mentally.

Oscar was mostly viewing this type of content on Instagram reels, but also watched gym motivational content on YouTube by influencers such as Andrew Tate⁵⁷, David Goggins, and Joe Rogan. Oscar specifically liked the gym content Andrew Tate was creating about how to increase his body size.

While these boys were relatively uncritical of the motives of these self-improvement influencers, one at least showed some discernment over what to believe and what to ignore

Oscar said that he engaged with Andrew Tate's content while maintaining a critical perspective, without accepting all his opinions.



"I know it's controversial to like him [Andrew Tate], but he does say some useful stuff too... about gym stuff. Some stuff he says is taken out of context... but I don't really listen to that stuff." – **Oscar, 16**

Oscar reported that when viewing or listening to content by people like Andrew Tate, he would take from them what he saw as useful advice on topics like exercise or lifestyle, while at the same time not agreeing with or choosing to ignore many of the more controversial views expressed by those individuals.

However, as seen in previous years of the study, most of the children were generally less likely to apply a critical lens when it came to those influencers and creators whom they particularly admired. For example, Ben was watching TikTok videos by the creator [Frankie](#) (238K followers) – a 17-year-old American boy who posts step-by-step advice videos on relationships and self-improvement. These included advice on ['how to grow taller'](#) and the ['easiest way to get a sharp jawline'](#). Ben said that he found Frankie's videos relatable and useful, and he seemingly did not question or reflect on the reliability of the advice given in the videos.



"It's just like giving advice to, like, younger people. I feel like if he explains what he's saying in the videos then that's sort of enough rather than giving sources and stuff, because the stuff he says – to me – makes sense." – **Ben, 16**

Ben looked to this influencer for lifestyle advice and instruction; however, he did not think critically about how trustworthy the advice was or consider whether Frankie might have a commercial motivation for making and posting this content.

⁵⁷ At the time of Oscar's interview (November 2023) Andrew Tate and his brother were still awaiting trial on human trafficking charges "after a Romanian judge ruled they could travel around the country" ([Romanian judge loosens restrictions on influencer Andrew Tate, Reuters](#), 23 November 2023). Researchers did not discuss any of these ongoing legal proceedings, or the reasons for them, with the participant.

Further research: Frankie

After Ben said he followed the creator Frankie on TikTok (238K followers), researchers explored Frankie's page further. A lot of his content offered advice on health and social situations. For example, some of the videos gave tips for becoming taller, which included stretching, drinking more water, and taking growth supplement 'gummies'. These gummies were advertised for sale by Frankie on a separate page linked to his account.

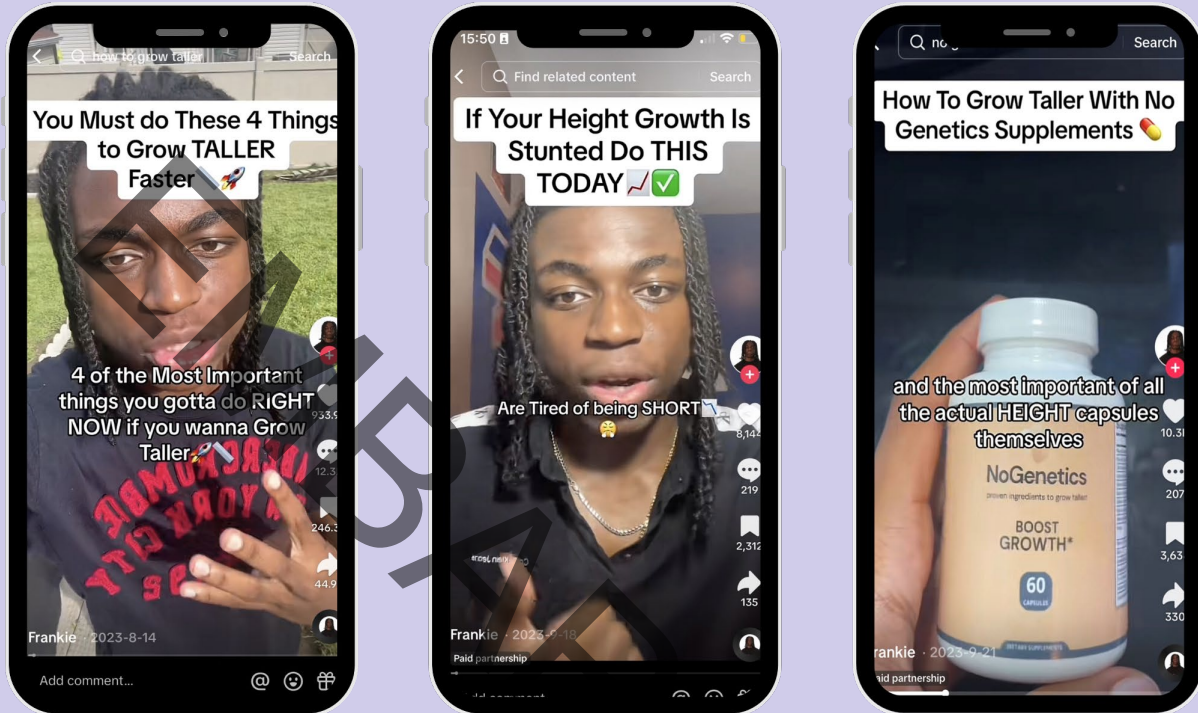


Figure 1 | a, b, c: Images of Frankie's videos on TikTok where he offers advice on how to grow taller using different techniques. The image on the right is of a video where Frankie promotes a height growth supplement.

Content discussing diagnoses continued to be popular and had led one child to seek a medical diagnosis

This year, as last year, some of the girls were seeing videos on social media that described behaviours potentially associated with conditions such as ADHD⁵⁸ and anxiety.

Terri said she had seen content on Instagram which she described as an 'advert' for diagnosing conditions. She added that in her view this was not appropriate:



"This should be done by a doctor, not by someone on social media." – Terri, 14

⁵⁸ Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

However, attitudes to this type of content differed. Last year, Bryony's mum told the researchers that she and Bryony were considering having Bryony assessed for autism or ADD⁵⁹ because she was struggling socially at school. Since then, Bryony has received a medical diagnosis of ADHD. Reflecting on her experience, Bryony said that until last year, she had not considered whether she had ADHD. But, after watching a TikTok video from Tarah and Barry (1.2M followers), a couple on TikTok – mentioned above – who share their experience of being in a relationship where one partner had ADHD, on her For You page, she identified with the behaviours described within it and this had prompted her to seek a diagnosis. In her interview in autumn 2023 for this year's research, Bryony said:



"We didn't think I had ADHD until this year really, I think we said I had ADD or something. But then I said, 'What about ADHD?' because they've [videos about ADHD] been coming up a lot more recently on TikTok." – **Bryony, 15**

"There was this one girl [Tarah] and she had ADHD, and she did a TikTok of, like, 'signs of ADHD' and all that in girls. I was watching the TikTok, and I was like ticking off everything she said. So, then that's when I was like, maybe [I have] ADHD." – **Bryony, 15**

Since seeing the first video, Bryony had followed Tarah and Barry (1.2M followers) on TikTok and was regularly watching their videos. Bryony expressed a sense of being able to relate to Tarah and said she found comfort in the shared experiences presented in the videos on her feed.

"I can relate to her stuff and what she's doing. I mean, all of a sudden, she's like, arranging her office and like, out of the blue, I'm rearranging my bedroom, so I suppose I relate to her a bit... it's nice to see that there are some people willing to share their personal life." – **Bryony, 15**

Further research: How is ADHD talked about on TikTok?

Some of the girls are seeing content created by influencers sharing their own experiences of having ADHD and/or describing 'signs' that could indicate a diagnosis.

Further research on TikTok using broad terms such as 'ADHD' revealed hundreds of videos featuring influencers offering advice or describing potential symptoms.

For example, [Modern Hippie Mindset](#) (95.3K followers), described in their profile as a "From miserable to magical" and "Your Life-Coach & ADHD Glow-Up Girlie", makes videos about manifestation, self-help and managing ADHD.

One video from this influencer is titled: '[Asking yourself "do I have ADHD?"](#)', with the description: "@doneadhd have provided me with a discount for you to get an affordable assessment and support. Link in Bio".

In the video, Modern Hippie Mindset talks through various behaviours and thoughts which she indicated might mean the viewer had ADHD. For example, she says, "At a young age you realised other people don't feel things as strongly as you do," and later refers to these behaviours as a "diagnosis that makes so much sense". The video ends with her encouraging viewers to click the link in her bio for an "affordable assessment" of whether they have ADHD.

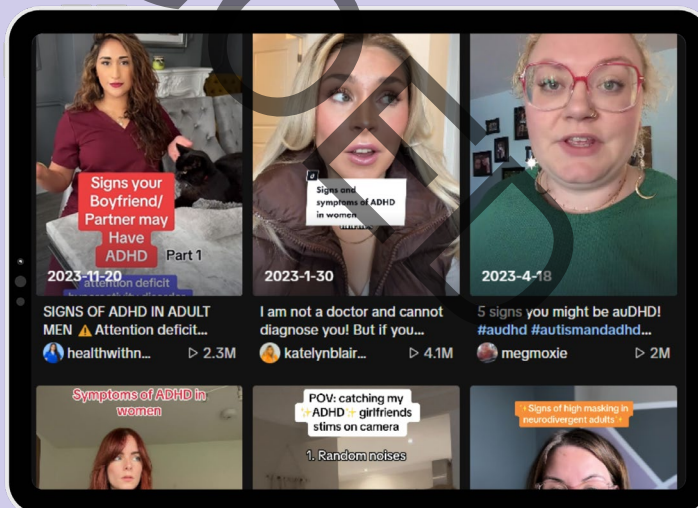


Figure 12: A screenshot of the top results for 'ADHD' on TikTok.

⁵⁹ Attention deficit disorder.

Researcher reflections

The children in this research have always found it challenging to know what to trust or how to tell what's true or not online. At the same time, we've reported over the years on the continued blurring of boundaries between news and gossip, fact and fiction on social media, which has made making these judgements even more difficult. News-like snippets are cut from unknown original sources, and presented without context, overlaid with reactions and commentary, edited, and reposted further.

This year, most of the children understood they should not believe everything they see online but they still struggled to discern the motives behind content creation. Some of the boys who are consuming more 'commentary' style content say they're aware they are often seeing only one side of the story and on occasion they will seek a wider range of perspectives. However, when it comes to lifestyle-related content – which appears to appeal more to girls than boys – we are not seeing much evidence of children in the study applying critical thought. The fact that their favourite content creators often use their platforms to sell products (whether growth supplements or ADHD relationship courses) does not seem to raise a red flag for most children that these creators may have a secondary or hidden motivation for posting their content.

Without critical awareness of the potentially commercial motives of some content creators, children are likely to be more vulnerable to influence by them. Whether it's internalising messages about their bodies and fitness or mental health and diagnoses, or buying their products, children in this study continue to be influenced by what they see on social media.

Chapter 3: Attention and stimulation

While content aimed at children has arguably always been attention-grabbing, compared with earlier waves of this research, this year, much of the content the children are watching could be described as hyper-stimulating – increasingly fast paced, bright, dramatic and loud. The style of filming and editing, full of jump cuts and whip zooms, exaggerates these effects, which appear to be designed to capture and hold viewers' attention.

In contrast to frenetic content, many of the girls are watching very tactile, slower-paced, sensory videos that they describe as relaxing.

What both types of content have in common, however, is that they appear to be optimised for stimulating the senses – maximising colour, movement, texture and sound – which seemingly appeals to children.

Attention and hyperstimulation: How media is capturing and keeping children's attention

Over 10 waves of Children's Media Lives we have seen children move further and further away from longer-form media like films and TV programmes and towards shorter-form video content.

The trend continued this year, with most of the children saying they preferred watching content on social media than shows and films on TV. Some of the younger children were watching shows on streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+, either on their own or with their families.

For example, Angus, 11, still loved watching Marvel films, his favourite of which was *Thor: Ragnarok*. However, the older children tended not to watch a great deal of TV on streaming services, and consumption of live TV was even less common.

The shorter form videos the children favoured made use of a range of strategies to engage children's attention.

On TikTok and YouTube Shorts, the children were often watching short clips cut from longer, original versions

Most of the children who took part in the study were frequently watching short snippets of content reposted from longer videos, such as movies or TV shows. For example, the screen recording of Niamh looking at TikTok showed her watching several very short clips (10 seconds or less) taken from different scenes of the TV show *Friends* which had been compiled together.



"I saw, like, all these edits about him [Matthew Perry]. I don't really love Friends that much [...] but it's just like seeing all the different clips." – **Niamh, 14**

Some of these videos included clips that started abruptly, or had been sped up, and gave no sense of the overall narrative, and several of them included no reference to the original show or film. For example, Amber had been seeing a lot of these 'out-of-context' clips on her TikTok For You Page. She assumed they were from a TV show or film but did not know which one.

Some of the children – notably the older boys – were seeing snippets of news stories clipped from longer videos and posted on their TikTok and Instagram feeds. For example, the majority of content Ishak had seen about the conflict in Gaza was in this format.

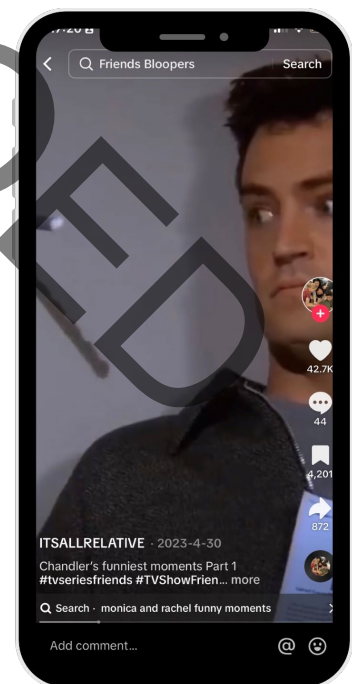


Figure 13: A TikTok video of scenes from the TV show *Friends*.

Abrupt and fast-paced editing styles with overlaid sound effects, animations and rapid transitions were a feature of shorter and longer videos

In the last two waves of this study, much of the content the children have been following – for example videos posted or shared on the MrBeast, The Royalty Family, or IShowSpeed channels – has been edited so that the videos cut and zoom abruptly, making them feel ‘choppy’ and fast-paced. Children across the sample and of all ages watched videos presented in this style.

This type of presentation is particularly prevalent in the short-form videos on TikTok and YouTube Shorts, but also in evidence in some longer form videos on YouTube.

Further research: Fast-paced, dramatic, chopply edited videos

The fast-paced and hyper-stimulating style of much of the content the children had been watching in recent waves of Children’s Media Lives was even more evident this year. It was seen across the main platforms used by children, most noticeably YouTube, TikTok and Instagram.

It tended to be crammed with visual attention-grabbing devices, such as explosive, colourful text appearing on screen, which were designed to reinforce or emphasise what was being said or the drama of the moment. Most of this content was also extremely loud – with on-screen performers usually shouting. Drama is built using teasers, cliff-hangers, big ‘reveals’, tension between the performers and high-stakes consequences in rapid succession – and sometimes all at once.

All this is reinforced by the filming and editing style, which uses abrupt jump cuts, close-ups, rapid in-and-out whip zooms and constant noise. Editing techniques like these can be seen in many content creators’ videos that children watched, such as those from [MrBeast](#) (244M subscribers), [The Royalty Family](#) (23.2M subscribers), [Ben Azelart](#) (25.3M subscribers) on YouTube.

These images show screenshots of content in this style that some of the children were watching on YouTube.



Figure 14: A screenshot from content creator MrBeast's video, "I gave People \$1,000,000 But ONLY 1 Minute To Spend It!"



Figure 15: A screenshot from content creator IShowSpeed's video, "Football challenges GOAT edition".

Further research: Thumbnails

Several of the images in this report are screenshots of the thumbnails for YouTube videos. Thumbnails are there to try to entice the user to watch the content. Content creators invest a lot of effort into optimising thumbnails to grab attention and get viewers to click on their content, and there are many articles online about how to create the most engaging thumbnails for your content as well as thumbnail creation services.

As the images below illustrate, the thumbnails promoting the videos described above commonly use the following devices: exaggerated facial expressions, wide eyes, large, bright text and repeated mentions of large sums of money.

Over the years, thumbnails have changed. This year, we've seen more thumbnails featuring extremely heavily edited, sometimes [contorted faces](#), with content creators emulating each other in terms of style (left). Looking back a few years, these same creators had much more varied styles of thumbnail (right) with less heavily edited visuals.



Figure 16: Thumbnail from The Royalty Family's video "I Tested 100 BANNED Amazon Products!"



Figure 18: Thumbnail from The Royalty Family's video "Saying GOODBYE To The MISSING PUPPY! **FOREVER**".



Figure 17: Thumbnail from MrBeast's video "\$1 vs \$250,000,000" "I Bought 100 Banned Amazon Products!"



Figure 19: Thumbnail from MrBeast's video "Surviving 24 Hours On a Desert Island"

Influencers watched by the children were often acting in an exaggerated way to heighten the sense of drama

In wave 9 (late 2022), it was reported that children from across the sample described 'drama' as something they loved in video content. This continues to be the case in wave 10, with much of the content the children were watching, predominantly on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram, involving people presenting themselves in a very theatrical, exaggerated way. Though the topic or subject matter varied across much of this content, creators often used the same loud, exaggerated, and dramatic tone in their videos irrespective of what they had to say.

Alfie enjoyed watching YouTube commentary videos about Pokémon. He particularly liked [Sirud](#) (597K subscribers) who made videos recording himself playing games and challenges relating to Pokémon.⁶⁰ During his diary task, Alfie watched a video titled '[GUESS THE POKEMON CHALLENGE \(Impossible\)](#)', and reflected on the presentation styles used throughout the video:



"The video wants you to stare at it...then it makes people laugh, and then you want to keep on watching to see if something else funny happens." – **Alfie, 9**

He also went on to comment on why creators make content like this:

"They want to get more than 100 subscribers so they can get more money and then it continues... I think they do it [post the content] for the money and to become famous and for people to like them." – **Alfie, 9**

The videos posted by The Royalty Family are another example, commonly using exaggerated mannerisms, shouting, and drama-focused storylines to engage attention. Bailey, who is nine, talked about how much he likes The Royalty Family and wants to be like them and have lots of money when he grows up.

⁶⁰ Pokémon is a game and media franchise relating to creatures or 'pocket monsters' which accompany the characters or in-game players in battles and adventures.

Further research: The Royalty Family

The Royalty Family (23.2M subscribers) post videos on their two YouTube channels ([The Royalty Family](#) and [Royalty Gaming](#)) every few days. They describe themselves as “a modern blended family based in Los Angeles that love to entertain you”. The channel portrays a family of four (and a dog) who do challenges, dares, and showcase their luxurious lifestyle. The videos often revolve around arbitrary items or products, such as [‘LATE Every DRIVE THRU in a Day’](#). The storylines also tend to include large sums of money, such as [‘My Dad Surprised me with Dream Vacation!!’](#), [‘GUESS the Price, I’ll BUY it Challenge!’](#), and [‘Winning 1,000,000 V-Bucks from my Dad’](#).

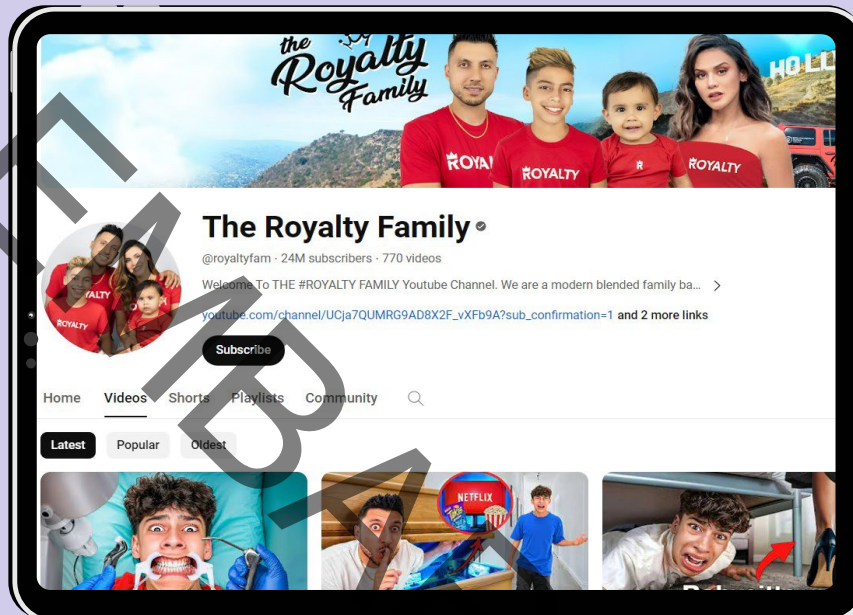


Figure 20: The Royalty Family's YouTube home page.

The videos usually involve some kind of game or challenge, attempting to keep the audience on the edge of their seat throughout. The Royalty Family videos are an example of the frenetic filming and editing style seen so widely this year.

The members of the family are the main characters and are presented as celebrities in their own content. This is exemplified in videos such as [‘My Daughter Walks for the First Time!’](#), [‘Telling My Family I’m PREGNANT!’](#), and [‘Ferran’s Official Room Tour!!’](#), in which the family reveals the son’s flashy new bedroom to viewers.

Some of the older boys in the sample were consuming content about more ‘grown-up’ or serious topics (sometimes documentary-style, sometimes about political or religious issues). Those creating this content also relied on using an exaggerated, dramatic and sometimes conspiratorial tone to foster a sense of drama and engage viewers.

For example, Bobby, 17, told researchers that he liked YouTubers such as [Tommy G](#) (1.29M subscribers), whose YouTube bio claims: “I make the craziest documentaries on YouTube”, and [Arab](#) (1.3M subscribers), whose bio reads: “travel vlogging the unknown”.

Bobby said he liked that these YouTubers “explore dangerous areas” and “show you things you don’t see around the world”. Bobby was particularly drawn to media that purported to give the viewer exclusive access to ‘hidden truths’ that mainstream sources wouldn’t show.

Further research: Tommy G and Arab

Tommy G (1.29M subscribers) and Arab (1.3M subscribers) are separate content creators who make mainly documentary-style content on YouTube about dangerous or dramatic environments or experiences. For example, Arab's video '[Day 1 of living with the Mexican Cartel](#)' and Tommy G's video '[Visiting the Sketchiest Trailer Park in Arizona](#)'.

Both use a loud, exaggerated, intense style of delivery when talking to the camera.



Figure 21: The Thumbnail of Tommy G's YouTube Video "On the Border with Human Smugglers and Illegal Immigrants".



Figure 22: The Thumbnail of Arab's "I Met the Most Wanted Kingpin in the Middle East"

Both creators' videos often begin with the YouTuber claiming they are exposing something previously unknown about an environment or group of people. In at least one instance, Arab claimed that his films had been censored or removed.

For example, one video starts with Arab saying: "Brazilian favelas are often referred to worldwide as some of the most dangerous places on earth". That was the original intro that YouTube removed. Because what I'm about to show you is some of the most undocumented footage of Brazil that the world has ever seen. And they keep shutting me down for showing you it."

However, watching many of these videos reveals that the degree of access or revelation claimed in the title or intro has often been overstated, with very little revealed throughout the course of the video.

One child had seen triple-split-screen videos this year

In wave 9 (fieldwork late 2022) we saw double split screen content appearing in several of the children's social media feeds. This usually involved a snippet from a film or TV show in the top half of the screen and some ASMR content involving slime or an automated single player game in the bottom half of the screen, so that the children were viewing two pieces of content at the same time. Children in the study continued to see this dual-split screen content this year. However, there was one example, Willow, aged 10, who had seen triple-split-screen video – three videos playing simultaneously.

Willow, who watched split-screen videos on YouTube during the diary task period, said these triple-screen videos featured three videos side by side, two of distinct ASMR clips, and one of a scene from a film or TV show.

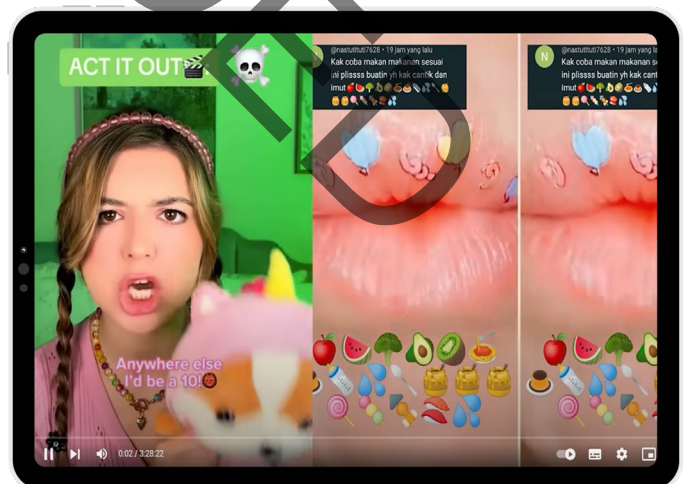


Figure 23: A screenshot of a triple split screen video Willow watched during the diary task period.

On many occasions the children did not watch clips through to the end, and a few of them were using TikTok's new playback feature to skim videos at twice the normal speed

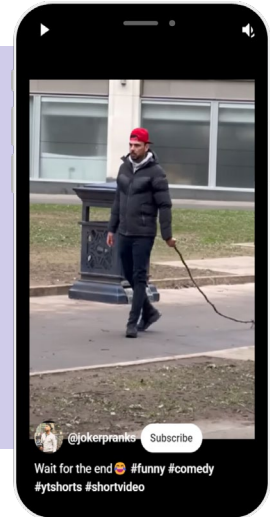
As seen in previous waves, the children often did not watch videos on any platform all the way through to the end. This year, researchers looked at the screen record clips which several children had sent in during the diary task stage of the study. They observed that most of the children scrolled through their feeds quickly, and often did not reach the end of a video before scrolling onto the next.

Further research: 'Watch to the end' techniques

Many of the videos the children watched used 'clickbait' titles or text on screen to encourage the viewer to keep watching until the end. For example, videos that appeared in some of the footage the children had screen-recorded on their phones to capture their viewing experience had captions such as "Wait for it" or "Wait till the end".

In some challenge videos, such as those posted by The Royalty Family, the creators would wait until the end of the video to do a 'big reveal' of the prize.

Figure 24: A video on YouTube Shorts with the caption 'Wait for the end'



During the screen-record tasks this year, researchers observed a few children tapping the right-hand side of their screens while watching videos on TikTok, which led the video to play in 2x speed. In the follow up interviews, several of the children described using this new playback feature to make quick assessments of how interesting a video was. This functionality is also available on YouTube Shorts.

Ben, who was asked about his use of the speed-up feature during the follow-up interview, said:



"I feel like it didn't need to be that long. It wasn't saying much, and it took a long time, so I just wanted to see it quicker really." – **Ben, 16**

"I probably use the speed up feature quite a lot, because on videos like that you don't really need to watch the whole thing. It's something you can just see and move on, rather than just linger on it. I use it with videos with not much meaning to them. I guess it helps you see what you actually want to see." – **Ben, 16**

In a similar vein Taylor said:



"Sometimes I just get really impatient. If it's a long video I really can't be bothered to watch the whole of the video. I'll skip to see if anything interesting happens. I feel like once I'm over halfway I'm like well I can't scroll (past) now I've already watched some of it, it'd be a waste of my time." – **Taylor, 15**

Many girls this year were watching ASMR videos and reported enjoying the tactile and sensory nature of the content

In previous years, participants like Amber were watching ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) content. The content usually involved sensory [ASMR tropes like watching hands playing with slime](#) with very crisp clear audio of the sounds.

This year, there was a greater awareness and consumption of ASMR content among the participants, with almost all the girls in the study having recently seen ASMR videos, whether they came up on their feed or they had actively sought them out. None of the boys reported seeing this type of content on their feeds.

Both Amira and Niamh watched ASMR videos on YouTube and TikTok. The content often involved objects such as soap, slime, and cardboard. For example, Amira enjoyed ASMR videos of content creators [organising their stationery](#), or small business owners packing up an order, while Niamh liked videos of different materials being [mixed together in a bowl](#):



“There’s, like, different textures and different sounds they make that I like. I like the wooden soups. It’s like little wooden balls in water and they mix it around.” – Niamh, 14

The girls watching this content reported being drawn to the tactile and sensory elements of it, particularly the sounds. They said they found the sounds of different objects being brushed or rubbed against each other or people whispering into a microphone satisfying, adding that it evoked feelings of relaxation or a tingling sensation.

Bryony, who frequently watched ASMR content, enjoyed videos where content creators whispered close to, and often touching, the microphone, and in which the recording was particularly sensitive to sounds of breath, rustling or tapping. The lulling rhythm of the phrases delivered in soft whispers made Bryony feel the physical sensations creators were describing.



“It feels like a head massage and your head is really tingly.” – Bryony, 15



ASMR | X Marks The Spot 🎧 HEAD TINGLES

782K views · 1 year ago

Figure 25: An ASMR video by SassySounds.

Some of these girls reported using ASMR content to help them relax or sleep – although not always effectively

Amber and Bryony, for instance, had incorporated ASMR videos into their night-time routines.



“I sometimes watch it in the morning or whenever, but mostly at night because, like, it helps me fall asleep because it’s nice and relaxing.” – Amber, 11

Both girls described the sounds featured in these videos as “relaxing”. These ranged from nails softly tapping against different objects, to the sound of people playing with messy slime or whispering.

These girls also said they found the sounds in these ASMR videos calming and that they helped them go to sleep. Bryony spoke about watching hours of ASMR content on YouTube before bed.



“I like watching ASMR, it helps me go to sleep. I like when they have clicky words [with exaggerated consonants], or certain words people say that are supposed to make you feel good, or whatever... There’s ‘we’re going on a treasure hunt X marks the spot... it would be like they’re actually writing on your back... and mentally, because they’re doing it you feel shivers down your back.” –

Bryony, 15

Bryony claimed that hearing certain words spoken by content creators evoked a physical sensation that had a relaxing effect. However, in the second interview, she reflected that watching these videos actually had a potentially adverse effect on her sleep because although they made her feel relaxed, she would stay up until 4am in the morning watching ASMR.

While Terri did not watch ASMR videos as often as Amber and Bryony, she described them as having similar effects on her:



“The soap cutting ones are my favourite. It looks nice. It makes me feel like I am in a spa – it’s relaxing. It makes you feel like you’re not just in your bed.” – Terri, 14

Researcher reflections

As with programmes on TV aimed at children, the content children watch on social media is often fast-paced, loud, and full of energy.

However, the intensity of this style often appears to be exaggerated much further on social media, with shouting, rapid, abrupt editing and hyperactive personas all common.

At the same time, the children's interest in watching longer-form content appears to have dropped, with children in previous waves saying films and episodes of TV series are too long. The speed of children's consumption of video content seems to have increased over the years – with children quickly scrolling, skipping, and fast forwarding through feeds of content. Creators appear to have responded to this by dropping hints of what will happen if you 'watch to the end' in an attempt to keep viewers with them throughout the entirety of the video. Clickbait titles and exaggerated thumbnails are also being used by content creators to try to catch attention.

This trend for highly stimulating content extends to the senses – for some styles of video, sound quality is heightened so sounds of crackling, rustling or whispering feel close and immersive, and videos portray the tactile qualities of slime, sand or food.

Relatability and intimacy: How the media children consume appeals to their social and emotional needs

Since the first wave of Children's Media Lives, children have been using media of many different kinds that appeals to more social and emotional needs. In that time, some children (in particular girls) have engaged with videos by content creators portraying themselves as 'relatable'. Children continue to watch content that seems to appeal to these more social and emotional needs, with the trend going in the direction of greater intimacy, immersion, and sense of closeness, such as proximity to the camera, portrayed in videos.

Many of the children appeared to be turning to social media to combat boredom or loneliness

Most of the children spent multiple hours each day on their devices and platforms, with TikTok, Snapchat and YouTube as the most popular platforms across the sample. However, the children were often unaware of the extent of their screen-time. Ishak, for example, claimed he was using YouTube more than TikTok and his time using TikTok had reduced. On reviewing his screen-time, he was often using TikTok for several hours longer than YouTube on any given day.

Bailey reflected:



"A kid who didn't have an iPad or any devices would feel alone...it would be so boring if they didn't have any TV, or any activities to do [online] they'd feel very left out and maybe bored." – **Bailey, 9**

Bailey himself spent most of his spare time at home gaming or watching YouTube videos to alleviate feelings of boredom.

Similarly, Niamh, who spent around six hours a day on her phone, considered going on social media a "cure" for boredom. While she felt that scrolling on her feed was not in her words "physically productive" as an activity as it sometimes stopped her from doing her homework, she liked it because it "engaged" her brain and entertained her when spending time in her bedroom.

'Personal attention' ASMR was a popular trend among some children this year

The emergence this year of more children in the study watching ASMR videos, as described in the previous chapter, extended beyond the purely sensory to more social themes.

Some of the girls described a new ASMR trend called 'personal attention', which involved content creators directly addressing the viewer in a soft, gentle, and caring manner.

Terri described the videos she'd seen:



"It's quite fun, it makes you feel like you're watching a TV show. It can feel like it is happening to you, and they are speaking directly to you." – **Terri, 14**

She claimed to know other people who liked this content because they could relate to it, and said it was an "easy way" for them to feel as though they had company. She also hypothesised that this type of content might be more appealing to people who were shy or lacked face-to-face interaction, as role-play content could simulate the feeling of having a friend speak directly to the viewer.

'Personal attention' ASMR included different styles and sub-genres of content, and role-playing ASMR (was particularly popular with some of the girls in the study. Bryony described a video by [Oceans ASMR](#) (553K subscribers), one of her favourite ASMR content creators:



"She's got a really nice, calming, soothing voice. There is this one video where she is pretending to be a southern girl hairdresser. I think I watch it as well for the gossip... the way that she talks as if you're her friend and you've known her all your life.

"You feel as though you're actually the one there."
– **Bryony, 15**

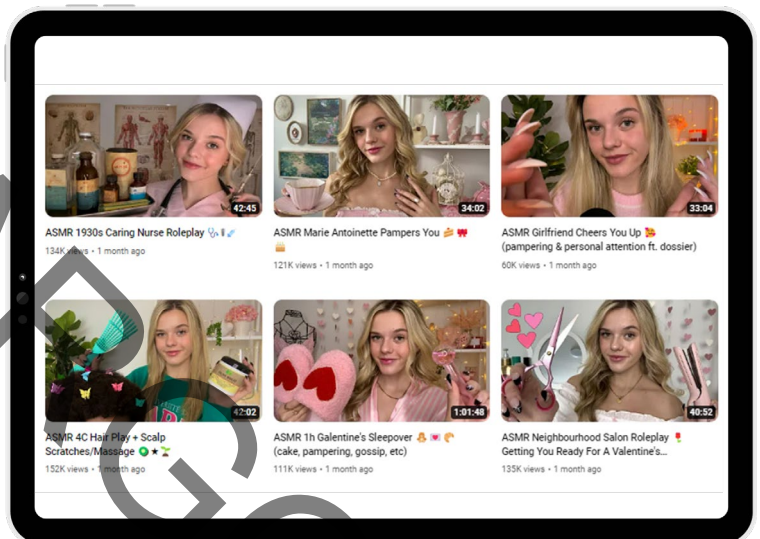


Figure 26: Ocean ASMR's home page on YouTube.

She appreciated the feelings of familiarity and friendship these videos evoked and highlighted the calming voice of the creator as a key factor in creating a friendly atmosphere. For Bryony, role-play ASMR provided a multi-faceted experience, offering a sense of relaxation, comfort and friendship, as well as elements of intrigue and drama, which she referred to as 'gossip'.

Some ASMR trends which the children mentioned lean even further into the intimate and interpersonal. Amber spoke about a new trend she saw appear on her TikTok For You Page, called 'spit painting', which she said she did not like.



"There's one called spit painting where they, like, spit on their hand and pretend to, like, paint me with it. I don't like that. They get their hands... and like wet their fingers with the spit and try to paint you."
– **Amber, 11**

Further research: ASMR trends

'Personal attention' ASMR was a trend mentioned by several children. This type of ASMR enhanced these videos' personal and relatable feel and seemed to combine the friendly aspects of more mainstream lifestyle and advice content with tactile and sensory elements.

These videos are all POV ('point of view') format, where the content creator appears to be speaking directly to you as the viewer and role playing a scenario, for example where creators such as [Oceans ASMR](#) (553K subscribers), played the role of a friend, hairdresser or therapist. Other content creators played the role of a doctor or nurse, for example giving the viewer a '[cranial nerve exam](#)' or '[pelvic exam](#)'.

Figure 27: A doctor check-up ASMR role-play video by ASMR Jas.

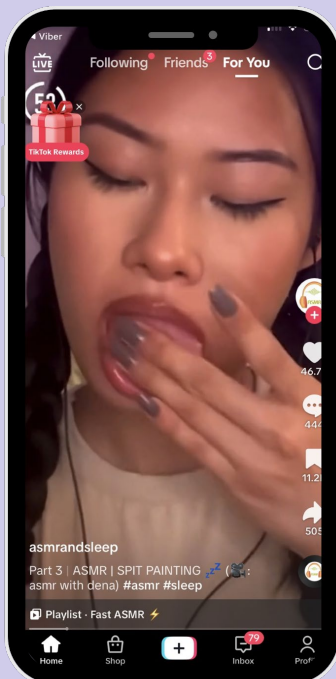
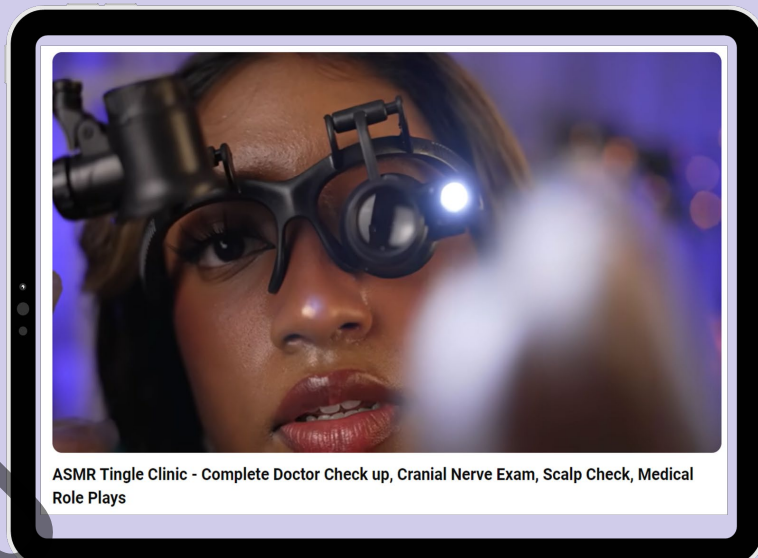


Figure 28: An ASMR spit painting video posted by *asmrandsleep* on TikTok.

Others focus on more social or friendship dynamics. For example, the content creator is your '[bestie doing your makeup](#)' telling you you're beautiful, or '[brushing your hair for relaxation](#)'.

One participant, Amber (11) had come across '[spit painting](#)' videos, which prompted researchers to investigate these videos. In spit painting the content creator uses spit on their fingers in a POV (point of view) style, using their fingers to wipe spit on the screen to simulate painting the viewers face with it.

Other genres of ASMR also involve bodily sounds, such as eating. For example, '[mukbangs](#)', in which the focus is on the sounds and textures of a variety of foods being eaten, has grown in popularity recently, although it was not specifically referred to by the children in this study.

The researchers' further exploration of more intimate personal attention ASMR content – not seen in the fieldwork but found by searching for hashtags and labels that were the same or similar as those encountered by the children – uncovered mature content involving sexual themes such as references to oral sex. These videos often used popular hashtags and terms from more mainstream ASMR videos such as 'tingles', 'scratching', and 'whispering'.

Researcher reflections

From wave 1 of Children's Media Lives onwards, we have reported that children, particularly girls, watch content made by content creators purporting to give viewers a 'behind the scenes' look at their lives: for example, Zoella giving you a window into her morning routine, or her latest skincare products back in 2014. These content creators appeared to play a 'best friend' or 'big sister' role for the children who watched their content – which young and teenage girls seem to find appealing.

The trend over the years has continually been towards these relationships feeling ever closer, more connected, more 'real'. Videos of influencers trying on new clothes, giving advice about relationships, showing their 'Day in the life' became increasingly popular in waves 6, 7 and 8 (2019 to 2022).

This year, the degree of cultivated intimacy and connection has been more noticeable than ever. We have seen participants watching videos in which the content creator is roleplaying with a POV (point of view) camera angle – seemingly to talk directly to the viewer, openly pretending to be their best friend, hairdresser or doctor. Much of this content makes use of the sensory qualities described in this chapter using ASMR triggers and techniques to emphasise the tactile, sensory experience – making it feel as if the content creator really is playing with your hair, whispering in your ear, or stroking your back.

Our wider research into this genre of video shows that these intimate and sensory qualities can be linked with more explicitly sexual themes, and while one child in the study seemed to be aware of this (i.e. had heard about 'spit painting' videos), so far these children are telling us that they aren't interested in this type of ASMR content.

The children who like ASMR videos are open about the fact they turn to this content when they feel lonely or want to feel soothed to sleep. How this tendency towards greater intimacy in digital media influences children is unknown, but it appears to be a growing trend.

Annex I: Profile of the participants

Gender	
Male	11
Female	10
Age	
8	1
9	3
10	2
11	2
12	2
13	3
14	2
15	2
16	2
17	1
18	1
Age bands	
Male and 8-11	4
Male and 12-15	3
Male and 16-17	4
Female and 8-11	4
Female and 12-15	6
Female and 16-17	0
Socioeconomic background (SEG)	
A/B	5
C1	5
C2	5
D/E	6
Location	
England	16
Wales	1
Scotland	2
Northern Ireland	2
Types of location	
City/large town	4
Town/small town	12

Village/hamlet	5
Family circumstances	
Older sibling(s)	8
Younger sibling(s)	12
Twin	1
Only child	5
Living with one parent	11
Living with both parents	9
Not living with parents	1
Ethnicity	
White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, White other	15
Mixed or multiple ethnic background	1
Asian or Asian British	3
Black, Black British, Caribbean, or African	2
Disabilities/SEND (including mental health issues)	
Diagnosed/awaiting diagnosis	5

Annex 2: Devices and platforms

Overview of device and platform use across the 21 children who took part in the research

Device	
Phone	16
Console	10
TV	16
Laptop	10
Tablet	9
Smart speaker	4
Smart watch	1

Platform/service	
YouTube	21
TikTok	11
Snapchat	13
Instagram	11
Facebook	5
WhatsApp	14
JusTalk Kids	2
Netflix	13
Disney+	7
Twitter	1
Twitch	2

The charts below illustrate the children's average daily screen-time overall and across different apps captured from a six-day media diary. This data was based on screen-time statistics from the children's devices, such as their smartphone or tablet, as well as their media diary entries which included self-reported data about time spent on devices and platforms.

Figure D: Children's average daily screen-time

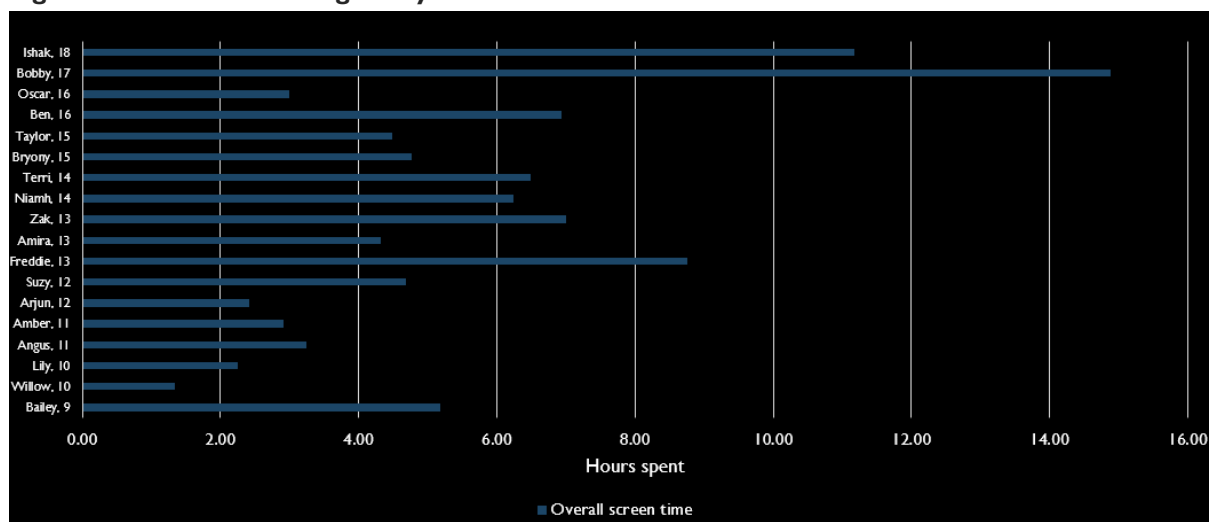
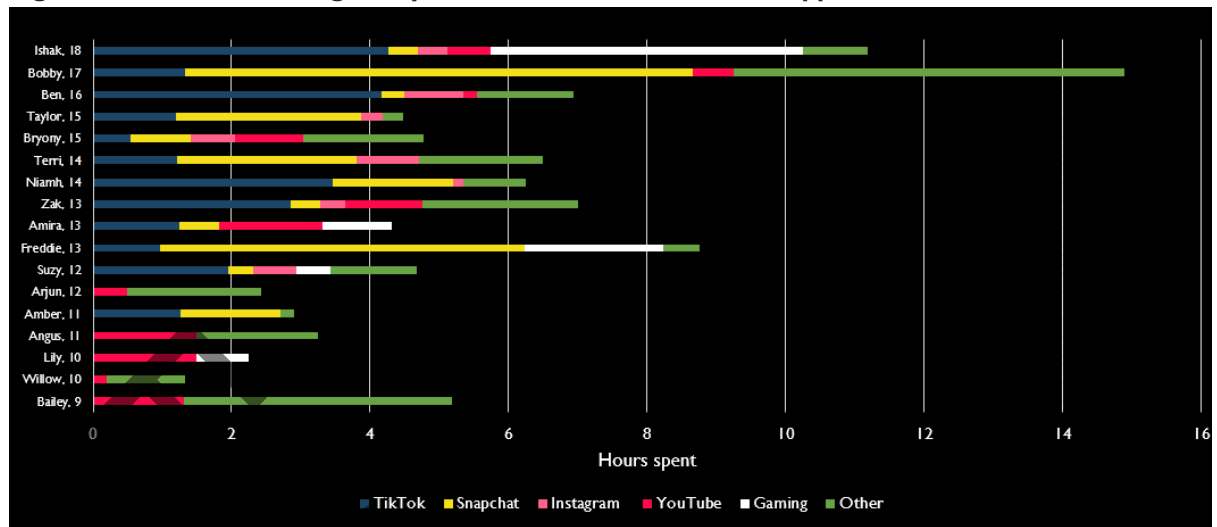


Figure E: Children's average daily screen-time across different apps/services



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Annex 3: Glossary

ASMR: ASMR stands for autonomous sensory meridian response. It is the feeling triggered by certain sounds and/or stimuli that causes a comforting physical feeling.

Bendy and the Ink Machine: Bendy and the Ink Machine is a first-person survival puzzle-action-horror game set in a fictional cartoon world in the mid to late 20th century.

Bio: A short summary found beneath an Instagram user's name. This could be a short description of them, a set of emojis or a link to another profile.

Clickbait: Clickbait usually refers to titles, captions or thumbnails that are designed in a sensationalised way to entice users to click on the link or video they are describing.

Creators: A social media user who produces and shares original content across various platforms, including but not limited to videos, images, blogs, and podcasts. They often cultivate dedicated audiences and may collaborate with brands or monetise their content through sponsorships or advertisements.

Coin Master: A free to play mobile game, the aim of which is to win coins and upgrade items to be able to develop the player's own villages.

'Day in the life': 'Day in the life' videos are types of videos on social media, usually TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube. These videos immerse viewers in influencers' lives and routines. 'Day in the life' content shows viewers various events in an influencer's day.

EA FC 24: This is first instalment of the rebranded series of popular football video games, the preceding version of which was FIFA 23. It is available on all major consoles.

Fast-forward feature (TikTok): A function on TikTok that enables users to skip through or quickly advance past segments of a video.

Filter: Filters are effects that can be applied to photos or videos on platforms such as TikTok or Snapchat to enhance or augment certain features of the video, such as colour, appearance, voice changing, or other effects.

For You Page: It is the main landing page or 'feed' on TikTok. It shows the user videos from creators they follow, and videos recommended for them based on TikTok's algorithm.

Fortnite: Fortnite is a multiplayer online combat video game with six different game modes and can played on multiple gaming platforms (e.g. Xbox, PlayStation). Predominantly, it is a combat game where players can fight and cooperate with other players, collect and upgrade items and build structures and fortifications. In the most popular game mode, Battle Royale, the game pits players against each other to be the last survivor on an island.

'Get ready with me': 'Get ready with me' videos are types of videos on social media, usually TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube. These videos immerse viewers in influencers' lives and routines. In 'Get ready with me' videos, the content creators typically talk through what skincare and make-up products they use, and the outfits they might wear that day.

Instagram Reels: The short-form section of Instagram, hosting reels of short-form content. Reels on Instagram are short videos (usually around 15-30 seconds) similar in format to videos found on TikTok.

Influencer: A social media user who exerts influence over the digital and material consumption habits of their audience. 'Influencer marketing' is now a well-established advertising technique whereby 'expert' influencers promote a product through public use on their 'channel'.

JusTalk Kids: This app is similar in functionality to WhatsApp, enabling children to communicate with friends through video chat or messaging. However, unlike WhatsApp, the user doesn't need a phone number. The app is described on the Google Play Store as a "Safe Messenger" app for children with both chat and video call functionality, and some parental controls.

Likes: This feature allows users to express their appreciation 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.

Lives: A feature which allows people to live-stream what they are doing in real time on social media, and they can be viewed by others online.

Madfut: An app where one can collect packs of football players and draft players into their teams. It is similar to EA Sports FC games, but without the in-match gameplay.

Mario games: Mario is a renowned Italian animated character, who is the lead character in a franchise of games such as Mario Kart, Super Mario Bros., and many more.

Minecraft: Minecraft is a creative computer game with blocky, pixelated visuals where players can explore their world, build structures, craft items, extract materials, and sometimes fight or cooperate with other players.

'Mukbangs' ASMR: An ASMR video style in which the focus is on the sounds and textures of a variety of foods being eaten. It has grown in popularity recently, although it was not specifically referred to by the children.

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

Oculus headset: A virtual reality headset that can be used for gaming, entertainment, social interaction, and other things.

'Personal Attention ASMR': An ASMR trend mentioned by several children. This type of ASMR enhanced these videos' personal and relatable feel and seemed to combine the friendly aspects of more mainstream lifestyle and advice content with tactile and sensory elements.

Pinterest: An image-based social media platform modelled on a pinboard. Users can engage with current interests, find ideas for recipes or outfits, for example, and 'pin' these to their digital boards. Users must be 13 or over.

Point of view (POV): This is a format of video where the camera is positioned so that the content creator appears to be speaking directly to you as the viewer. As mentioned in the report, this viewpoint is often used online to mimic a conversation, interaction, or roleplay between the creator and the viewer.

Pokémon: Pokémon is a game and media franchise relating to creatures or 'Pocket Monsters' which accompany the characters or in-game players in battles and adventures.

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

Rec Room: A virtual reality multiplayer game where users can create rooms (online spaces), for different experiences. One room might be for a debate while another could be a virtual game of tag. Users can enter rooms and interact with other users within that space. There are no age restrictions on Rec Room, but users registered under 13 will automatically have a junior account.

Recommender Systems: Systems used by platforms to rank and curate content that users see on their feeds. These are often based on several criteria, which can include demographics, preferences, and past behaviours.

Roblox: Roblox is an online gaming platform that allows users to access and play millions of games. Roblox includes a vast array of different genres in their games, and both single and multiplayer games.

Rocket League: A video game combining football and cars, where players use rocket-powered vehicles to score goals against their opponents. This can be played both online with other people, or offline in a solo play mode.

Screen recording: Screen recording is a feature which allows the user to record real-time what they are viewing on their device, typically a phone, tablet, or console.

Screen-time: Screen-time is a smartphone function which provides a breakdown of how much time a child has spent on different apps on their device that day.

Snapchat: A messaging platform where users can send photos, videos, messages, post stories, to other individuals and group chats.

Spit painting: A type of ASMR video where the content creator uses spit on their fingers in a POV (point of view) perspective, using their fingers to wipe spit on the screen to simulate painting your face with it.

Spotlight: A reel-style feature on Snapchat that showcases popular short-form videos from users who have posted content onto the 'spotlight story'.

Split-screen: A single post or piece of content which displays two different (often unrelated) videos, playing simultaneously, either side by side or one on top of the other. Some social media platforms provide templates for 'split-screen' content to be produced.

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

Stumble Guys: Stumble Guys is a multiplayer knockout game with up to 32 players online. Players control jellybean-like characters navigating obstacle courses to be the last one standing.

Thumbnail: A thumbnail is the cover photo of a video that appears in search and on a channel on social media platforms, such as YouTube, before clicking through to watch the video.

TikTok: TikTok is a video-sharing social networking platform which is used to watch algorithmically generated short-form content (lasting between 15 seconds and 10 minutes) in a feed, and create short-form videos. Users must be 13 or over to use the platform and 18 or over to stream on TikTok Live.

TikTok Shop: This is a shop in the TikTok app, where users can shop directly within the app, and content creators can showcase products.

Tommy Clancy's Rainbow Six Siege: This is an online first-person shooter game with a variety of solo, cooperative, and competitive game modes, where players assume control of an attacking or defending player in different situations such as defusing bombs, rescuing hostages, and completing objectives.

Triple-split screen: A video showing three separate videos within it, all playing at the same time.

Wizz: A social media platform that allows users to chat live online with other users from around the world. It features a swiping system that allows users to choose who they want to chat to. Users must be 13 or over.

Xbox: A line of consoles manufactured by global manufacturing giants, Microsoft. The Xbox is primarily a gaming console but can also be used to stream TV programmes and access social media.

YouTuber: A YouTuber is a person who 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.

YouTube Shorts: The short-form section of YouTube, hosting reels of short-form content up to 60 seconds. There are no age restrictions on YouTube Shorts.

Annex 4: Image references

Foreword

Figure A: A graphic illustrating Niamh's screentime. Developed by Revealing Reality, this graphic (and those for other children in the report) illustrate the children's estimated media and device usage. These are based on a combination of what they told the researchers and screenshots of their screentime sent through in the diary task phase.

Screentime data was not available for some of the children, as there were some participants who did not have phones (and so it was not possible to measure screentime in the same way), and a couple of participants did not send through their screentime consistently during the diary task phase.

The graphic shows an estimate of non-screen time, split between waking and sleeping, with an assumed eight hours allocated to sleeping (although the amount the children slept each night on average varied widely and this is won't be accurate in many cases).

Figure B: MrBeast, "I Gave People \$1,000,000 But ONLY 1 Minute To Spend It!", 204M views (YouTube, 2020)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeYsRMZFUq0>

Figure C: Oceans ASMR, YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/@OceansASMR>

Figure D: A screenshot of the top results for 'ADHD' on TikTok. The content is from the following accounts (left to right, top to bottom): healthwithnyrah, katelynblairesmit, megmoxie, cherry.adhd, tarah.and.barry, megmoxie, mindovermatterwithemma.#

Main body

Figure 1: Reposted by one of the children, Taylor (TikTok, 2023)

Figure 2: Joely Bonner, "!!! for them from us !![#watermelon](#) [#filterforgood](#) [#fyp](#) [#foryou](#)", 977.6Kviews (TikTok, 2023).

<https://www.tiktok.com/@joelybonner/video/7301370670741605664?lang=en&q=joely%20bonner%20t%20filter%20for%20good&t=1710523262911>.

Figure 3a: Jourdan Johnson, "Replying to @^o love // WE DID IT !!!

We have reached the maximum reward and have generated \$14k for humanitarian aid[...]

[#effecthouse](#) [#watermelon](#) [#watermelonfilter](#) [#blackgirlsintech](#) [#augmentedreality](#) [#socialchange](#) [#filterforgood](#)", 2.7M views (TikTok, 2023).

https://www.tiktok.com/@xojourdanlouise/video/7302107535165672735?_r=1&_t=8IGWYQ0kuOW

Figure 3b

Jourdan Johnson, "how I made the FILTER FOR GOOD I !! about 6 hours crammed into 1 minute [#filterforgood](#) [...] [#effecthouse](#) [#watermelon](#) [#watermelonfilter](#) [#blackgirlsintech](#) [#blackcreatives](#) [#augmentedreality](#) [#socialchange](#) [#filterforgood](#)", 250.2K views (TikTok, 2023)

https://www.tiktok.com/@xojourdanlouise/video/7304014330884934943?_r=1&_t=8IGx6UjAMCX

Figure 3c: Monica Aksamit, "can someone do it and teach me how to win? [#filterforgood](#) [#forgoodfilter](#) [#watermelon](#)", 2.1M views (TikTok, 2023)

https://www.tiktok.com/@monicaaksamit/video/7300237072529378603?_r=1&_t=8IGx5I45bf7

Figure 3d: Lailoolz, "@Jourdan [#filterforgood](#) [#freepalestine](#) [#foryou](#)", 16.2M views (TikTok, 2023)

Figure 4: Adrian Markovac, ““Students don’t spend enough time in the classroom” – Rishi Sunak #rishisunak #educationsystem #ukschool #alevelsscraped”, 3.3M views (TikTok 2023)

<https://www.tiktok.com/@inthewvlogs/video/7287619343226113312>

Figure 5: Mohammed Hijab, “Responding To Ben Shapiro On Israel”, 722K views (YouTube 2023)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBHFN4TCVW8>

Figure 6: Ali Dawah, “STARBUCKS HUNTING FOR MUSLIMS”, 37K views (YouTube 2024)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZckLkwNtrDE>

Figure 7: One of the children, Bobby, saw this Facebook post on the internet and talked about it in his second interview. The following photo is from: <https://archive.ph/WqVsa>

Figure 8: Madison Sarah, “weekly diaries | staying at the ritz, my boohoo collection + lots of fun evenings”, 77K views (YouTube 2024).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8JEEwSCXS84>

Figure 9: Kylie Jenner, “DRUNK GET READY WITH ME: KYLIE AND KENDALL”, 29M views (YouTube 2022)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEfPr4kDUak&t=3s>

Figure 10a: Tarah and Barry, Linktree page signposting their YouTube, their membership-based community and products they are selling.

<https://linktr.ee/tarahelizabeth>

Figure 10b: Tarah and Barry, “She goes from 0 – 100 in 0.5 seconds flat #adhdinwomen #adhd #funnycouple #couplecomedy #adhdzoomies”, 7.3M views (TikTok 2023)

<https://www.tiktok.com/@tarah.and.barry/video/7249318833897393410>

Figure 10c: Tarah and Barry, “EVERY. SINGLE. TIME. I normally cook for her and set the table but we cooked together so she was already onto getting her own bowl #adhdinwomen #adhdgirlfriend #adhdproblems #funnycouple #couplecomedy”, 37.6M views (TikTok 2023)

<https://www.tiktok.com/@tarah.and.barry/video/7231141360399551770>

Figure 11a: Frankie, “You Must do These 4 Things to Grow TALLER Faster”, 7.9M views (TikTok 2023)

<https://www.tiktok.com/@toomuchfrankie/video/7267212604005747973>

Figure 11b: Frankie, “If Your Height Growth Is Stunted Do THIS TODAY”, 73.7K views (TikTok 2023)

<https://www.tiktok.com/@toomuchfrankie/video/7280206351735721222>

Figure 11c: Frankie, “How To Grow Taller With No Genetics Supplements”, 137.1K views (TikTok 2023)

<https://www.tiktok.com/@toomuchfrankie/video/7281389155433630982>

Figure 12: A screenshot of the top results for ‘ADHD’ on TikTok. The content is from the following accounts (left to right, top to bottom): healthwithnyrah, katelynblairesmit, megmoxie, cherry.adhd, tarah.and.barry, megmoxie, mindovermatterwithemma.

Figure 13: ITSALLRELATIVE, “Chandler’s funniest moments Part 1 #tvseriesfriends #TVShowFriends #fyp #matthewperry #friendstvofficial #chandlerbing #funnyclips #friendstvshowclips”, 427K views (TikTok 2023)

<https://www.tiktok.com/@friendsfanatic444/video/7227698505131904283>

Figure 14: MrBeast, “I Gave People \$1,000,000 But ONLY 1 Minute To Spend It!”, 204M views (YouTube, 2020)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeYsRMZFUq0>

Figure 15: IShowSpeed, “Football challenges GOAT edition”, 2.2M views (YouTube, 2023)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RESzustAH0c&t=19s>

Figure 16: The Royalty Family, “I Tested 100 BANNED Amazon Products!”, 10M views (YouTube, 2023)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UY6tOlv5ipg&t=1s>

Figure 17: Ben Azelart, "I Bought 100 Banned Amazon Products!", 16M views (YouTube, 2023)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8MMjigoXoA>

Figure 18: The Royalty Family, "Saying GOODBYE To The MISSING PUPPY! **FOREVER** | The Royalty Family", 9.7M views (YouTube 2020)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqrCbXhiGg4>

Figure 19: MrBeast, "Surviving 24 Hours On A Deserted Island", 190M views (YouTube 2020)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBYC4_Lccjw

Figure 20: The Royalty Family, YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/@royaltyfam>

Figure 21: Tommy G, "On the Border with Human Smugglers and Illegal Immigrants", 1.5M views (YouTube, 2024)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQJN0GEsW8U>

Figure 22: Arab, "I Met the Most Wanted Kingpin in the Middle East", 1.6M views (YouTube, 2024)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Chzla7KCaYM>

Figure 23: ASMR slime storytime, "Text To Speech ASMR Satisfying Eating || Briana Mizura|| POVs Tiktok Compilations 2023 #101", 637K views (YouTube, 2023)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbQ_KsJrGLU&t=163s

Figure 24: Joker pranks, "Wait for the end #funny #ytshorts #shortvideo", 46M views, (YouTube Shorts, 2023)

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/PnpeGhTzS2s>

Figure 25: SassySounds ASMR, "ASMR| X Marks The Spot HEAD TINGLES". 782K views. (YouTube, 2023)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjhRB32wa8g&t=3s>

Figure 26: Oceans ASMR, YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/@OceansASMR>

Figure 27: ASMR Jas, "ASMR Tingle Clinic – Complete Doctor Check up, Cranial Nerve Exam, Scalp Check, Medical Role Plays", 294K views (YouTube, 2023)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hh2Ca_SkBq4

Figure 28: ASMRandsleep, "ASMR | SPIT PAINTING (asmr with dena) #asmr #sleep", 1.7M views (TikTok, 2023)

<https://www.tiktok.com/@asmrandsleep/video/7299949234328030496>