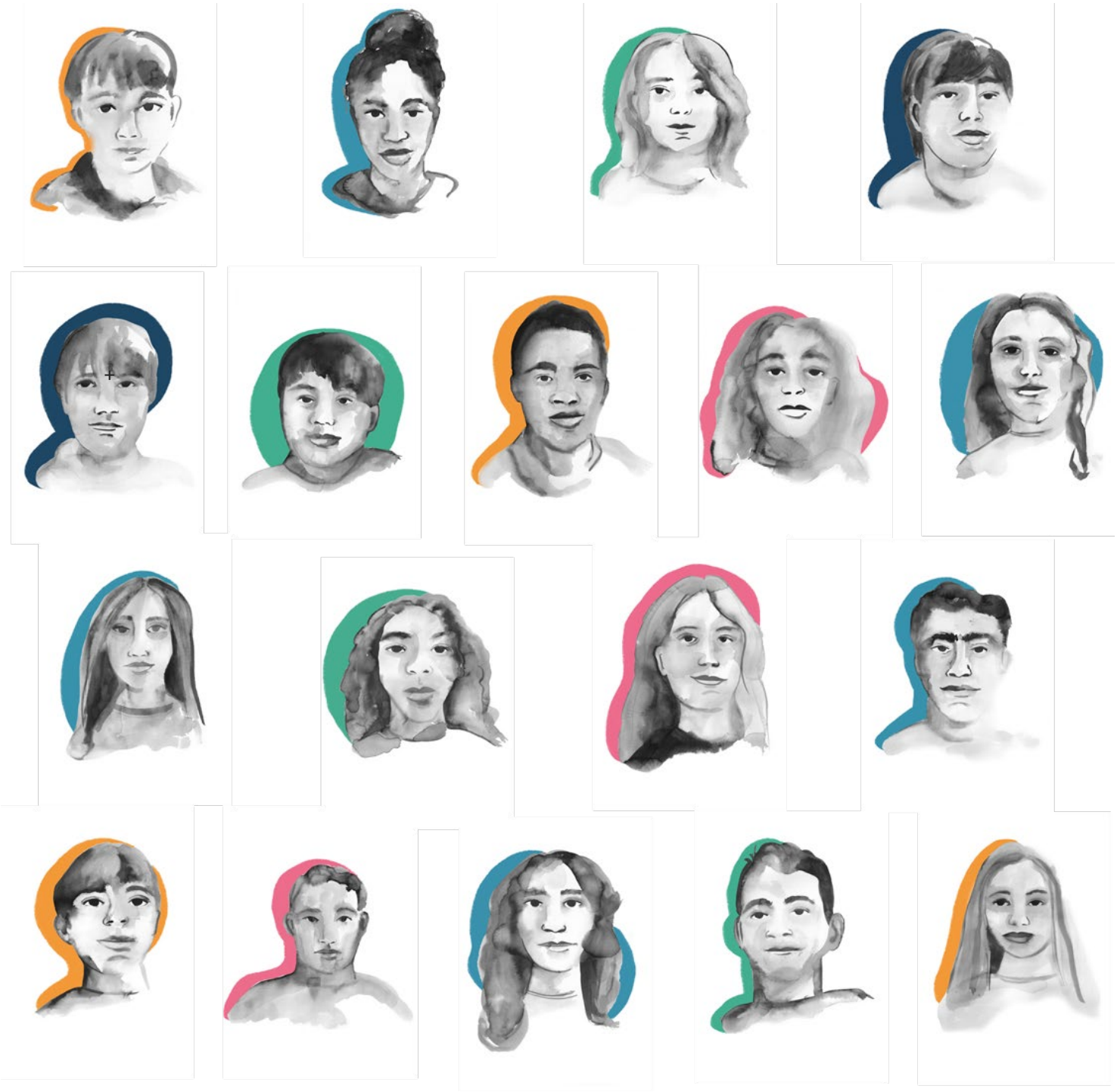

Children's Media Lives 2020/21

A report for Ofcom

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Introduction

One year of lockdowns and a global pandemic has resulted in everyone spending a lot more time at home and on their devices. This impact has been felt by all - and particularly by children who have now had several months of at-home learning. In this context, media activities have become an even more important part of children's lives; allowing them to connect with peers, explore their interests, learn about the world and stay entertained from the confines of their homes.

This is the seventh wave of the Children's Media Lives study. This longitudinal study of children's digital media use started in 2014. Since then, each year we've tracked the online behaviours and experiences of 18 children aged between eight and 18. Interviewing these children annually has allowed us to gain insight into how different factors affect children's media use, including age, family, social life and society as a whole.

Methodology

This wave was completed in February of 2021, during the UK's third national Covid-19 lockdown. The work followed on from *Life in Lockdown*[1], completed in the summer of 2020, which was a Covid-19-specific wave of the study that aimed to get an insight into the media lives of children during the initial period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Apart from this deep-dive report, the project has run once each year between 2014 and 2019.

Due to the travel and distancing restrictions in place during the Covid-19 pandemic, all the interviews for wave 7 were, like those for *Life in Lockdown*, conducted remotely via a video-calling platform.

We used new research methods this year to understand the children's experience of using media during a pandemic. These new techniques provided us with more insight into their online lives than ever before.

This phase included the following:

An initial interview with each child and their parent.

A media diary: Following their first interview, children kept a detailed diary over a two-week period, including a description of what they did each day. They also submitted six **screen-recorded** videos showing how they used their devices and giving tours around their favourite social media apps and influencers.

Social media tracking: In addition to the material that the children recorded for us, we were able to follow them on social media over the same period; this allowed us to see how they acted online.

Follow-up interviews: During the follow-up interviews, researchers were able to explore what the participants had uploaded and shared on their social media profiles, and cover specific topics of interest raised during the first interview.

Revealing Reality has a strict ethics and safeguarding policy[2] in place to ensure, as much as possible, that taking part in research is a positive experience for children and that they are not placed under any undue risk, stress

[1] Life in Lockdown

[2] See Annex 5 to review Revealing Reality's Ethics and Safeguarding Policy

or discomfort during the project. This policy is reviewed regularly to ensure that it is in line with all industry standards, including the Market Research Society and the Government Social Research Service.

Warning: this report contains some words and imagery which may cause offence.

Summary of key findings

Most children lacked routine and structure, and as a result were spending long periods of time online

- Children experienced a lack of structure and routine:
    - access to technology and different home circumstances meant that it was harder for some children than for others to engage with schoolwork.

- Many participants were spending long periods of time online:
    - smartphones and gaming consoles were the most popular devices;
    - TikTok continued to be a dominant social media platform;
    - for most of the boys, gaming was their primary activity;
    - many children in the study were 'binge-watching' shows; and
    - multi-screening was part of everyday life.

Social circles were shrinking, and online friendships were more normalised than in previous waves

- A lot of the children were talking to fewer people, and doing so less often:
    - maintaining friendships during the pandemic was seen to be harder;
    - some children's social lives were limited by the platforms they used; and
    - it was more common to have 'online-only friends'.

Some children in the study were watching content online in continuous 'binges'

- All the children remained disengaged from live television, watching on-demand content instead:
    - most children binge-watched shows;
    - some re-visited shows they had already watched; and
    - for some children, anime had become more popular than in previous waves.
- Several children sought content from people they felt they could relate to, even if their lifestyles or appearance differed from their own.

For most of the children, *'how you look'* was central to creating their online identity

- Almost all of the children in the study reported that that there was pressure to look good online.
- A majority of the children, across all ages, used filters and editing apps to alter their appearance:
    - for some of the teenage girls, there was an expectation that female friends would share positive affirmation underneath each other's photos.
- Copycatting content remained common across multiple social media platforms.
- Both boys and girls in the study were following and seeing content that focused on fitness and body sculpting:
    - the interest in body-conscious exercise seen among the teenage girls in *Life in Lockdown* was also evident among boys in this more recent wave.

Across the sample, children of all ages were continuing to seek opportunities for self-promotion online and were increasingly aware that this could be monetised

- #Makemefamous: online attention remained a precious commodity.
- Several children were using new strategies to promote their posts without necessarily understanding how these worked.
- A number of children thought that broadcasting their social drama online would gain them attention.
- Some understood that online attention could make them money.
- Some children were streaming[3] to capture online attention - and potentially money.
- A few children were connecting with streamers 'to feel part of the action'.

Children remained disengaged from major news sources, and most were passively consuming news via social media

- After a brief surge in interest at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, nearly all the participants had reverted to being disengaged with major news sources, as seen in summer 2019.
- Most news was passively consumed through social media – although some children had begun to share content themselves.
- Most children in the study did not tend to think about whether the news they saw online was accurate and had limited methods for assessing this, beyond a few 'rules of thumb'.

Many children felt that living life online was a poor substitute for offline activities, and reported lower wellbeing during lockdown than previously

- Despite spending time socialising and being entertained online, many children felt lonely or pessimistic about their situation.

[3] Streaming refers to the sharing of live video content with a public audience. See page 60 of this report for more detailed definition.

About this study

The Children's Media Lives study was set up in 2014 to provide a small-scale, rich and detailed qualitative complement to Ofcom's quantitative surveys of media literacy.

Ofcom has a statutory duty under The Communications Act 2003 to promote and to carry out research in media literacy across the UK. Ofcom's definition of media literacy is: "the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts".

The report forms part of our wider programme of work, Making Sense of Media, which aims to help improve the online skills, knowledge and understanding of UK adults and children. We do this through cutting-edge research, and by bringing together organisations and individuals with expertise in media literacy, to share ideas and to support their activities.

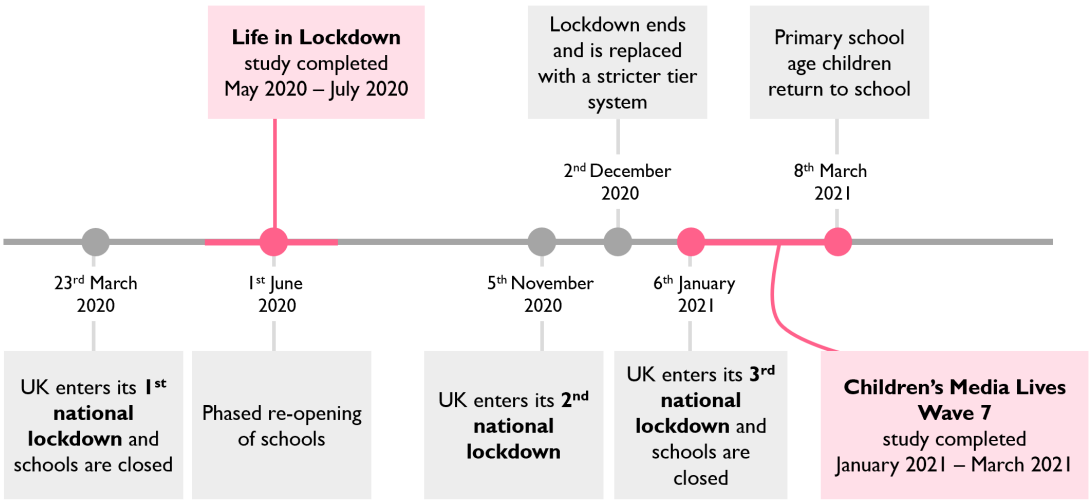
To find out more about our Making Sense of Media programme and for details on how to join our network, please go to https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research.

The Children's Media Lives project follows, as far as possible, the same 18 children, aged eight to 18, conducting filmed interviews each year to learn about their media habits and attitudes. It provides evidence about the motivations and the context for media use, and how media is a part of daily life and domestic circumstances. The project also provides rich details of how children's media habits and attitudes change over time, particularly in the context of their emotional and cognitive development.

This document provides analysis of the findings from the seventh wave of the study, and any changes or nuances we have seen since *Life in Lockdown*.

Setting the context for this year

This study took place during the UK's third national lockdown between January 2021 and March 2021. This followed a Covid-19-specific wave of the project *Life in Lockdown*, carried out between May 2020 and July 2020.



Innovating with research methods that go beyond self-reported behaviour

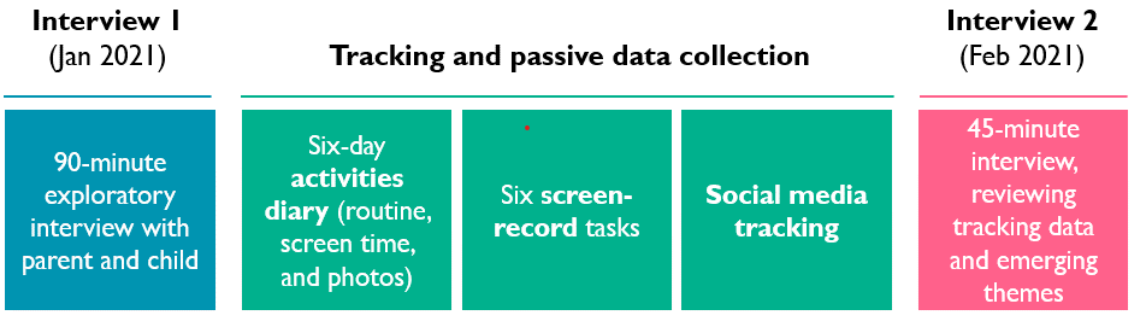
As in previous waves of Children's Media Lives, our research relies on going beyond what children *say* they do, to reveal what they actually do. In the context of research with children, collecting reliable data on online behaviour is a challenge. This is particularly true when research is not face-to-face, as was the case during this wave of the project.

A multi-strand method

In previous waves, we conducted one face-to-face in-home interview (including collection of screen recordings, film footage, photography and 360-degree filming) with each child, followed by social media tracking for a short period of time (typically about two weeks).

For this wave, the constraints of lockdown meant that face-to-face methods were not possible. To mitigate against losing too much data, we introduced a new three-part methodology, allowing researchers to capture more detail about children's online behaviours, and to gain insight into how the participants perceive and explain these behaviours by presenting data back to them for reflection. These included:

- **An initial 90-minute** interview with children and their parents, followed by:
- **two weeks of 'tracking activities'**: including a six-day written media diary, screen-time data collection (showing daily app use), six screen recording activities and social media tracking; and
- **a second, 45-minute interview** with the children, exploring specific behaviours seen in the tracking phase and encouraging participants to reflect explicitly on what they had shared.



1. Initial exploratory interview:

The initial exploratory interview[4] explored the full range of media behaviours that children were engaged in, and included a brief interview to gather parents' perspectives on their children's media lives.

2. Tracking and passive data collection

We collected a lot more passive data than in previous waves. Children were asked to complete a **six-day media diary,** detailing where media activities fitted into their wider routine. First, they were asked to share a written diary of their various activities each day, along with photos of what they had got up to. They were also asked to share daily 'screen-time' data from their smartphones, to allow researchers to build an accurate picture of exactly what they were doing on their phones.

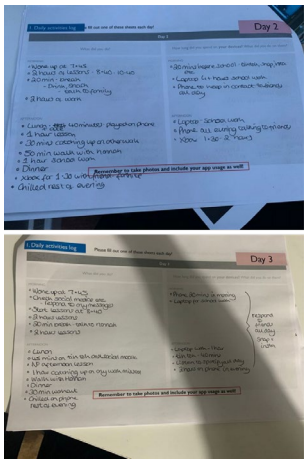
Children with smartphones were also asked to complete six **screen recording tasks**. Screen recording refers to real-time recording of what children are seeing as they use their phones. This is a good way to go beyond self-reported data, to uncover what content children *actually see* online, as well as how they *use* features on social media platforms. Children were asked to complete relevant tasks from the following options:

- Scrolling on their favourite social media platforms;
- demonstrating how they might prepare, edit or caption a social media post;
- showing their favourite social media accounts and explaining what they like about them;
- demonstrating how they 'learn about the world'; or
- sharing their *YouTube* history over the previous week.

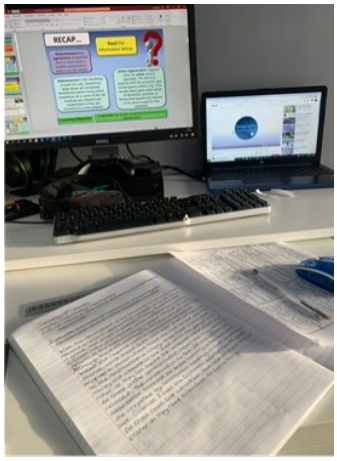
In addition, we conducted **social media tracking** – friending or following the children on social media (with their permission) using bespoke accounts set up by researchers. For those participants who agreed to this, we gained valuable insight into what, when and how often they were posting, as well as into how they interacted with others in semi-public spaces online. Tracking of this nature allows us to look back and review how posting behaviours have changed over time, revealing valuable insights into how children in our study are controlling their online presence and self-image.

[4] See Annex 1 to review discussion materials

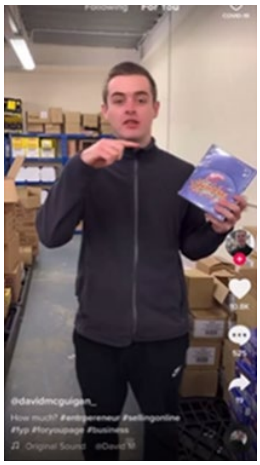
Example of the passive data assets collected for Peter, 15



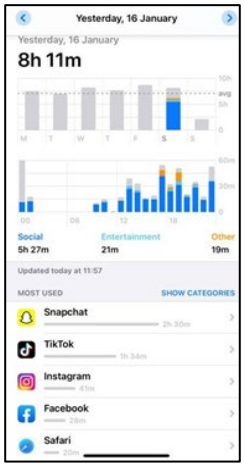
A daily activity diary



A photo shared as part of the diary



Screen record footage from SM



Daily screentime record

3. Follow-up interview:

In the final interview, participants were encouraged to reflect on data gathered during the tracking phase of the fieldwork. Researchers used screen sharing to prompt them with key bits of content seen in their social media tracking and screen record tasks, or with elements of their routine seen in their screen-time data and written diary.

By showing children their actual behaviour, researchers could learn what children understand about the content they see online, and explore their critical thinking on specific features, trends or topic areas. The second interviews also allowed researchers to further explore any new questions that emerged over the course of the research.

Meet the respondents

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

- Age (spread across 8 to 18)
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Representation of children with special educational needs (SEN)
- Location, including urban and rural areas, and all four nations
- Family set-up, including a mixture of different sibling and parental relationships
- Access to devices (including smartphones, mobile phones, tablets, smart TVs, games consoles)
- Usage levels
- Parental approaches to managing media use
- Parental confidence with digital media

As children age out of the sample, new children are brought into the study, often at the younger end of the spectrum, to keep the age-spread balanced. Despite our best efforts to keep the sample consistent, some children may also drop out of the research due to personal circumstances. Each year we replace anyone who has chosen to leave the study with a child representing similar demographic factors and behaviours.

This year's sample included:

Freddie, 9 – Stockport

Freddie splits his time between his mum's house (where he lives with his older sister and younger brother) and his dad's. Freddie is very into football – before lockdown he had begun playing in the older age group (under-11s) and had also received interest from professional clubs. During the third lockdown, Freddie was doing very little schoolwork, and his mum described having her hands full looking after his younger brother (who has behavioural difficulties). Freddie spends the majority of his day playing on his Xbox, and particularly enjoys playing Rocket League (a car-based football game). He also enjoys spending time on Netflix and YouTube, and recently got his first smartphone, which he uses to speak to his family on WhatsApp and Snapchat.

Arjun, 9 – Birmingham

Arjun lives in Birmingham with his Mum and Dad. During the third lockdown, he had been attending face-to-face schooling as both of his parents are key workers. Arjun works very hard at school and is particularly proud of being at the top of his maths class. He is currently being privately tutored and hopes to go to a local grammar school. Arjun's parents make sure that he has a strong sense of routine despite the lockdown; for example, restricting his access to TV and his Nintendo Switch during the week. Arjun loves watching TV, and particularly anything to do with kids in an action setting. Arjun does not have a smartphone, but shares his parents' iPad, which he uses to play games and watch YouTube.

Suzy, 10 – Glasgow

Suzy lives with her mum and dog in Glasgow. She has been finding home schooling very boring and normally finishes her schoolwork for the day in one hour. Suzy then spends the rest of her time playing in person with her friend from a couple of doors down the road, with her dog, on social media and watching Netflix. She posts regular TikTok videos, often copying dance trends or make-up videos.

Zak, 11 – South Yorkshire

Zak is currently living with his mum and dad in South Yorkshire. As his mum works at the same school that he attends, Zak has been going into school three days a week, a fact that he is very happy about as it means that he can see his friends in person. He has recently been bought a new Xbox and has been using this to communicate with his friends when he is not at school. He is still making videos on YouTube and TikTok, and has recently made a separate TikTok account where he posts videos about his nan's dog.

Emma, 12 – rural Northern Ireland

Emma lives with her mum, stepdad and older sister in rural Northern Ireland while her older brother is at university. As in previous years, Emma's main focus is horse riding, and she hopes to become a professional show jumper. She has been enjoying the most recent lockdown as it has enabled her to spend most of her time at her grandparents' farm with her new horse 'Missy'. Emma doesn't use her phone very often, except to send a couple of snaps on Snapchat to her friends or post TikTok videos of her horse.

Ben, 13 – London

Ben's parents have separated, and he and his older brother and sister are dividing their time between their parents' houses. He has been struggling to engage with online learning and often finds himself falling asleep during lessons. His free time is mainly taken up by playing games on his Xbox and watching TikTok videos on his phone. He used to post on TikTok, but during the recent lockdown has lost the motivation to post on the platform and has deleted his public account.

Bryony, 13 – Wales

Bryony is an only child, living on a farm in Wales with her mum, grandparents, and four horses, which she looks after and rides every day. She has ambitions to compete internationally with the Welsh squad in dressage competitions. She is trying to build an online presence using Facebook, as she has heard this might get her sponsorship from a relevant brand.

Nathan, 14 – London (new to this wave)

Nathan lives in London with his mum and two younger sisters. When not in lockdown, he enjoys going out on his bike with his friends and hanging out in parks. Nathan's mum is quite strict with his screen time – she will often remove his phone before he goes to bed and doesn't let him use his Xbox until the weekend. Nathan considers himself a big gamer and during weekends will often play *Call of Duty* with his friends for a whole day. He also enjoys using Twitch and is a fan of anime. He likes to share memes, or clips of his *Call of Duty* gameplay, on social media.

Peter, 15 – West Midlands

Peter lives with his mum, dad and younger sister in the West Midlands. Although he has always been interested in sport, since wave 6 Peter has become much keener on personal fitness. During the third national lockdown, Peter was doing home workouts three times a week and was also more interested in the fitness content he saw on social media. Despite Peter's school having a rigorous approach to remote learning, Peter was often on social media throughout his school day – speaking to his friends on Snapchat and scrolling through TikTok. Peter also uses his Xbox to spend time with his friends. He has also become interested in more 'challenging' games like Football Manager 2021.

Isaac, 15 – West Midlands (new to this wave)

Isaac lives with his mum and two brothers in a town in the West Midlands. He is the middle sibling and joked that being in the middle means "you always get told off even when it is not your fault." Before the pandemic he enjoyed playing cricket and hanging out in the park with his friends. He is currently sharing a PS4 with his brother and they alternate the days they on which they are allowed to play on the console. On the days when he is not able to play on the PS4 he spends his time mainly watching Netflix, YouTube or TikTok.

Shriya, 16 – Birmingham

Shriya lives in Birmingham with her parents and two younger brothers. In September she moved to a new college and has been working hard maintain her grades. Previously, Shriya was reluctant to post on social media, but this had recently changed; she now posts photos on Instagram. Shriya explained that she likes to use Instagram and Pinterest to get inspiration for outfits as well as for poses and photos.

Shaniqua, 16 – London

Shaniqua moved this year from a small flat in London to a larger house. This means that she and her three younger brothers (who all used to share a room) now have more space, including a garden. This year Shaniqua started working part-time in a local supermarket, which she balances with studying art, media and social work in college. She has a boyfriend, and the two have now been together for nearly a year.

Josie, 16 – West Midlands

Josie is an only child who lives with her mum in the West Midlands. She had a difficult year this year, struggling with her mental health after breaking up with her boyfriend. However, after receiving counselling and increased support from her family, she was doing better at the time of the interview. A keen gamer, she plays regularly with friends online. She chose to leave her school in order to attend college, where she is currently studying catering. However, she has recently started to rethink this decision and thinks she might try to apply for a course in games design at university.

Alice, 16 – Small town near London

Alice has recently moved into a new house with her mum, new stepdad and brother, who has moved back home after graduating from university. She has started to think she is 'not very academic' and has applied for a course in baking at a college next year, rather than pursuing A levels. She loves sports, and her mum started paying for a personal trainer during the pandemic so Alice could keep up with her exercising in a local park.

Jack, 16 – the West Country

Jack and his mum have recently moved into a new house in a village in the West Country. He is currently studying mechanics at a local college where he had been learning how to build an engine and change the oil in a car. He is enjoying his time at college but has not been participating in any of the college's online learning. As a result, he has been spending most of his days gaming and on his phone.

William, 17 – Staffordshire

William lives with his parents and younger sisters in Staffordshire. William dropped out of school just before wave 6 and is currently on furlough from his pub job. Without school or work, William has very little structure to his day and will often stay up through the night and get up late in the afternoon. William has always enjoyed gaming and particularly the game *Destiny* but has recently begun to earn money for helping other players progress through the game. He has also begun streaming on Twitch. During lockdown William struggled to maintain some of his friendships and has become closer to people he's met purely online (on Discord and Yubo).

Freya, 17 – Norwich (new to this wave)

Freya lives with her mum and older sister in an apartment in Norwich. She is studying for her A levels and spends most of the day at home alone as her mother and sister both work in healthcare. Freya enjoys spending time watching Netflix on her phone. She has a series or a film playing on her TV throughout the day, including when she is doing schoolwork, as she finds the background noise comforting. While Freya does have social media, she doesn't like using it very much and is aware that she often compares herself to the celebrities and influencers she follows on Instagram.

Sarah, 17 – Manchester

Sarah lives with her parents in Manchester. She has finished her hairdressing course at college and now has a job at a salon. Due to the lockdowns, she hasn't been at work consistently this year and has been finding the third lockdown hard. She explained that the first lockdown in the spring and summer of 2020 was better as she could go out and do things because the weather was better. Sarah spends a lot of time on her phone every day and posts regularly on Instagram and TikTok.

How were young people experiencing the UK's third lockdown?

Most children were lacking routine and structure and as a result were spending lengthy periods of time online

Summary:

- A day in the life…
- Most children experienced a lack of structure and routine
- Many participants were spending lengthy periods of time online

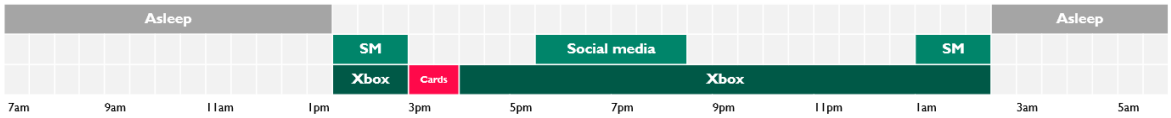
A day in the life…

Jack, 16

Since *Life in Lockdown* (the Covid-19-specific wave of the study that took place during the first national lockdown in the UK in spring and summer 2020), Jack had begun studying to become a mechanic at college. However, during the third lockdown he had not been engaging at all with his online classes, deciding not to join these via Microsoft Teams, despite being required to.

As a result, his typical weekday lacked the structure he might have had at college. He regularly got up at 1pm or 2pm and went to bed at 2am. Instead of college work, he filled his time playing Xbox – mainly FIFA - and scrolling through social media on his phone.

Weekday



Despite enjoying these activities and using gaming as an opportunity to speak to his friends, Jack saw these activities as a way to simply 'fill time' and repeatedly used the word 'addictive' to describe his behaviours on these platforms.

"You just keep scrolling [on *TikTok*]*… There is nothing I specifically like; I just scroll through it and it gets addictive."*

Jack, 16

"He has gotten himself into a funny nocturnal patten because he can't stop, and it was getting to the stage where I'm not sleeping because he would be on his headphones speaking to all his friends until four in the morning."

Jack's mum

Jack also watched content on Netflix in continuous binges. He had recently been watching *Ackley Bridge* (a school drama set in a Yorkshire Mill town that was originally broadcast on Channel 4).

"I'm not sure what I like about it, it is just one of those things that is addictive. You just watch episode after episode."

Jack, 16

Jack's mum described finding it difficult to motivate Jack to do any offline activities, having to "*blackmail him with food and money*". Jack's only regular offline activity was playing cards with his nan once a day in the afternoon.

Alice, 16

While in lockdown, Alice's school kept up a full timetable of lessons, which she dialled into from her laptop. Each morning, she struggled to wake up, so would join lessons from her bed. After the morning break, she would move to her desk for the rest of her studies.

During the school day, she messaged her friends on Snapchat. She has two large groups of female friends and often sends big group messages out at the start of the day. She also keeps in touch with her peers throughout lessons via her phone.

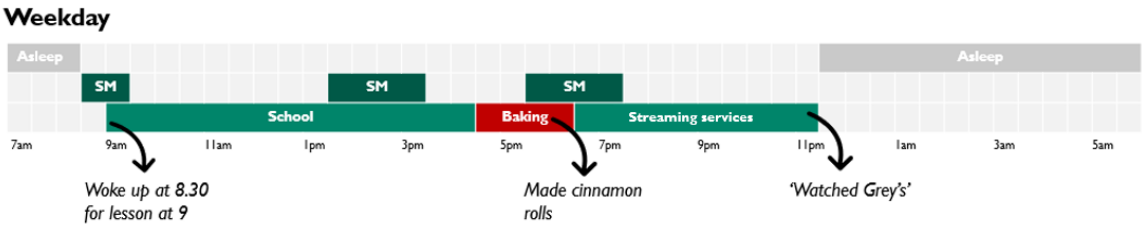
After school, Alice either bakes or exercises before watching Netflix. She has applied to study baking at college next year rather than staying on at school. She does a lot of baking in her spare time and is trying to learn new culinary skills and take photos of things she has made.

At the time of fieldwork, she was predominantly watching *Grey's Anatomy*. She said it was the second time she was watching all 17 seasons of the show, and that many of her friends were also re-watching it. She often 'binge-watched' the show for hours at a time.

"I'm so hooked. I've watched the whole 17 seasons, so I'm re-watching it."

Alice, 16

She has struggled with insomnia for a long time and often watches content until she falls asleep. However, staying up late means she finds it difficult to get up in the mornings. At weekends, she occasionally visited her dad, or had a walk with friends, but sometimes also spent all day in bed watching *'Grey's'*.



Most children experienced a lack of structure and routine

The above examples were typical of the children in the study. As seen in *Life in Lockdown*, the lack of face-to-face activities, and home schooling becoming the norm, meant that even if they did have regular lessons, many children were left with a lot of unstructured time on their hands.

Some of the participants said that their remote learning had improved over time, as new routines and systems were put in place. For example, Alice said she felt her school had improved since the staff had had more time to practise online lessons and support their students:

"It's more organised than it was last lockdown… teachers know how to use [Microsoft] Teams now."

Alice, 16

However, even where schools were offering a consistent schedule of online lessons, many children struggled to stay engaged and maintain a regular routine. For Ben, it was sometimes a challenge to stay awake for lessons:

"It's not great to be honest. I'm waking up a bit late and I'm going to sleep later than I should. So, I'm a bit tired in the mornings especially for my first two lessons…I even fell asleep yesterday in my lessons. But it's not terrible, it's just not great."

Ben, 13

Access to technology and different home circumstances meant that it was harder for some children to engage with schoolwork than others

Some children's schooling was limited by their access to the internet or certain devices. For example, Nathan's laptop was quite old, so would sometimes die when he needed it for lessons. Similarly, Freddie's mum did not have a working printer so was unable to print worksheets that the school had set.

"It's kind of annoying because if your internet's not working properly sometimes you don't attend… It [the internet] *doesn't drop out, it's just the laptop is quite faulty… it overheats quickly."*

Nathan, 14

For some children, family circumstances made attending school difficult. Freddie, 9, lives with his mum and two brothers. Freddie's mum explained that, as a single mother, she was struggling to support his younger brother (who has some additional learning requirements) while also managing the needs of her other children. She recognised it was a tough time for her sons, and so had chosen not to put too much pressure on Freddie to engage in online learning. As a result, he often chose to play on his computer instead:

"It's quite difficult because I've got all three children at home… [Freddie's younger brother] has quite challenging behaviours so a lot of my time is spent with [him]… Freddie spends a lot of time on the computer [which] gets him away from his younger brother and gives him his peace."

Freddie's mum

Some of the older children, especially those out of full-time education or engaging in more self-directed learning at college or sixth form, had fewer scheduled activities to mark their days. For example, William, 17, had decided to leave school last year in order to work in a local pub. During this wave of the study, William had been furloughed from his job and had no routine to speak of. He was keeping irregular hours and reported that he had only left home once in the week before his interview and this was "to take the rubbish out":

"I kind of just wake up and go to sleep randomly at the moment."

William, 17

"It is like a big holiday."

Jack, 16

Not everyone was experiencing this lack of structure. Arjun, 9, was attending school as both of his parents were key workers, and he had quite a strict routine at home (including limits on his screen time).

Many participants were spending lengthy periods of time online

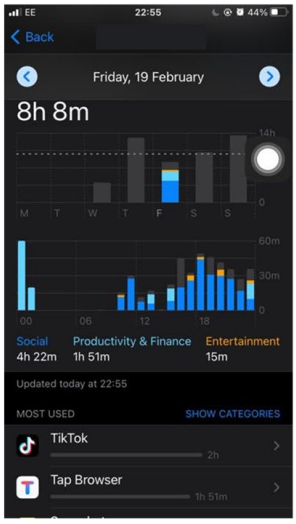
So, what were the participants doing with their time?

With large amounts of time to fill, the children in our study were spending a large portion of their waking hours on their devices. All of the activities that they might usually do – socialising, entertainment, learning and exploring the world – were now almost entirely done online.

During the tracking phase of the fieldwork, the children sent researchers screenshots of their daily screen time and app use, and also shared how long they had spent on other devices. Apart from some of the younger children – like Arjun, who didn't yet have a phone and Emma, 12, who spent the majority of her time with her

horse – the majority of the children reflected that their screen time had increased when compared to the pre-pandemic period.

The examples below illustrate the amount of time some children spent on their phones. William, 17, had the highest screen time average of the sample; he had spent an average of 15 hours a day on his phone during his media diary.



Nathan's screen time, 14

William's screen time, 17

Jack's screen time, 16

Sarah's screen time, 17

Most participants said that their screen time had increased, but generally felt there were few other options for filling their time:

"When you're at school you can't go on your phone or anything… [but now] I think [my screen time's] higher because it's lockdown – it's just what you do."

Peter, 15

"So I woke up, maybe laid in bed for half an hour or an hour just watching YouTube or checking Instagram and stuff like that… I'm on YouTube quite a lot recently just trying to fill in time. I go downstairs and see what everyone is doing, then go and play Xbox for a couple of hours, watch YouTube again."

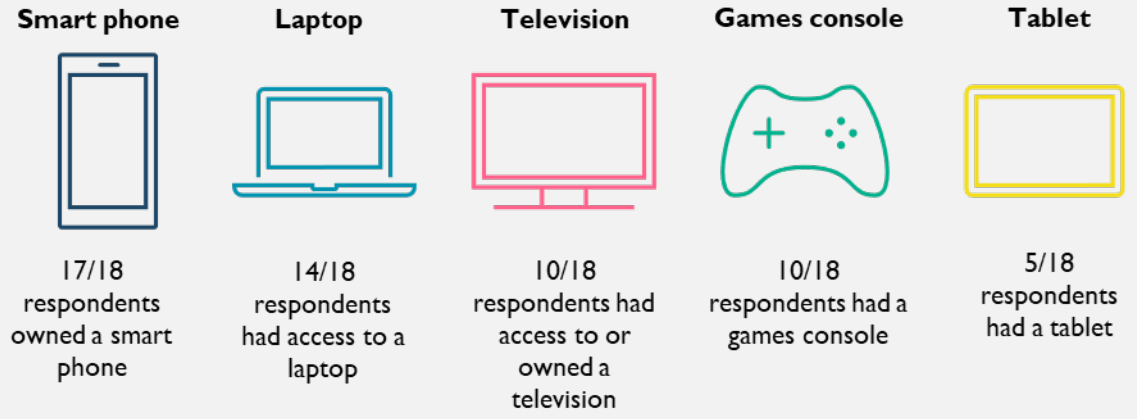
William, 17

Smartphones and gaming consoles were the most popular devices

Most children in our study, with a couple of exceptions (Arjun, 9, and Emma, 12), were spending the vast majority of their online time on their smartphones, continuing the trend seen in previous waves.

All the boys were also spending a lot of time on gaming consoles: Xboxes, PlayStations, PCs and, in one case, a Nintendo Switch.

The respondents' favourite devices:



TikTok continued to be a dominant social media platform

As was seen in *Life in Lockdown*, TikTok was the platform where the children spent most of their time. All except one were using Snapchat daily, and Instagram was also popular. Only four children were using Facebook (Bryony, 13; Sarah, 17; William,17; and Peter, 15), and this was often for very different purposes than other social networks. Facebook tended to be used either for commercial reasons – like Peter buying and selling items on Facebook Marketplace – or to interact with more distant connections (e.g. with work colleagues or extended family).

Some social media apps also seemed to be gaining popularity when compared to previous waves. Four children were now using Discord, compared to the last two waves when this was only mentioned by Josie,16. In this wave, Isaac, 15; William, 17; Nathan, 14 and Josie, 16, were all using the platform regularly. A further four were now using the streaming platform Twitch (William, 17; Nathan, 14; Isaac, 15 and Zak, 11. Nathan and Isaac are both new to this study, so we don't know when they started to use Twitch; we first observed William using it during wave 6 (February 2020) but he was the only participant doing so at the time.

What is Discord?

Launched in 2015, Discord[5] is a group chat-focused social media platform particularly popular with gamers. Discord allows users to interact on 'servers' – chat rooms that can range in size from two individuals to thousands-strong gaming communities. Servers, which often tend to focus on a particular topic (e.g. a specific game) can be private, invitation-only spaces for groups to stay in touch and spend time together, or can be open to anyone. Servers are free to create and free to join.[6]

Although still popular primarily with gamers, Discord now hosts communities focused on a huge range of topics, including music, films, and science and technology. In 2020, Discord reached 140 million monthly active users.[7]

[5] https://discord.com/

[6] https://www.businessinsider.com/what-is-discord?r=US&IR=T

[7] https://blog.discord.com/discord-welcomes-tomasz-marcinkowski-as-new-cfo-7781d049029

The most popular social media platforms this year:

Snapchat

17/18 respondents used Snapchat

Instagram

16/18 respondents used Instagram

TikTok

15/18 respondents used TikTok

Twitch

4/18 respondents used Twitch

Discord

4/18 respondents used Discord

Facebook

4/18 respondents used Facebook

Yubo

2/18 respondents used Yubo

Pinterest

2/18 respondents used Pinterest

Some reported that the content they saw across their various social media platforms looked and felt quite similar, and screen recordings showed that it was common to see content from one platform re-posted on another by users of both platforms:

"I feel like I use [Instagram] quite a lot like TikTok – just watching entertaining videos really. The videos are the same, some of them are copied from it."

Peter, 15

Across the sample, short-form ephemeral video content was also increasingly dominant. Children remained engaged with Instagram and Snapchat stories (shared content that can be either 15 seconds (Instagram) or 60 seconds (Snapchat) long and disappears after 24 hours). Given the popularity of TikTok, many children also spent hours consuming short snippets of content. TikTok videos last a maximum of 60 seconds, but are often much shorter, and many children described them as 'blurring together' during long sessions on the app.

"There's nothing I specifically like on there, I just keep scrolling, it's addictive."

Jack, 16

For most of the boys, gaming was their primary activity

As explained above, given the context of the pandemic and the suspension of many activities, the majority of the children had a lot of time on their hands. For most of the boys and one girl, Josie, this was predominantly spent gaming. In many cases, they were playing with other friends online, and this was an opportunity for them to catch up and keep up with their social lives.

Whenever possible during the week and especially at the weekends, Freddie, 9, (who, as explained above, was not engaging with home schooling) spent most of his day playing Xbox - taking breaks only for eating and sleeping.

Freddie mainly played the arcade-style football and driving game *Rocket League*, and said he was only really talking to his friends who played the same game. He had lost touch with his other school friends who didn't spend the same amount of time playing the game, partly because they didn't interact often, and partly because they weren't as good at the game and didn't take it as seriously as Freddie.

Nathan, 14, was also gaming a lot – although predominantly at the weekend, as his mum had strict rules for phone use and gaming during the week. Although he primarily played to spend time with his friends, his secondary goal on the first-person shooter, *Call of Duty* (his favourite game) was to get to a level where he could play against his favourite streamer, alwuhu (a *Call of Duty* Twitch streamer).

"Most of the day on the weekend is on the Xbox, because most of my friends are online at the weekend and we play together a lot… probably like ten hours."

Nathan, 14

Many children in the study were binge-watching series

Most participants reported binge-watching shows. In some cases, the children particularly sought out series they had seen in the past. As mentioned previously, Alice, 16, was re-watching all 17 seasons of the medical drama *Grey's Anatomy*, a show she liked because she felt the acting was 'really good.' Freya, 17, also binge-watched while studying for her A levels. At the time of the second interview, she had recently binge-watched the period drama *Bridgerton* and the sci-fi thriller series *Black Mirror*.

"It took me like four hours to complete like one season [of Black Mirror]."

Freya, 17

Multi-screening was part of everyday life

As seen since wave 5, most of the children reported multi-screening (using multiple devices simultaneously). For the most part, this was to browse social media on their phones while also watching content, gaming or learning on another device. A particular example among our participants was 16-year-old Josie, who regularly took both her phone and laptop into the bath with her so she could use both while bathing.

Some suggested this felt similar to group activities that they might otherwise be doing were they not in lockdown. Peter, 15, for example, used Snapchat throughout his school day to keep in touch with his friends:

"I feel like it doesn't distract me from my work… I just respond to my messages and put it down. In a normal classroom you don't sit in silence - you still have to speak to your friends."

Peter, 15

Peter's multi-screening

Screentime data collected during the tracking phase of the fieldwork showed that Peter was using his phone while on his laptop for home learning. The three screenshots below are from a Wednesday, Thursday and Friday during a school week, and the vertical bars show how much of each hour Peter spent on his phone. Even within school hours (9am – 4pm), Peter was using his phone a lot – most often to talk to his friends on Snapchat or to scroll through videos on TikTok.

What was happening in children's social lives?

Social circles were shrinking, and online friendships were more normalised than in previous waves

Summary:

- A lot of the children were talking to fewer people, and doing so less often
- It was more common to have 'online-only friends'

A lot of the children were talking to fewer people, and doing so less often

Opportunities for face-to-face contact were, of course, limited by coronavirus restrictions – children were seeing few, if any, of their friends, peers from school, or adults outside their immediate circle.

And children's friendship networks had contracted since the earlier waves of research – with almost all seemingly talking to fewer people, and doing so less regularly, than in previous waves.

Maintaining friendships during the pandemic was seen to be harder

Several children noted that they had stopped talking to people with whom they had been in regular contact at the start of the first lockdown. For example, during the *Life in Lockdown* wave, Alice, 16, had been playing the popular first-person shooter game *Fortnite* regularly with a friend. This wave, she reported that she had stopped playing in recent weeks, and thereby lost touch with the friend.

Others suggested that maintaining relationships with more distant friends online was difficult, requiring more energy than they would need if they could see these people offline on a regular basis. For example, Freya's social network had reduced dramatically in recent months and she said that she felt a need to be more 'proactive' to keep in touch with friends, both in terms of messaging and interacting about content shared by others on social media. At the time of the interview she did not feel like putting in the effort she thought might be needed:

"I've been keeping myself to myself, but I'll catch up with them [friends] if they reach out… I've been feeling like I need to work on myself and have a little break"

Freya, 17

William, 17, who left school during the *Life in Lockdown* study, also described struggling to keep up with his old school friends now that all interaction had moved online. He felt that he knew what people were up to after seeing the images they posted on their Snapchat or Instagram Stories, but reported that in-depth, one-to-one interactions were less likely to occur. He was also not too keen on making an effort to keep in touch with friends if he felt this might be one-sided.

"I'm not going to want to speak to them if they don't want to speak to me…"

William, 17

Josie, 16, also chose to leave school last year in order to study catering and bartending at a local college. She tried to stay in touch with old school friends on the video-calling platform Zoom and the social media platform Discord, but she found it hard to relate to the conversations her friends were having about their school work. She said that she increasingly felt she didn't have much to say to them. Instead, her social world was more focused on just a couple of people she knew from her college, and a friend she made online via the gaming community (see 'It was more common to have 'online-only friends'' section below for more information).

Some children's social lives were limited by the platforms they used

Parents of younger children had more influence than parents of older children over how their child went online and what they could do there. This sometimes meant that children didn't have access to the same online platforms as some of their friends, and so found it harder to keep up with them. For example, Suzy, 10, described how she could only speak with her friends from school if they had smartphones. Her school was not offering online classes to students, so she didn't have regular contact with school friends. This meant there were some friends she was completely unable to reach.

For boys, social connection tended to be more focused around gaming. Isaac,15, who had most of his social contact through playing the first-person shooter *Call of Duty* on PlayStation, explained that it could be difficult to interact with his friends who had a different gaming device such as an Xbox.

"One of my friends has an Xbox so I can't really talk to him as much... and I used to play with him a lot. And there are some friends that have Xbox that I can't really play with because there is not a lot of cross play between the Xbox and PlayStation."

Isaac, 15

What is Crossplay?

Crossplay, or cross-platform play, describes the ability of gamers using different hardware (e.g. PlayStation and Xbox) to play together. *Fortnite*, a 'battle-royale' game, is one of the most famous cross-platform games.

In a similar example, Arjun, 9, was upset that his parents would not allow him to play the multiplayer battle-royale game, *Fortnite*, as he felt this was excluding him from interacting with some of his classmates:

"Everybody plays [Fortnite] – it's gone from zero to hero… Every day they're making plans to play Fortnite… I feel jealous a little bit because I'm not part of that."

Arjun, 9

Freddie, 9, had not spoken to some of his classmates for a long time, as they didn't play the same games he did. His current passion was the online car-based football game *Rocket League*, and when playing, he only wanted to play with people who were at a high enough standard that they could play well together. As this was not true of many of Freddie's previous friends, he had stopped playing with them, and had a smaller social circle as a result:

"My school mates…I don't really chat to them that much… maybe one of them once a week… They do have Rocket League and they sometimes play it, but they don't play it all the time."

Freddie, 9

It was more common to have 'online-only friends'

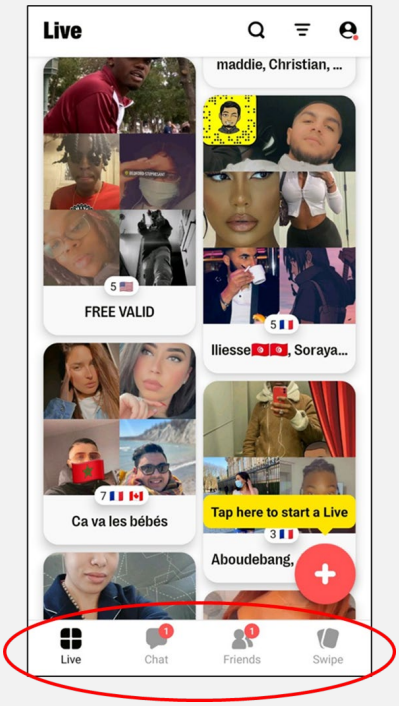
For some older children, making online-only friends had become commonplace compared to previous waves. William, 17; Josie, 16; and Jack, 16, were the most open to forming friendships online. Interestingly, they were also the participants whose routines had changed the most as a result of the pandemic. These three participants did not report any sense of risk around interacting with people they had only met online, although all had reported in previous years that they knew it was risky to 'talk to strangers' online.

William spent the majority of his day (both weekends and weekdays) interacting online with people he had never met in real life. This was largely through the livestream-focused social media platform, Yubo. William had started using Yubo in summer 2020 and had made a strong group of friends from all over the UK. During the most recent lockdown, he 'got back into it' and spent long periods of time on there: during the diary task tracking, William spent 44 hours on Yubo out of a weekly total of 107 hours on his phone.

Although William often talked to a longer-term group of friends made on Yubo, the app's design encouraged him to meet new people: Yubo has a dating app-like 'swipe' function that allows users to make new connections, and strangers can join 'lives' (open-room video conversations) at random to make new connections.

"You sit on a live and you just chat… [It's] people who are a similar age but all over the UK – people who I've just made friends with after I've used it… You host a live with your friends and then other people can join – you might invite them to the live and then maybe become friends with them."

William, 17



Making online friends on *Yubo*

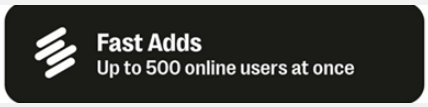
Yubo[8] is a social media platform which is specifically designed to help young people meet new people online. The platform has 40 million users[9] worldwide, who are split into two communities: one is for users between the ages of 13 and 17 and another for those who are over 18.

Features on Yubo

Yubo has several different features that enable users to interact with each other in different ways. These include a chat feature, allowing users to talk to their online friends directly, and a swipe function similar to that in the dating app *Tinder*, where users can swipe left or right on different accounts to include or discount them from their social network.

Live streaming is also a key feature of the platform, and the home page includes a number of different live streams that users can join, with streamers from all over the world. Users are also able to start their own live streams – as William, 17, had done when he shaved his head online in a live stream to get more views.

The platform is also optimised to increase the number of online friends that users can make at any one time, through features such as the 'Fast Adds' function, which enable users to add up to 500 online users at once.



William had also become increasingly interested in streaming videos of himself playing games ('gameplay videos') and had joined an online-only community with players of the sci-fi shooter game *Destiny* – a game he

[8] https://yubo.live/

[9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yubo

has played since 2014. He formed new friendships with the *Destiny* community through the social media platform Discord, which he described as a competitive 'clan'.

He carried many of these connections over to the streaming platform Twitch, where members of his clan supported one another, either financially or by promoting one another's content to increase viewership of the videos they posted. Although in this world William was largely known by his gaming 'tag' (an online gamer name), and discussions were largely about *Destiny*, he considered his clanmates friends.

"I'm in my own little world on Discord."

William, 17

Another keen gamer, Josie, 16, was also meeting online-only friends through the platform Discord and playing games online. She loved the first-person shooter game *Valorant*, which allowed her to choose different characters and invest in developing certain types of skills or purchasing certain weapons. However, many of the people she knew in real life were not interested in playing this game, preferring instead to play *Counter-Strike* – another first-person shooter game.

The friends who did like playing *Valorant* introduced her to some of their contacts, so she could also play with them, and they ended up forming a group chat on Discord to coordinate playing. Josie had made international friends in this way and was regularly gaming with a group of Germans at the time of her first interview.

In most cases, these friendships came and went, but Josie had formed a strong bond with one boy. They had slowly moved from gaming together to exchanging contact details on Snapchat, and at the time of the interview, Josie was talking to him every night. The two played games together, before using the app Discord to screen-share and stream films together (the popular sci-fi films in the *Star Wars* series were a mutual favourite), after which she often watched his screen as he browsed Twitter or YouTube – often until late into the night.

Initially, when Josie was gaming in the first lockdown, her mum had been worried about hearing 'new names' that she knew referred to Josie's online friends. After asking for a lot of information about the new friends, Josie's mum satisfied herself that there was nothing to worry about. She was instead pleased that Josie had some strong social contact during an otherwise difficult time.

During the social media tracking phase of fieldwork, Jack had issued a 'call out' on TikTok to try to build new connections with other users – he shared a video which contained his Snapchat details and the caption: "*Drop your snap to be in a lockdown GC [group chat]… 15-16… can be anywhere in the world"* (see image to the right).

By doing this, Jack was hoping that other users would share their 'snap' (Snapchat details) with him, so he could add them to a group chat with other users and talk. He specified the age (15-16) as well as indicating it didn't matter where the other users were based. He also included the caption '*if your gonna be toxic fuck off' [sic]*, indicating that he didn't want to include people who might share negative or mean comments.

"I was saying that people should go meet new people. So if people put their Snapchats in the comments then I will add them to a group chat then everyone meets new people. So, it is like Yubo but just making a chat with loads of random people."

Jack, 16

Jack posting on TikTok

What were children watching?

Some children in the study were watching content online in continuous binges

Summary:

- All the children remained disengaged from live television, watching on-demand content instead
- Some of the children sought content from people they felt they could relate to, even if their lifestyles or appearance differed from their own

All the children remained disengaged from live television, watching on-demand content instead

As in previous waves, none of the children in the sample were watching live television (TV) regularly.

Across the sample, children used the term 'watching 'TV'' to refer to a set of behaviours distinct from watching live television. To the participants 'watching TV' might include watching live, terrestrial television (for example, live sports, or on some occasions news broadcasts), but predominantly it referred to watching on-demand content on streaming platforms like Netflix and Prime Video. For most, this was primarily consumed on their phones or games consoles (as opposed to television sets).

"I don't even know the last time I watched live TV. Probably not since the first lockdown. I prefer to watch movies or Netflix or play on my Xbox. I don't really like watching the types of shows that are on TV. Because most of the things on Netflix are aimed at people my age. And on TV it is boring stuff like the BBC and stuff for grown-ups and I don't really want to watch that."

Ben, 13

Examples of the children engaging with PSB (either live or on-demand) were limited:

Arjun, 9, would watch *MasterChef* on BBC iPlayer, and sometimes watch live football

Peter, 15, would occasionally watch Birmingham City football games on sports channels when these were aired live

Sarah, 17, sometimes watched the soap *Coronation Street* with her family on ITV

Bryony, 13, also occasionally saw *Coronation Street* on the family television when her nan was watching it on ITV

Building on previous insight

Live television was playing a very limited role in our participants' media consumption

Throughout all waves of this study, we have seen the participants moving away from live TV and towards streaming content online using platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime and YouTube. Increasingly, children have been streaming the shows they want to see on any device, including their phones.

Most children binge-watched shows

While children were not sitting down to watch programmes live, the majority referred to binge-watching series (watching multiple episodes of a series in a relatively short period of time). Jack, 16, who had been binge-watching the British comedy-drama series *Ackley Bridge* on Netflix, struggled to articulate why he liked watching back-to-back episodes of the show:

"I'm not sure what I like about it, it is just one of those things that is addictive. You just watch episode after episode."

Jack, 16

Nathan, 14, described getting through whole anime series in a very short space of time. The faster he watched one series, the sooner he'd get to try something else. Nathan described watching up to twenty 25-minute episodes in one day.

"If I was starting some anime I'd watch a lot in a row so I could get it over with quickly… So I can get it done and carry on to another anime I want to watch. Sometimes I'd watch 20 [episodes] in a row – it depends how motivated I am on that day."

Nathan, 14

Binge-watching was also often done in tandem with other activities, with some using multiple devices so they could watch shows or content while doing other tasks such as schoolwork, chatting to their friends on social media, and gaming. Zak said he liked to do this with shows on Netflix, like the American martial-arts drama *Cobra Kai* and the science fiction series *Stranger Things*:

"When I am doing schoolwork or I am playing a game, I'll normally watch the iPad while I'm doing it"

Zak, 11

Like Zak, Freya, 17, often had Netflix running while she did her schoolwork, streaming series on her television set. Most recently she had been watching the period drama *Bridgerton* and the science fiction series *Black Mirror* on her television set, while she did her schoolwork on her laptop. On average, tracking showed that Freya spent eight hours per day on Netflix on weekdays, taking regular breaks from her schoolwork to do so.

Freya said she found the background noise 'comforting':

"Aw, this is bad… I watch it while I'm on my computer, so the TV's turned towards me so I can do a sneaky double turn and see what's going on, read the subtitles and do my work at the same time… It's a bit distracting but yeah…"

Freya 17

Although not watching 'shows' as such, William described aimlessly bingeing on YouTube, allowing the YouTube app to 'guide' him through videos for hours at a time without any particular goal or end-point.

"I'll flick around – use my recommended section to guide me around what I want to watch."

William, 17

Some re-visited shows they had already watched

Several children were re-watching shows and content that they had already seen. As seen above, Alice had recently started to watch the medical drama *Grey's Anatomy* for the second time, and said she planned to watch all 17 seasons again:

"I've been watching Grey's Anatomy and I've been kind of obsessed with it… it's really good and they have really good storylines."

"I'm so hooked. I've watched the whole 17 seasons, so I'm re-watching it."

Alice, 16

Alice was also rediscovering content on YouTube that she used to enjoy watching. Examples she mentioned were videos posted by the comedians the *Try Guys*; and the make-up influencer, *James Charles*:

"Two, three years ago, I used to be obsessed with him [James Charles] and then I stopped watching him for a while and then I restarted again"

Alice, 16

Jack had also been re-watching old episodes of the teen drama series *Skins* on Netflix. He suggested that when he was bored, he would often watch shows he had already seen.

"I might just get that feeling that I want to watch something again."

Jack,16

For some children, anime had become more popular than in previous waves

In earlier waves, Josie (now 16) was the only child who engaged with anime (an animation style originating from Japan that is increasingly popular elsewhere – see pull-out box below). In wave four (November 2017) she enjoyed watching the show *Black Butler* on Netflix, and had saved imagery of her favourite character, Alois

Tracy, on her phone. She was also interested in the culture around anime and was keen to attend a 'Comicon' (comic book convention) event – a dream she achieved the following year.

This year, three of the children in the sample: Nathan, 14; William, 17; and Shriya, 16, were consuming anime. Some were finding it on Netflix, but others on specialised online sites that offer free access to numerous anime shows. Shriya, for example, used a specific app, Crunchy Roll – to access anime. She described how this offered a much larger selection of genres and shows than platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime. In a similar vein, Nathan used a free website called 9anime to access anime shows.

All the children watching anime explained that they were drawn to it as they felt it offered something different to the shows they might otherwise consume. They felt that anime offered more creative storytelling, and opportunities to explore new ideas, more akin to science fiction, such as different universes and alternative futures. Shriya especially liked how unpredictable the shows were, and felt that there was often a deeper moral lesson behind the stories:

"Okay, so that's one of the reasons I like it because, whereas when you watch a movie you always know what's going to happen – something bad is going to happen and then it's going to go good. But a lot of them are really different, like each series is completely different I can't pick up a pattern… It's really unpredictable."

Shriya, 16

This was echoed by Nathan, who felt that anime gave him access to ideas he didn't get elsewhere:

"[Anime] is different from normal shows – it gives you a vast image of what different worlds could be like. Like in 'Attack on Titan', I would never think that someone would think of something like that – times where humanity is fighting for its life as it's about to be extinct. It's more interesting in my opinion [than Netflix], it's more engaging for the audience… I like how the art style is, and you can get attached to the characters easily."

Nathan, 14

What is anime?

Anime typically refers to animation that originates from Japan [10]. It encompasses every genre, including drama, science fiction, romance, action-adventure and horror. Over the last few decades, it has grown in popularity internationally, and has recently begun to be hosted on streaming platforms like Netflix [11].

While cartoons are often viewed as children's content, anime and manga are typically created for all ages, including adults, and therefore often explore more adult themes. In addition, the aesthetics of and illustrations used in anime are quite distinct to those of cartoons.

Here are some examples of the kinds of shows children in our sample watched:

Shriya, 17, was a particularly big fan of romantic anime. One of her favourite anime movies was *A Silent Voice* – a romance about a schoolgirl with impaired hearing. After being made fun of, the girl manages to communicate with one of her classmates, with whom she eventually starts a relationship [12].

Nathan, 14, enjoyed a range of different genres of anime. One of his longer-term favourite series was *Attack on Titan*, an action-adventure series about humanity driven to near-extinction after the emergence of humanoid giants called Titans [13].

William, 17, watched a range of anime on Netflix, including *Kakegurui* [14]. *Kakegurui* tells the story of student life at one of Japan's most prestigious private schools – where popularity and achievement are defined not by academic prowess, but by students' ability to gamble.

Some of these children were also participating in the wider culture around anime, as well as watching it. Both Nathan and Shriya engaged with anime content on social media by following anime-centric accounts, and by sharing clips or pictures of anime they had seen.

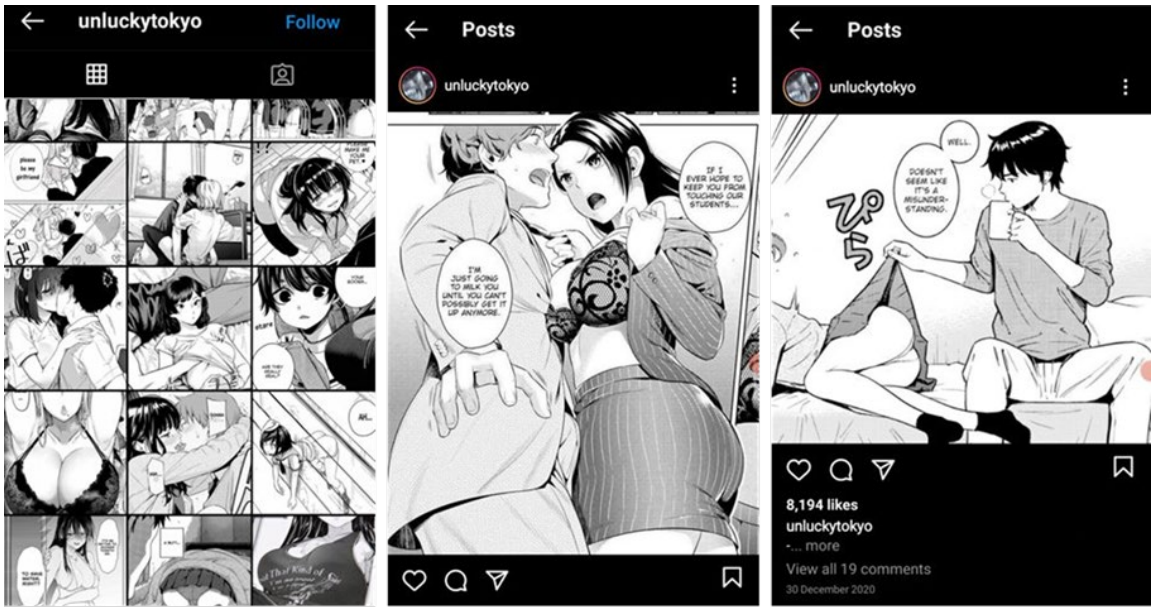
Nathan, for example, followed *MizuShogun* on TikTok – an account that shared funny videos or facts about a range of anime shows. He shared his own clips on Instagram, including his drawings of his favourite characters. Shriya posted a clip of anime movie *A Silent Voice* as an Instagram story.

There was some suggestion that anime-related content on social media could be of a sexual nature. Shriya's Instagram bio [15] read '*unluckytokyo*'. She told us that *unluckytokyo* was an account which posted still images from

anime shows or manga (graphic novels), and that she enjoyed how it reminded her of her favourite shows or provided inspiration for shows to watch in the future.

Tracking revealed that *unluckytokyo's* still images tended to be focused on sexual (although non-nude content). While not explicitly pornographic, *unluckytokyo's* posts were fairly explicit, and reminiscent of hentai[16] (pornographic anime / manga). The account also explored less mainstream storylines and sexual themes such as romances between teachers and pupils.

Similarly, during the social media tracking, Nathan re-shared a video on *Instagram* entitled '*Most Legendary Anime Scene Ever*', which was sexually explicit.



@unluckytokyo, the account that Shriya had tagged in her Instagram bio, was an account that posted manga of a sexual nature.

[10] https://www.liveabout.com/what-is-anime-144982

[11] https://www.netflix.com/gb/browse/genre/7424

[12] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Silent_Voice_(film)

[13] https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2560140/

[14] https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/80175351

[15] A tagline on her Instagram profile

[16] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hentai

Some of the children sought content from people they felt they could relate to, even if their lifestyles or appearance differed from their own

Children sometimes reported 'relating' to content that was shared by people with similar interests or who were aspirational in some way – even if their lifestyles were in fact very different from their own.

Many of the children were seeking content from influencers they found 'relatable' in these ways. For example, Shaniqua, 16, went through 'phases' of watching *YouTube* videos by two young, British YouTubers: Summer XO and Amelia-Mae Pritchard. Both posted content like fashion hauls (videos showing them trying on lots of items of clothing sent to them by a sponsoring brand, e.g. '*HUGE try on Boohoo haul*'[17]), routine videos (e.g. '*Morning routine in lockdown*[18]') and advice videos to viewers (e.g. *Girly Talk*[19]), which received somewhere between 5,000 and 25,000 views. Reflecting on why she liked the content they shared, Shaniqua suggested that they were more like her than some of the more famous YouTubers; that they were 'really nice' and had 'nice voices'. Shaniqua assumed the girls were 'very rich' because of all the fashion brands they were able to show in their videos.

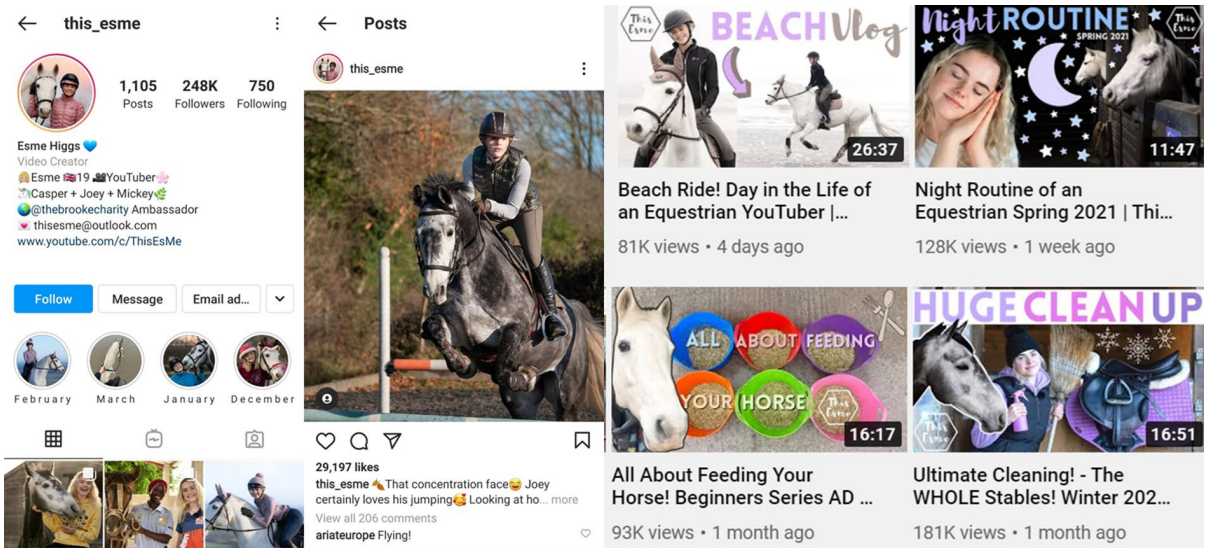
Both Bryony and Emma (13 and 12) are keen horse-riders living on farms in Wales and Northern Ireland respectively. Both love all things horse-related, and said they liked watching content from the teenage YouTuber This Esme, who posted content about her horse on Instagram and YouTube. Examples of her content include 'day in the life' videos on YouTube, such as *'Day in the life of an Equestrian*[20]*'*. They also engaged with some of this content on TikTok and Instagram.

[17] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0fuW4yMAEA

[18] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F13dQtWKTq8

[19] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06m7Au52gdo

[20] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-uovOfuHKM



This Esme - a 19-year-old influencer who posts horse-related content on Instagram and YouTube

Bryony was particularly interested in horse-related content. She was excited when This Esme 'liked' a comment she posted about This Esme's pony recovering from an injury. Bryony felt that she was on a similar developmental journey as This Esme, with her own riding, and frequently looked at her posts for inspiration for things she could do with her horses, or to post about her horses in her own blog on Facebook.

Even though Emma had no interest in becoming a YouTuber or of having a presence online like This Esme, she explained that she liked watching her videos because she felt that they had similar personalities as well as interests.

"Well, she's kind of similar to me."

Emma, 12

Some felt it was important to find content creators who bore a resemblance to them. On TikTok, 17-year-old Freya 'liked' certain videos intentionally, so the platform would serve her more of this type of content. In particular, she wanted to see a more culturally diverse feed on her 'For You' page. She specifically wanted to see content from creators with dual-heritage backgrounds – Freya's mother is Filipino and her father is Nigerian. She particularly enjoyed the comedic videos some users posted about growing up with multiple cultures.

As well as relating to some of this content, Freya wanted to find content creators who looked like her, for inspiration and to help her to develop her style and fashion sense. She especially liked the models Jourdan Dunn and Jayde Pierce because she felt they looked more like her and had a 'great sense of style'.

Similarly, 16-year-old Shriya followed models on Instagram to get inspiration for her hairstyles and outfits, and also for inspiration for poses she could try when posting images on her own Instagram profile. Several of the images on her Instagram page were almost exact replicas of images posted by the fashion influencers she followed, like Lexi Wood and Jess Hunt. Her favourite model was Bella Hadid, a supermodel who had been featured in a number of high-profile campaigns. Shriya said she looked up to this model because she felt she used her social media platform for more than just posting photos:

"Whenever there is something going on, with like Black Lives Matter, with the election she told everyone to vote, with Covid and wearing masks she is always posting about it… I think she's really generous, she uses her platform well."

Shriya, 16

In a similar vein, Peter, 15, who has always been interested in sport and fitness, was seeking inspiration for workouts online. He was pleased that his Explore page on Instagram now served him predominantly fitness content, so he could go there for ideas to help to 'motivate' himself. Peter's two favourite fitness accounts were Matt Does Fitness and Mike Thurston – both body builders promoting their workout plans and fitness-related products on their channels.

Peter said he especially 'related' to Mike Thurston, a British fitness influencer living in Dubai who regularly posted content related to his physique and about being a sports influencer in Dubai. Peter particularly liked following him as said he found him more relatable than other fitness influencers:

"I think he's having fun and being himself…He's really relatable."

"He's had to work hard for [his fitness] and it motivates you that you can do it."

Peter, 15

Peter was regularly doing workouts at home during lockdown, and saw these influencers' lifestyles, skills and physiques as aspirational.

Mike Thurston - a fitness influencer with 800k followers

What was important to children when creating their online identities?

For most of the children 'how you look' was central to creating their online identity

Summary:

- Almost all the children reported that there was pressure to look good online
- A majority of the children, across all ages, used filters and editing apps to alter their appearance
- Copycatting content remained common across multiple social media platforms
- Both boys and girls in the study were following and seeing content that focused on fitness and body sculpting

Almost all of the children reported that there was pressure to look good online

Many of the children talked about how it was important to 'look good' online, and that this was something they and their friends cared about a lot. For example, Alice, 16, talked about how a large portion of the content she saw on Instagram was people being 'vain':

"I mean, all everyone does [on Instagram] is post pictures of themselves... they have like thirty photos of themselves posing in a mirror."

Alice, 16

She said that this was a source of anxiety for some of her female friends, who tried to curate their images carefully by sharing images with one another before uploading them to check they looked 'good enough'. Alice said that she sometimes shared sets of photos with friends and asked them to help her choose the best one to upload:

"I think people just kind of feel like they're going to be judged – girls more than boys."

Alice, 16

This pressure was also reported by Shaniqua, who argued that, in her social circles, having nice skin and an 'hourglass figure' was especially important for girls. However, she also felt there was pressure for boys, and said that boys were more likely to get positive affirmation online if they were wearing 'nice clothes' or could signify they had money – often by wearing expensive brands.

Sarah, 17, from Manchester, also spoke about the importance of looking a specific way online. She reflected that she got more attention online when she posted selfies wearing make-up:

"The one [selfie-image I uploaded] with makeup got 88 likes but the photo without makeup got like 38 likes."

Sarah, 17

Boys too, reported pressure to look good online. For example, 9-year-old Freddie used a filter on Snapchat that he liked because he thought it made his skin look 'better'. Despite his age, Freddie preferred more subtle filters that only slightly changed his facial features, rather than 'fun' options that might make things 'come out' of his face (like animal ears or a tongue).

"You normally just do one [filter] called INAO [sic]… you can still see your face, it's not like anything is coming out of it but it just makes it look better. It just changes the look of your face a little bit."

Freddie, 9

Ben, 13, also echoed the idea that looking good on Instagram was important to get recognition:

"Instagram is more pictures of you, and it is about what you look like. So, if someone likes what you look like then they are more likely to follow you."

Ben 13

While Ben claimed he was not interested in 'likes' himself, he reflected that people who looked good online got more positive attention:

"*On Instagram and stuff, you're more likely to find a good-looking person with a million subscribers than just a normal person with a million followers."*

Ben, 13

Jack and Peter were both viewing more fitness-related content online and exercising more – although they did not openly talk about the pressures to look good during the interview.

A majority of the children, across all ages, used filters and editing apps to alter their appearance

For the teenage girls, it was normal to use a filter or edit a photo before uploading a selfie on their social media profiles. Most of this editing was light-touch and aimed to make small changes to a photo while not altering their appearance too much. There was some suggestion that filters were best when it was not obvious that they had been used.

For example, Alice, 16, used the app Facetune2 to colour-correct or remove red-eye from a photo before uploading it. Similarly, Josie, 16, and Freya, 17, used *Instagram's* pre-set editing tools to change the brightness and contrast of their images as a whole, without changing their appearance in them. Josie did this to match a specific set of criteria she saw another user recommend in a TikTok video, and felt this gave her images more of an 'indie feel'.

Other girls were more likely to alter their appearance and use image-editing apps to try to fix what they saw as imperfections. For example, Shriya used a range of apps to edit different parts of her body, but her default app for editing was FaceTune.

"I'll do my skin first, I'll get rid of any blemishes and then I'll change my eyelashes, that's how I normally do it."

Shriya, 16

She explained that when she looked back at her photos, the first thing she looked at was her skin, often editing it to look smoother. Similarly, Sarah, 17, said she tended to use the app AirBrush to blur her 'smile lines' and 'knees' in photos to make her skin look smooth. She mentioned that she would also edit her friends' appearance in her photos sometimes if she knew they too were self-conscious about elements of their own appearance.

Shriya typically went through a long process before posting a photo, which involved getting ready and planning her outfit, as well as editing the image and asking her friends which they one they thought she should post. She found choosing the right picture hard, and often second-guessed whether she had posted the right thing:

"I like them one day and then don't… I just want people to think that it looks nice or cool or unique and different."

Shriya, 16

Some of the younger children also used filters to change their appearance. In addition to the example of Freddie, 9, above, who used realistic filters to smooth out his skin, Suzy, 10, echoed the idea that subtle filters were preferable; those that other users might not even realise had been applied.

Although Suzy did sometimes use filters in TikTok videos, she didn't like the way they looked any more, as she explained during the interview. She had noticed that only the 'smaller' (i.e. less followed) TikTok accounts used the more obvious filters, and therefore this was something she was keen not to be associated with, as she wanted to emulate the 'bigger' accounts with more followers. As a result, Suzy avoided using obvious filters, instead using more subtle ones to smooth out her skin and appearance.

Like some of the older girls, Suzy spoke about feeling self-conscious before posting content, and was very much aware of the negative attention that some videos could receive on TikTok.

"You've got to have pretty good lighting and make sure that if you are going to do something you're pretty good at it, otherwise you can be made into a laughing stock."

Suzy, 10

Building on previous insight

Using filters to subtly edit your appearance

Looking back to wave 5, participants tended to prefer more naturalistic filters only as they grew older. The younger children experimented with filters (often ones that turned them into 'cute' animals), but as the participants grew up they looked for filters that altered images more subtly. Increasingly, the aim of using filters is to edit the picture without it looking as though it has been edited - usually focusing on 'smoothing' skin or changing the lighting of the image.

Blurring the lines of reality…

On Instagram, Shriya, 16, was predominantly following models. One of the models' accounts she followed was *@lilmiquela,* a CGI model with an Instagram following of over three million. Lilmiquela's bio describes her as a 'change-seeking robot with the drip' ('drip' meaning she is 'cool' or 'stylish').

So what are CGI models?

Computer-generated images (CGI) models, sometimes referred to as artificial intelligence (AI) models, are digital models or influencers which also have a presence on social media[21]. Like real-life models, they model for genuine brands and are increasingly used in fashion campaigns[22]. As well as posting on Instagram they may also interact with others online. Sometimes their accounts feature real people – such as actor and musician Finn Wolfhard - and at other times they are pictured with their CGI 'robot' friends.

Shriya spoke about how she discovered CGI model @lilmiquela:

"I saw her answering all these questions on a story on Snapchat so I started watching her and then got really invested in her because she has this whole personality and life but like… she's not a real person."

Shriya, 16

Shriya liked following her because she said it was so different to what she normally saw. She also enjoyed the 'mystery' of not always knowing what or who was real in her posts.

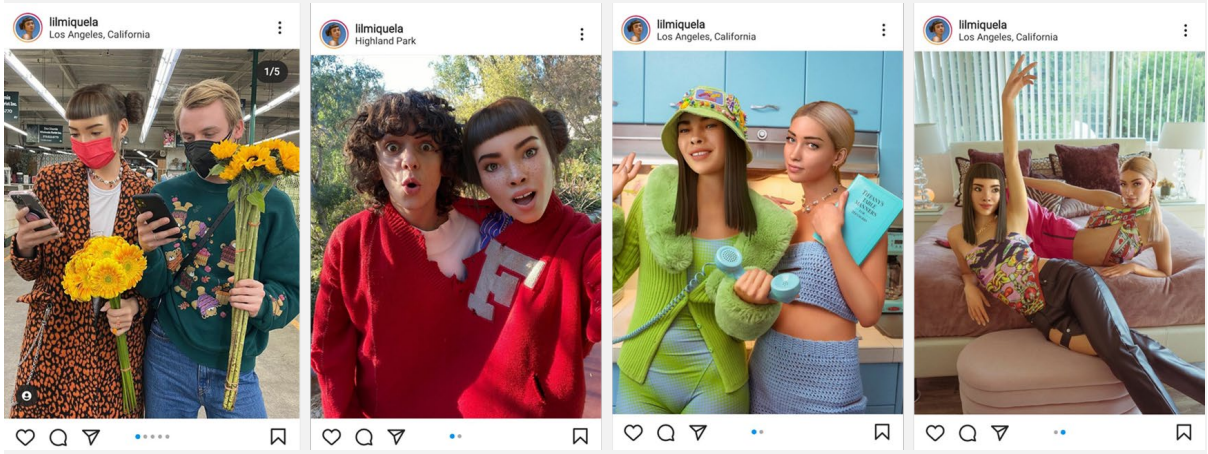
"I think it confuses people, sometimes she posts with other AIs [another term used for CGI models] and I'll zoom in to see whether it's been edited and to see if it's real…"

[21] https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/cgi-virtual-reality-model-debate

[22] https://en.vogue.me/fashion/news/balenciaga-cgi-model-instagram/

"I don't know who she is or what she is… it's that mystery factor."

Shriya, 16



Posts from @lilmiquela's Instagram feed. The two posts on the left are with real people, while the two on the right are with her 'robot' friend Bermuda, another CGI model

Among some of these teenage girls, there was an expectation that female friends would share positive affirmation underneath each other's photos

For example, Freya, 17, posted a selfie with the caption 'Can't wait for summer' on Instagram and got lots of comments and feedback from her female friends saying things like 'unreal' and 'so hot'. Freya tended to reply to all these comments saying things like 'thank you stunner' or 'thanks gorgeous', to show appreciation for their positive comments, thereby creating affirmation chains.

Like Freya, 16-year-old Alice's friends also left a lot of positive comments underneath one another's images. She explained that her friends sometimes sent her private messages when they uploaded something new, asking her specifically to leave a positive comment and 'like' the image. She always wanted to support her friends, although she spoke critically about it during the interview:

"There's always like the generic comments under images…they all say the same thing like 'stunning', etc."

Alice, 16

Alice explained this was because friends were unlikely to leave something 'mean' underneath an image, but it made the comments underneath images very similar:

"There's only so many synonyms you can have for pretty".

Alice, 16

The girls spoken to were relatively risk-averse in what they posted – tending only to post their favoured images that had been vetted by friends. As such, few had examples of people not responding positively to the images they shared. In one example. Sarah, 17, had posted a selfie to her Instagram profile in which she was not wearing make-up. This image had received fewer 'likes' than the other images she shared, and she hypothesised that the lack of make-up might be a reason for this. But she also noted that this was the first image she had uploaded in a while, and wondered if this meant her online friends were paying less attention to her profile and so were less likely to 'like' her uploads.

Copycatting content remained common across multiple social media platforms

Since wave 6 (February 2020), we have seen examples of participants in the study copycatting behaviours they saw online. For some, this was about emulating looks or actions, and for others it was a way of trying out different identities. In the *Life in Lockdown*[23] wave, several of the children were copycatting content on TikTok[24]. The app's functionality optimises this as it encourages users to copy and re-make content; for example, by copying certain dances and lip-syncing along to trending audio tracks.

Copycatting on TikTok was still prevalent in this wave, but there was also evidence of copycatting on a number of other platforms including Twitch and Instagram. This had been observed to a degree in wave 6, with some children emulating others in what they wrote in their bios, and in the types of imagery or videos posted on their profiles. This year we have more evidence of this as a result of using more thorough tracking methodologies.

In this wave, almost all the children were sharing their own videos on TikTok, and Suzy, 10; Zak, 11; and Alice, 16, in particular, were sharing content copied from other influencers.

Suzy, who lives near Glasgow with her mother, loves TikTok. She posted videos every couple of days featuring anything from make-up tutorials, to her dog, to TikTok dances. At the time of the interview, Suzy's favourite TikTokker was Addison Rae, an influencer famous for her dances, with 78.1 million followers. Suzy liked to copy the dances posted by Addison Rae and admired how she was able to increase her following:

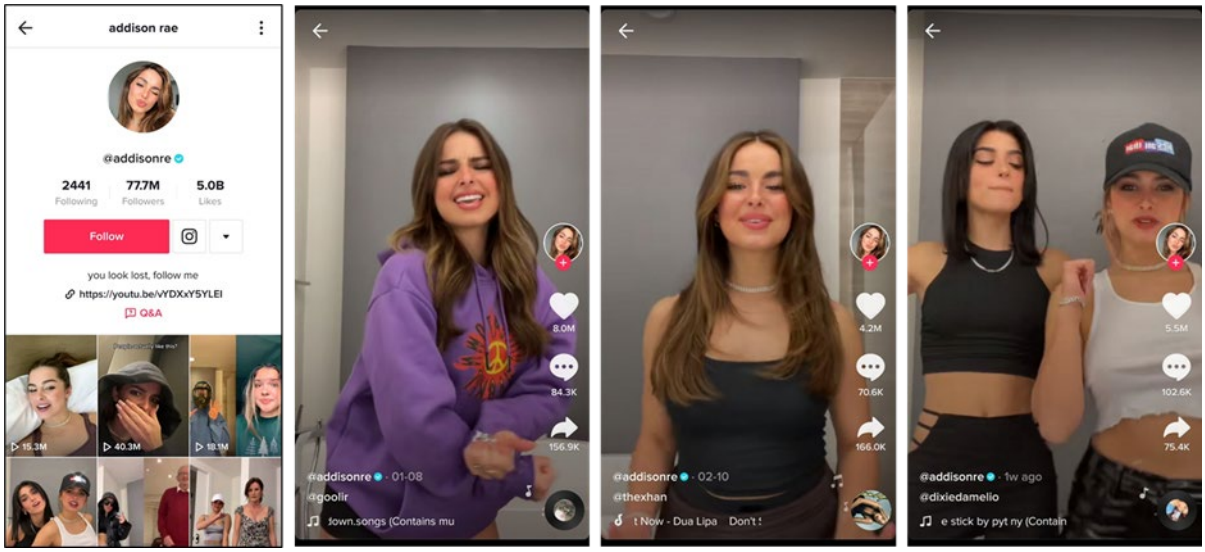
"Addison started from a very small account and then she grew from that."

Suzy, 10

[23] https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0024/200976/cml-life-in-lockdown-report.pdf

[24] In both the previous and current wave, younger children were using TikTok regularly. TikTok's terms of service specify that users should be aged over 13, and that users under the age of 18 need parental consent to use the app (https://www.*TikTok*.com/legal/terms-of-service?lang=en), and the platform is developing privacy restrictions for younger users (https://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/parents-ultimate-guide-to-*TikTok*). However, in this study, children as young as 9 had access to the full functionality of the platform.

Suzy hoped to increase her own account by posting content like Addison Rae's, and was aware that TikTokkers could earn 'a lot of money', which is something she had also said in the Life in Lockdown study in June 2020. During social media tracking, Suzy uploaded content copying Addison Rae's dances move-for-move.



Suzy's favourite influencer Addison Rae has over 78 million TikTok followers

Suzy explained that her key goal on TikTok was to be able to do a TikTok 'live video'. Live videos on TikTok (also known as TikTok lives) allow users to share a live video stream that others can watch and comment on in real time. This functionality is only available to users who have a minimum of 1,000 followers on TikTok. These live streams were often featured on Suzy's For You page, so she assumed that they were promoted more widely to other users too. This made live streaming on TikTok something that Suzy was very keen on trying.

What's the For You page (FYP)?

The *'For You' page* is a customised selection of videos[25], curated by TikTok for each user using algorithms. The page offers content that users are likely to enjoy, based on their existing viewing habits, likes and histories. The page may feature content from users who are not connected to one another.

Zak, 11, liked following famous TikTokkers like DadvsGirls and DanTDM. He often posted content such as lip-syncing videos, videos of himself dancing, and – on a separate account he set up for this purpose – videos of

[25] https://influencermarketinghub.com/tiktok-for-you-page/

him lip-syncing with his gran's dog. Like Suzy, he copied content posted by other users. For example, he had seen a video on his For You page of someone drinking a Starbucks drink. After watching this, he asked his mum to help him replicate it by taking him to Starbucks so that he could buy, and then post, a picture of the drink himself.

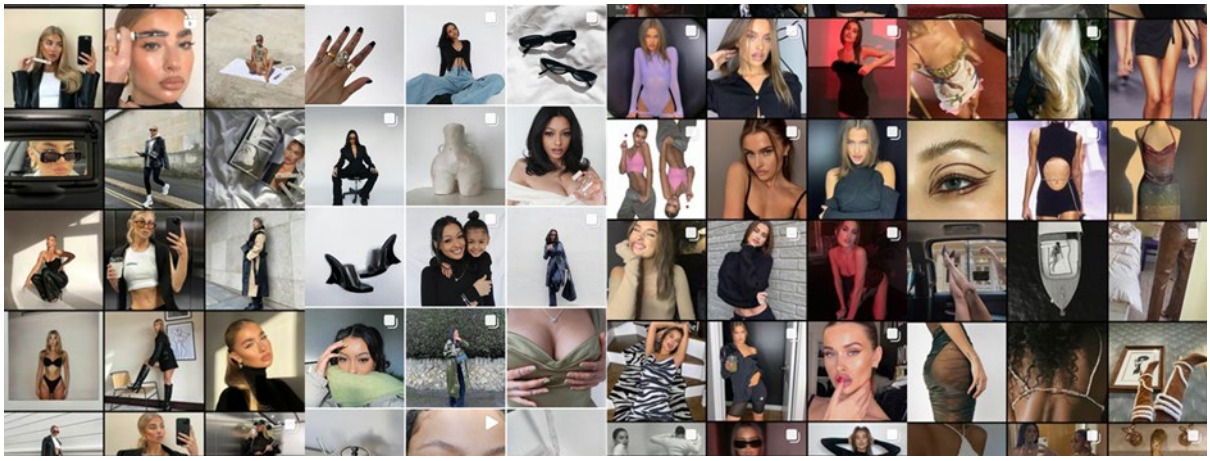
Zak was also copying videos he had seen on YouTube. He had recently posted an unboxing video on TikTok (videos showing users unpacking new products for the first time and reviewing the contents) after seeing his favourite YouTuber, DanTDM, post similar videos on YouTube. Zak had posted an unboxing video of himself opening an Xbox One.

As mentioned above, the teenage girls Shriya, 16, and Freya, 17, followed accounts on Instagram in order to gain inspiration for their own posts. They commonly copied what others posted in an attempt to create and promote their own online identities. Freya followed influencers *@jaydepierce* and *@jodiewoods* for their fashion and style content. She posted similar images to those the influencers had uploaded, copying their hairstyles, and dressing in similar outfits:

"They have a big influence on me through, like, the clothes that they wear."

Freya, 17

Similarly, Shriya liked to follow models like *@lexiwood* and *@jesshunt2* for fashion inspiration. She often shared their posts with her friend so that they could copy the same poses. During the social media tracking phase, she uploaded photos of herself staged in exactly the same way as recent images posted by *@lexiwood* – images taken outside at night, using motion blurring and red lighting.

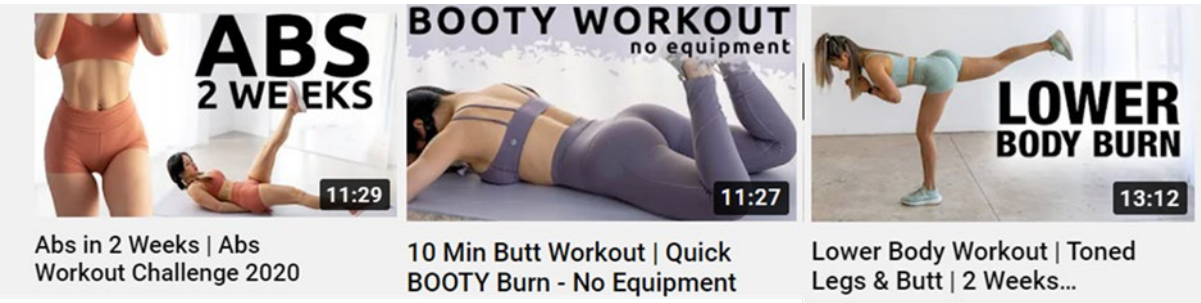


From left to right are the Instagram grids of @jesshunt2, @jaydepierce, @lexiwood and @shesfarout

Both boys and girls in the study were following and seeing content that focused on fitness and body sculpting

During the *Life in Lockdown* wave, several of the teenage girls in the study had been watching fitness videos. In particular, the fitness vlogger Chloe Ting was popular for her fitness and body sculpting content, for example: *'Full Body No Jumping Workout to Burn Fat'* and *'Get Abs in 2 WEEKS'*. Although Alice and Shaniqua (both 16) reported that their interest in Chloe Ting had waned over the past few months, Shriya (also 16) was still following her content. She explained that after feeling she had gained a bit of weight during lockdown she was trying to stay 'healthy' and so aimed to do three Chloe Ting workouts (approximately 15 to 20 minutes each) a day.

She liked to choose videos that focused on toning different parts of the body, for example, one for 'abs' and two others for 'lower body'. She also reported that she liked doing them in her bedroom and that she didn't need any equipment to do them.



Three Chloe Ting workouts that Shriya tries to do each day

In contrast, Alice, Shaniqua and Josie (all 16), reported that they were no longer doing the fitness routines they had done during the *Life in Lockdown* wave, although Alice had kept up exercising with a personal trainer in a nearby park. All of them talked about how seeing a lot of content from slim and 'healthy' girls sometimes made them feel self-conscious. Alice suggested that it could be 'triggering' for some girls to see a lot of people much skinnier than them, or skinny people complaining about their 'fat rolls'. In a similar vein, Shaniqua said she knew friends who worried about their weight, and occasionally saw people posting about their 'weight-loss journey' on social media.

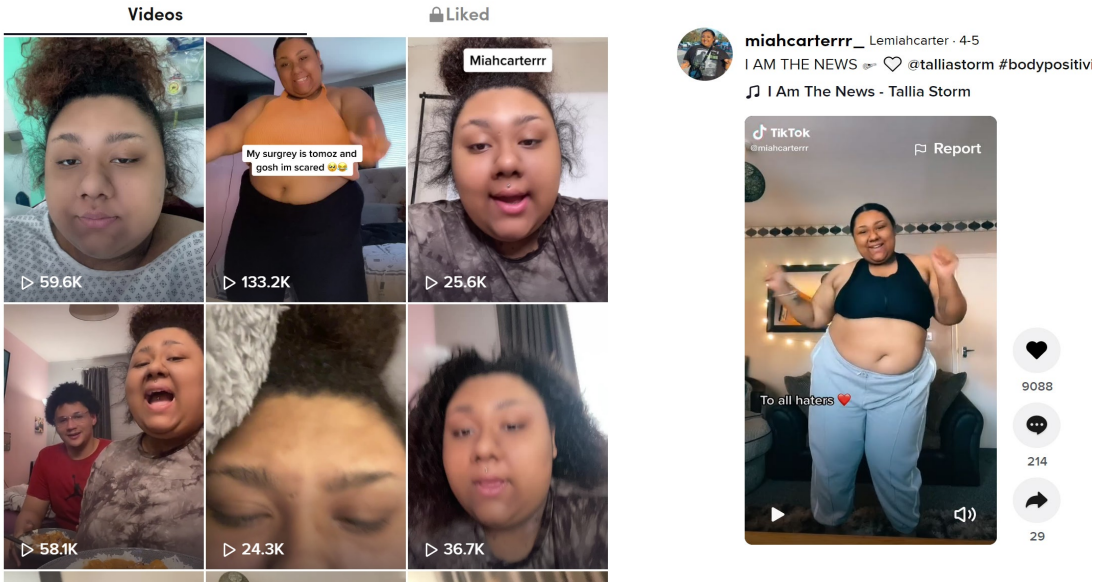
Alice felt that for girls especially, there was pressure around weight and weight loss on social media:

"Being a girl especially, [some people want to] eat and eat less than you and things like that…so I think it's very competitive."

"I think that's why people ask about pictures like, do I look fat? Because I think, like, a lot of people don't want - like girls especially - don't want anyone to judge them like Snapchat… It's just very triggering and a bit unnecessary."

Alice, 16

Alice had decided to follow some 'body-positive' influencers on TikTok to counteract some of the 'triggering content' she was seeing elsewhere. She especially liked following content from MiaCarterrr, a plus-sized influencer posting dancing videos. Alice said she thought it was 'good to see different types of bodies' but it was clear during tracking that the majority of the images she was seeing were still of slim girls.



Content posted by Miah Carrterrr on her TikTok account

As previously mentioned, Freya, 17 (of Nigerian and Filipino heritage), had followed more non-white models like Jourdan Dunn and Jodie Woods, which she thought would make her feel good. However, she admitted she felt this had backfired after a while, as she realised that she had started comparing herself and her life to theirs:

"You know how I said I thought it was a good thing that I was following people who look like me? But it ended up going the opposite wrong way and now me being insecure about the people I follow who look like me…basically I just end up being jealous of them."

Freya, 17

A couple of the older boys were following and seeing content that focused on fitness and body sculpting

During the *Life in Lockdown* wave, it had only been the girls who had reported seeing fitness and body-sculpting content. But in this wave, some of the boys had also started consuming similar content. For example, Peter, 15, explained that he saw a range of fitness-related content on his '*Explore'* page on Instagram. And as mentioned above, Peter specifically followed body-sculpting and weightlifting influencers like *@mikethurston* and *Eddie Hall*. He said he found them aspirational and relatable:

"[Seeing their content] motivates you to keep going, because they all started off the same as you."

Peter, 15

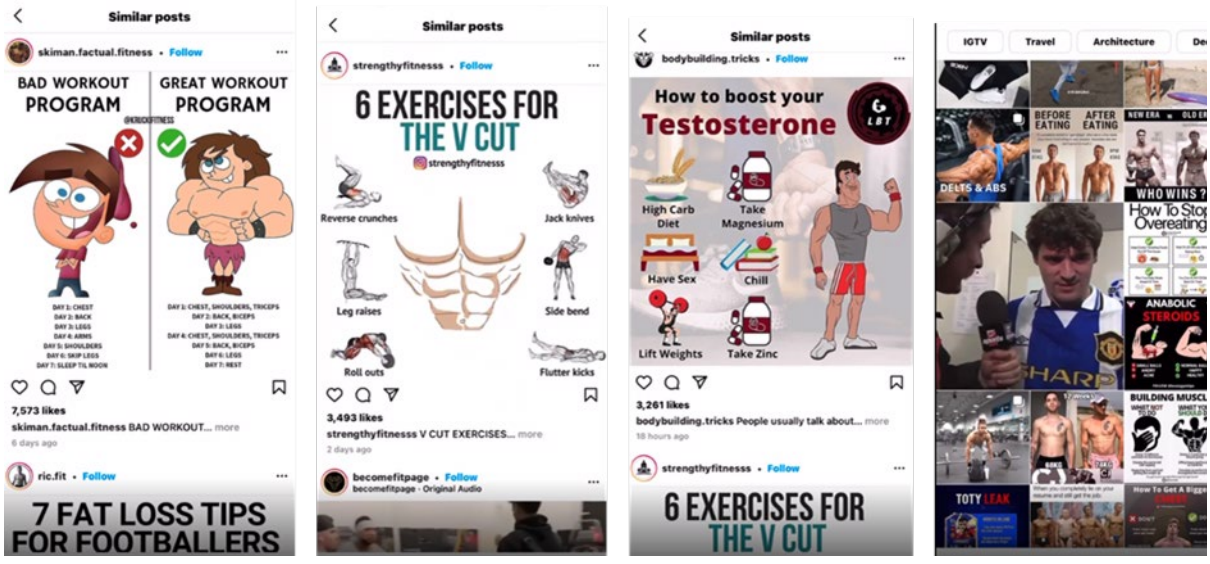
He recognised that Instagram pushed more of this content to him as he was already following and interacting with similar content.

"As I'm interested in like weights and weightlifting, I'll have a look at stuff that inspires me about [that]… to see if I can get any workout ideas or stuff like that…. sometimes I haven't got motivation and then I'll go on Instagram and think "oh that looks quite fun" and actually try a workout."

Peter, 15

Peter said that this content inspired him to do more exercise and described using his 'Explore' page to get inspiration for future workouts. However, during the tracking phase of fieldwork, his screen record footage showed that much of this content was in fact focused on diet, weight-loss or more dramatic body transformations.

While he had been keen on sports and exercise from a young age, there was evidence to suggest that this was taking on a new, more image-conscious, dimension for Peter. For example, he also used his Apple Watch to track his health and said that he liked the fact that it challenged him to burn calories.



Fitness content that Peter sees on his Instagram Explore page

Jack, 16, was also seeing images of muscular men on his social media feeds. Primarily, these were from influencers and other users who posted selfies showing their toned arms and six-packs. He reported that he had also started to think more about fitness over the course of the past year. At the time of the interview, he had asked his mum to buy him personal training sessions and protein drinks to help him get stronger. His mum said she was happy that he was getting more into fitness, but she expressed concern that he had started to listen to advice he had seen online about not eating, in order to lose weight.

"I think he is just seeing all of these fit guys [on social media] and that's obviously going to be attractive to him."

"He will believe what he sees and doesn't think about it until we have a conversation about it."

Jack's mum

How were children promoting themselves online?

Across the sample, children of all ages were continuing to seek opportunities for self-promotion online and were increasingly aware that this could be monetised

Summary:

- #makemefamous: online attention remained a precious commodity
- Several children were using new strategies to promote their posts without necessarily understanding how these worked
- A number of children thought that broadcasting their social drama online would gain them attention
- Some understood that online attention could make them money
- Some children were streaming to capture online attention and potentially money
- A few children were connecting with streamers 'to feel part of the action'

#makemefamous: online attention remained a precious commodity

Across the sample, children were using different methods of attracting attention and boosting their online profile, as well as sharing their interests with others. Getting attention online was seen as important by respondents of all ages, with many of them seeking it in different ways.

Arjun, 9, was not yet allowed to use social media or have a phone, but he hoped to build a *YouTube* brand at some point in the future.

"I might make my own YouTube channel myself… I already have a name for it – 'kids cooking'."

Arjun, 9

New platforms also offered new opportunities to gain attention. As well as building his Twitch following, William enjoyed the way Yubo's[26] 'Live' function allowed him to get instantaneous attention and approval from young people across the UK.

"I don't really mind people watching me – I never have. I've been live on Yubo with hundreds of people watching me. I remember one time I was on a live with 20 people watching – it was me and my friend – and we said to the viewers 'If we get 100 viewers and someone PayPals me £20 I will shave my head on the live'… And I did to be fair… I shaved my head on the live. I'm not really bothered by people watching me, I kind of like it."

William, 17

Several children were using new strategies to promote their posts without necessarily understanding how these worked

The majority of the participants who were posting content were employing new strategies to gain attention and build their online brand. In many cases this meant emulating what they had seen to be 'successful' without understanding exactly how this might work.

Several children had heard that using particular hashtags on TikTok could boost engagement with their posts. For example, Sarah, 17, had a set of hashtags she used on every post, including *'#fyp', '#fy', '#fy;)', '#tiktoktraditions'* and *'#xyzbca'*. She acknowledged that she wasn't entirely sure how (or whether) this would affect the number of views she received, but she knew they were 'trending', so she felt compelled to use them anyway.

"I don't actually know whether it's true or not… that it will get you more views and stuff. To be fair I don't really know how to work it so I'll ring my mate and say 'what hashtag should I put on my video'… Or also if you're uploading it and you put a hashtag then it comes up with trending ones, so I click loads of them. [The hashtags she tends to use] are always trending so if my mate is ever busy, I'll just put those ones on."

Sarah, 17

Similarly, Alice used a set of trending hashtags on almost every post, including *'#fyp', '#foryoupage', '#foryou', '#viral'* and *'#makemefamous'*, sometimes with additional captions like 'I'm so bored, so make me famous'.

[26] Yubo is a social networking site aimed at young adults to make online friends, a key feature of which is live streaming that allows people across the world connect online in group chats. See page 28 for more information.

A number of children thought that broadcasting their social dramas online would gain them attention

Several children spoke about seeing people post about dramas or disputes online. Tracking revealed that two of them (Sarah, 17 and Suzy, 10) had posted content that focused on airing feuds or otherwise 'shaming' their friends. In the follow-up interviews, these children acknowledged that this was something they had seen done elsewhere online.

Sarah had been involved in online drama when her ex-boyfriend got a new girlfriend: the two girls posted a series of inflammatory videos about one another. In one post on TikTok, Sarah lip-synced along to an audio track that said: '*I cried when you left me, but laughed when I saw what you left me for…'*, in which she tagged the new girlfriend. When asked about the video, she said that she thought it was stupid, and she would like to think she didn't get involved in drama like that online, but that after she had posted the video, it had received a lot of 'likes' so she decided to leave it up.

Engaging in 'shaming' or 'exposing' online was not limited to the older children. Suzy, 10, was involved in an online feud after falling out with one of her best friends on TikTok. At first, the girl and her friends posted 'nasty' comments under Suzy's TikTok videos. This escalated until the girls were commenting on each video Suzy posted, so Suzy's mum got involved and contacted the school. This resulted in Suzy having to delete her TikTok account.

The drama did not end there: during the social media tracking phase, Suzy had decided to post a new video called '*Exposing my ex best friends ugly pics cos I'm borad*' [sic] on her new TikTok account. In her follow-up interview she explained that she didn't feel she was doing anything wrong, as her friend had been mean to her and she wanted others to know her true character.

"I was bored so I decided to expose her. I want everyone to see it… she deserves it."

Suzy, 10

As well as seeing other users 'exposing' one another's secrets online, Suzy was aware of a wider trend of people being 'cancelled' (when users on a platform stop showing interest or following someone online, or when a user is forced to leave a platform due to pressure from others).

Both Suzy and Sarah suggested that this sort of content was more likely to get attention than other posts. Using TikTok as a way to retaliate to comments, or increase drama, was a tactic that some children seemed to be copying from more well known TikTokkers. In the video that Suzy posted to 'expose' her friend, she wrote in the video description *'if you want a storytime, let me know in the comments'* – a typical sentence seen on more popular posts. Nathan, 14, also acknowledged that airing social drama on social media was increasingly commonplace.

"I do see [drama] on TikTok most of the time… it's kind of like childish in a way. People just talk rubbish online, they wouldn't do stuff like that in real life."

Nathan, 14

Engaging with social drama, or falling out with friends, are things that many children have experienced in their offline lives; however, airing grievances online can have a wider impact. Dealing with social drama in this way has a more widespread reach, and attention-seeking played a specific role in the online drama for both Suzy

and Sarah. Sarah explained that she kept her TikTok post because it got 'a lot of likes', while Suzy's aim was for 'everyone' to see her post.

Some understood that online attention could make them money

As in previous waves, some children were aware of the connection between online attention and money, and the ways in which social media could be leveraged to gain money in other areas of their lives.

For example, some children were following 'entrepreneur accounts', particularly on TikTok. These were often accounts run by children of a similar age who were openly seeking to make money. Peter, 15, followed a number of these accounts, including one TikTokker who described a number of schemes to earn money as a young person, such as by pressure-washing neighbours' cars. Many of these posts had titles like 'How to make £1000 a month at 13 years old'. Peter felt this sort of content was 'inspirational', as it came from someone his age, and he had been encouraged to try to make money online himself.

"He's the same age as me and it's interesting to see what he does – he's trying to earn money to start with – I think it's quite inspirational and I can kind of relate to it as I'm the same age… He started from nothing and just built [his business]… It just shows that anyone can do it – he doesn't seem like the sort of person to be like mega rich or anything, I feel like he's just a normal person."

"On Facebook I bought a bundle of nerf guns – I think there were like 17 of them – I bought them and then sold them all individually for more profit on Facebook and eBay – I think I made 30 pounds."

Peter, 15

In this wave, the participants also spoke about becoming more receptive to buying products through social media. Most of the children in the study suggested that receiving targeted advertisements was just another benefit of social media; they regarded adverts and sponsored content in much the same way as other posts that they might see from influencers they followed.

The children in the sample understood that they were being advertised to, and that influencers were paid to promote content. Rather than annoying them, they reported finding this helpful as it showed them things that were in line with their interests. For example, Shriya, 16, and Josie, also 16, both 'liked' many of the adverts that appeared on their Instagram feeds as they promoted items they were already interested in, like clothing and jewellery. Shriya often went on to buy items directly from these adverts.

A number of the children also saw more value in products that were promoted by influencers. Shriya enjoyed following people like *Victoria Loopz* (a 20-year-old LA-based clothing influencer) as she posted affordable fashion 'hauls' that Shriya might then go on to buy. Similarly, Peter, 15, didn't mind when his favourite fitness influencers promoted their own products or products from sponsors. Reflecting on a post by *MattDoesFitness* in collaboration with MyProtein (a fitness nutrition company) he said:

"It's his stuff… so I understand he needs to promote it."

Peter, 15

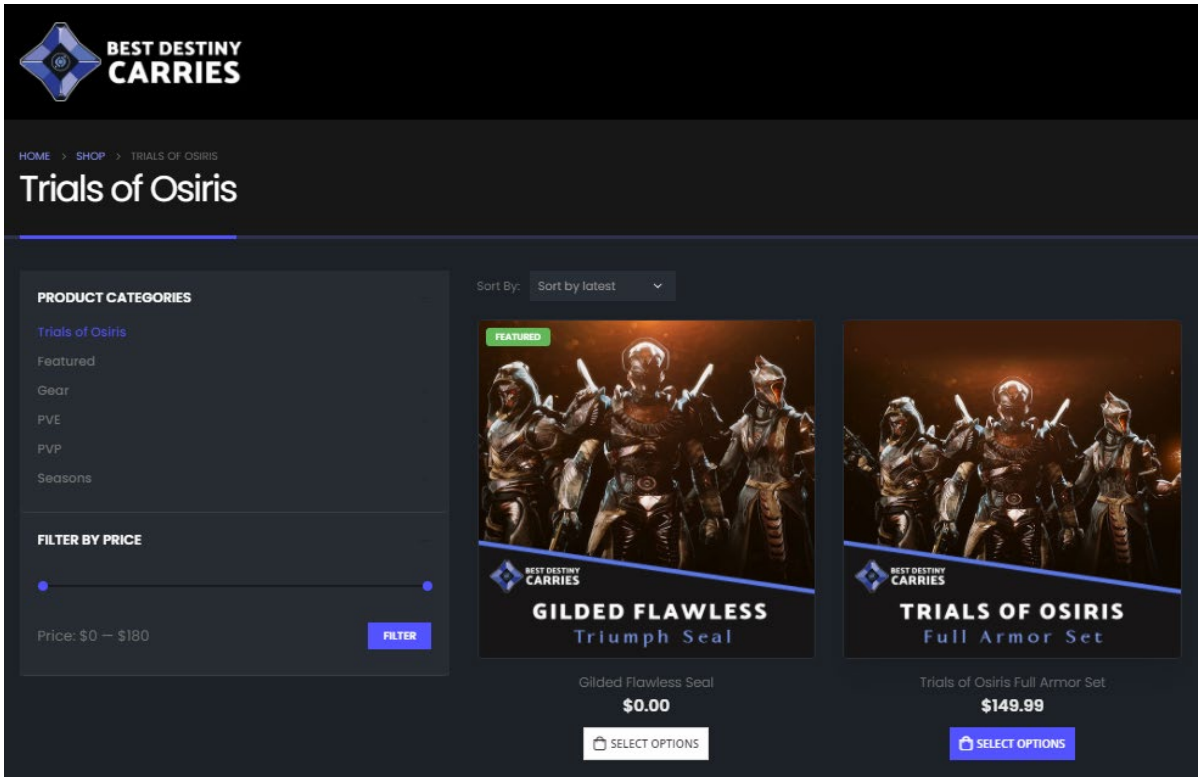
Of all the participants, William, 17, was engaging most with online opportunities to make money. A keen player of the online first-person shooter game, *Destiny*, he had recently been approached by a company called 'Best Destiny Carries' after doing well in an online *Destiny* competition. Best Destiny Carries is an American company that allows *Destiny* players around the world to pay for 'Sherpas' (skilled players like William) to complete difficult objectives for them.

William specialised in a game mode called '*Trials of Osiris*' (an elimination-style mode in which the strongest players compete to earn rewards). Players could pay Best Destiny Carries up to $145.00 to progress through these trials or unlock certain items.

Every weekend, William received a message from his 'manager' on Discord with a set of 'orders' – specific jobs, along with the paying player's account information. He then logged on as that player and completed the task, earning up to £10 for each order completed. On a 'good' weekend William would be on his Xbox for up to 11 hours a day, completing 10-15 orders and earning upwards of £100.

"I think [William earning money by playing Destiny] is quite cool to be honest – it's something he has always wanted to do from when he was very young. Very few people actually are successful at it. I'm quite proud that he's ranked quite highly out of people playing the game… He's obviously got some talent for it which is to be commended. I know it's only Xbox but it's still a thing. It's not what I was brought up with, but then the world isn't how I was brought up. Things change. I'm quite proud of him."

William's mum



Best Destiny Carries – the American company that employs William to level other players up

However, this year there was some evidence that the urge to make money online can fade when the reality of competition for online attention becomes clear. For Zak, 11, the lustre of being a YouTuber had started to diminish:

"YouTubers can make money if they have something like 10,000 subscribers…When I was little, I used to say that I could earn money on YouTube but unless one day I get famous... probably not."

Zak, 11

Some children were streaming to capture online attention, and potentially money

One significant new trend in this wave was an increase in engagement with streaming. Five children – William, 17; Josie.16; Nathan, 14; Isaac, 15; and Zak, 11 – were either viewing streams or attempting to become streamers themselves.

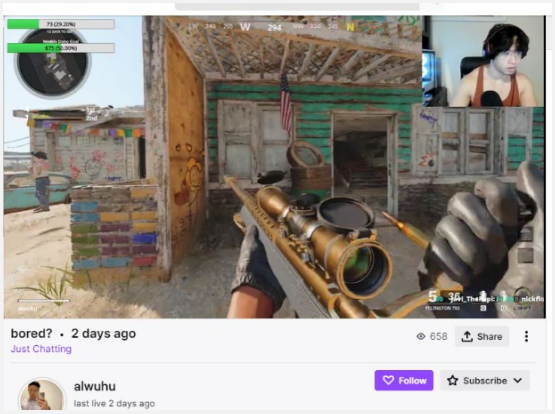
So what is streaming?[27]

Streaming refers to the sharing of live video content with a public audience. It takes the 'live' element from TV but democratises it – anyone can be a streamer as long as they have an interested audience. Streaming also leans heavily on the viewer feeling closely connected to the streamer, through features like live chat. Audiences are often more interested in feeling that they are a streamer's friend, or part of their life, rather than the content itself.

Streaming is also intensely monetised; streaming platforms allow streamers to generate income (through direct payments from viewers, or indirect payments: subscriptions, advertising revenue or sales of merchandise).

What is Twitch?[28]

Twitch[29] is a live video-streaming service, bought by Amazon in 2014. Originally created for gaming streams, it has expanded to include a range of content, including music, hobbies and 'just chatting' streams.



Although a range of other streaming-only platforms (e.g. Mixer and Periscope[30]) exist, and many social media platforms have their own streaming features (e.g. Instagram Live, Facebook Live, YouTube Gaming), Twitch is the most popular live streaming service; globally, it accounts for 70% of all livestream hours watched, at 2.72 billion hours in 2019[31].

Twitch has made live streaming mainstream – making it easier to upload content and earn money – and has led to the high number of full-time and 'celebrity' streamers there are today: there are over 3.3. million unique broadcasters and 140 million unique viewers on Twitch each month. The most popular streamer on Twitch, *Ninja*, has over 12 million followers[32].

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[27] https://www.revealingreality.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Live-Streaming_A-new-economy-of-connection.pdf

[28] https://www.revealingreality.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Live-Streaming_A-new-economy-of-connection.pdf

[29] https://www.twitch.tv/

[30] The Periscope app was discontinued on 1 April 2021: https://www.mobileworldlive.com/featured-content/apps-home-banner/periscope-app-goes-off-air

[31] https://www.digitaltrends.com/gaming/what-is-twitch/

[32] https://muchneeded.com/twitch-statistics/

A number of children in the sample saw streaming as a way to build a new type of online presence; to share their interest and skills in gaming, and also (hopefully) to begin to make money:

"I have been saving up for an Xbox so I was thinking, if I get a new Xbox then I will start streaming on Twitch."

Zak, 11

"I'm going to start my Twitch account back up once I get a PC and I can do some proper streaming, which should earn me like… not a lot of money, but it should earn me some money."

Josie, 16

Of all the children in the sample who streamed (William, 17; Josie, 16; Zak, 11 and Nathan, 13), William was having the most success with his streaming. As part of a *Destiny 2* 'clan' on Discord, he was building connections within the streaming world, and as noted above, had even begun to make money at the time of our second interview through helping players to level up, as well as through streaming on Twitch.

The life of a streamer: William, 17

William was part of what he called a 'competitive *Destiny* clan' on Discord. Populated by 'high quality' *Destiny* players, this was closely connected to streaming. William had begun streaming regularly after *Life in Lockdown*[33] and at the time of the interview had more than100 subscribers.

William described how the members of his clan, and others in the wider *Destiny* community, would try to help each other out in their efforts to build a streaming following. Streamers would help by joining each other's streams to play co-operatively in competitions (thereby introducing their viewers to each other) and doing something called 'hosting'. 'Hosting' involved directing viewers to another stream when your own stream finishes, boosting someone else's viewer numbers as a result.

"Every time I finish my stream I make sure to do it, because that's how you get connections in the streaming community, so then if you start hosting them a couple of times, maybe they'll host you and get you loads of viewers."

William also described **adopting a particular persona** to make his stream more entertaining for his viewers. In his videos, he changed the intonation and style of his voice, using slang and picking up a patter with viewers leaving comments on his video. He would regularly have R&B music playing in the background of his streams, sometimes singing along to add further interest.

"[My persona] kind of just comes naturally… a bit more over-exaggerated and energetic… to make it more interesting for the viewers."

"You've got to be really entertaining, or really good at the game – if you're good at both that's when you get popular in my opinion."

Interacting with viewers was a key element of William's streaming. He would constantly interact with people watching him by verbally responding to their contributions to the Twitch chat. William had a small number of regular viewers, whom he would welcome and interact with throughout his stream. One viewer would occasionally gift him money or even or even pay for multiple subscriptions to his stream (using different accounts they had set up on the platform).

For William, **earning money** was one of his primary motivations for getting into streaming. He mentioned one popular streamer, who had earned £400 streaming on New Year's Eve, as something he aspired to. Given that he was furloughed from his job in a pub and had no immediate plans for his career after lockdown, he was aiming to build his Twitch following as much as possible, and to see if he could begin to earn money. He had recently invested in various items of new gaming 'gear' to help him take it 'seriously', including a new controller, monitor, chair and desk.

"I'll focus on getting money from Destiny and see if I can get around £100 a month from that."

Just before his second interview, William had qualified for Twitch's affiliate programme (requiring a certain amount of streaming time and regular viewers). As a result, Twitch users could now subscribe to his account for $4.99 / month. William had five subscribers – so after deductions by Twitch, he was earning around £15 each month.

It was not as easy for everyone to find success with streaming. Isaac, 15, was keen to become a streamer, but was struggling to get anyone to view his channel. He described going onto smaller streamers' channels in order to give them views (perhaps out of sympathy):

"I've been trying for a month and I haven't even gotten one person to watch."

"[I go onto smaller streams] just to get them one or two views, I know I would have liked that."

Isaac, 15

A few children were connecting with streamers to feel part of the action

Nathan had no immediate ambition to become a streamer himself, but described the enhanced sense of connection that watching a stream gave him, compared to more typical media formats:

"When you're on Twitch you get to interact lively [sic] – you can message, and they'll probably see it and they'll talk back and stuff like that."

Nathan, 14

One of Nathan's favourite *Call of Duty* (a first-person shooter game) streamers would do '*viewer 1-v-1s*' (one-on-one battles) where viewers could have an in-game battle with the streamer using sniper rifles (a type of weapon used in the game). Nathan was keen to take part in one of these, describing his excitement at the chance to be part of the action:

"He'll do viewer 1v1s with snipers and stuff like that… you'll add him as a friend and he'll invite you into the [game] lobby, and then you'll do 1v1s and see if you can beat him or not – he's pretty good at the game. I'm trying to get better at sniping so then I can join and put up a [good] match."

Nathan, 14

Streams are not only run by individuals. Nathan had also joined streams run by games themselves, including one of his favourite games, *Brawlhalla* (a free-to-play platform fighting game). On certain streams run by this channel, viewing for a certain amount of time would unlock skins (in-game costumes) and other rewards.

[33] https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0024/200976/cml-life-in-lockdown-report.pdf

How were children engaging with the news?

Children remained disengaged from TV and radio news, and most were passively consuming news via social media

Summary:

- After a brief surge in interest at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, nearly all the participants had reverted to being disengaged with major news sources, as seen in summer 2019
- Most news was passively consumed through social media, although some children had begun to share content themselves
- Most children in the study did not tend to think about whether the news they saw online was accurate, and had limited methods for assessing this beyond a few 'rules of thumb'

Nearly all the participants had reverted to being disengaged with major news sources

After a peak in interest in the news at the start of the first lockdown[34], engagement with the news reverted to the low levels of engagement seen in wave 6, with few of the children engaging with major news providers. This echoes a trend seen in previous waves, with behaviours in wave 6 showing decreased engagement with major news sources, but with some children following informal gossip and local news stories.

During this wave, most children reported only hearing about news and current events via social media. Peter, 15, for example, reported that he had completely disengaged from the news except for what he saw his parents watching. Arjun, 9, explained that *"there's no news for us kids"* so he had also stopped watching it.

None of the participants were watching news on television regularly, but Alice, 16; Josie, 16; and Freya, 17, would occasionally check news apps to see what was going on. Freya described using the Channel 4 news app, in particular for updates regarding lockdown restrictions. She appreciated the fact that the Channel 4 app was concise, so it was easy for her to find the information she is interested in.

[34] See *Life in Lockdown*: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0024/200976/cml-life-in-lockdown-report.pdf

Alice and Josie both said they sometimes saw the news if one of their parents was watching it, but otherwise, they wouldn't choose to engage with live news on television:

"If it's not on then I'm not going to be like, oh, 'I'm going to watch the news', OK?"

Alice, 16

Building on previous insight:

Children's engagement with major news sources had risen at the start of the first coronavirus lockdown, but then fallen away over time

At the start of the first coronavirus lockdown (March – June 2020) children in the study had been watching TV news broadcasts with their families to keep up with developments. However, as the pandemic unfolded, the children began to disengage, either due to anxiety about the situation or a lack of interest.

Engaging with the news through social media

In previous waves of Children's Media Lives, the children in our study expressed a lack of interest in major news sources. In Wave 4, we noted that many participants had begun absorbing most of their news from social media, often without intentionally seeking it out. Since then, there has been a trend towards more children looking to informal gossip and local news sources to learn about what is going on in the world.

Most news was passively consumed through social media, although some children had begun to share content themselves

Most children in the study reported only hearing about news and current events via social media. As in previous waves, this meant that much of their news consumption was passive – something they came across accidentally rather than seeking it out. It also meant much of the 'news-like' content they saw pertained to local issues or gossip between users on social media, or influencers, as opposed to large international news stories (with the exception of stories about schooling and Covid-19, which the participants were interested in at the start of lockdown, or when new statements were due to be made about schooling).

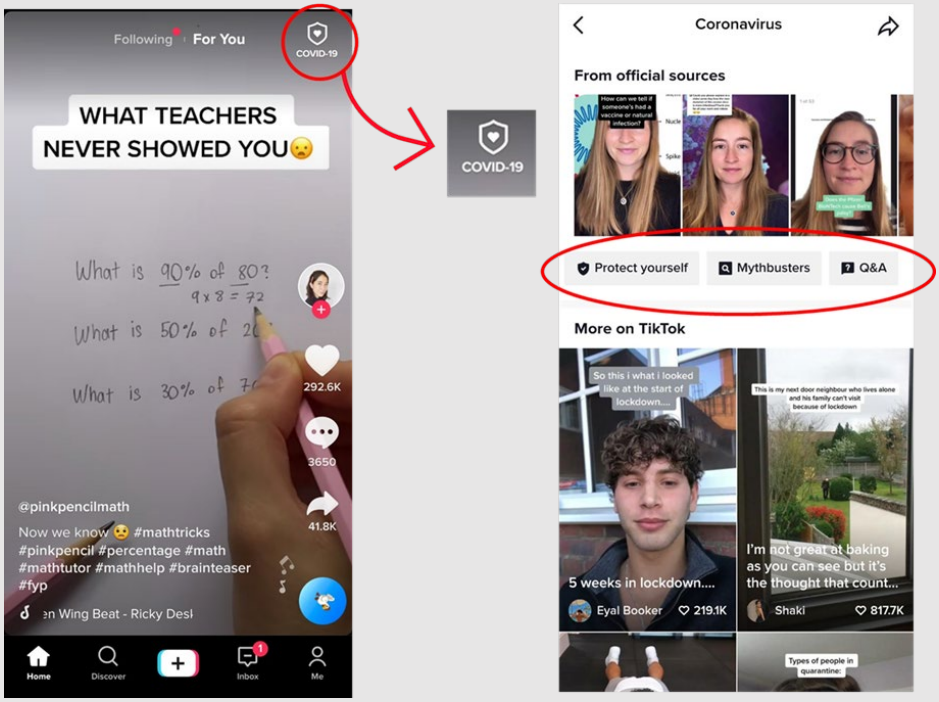
Many of the children picked up knowledge about the world through their Snapchat 'Explore' feed and viral videos on TikTok. Many of the viral videos about current events that the children saw on TikTok commentaries on social justice issues. While it was common for children to see news-type content on their 'For You' page', they weren't always clear on the source or accuracy of the information. Some children also mentioned that TikTok had a specific feature for news and videos relating to Covid-19:

"Recently there has been this little thing on TikTok where, like, coronavirus little news bits have come up on it. Like what's happening and what you should do… TikTok is doing it. Because like now there is a little bit in the corner that says coronavirus and if you click it all the related videos come up."

Zak, 11

Covid-19 information and news content on TikTok

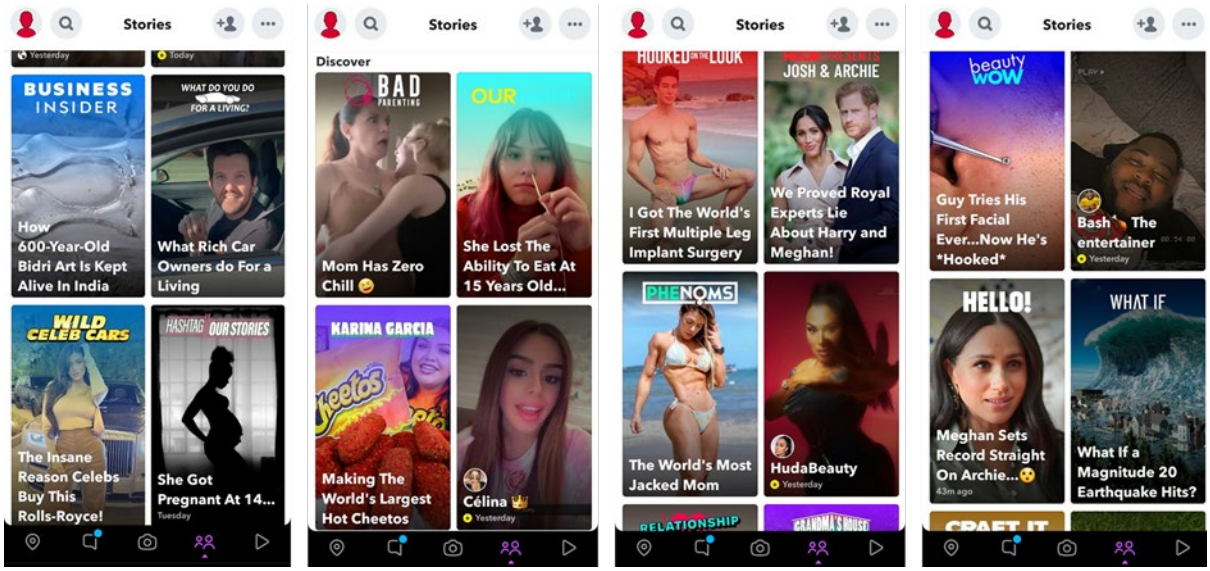
On the main feed on TikTok, the 'For You' page, an icon in the top right-hand corner links to Covid-19-related content on the platform. This includes official information including 'Mythbusters' and 'ways to protect yourself' as well as the most popular videos about Covid-19.



Freya, 17, learned about the news and what was going on in the world mainly through TikTok. On her 'For You' page she regularly saw videos about current events, most of which were related to social justice issues.

Freya often saw multiple videos on one topic. This was often when topics had gained attention online, or if a trending audio clip had been posted in relation to a news story. As Freya often watched these videos, she received more of them on her 'For You' page and assumed that the TikTok algorithm pushed more of this content to her. If she saw a story which interested her, she would sometimes save the video and 'Google it' to see if there were articles talking about it. She was not sure exactly how to assess the truth of the articles, but if she saw multiple articles on the topic, she tended to assume the video must be accurate.

Snapchat was another way in which children in the study were consuming news. Shriya, 16, explained that although her college sent out news sources for pupils to read for their media class, she mainly saw news content on the 'discover' page on Snapchat. She generally preferred celebrity news and found out about Kim Kardashian and Kanye West getting a divorce on the app.



Snapchats 'Discover' page shows news stories often relating to celebrities

Other stories seen on Snapchat included local news, news aimed at the children's demographic, or celebrity gossip that their peers were sharing. For example, William, 17, had heard about the stabbing of a young teenage boy in Reading on Snapchat, but had not seen this story anywhere else:

"Sometimes I see stories that are based at my age range probably… not particularly world news. There's been a lot recently of people posting on Snapchat about a boy who was stabbed and killed… There was a lot of stuff on Snapchat stories saying rest in peace and stuff to that kid – it's a sad story to hear."

William, 17

Some children were also sharing news content, but mainly in a light-touch way. For example, Zak, 11, re-shared a joke video on TikTok of Boris Johnson talking about what he ate for dinner, because he found it funny.

Re-sharing news content was sometimes used to signal approval or disapproval of a certain topic. For example, on Instagram William had a *BLM* (Black Lives Matter) poll linked from his profile. But although he wanted to show that he cared, he didn't know a great deal about the Black Lives Matter movement or the news stories it had generated.

"I just saw it on my friend's story… and thought it was a good way to help… because I couldn't really do much else… hopefully it helped do something."

William, 17

Similarly, Peter, 15, re-shared an Instagram story about the death of Captain Tom, but didn't really know much about him:

"Loads of people respect him and it's good to like… pay your respects. I think I was one of the first people to do it."

Peter, 15

Most children in the study did not tend to think about whether the news they saw online was accurate, and had limited methods for assessing this beyond a few 'rules of thumb'

Most of the children didn't tend to question whether what they saw was true or accurate, and some struggled to imagine how they would do this. Sarah, 17, was sceptical about many of the stories she saw about the 5G phone signals being linked to the transmission of the Covid-19 virus, but she gave more credence to certain stories she had seen about the Covid-19 vaccine.

"Don't get me wrong I have seen some stuff about the vaccine and me personally I don't want it. I don't trust it in the slightest and I do think a lot of that is because of my social media but me obviously I make my own decisions and when I've thought about what social media is saying to me about it, then it does come across as correct. Like how have they got this vaccine so quick compared to everything else, how did we go from having one to having 5?"

Sarah, 17

As previously mentioned, Freya, 17, tended to look for multiple corroborating sources, rather than questioning the quality, and was reassured if she found several articles referencing a topic she had seen discussed in a TikTok video.

Zak, 11, relied on his mum to help him understand what he should and should not believe:

"I don't really watch the news much, I just hear it from my mum and she will know if the news is real or fake so I just listen to what she says."

Zak, 11

William, 17, recognised that the stories he saw on social media might not be entirely truthful, but he very rarely looked for more information about a story he stumbled across. However, on one occasion he had read up on a celebrity rumour he had seen on Instagram.

"I saw another story going with rumours going around about Kanye West having an affair with a man – a person called Jeffrey Starr. Kind of like a false scandal where like he's getting a divorce with Kim because of this affair. But apparently, it's all a rumour that started with TikTok… I read up on it and apparently it was just someone started a random rumour on TikTok and it blew up, and now it's gone around and people are believing it."

William, 17

How did children feel about spending more time online during lockdown?

Many children felt that living life online was a poor substitute for offline activities, and reported lower wellbeing during lockdown than previously

Summary:

- Putting this wave into context
- Despite time spent socialising and being entertained online, many children felt lonely or pessimistic about their situation

Putting this wave into context

As in *Life in Lockdown*[35], it is clear that the UK's third lockdown has encouraged children to spend more time online. Restrictions on normal life have left a space which young people continue to fill with social media, gaming and watching online content.

Almost all aspects of a young person's life have moved online – whether socialising, learning, being entertained, building an identity, or exploring the world.

[35] Life in Lockdown

A note on this year…

In wave 6 (2019) we conducted a 'deep dive' into potentially harmful content that children saw online, asking a series of detailed questions about different types of nasty or upsetting content they were exposed to. As a result, several children reported seeing online content such as violence or self-harm videos (although some of these occurred outside the period between waves 5 and 6). This year, we did not include a specific deep-dive into online harms, so our findings are more generally centred around children's experiences of wellbeing.

Despite time spent socialising and being entertained online, many children felt lonely or pessimistic about their situation

Most of the sample were struggling with the realities of lockdown. Some expressed a lack of hope for the future or acknowledged that they had withdrawn into themselves.

"I feel like I'm not progressing in the way I should be…"

Freya, 17

"[School from home] makes me feel dumber."

Isaac, 15

Online activities have clearly helped to assuage some of the loneliness and hardship felt by children during this time. Being able to chat to friends while playing Xbox or fill time watching Netflix was a lifeline to children whose worlds have changed dramatically since March 2020.

But being online was generally seen as a poor substitute for the loss of offline activities. While the children could readily 'fill time' with gaming, binge-watching or scrolling on TikTok, this did not bring them the same positive feeling that offline hobbies had brought them. Similarly, although the children could keep in touch with friends or family through gaming and social media, they did not consider this to be an adequate replacement for seeing people they were close to in person. Technology offered a distraction but was unable to fulfil the children's need for offline connection.

Almost all of the children in our study spoke about feeling lonelier than they had previously. Those who did not like communicating over the phone or on social media were withdrawing more, and felt particularly isolated. Freya, 17, for example, described feeling trapped at home and struggled to feel close to people when interacting with others online. Similarly, Sarah, 17, described feelings of intense loneliness during lockdown.

"It has been quite difficult – it's been very lonely… It is really, really, really, lonely. Even when you do Facetime people and stuff it's not the same, you don't feel like you've got somebody there. When you're feeling down, you don't feel like you've got somebody there."

Sarah, 17

"The best for me right now would be for Covid to end. [That might happen in] May – I don't know – October? It could go on until 2022, who knows? It's sad… not seeing my friends, we barely got through a year of this – two years would be… I don't know."

Arjun, 9

Most of the children in the study reflected that online activities improved their situation but compared poorly to the activities they had replaced. The children described a range of issues with living life online:

- Feeling lonely despite time spent socialising on social media or while gaming
- Missing previous offline hobbies, like sport, seeing friends or after-school clubs
- Feeling that online learning was harder to engage with and less fulfilling than offline schooling

Some children *were* enjoying spending more time with family or doing their hobbies

Some children reported positives from the January 2021 lockdown. Emma and Bryony (12 and 13), for example, were enjoying the additional time they were able to spend with their families, and particularly with their horses.

"Well I prefer it [home schooling] because it's less time, so as soon as I finish I go outside to the pony…I like it better."

Emma, 12

Jack, 16, had started playing cards with his nan once each day for a bit of family contact. Similarly, Josie, 16, had been spending more time with her dad's family and with her older brother, who was encouraging her to go to university in the future. She went out for walks with them sometimes and appreciated the opportunity to catch up with them while her mum was busy at work.

And some of the participants had also tried new things during lockdown. For example, Alice, 16, had started training with a personal trainer and making digital art on her iPad, and Josie, 16, had dyed her hair twice.

But for most of the children, getting back to normal was the priority

Across the sample, children were eager to return to a life that had more of a balance between online and offline activities:

"I think I probably should [go out] because I haven't been outdoors in a while. I have been outdoors but to take the rubbish out and stuff like that. I couldn't remember the last time [I went out]… maybe to the shops or something."

William, 17

"I would rather things were back to normal, than the way it is at the moment. Because it's just making everything harder… harder than it needs to be. And sometimes I want to go out with my friends, and we can't really do that, because obviously we're not really meant to go out in other groups so we can't really do that."

"I'm looking forward to playing basketball as a team because obviously it has been cancelled for a while. And I am looking forward to playing matches again."

Ben, 13

Glossary

Anime: Anime typically refers to animation that originates from Japan. It encompasses every genre, including drama, sci-fi, romance, action-adventure and horror. Over the last few decades, it has grown in popularity internationally, and has recently begun to be hosted on streaming platforms like Netflix.

Body sculpting: The process of increasing the body's visible muscle tone or otherwise changing its shape through exercise or cosmetic procedures.

Call of Duty: *Call of Duty* is a very successful games franchise. It is a first-person shooter game, originally set in World War 2. More recent iterations have been set in the Cold War, the near future and even outer space. The most recent Call of Duty release was *Call of Duty: Black Ops Cold War,* which came out in November 2020

Clan: Groups of video game players who regularly play together in multiplayer games

Destiny: A science fiction first-person shooter game, available on both PlayStation and Xbox

Discord: A group chat-focused social media platform particularly popular with gamers. Discord allows users to interact on 'servers' – chat rooms that can range in size from two individuals to thousands-strong gaming communities

Drip: A slang term used to describe someone's look or outfit - particularly when this is cool or attractive

Explore Page: A user-specific section of *Instagram*, where users see content based on things they have previously interacted with

Facetune: One example of a photo editing app used to enhance, edit, and retouch photos. It is typically used for editing selfies or other photos before they are uploaded to social media

FIFA: FIFA21 is the latest in a series of popular football video game, available on all major consoles

Filters: An overlay that can be used when taking a photo of oneself. Filters can be subtle (e.g. smoothing skin) or more obvious (e.g. adding animal ears). Filters are regularly updated on *Snapchat*, *Instagram* and *Facebook*, and are also programmed into camera settings on some smartphones

Fortnite: A multiplayer online game which can be played for free on multiple gaming platforms (e.g. Xbox, PlayStation). In the most popular game mode, Battle Royale, the game pits players against each other to be the last survivor on an island.

Gamertag: A pseudonym (and sometimes image and short bio) by which gamers are known to others.

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 where 'expert' influencers promote a product through public use on their 'channel'

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

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

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

Meme: A meme is an image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by Internet users, often with slight variations

Microsoft Teams: Part of Microsoft 365, Teams is a communication platform that offers chat, videoconferencing and file storage

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

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

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

Rocket League: Rocket League is a car-based football video game. In Rocket League, eight players are assigned to two teams, who compete to score goals using rocket-powered vehicles

Selfie: A photograph that a user takes of themselves, typically with a smartphone or webcam. Selfies are often shared via social media.

Skins; Skins are outfits/costumes that can be bought for use in video games, using either in-game currency or real money. Skins allow users to change the appearance of their character

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

TikTok: TikTok is a video-sharing social networking platform which is used to create short lip-sync, comedy, and talent videos.

Toxic: Slang adjective used to describe someone who is very negative, offensive, or acts rudely to others. Commonly used in reference to people's behaviour on social media or in online games

Twitch: This is a live-streaming video service that mainly focuses on the live-streaming of gameplay videos. It will often broadcast competitions between different players.

Try on Haul: A type of video (shared on social media or *YouTube*) where a user or influencer tries on or demonstrates a range of items (often clothing) to their audience

Unboxing: Opening a new product while being filmed. The item is often then explained in detail or demonstrated. Unboxing videos are popular on *YouTube* and other platforms

Valorant: A free-to-play shooting game available on Microsoft Windows. Players chose to play as one of 15 'agents' (each with unique abilities) and are assigned to an attacking or defending team

Vlogger: A vlogger is someone who video blogs, otherwise known as 'vlogs'. This means that they upload diary-style videos online

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

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

Yubo: *Yubo* is a social media platform which is specifically designed to help young people meet new people online. The platform has 40 million users worldwide, which are split into two communities: one is for users between the ages of 13 – 17 and another for those who are over 18

Thank you