



Social Media,
Television And Children

Social Media and Television in the Lives of Children

— Media Industry Guide





Recommendations for the Media Industry



The information that follows derives from the findings of the study 'Social Media and Television in the Lives of Children'. The study explored social media specifically in relation to television, but some of the findings can be applied to thinking about the connection between children's use of social media with other media, such as digital games. A full copy of the study's findings are available from www.stac-study.org. The following gives a top line summary of the findings and then makes recommendations for professionals working in the development and production of digital media for children, based on specific design aspects.

How we carried out the study



Research Design

3154

Families

We undertook an online survey with 3154 families in the UK who had children aged 0-16.



6

We undertook case studies with six families over a period of three months.

110

Children aged 5-11

One hundred and ten children and young people aged 5-11 took part in telephone interviews.

33

Children aged 12-16

Thirty children and young people aged 12-16 took part in telephone interviews.



Research Questions



Q1

How do children aged 0-16 use television and social media in their daily lives?

Q2

What views and practices do parents have in relation to children's use of television and social media?

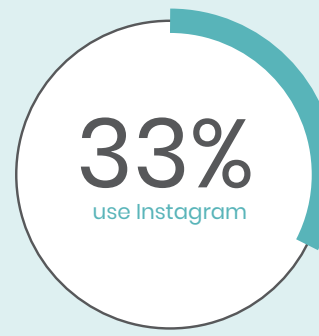
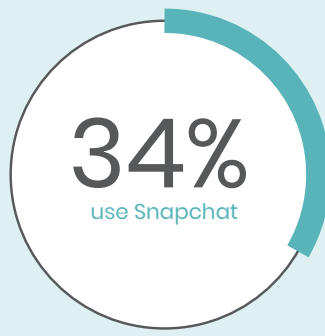
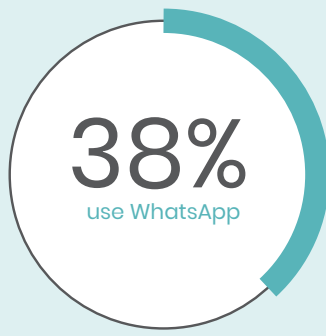
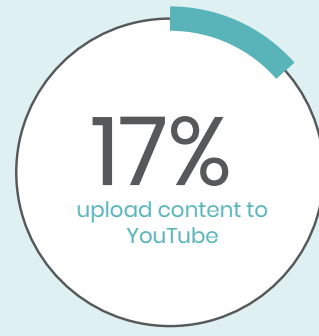
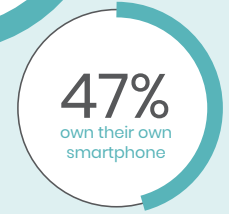
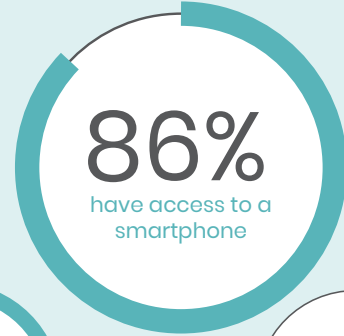
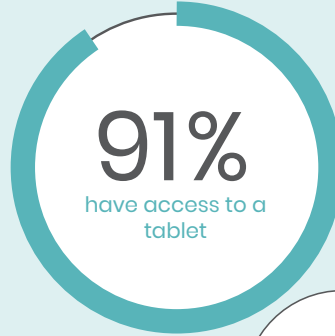
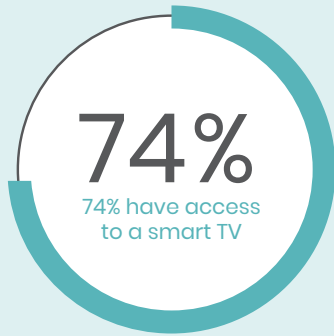


Q3

What are the implications of this analysis for the children's media industry, schools and parents?



How do children aged 0-16 use social media and television?





WhatsApp used most often to communicate with family

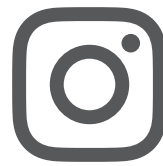
NETFLIX



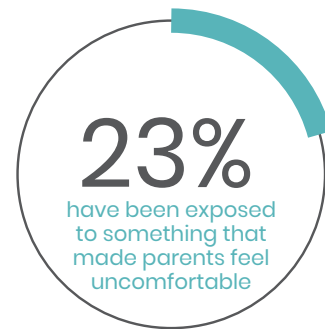
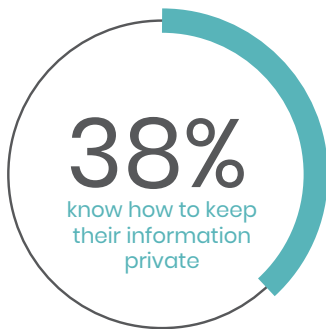
Most frequently viewed content: YouTube and Netflix



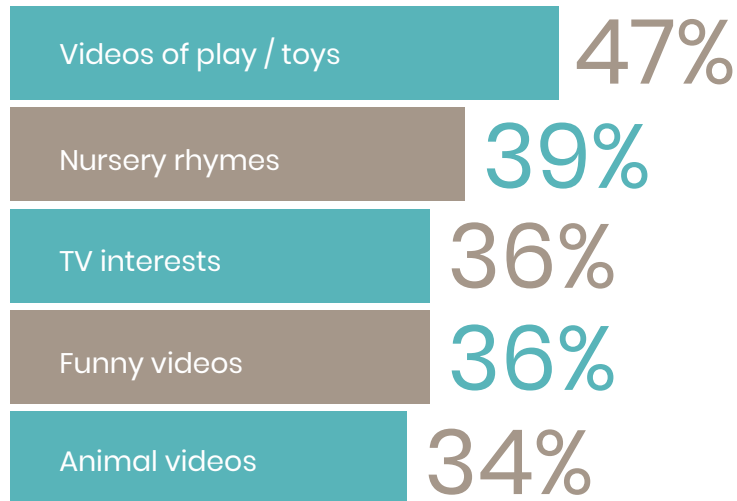
Snapchat used most often to communicate with family



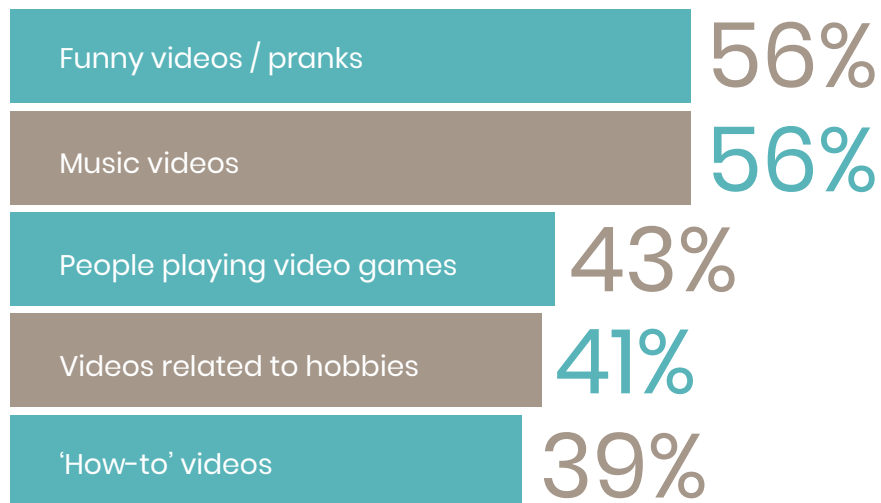
Instagram used most often to post photographs



Favourite YouTube content of 0-7 year-olds



Favourite YouTube content of 8-16 year-olds



Recommendations

The following presents recommendations arising from the findings categorised under the following design features: (1) logos, (2) interface, (3) access, (4) scheduling, (5) platform, (6) content genre and (7) safety.

Logos

- Use simple logos that make it easy for children to identify their favourite platform content. Currently, few programmes have a recognisable logo for younger children.
- Use logos that indicate content consistently across platforms so that younger children can find their favourite programmes more easily. This is particularly important for children who are not yet able to read independently. Currently only 56% of children can consistently find the content they want.

Interface

- Make a clean interface that is free of clutter e.g. remove the buttons children don't use.
- Create an interface that is simple to use. One way to do this is to look at existing interfaces that are popular with children, such as YouTube. Offering interface mechanics based on existing platforms makes it easier for children to scaffold their knowledge.
- Ensure content for younger children has a built-in margin of error for interactive parts. This responds to their developing fine motor skills, e.g. younger children might push buttons with their thumb (as they have more power) than with their fingers.
- Offer more than one means of searching for content, i.e. history & search bar. The first strategy is used more often by younger children and the latter by older children.

Access

- Provide content across a variety of platforms. This allows children to engage continuously with your IP and in different ways that connect to their wider play and learning.
- Offer both short and long-form content, as these appeal to different ages of children and at different times of the day.
- Offer ad-free content even if this version needs to be paid for. Children are increasingly frustrated by adverts and many parents don't wish their children to be exposed to them.
- Allow children an easy way to find new content by making recommendations based on favourites.

Scheduling

- Schedule content for TV that coincides with children's everyday life patterns, i.e. use of social media peaks in the period after dinner and before bedtime.
- Social media can be used to engage audiences with content on other platforms e.g. by providing exclusive previews, updates on characters and suggestions for parents on how to engage with their children with the content.
- Place content that siblings can watch together on at times when this is most needed, i.e. afterschool and before dinner, at breakfast time and so on, when they are in the same place at the same time.

Platform

- Ensure the content is the best match for the platform it is intended to be engaged with, i.e. YouTube –entertaining, Instagram –everyday events, Twitter –celebs. Children are connoisseurs of this. If your content is not the best match for the platform, they will engage with something else.
- Linear TV is often a shared family activity – schedule content to make the most of this. Other than this, engagement with linear TV is in decline.

Content genre

- Offer content about DIY, toy hacking, craft and making. These are themes children search for regularly on YouTube.
- Children want a wide range of content including content about gaming, and life-style vloggers.
- Find ways for children to feedback on content, i.e. to ‘like’/ ‘favourite’ and so on.
- Consider the genre type being foregrounded, i.e. all content can be considered entertaining and educational, but some clearly foregrounds one above the other. Children prefer entertainment and adults select content that is overtly educational. You can use both angles to market your product, but do not characterise content as educational if it is not really the case.
- More high quality long-form content needed.

Safety and privacy

- Embed a timed controller to limit screen time.
- Offer easy-to-access parental controls, even if they don’t always get used. Parental sentiment is that they feel comfortable knowing they exist, but it needs to be made very clear how to use them.
- Develop easy-to-use controls that foster children’s self-regulation strategies for using social media.
- The host of content needs to monitor it in order for parents to trust it and allow children to navigate it alone. Algorithms need to focus on child-relevant measures.
- The types of content on mobile devices needs to have a particularly strong emphasis on age appropriate content, because children are more likely to be viewing it alone.
- A ‘History’ feature can be used as a safety feature for younger children, because parents are able to use it like a playlist of pre-vetted content.
- Make privacy and data control features easy to use and understand. Make an effort to go beyond the minimal requirements embedded in relevant law and regulations, and tell your audience you are doing so – parents will appreciate you going ‘that extra mile’, and it can help to build trust in your brand.

Conclusion



This booklet has offered a number of recommendations for the media industry, based on the findings of our study.

The primary aim of these recommendations is to ensure that children have access to high-quality content and design. One of the best ways to ensure the development of a good product is to combine it with research. This can be undertaken in a number of ways to suit a variety of budgets, such as referring to the findings of studies such as this one, through user testing with individual children, or in schools. If your budget allows it, user testing and research in children's homes can give great insight into how your product is likely to be used, and how it will fit into the lives of your audience. For further guidance on fostering partnerships with universities that might lead to productive research partnerships, see the following booklet:

Working Together on Young Children's Digital and Media Practices: Fostering Academic and Industry Partnerships¹

Children's use of television and social media is a fast-changing field, and it is sometimes difficult for smaller companies to keep up with what is happening in this area. Dubit, one of the partners in the research study, provides regular updates that are free to access, and so the **Insights²** section of their website may be of value.

The Children's Media Foundation³ also offers up-to-date information about developments in the field.

Finally, meeting with other producers can be a valuable means of keeping up-to-date. **The Children's Media Conference⁴** is an annual conference, held every July in Sheffield, UK, that offers sessions for those involved in developing, producing and distributing content to children, on all platforms.

¹ <http://digilitey.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/IAP.pdf>

² <https://www.dubitlimited.com/insights>

³ <https://www.thechildrensmediafoundation.org>

⁴ <http://www.thechildrensmediaconference.com>

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www.stac-study.org