

Consultation response form

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Your response

Question 1: What characteristics do (i) children and (ii) parents/carers most value about content aimed at children? How does this vary depending on the age of the child?

Confidential? – N

I'd like to ask a question in return here: there has been a great deal of research on what children and parents value/like/don't like/ learn from/are upset by in media material. This includes some research commissioned by Ofcom (see e.g. The Future of Children's Television (2007) and the literature review attached to it.) Obviously more up-to-date research than this exists and my question is: do you have access to this research and is there someone responsible for monitoring and collating it and occasionally giving you reports on it? I think this would be useful for you.

Without going to the trouble of checking all this research myself, I can give you my own current take:

1. What do children most value? Clarity; being addressed directly and respectfully and not patronised; humour - how sophisticated this is depends on the age of the child – Dip Dap for the young, slapstick comedy for older kids – including making adults look silly; information and education – Horrible Histories combines all these qualities – it is an exemplary show, and also very well-researched and it shows.

2. Parents – all of the above, plus stuff they liked themselves as children. This would include live action drama including adaptations of children's books, of which there isn't much nowadays. Children like this too. (See my book, 'Dear BBC: Children, Television Storytelling and the Public Sphere', Cambridge University Press, 2001, based on a BBC-funded study with 1400 children in the UK). Parents don't like advertising, research shows. Also adults tend to be more sensitive to

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| | <p>stereotyping and to object to girls being shown in domestic roles and boys in heroic roles and animated characters tending to be primarily male. Ethnic diversity and diversity of accent important too.</p> <p>3. Obviously everything depends on the age of the children – most particularly a.) level of understanding and linguistic complexity, the simpler and clearer the better for youngest children, and that includes simple, clear, compelling visuals, and occasionally nice music. And b.) level of emotional intensity – small children are more easily scared than older ones, though it's impossible to know what they're going to be scared by without very detailed observation of lots of different children. The risk of imitative behaviour exists in all children, so there should be no dangerous examples. All children, in my experience, and in my research, appreciate honourable behaviour in protagonists; they like carnivalesque humour, but they want wrongs righted, the good guys rewarded and fairness to prevail. They also want to see children like themselves, i.e. not a dominance of attractive white child models with standardised accents.</p> |
| <p>Question 2: Are there certain genres within children's (e.g. live action, animation) that children or parents/carers particularly value and watch, and if so why?</p> | <p>Confidential? – N Yes there are such genres. Again, see research including your own, and BARB. Animation popular and acceptable for preschoolers and some slightly older children. Older children like live action and realism. They also appreciate good factual material like Newsround. Parents do too. There is a gap for the oldest age group of children - 12-15. This is an important stage of life for people - transferring to high school, onset of puberty, anxieties about body changes, sexual identity, and - yes - the state of the world: politics, the environment and so on. See the study by Carter et al on Newsround (2009).</p> |
| <p>Question 3: Do children or parents/carers have different expectations in terms of quality or other characteristics depending on the format (e.g. long-form vs. short-form/broadcast vs. online), or the provider/brand (e.g. BBC/ITV vs. Netflix vs. YouTube etc). Do they value content in these different formats or from these different providers differently? Do these different formats or</p> | <p>Confidential? –N</p> <p>All of these questions are impossible to answer without actually asking a representative sample of parents and children themselves. Again, answering simply as myself without doing the necessary research - which I would love to do, actually (I'm a parent, grandparent, teacher, researcher, media campaigner):</p> |

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| <p>providers meet different needs for children?</p> | <p>the child/family audience values diversity of genre, format and access in exactly the same way as the adult audience. That is, adults like entertainment and humour - so do children; adults like thrilling drama - so do children; adults like to be informed - so do children. Children also NEED these things as they are still learning about the world. Additionally, children are open to new types of experimental material and formats and there are some genres specific to children, such as animation and certain kinds of silly humour that adults don't appreciate so much.</p> |
| <p>Question 4: When and why do children and parents/carers choose online or streaming services (for instance iPlayer, Netflix, YouTube) instead of watching TV on a TV set? Is this for particular sorts of programmes? Do you have any evidence in support of your view?</p> | <p>Confidential? – N Ofcom figures are the best source for the answer to this. Again, from my observation - and if you'd like evidence, I'd love to do the research if someone would fund it - online and streaming services are useful when travelling and away from home. Sitting down with the family and watching TV as broadcast is easier and can be more fun at home. We shouldn't forget other media such as radio, podcasts and music either.</p> |
| <p>Question 5: How do children discover programmes and decide what to watch? What role do broadcasters, platforms, parents, and friends play, and does this change as children get older?</p> | <p>Confidential? – /N Again - research needed. My sense is it's quite difficult for children to find new (or indeed old) material that they like. Branded channels obviously help - CBBC, CBeebies, Cartoon Network, Nick, etc. and knowing where and when to find them. Also playing with mum's iPad and browsing YouTube. Personally I'm not sure this is the best way of them finding good stuff. Trailing children's material on adult channels is a good thing to do. I'm going to put in a word for good media education in schools too. Broadly, they need help in directing them towards good content - and this is where adult programme makers and channel controllers can help.</p> |
| <p>Question 6: Are there specific genres within children's content (on any platform) where demand or audience need is not currently matched by supply from PSBs, commercial channels, or on-demand and streaming services, or a combination of the former? What supports your view on this?</p> | <p>Confidential? – N Material aimed at older children: 12-15; good live action drama.</p> |
| <p>Question 7: What is the role and importance of first-run UK-originated programming for audiences? For</p> | <p>Confidential? – N The child audience is no different from the</p> |

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| <p>broadcasters? Does this vary by sub-genres or by age group?</p> | <p>adult audience in terms of having their own tastes and in terms of the need for information , education and entertainment geared to their age and stage of development; producers need to remember that the child audience will soon become the adult audience, and will need to be educated as such in the ways of appreciating and finding good material. Hence the child audience will appreciate original, first-run material just as much as the audiences for Call the Midwife or Broadchurch, or the 10 o clock news do. If they are never offered such material in childhood, it's unlikely that they'll suddenly realise its value when they're grownup.</p> |
| <p>Question 8: How are on-demand and streaming services changing the nature of competition in children's content? Is this impacting on the range or quality of content available to UK audiences?</p> | <p>Confidential? – N</p> <p>Someone really needs to do some homework on this question. Ofcom data has some answers but presumably more questions need to be asked of the providers of these services. It seems to me that this is a financial question, rather than a question to do with the quality of content, or the tastes of the audience.</p> |
| <p>Question 9: How have funding models and investment in children's content changed over the last five to ten years? Do you have evidence you can share with this to support your view?</p> | <p>Confidential? – N</p> <p>No I don't have evidence for this, as my specialism is research on child audiences.</p> |
| <p>Question 10: If certain genres within children's content (for instance news, factual, or drama) are becoming increasingly difficult to obtain funding for, what are the reasons for this? Are certain genres more difficult to generate financial returns from, and if so, why?</p> | <p>Confidential? – N</p> <p>I don't know. News, in my experience, is valued by children, so it isn't the audience's fault if there's no funding for factual material. It must be the fault of the industry.</p> |
| <p>Question 11: Are there other incentives and disincentives you think we should consider as part of the review?</p> | <p>Confidential? – N</p> <p>Probably - but my specialism is audience research and I think that it would be very interesting to do some original research addressing the questions you are asking about the audience. I have also always found it very useful to talk to the actual producers and writers of children's material, who understand their audiences well. (Again, see the 'Dear BBC' study.)</p> |

References:

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