

# Live action strikes back Kids TV in the online era

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*Image: Horrible Histories - Lion Television Ltd.*

Live action kids content has been rejuvenated by the growth of online—a somewhat counter-intuitive development as older kids are more prone to spend more time on social media and mobile devices than other age groups. The TV business faces the challenge of a new generation of children that embrace all content—video and television, short-form and long-form—as equal in the digital era.

This whitepaper combines insights from leading producers, platforms and channels to examine the latest trends, challenges and opportunities in this space. Our key findings are:

- Not only are kids becoming platform-agnostic, they are also becoming increasingly global in outlook
- The arrival of online platforms Amazon and Netflix is leading to more funding for the live action genre and more flexible approaches to programming. However, the issue of global ‘all rights’ deals is a difficulty for many producers
- New co-production models are emerging: filming local transmission and global versions at the same time; and the adoption of ‘pre-buy’ co-productions to increase the creative input from channels
- There are increased international opportunities in scripted but it’s unclear whether they will also develop into more unscripted opportunities for producers
- Creatively, scripted programming is seeing a widening of scope with the sub-genres of scary stories and mysteries
- Short-form production is rising with the growing importance of YouTube and Facebook for older kids demographics
- The rise of short form is also seeing the re-invention and rejuvenation of formats and sub-genres that have existed for decades on children’s television, and are now flourishing online
- Additionally, the new generation of content creators are the kids themselves; with smartphones and tablets, kids are now making their own content and there’s been an explosion of videos made by kids for kids.

With all these developing trends, the world of kids TV can look forward to continued renewal and innovation from both established players and the new digitally-native kids audience.



**Kids live action TV**  
The kids audience

## The kids TV audience

### Tweens, family & co-viewing



Image: Officially Amazing – Lion Television Ltd.

For live action programming in children's TV the key audience is eight to 12 years (also known as the 'tween' audience) although key players highlight subtle variations to this broad target. For Nickelodeon the live action sweet spot is 'age 9 to 10', KiKA in Germany targets 'kids six to 13-plus family' while Lion TV aims at an audience of 8-12 for all live action but 'reaches for these projects of seven to family'. Zodiac Kids also stated that eight to 12 years is its core audience but the production company is looking at shows that might play 'slightly older'.

Series that appeal to not only kids but also where older siblings—and parents viewing alongside their children—are valuable properties. Parents watching programming alongside their children—also referred to as 'co-viewing'—is observed in both *Horrible Histories* and *Officially Amazing* (both Lion TV for BBC) according to Lion TV MD Richard Bradley.

There is also a link between co-viewing and online platforms. When *Horrible Histories* was transmitted on the children's segment of BBC1 (the BBC's main channel) there was co-viewing. However, now the series is broadcast on the BBC's dedicated kids TV channel (CBBC) rather than the main BBC channel, *Horrible Histories* does not generate as much co-viewing. However, there is co-viewing when the programme is accessed via the BBC's iPlayer.

While co-viewing was not an initial aim for *Horrible Histories*, new projects are being produced with this potential in mind. *Creeped Out*, the mystery, scary stories anthology from DHX Studios (for UK's CBBC and Family Channel in Canada), has had co-viewing in mind from the start. DHX's EVP, content and distribution Josh Scherba notes that the series has higher production values than is normally associated with kids scripted and part of the thinking behind this additional investment is the hope of attracting younger teens plus the possibility of parental co-viewing as production values need to be nearer network scripted shows for this co-view opportunity to work.

New online players (Amazon and Netflix in particular) are investing in kids content with an eye to serving the family audience. Lion TV's Bradley thinks having strong content the whole family can watch together provides a strong hook for online platforms trying to gain, and retain, subscribers. Animation also has a strong element of family and co-viewing.

## The kids TV audience

### Preschool

Traditionally, the preschool audience has been served by animated series with a limited number of live-action presenter-led preschool series and 'make and do' style series (*Zodiak Kids Mister Maker's Arty Party* is a 'make and do' style series and has been selling relatively well in the international preschool market). However Josh Scherba of DHX Media has noticed fresh possibilities for pre-school live action. For example, DHX Media distributed *Grandpa In My Pocket* which sold well internationally and DHX is also distributing *Waffle The Wonder Dog* from UK producer Darrall MacQueen, a new pre-school live action series and an example of the increased live action activity in this younger kids demographic.

*Topsy & Tim* is a live action series that is doing very well in ratings for CBeebies in the UK. *Topsy & Tim* also has a serialisation element: the characters change and evolve over the episodes in the series—a new creative development in pre-school scripted where cross-episode development was not previously seen. Astrid Plenk of Germany's KiKA has also observed 'there is strong tendency of moving away from purely procedural episodes to more horizontal storyline over multiple episodes / seasons' across kids TV fiction in general.

However, the live action market in preschool demographics does depend on the territory and channel. The BBC has a great tradition with live action for the preschool audience with its CBeebies channel. Nickelodeon, however, focuses on animation at a global level with its preschool Nick Jr brand. Nickelodeon's live action for preschool is produced and broadcast at a regional or local level (as opposed to globally). Nina Hahn, SVP production and development for Nickelodeon International, says that Nickelodeon has found 'culturally specific content' is more important in the preschool action live action—hence the regional and local production.



Image: Mister Maker's Arty Party – © Zodiak Kids Studios

## The kids TV audience

### Local versus global

For Nickelodeon, 'global is great' is key to its current thinking. This is not only from the business perspective but also on-air in the tone and scope of the content it offers. Nickelodeon is finding that kids are 'increasingly culturally neutral, they aren't afraid of foreign or different accents' according to Nina Hahn. The current kids audience also don't mind programming that is set in unfamiliar cities or countries. Additionally, as well as being increasingly 'culturally agnostic' they are also platform-neutral. Nielsen's Total Audience Report found in 2017 that children (age 2-11) in the USA have the highest monthly reach for enabled devices (87%), with the 12-17 demographics second with 84%. However 12-17 is highest demographic for usage per day (even more than 2-11).

Others, however, observe differences in the local audience and the global kids audience. Within the scripted genre there are some sub-genres, settings and themes that have more cross-territory appeal. Steven Andrew mentions the *The Worst Witch* as a series that transferred successfully to other territories: there are witches in many cultures and languages and so it travelled—and there is also a global iconic look to witches (and wizards). *The Worst Witch* has had two TV versions: a live action series in 1998 to 2001 and new version in 2017 (now a CBBC, ZDF and Netflix co-production)—which demonstrates the continued attraction of this sub-genre.



DHX Media also noted the universality of certain sub-genres helps with the international roll-out of series. The genre conventions of 'scary' are found in many cultures and the company hopes *Creeped Out* will travel as well as witches and wizards.

However, casting of live action can be tricky. Producers observe there tends to be an originating territory bias: a cultural badge from the originating territory and it is hard to avoid the kids audience picking up on this. (Although Nickelodeon observes it is becoming less of an issue with the new generation of kids).

Furthermore, there is also the pacing and style of drama and this can create issues from territory to territory. Broadly, the UK and USA scripted style is more verbal; while in other cultures the drama and scripting-style is more visual. This can create issues for cross territory appeal.



## Kids live action TV

### Key territories

Image: Seven and Me — © 2016 Method Animation, AB Productions, Nexus Factory, Umedia, ZDF, ZDF Enterprises, RTBF, Ouftivi, Jeem TV

## Key Territories

### USA & Online

In the USA, Josh Scherba notes, 'the competition factor is much greater than three or four years ago'. Now there is the rise of online players Netflix and Amazon in addition to the dominant Disney and Nickelodeon. Disney live action original scripted series in 2017 include *Andi Mack*, *Bunk'd* and *Stuck In The Middle* (Disney Channel) with *Kirby Buckets*, *Mech-X4* and *Walk The Prank* on Disney XD. Nickelodeon's scripted output includes *School of Rock*, *Henry Danger*, and *Nicky, Ricky, Dicky & Dawn*.

Both Netflix and Amazon have made significant investments in kids, teen and family content. For Netflix, *Degrassi: Next Class*, *Mako Mermaids* and *Free Rein* are among the six scripted kids live action originals IHS Markit has tracked as launching in 2017 on the platform. Amazon's 2017 originals output includes *Annedroids*, *The Kicks* and *Sigmund and Sea Monsters*. Additionally both platforms have a large number of acquired series and children's animation.

There is also the arrival of Universal Kids in autumn 2017 (a relaunch of the joint venture PBS Kids Sprout TV channel). Universal Kids has acquired live action *Hank Zipzer* from DHX Media and *The Next Step* from fellow Canadian production company Boat Rocker Media. Additionally there is PBS Kids (which had partnered with NBC Universal's *Sprout*) which has a long track-record in kids TV – with pre-school *Sesame Street* being the iconic series for PBS (although since 2016 the first run of *Sesame Street* has been on pay TV channel HBO).

Other online players are also making a play for the kids audience. Hulu is also moving into kids live action with acquisitions and co-commissions, notes Josh Scherba, and both Facebook and YouTube have also made moves in children's and teen live action video. In the autumn of 2017 Facebook Watch announced an English-language version of teen drama *Skam* (originally a TV series for Norwegian public broadcaster NRK). YouTube Red is taking worldwide rights (non-Canada) for kids magazine series *We Are Savvy* and also originated the teen pop series *Hyperlinked*.



Image: Hank Zipzer— DHX Media

## Key territories UK & Germany

In the UK, it's been a story of stasis for the last few years according to Lion TV's Richard Bradley. 'Beyond Nickelodeon, Disney and Cartoon Network with their dominant appetite for animation that works globally, the BBC has been pretty much the only game in town and in live action factual the BBC has concentrated on its keys brands,' he observes. This has been the same for live action drama: a few new shows but a concentration on existing series.

Zodiak's Steven Andrew also noted that CITV (the children's' brand of private broadcaster ITV) is now doing more children's (including live action) than has been the case in recent years. Zodiak Kids produces Saturday morning entertainment format *Scrambled* and upcoming unscripted format *Spy School* for CITV. The UK is also the base for regional channel hubs: Disney commissioned drama *Evermore* (Lime Pictures) and Zodiak Kids Studio produces *The Lodge* for Disney EMEA/ MENA from the UK.

One other issue is highlighted by Bradley in relation to the UK (but this also applies to other territories, particularly in the EU): the regulation of children's advertising. PSB TV channels in the UK (i.e. non-BBC channels including CITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5) operate on an advertiser-funding model, but the regulation of advertising for kids programming has hit revenues. The upshot is less revenue for the channels and so less kids programming. However, subscription VoD players (including Netflix and Amazon) are more open to kids content because they are not driven by the classic in-programme advertising model and regulation is lighter.

In Germany, both public broadcasters (ARD and ZDF) broadcast original kids TV and jointly operate the children's channel KiKA which commissions its own series. Astrid Plenk, programme manager of KiKA, highlights original series *Beutolomäus* and *Schloss Einstein* plus productions from ARD and ZDF—*Peppercorns* and *The Worst Witch*—as key scripted shows currently on the channel. Beyond the public broadcasters, both Disney and Nickelodeon operate channels with limited original live action series like teen drama *Spotlight* (UFA Serial Drama for Nickelodeon Germany). Additionally the Disney-RTL joint venture Super RTL (with its TOOGO and Toggolino children's brands) is a major offering in the German kids TV market—although it is skewed to animated programming with a limited amount of live action content.



Image: Horrible Histories — Lion Television Ltd.

## Key territories

### Canada & Australia

Lion TV highlights Canada as an interesting territory for live action as its great for co-productions. 'Canada has a good tax regime, good media funds and generally a good appetite for kids TV in general.' In its most recent report, the CMPA (Canadian Media Producers Association) found the English-language children's & youth production spend in Canada in 2016 was C\$473 million (\$380 million). (This was split roughly equally between live action and animation.)

In Canada, a range of Canada-owned channels including Family Channel and Family Chrgd (owned by DHX Media), YTV and Treehouse (Corus Entertainment) and VRAK (Bell Media) plus public broadcaster brands TVOKids and Télé-Québec all combine to provide a vibrant kids and youth TV market. (There are additionally Disney, Nickelodeon and BBC-branded kids channels.)



Image: Secret Life of Boys — © Zodiak Kids Studios

With its proximity to the USA (and its long-standing role as producer for US TV in general) it is no surprise to see Canadian producers involved in many US and online series: *Degrassi: Next Class* (DHX Media for Family /Netflix), *Anneroids* (Sinking Ship Entertainment for Amazon), *We Are Savvy* (B Minors Productions for YouTube Red) and *The Next Step* (Boat Rocker Media) are highlighted series throughout this report.

Australian teen drama *Nowhere Boys* (Matchbox Pictures for ABC Me) highlights the importance of media funds for live action. The first series of *Nowhere Boys* was supported by Screen Australia, Film Victoria and the Australian Children's Television Foundation. The series has been a notable success—it picked up an international Emmy Award in 2017 and sold internationally to the BBC and the new Universal Kids channel in the USA.

Australia is also an active co-production partner—for example Zodiak Kids Studios produces *Secret Life of Boys* as a co-production between ABC Me (the Australian Broadcasting Company kids channel) and CBBC. However, Screen Australia has reported that scripted programming for kids has struggled. Screen Australia's 2017 Drama Report stated that 2016/17 saw the production of 13 Australian Children's TV drama titles totalling a spend of A\$48 million (A\$38 million) in Australia. This was reported as 'significantly below the five-year average'. However, while hours produced were down slightly on the previous year, when combined with hours for children's programs made for online, there was a slight increase. This reflects the shift from TV to online production that is being observed in kids TV—and other TV genres.

## Key territories

### New markets: co-productions in Europe, China & Asia

Whilst there has been a tendency for Anglophone nations to co-produce live action series as this reduces on redubbing issues (as well as similar cultural sensibilities) there is a growing trend for co-productions beyond the small pool of Anglo-phone nations. 'Certainly, there are generally more opportunities for co-productions throughout Europe,' says Steven Andrew . He adds that it's not restricted to UK and Germany: the Nordics, France and Italy all offer co-pro opportunities for live action.

Live action programming has generally required fewer co-producers (sometimes two or three partners) whereas animation projects often have many more co-production partners and funders. However, *Seven and Me* from France's AB Group is a live action series with a larger than usual number of funders. AB Group co-produced with six partners from France, India, Belgium, Italy, Germany and the Middle East. Notably *Seven and Me* is a live action hybrid with significant CGI animation and so the additional costs of bringing CGI animation to live action resulted in a wider pool of co-producers and funders being required.

Lion TV's Managing Director Richard Bradley has also been active in China and wider Asian market. He observes that China and Asia has a kids TV framework that is similar to the UK's market and attitudes in the 70s. At this time kids TV was very education-focused. Children's television was designed to be 'nourishing' and an educational tool.

Bradley thinks the Chinese appetite for kids TV is huge. 'They are looking West because they like the imaginative story-telling and would like to combine this with nutritional and educational content.'

Bradley has found new players in content in China are very interested in kids content and is reaching out along with South Korea and Japan; so new opportunities are there for kids TV producers.

However, discovering what speaks to both Chinese and British kids is a challenge Bradley observes. Lion TV's strategy in China is to look at consultancy deals and co-productions as opposed to producing shows directly for Chinese channels.





**Kids Live Action TV  
Production & Finance**

In scripted production, DHX Media highlights a few changes in the last few years in the 8-12 'tween' demographic. Traditionally live action has been dominated multi-camera sitcoms—many of them found in abundance on the Nickelodeon's and Disney's channels.

In Germany, Astrid Plenk of public kids channel KiKA has found in kids scripted fiction that 'other genres like crime, mystery and adventure' are becoming more interesting. In general, dramedies work very well on KiKA, stories with strong characters, valid conflicts and a good portion of humour.

However Josh Scherba thinks that there is no doubt that kids still like sitcom (and the laugh track) and so this will certainly continue. The difference is now other formats and approaches are considered in live action in addition to sitcom.

From a production deal perspective, *Star Falls* is a Nickelodeon series of note. This drama (due to transmit in 2018) is made with Canadian co-producer Breakthrough Entertainment and has an interesting co-production model according to Nina Hahn.

It is a 'pre-buy' rather than an acquisition for Nickelodeon. With a traditional acquisition, the channel acquires content that has already been filmed. With a 'pre-buy' the channel has a licence deal with the Canadian partner (the producer) but has been involved in creative and editorial from the start. While this model has been in use for some time in other parts of the TV industry, this is a new co-production model for Nickelodeon.



Image: The Worst Witch © ZDF/BBC/ZDF Enterprises



Image: Peppercorns — © NDR/Boris Laewen

## Production and finance

### Unscripted production

For Nickelodeon at a global level 'the vast majority' of live action content is scripted. Unscripted is commissioned and produced at a regional level as this helps reflect cultural sensibilities. The US/North American Nickelodeon transmits many unscripted shows (for example *Lip Sync Battle Shorties*, *The Dude Perfect Show* and *Paradise Run*), and other regions commission their own unscripted too, but not at the same volume as the USA.

A significant part of this is economic; the return-on-investment issues explain the lack of unscripted live action at a globally-distributed level. Re-dubbing a series into many more languages—a requirement for global roll-out— is costly. It's been found by global channels that unscripted shows don't sustain the same level of repeats as scripted. The redubbing for unscripted is therefore too costly for the amount of airtime the series will fill when repeats are accounted for. Scripted —with the capacity to sustain many more repeats and retain audience engagement—will return on the redubbing investment. Unscripted, on the whole, does not.

Additionally, unscripted live action content is generally more culturally-specific and so this also presents a difficulty when transmitting globally. However, some unscripted factual ideas can travel. Lion TV's Richard Bradley cites *Deadly Sixty*, a natural history show from the BBC that looked at the deadliest animals around the world. Animals and natural history is a subject with cross-territory appeal and the presenter Steve Backshall also had international profile and this combination helped the series go global.

For the gameshow sub-genre of unscripted, there are no specific trends 'but it's always there' in the live action mix according to Zodiak Kids Studio UK Creative Director Steven Andrew—but interaction with the content is a very interesting possibility for gameshows with the advent of digital technology. From a business perspective, gameshows are cheaper than scripted and a much faster turnaround (from pitch to transmission) than both live action scripted and animation. This has attractions for channels, but there is generally much less international sales potential for gameshows. For documentaries and factual—the other main sub-genres of unscripted live action—this is a growing area and Zodiak Kids notes that 'kids are interested in the lives of other kids from other cultures'. The growth on YouTube of short-form documentaries made by kids for kids has triggered interest in the sub-genre from channels and producers.



Image: *Deadly Sixty* — BBC/Graham MacFarlane

## Production and finance

### Creative in co-productions



Image: I Am Frankie — Nickelodeon

Co-producing live action series has specific creative and logistical challenges and there are various approaches to addressing these production issues.

At Nickelodeon the 'choreography of co-production' has been changing and an example of a fresh approach to co-production models is scripted series *Hunter Street*. Dutch independent Blooming Media was commissioned by Nickelodeon for two series from one idea—one series in Dutch for the local Nickelodeon TV channel and a second series in English for international channels. However, these two series were made with one set of scripts (Dutch and English translation), a single set and one crew. Nina Hahn, SVP Production and Development for Nickelodeon International, notes that both series were recorded during the same filming block and the studio was effectively filming two seasons at once. Nickelodeon also used Dutch directors not only for the Dutch version, but also the Anglo-version.

Nickelodeon is also using a similar approach in the Americas with *I am Frankie*, filming one version for Nickelodeon's US channels (and global rollout) based on a separate version for the LatAm region. Nickelodeon Nina Hahn likens this approach to 'shopping from the same closet' and getting additional series to work for different regions from the same core production resources. It's more efficient and there is creative continuity.

Language issues also present several challenges. Zodiak's Steven Andrew says that it's true that generally a handful of English-speaking territories commission live action. For the original English language version, a couple of other territories will take live action and re-dub it (eg. German or Italian). But this is limited. It is much easier for animation to work across multiple territories. The voice casting and production for animation is much easier. For each language, the producers can re-cast and voice other languages and lip-sync is much easier. It is difficult for live action co-productions to satisfy the differing sensibilities of channels and different territories. It is much easier with animation as producers can use different voice casts and languages.

## Production and finance

### Financing issues with co-productions

There is a perception that live action programming is easier to get off the ground than animation, but that selling internationally is harder than kids animation. However, live action scripted isn't easier to get away and can be more expensive than animation, according to Josh Scherba, EVP, Content and Distribution at DHX Media. Live action as a genre is tricky to finance as it is harder to develop and sell consumer products around live action series when compared to animation. The lack of revenue stream from consumer products and merchandising means that distributors and co-investors are taking a bigger risk with live action than with animation. Not every animation series is a hit with a big consumer product reward but there is more potential in animation for this additional revenue stream.

There is also a perception that live action has less of a shelf life (and within this unscripted live action having even less of shelf-life than scripted live action). After relatively few years the repeats of a live action series are much less engaging; with animation there is a chance of more repeats over a longer shelf-life.

Generally the more partners in a co-production, the more complicated the financing. Furthermore, more partners means there potentially more compromises and projects can get confused. 'You often get someone provides 10% of the funding but want 100% of the notes' notes one producer. This is an issue for both live action and animation co-productions. While it is part of the business for production executives to be as accommodating as possible and make everyone happy, it is not always that easy. Ideally at the helm of a co-production there needs to be a strong executive with a clear vision for a successful co-production, says Steven Andrew.

On the topic of funding, producers of live action kids TV would expect to get 50% to 60% of the budget from the domestic broadcaster, looking to top up with co-production money from one or two partners. With animation, producers would typically cover a much lower percentage of the budget from the commissioning broadcaster and then make up the remainder from a much larger number of broadcasters, partners and funds. However, there are many more companies and financiers interested in investing and partnering in animation projects.

Unscripted live action is quicker and easier to turn around than animation—and less complicated co-productions are a factor in this. Unscripted series also tend to be lower budget and easier to fund in one territory. It is harder to get way co-productions in factual as it's harder to develop ideas that can appeal to several kids territories.

## Production and finance

### The impact of online

Producers interviewed for this white paper said the rise of online means there is more opportunity in live action than there has been for some time—and this is impacting on finance and the business of commissioning. ‘The hope is that the new players mean new money,’ says Richard Bradley. Online has also brought in new approaches and flexibility. As one producer commented, ‘you can now get away four or eight-part series. It used to be 26 episodes per series or nothing internationally.’ With Netflix and Amazon, ‘there’s a feeling you can take anything to anyone of them whatever the scale, and one of them might turn around and say “yes”.’



However, it is very competitive when working with the new online players. Netflix operates with the principle that ‘many are called but few are chosen’ and constantly aim to have ‘best in breed’. Producers find that it is difficult to get meetings and to then get things away with these global players. Working with online platforms of global reach also has challenges —with rights a particular issue. Netflix’s strategy is focused on fully-owned originals (not only in kids content but across all of its programming genres) as it works globally. Independent producers have traditionally operated on keeping some rights to sell separately and raise additional revenue. This business model does not work with subscription-based online platforms, which want to retain all rights. As one producer commented: ‘Netflix and Amazon want to keep all rights so producers are effectively expensive workers for hire.’

It’s notable that Hulu, the other large subscription online video platform, is a USA-only platform and kids producers have found it more open to co-funding and partnerships than Netflix and Amazon. The need for global rights for global distribution is driving the ‘all rights’ trend, but regional SVoD platforms don’t place a priority on global rights and hence the openness to other rights arrangements.

However, Disney’s acquisition of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox TV entertainment assets (expected to be completed in 2018) will include Disney gaining a majority share of Hulu. With this change Hulu’s strategy for rights (and territories covered) may well change. Additionally Disney plans to launch its own Disney-branded streaming services in 2019 featuring family and kids movies plus originally-commissioned content.



**Kids live action TV**  
Social media and short-form

## Social media and short-form

### Short-form video platforms



*Image: Elli Explorer — Wildbrain*

YouTube, Facebook and Snapchat have become very significant platforms for kids viewing. In 2017, Ofcom found in the UK that 71% of 5-7s used YouTube. The platform was the most recognised content brand for 12-15s and the provider that 12-15s are most likely to turn to first for content that is important to them.

For many, YouTube has become synonymous with short-form. However, in the digital era the concept of 'short-form' is evolving rapidly. Alfred Chubb, head of mergers and acquisitions at Wildbrain (the digital arm of DHX Media ) highlights a big change in the last few years: from 2006 to 2012 the industry talked more about short-form and 'webisodes'.

This has now shifted (especially on YouTube) as the algorithms that determine how content is promoted on YouTube has changed to score 'watch-time' rather than 'views'. The upshot is that many kids content creators on YouTube are shifting from two to four-minute 'short-form' content to videos that are 10 to 15 minutes in duration. These longer versions of 'short-form' deliver better watch-time scores and therefore better promotion across YouTube and more potential revenue.

The volume of short-form video available for kids on YouTube is a second factor. In the past, there was relatively little in the kids space; so for the material available it was possible to obtain a large number of views. Now the platform is rightly seen as a key destination for the kids audience and there is now a vast amount of content; it's therefore hard to gain the traction to be viewed and to be a distinct voice in the noise.

At the older end of the kids audience short videos are key as this demographic switches between videos more rapidly. In the older demographics videos need to go on Facebook and Snapchat. On these platforms, factors such as grabbing viewer attentions in a few seconds and being engaging when the sound is muted are important. Kids use of social media is also evolving rapidly—in 2017 Ofcom found: 'less than half (40%) of 12-15s with a profile say that Facebook is their main social media profile (down from 52% in 2016) while 32% now say Snapchat is their main profile (up from 16%).'

## Social media and short-form

### Short-form video from broadcasters

Legacy kids TV players have also embraced short-form. Nickelodeon recently formed a specific global business unit to produce new bespoke short-form content (both animation and live action). It's a reflection of the large and growing viewing of short-form content by kids. However, the new approach sees the production starting with short-form and also exploring how the content might feed back to linear TV. Short-form will also be used as an incubator for talent and ideas; Nickelodeon's *Welcome to Wayne* started as animated shorts and now a full long series. It's same philosophy for live action.

In the UK Sky has launched its own kids platform and is commissioning short-form originals. This platform is available on tablet devices and it is interesting to note that Sky has not offered this content on a dedicated TV channel—reflecting the platform-agnostic profile of the modern kids audience. (In 2017 Ofcom found that 23% of 12-15 year-olds now mostly watch TV content on either a tablet or a mobile phone.)

Kids channel KiKA sees the challenge of 'gaining kid's attention off-platform in the infinity of available video content in the internet' presenting the opportunity of 'short-form spin-offs/web series... we can enhance our programming brands and extend their reach on and off our own platforms'.

However, some producers have noted that while many client TV channels are all aware that kids are watching a lot of short-form programming (much more than the average adult), channels are paradoxically still spending much less on short-form originals. As there is little funding very few content production companies are investing in short-form. The economics of short-form from this perspective are problematic: it is generally quoted that YouTube video creators receive \$1,000 to \$2,000 for a million views. A live action kids TV budget is upwards of \$90,000 per 30 mins (\$3,000 per minute). There is a big gap between production costs and the revenue back and this is very hard to crack for content producers and their partners.



Image: The Gaming Show — Wildbrain

## Social media and short-form Influencers and social media

Social media stars with huge followings have made an 'influencer' plan a core part of digital content strategies. Nickelodeon has taken their first steps with the signing of 13-year-old JoJo Siwa, a hugely popular social media influencer (4.8 million Instagram followers before joining Nickelodeon in 2017) with a strong line on anti-bullying. She has been signed on a talent deal and is starting to appear on the channel as a host and in her own projects, as well as a lucrative licencing and merchandising deal. It's a reverse of the previously well-trodden path where past tween and teen stars (Miley Cyrus and Justin Timberlake for example) went from children's television to global stardom. JoJo is starting off from social media success and established fan-base and is now moving into kids broadcast programming.

At the pre-school end of the kids demographics there are number of YouTube channels with respected influencer status—although many of these are more concerned with the niche activity they capture rather than a central star personality.

*MyFroggyStuff* for example is a variation of the 'make and do' live action TV formats and has a huge influencer role and works with many toy brands. *Blippi* is a very popular educational channel and also owns the 'garbage truck' space. *ToylabTV* is very strong for dinosaur-based kids content. Many of these elements have been part of pre-school live action TV for decades and are now reinvented and flourishing on YouTube .

Disney have also taken to social media. In autumn 2017, *Club Mickey Mouse*, a new version of its 62 year-old *Micky Mouse Club*, was launched on Facebook and Instagram, and is also a 'social first' project not intended for TV transmission. The format mixes in more reality-style sections and utilises data from the platforms to re-invent the format for a modern teen audience.



Image: Club Mickey Mouse — Photo courtesy of Disney Digital Network

## Social media and short-form Short-form video production



Image: Horrible Histories – Lion Television Ltd.

Producers note that the key to success in this space is to create great content that kids want to share. Industry research highlights a large proportion of clips that are shared are funny and comedy-based. In Ofcom's 2017 report, UK Children aged 3-7 were most likely to watch cartoons on YouTube, while 8-15s were most likely to watch funny videos and music videos. One producer observes that with social media (and short-form in general) 'kids watching other kids is huge'. It is very democratising but there isn't much TV producers can do to start this off, it just happens organically. 'Seeing other children of their age is influential on kids and something they want to watch,' Zodiak Kids Steven Andrew observes, 'and it is fantastically empowering for the audience.'

The idea that kids can also contribute and participate is being embraced as a positive trend. The effects could be far-reaching: with these new platforms and technology (such as smartphone and tablets) kids are increasingly making their own video content and posting it. As Andrew observes: 'Kids know how to use the tech and now have access... we'll see a whole new generation of content makers coming through.' The world of kids TV can look forward to continual rejuvenation from this fresh, digital native audience.

Using social media influencers to boost existing TV programming is a tactic producers are also beginning to exploit. UK comedy factual show *Horrible Histories* featured 'Dave TDS', a parody of gaming social media star DanTDM and this turned into a social media boost for the show.

Richard Bradley of Lion TV recalls that the original *Horrible Histories* episode had 200,000 viewers at TX on CBBC in the UK. Lion TV engaged with DanTDM—he watched sketch, found it funny and posted a video on his YouTube Channel of him watching the sketch. This YouTube posting had four million views in a few days of posting and—with DanTDM pointing his YouTube viewers back to *Horrible Histories* on the BBC iPlayer the iPlayer audience doubled for that episode of *Horrible Histories*.

## About the Author



### IHS Markit Channels & Programming Intelligence

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