

Research Summary: Parents' Perspectives on Australian Children's Television in the Streaming Era - 2

Australian Children's Television Cultures (ACTC) is a research project based at Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, in association with RMIT University.¹ To track household viewing habits ACTC is conducting a four-year programme of audience research. This research includes nationwide surveys with Australian parents and legal guardians of children aged 14 years and under. Audience research surveys were carried out over the same six-week period (late August to early October) in 2021 and 2022, and will be repeated in 2023 and 2024 to capture viewing practices and interests over time. Topics covered include perceptions of what makes "good" Australian children's television, how families use different media platforms, and the importance parents place on diverse representation. The findings from the 2021 audience research were published in the peer-reviewed report "Parent's Perspectives on Children's Television in the Streaming Era" in early 2022.²

The 2022 survey concluded with 333 unspoiled completes, which were used as the basis of this Research Summary. Only 10% of 2022 respondents had previously completed the 2021 survey, meaning that this data represents a largely fresh sample. As a result, familiarity with the topics and questions would not have a significant influence on responses. To track viewing habits, the 2022 "Parents Survey" repeated many questions from the first survey. It also included new questions on topics such as viewing habits during COVID lockdowns, the use of television in the classroom, SVoD features and functionality, and favourite genres.³ This Research Summary provides key findings from the 2022 Parents Survey.

¹ This research is funded by the Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF). Qualitative research consultation was provided by a strategy and insight specialist at The Human Project.

² Liam Burke, Joanna McIntyre, Jessica Balanzategui, Djoyimi Baker (2022), *Parents' Perspectives on Australian Children's Television in the Streaming Era*, Swinburne University of Technology. <https://doi.org/10.26185/xxt0-d294>

³ This research adhered to the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and received ethics clearance from Swinburne University of Technology (Re: 20215807-6725).



1. Parents Still Value Australian Content

To date, the ACTC Parents Surveys have tracked that Australian parents increasingly consider it important that children’s television is Australian. Responses to the first Parents Survey (conducted in 2021) found that 28% of parents considered it either “very” or “extremely” important that children’s TV is Australian. This opinion increased to 47% in the 2022 survey. To gain nuanced responses to the question of what parents consider to be important in children’s television, the answer “Australian” was embedded among a range of options. When moderate responses are included, 83% of respondents in the 2022 Parents Survey deemed it important that children’s television is Australian.

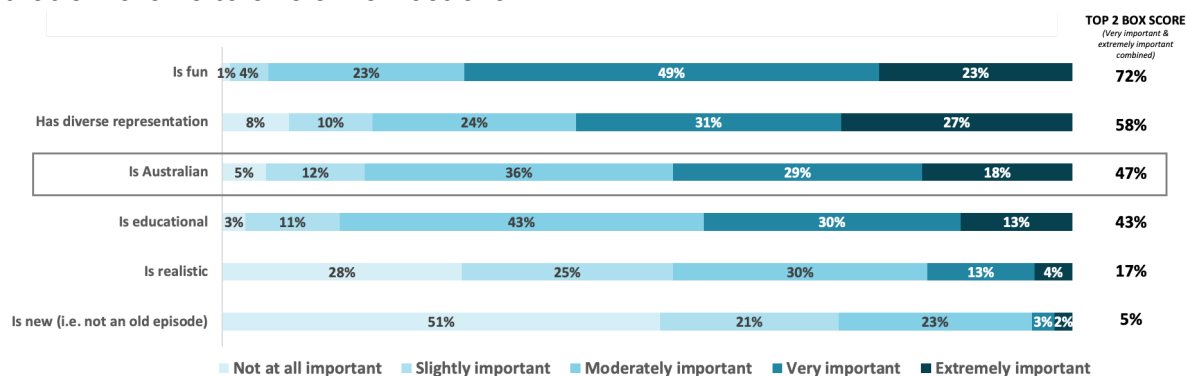


Table 1 Parents rate how important each criterion is for children’s shows/content their child(ren) watch

Open responses to the question “What exactly makes good Australian children’s shows/content?” provided insights into this sentiment with typical responses including:

Great Australian content reflects our society, cultures, languages and environments. It allows kids to see their own lives reflected on screen, validating their experiences. – Mother-of-one from Victoria

It leans into our unique heritage without alienating those who have other experiences. Teaching about what it means to be Australian without creating a firm definition. Showcasing different experiences. – Dad-of-one from New South Wales

Good Australian children’s content is relatable and engaging. Bluey, InBESTigators, Little Lunch have been favourites. – Mother-of-two from Victoria

Within the group that valued Australian content, “rural” and “regional” parents were more likely to rate Australian content as very important than those in a “major city”.



Parents who did not consider it important that children's content is Australian provided the following reasons:

- Quality more important than origin (47%)
- Exposure to different cultures (33%)
- Kids' choice (22%)
- International family (16%)
- Negative feelings towards Australian content (13%)

2. Good "Aussie" Kids' TV

Parents were asked to describe what qualities make "good Australian children's shows/content?" When responses were analysed thematically, the most common groupings were:

- Relatable (47%)
- Positive messages (41%)
- Humour (39%)
- Representation and diversity (32%)
- Educational (but fun) (31%)
- Quality and creativity (24%)
- Family dynamics (16%)

In this context, "Relatability" included: Australian accents and slang, settings and iconography (e.g. Queenslander houses, local wildlife etc.), and "warts-and-all" portrayals (often contrasted with "overly sanitised" US shows).

Good TV reflects Australian kids' reality, is free of American psychobabble and melodrama, is either 'light' or introduces heavy themes in child-appropriate ways. I am a huge fan of the Australian shows Little Lunch, Are You Tougher Than Your Ancestors?, Teenage Boss, Bluey, Mustangs, Play School and its spin-offs. – Mother-of-two from Victoria

That it shows my children playing in a way that other children that they wouldn't know would also play. That it shows places and things and animals that they would recognise, and that we would actively be able to go and experience on the weekends. Shows that have animals or experiences that are not common in Australia or that we can't do, can lead to meltdowns and sadness when we try to explain that those things aren't here. For example try to explain why we can't get snow in the winter in Australia. – Mother-of-two from Victoria



“Positive messages” encompassed a focus on tolerance, acceptance, sharing, kindness, and self-awareness, but without being too didactic.

Shows modern Australian values – diversity, inclusivity, sharing of culture (foreign and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander cultures), kindness, friendship, problem solving, interaction of different generations and different family types and structures. Reflective of current day Australia. – Mother-of-one from Victoria

InBESTigators, Little Lunch, etc are fun to watch with inclusiveness and good behaviour modelling at the edges, not in the centre. – Father-of-two from Queensland

“Humour” in good Australian kids’ TV was defined as cheeky, witty, or clever – without being too self-serious, and including knowing nods to parents.

Australian humour i.e. slightly wacky, borderline but not quite crude/cringe (Round The Twist, Bluey), Aussie accents, Australian values like FairPlay, helping your mate etc as opposed to the US style ‘look out for no 1’, – Father-of-two from Queensland

Australian humour so yes, poop jokes are fine. – Mother-of-two from Victoria

Parents identified *Bluey* as the show most watched by their youngest child (65%) and oldest child (39%), which is an increase from 2021. In 2022, *Bluey* is still the show parents most like to co-view with their children (60%).

See everything Bluey has done. Kindness. Community values. Biggest of all a sense of humour. – Father-of-two from Victoria

The qualities that parents most identified as making “good” Australian television – relatable, positive messages, humour – are found in *Bluey*. As in the earlier Parents Report, this show’s prominence suggests that *Bluey* is not only reflective of parent preferences, but that it may now also be influencing what is considered good “Aussie” children’s television.



3. Education and TV

In open responses to the question “What makes good Australian children’s shows/content?” three out of 10 parents identified “education” as a key quality, but many added that Australian children’s television tends to pair education with fun and does not “talk down” to children.

Grows from the experience of kids in the world without being condescending or patronising. Demonstrates good emotional responses and relationships. Is diverse and helps broaden children's experience. Doesn't shy away from the reality that kids experience but shows that there are good people. Incorporates the wide variety of 'real Australia' without being cliched. Bluey does a great job of this, as does Little J and Big Cuz. – Father-of-two from Tasmania

A new set of questions in the 2022 survey focused on the role of television in the classroom. In responses, parents favoured a “middle-ground” approach to the use of television in the classroom. Only one in 10 parents felt it should be used “frequently” or “never.”

Reasons parents gave for why television could be used in school settings included:

⇒ Educational support in moderation (36%)

Some content can be great to supplement other forms of learning, but it will lose impact if relied on too much. – Mother-of-two from Victoria

⇒ Key part of curriculum (41%)

Because it can help illustrate concepts in a different way for different learning styles – Mother-of-one from Queensland

⇒ Entertain and provide “down time” (4%)

I understand that it can be used to settle children or for down time. And some shows support learning. Eg. Numberblocks or Little J and Big Cuz – Mother-of-two from Victoria

Although the majority of respondents felt occasional usage was appropriate, 40% of parents felt television should have a more frequent presence in the classroom.

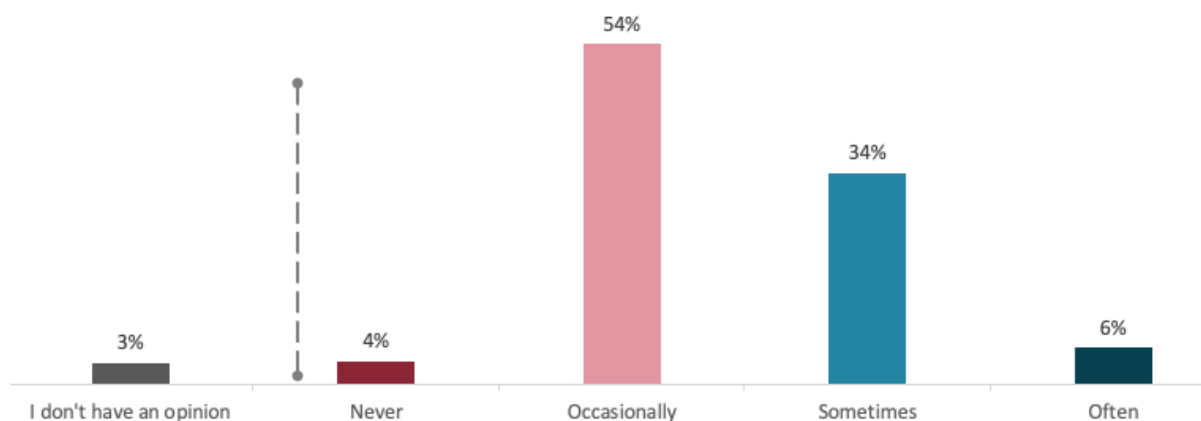


Table 2 Responses to the question: How Often Do You Think Television Should Be Used In The Classroom?

Concerns mentioned in the limited number of negative responses (17%) included:

- Kids get enough screentime at home and schooltime is limited
- “Hands-on” learning is superior
- Screens are a crutch for lazy teachers
- School is for learning, not for “entertainment”

Because the teacher’s job is to teach. If they are too tired to teach then the kids would benefit more from playing outdoors than sitting inside watching a screen and not interacting with one another. It drives me crazy when teachers put on the TV instead of teaching! – Mother-of-two from Western Australia

New questions regarding viewing habits during COVID lockdowns also shed light on parents attitudes to the relationship between television and education. 10% of parents who noticed a change in their child’s viewing habits during COVID lockdowns stated that they watched more educational content. Parents also noted that the Australian school education system utilised screens during lockdowns, which led to a lot more screen time overall as children “needed” to engage with screens.



4. The TV Set is Still Number One

Despite the availability of an expanding number of platforms, 95% of households use television sets to watch children’s shows/content (up slightly from 94% in 2021). While most content is consumed via streaming services, the streaming services are typically accessed on television sets. Parents reported that older children were more likely to use computers and gaming consoles to watch children’s shows and content, while boys were more likely to use computers.

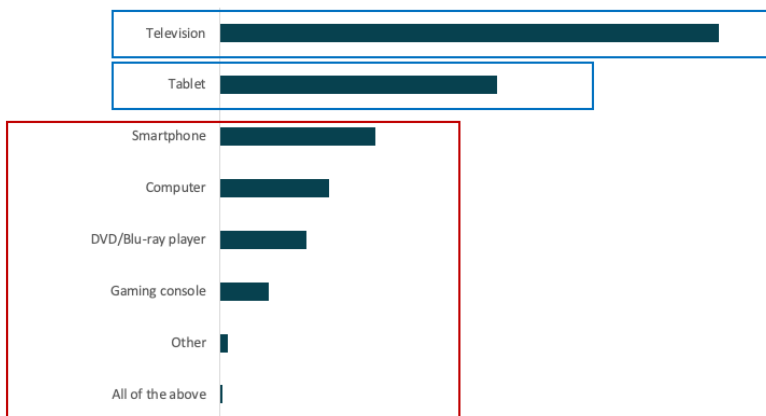


Table 3 Responses to the question: What devices do your child(ren) use to watch children’s shows/content?

5. Streaming Services Dominate

Although the television set was identified by parents as the leading device across both 2021 and 2022 surveys, the top 10 most popular “channels” are almost exclusively streaming services. The ABC is a prominent source of children’s television. 93% of parents identified that they use at least one of the ABC’s services (up from 89% in 2021), with 74% of parents selecting ABC Kids in particular. Other highly ranked services included Netflix (73%), YouTube (66%), and Disney+ (60%).

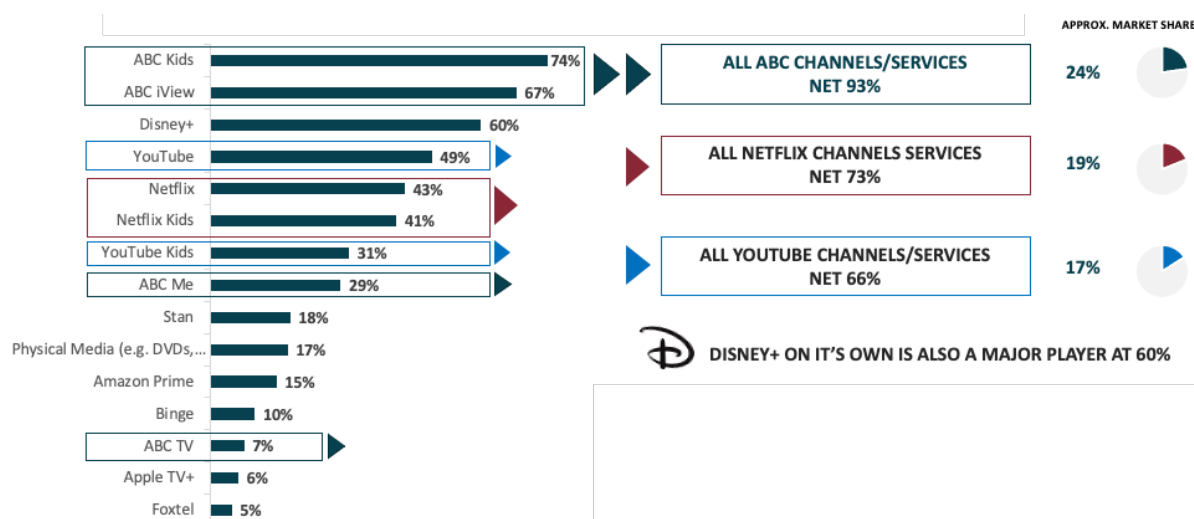


Table 4 Services parents identified that their child uses to watch children’s shows/content

Similarly to 2021, despite diversity being a prominent feature of later open responses, few parents identified NITV/ NITV Jarjums as a channel their children watched (2%).



SVoDs without clearly demarcated “kids” sections continue to be less frequently used (e.g. Apple TV+ – 6%) than those services that feature prominently placed children’s sections or have a reputation for child-friendly content. Only 15% of parents selected Prime Video as a service their children use, despite Prime Video having a similar number of Australian subscribers as Disney+ at the time the survey took place.⁴

6. Children Choose what they Watch

Most parents allow their children to choose “most” of what they watch, and this freedom increases as children get older.

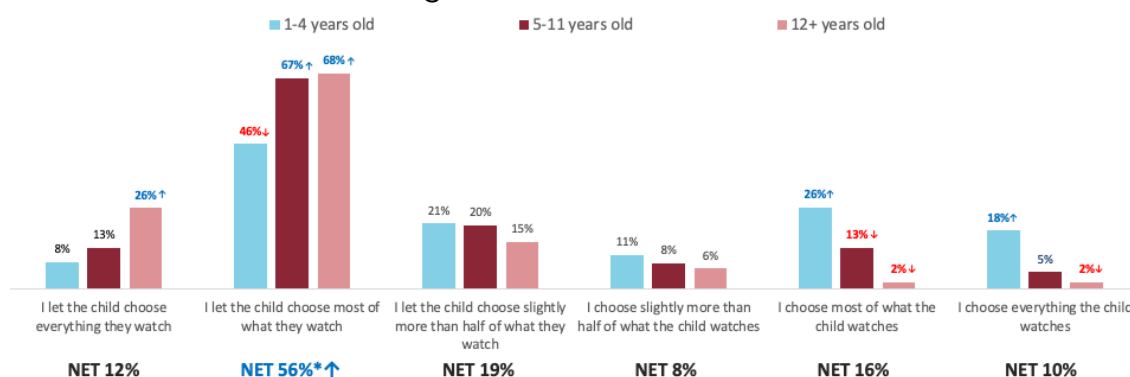


Table 5 Parent’s perspective on input their children have on what they watch. **METHODOLOGY NOTE:** totals will be greater than 100% because parents with multiple children completed the question twice (once for their youngest child and once for oldest child).

The ABC’s strategy of differentiated channels and platforms for specific age groups appears to be reaching its intended audiences, with greater representation for different age ranges across the ABC’s services. ABC Kids and iView trended towards younger children, while Netflix, YouTube, and ABC Me trended towards older children.

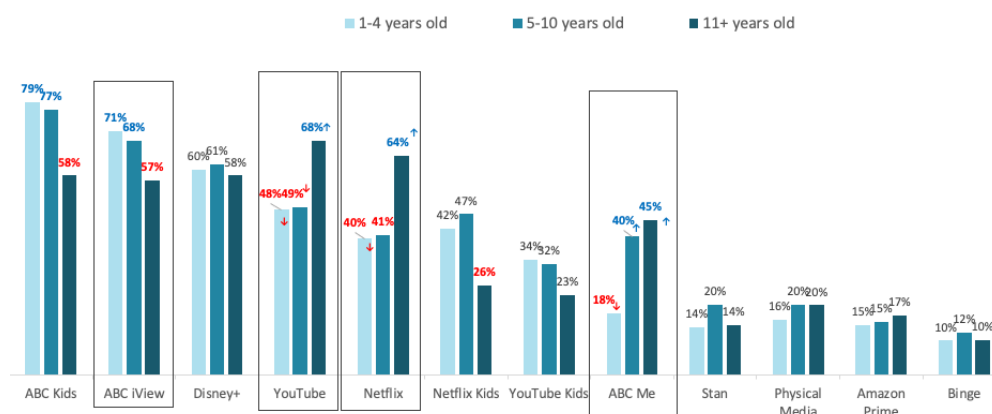


Table 6 Services that parents identify that their children use to watch children’s shows/content broken down by age range

⁴ “MPA Report: SVOD & BVOD Platforms Share Of Total Streaming Consumption Up From 26% In 2021 To 35% In 2022 Ytd; Netflix Retains Pole Position” Media Partners Asia, September 20, 2022 https://media-partners-asia.com/AMPD/September_2022/AUSTRALIA/PR.pdf



Parents report that older children watch more on weekend afternoons and nights, while younger children watch more on weekday mornings.

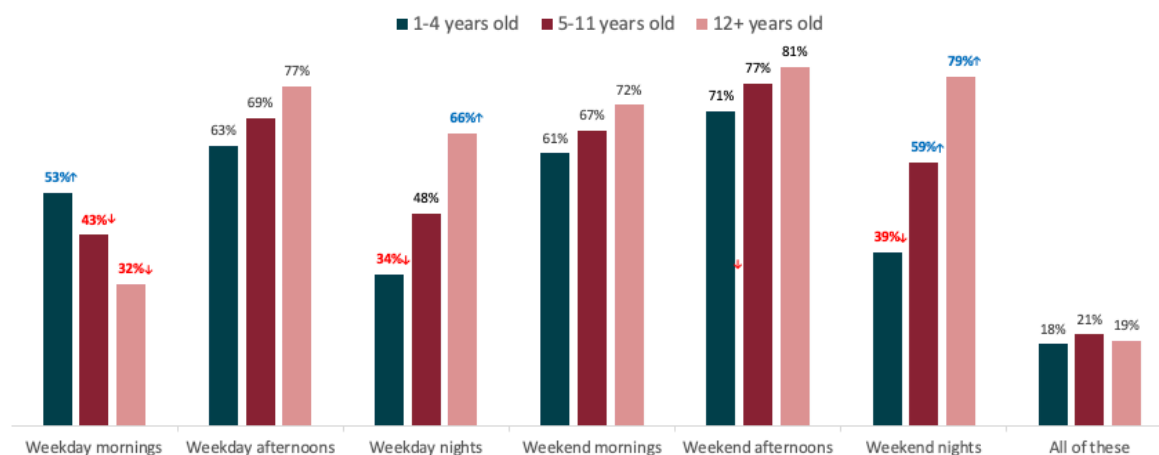


Table 7 Parent's perspectives on when their children are watching broken down by age range

Family co-viewing is a common practice with nine out of 10 parents watching at least "some" content with their children and are most likely to do so on weekends. In identifying what makes "good Australian children's shows/content?" many parents highlighted that humorous local content appeals to both children and parents.

Original content that highlights Australian culture (whatever that may be), using humour and dialogue that appeals to both children and adults. Genie From Down Under and Round The Twist are stand out examples. – Mother-of-one from Tasmania

It has Australian humour in it and is enjoyable for adults to watch as well with kids. – Mother-of-one from South Australia

Shows that have an easy to follow story line, hidden messages for children and parents, for example Bluey is great for kids but also great for adults too – Mother-of-one from Victoria



7. Lockdown Viewing

More than half of respondents noticed changes in their children's viewing habits during the COVID lockdowns. These changes included:

- More screen time (84%)
- Change in content (26%)
- Less parental oversight (11%)

My child also accessed more educational children's content than she usually would, because it supplemented home learning and/or was recommended by the school. This was usually on YouTube (whereas we don't typically watch YouTube). The content recommended by the school included Joe Wicks exercise routines, Cosmic Kids yoga, GoNoodle, Kidz Bop Kids. My husband was also home during lockdown, so he was more involved in choosing and watching content with my child (whereas he usually wouldn't be involved.)
– Mother from Western Australia

Unsurprisingly perhaps, parents in states and territories that experienced longer lockdowns were more greatly represented in responses to this question. The state of Victoria had the greatest number of days in lockdown of any Australian state and 57% of Victorian parents noticed a change in their children's viewing habits during lockdowns. By contrast, in Queensland, which had significantly fewer days in lockdown than Victoria, only 41% of parents noticed a change in their child's viewing habits during lockdown. Many parents described a greater use of YouTube during lockdown to access videos about exercise and other activities, as well as educational resources sometimes recommended by schools.

Before online learning during lockdowns [we] would watch shows via TV - ABC for Kids and Netflix. Suddenly after lockdown online learning they started watching YouTube videos of people playing games almost exclusively. We didn't introduce YouTube to them, the schools used it for some content and I guess the algorithms took it from there. Now I have two kids that only watch YouTube and the stuff is rubbish. – Dad from Victoria

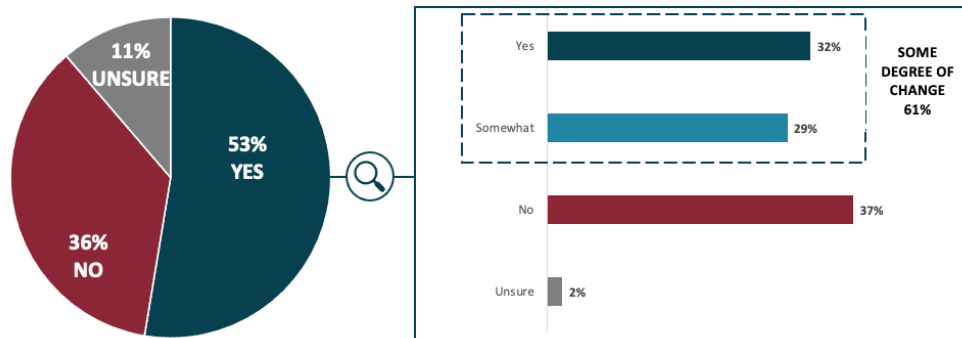


Table 8 Over half of parents noticed changes in their child's viewing habits during lockdown and, of these parents, almost two thirds reported changes remaining after lockdown.



We went from near zero screen time pre lockdown to too much screen time during when daycare was not available to slowly winding back post lockdown but we are stuck with a higher than preferred amount of screen time now.

– Dad from Queensland

This research found that 61% of the parents that noticed a change in their children’s viewing during lockdown said these habits continued post-lockdown. Girls and families with younger parents were more likely to revert to pre-COVID viewing habits after lockdown.

8. Child-Favourite Genres

As new viewing platforms and habits impact traditional children’s content categories, a question was added to the 2022 survey that asked parents, “What types/genres of content does your child tend to watch/enjoy?” Parents could make as many selections as they wished from over 20 categories. Categories ranged from traditional genres such as “Comedy” and “Action” to popular online categories like “Reaction videos”, and “Compilation/countdown”. Parents were also given the option to add “Other” types of content not listed, with Arts and Crafts, History Documentaries, and Dance, the categories most identified as “Other”.

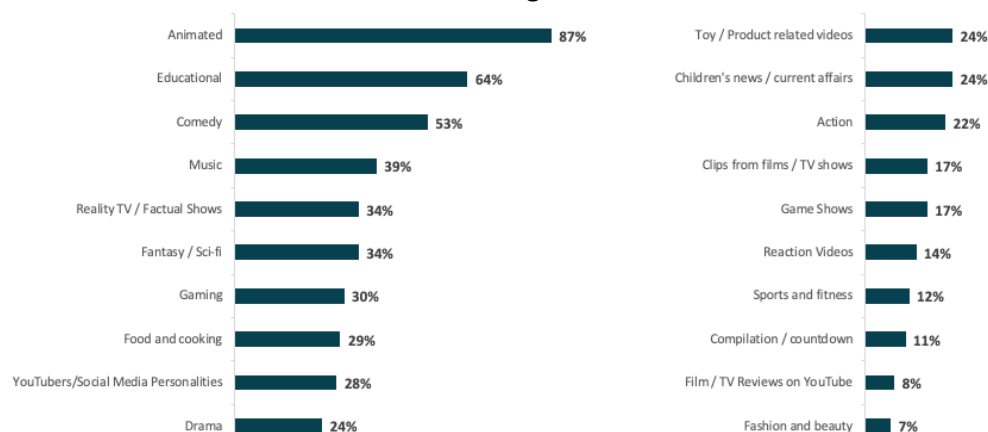


Table 9 “Types/genres of content” parents identified that their children enjoy.

According to parents, older children engaged with a much greater variety of genres compared to their younger counterparts. Children aged 1 to 4 years were more greatly represented in Animation, Educational, and Comedy genres compared to older children, and were less represented on almost all other genres.

Parents reported that content tends to be split along traditional binary gender lines with boys more greatly represented in categories like Fantasy/Sci-Fi, Gaming, YouTubers, Action, Reaction Videos, Sports, and Film /TV reviews, while girls over-indexed on Drama, Food/Cooking, and Fashion/Beauty. “Educational” was rated as the second highest genre, which could suggest a parent bias or embellishment. These findings will be contrasted with the child audience research being conducted as part of the larger Australian Children’s Television Cultures project to gain a more rounded understanding of viewing practices and preferences.



9. SVoD Features and Functionality

To better chart the impacts of the changing television landscape on children's viewing practices, the 2022 study included additional questions about what features and functionality parents value in streaming services. The responses to these questions aligned with other findings within this project, and wider audience trends and interests.

Parents identified the following SVoD features as either "moderately," "very," or "extremely" important:

⇒ Parental settings and controls e.g. classifications (79%)

Concerns over the safety of online platforms identified in the first Parents Survey persist. In the 2021 "Parents Perspectives" report respondents described how the ABC and its related services were trusted and reliable.

⇒ Content you can watch together as a family (75%)

As evident in Section 6 (above) co-viewing is a common practice with nine out of 10 parents watching at least some content with their children. Parents are eager for content they can watch with their family, which may partly explain the popularity of services like Disney+ with parents as opposed to more adult-skewing SVoDs such as Prime Video and Apple TV+.

⇒ Australian content (74%)

In keeping with the value parents placed on Australian children's content (see: Section 1), parents reiterated the value of Australian content on streaming services. This result supports calls for Australian content to be more prominent on streaming services and on smart televisions, including the ACTC's recent policy submission.⁵

⇒ A separate children's section/version (67%)

Supporting the finding from the first Parents Survey that parents favour streaming services with a clearly demarcated children's section, parents identified a separate children's section/version as an important feature of streaming services. Like content that can be watched as a family, the importance placed on a demarcated kids section may have contributed to the popularity of services that have a reputation for being child-friendly with parents (e.g. ABC Kids and Disney+).

⁵ Jessica Balanzategui, Djoyimi Baker, Liam Burke and Joanna McIntyre (2023), "Australian Children's Television, Discoverability and Prominence on Connected TV Devices", February 2023, <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/pfpp--australian-children%27s-television-cultures-actc.pdf>

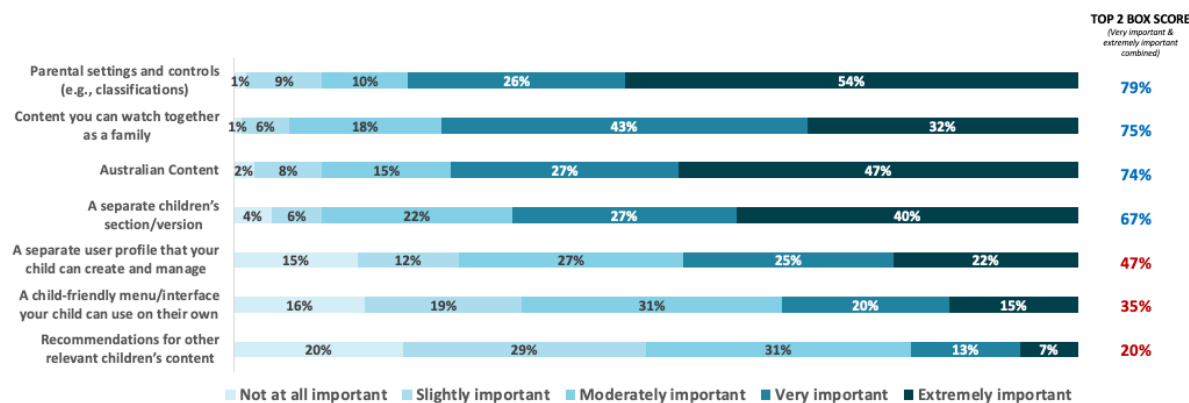


Table 10 Parent responses to the importance of different features and functionality on streaming services

This research establishes that in an often-fragmented streaming landscape, parents value clearly demarcated Australian children’s content that is safely organised in a dedicated online platform. This finding resonates also with the larger project’s Children’s Perspectives study, in which child participants aged 7-9 and their parents expressed concerns about the difficulties of finding Australian and age-appropriate content on streaming platforms and on smart television devices. A preliminary combined analysis of these findings and their implications can be found in ACTC’s Policy Submission to the Federal Government’s Prominence Framework Consultation, which outlines the importance of accounting for the child audience when developing legislation around prominence of “local” content providers on Smart Television interfaces.⁶ This finding also underscores recent calls by industry stakeholders, including the Australian Children’s Television Foundation, for a Children’s Content App with a complementary “KIDS” button on all remotes sold in Australia.⁷

Conclusion

The nationwide 2022 Parents Survey built on the 2021 study by providing further evidence-based insights into how audiences value and find Australian children’s content in the streaming era, including the growing importance parents place on local content. The 2022 Parents Survey also expanded upon that earlier research by developing new understandings of the lasting impacts of lockdown viewing habits, parents’ perspectives on television in the classroom, and the SVoD features and functionalities that are most important to families. This research is designed to aid the long-term strategy and resource management of stakeholders in the children’s television sector, including those involved with production, education, and policy.

⁶ Jessica Balanzategui, Djoymi Baker, Liam Burke and Joanna McIntyre (2023), “Australian Children’s Television, Discoverability and Prominence on Connected TV Devices”, February 2023, <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/pfpp--australian-children%27s-television-cultures-actc.pdf>

⁷ “Prominence Framework for Connected Television Devices Proposals Paper Incorporating a new proposal for an Australian Children’s Content App”, ACTF, February, 2023 https://actf.com.au/assets/uploads/2023-02/actf_discoverability_submission_fa.pdf



This research will continue in 2023 and 2024. At the end of this four-year project, this audience research will provide a detailed longitudinal picture of Australian parents' perspectives on children's television in the streaming era.

This Research Summary is based on research conducted by the [Australian Children's Television Cultures](#) (ACTC) research group

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