

Binge-watching in children: YouTube Kids in particular tempts kids to binge

A survey by the International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI) has investigated binge-watching in 326 6- to 9-year-old children and their parents on Netflix, Amazon Prime and YouTube Kids. The study found that in households with streaming services, children often watch several episodes back to back (binge watching). In the case of YouTube Kids in particular, children showed greater loss of control.

Munich, 18.12.2019 – The International Central Institute for Youth and Educational Television (IZI) interviewed children from families with access to Netflix, Amazon Prime and YouTube Kids throughout Germany on their binge-watching behaviour. The study involved n=326 girls and boys between the ages of 6 and 9 from families who used Netflix, Amazon Prime or YouTube Kids several times a week.¹ The survey found that binge-watching is an issue affecting not only adolescents, but also children.

It was revealed that eight out of ten children in households with streaming services binge-watched. Half are “light binge-watchers”, usually viewing 2 episodes in succession, while the other half are “heavy binge-watchers”, viewing four or more episodes back to back on a daily basis.

Paw Patrol, *Peppa Wutz* and *LEGO Ninjago* are the series most frequently cited for binge-watching by 6- to 9-year-olds. These are series also running on analogue televisions (especially SUPER RTL); they are all extensively marketed via various licensed products and hence have a strong presence in children’s everyday culture.

| | Overall | Amazon Prime | Netflix | YouTube Kids |
|----|------------------------|---|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. | <i>Paw Patrol</i> 15 % | <i>Paw Patrol</i> 19 % | <i>Paw Patrol</i> 15 % | <i>Peppa Wutz</i> 17 % |
| 2. | <i>Peppa Wutz</i> 11 % | <i>Bibi und Tina</i> 13 % | <i>Ninjago</i> 15 % | <i>Paw Patrol</i> 11 % |
| 3. | <i>Ninjago</i> 10 % | <i>Ninjago</i> 12%, <i>Peppa Wutz</i> 12 % | <i>Pokémon</i> 14 % | <i>Bibi Blocksberg</i> 8 % |

The most popular children’s series for binge-watching via streaming services

Why children watch episode after episode

Asked why they watch episode after episode, children name motivations that have already been documented by studies on fans of series. They enjoy the stories and want to see what their heroes or heroines will experience next. The popularity of the series means they are unlikely to become boring or too emotionally challenging. Not all of the young viewers surveyed made conscious decisions however: around seven out of ten children (73 %) sometimes happen to keep watching because the next episode starts playing automatically.

¹ The survey was conducted online (by Iconkids & Youth). Quota sampling was based on children’s gender and age and the streaming service used between 25 October and 5 November 2019.

Addiction is a risk, especially with YouTube Kids

Unlike the internet and computer games, watching a lot of television is currently not considered to carry the same risk of clinical addiction. Nevertheless, children who binge-watch display elements of risk of addiction such as loss of control, negative social consequences and mild withdrawal symptoms. Seven out of ten children state that they sometimes cannot stop watching one episode after another. Around half of them note that they spend more time watching back-to-back episodes than they thought and that they do less with others. Almost one in three children describes him- or herself as being annoyed and dissatisfied if he or she cannot watch several episodes in a row. Children who watch YouTube Kids more frequently show signs of risk of addiction, experience loss of control and negative consequences in their everyday lives and display mild withdrawal symptoms.

Children who “binge-watch” have often had early exposure to unregulated media

Many of the children who watch one episode after another via streaming services have had early access to media and were often allowed to watch an unlimited amount of television. Children who have watched a lot of television by the age of five more frequently describe signs of a lack of control, negative social consequences and mild withdrawal symptoms than five-year-olds who have watched (very) little television. A lack of self-reflexive media competence was observed.

Conclusion: there is a need for targeted promotion of media competence

Streaming services, especially when used via mobile media, present today’s children with new challenges. It is not necessarily the content that is the problem, but above all the time children spend using the medium, often without being able to control it themselves. “Here children urgently need specific support to be able to cope with the attraction and temptation of series that are constantly available,” says leader of the study Dr. Maya Götz. It is largely down to the parents to find ways to teach these skills; there is still a lack of practical tips and concepts for targeted promotion of media competence. “A first step would be for parents to turn off autoplay for the next episode,” recommends Götz. But further measures are needed.

The study “Binge-Watching in Children” was presented at the IZI conference “Media Realities Today: Multi-Screen” in Munich on 5 December.

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