

The Challenge of Children's TV

How to engage the YouTube generation with the wider world

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Quantitative Analysis of Children's TV International Content

METHODOLOGY

This research used a similar methodology to our earlier *Screening the World* report.

Sample 1

For *Screening the World* we did a quantitative analysis of all new children's content broadcast in 2007 by the main public service broadcasters (PSBs). This time we looked at the calendar year 2018, but the channels analysed have changed since the creation of several bespoke digital channels for children, CBeebies, CBBC and CITV. However, Channel 5's children's content is still broadcast on its main channel. The primary source for documenting screen time of relevant programmes was *Radio Times*. Reference was also made to secondary sources such as broadcasters' own websites and occasionally third parties, to confirm episode content.

Sample 2

For *Screening the World* a two week sample of commercial television was analysed by recording all the content available on a children's Sky package in 2007. On this occasion, we also looked at all the programmes broadcast as part of a Sky Kids subscription over a two week period (the weeks commencing December 19 and January 4). This covers 11 channels including Cartoon Network, Boomerang, Nickelodeon and Disney Channel. Sky Kids itself does not have a linear channel but instead provides programmes on-demand alongside its linear partners.

DEFINITIONS

International children's programming

Output for children that is related to, and/or filmed on location in countries outside the UK. Animated and studio-based content was included, even if produced in the UK. Fictional and even some fantasy content were also included, if viewers were offered cultural understandings from actual countries.

Developing country children's programming

Programmes relating to developing countries, narratives set in historical times and touristic coverage of developing countries were all included. Generic regional content was also included if reference was made to a country, region or continent.

SAMPLE 1: New international children's programmes on the PSBs in 2018

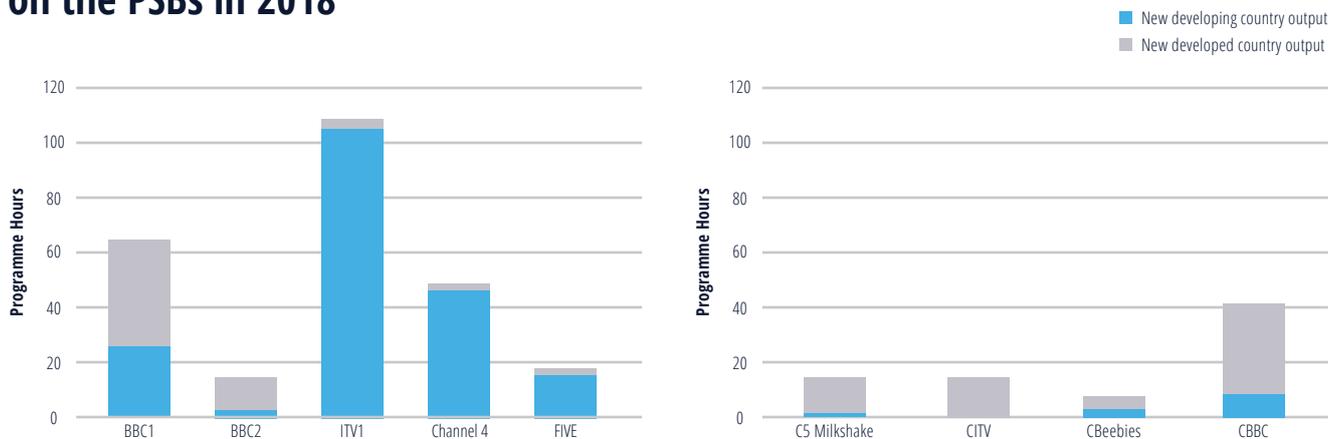


Figure 1: New international and developing country programming on the five terrestrial channels in 2007

Figure 2: New international and developing country programming on the PSBs in 2018

Coverage of developed and developing countries

The quantity of new international content broadcast by the PSBs and their children's portfolio channels in 2018 was considerably less than that in 2007 as can be seen by comparing figures 1 and 2. In both this and our 2007 study we have measured the volume of **new** content for the public service broadcasters, rather than the volume of **all** content because the commissioning of new programmes is an indicator of innovation and investment in children's content. It has to be noted therefore that these findings, while useful as an indicator of investment, do not provide an analysis of all the programmes available on the PSBs. It should also be noted that because the children's audience is broken into different age groups, repeats are less of a problem than they are for adult audiences. Many younger children enjoy watching the same programmes over and over again, therefore for this audience repeating programmes could be considered to be beneficial.

47% of CBeebies' international material was from countries defined as developing, rather than developed. How much insight this offers into those countries varies. *Andy's Safari Adventures* contributed over a third of developing country screen time on CBeebies. Park ranger Andy's graphics and CGI travels around the world show the globe, reinforcing some basic geography, but the international screen time consists largely of inserting him into stock wildlife footage from various continents.

Another CBeebies show was the animation *Go-Jetters*. It offers younger children considerable geographical variety, as humanoid characters jet around the globe, sharing geographical knowledge with each other as they visit locations as varied as Mali, West Papua and

the American Everglades. But they travel to thwart the same fantasy baddie each time. Local people are rarely shown on screen, and never with identity or significant agency.

For older children, *All Over the Place: Asia* was CBBC's major new developing country contribution. This is an upbeat road movie magazine show, centred on the experiences of a shifting group of UK 'tourist-presenters'. Each episode includes skits and links back in the studio, to items from at least three different countries. The programme is popular and fun, but could do more to develop children's understanding of the wider world. However, there is interaction with local people who are given names and identities, and are allowed to teach new skills to their visitors.

On Channel 5 it was notable that in the new series of *Thomas and Friends*, Thomas left Sodor for the first time, travelling to China, India and Australia. He was joined by a number of new engines, including Isla, an Australian flying doctor plane, Noor Jehan, a royal express train from India and Hong-Mei and Number 1 Blue Tank Engine both from China. Additionally, Milkshake, Channel 5's strand for younger children, has begun featuring world celebrations in its output such as Diwali and other festivals.

The developing world content is mostly set in America. The CBeebies show, *Gudrun the Viking Princess*, is one exception. Set in pre-industrial Northern Europe, it offers a live action character that young children can identify with. The word 'princess' is misleading as Gudrun wears simple clothes and does things for herself, living a life before development removed her people from direct contact with the natural world and a subsistence lifestyle.



Figure 3: Percentage of new international programming on the PSBs in 2007 covering different regions of the world

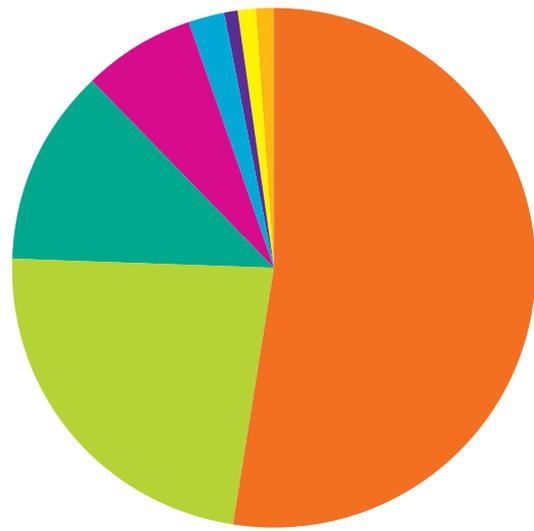


Figure 4: Percentage of new international programming on the PSBs in 2018 covering different regions of the world

Regional spread

Figure 4 shows the continuing dominance of output from North America, contributing just over half of new international screen time. The regional spread is very similar to what we found in 2007 as can be seen from figure 3.

The North American dominance on the commercial PSBs was slightly diminished by an increasing presence of the Irish Republic. CITV broadcast 12 hours of the new series *Drop Dead Weird*, an Australian-Irish co-production involving expat teens with zombie parents, coping with life in rural Ireland. Similarly, C5 Milkshake's only new international but non-North American content was 1.5 hours of the Irish animation *The Day Henry Met...*

For younger children, one CBeebies show successfully covered most regions. *My World Kitchen* uses family recipes as a vehicle for stock-footage narrated inserts about various heritage countries. Each episode of *This is Me*, also on CBeebies, showed a young child's enthusiasm for their hobby, such as cycling (Norway) or bowling (Netherlands). *Where in the World* which documented the lives of young children across the globe does not feature in our analysis as it was first broadcast in 2017 but not recommissioned for 2018.

For older children, Latin America was portrayed in *Finding my Family*, a *Newsround* special, shown on CBBC, about the Windrush generation. Two

teenagers, with Barbadian and Jamaican heritage respectively, travelled to research the life stories of their grandfathers.

CBBC's documentary series *My Life* featured the widest range of foreign locations. This series is personal, rather than journalistic and episodes promote a sense of commonality rather than otherness. Young viewers are invited to relate directly to the protagonists. Overall coverage of the Middle East was sparse, the exception being an episode of *My Life* called *The Boy on the Bicycle - 2 years on*. Ahmed still lives in a Jordanian refugee camp, notwithstanding the 2016 BAFTA award won by an earlier episode about him.

My Life also brought to the screen an underdeveloped European country, Moldova. Finn is a character in the CBBC children's care home drama *The Dumping Ground*. He's living with Down's Syndrome, as is the actor who plays him, Ruben. In *The Real Dumping Ground*, Ruben visits institutionalised children with disabilities in a country where inclusivity is a very new idea, and reflects thoughtfully on the experience.

Africa featured in another episode of *My Life*, *Motorcross Girl* which flew between Zimbabwe and UK to tell the story of a talented youngster turning professional. From Asia, *Mumbai Street Strikers* followed a young football team to UK and back. *Too Many Guns* profiled a young gun control campaigner in the USA.

SAMPLE 2: All international programming on a Sky Kids subscription for two sample weeks

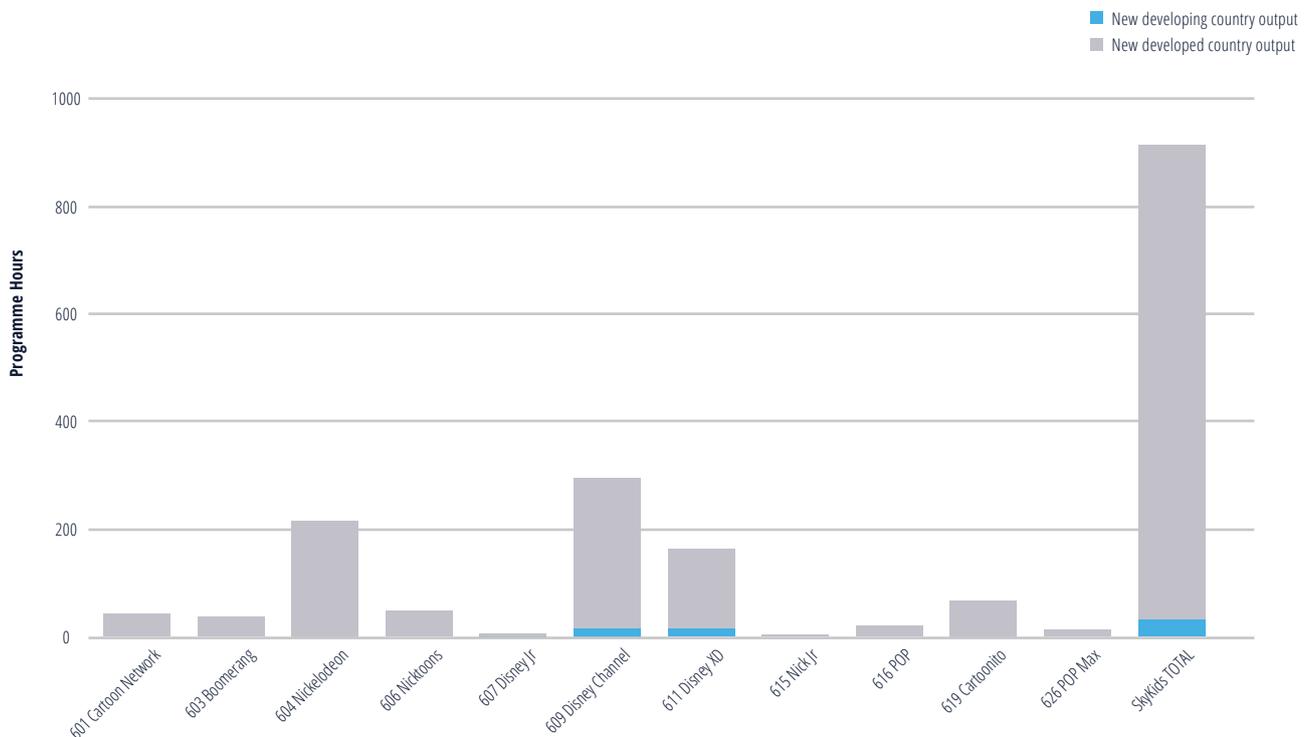


Figure 5: Number of programme hours of developed and developing country children's programming on 11 linear channels for two sample weeks in 2018-19

Coverage of developed and developing countries

We found very little factual or even live action content on many channels, and there was an almost total lack of developing country programming.

As with Sample 1, the data showed very little change in emphasis compared with the previous study. In 2007, too, it was Disney that offered the only developing country content, with over five hours on Disney and Disney Cinemagic. This was all animation, such as *Tarzan* and *Aladdin*, which arguably work *against* international understanding.

Within the large proportion of screen time devoted to North American content, there were some exceptions to the familiar middle class suburban high school scenarios. The animation *Spirit Riding Free* is about girls and their horses in frontier-time North America. The live action sitcom *Raven's Home* centres on a single mum of colour, with a blue collar job and the animated protagonist in *Craig of the Creek* enjoys backwoods adventures, rather than consumerist pre-occupations.

Sky Kids itself does not have a linear channel but instead has responded to changing audience behaviours and provides over 5,000 episodes on-demand alongside its linear partners. The Sky Kids

on-demand content included some noteworthy international shows: *Dive in & Do It* (about plastics pollution in our oceans and what kids can do about it), *Big Cats: Wild Files* (exploring big cats, filmed on location in Africa, Asia and Europe), *Monkeys & Apes* (exploring monkeys and apes, filmed on location throughout the world) and *Duck Quacks Don't Echo* (a science-based entertainment show).

Hope Works, broadcast on Disney Junior and Sky Kids, warrants a special mention, even though it occupies a tiny proportion of hours. The project came about as a result of a unique coalition of children's broadcasters and media companies from around the world to mark 2018's UNICEF World Children's Day. The stated aim of bringing uplifting 'stories of kindness and inclusion' to the screen was achieved in a range of styles, from animation to live action to puppetry. The 12 short films included *Children United* which featured live action tales of survival and hope from children in New York City, Azraq refugee camp (Jordan/Syrian border), Rio de Janeiro, Sheffield and Manila.

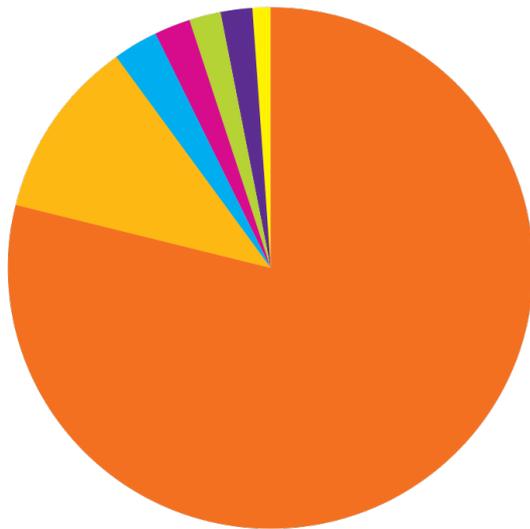


Figure 6: International output on a Sky Kids subscription by region in 2007

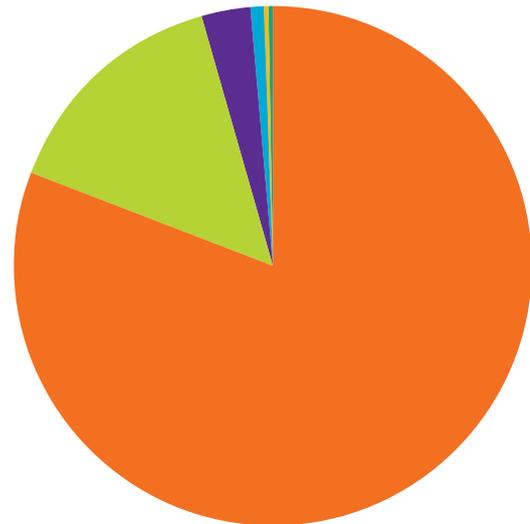


Figure 7: International output on a Sky Kids subscription by region in 2018

Regional spread

The regional spread on the commercial channels in 2018 was very similar to what we found in 2007. The North American bias is even more marked than in sample 1. This time, 82% of content was North American; in 2007 the equivalent figure was 79%.

Africa was represented by Disney Channel's *Disney Cookabout*, a South African travelling cooking competition that takes viewers into a range of environments and cultures in this very diverse country.

Asia only appeared as a backdrop for glamorous teenagers from the US on tour in Japan, in *True Jackson VP* and *iCarly*, both featuring young female entrepreneurs, in fashion and social media respectively.

From Europe, *Alex & Co* follows a North American high school band touring Italy. Paris exists in cartoon form for the extravagant animated superheroes *Ladybug and Cat Noir*, and as a live action backdrop for a fashionable US teenager on tour in *True Jackson, VP*. In Iceland, the live action sitcom *Lazy Town* features an energetic newcomer trying to change neighbours' habits. And in *Hunter Street*, five Dutch foster children seek their biological parents.

A recent addition is the Russian CGI-animated character, Masha. Either with her protective adult avatar in *Masha & the Bear*, or telling muddled versions of fairy tales to her attentive toys in *Masha's*

Tales, the very young protagonist rehearses and communicates Russian values. She's even been accused by *The Times* of acting on Putin's behalf.

Latin America was represented by two live action dramas from Argentina. On Disney XD, *Disney 11* followed a young male football team training hard for success. On the Disney Channel, *Violetta*, the eponymous heroine discovers her singing talent. Both scenarios would be recognisable to UK children, but there is clearly value in setting these narratives in Latin America, which would otherwise be invisible.

Beyond the few minutes in Azraq refugee camp during the *Children United* episode of *Hope Works*, the Middle East did not feature at all.

NEWSROUND AND FYI

Online platforms and video on demand were not included in our quantitative study. However, the CBBC *Newsround* website and the Sky Kids production *FYI* deserve a special mention as they offer the most coherent, insightful and significant factual as well as specifically international content for children.

Newsround

The BBC continues to broadcast *Newsround* on CBBC but the content and style of bulletins is increasingly removed from genuine news or current affairs featuring more personal issues and showbiz items. However, *Newsround's* online presence offers intelligent and thoughtful international content. For example, a blog about Yemen included a powerful subtitled interview from 11 year old Salah about the basics of displacement and survival in war zone after war zone, and an item on the Mexican caravan migrants was topical and moving.

FYI

In November 2018, Sky Kids launched *FYI*, its own news strand for children. An engaging team of young studio presenters and roving reporters bring viewers an energetic and sometimes challenging range of content, including reports from overseas. *FYI* is available on Sky News at 10.30am every Saturday, and repeated at 11.30am on Sunday. It is accessible to non-Sky subscribers via the *First News* website.

Early publicity for the launch of *FYI* made great play of the 'Prime Minister's Questions' inserts, but the location reports and in-depth VT inserts are more relevant in the context of this research. Topics to date range from the COP24 talks, a viral dance in Nigeria, young Syrian refugee bloggers, plastic waste and child migrants on the US border. Links between items include a great deal of scripted chat between the young presenters, reflecting and often debating the content itself. Media literacy is also directly addressed by the regular 'Fake News or Fact?' slot.