

Research on the 'strong appeal' of personalities in advertising

Report for the Advertising Standards Authority, prepared by Sherbert Research + The Culture Studio

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1. Executive summary

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is the UK's independent regulator of advertising. It applies the Advertising Codes¹ written by the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) and Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP). The ASA ensures ads across all media are legal, decent, honest and truthful, taking action where ads are misleading, harmful, offensive or otherwise irresponsible.

The Gambling section of the CAP Code² requires ads for gambling products to be socially responsible, with particular consideration given to protecting children (under-16s), young people (16–17-year-olds) and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited.

One way in which the Codes seeks to protect children and young people (under-18s) is through stating that gambling ads should not have 'strong appeal' to them, including through the featuring of personalities or characters likely to have strong appeal to under-18s.

To strengthen the way the ASA makes assessments and applies these rules, Sherbert Research, working with The Culture Studio, were commissioned to undertake a study exploring how 11–17-year-olds discover and engage with personalities/characters of strong appeal to them. The study consisted of three phases:

- A literature review
- A two-stage qualitative study involving a five-day online activity and follow up in-depth interviews
- A survey of 1,687 young people aged 11–17 years old.

Key findings

In their digital first media universe, 11–17-year-olds are engaging with, following and liking, a huge range of well-known personalities from the entertainment and sporting world, every day. Personalities are 'omnipresent' in their lives: they feel close to them and often know a lot about them. It is a subject they find easy and interesting to talk about: which personalities they like; why they like them; and what makes them likeable. 'Fandom' or strong appeal is an inherent part of how they engage with media and specifically social media, sharing content by personalities they love, liking posts and following their stories.

¹ <https://www.asa.org.uk/codes-and-rulings/advertising-codes.html>

² https://www.asa.org.uk/type/non_broadcast/code_section/16.html

Their sporting interests are wide ranging and are informed by family and school at an earlier age, and by friends and social media as they grow older. The most popular sports were men's football, swimming and then women's football. And of the 26 sports listed in the survey, on average, 11-17-year-olds claimed to be 'really interested' in four different sports, reflecting the breadth and depth of interests we had seen qualitatively. Formula 1 (F1), Boxing and Basketball all held strong appeal for this age group, although there were clear differences in gender both in the levels of engagement in sports and the types of sports boys and girls were engaging in.

The personalities they like are typically not from the world of Saturday night television or analogue/linear television. Rather they are well known in the wide range of interests, pastimes and sporting activities that children and young people are engaging with. The types of personalities who have strong appeal tend to be more mainstream (e.g., Harry Kane) for younger age groups (11-13s) and more niche (e.g., Jeremy Lynch) for older age groups (14+).

They are seeing personalities, that hold strong appeal, advertising or endorsing products in the social space and they say they often find it hard to tell what is an ad and what isn't. Young people say they notice ads more when they feature 'personalities' - 79% agree with the statement 'I notice adverts more when they include celebrities (whether I like them or not).'

The (perceived) age of the different celebrities that hold strong appeal varies widely; it's certainly not limited in any way to younger personalities. For boys almost all celebrities who hold strong appeal are male, and for girls there is an even balance of males and females.

Discovery is via

- Wider culture
- Word-of-mouth (family and friends)
- 'The algorithm'

As their media consumption tends to be 'social first', the algorithm and what is shared by friends online appears to be the most significant in terms of how they are engaging with the personalities that hold strong appeal.

The drivers of appeal are hard to unpick and vary a lot. However, three attributes, all value statements, came out marginally more consistently than others: personalities that are considered to:

- *be inspirational/work hard to be the best they can*
- *be authentic/genuine*
- *have good values/considered to be a good person*

These are evidently subjective measures - it is difficult to categorise personalities on these measures from the perspective of an average 11-17-year-old (if there is such a thing). How well any single personality scores can change quickly, often overnight.

And in addition, the same personality can be perceived differently across the age group.

There is also a whole raft of other drivers which often feature – e.g., humour, appearance and ‘success’ (be that financial or a perception that they have overcome obstacles to get where they are).

The typical weight given to each of these attributes varies by gender and type of personality. For example, for music artists, appearance was more important, while for sports personalities humour and appearance were often ‘nice-to-haves’.

This research underlines that there are other important questions to be considered when reflecting on whether a personality is likely to be engaging and/or appealing strongly to young people.

- Are they currently a part of wider popular culture discourse – e.g., do they feature regularly in the media with a wide engagement on social media?
- Were they ever top in their field in the past, even if not currently? This is particularly important in the most mainstream sports.
- Are they considered an icon – via sport or even FIFA game/cards or the like?

The findings of this research study reveal the complexity in understanding *which* personalities hold strong appeal for young people and *why* they are strongly appealing. However, there are clear learnings which should enable the ASA to strengthen their application of the CAP Code.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

The ASA is the UK's independent regulator of advertising. It applies the Advertising Codes³ written by the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) and Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP). The ASA ensures ads across all media are legal, decent, honest and truthful, taking action where ads are misleading, harmful, offensive or otherwise irresponsible.

The Gambling section of the CAP Code⁴ requires ads for gambling products to be socially responsible, with particular consideration given to protecting children (under-16s), young people (16–17-year-olds) and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited.

One way in which the Codes seeks to protect children and young people (under-18s) is through stating that gambling ads should not have 'strong appeal' to them, especially by reflecting or being associated with youth culture (rule 16.3.12).

New rules around the content of gambling ads and the protection of under-18s were introduced in October 2022^{5,6}. The previous rules required that ads must not be of 'particular appeal' to under-18s; ads were said to have *particular appeal* to under-18s if they appeal *more* to this age group than to adults. The 'strong appeal' test, however, prohibits content (imagery, themes and characters) that has a *strong level of appeal* to under-18s, regardless of how the ad is viewed by adults.

As well as highlighting potentially high-risk ad content/approaches and activities of 'inherent' strong appeal to under-18s that advertisers are strongly advised against using, the guidance sets out the factors advertisers must consider in their featuring of personalities or characters in an ad to ensure they are unlikely to have strong appeal to under-18s.

To strengthen the way the ASA makes assessments and applies these rules, Sherbert Research, working with The Culture Studio, were commissioned to undertake a study exploring how 11–17-year-olds discover and engage with personalities/characters of strong appeal to them.

³ <https://www.asa.org.uk/codes-and-rulings/advertising-codes.html>

⁴ https://www.asa.org.uk/type/non_broadcast/code_section/16.html

⁵ <https://www.asa.org.uk/news/new-content-restrictions-on-gambling-and-lotteries-ads.html>

⁶ <https://www.asa.org.uk/resource/protecting-children-and-young-people-gambling-guidance-2022.html>

Given the application of the strong appeal rules to ads for gambling ads, which often feature sports personalities, there is a particular focus on understanding the under-18s association with different sports (including those they play, watch or follow) and related personalities.

This research report contains the findings of a combined qualitative and quantitative study that Sherbert Research, with The Culture Studio, conducted on behalf of the ASA during 2024.

2.2 Objectives

The objectives of the research, as set out in the original Request for Proposal (RFP), were that the research should:

- Explore how children and young people (11–17s) discover celebrities/influencers that appeal to them and what makes them appealing
- Explore how 11–17-year-olds engage with those celebrities/influencers that hold strong appeal to them
- Look at the popularity of different sports and the way under-18s engage with those sports, beyond participation and TV viewership

And in more detail, the research sought to address the following questions:

- Which personalities/characters appeal to under-18s?
 - Why do these personalities/characters appeal to under-18s?
 - Where does their interest in these personalities/characters stem from?
 - How do under-18s engage with these personalities/characters?
 - What are the demographic differences in appeal?
 - What sports are under-18s interested in?
 - Are some groups more interested in certain sports?
-

2.3 Research approach

A **three-phased research approach** was taken to address all the questions in the RFP.

Phase one – literature review

This focused on four main areas:

1. A review of existing academic research on identity formation in young people and how this informs their interests, outlooks and behaviours
2. A review of the latest existing data and literature on the most popular, and fastest growing sports for young people in the UK
3. A review of academic research relating to the use of celebrities in advertising, and how academic thinking has created frameworks for understanding the drivers of appeal
4. Finally, a review of the latest academic research relating to children and gambling

We have not included the findings of this phase in this report but have included citations where relevant. Phase one informed subsequent phases, most notably in the design of the activity guide in the qualitative phase and the survey design in the quantitative phase. We leant on existing data on the popularity of certain sports amongst young people in lists provided in both phases. In addition, in unpicking why celebrities have strong appeal amongst young audiences we used the Meaning Transfer Model⁷ developed by Grant McCracken, a social science academic and expert on consumer culture and markets, as a starting point for the way in which we approached the question.

Phase two – qualitative research

An asynchronous approach was used for the first part of the qualitative phase. Forty-four participants aged between 12 and 17 completed a 20-minute task, each day, over five days. Fieldwork dates ran from 17 to 22 June 2024⁸. The asynchronous approach was chosen for several reasons:

- Firstly, the scope of the brief required spending an extended period with young people to be able to answer all the questions and explore the different areas of interest
- Secondly, we wanted participants to be able to reflect on the questions we were asking them – a ‘live’ interview format or focus group setting may have only revealed surfaced responses to areas of discussion. Giving participants space to breathe and reflect on the questions at hand felt more valuable
- Thirdly, in a group setting, young participants, in a key stage of identity formation, might have felt uncomfortable or self-conscious, sharing which personalities held strong appeal, and why

⁷ G. McCracken, Who Is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16 (3), December 1989, Pages 310–321.

⁸ Fieldwork took place during the Euro 2024 tournament and, therefore, some sports personalities participating in the tournament may feature more heavily than they would have done outside this period.

- Finally, a relaxed ‘in home’ approach meant the participants could complete the research tasks at times that were convenient to them and in a less formal environment

Over five days, each area in the RFP was explored, with participants spending around 20-30 minutes each day thinking about and completing the tasks.

The Qualzy⁹ online discussion platform was used, and the design of the platform meant that moderators could interact with and follow up on answers that were particularly interesting and ask for clarification on any responses that were less clear.

Figure 1 – Overview of five-day activity guide

Day 1: Introduction to the research, participants introduce themselves
Day 2: Understanding their interests, with a focus on sporting activities
Day 3: How they discover personalities that hold strong appeal
Day 4: Exploring and identifying the building blocks of strong appeal
Day 5: Understanding the shared characteristics of personalities that hold strong appeal

In addition, participants were asked to keep a daily ‘media diary’ noting any ads they’d seen/heard, across any media, that featured celebrities or personalities¹⁰

Figure 2 – Five-day activity, qualitative sample matrix 12–17-year-olds

Ethnicity	Locations of female participants	Locations of male participants
Asian	Coventry, Surrey, Stockport, Bury Middlesex, Glasgow, Hertfordshire	London
Black	London, Lincoln	London, Essex, Enfield, Slough
Mixed race	London	Birmingham
White	Bournemouth, Peterborough, Leicester, Leeds, Glasgow, Surrey Sussex, Essex, Birmingham Bolton, Belfast	Cardiff, Hertfordshire, Eastbourne Cardiff, Dorset, Essex, Rochdale Bedfordshire, Hampshire, London, Aberdeen, Dundee, Halifax, Belfast

Following on from the five-day research activity, 14 participants were shortlisted to take part in online in-depth interviews, ranging between 45 minutes and one hour in length. They were selected to represent a range of demographics and typologies. They were also given the opportunity to attend the interview with a friend (nine of them did) who hadn’t taken part in the previous phase.

⁹ <https://qualzy.com/>

¹⁰ Examples of this in the Appendix 5.3

This phase enabled us to further probe on themes that had emerged across the five days. In addition, the presence of a friend gave participants the ability to interact with one another and discuss the questions, reflect on the personalities that held strong appeal and why.

Figure 3 – Online follow up in-depth interviews, sample matrix

Age	Gender	Location
12 year olds (2)	Females	Bournemouth
12 year olds (2)	Males	Essex
13 year olds (2)	Males	Cardiff
14 + 16 year olds (2)	Females	Hertfordshire
15 year olds (2)	Females	Surrey
15 year olds (2)	Female	Birmingham
15 year old (1)	Female	Bury
15 year old (1)	Male	Enfield
16 + 17 year olds (2)	Male	Hertfordshire
16 year old (1)	Male	Aberdeen
16 year olds (2)	Males	Hampshire
17 year old (1)	Female	Bolton
17 year olds (2)	Males	London
17 year old (1)	Male	Dundee

To comply with the Market Research Society (MRS) best practice code, the qualitative phase was conducted with confirmed parental permission, and by moderators who had Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.

Phase three – Online 12-minute survey

Following the qualitative research and interim debrief an online survey was developed and quantitative fieldwork conducted via access panels between 6 and 20 August 2024¹¹.

¹¹ Fieldwork overlapped with the Paris Olympics and therefore some sports personalities may feature more heavily than they would have done outside this period.

An initial sample of 1,500 participants completed the survey across the four UK nations, with quotas set to ensure the sample was nationally representative for nation, age & gender, socio-economic group and ethnicity. 'Booster' samples were then undertaken for the nations and ethnic minority audiences not yet reaching a minimum of 100 respondents to increase their robustness for analysis; the final sample of 1,687 was weighted back to nationally representative proportions. Respondents were recruited via their parents/guardians.

This final quantitative phase therefore enabled us to increase confidence in the core findings emerging qualitatively (ensuring they were robust and conclusive) as well as allowing us to explore key differences by demographic.

The survey was designed to take just 10–12 minutes to complete on average, increasing participation rates and data quality. It focused on some specific areas of the RFP – namely measuring levels of interest in different sports and activities; sizing up the different ways of engaging with those sports and activities; looking at channels for discovering and then engaging with strongly appealing celebrities; and finally quantifying the 'weight' of each of the drivers of strong appeal, as identified during the qualitative phase.

When it comes to reasons for strong appeal, our conversations with the young people in the earlier stages of research found that it is better to discuss specifics. As such, when exploring personalities that held strong appeal, the survey first asked respondents to list out examples of personalities they were 'fans of' (open-ended) and then to choose two to respond about in more detail. If they had included any sports/esports personalities in their unprompted list, they were asked to select at least one to respond about in more detail.

A list of 13 potential drivers of strong appeal had been curated following the qualitative phases and this was presented in the survey in a number of ways. Initially the respondent was asked to mark the celebrity on each of the drivers based on the extent to which it was a reason they particularly liked them (the order was randomised). We then also asked for the Top Three reasons and finally the main reason for appeal.

2.4 Terminology

The RFP uses the term 'strong appeal' when describing celebrities or personalities that are very popular with children and young people. The term 'strong appeal' doesn't tend to be used in everyday conversation, especially amongst young people. For this reason, during the research we used some terms interchangeably with the phrase 'strong appeal'. These terms were: someone that you are a 'particular fan of'; or a personality that you 'really like or love'. We would then explain to participants that in the research we were calling 'being a real fan of' or 'loving a celebrity', 'strong appeal'.

In addition, we tended to use the words 'celebrities' and 'personalities' interchangeably dependent on the type of personality being referenced.

2.5 Strengths and limitations of this research

Unpicking the drivers of strong appeal in celebrities amongst a young audience is a complex area to investigate. This is for a variety of reasons, all of which we have tried to mitigate against in the research methodology. Using an asynchronous approach as the main qualitative research methodology helped to remove self-consciousness around the personalities or celebrities that hold strong appeal, and research over a series of days made it possible for the young participants to think about and reflect on, who the celebrities are that hold strong appeal for them and, the trickier to think about question of *why* they hold strong appeal.

While we first enabled participants to explain in their own words why celebrities held strong appeal we then, in a subsequent task, gave them a list of characteristics, informed by the work of Grant McCracken¹², which gave them a series of options to choose from, some of which they may not have considered. The results from both qualitative tasks helped inform the quantitative survey design stage, where we reviewed the results from both tasks.

¹² McCracken, Who is the Celebrity Endorser? Pages 310–321

3. Findings – research on the strong appeal of personalities in advertising

3.1 Young people's media lives

Children and young people's media lives are radically different from the media lives of a generation ago. The centrality of digital media in their everyday life shapes and informs their interests, their outlooks and behaviours. In fact, understanding the way in which they interact and use digital media is key in answering many of the questions posed in this brief.

Children and young people are unambiguously 'social first' when it comes to consuming media content. There were very few celebrities or personalities mentioned as having strong appeal that came from the world of traditional family entertainment. Rather they were drawn from the worlds of sport, music and digital influence.

The diaries the children and young people kept across the week, underlined the degree to which this was the case. Most ads featuring personalities that were seen by the children and young people were on TikTok, Snapchat and (to a lesser degree) Instagram. Alongside sports and music personalities that they were 'particular fans of' (we tended to use this phrase as a proxy for strong appeal) featured many digital 'influencers' and this was particularly the case for older teenagers (15+).

The television set, for linear viewing in the living room, is almost forgotten when it came to describing their own media lives. When it was used, it was more likely to be for YouTube, Netflix and gaming.

"I really only watch YouTube these days on the TV, rarely anything live except maybe sport" (13-year-old boy, Wales)

"I never really watch TV to be honest, very occasionally my mum will say come and sit with me" (13-year-old girl, London)

"I don't really have time to watch TV anymore, I am too busy and if I have time I am mostly on my phone" (15-year-old girl, Bury)

"I used to watch a lot more when I was younger but now, I hardly ever watch actual TV anymore (16-year-old boy, Aberdeen)

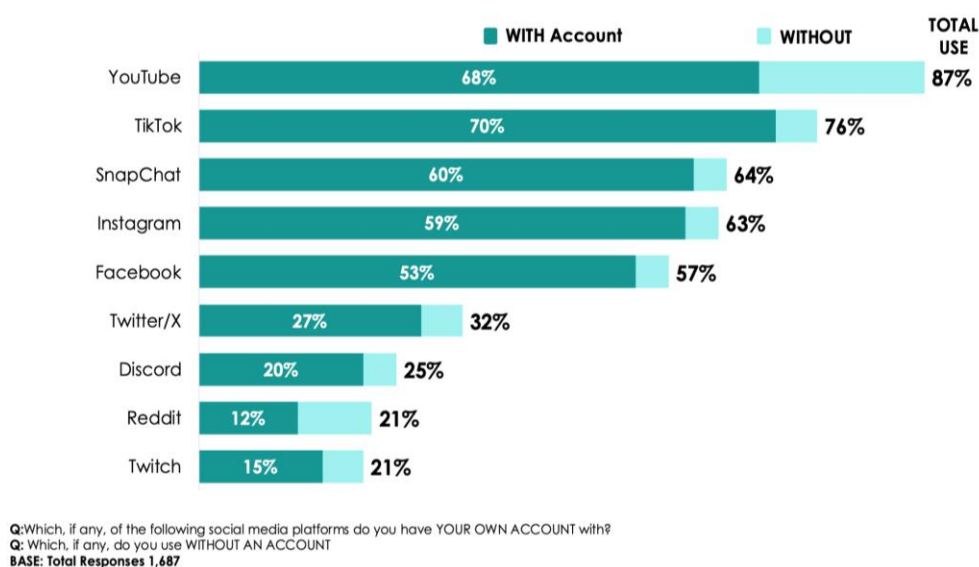
An exception to this was watching the Euro 2024 tournament on the TV with family, as it was taking place during the qualitative phase. Consequently, football and footballing personalities may have been mentioned more in this research than they

might ordinarily have been. Subsequently, during the quantitative phase the Paris Olympics were taking place. While both events may have influenced the personalities and sports mentioned, it is the case that popular sporting events happen periodically throughout the year so the dates of fieldwork should not be seen as problematic for this research.

But beyond big ‘tent pole’ sporting moments, we heard very little about shared viewing/family moments and the TV. Instead, for children and young people in 2024, social content dominates their everyday lives: as seen in Ofcom’s Children’s Media Lives 2024¹³ and throughout the qualitative exploration for this study.

The survey then re-confirmed the widespread reach of various social media platforms as seen in Figure 4, with almost nine in 10 saying that they use YouTube and three in every four TikTok.

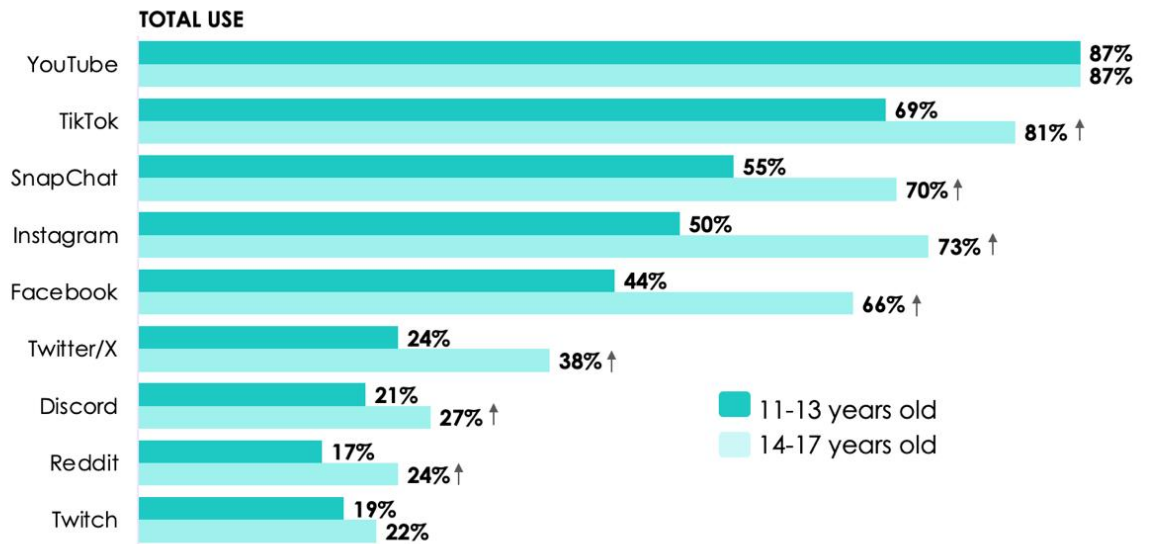
Figure 4 – Social media platform use (with or without own accounts)



The reach of each platform increases with age (Figure 5) and there are also differences by gender (Figure 6). For example, 70% of girls say they use Snapchat compared with 58% of boys, and 26% of boys using Twitch compared with 16% of girls.

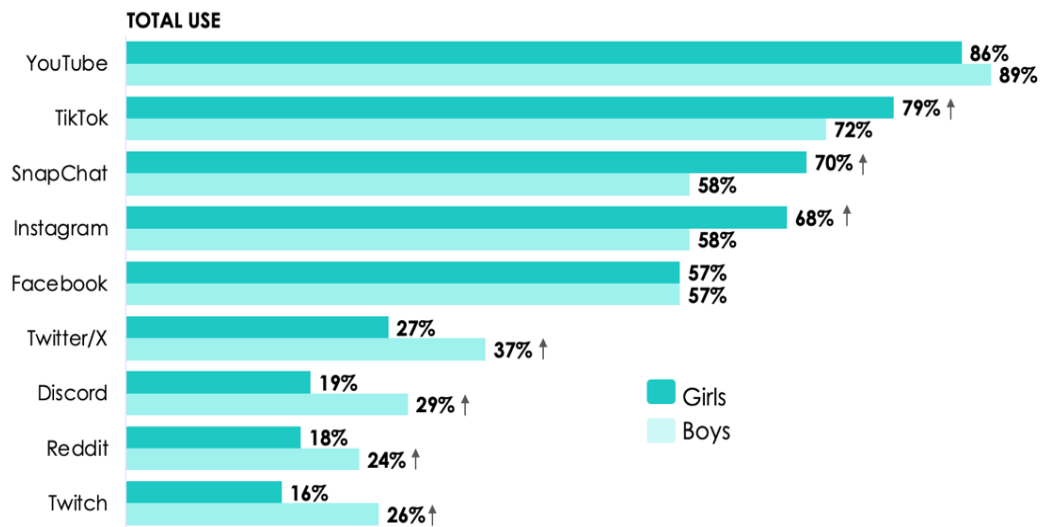
¹³ <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-habits-children/childrens-media-lives/>

Figure 5 – Social media platform use, by age (with or without own accounts)



Q: Which, if any, of the following social media platforms do you have YOUR OWN ACCOUNT with?
 Q: Which, if any, do you use WITHOUT AN ACCOUNT
 Total Sample 716 11-13s vs 971 14-17s
 ↑ Indicates a statistically significant difference between The Age Groups (95% confidence level)

Figure 6 – Social media platform use, by gender (with or without own accounts)



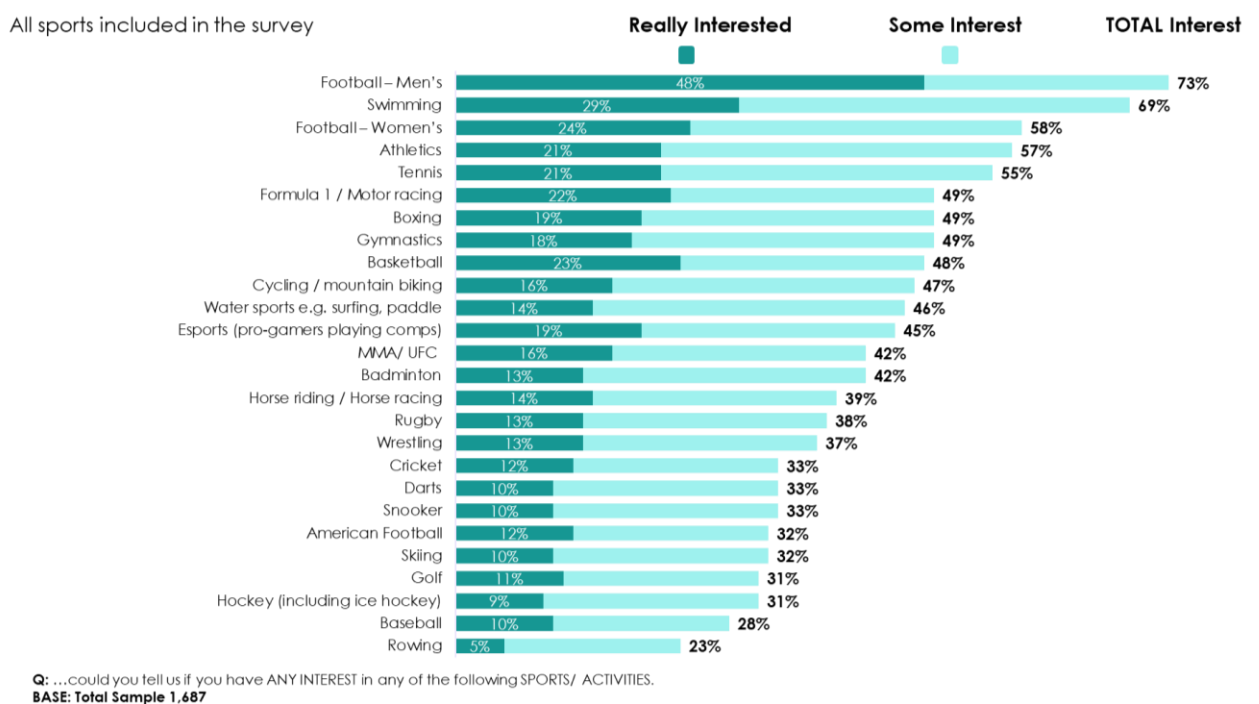
Q: Which, if any, of the following social media platforms do you have YOUR OWN ACCOUNT with?
 Q: Which, if any, do you use WITHOUT AN ACCOUNT
 Total Sample 845 Girls vs 833 Boys
 ↑ Indicates a statistically significant difference between Girls & Boys (95% confidence level)

3.2 Their interests, and specifically, their sporting interests

The survey presented respondents with a list of 26 sports and were asked about their interests in each. The survey found that, on average, each claimed to be ‘really interested’ in four of the 26 different sports listed, reflecting the breadth and depth of interests we had seen qualitatively.

As illustrated in Figure 7, half (48%) said they are ‘really interested’ in men’s football giving it the largest fan-base overall. Women’s football was not far behind in third place with around three in five (58%) having some interest and one in four saying that they are ‘really interested’. A number of other sports hold interest for around half of all children and young people, including swimming (something a lot of young people participate in at school), athletics, tennis, Formula 1 (F1), boxing, gymnastics and basketball.

Figure 7 – Sports young people are interested in



Children and young people tend to discover sports via school and family, with the dad in the household often seeming to play a more influential role here. As they got older, friends and social media became more influential in sports discovery and engagement.

Formula 1 (F1) case study:

F1 featured in both the quantitative and qualitative phases as a sport that young people were engaging with.

They enjoyed it for its excitement, not just the racing itself but also the stories beyond the game and the engaging personalities like Lando Norris and Max Verstappen. Its presence on social media platforms also kept them connected to their favourite drivers and teams.

Both boys and girls said they found it interesting because of the background stories, the crashes and various off-track events, including brand deals (e.g., McLaren collaborating with brands like H&M and Hollister).

Social media

Social media as a way of keeping up with F1 was frequently mentioned.

A 16-year-old boy from Aberdeen, mentioned that F1 was very present on his social media feeds, and that he was following several drivers, including Max Verstappen, Sergio Perez and Lando Norris.

A 17-year-old girl from Bolton, was also really interested in watching F1, especially Lando Norris. She became interested in it a few years ago, in high school, when many people were talking about it.

There was a lot of admiration for drivers, including for Lando Norris and his journey as a young racer who has become successful and is seen as inspiring. There was an appreciation for how he remained positive and down-to-earth despite his success.

As with many of the sports mentioned, family influence also played a significant role in the first instance.

"I feel like a lot of people think, like, oh, it can be boring because, like, the same kind of people win every time, like Lewis Hamilton or people like that. But I feel like it's just interesting, like, the background of it as well. So, like, there's obviously, like, crashes. It's really realistic, it's real ..." (17-year-old girl, Bolton)

"I first came across Formula 1 a few years ago when my brother was watching it ... I'm quite a competitive person so I like watching competitions and picking a player to root for. I also like how it's quite high risk and dangerous; it makes it interesting to watch as you know how much skill it must take to be a driver and can only imagine how scared they are." (16-year-old girl, Hertfordshire)

"I know, I just think it's really different to a lot of other sports, and there's a lot more to it than just the actual races. There's a lot of things behind the scenes and stuff." (17-year-old boy, London)

Boxing case study:

Boxing was mentioned by several participants during the qualitative phase as a favourite, or one of their favourite sports and scored highly in the quantitative phase. Participants were engaging with the sport through different channels including social media, television and live events with friends or family. Discussion and mentions of celebrities that held strong appeal fell into three areas.

Contemporary boxers: A 16-year-old boy in Scotland said he liked watching boxing and was a big fan of Tyson Fury. He followed Anthony Joshua (AJ) and watched boxing events with friends or family when he could.

A 17-year-old boy from Northern Ireland, expressed his love for boxing because he enjoyed watching his favourite boxers dominate in the ring. His brother was a semi-professional boxer and his own experience in the sport for a few years also contributed to his interest.

Influencer boxers came up several times: A 16-year-old boy from Hampshire, shared mixed feelings about 'influencer' boxing. He noted that initially there was a clear distinction between YouTube boxing and traditional boxing, but felt the lines were blurring as influencers like Jake Paul improved in the sport. He viewed the KSI vs Logan Paul fight as more of a publicity stunt rather than an authentic sporting event.

Iconic boxers: There was also a lot of admiration for iconic boxers, like Mike Tyson and Muhammad Ali. Mike Tyson was considered to be one of the greatest boxers ever and his journey from an unstable background to becoming one of the most famous people in the world was mentioned.

"I kind of watch it with just anyone, like, when I can, because I'm quite busy, but I really enjoy watching it, it's always exciting." (16-year-old boy, Aberdeen)

"I love boxing because I like to watch my favourite boxers dominate other people in the ring as well as my brother being a semi-professional boxer, and I have done the sport myself for a few years!" (17-year-old boy, Belfast)

Basketball case study:

Basketball scored highly, particularly amongst boys, in the quantitative phase and also featured prominently in the qualitative phase. There were varying levels of engagement, ranging from active participation to following professional leagues like the NBA. They admired notable players for their skills and contributions to the sport and were influenced by family members who played the sport and by social media

content featuring prominent athletes, as well as getting interested in basketball through school.

There was a lot of admiration for players. A 16-year-old boy from Rochdale, mentioned Caitlin Clark as a significant figure in women's basketball. He'd discovered her via content served to him on TikTok. He noted that she is revolutionising the way people think about women's basketball.

While most were unable to watch live there was certainly an interest in doing so particularly for those following the NBA.

"I like playing basketball. Yeah. I enjoy playing basketball and I enjoy watching it too [attending Glasgow Rocks games with his dad] it is just an exciting sport to watch and play." (17-year-old boy, Dundee)

"So, there's like a high school near me and there's like an outside club where you can just go to basketball against, like, different teams. It's like a full-on tournament. So that's quite interesting to participate in." (17-year-old girl, Bolton)

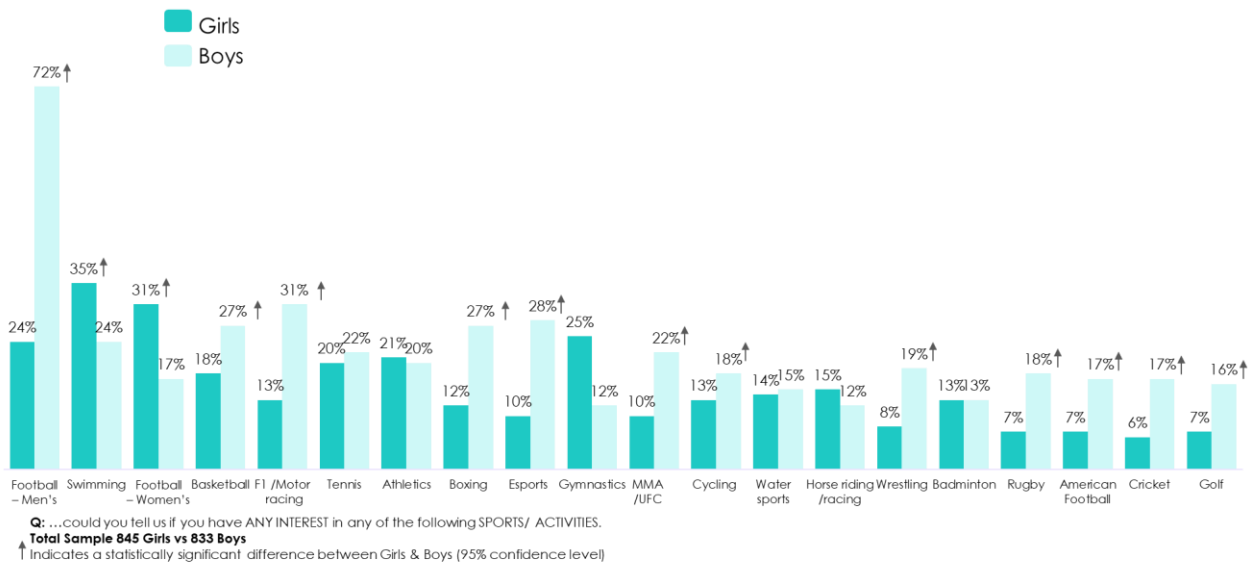
"I love basketball because I have realised that I have gotten good at it and will get better with practice." (12-year-old boy, London)

"I follow NBA, I love it, wish I could go watch it live but you just can't here really." (15-year-old boy, Enfield)

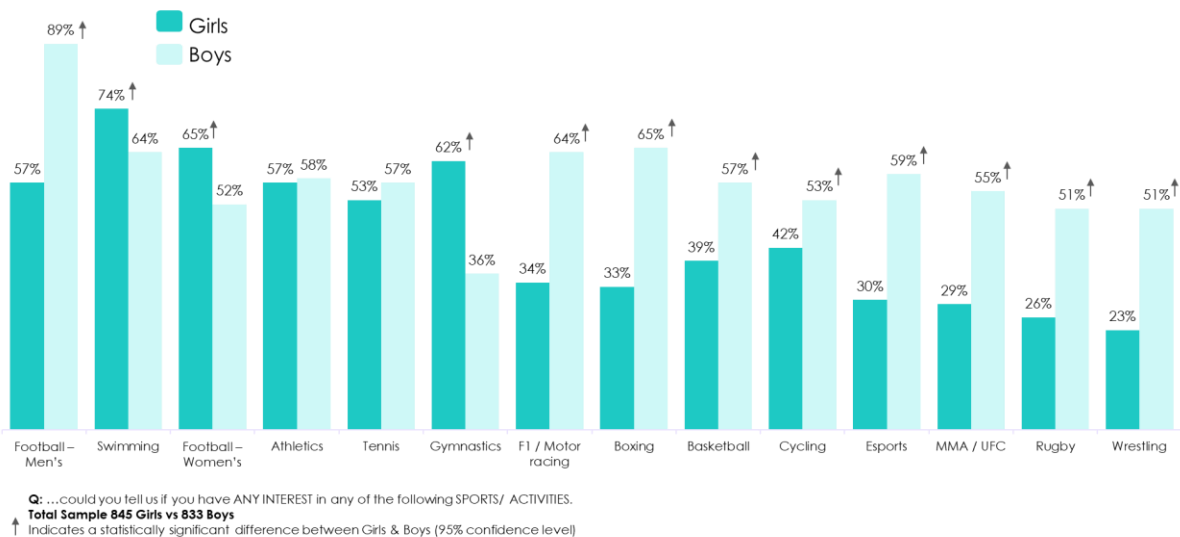
A greater proportion of boys than girls expressed an interest in at least one sport (90% vs 72%) with each boy selecting five, on average, compared with three to four for girls. There are also some differences in the types of sports each are interested in. For example, in Figure 8 we find more than one in five (22%) boys say that they are 'really interested' in MMA/UFC compared to 10% of girls. One in four (25%) girls are 'really interested' in gymnastics compared to half that proportion of boys (12%).

Figure 8 – Sports interest by gender

Sports interest by gender – Really interested
Sports reaching 15%+ for either Gender



Sports interest by gender – Any interest
Sports reaching 50%+ for either Gender



In contrast, there was relatively little difference in interest levels by age, although some sports did appear to suffer a gradual decline (e.g., gymnastics) while others increased in popularity (e.g., rugby).

We then asked respondents how they engaged with each of the sports they mentioned having an interest in. Children and young people are engaging in the sports that interest them in a variety of different ways. Figure 9 shows the Top 10 sports mentioned by type of engagement, showing how, for example, they are most likely to swim regularly, while boxing is in second place in terms of watching pay-per-view content.

Figure 9 – Top 10 sports by type of engagement

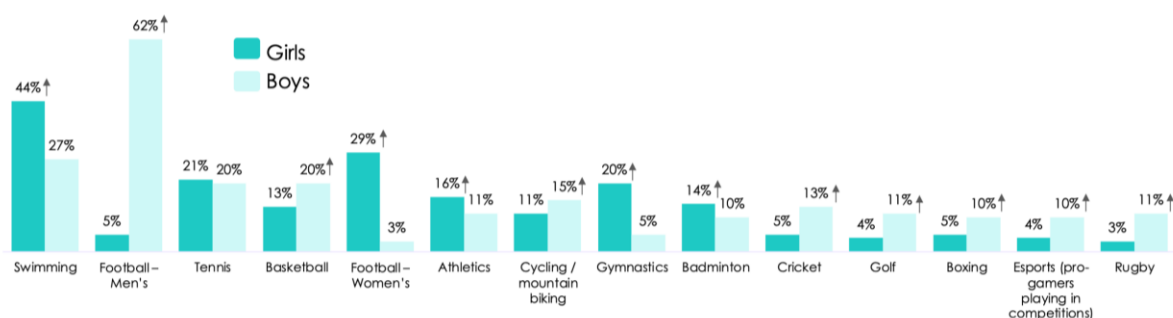
Play / Take Part In Regularly	Chat with Friends / Family	Watch In Person	Watch The Sport Itself On TV	Watch TV Progs ABOUT The Sport	Watch Clips of The Sport On Social Media	Watch Other Content on Social Media By Individuals From The Sport	Watch Pay-Per-View
Swimming	Football – Men's	Football – Men's	Football – Men's	Football – Men's	Football – Men's	Football – Men's	Football – Men's
Football – Men's	Football – Women's	Football – Women's	Football – Women's	Football – Women's	Football – Women's	Football – Women's	Boxing
Tennis	Swimming	Swimming	Formula 1 / Motor racing	Formula 1 / Motor racing	Boxing	Boxing	Football – Women's
Basketball	Boxing	Tennis	Tennis	Boxing	Formula 1 / Motor racing	Basketball	Basketball
Football – Women's	Formula 1 / Motor racing	Basketball	Boxing	Tennis	Swimming	Swimming	Formula 1 / Motor racing
Athletics	Basketball	Boxing	Swimming	Basketball	Tennis	Tennis	Tennis
Cycling / mountain biking	Tennis	Cricket	Athletics	Swimming	Basketball	Formula 1 / Motor racing	Wrestling
Gymnastics	Athletics	Rugby	Basketball	Athletics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	MMA/ UFC
Badminton	Gymnastics	Athletics	Gymnastics	Gymnastics	MMA/ UFC	Athletics	Swimming
Cricket	MMA/ UFC	Formula 1 / Motor racing	Wrestling	Wrestling	Athletics	MMA/ UFC	Cricket

Q: Which, if any...
 BASE: Total Sample 1687

Figure 10 shows the proportions stating that they take part in these sports on a regular basis and highlights the substantial differences by gender.

Figure 10 – Sports participation by gender

Showing those sports reaching 10%+ for either Gender



Q: Do you regularly Do you regularly PLAY / TAKE PART IN YOURSELF ?
 BASE: Total Sample 845 Girls vs 833 Boys
 ↑ Indicates a statistically significant difference between Girls & Boys (95% confidence level)

As can be seen in Figure 11, sport is one of the things that will draw them back to the world of TV. For example, three in five say they regularly watch men's football on TV and one in three mention women's football. Three in 10 watch F1/ motor racing on television, the same proportion as boxing¹⁴.

¹⁴ Three questions in the survey were combined to reach these figures: regularly watching the sport on TV (any channel/provider, matches / competitions/games/events); regularly watching documentary programmes about the sport (any channel / provider); and/or watching pay-per-view content.

Figure 11 – Sports watched on TV (total)

Showing sports with a reach of 15% or more

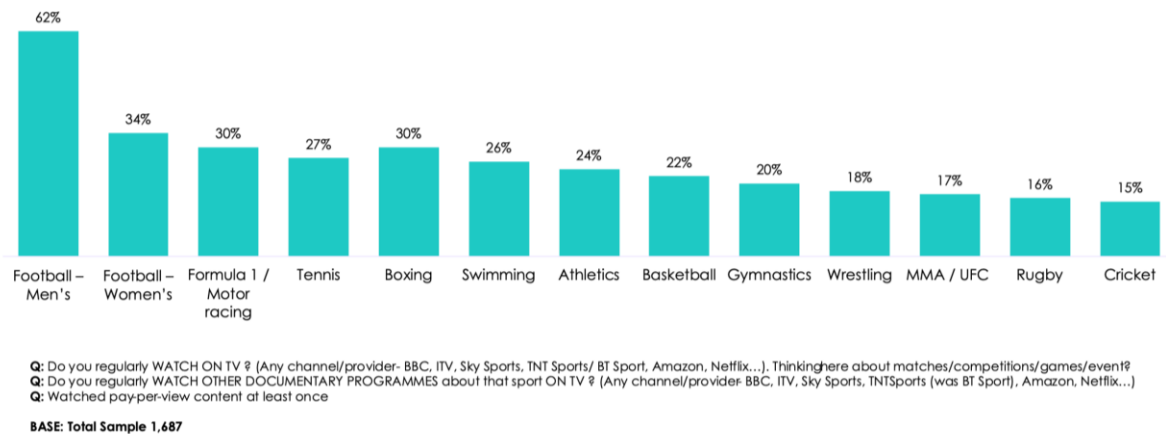
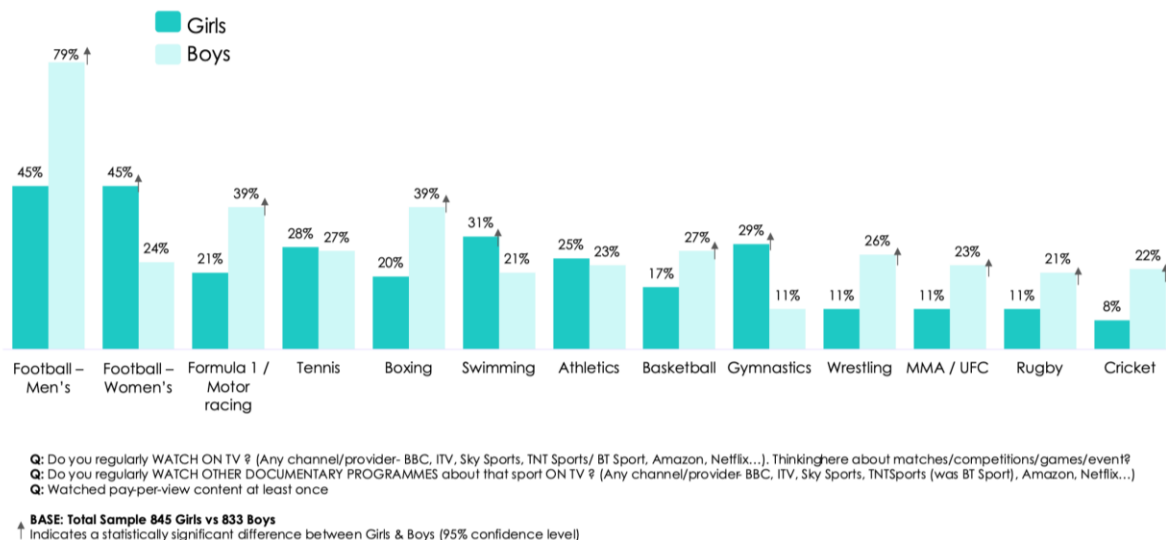


Figure 12 shows that there are some significant differences by gender. Again, looking at boxing as an example, 39% of boys say they watch it on TV compared with 20% of girls.

Figure 12 – Sports watched on TV (total), by gender

Showing those sports reaching 20%+ for either Gender



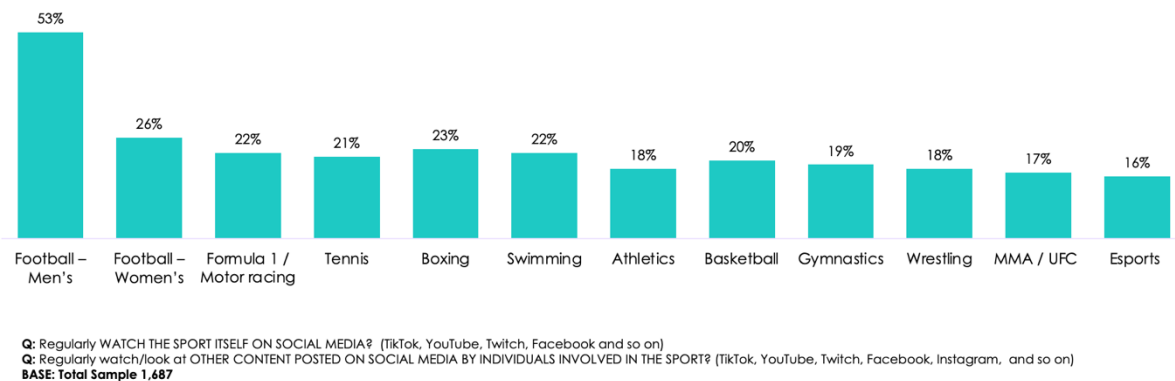
Inevitably, there are also very large numbers of children and young people engaging in the sports they enjoy via social media. As seen in Figure 13¹⁵, more than half say they

¹⁵ Two questions in the survey were combined to reach these figures: regularly watching the sport on social media and/or regularly watching/looking at other content posted on social media.

watch men’s football matches or content related to men’s football in some way, while one in four follow F1/motor racing via social media (either watching the sport itself or content posted about the sport).

Figure 13 – Sports watched on social media (total)

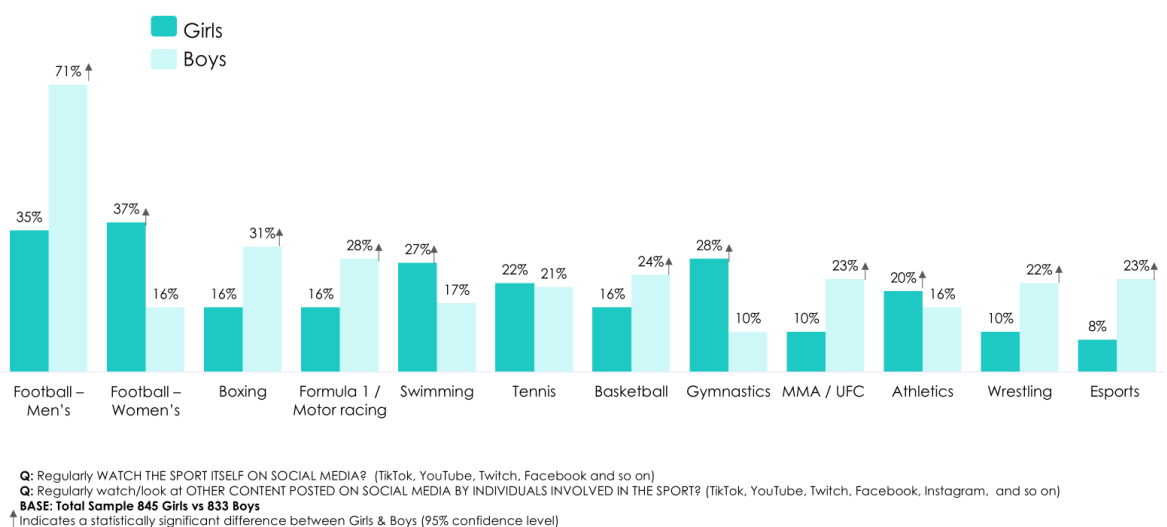
Showing sports with a reach of 15% or more



Once again, differences by gender were very apparent (Figure 14). For example, more than a quarter (28%) of girls are engaging with gymnastics on social media and around a quarter (23%) of boys with MMA/UFC.

Figure 14 – Sports watched on social media (total), by gender

Showing those sports reaching 20%+ for either Gender



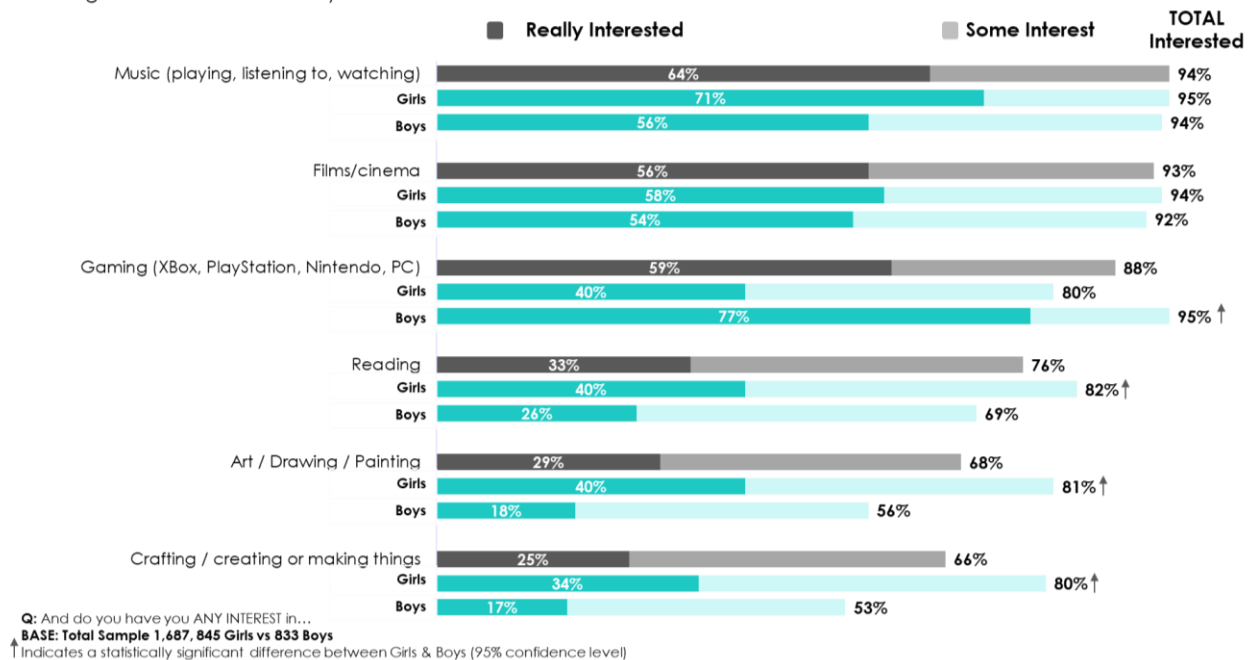
Most have a range of other interests outside of sport – particularly girls. In the qualitative phase a wide variety of interests outside of sport were mentioned, including

fashion, make-up and skin care, food, music, travel, gaming, keeping fit, being on social media, arts and crafting, reading and even plane spotting. All were influenced by what they saw/found when on social media.

In the survey we found that almost all have some interest in music, films/cinema and gaming, with substantial numbers interested in reading and creative activities (Figure 15). As might be anticipated, there were several differences by gender. For example, 95% of boys expressed an interest in gaming with 77% 'really interested', compared with 40% of girls. In contrast, 82% of girls say they have an interest in reading, compared with 69% of boys.

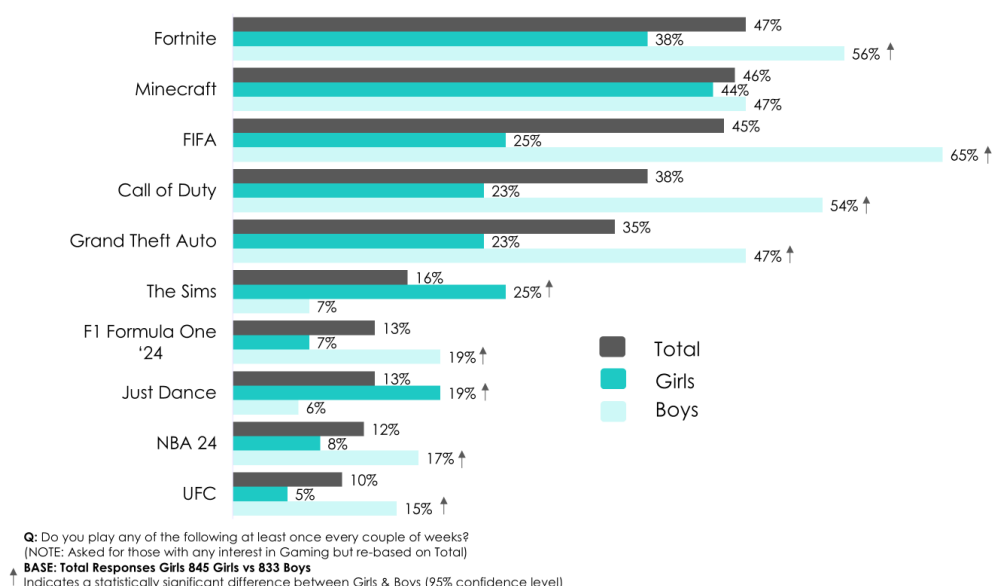
Figure 15 – Interest in other activities

Showing all included in the survey



Gaming was a particularly rich source of discovery when it came to celebrities (more on this in Section 3.5 on how young people 'discover' personalities), although it's noteworthy that two in three boys are playing FIFA at least every couple of weeks (Figure 16) which exposes them to 'icons' of the game, many of whom are no longer playing.

Figure 16 – Online games played regularly (at least every couple of weeks)

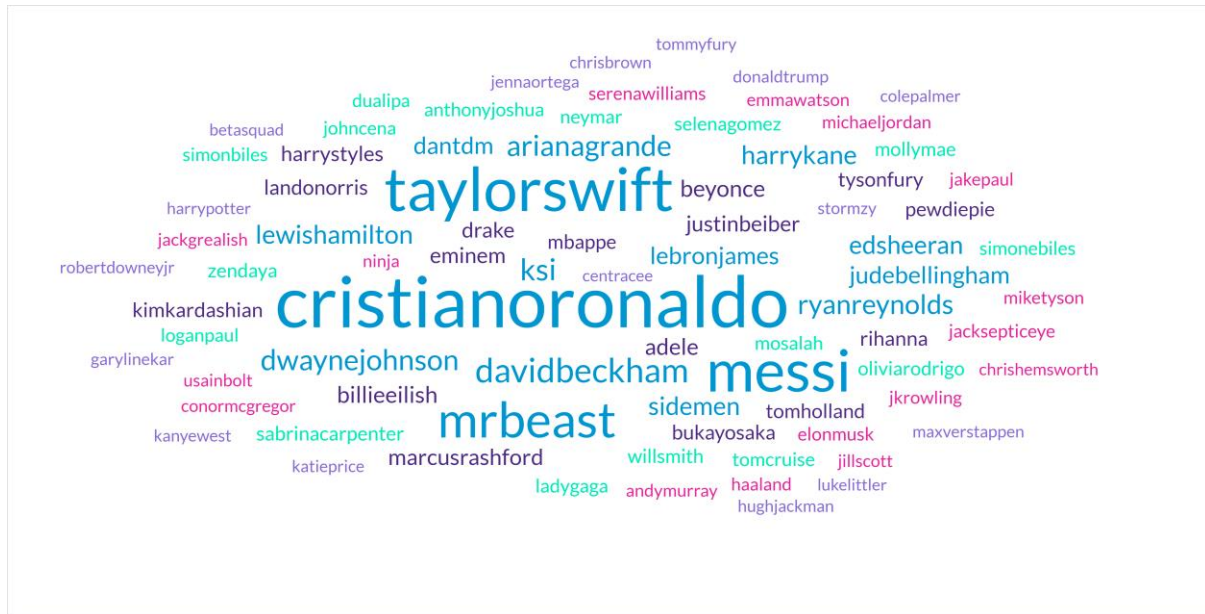


Children and young people’s media lives are social first and rich, with a wide range of interests both sports and non-sports related. This in turn influences the range of personalities that they enjoy watching or engaging with, what we refer to in this report as ‘strong appeal’.

3.3 Which personalities have strong appeal?

Young people are constantly discovering and engaging with a huge number of celebrities/personalities daily – many of whom hold strong appeal for them. Hundreds of different celebrities and personalities were mentioned in both phases of research, from a range of backgrounds, both sporting and non-sporting. In the quantitative survey, respondents were able to enter up to ten personalities that held strong appeal for them. The word cloud shown in Figure 17, visualises the most mentioned names in the survey, with the size of the personality reflecting the number of times they were mentioned.

Figure 17 – Most mentioned personalities in survey



As seen in the word cloud, sport, music and social media are all rich sources of admired celebrities. The list of celebrities 11-17-year-olds are 'strong fans' of, is extensive, changing all the time and quite often particular to their hobbies and interests.

Gender strongly influences the celebrities/sports people that hold strong appeal. Based on the two celebrities they chose to focus on for the latter part of the survey, it's clear that girls liked both male and female celebrities, while the vast majority of boys only liked male celebrities, as shown in Figure 18.

Figure 18 – Gender of celebrities with strong appeal, by gender

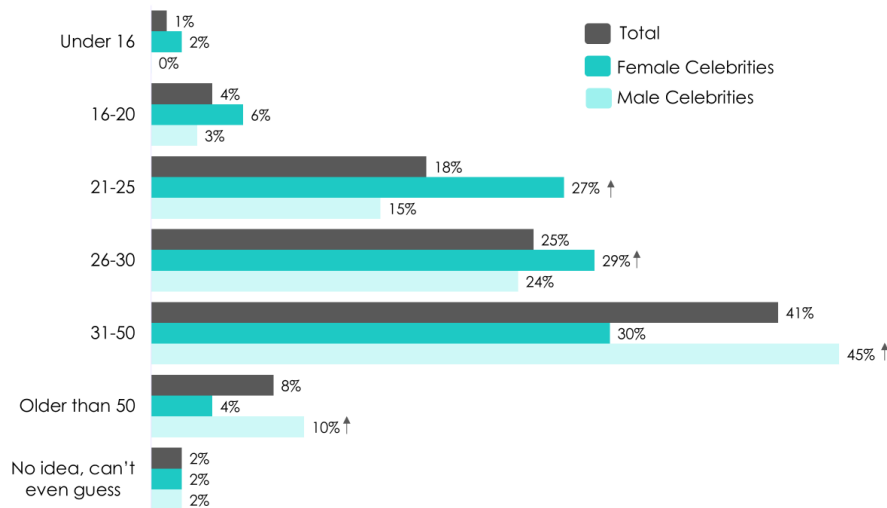
Girls Selected A Balance Of Male & Female Celebrities; Boys Largely Males.

		OF THE CHILD / YOUNG PERSON	
		Female	Male
OF THE CELEBS THEY CHOSE TO DISCUSS	Female	44%	6%
	Male	54%	93%

Q: As far as you know, does XXXX identify as...?
 BASE: Total Responses Girls 1690, Boys 1664
 N.B. A very small numbers said Non-Binary / Prefer to Self-Describe / DK

Notably, both in the survey and in the qualitative research, they picked celebrities from a wide range of different age groups. Figure 19 shows the results from the survey where in half of all cases the respondent estimated that the two personalities they selected as ‘strongly appealing’ were believed to be over 30 years of age.

Figure 19 – Estimated ages of celebrities with strong appeal, by gender



Q: And roughly how old do you think XXXX is? Please just give us your best estimate, don't worry if you don't know exactly
 BASE: Total Responses Those Selecting Female Celebs 858 vs Male Celebs 2469
 ↑ Indicates a statistically significant difference between Female and Male Celebrities (95% confidence level)

During the qualitative phase it was observed that Black and Asian young people were more likely to select Black and Asian celebrities or personalities.

“I think David (Beckham), Jude (Bellingham) and Serena (Williams) all have the same attitude and attributes I look for in a sports personality. They all have come from humble backgrounds and faced and overcome prejudice in their own way. I am from mixed heritage, and I feel sometimes there is prejudice because of my race and gender. I am from a working-class background and so are my parents. I work hard at school and especially in sports classes I attend. I want to go to university one day and be an architect. I know I will have to make sacrifices just like Serena and as a woman will face gender inequality in the workplace.” (12-year-old girl, Coventry)

Kai Fagan (a contestant on Love Island) was also mentioned by some participants:

“I liked him on Love Island when he met Sanam in Casa Amor, and I loved that they went on to win and became, not only the first casa amor couple to win but also the first non-white couple to win (as Sanam is Asian and Kai is mixed race), which is a huge step for diversity on TV.” (15-year-old girl, Surrey)

“Kai Cenat brings confident vibes, he looks after himself. He's got good style; I like his dress sense as well. He's overcome obstacles to be successful, he came from a similar background to me, which I like too.” (15-year-old boy, London)

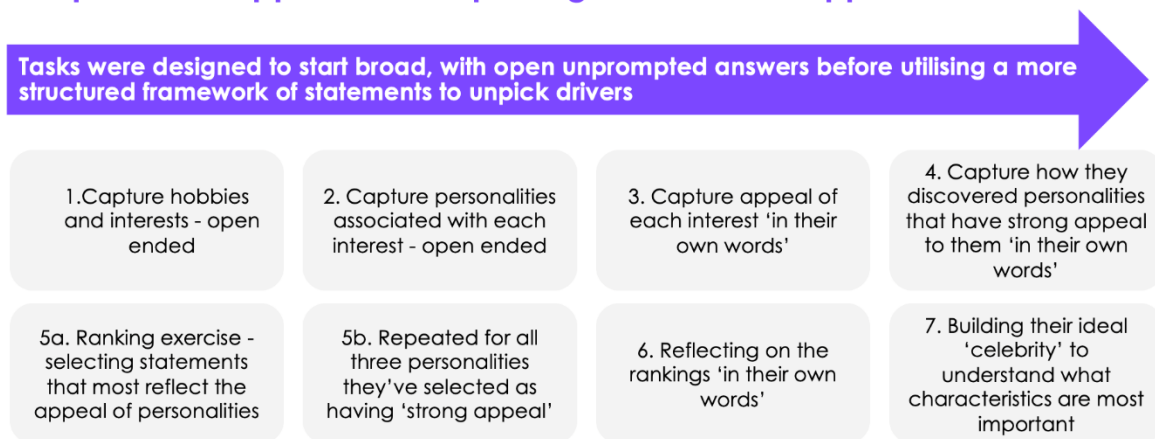
The sheer range and number of celebrities and personalities mentioned by participants underlines the complexity of the challenges in determining the appeal of celebrities to children and young people. They reflect the wide range of interests both mainstream and niche, that young people have, from within the sports category but also beyond – notably from the world of social media and social media influencers.

3.4 Why do these personalities have strong appeal?

Unpicking what makes young people hold certain celebrities or personalities in high regard **is a complex question**. We took a staggered, triangulated approach to digging into the question, exploring first in the qualitative phase across multiple tasks, as outlined in Figure 20, before further testing the validity of those findings in the quantitative phase.

Figure 20 – Qualitative research tasks to explore drivers of appeal in celebrities

The qualitative approach to unpicking the drivers of appeal...



This process, only possible over a series of days, enabled us to hear from them both in their own words first about the drivers of appeal (the reasons they are strong fans of a personality) before bringing in statements informed by academic work in this field on the drivers of appeal.

Participants were first asked unstructured, open questions about three of their favourite interests and well-known people they connected each interest to. They were then asked to explain, in their own words, the appeal of each of those interests. This gave us a wide range of outputs in both video and written form to analyse.

Having gathered open-ended responses on the drivers of appeal, we then asked participants about the drivers of appeal in relation to three personalities they had selected (with ideally one to be chosen from the world of sport). We provided them with a list of characteristics and asked them to rank them in order of importance. This list was informed by Grant McCracken's Meaning Transfer Model (1989)¹⁶, which

¹⁶ McCracken, Who is the Celebrity Endorser? Pages 310–321

explores how effective celebrity endorsers in advertising were by identifying and labelling the cultural meanings that the consumer associated with the endorser.

The statements presented to the respondents were:

- *They are authentic and/or genuine*
- *They have good values and are a good person*
- *They make me feel like I can do anything (empowering)*
- *They are the type of person I aspire to be*
- *They inspire me to be my best*
- *They work hard to be the best they can*
- *They have made it in life – overcome many obstacles*
- *They are successful, they have a lot of money*
- *They make me laugh, they are really funny*
- *They look after/take care of themselves*
- *They have good style/they look good*
- *They are relatable because they are a similar age to me*
- *They make me feel I'm represented*

These statements were used in both the qualitative and quantitative phases, with the two phases telling a very similar story. The drivers of appeal for young people vary a lot.

In the qualitative phase many drivers of appeal were mentioned and these differed by the type of celebrity or personality. However, for sports personalities there was a leaning towards those who felt *authentic, had an inspirational story* and were *relatable*. These attributes scored as most appealing amongst qualitative participants (Figure 21). For non-sports celebrities with strong appeal, appearance and humour played a much bigger role – whereas these were ‘nice to haves’ (rather than a priority) for sports personalities.

Figure 21 – Qualitative drivers of appeal for sports personalities

For sports personalities the drivers of appeal leaned towards



The open-ended responses also reflected these themes.

“I connect with Kevin de Bruyne as he has had to go through so much ... now he is winning titles every year.” (17-year-old boy, Aberdeen)

“There are many popular TikTokers and Instagram influencers that I love and that I like to take inspiration from their outfits and shop recommendations.” (17-year-old girl, Bolton)

“I have always watched people play live on YouTube and Twitch which inspires me to get to their level and compete against them.” (15-year-old boy, Essex)

“Growing up with lots of famous football players, like Harry Kane, David Beckham and now Jude Bellingham, Bukayo Saka allows me to continue being a huge fan of the game and I love to follow them all on social media and see what they get up to, where they go, what products they use.” (16-year-old boy, Hertfordshire)

“Kylie Jenner connects with my interest of make-up as she has her own beauty line which I love to buy from.” (16-year-old girl, Essex)

The word ‘relatable’ came up frequently, as did the importance of life stories, of how celebrities they loved had gone from having a challenging start in life to becoming well regarded personalities in their field (e.g., ‘top of their game’). Due to the nature of social media and the degree to which personalities or influencers are encouraged to post, participants felt they knew a lot about the personalities that held strong appeal. The narrative of ‘the journey in life’ felt particularly important to this age group, who are in the developmental stage of identity formation¹⁷.

This same list of attributes was then used in the survey. Each respondent was asked to think about two specific celebrities they considered themselves to be fans of, with one a sports personality where possible. The list of personalities mentioned, as seen in the word cloud, was wide ranging – drawn primarily from the worlds of sport, music and digital influence. Then taking each in turn, they were asked to consider what they particularly liked about them. Firstly, they were asked to consider each of the attributes on the list and score it from 10 (‘one of the main reasons you like them’) down to 0 (‘has nothing to do with why you like them’). They were then asked to narrow this down to their Top 3 reasons and then again to the main reason they found them appealing.

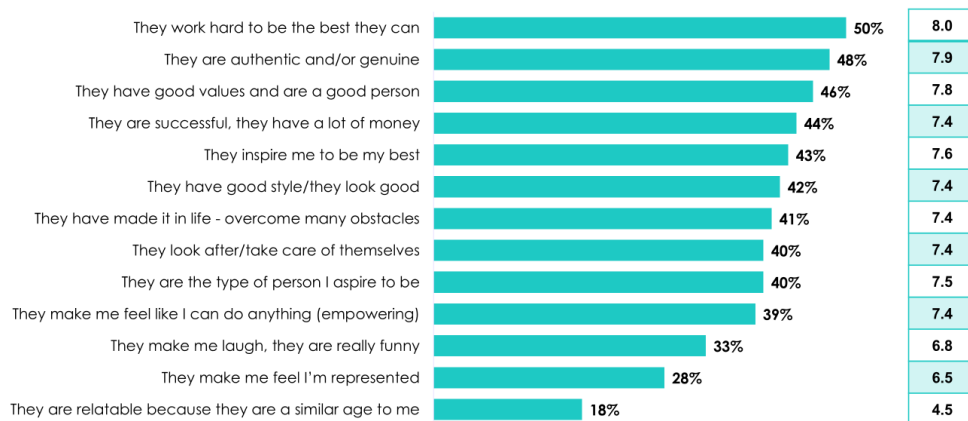
At the initial step in this process, on average, five different attributes were given a score of 9 or even 10 out of 10 for a single, specific celebrity. ‘Fans’ of a particular celebrity tend to like them for a range of different reasons as illustrated in Figure 22.

For half of all celebrities, the fact that they are perceived to ‘work hard to be the best they can’ was scored as a 9 or 10 out of 10 and received an overall mean score of 8.0 putting it (just) top of the list of attributes. The results for ‘they are authentic and/or genuine’ and ‘they have good values and are a good person’ were equally high scoring.

¹⁷ Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and society*. New York: Norton.

In sharp contrast, and as evidenced by the range of estimated ages for these celebrities (Figure 19), the fact that they are 'relatable because they are a similar age to me' was rarely considered to be important (Figure 22).

Figure 22 – Reasons for appeal, % giving 9-10 & mean scores out of 10

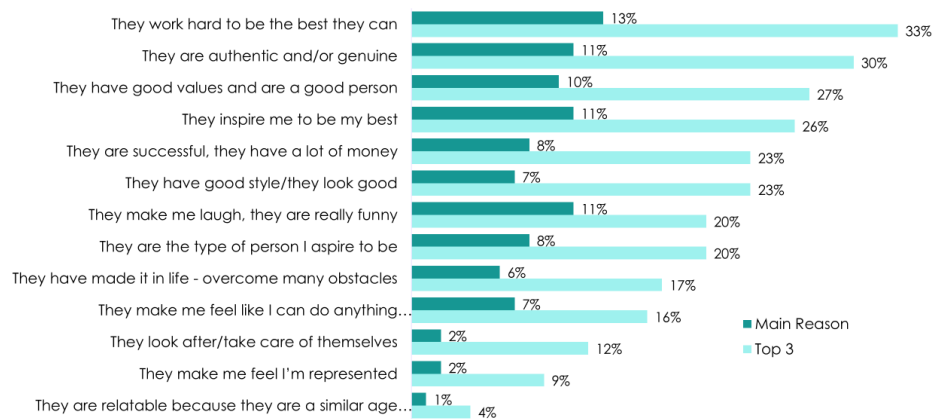


Q: Thinking now about WHY you like XXXX. In other words, why they appeal to you. Please take a look at each of these descriptions and give us a score from 0 to 10: where 0 = this has Nothing To Do with why you like XXXX and 10 = this is Definitely One of The Main Reasons you like XXXX.
BASE: Total Responses 3,374 Celebrities

When asked to be more selective, the main reason given for a well-known personality having strong appeal varied considerably. This was the case, not only when comparing the answers given by different children/young people, but also when comparing the answers a single respondent gave for the two different celebrities/personalities that they had chosen to answer the set of questions about. In addition, the same personality can mean many different things to different young people, this is particularly well demonstrated by Taylor Swift, loved by some and disliked by others (as seen later in the report in the mentions of personalities that were once liked).

That said, as can be seen in Figure 23, the Top 3 attributes remain the same and are therefore very important to consider. In fact, the order of the attributes largely remains the same.

Figure 23 – Reasons for appeal, Top 3 & main reason



Q: Which of those would you say are the 3 MAIN REASONS XXXX appeals to you? (NOTE: You don't have to select 3, you can select just 1 or 2)
 Q: And which of those would you say is the ONE MAIN REASON you find XXXX appealing?
 BASE: Total Responses 3,374 Celebrities

As such, we did find some clear overall patterns emerge across the sample of more than 3,000¹⁸ sets of survey responses and the in-depth qualitative exploration. In particular, three interrelated character traits, anchored in positive personal values, came through consistently as driving appeal across a wide variety of celebrities:

- They work hard to be the best they can
- They are authentic/genuine
- They have good values and are a good person

"I think when I look at celebrities and stuff, I definitely more actively think about how successful they actually are because I think that's something that I can respect about them a lot ... if they haven't had the best upbringing or haven't had best opportunities to be able to make it in life and then they've done extremely well for themselves ... it makes me want to back them and want to see them do well because they've put so much hard work in to be where they are." (16-year-old boy, Rochdale)

"And obviously this is the same with all professional sports players, but Koby [sic] Bryant had to work, like extra, extra, extra hard. Yeah, he had. That's what I know about him. How he rose to fame." (15-year-old boy, Essex)

Being a source of inspiration/aspiration ('they inspire me to be my best' and 'they are the type of person I aspire to be') was also seen to be important. Both statements relate to how the 'connection' with the celebrity can make them feel about themselves and we see this reflected in qualitative verbatim:

¹⁸ Each of the 1,687 respondents told us about two different celebrities they found strongly appealing, giving us a total base of 3,374 for analysis.

“Taylor Swift makes me feel very good about myself and inspired and Tate McRae in a similar way. They both make me feel I can overcome any difficulties through listening to their music.” (12-year-old girl, Lincoln)

“I think they have overcome obstacles to be successful because I was reading about him and, like, with the overcoming obstacles, the rags to riches bit, he has, like, he didn't grow up very rich and his parents were, like, divorced and stuff like that. So, he has come from, like, not the wealthiest background, and he's made it. Yeah. Yeah. I think they've made it in life, because I also saw this thing that was like, he bought a house for his grandma and his mom and his dad.” [Lamine Yamal footballer] (15-year-old girl, London)

This is particularly important for this age group given the development stage they are in – one of identity formation.

Humour (‘they make me laugh, they are really funny’) is ranked in 4th place as the *main* reason a personality appeals, but features much lower when it comes to mean scores or the proportion scoring 9 or 10. This demonstrates that humour is more of a stand-alone trait: in some cases, it’s all about being funny and in other cases it plays no part at all in a celebrity's appeal.

Measures of success (‘they are successful, they have a lot of money’ and ‘they have made it in life – overcome many obstacles’) again featured regularly as Top 3 drivers, although since the mean scores are marginally lower there are clearly instances where this trait is not important.

While relatively few told us that appearance (‘they have a good style / they look good’ and ‘they look after/take care of themselves’) was the main reason for really liking a celebrity, most did tend to agree that this plays some part in their appeal.

As shown in Figure 24 there are some clear differences in the typical ‘weight’ of each attribute dependent on the gender of the celebrity. Humour is more often a driver of appeal for male celebrities while both appearance and empowerment feature more often for female celebrities selected.

Figure 24 – Differences by gender of celebrity, Top 3 attributes

They...	Female Celebs	Male Celebs
Work Hard To Be The Best They Can	30%	34% ↑
Are Successful, They Have Lots Of Money	19%	25% ↑
Make Me Laugh, They Are Really Funny	13%	22% ↑
They Have Made It In Life, Overcoming Many Obstacles	13%	18% ↑
Have Good Style / They Look Good	30% ↑	20%
Make Me Feel I Can Do Anything (Empowering)	19% ↑	15%
Look After/Take Care Of Themselves	14% ↑	11%

↑ BASE: Total Responses 858 discussing Female Celebrities vs 2,469 Male
 ↑ indicates a statistically significant difference @95% confidence when discussing Female vs Male Celebrities

“Micah Richards was a great footballer, but now a pundit on TV and he is actually quite funny at times.” (17-year-old boy, Aberdeen)

“Jeremy Lynch is like. I mean, I don't want to sound like, weird in a way, but, like, he looks after himself and a lot of people say he is handsome. A lot of people. Yeah (13-year-old boy, Essex)

Figure 25 shows how the drivers of appeal also tend to differ somewhat for celebrities from the world of sport, with recognition of the hard work required and (perhaps) an increased likelihood that they are seen as providing inspiration, particularly if they have had to overcome significant obstacles.

Figure 25 – Differences by type of celebrity, Top 3 attributes

They...	Celebs Known for Sport	Celebs Known for Other Reasons
Work Hard To Be The Best They Can	40% ↑	29%
Inspire Me To Be My Best	32% ↑	22%
Type Of Person I Aspire To Be	25% ↑	18%
They Have Made It In Life, Overcoming Many Obstacles	21% ↑	15%
Authentic / Genuine	26%	32% ↑
Make Me Laugh, They Are Really Funny	12%	25% ↑
Have Good Style / They Look Good	16%	26% ↑

BASE: Total Responses - Celebs Known for Sport 1,545 vs Celebs Known For Other Reasons 2231
 (N. B. A small proportion were put into both categories.)
 ↑ indicates a statistically significant difference between Celebrities Known for Sport & Celebrities Known for Other Reasons (95% confidence level)

Participants were also asked in the qualitative phase about personalities/celebrities that once held strong appeal and no longer do. Taylor Swift was mentioned multiple times and some sports personalities who had received negative publicity were also mentioned.

"I used to rate Mason Greenwood, he used to be a player for Man United, but he got accused of sexual assault." (15-year-old boy, Birmingham)

The reasons given for no longer liking a celebrity/personality fell into a few key areas:

- When personalities had misbehaved towards others or deemed not to have behaved nicely
- When they were perceived to have become arrogant
- When they had disappeared from the public eye
- When they had grown out of them and their tastes had simply changed

As such, while there are some common themes in the evidence collected, it would be hard to develop a *persona* or even a set of *personas* that could be referred to when assessing strong appeal. Having said that, there are key *characteristics* that should be borne in mind – the positive values of authenticity, being an aspiration to young people and having a compelling story, or at least this story being well known.

3.5 How do they discover personalities and where does the interest stem from?

The research identified three ways in which 11–17-year-olds discover personalities that go on to have strong appeal (Figure 26).

Figure 26 – Discovery of personalities that have strong appeal

1. Wider culture of course plays an important and enduring role in driving discovery and trial. For example, the dominance of certain sports or the emergence of new ones - an obvious example being the growth in popularity of women's football. Wider culture then also influences the two other drivers of discovery...

2. The role of family and friends is huge: Or what we might also call word of mouth

3. But in addition, socials and the 'algorithm' was also mentioned in driving discovery and fandom

"I feel like societal culture is a reason why people would be fans of a celebrity ... Like certain footballers or musicians or influencers ... everyone loves them because they see them every day on their feeds and everyone else likes them." (15-year-old girl, Surrey)

At the younger end of the age group, the interests that parents have influence the interests that children develop. Unsurprisingly, the influence of friends increases with

older age groups – but many of the interests instigated by family members remain (most commonly, the teams they support, or the sports they watch/participate in).

But in addition, social media was mentioned frequently by participants in driving both discovery, investigation and then engagement with personalities that share their interests. Participants spoke about their 'For you' page and how new people appear that they like, but also the role of seeing things shared by their peers – this was mainly happening via TikTok or Snapchat. Discovering new personalities or influencers via their 'For You' page was more common when it came to beauty and fashion and non-sporting activities.

“Both my parents have always been into football, so it was obvious I was going to like watching and playing it too.” (17-year-old boy, London)

“Once you decide you like a sport, or you watch someone or something on like TikTok or YouTube then you will start to get other content about that almost straight away.” (16-year-old girl, London)

“Well, I started watching things like I’m a Celeb and stuff, probably when I was like maybe ten. But then when I got social media in like year 7 that was when I really started to actually follow celebrities and stuff.” (15-year-old girl, Surrey)

“Taylor Swift, in year 6 at primary school all my friends started to like her and said to listen to her music, so I did, and I really liked her voice and particularly liked her single Cruel Summer.” (12-year-old girl, Lincoln)

“Tate McRae – I started to find out about her in y7 when I was scrolling through YouTube, and I saw one of her music videos and I decided to listen to all of her songs.” (12-year-old girl, Bournemouth)

“You follow celebrities that you like. So already they’re going to be on your Instagram. You don’t need to scroll for it. They’re going to be there because you already followed them on TikTok. You can go into the following section and it’s literally just going to be the people, those celebrities that you follow.” (15-year-old girl, Bury)

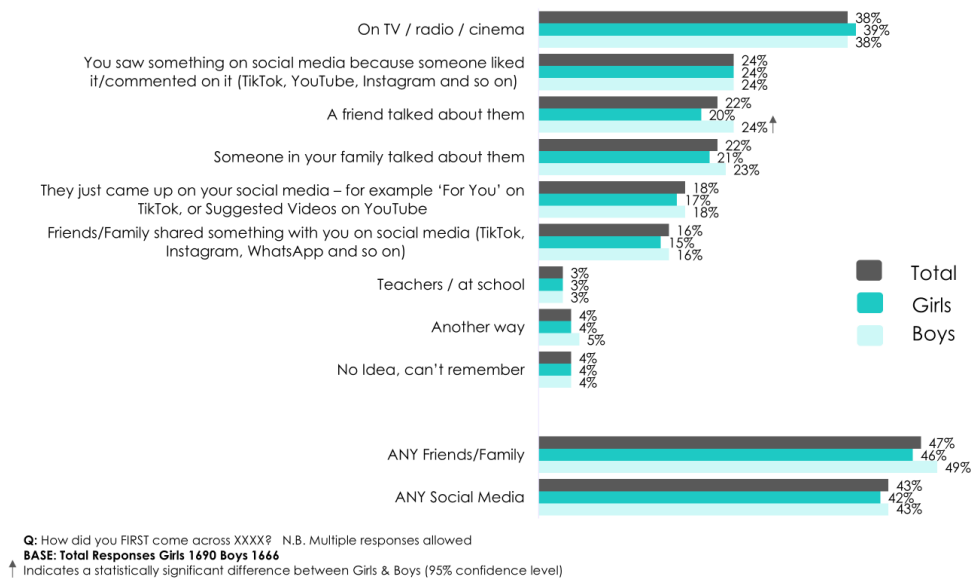
“Barack Obama – how I keep up to date with him is I’ll go through old newspapers or watch old documentaries about him, and I’ll study the different things that he says to help me reflect and become a more resilient and hardworking person like him.” (12-year-old girl, London)

“They kind of just pop up. I don’t go searching for them, they just kind of end up on my phone.” (16-year-old boy, Aberdeen)

“Playing darts gives me a feel-good emotion. In my opinion it is quite an intense sport and allows you to release a lot of energy into throwing the dart as well as being quite competitive. The most obvious sports star currently for this sport is Luke Littler, but I do enjoy watching past videos of Phil Taylor. It used to make me laugh when I was younger watching him play, because he used to raise his eyebrows every time he threw a dart.” (17-year-old girl, Bolton)

We also asked survey respondents to recall how they discovered celebrities (again, based on the two specific examples chosen, by them, to discuss). While this is a challenging question for anyone, and always subject to the imperfections of recall, it was clear to see (as we had during the qualitative phase) the importance of social media (43%) as well as word of mouth from their immediate social circles (47%) (Figure 27).

Figure 27 – Discovery recall, by gender



Because personalities tend to be so active on social media, children and young people found it very easy to tell us about the personalities they liked and why – it is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that our respondents felt they ‘knew’ the celebrities or personalities that held strong appeal for them.

“I like celebrities that make me laugh, enjoy having a bit of fun and don’t take themselves too seriously, and I like to see what they are getting up to and I can whenever I want to.” (13-year-old boy, Wales)

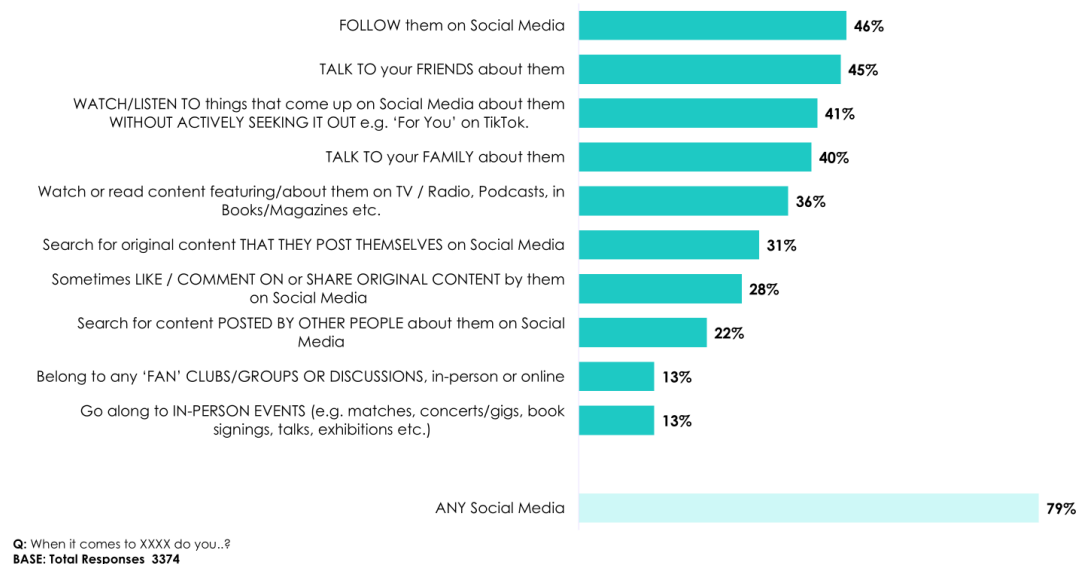
“Celebrities are like a big part of the world now. Like, you see them all the time. They’re all-over social media, they’re kind of like integrated into everyday life.” (16-year-old girl, London)

“I think there are definite reasons why I like certain celebrities, especially things like being relatable and humble and when they are down to earth and don’t act like they’re above everyone else. They are people that you look up to and can share day-to-day experiences with.” (17-year-old boy, London)

“I think for us, celebrities and influencers are, like, a big part of our life because we see them all the time. We see them everywhere. And so, whether we, like, know it or not, they can have a very strong effect, I think, on our opinions about, like, topics and just products in general.” (16-year-old boy, Rochdale)

Regardless of how they discover an individual, in four out of five cases they go on to 'engage' with that celebrity via social media (Figure 28). This engagement was made up of a combination of active engagement (in almost half of all cases they were following the individual on social media) and the influence of the algorithms (two in five agreed they watch/listen to content about that celebrity which appears without them seeking it out, e.g., via 'For You' on TikTok).

Figure 28 – How young people engage with the celebrities that have strong appeal



3.6. Celebrities and Advertising

Children and young people see a lot of personalities advertising products (see Appendix 5.3 for the list of adverts noticed during qualitative research phase). It is seen as a normal part of their online experience and part of their everyday life. Participants taking part in the five-day qualitative activity were tasked with keeping a media diary across the period and each day were asked about personalities they had seen advertising products. Most ads were seen on social media and their responses, which included capturing ads where possible, suggested it was sometimes difficult for them to tell what was an ad and what wasn't.

Children and young people tend to think that personalities only advertise or promote things they themselves like or trust. While children and young people can explain why they think brands want celebrities to advertise for them – they didn't think as much about what was in it for the celebrity or personality.

When asked, 79% of 11–17-year-olds say they take more notice of ads which include celebrities they know even if they don't find them personally appealing. Examples of some of the ads featuring personalities that were noticed by participants during the research were:

Jude Bellingham and Lucozade - "He seems to be everywhere at the moment, I quite enjoy seeing him on different adverts. He's fun to watch and he probably likes drinking Lucozade as well." (14-year-old boy, Hertfordshire)

Phil Foden and Cernucci - "I like how they have made it meaningful and put thought into the time it was going to be posted at, it was wishing Phil Foden a happy Father's Day and showcased images of the football player and his son. I feel that it spread a meaningful message and used indirect advertising in a great way, the main focus wasn't on the brand but more on the message of the day. I also really like how Phil Foden makes time for his family, even as a professional football player." (17-year-old girl, Bolton)

Cheyenne Kerr and Benefit - "I love how she is creative when making her TikTok content. I love how she shows her personality through her videos and just truly enjoys herself when she's on camera." (17-year-old girl, Belfast)

Josie Gibson and Iceland - "I really love this collaboration. I think Josie is so down to earth and funny, she has a laid-back style that is so in tune with us normal people and I can see her shopping here." (12-year-old girl, Peterborough)

Thierry Henry & David Beckham and Walkers - "How cool, two really famous footballers coming together for an advert, definitely more appealing than random actors and it makes you believe they must like Walkers." (17-year-old boy, Aberdeen)

Lando Norris and PlayStation - "Lando Norris is my favourite sportsman at the moment, so it appeals to me that it is him who is promoting PlayStation. I don't really play on it anymore, but I do enjoy Marvel movies so perhaps it would be good to try out. I feel seeing Lando Norris share it and promote it makes me want to buy it more, so the advertisement has worked well." (17-year-old girl, Bolton)

4. Conclusions

Young people are engaging with an overwhelming range of personalities on a daily basis, and those who hold strong appeal change rapidly from one day to the next. This research, however, has produced consistent and coherent findings across both the qualitative and quantitative phases that should help inform assessments on the likely appeal of personalities among this group.

It is important to acknowledge that discovery is dominated by 'social first' media behaviour – and that 11–17-year-olds are engaging, across multiple touchpoints, with a huge range of personalities on any given day (Figure 30). They are also engaging with a wide range of sports both mainstream as well as the more niche.

Figure 29 – Summary of discovery and engagement with celebrities and sports



The drivers of appeal are broad and varied and many of the drivers of appeal are subjective, e.g., how does one define 'authentic'? In addition, we saw that age has no bearing on strong appeal, while gender does for boys, but not for girls. However, coherent themes did emerge across the qualitative and quantitative phases and should be considered when assessing the appeal of a particular personality:

- Being authentic – genuine in whatever they do
- Inspiring through hard work – successful in what they do with a story to tell
- Relatable – they know/trust/like what they do and say – age is not a determining factor most of the time

This research underlines that there are other important questions to be considered when reflecting on whether a personality is likely to be engaging and/or strongly appealing to young people:

- Are they currently a part of wider popular culture discourse, e.g., do they feature regularly in the media, and do they have wide engagement on social media?
- Were they ever top in their field – this is particularly important in the most mainstream sports?
- Are they considered an icon – via sport or even FIFA game/cards or alike?

The findings of this research study reveal the complexity in understanding *what* personalities hold strong appeal for young people and *why* they are strongly appealing. However, there are clear learnings which should enable the ASA to strengthen their application of the CAP Code.

5. Appendixes

5.1 Survey Demographics

Respondent Demographics: Survey

Weighted profile (Nat Rep + Boosters combined and weighted back)

	Female (49%)*	Male (50%)		%		%
11 years old	14%	14%	England	84%	AB	39%
12	15%	14%	London	18%	C1	16%
13	14%	14%	North West	14%	C2	24%
14	15%	14%	West Midlands	10%	DE	21%
15	13%	15%	South East England	10%		
16	15%	14%	Yorkshire & Humberside	8%		
17	15%	15%	East Midlands	6%		
			South West England	6%		
			East of England	6%		
			North East	4%		
			Scotland	8%		
			Wales	5%		
			Northern Ireland	3%		

BASE: Total Sample, 1,687 Unweighted weighted back to 1,500

5.2 Personality Case Studies

Peter Crouch

Although he no longer plays football today, he is well known by all ages for many reasons:

- He was once a good footballer who played in some of the best teams in England
- He also played in the England team
- He is known for being quite funny and he was the 'inventor' of the robot - football celebration dance
- He is married to Abby Clancey (ex-model and regularly on TV) who he has a podcast with – young people unlikely to listen but some of their parents probably do
- He is a regular pundit on TNT Sports
- Some recalled his current ad for Paddy Power

"I really like Peter crouch as he's funny and charming, he can easily grab someone's attention just by speaking a few words, and this is what makes me engaged with him ... I saw him recently on that Bet 365 ad, he's funny with his wife." (13-year-old boy Essex)

"He's a pundit, my dad likes him, says he is funny." (15-year-old boy, London)

Mike Tyson

Admired by those interested in boxing, Mike Tyson came up several times in qualitative phases.

- He's inspirational
- He's an iconic figure in sports history
- Trust that he would only use, endorse the best!
- One of the best ever

"Well, I think for Tyson specifically, I think he's just probably one of the greatest boxers, if not the greatest. Like, how I. How I would see it is if you put all of the boxers in a room together, which one would come out on top? And I would say every time it would be Mike Tyson." (16-year-old boy, Hampshire)

- Often discovered via social media, he has an interesting and inspiring story to tell, and he's seen as having worked hard to get to the top

"I like how obviously he came from quite an unstable background, and he didn't even know that he wanted to be a boxer... he found out how good he was and then became one of the most famous people in the world." (16-year-old boy, Hampshire)

"Mike Tyson was as an absolute menace back in his day - when Mike Tyson's having a fight, no matter who it was, the talk was, how many rounds is the other guy gonna last? Not, is he beating him? It's how many rounds is he lasting before he's beaten?... That's what he called domination in a sport as well." (15-year-old boy, Enfield)

Pele

An iconic footballer, Pele was mentioned in the qualitative phase:

- Many still find his story inspiring
- He was skilful and won trophies – lots of them
- Often discovered when playing FIFA (he's an icon within the game of course too!) or via parents, who tell their kids they'll never be another Pele!

'Well, Pele was still one of the best, one of the GOATs till he died.' (13-year-old boy, Essex)

"My dad always goes on about how good Pele was!" (17-year-old boy, London)

5.3 Diary task

The table below lists the ads featuring personalities seen by qualitative research participants and recorded in their diary task.

Note: As the research suggests, it was sometimes difficult for respondents to identify what was an ad and what wasn't. As a result, some of the entries below may relate to editorial content rather than ads.

Age	Who	Where	What	Thoughts
Girl 15	Nicola Coughan	TikTok	Skims	<i>I like her as an actress and the dress was pretty on her but I'm not a fan of Kim Kardashian, whose brand it is</i>
Girl 14	Jason Momoa Zach Braff and Donald Faison	Phone	T-Mobile	<i>I like the way they presented all the actors; it was really funny, and the music went really well with the characters. Very lively and catchy, comical elements which I think really captured the celebrities quite well.</i>
Girl 13	Jordi	YouTube	Makeup	<i>She's really funny</i>
Girl 13	John Casterline	YouTube	Hoodies	<i>Like his editing style</i>
Boy 12	Messi	Instagram	Mas+	<i>I have seen the drink, and it looks delicious</i>
Girl 13	Taylor Swift	TV	Her concert	<i>Her music video was filmed in a London food shop, which I liked</i>
Boy 12	KSI	TikTok	Lynx	<i>I love the deodorant and especially the new scents</i>
Boy 12	Miniminter	Instagram	Deodorant	<i>The new scent of deodorant that has come out is absolutely amazing and I love it</i>
Girl 12	Ashley Lamarca	Snapchat	K18 Dry Shampoo	<i>She was saying how great this product is, it was a nice get-ready-with-me video, I really like her as an influencer and I think it was a great ad</i>
Boy 17	Kaisheps	TikTok	MyProtein	<i>I like him as a person and also buy my protein products from them</i>
Boy 17	Dave Trains	TikTok	Vanquish Fitness	<i>Dave is funny and likeable, and I also buy vanquish products so I liked the ad</i>
Boy 17	Samuel Jackson	TV	Warburton's	<i>I like him as he is a great actor and has played in many of my favourite films</i>
Girl 12	Declan Rice	YouTube	Yoghurt	<i>I like him because he is very good at football and he is really kind</i>
Boy 17	Kevin Bacon	TV	EE	<i>I didn't know he was someone famous until my mum pointed out he was an actor in a film when she was a teenager</i>
Boy 17	Trent Alexander Arnold	TV	Football boots	<i>I like this as they will see their favourite players using this and will go out and see what they look like in person and try them on</i>
Boy 13	David Beckham	TV	Walkers	<i>He once scored a brilliant halfway goal</i>
Boy 13	Jack Grealish	Poster	Mayonnaise	<i>I think he's a very flashy player but sometimes seems overconfident. I do like him though and when I met him he was kind</i>

Boy 17	Rodrigo	TV	For the Copa America	<i>I like this as it will tell people or give them a reason to watch the Copa America as they now know when it is on</i>
Girl 17	Phil Foden	Instagram	Cernucci	<i>I like how they have made it meaningful and put thought into the time it was going to be posted at, it was wishing Phil Foden a happy Father's Day and showcased images of the football player and his son. I feel that it spread a meaningful message and used indirect advertising in a great way, the main focus wasn't on the brand but more on the message of the day. I also really like how Phil Foden always makes time for his family, even as a professional football player.</i>
Boy 12	Lebron James	YouTube	Talks about how to become a great player	<i>He is sharing how he got good.</i>
Girl 16	Ronaldo	TikTok	Playing football	<i>He is good at football but he is very cocky and thinks he is the best.</i>
Girl 15	Taylor Swift	Social media	Eras Tour	<i>I don't like the amount of fan base and how much tickets to the tour is. It means its not accessible to all people.</i>
Girl 16	Drake	TikTok	His music video	<i>I like his music.</i>
Boy 15	Luka Modric	Instagram	Snickers	<i>He looked more calm headed and his part was very funny</i>
Boy 16	Gary Neville	Instagram	Overlap	<i>I like Gary Neville and what he has done with Overlap, getting footballers on his podcast and YouTube.</i>
Boy 15	Saka	TikTok	Snickers	<i>He looked a bit awkward but it was funny and appealing.</i>
Girl 12	Sanjeev Kohli	TV	Irn Bru	<i>I loved this Iron Bru Advert, I saw it during the opening match between Scotland and Germany. I loved how it showed different cultures and a collective love for football and fandoms.</i>
Boy 17	David Beckham + Thierry Henry	TV	Walkers Crisps	<i>Was really cool two really famous footballers coming together for an advert, definitely more appealing then a random actor.</i>
Boy 16	Roman Kemp	Instagram	Podcast	<i>I like Roman Kemp and the things he does</i>
Boy 15	Johnny Depp	Instagram	Savage (aftershave)	<i>I think he's quite cool and a good actor</i>
Boy 16	Jennifer Aniston	TV/Internet	Uber Eats	<i>Dear actress well known from friends and lovely</i>
Boy 14	Jude Bellingham	TV	Lucozade	<i>He seems to be everywhere at the moment so quite enjoy seeing him on different adverts. He's fun to watch.</i>
Boy 16	Jude Bellingham	TikTok	Adidas (sports shoes)	<i>He is a cool guy and a great all rounded footballer. I look up to him.</i>
Boy 16	Luke Littler	Instagram	Cereals	<i>He is an amazing darts player for his age and the talk of the country this year - fair play to the guy.</i>
Girl 17	Oli White	Instagram	PukPip	<i>I used to watch this youtuber a lot when I was younger, they used to do challenges that were trending a few years ago and that's how I came across him.</i>
Girl 17	The Rock	TikTok	UFL	<i>I see this celebrity quite a lot and I don't mind them but I wouldn't say I'm particularly interested in them. I often find his content quite boring and repetitive.</i>

Boy 15	David Beckham	Poster (bus stop)	Alibaba and the Euros	<i>Bland, it was only a picture as well quite informative though.</i>
Boy 17	Ronaldo	Online (mobile)	Football game	<i>It will convince more people to try it as there idol is telling them it's good so they will give it a try</i>
Girl 16	Kit Price	TikTok	Gucci	<i>I really like this ad because it wasn't obvious it was an ad in the slightest. It was also fitting for him considering he is a model and makes videos about high fashion and has most likely walked a Gucci runway in the past.</i>
Girl 16	Sophie	TikTok	Frubes	<i>I thought this was a bit random as I don't typically see Frubes advertising through influencers. I felt it was very fitting for Sophiena as she posts about her children and got a lot of her following from packing and unpacking what her children eat for school that day. The ad wasn't particularly interesting through and the whole video centred around the ad so I'm unlikely to watch it.</i>
Boy 12	David Beckham	TV	Adidas	<i>I like him I've just watched his documentary, his football career was interesting</i>
Girl 13	Billy Wingrove	Instagram	Rascal clothing	<i>I like how they showed the clothing looked on a person rather than just a picture of the clothes because it gives you a more accurate idea of what the clothes are really like.</i>
Girl 15	Selena Gomez	YouTube	Shampoo	<i>I love her as when she got hate in the past she kept her head high and continued to be a successful woman.</i>
Girl 15	Ayame	TikTok	AllOnTour x Ibis	<i>I loved her energy and her colourful clothes with the background as well as the jokes she was making and her confidence.</i>
Girl 13	Michaela	TikTok	Kerastase hair oil	<i>She demonstrates using the product which is appealing. Nothing stands out about the ad and does not encourage me to buy the product</i>
Girl 12	Josie Gibson	TV	Iceland	<i>I really love this collaboration. I think josie is so down to earth and funny, she has a laid back style that is so in tune with us normal people.</i>
Girl 17	Cheyenne Kerr	TikTok	Benefit Cosmetics	<i>I love how she is creative when making her TikTok content. I love how she shows her personality through her videos and just truly enjoys herself when she's on camera/</i>
Boy 13	Sam Thompson	TV	Love island	<i>I hate love island</i>
Girl 13	WendySkin	YouTube	Skincare product	<i>She always has cool hair colours</i>
Boy 13	Harry Kane	TV	England vs Denmark	<i>I love football</i>
Girl 13	Ashley Li	YouTube	An airline	<i>She's always very expressive</i>
Girl 14	David Beckham	TikTok	Adidas	<i>I really liked it because it used a song I really like and showed some good clips from the euros so overall I liked it.</i>
Boy 16	Tommy Richman	TikTok	Song	<i>I like his music</i>
Girl 14	Ryan Reynolds	TikTok	His new movie	<i>I thought it was quite funny and I love Ryan Reynolds, so it was funny to watch because he has a good sense of humour.</i>
Boy 14	John Stones	TV	Oral B	<i>I like it because I have an electric oral-B toothbrush which is amazing for brushing my teeth</i>

Girl 13	Ange Marino	YouTube	Clothes	<i>She has good fashion sense</i>
Girl 15	Jude Bellingham	YouTube	Google Pixel	<i>He was smiling for a team picture with England players – grabbed my attention for a few seconds but I've seen photos before so nothing new.</i>
Girl 15	Jessica Gale	Instagram	Hello Fresh	<i>I loved her on love island all-stars, her and her twin were the first twins on love island in the same season. However, she is unnatural, so she looks very different to how she did naturally</i>
Girl 14	Kevin and Heaven Hart	YouTube	Fabletics	<i>I really like how they interacted, it seemed natural, and the mixed message was funny.</i>
Girl 15	Beyonce	TikTok	Perfume	<i>She is a unique artist which you can see the large amount of power and strength that she holds.</i>
Girl 12	Haley Kali	Snapchat	Garnier Fructis	<i>It was quite funny as she was pretending that she was in an ad so it seemed real and like she had just made it for fun. She is super relevant right now and many people like her so it was a good choice to pick her for the ad.</i>
Girl 13	Emma Jean	TikTok	Pantene Bond Repair Treatment	<i>It is not an influencer I follow or know so it is not appealing and reduces the chances of me buying and my interest in the product, but her hair is very nice in the ad.</i>
Girl 17	Tennessee Thresh	TikTok	White Fox	<i>She is stunning and I love her sense of fashion, confidence and the way she models in front of the camera. She can sometimes come across arrogant.</i>
Girl 17	Milly Grace Court	TikTok	VO5 (hair products)	<i>She always has a big, lovely smile and it brightens my day.</i>
Girl 14	Miley Cyrus	TikTok	Gucci (perfume)	<i>It was fun and it had lots of flowers, so it looked pretty and she looked nice.</i>
Boy 16	Jack Harlow	TikTok	Doritos	<i>I really like him</i>
Girl 15	Paris Fury	Instagram	Hello Fresh	<i>She is a strong woman influencer; she is very open about her views and holds herself well.</i>
Girl 12	Ed Sheeran	Snapchat	His songs	<i>He has a strong likeable voice, and I like all of his music and he seems really down to earth.</i>
Boy 13	Justin Bieber	Online (mobile)	His concert	<i>I like listening to his music it makes me feel happy</i>
Boy 13	Rupert Grint	Online (mobile)	New TV show	<i>I really like him as he is exciting to watch.</i>
Girl 17	Angry Ginger	TikTok	JD sports	<i>He is very funny and appealing to me. The most appropriate celebrities for my age group as their sense of humour matches what I would find funny.</i>
Boy 14	Rita Ora	In store (Primark)	Clothing line	<i>I like some of her songs but don't really like her, the clothes weren't great either</i>
Boy 14	Martin and Roman Kemp	Instagram	L'Oréal Men Expert	<i>I don't know Martin, but I like roman from Capital radio – he is funny and good looking.</i>
Girl 16	Ella Thomas	Instagram	Pretty Little Thing	<i>She was really interesting to watch on love island as she always spoke her mind and was always kind.</i>
Boy 12	Will Smith	Poster	Bad Boys movie	<i>I think he is funny in the fresh prince of bel air and very cool.</i>

Boy 17	Raheem Stirling	YouTube	Gillette	<i>I appreciate that they are an expert in his field.</i>
Girl 17	Tanya Burr	Instagram	Peroni	<i>I haven't watched this person recently, but I like her as a person, no reason to dislike.</i>
Girl 17	Jill Scott	Instagram	Holland & Barrett	<i>She is a well-rounded individual who isn't afraid to be in the media.</i>
Girl 12	Danny Dyer	TV	Paddy Power	<i>It's a funny advert about English people who go abroad on holiday, and I really liked it. it was very refreshing to see someone like Danny Dyer on tv as he is usually seen in Eastenders.</i>
Boy 17	Mbappe	Unsure	Football boots	<i>People will see players they like and will want to buy and wear the same boots.</i>
Boy 16	Kylie Jenner	Instagram	Kylie Cosmetics	<i>She posted a story demonstrating her new lip kit, using a mix of behind-the-scenes content and professional product shots.</i>
Boy 12	Ronaldo	TikTok	Euro 2024	<i>He is going to play in euro 2024 he has played 6 times</i>
Boy 17	Tom Holland	Online (mobile)	New movie	<i>As people don't know about the movie will see it and will want to watch it so will go to the cinema and see it</i>
Boy 17	Vinicius Junior	TV	Nike	<i>It will make people more likely to buy the things that he is advertising as they will want to wear the same clothing</i>
Girl 16	Keir Starmer	YouTube	Scottish Labour party	<i>I didn't like the ad because I'm not a fan of Keir Starmer and his ideas if he becomes prime minister</i>
Boy 15	The Fitness Chef	Instagram	Healthy eating	<i>I like his food tips and he's interesting</i>
Girl 15	Sarah Conder	Instagram	Revolut app	<i>She is a mum of 5 so I don't relate to her in the slightest however I do love her family channel as her children make it more interesting to me.</i>
Girl 13	Sienna Walker	TikTok	Baddest Tan Eraser	<i>I like that she showed how to use the product, and she showed how it looked afterwards so we had an idea of what to do if we buy it.</i>
Girl 12	Ella Henderson	YouTube	Her song	<i>Her voice is very strong and easy to hear the words in her songs which I like</i>
Boy 16	Stephen Bartlett	Poster	Huel Drink	<i>Looks like it will be a nice drink and healthy probably too as I saw it near to the gym</i>
Boy 12	Gareth Southgate	TikTok	Pizza Hut	<i>To be honest I love Pizza Hut, so I loved this one - it is old I think</i>
Girl 17	Lando Norris	Instagram	PlayStation	<i>Lando Norris is my favourite sportsman at the moment, so it appeals to me that it is him who is promoting PlayStation. I don't really play on it anymore, but I do enjoy Marvel movies so perhaps it would be good to try out. I feel seeing Lando Norris share it and promote it makes me want to buy it more, so the advertisement has worked well.</i>