

Where next for kids' TV: Predicting the future of children's content

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Image: Kiddyuzaa, WildBrain

Where next for kids' TV?

The challenge of the impossible question

Here's a challenge: what will producers be creating and buyers demanding in the kids' content space in five years time? It's an impossible question to answer. The viewing patterns, content preferences and platform choices of children are changing at a faster rate than those of any other segment. But that certainly makes it a fun challenge. In this report we look at Ampere data on viewing habits and the recent trends in content development and production to see how far we can get in answering the impossible. So, where next for kids' TV?:

- **The home environment for children has evolved significantly since our last analysis, almost two years ago: Young kids' households are still more likely to have traditional pay TV than homes with older kids of childless homes, but the likelihood of having SVoD is roughly equal across all segments (homes with younger kids had been early adopters, but the increasing ubiquity of SVoD has ironed out the difference).**
- **Crucially, however, the shift to non-linear viewing in homes with younger kids' remains very significant and young kids' homes are far more likely to be substituting for SVoD as a main form of TV.**
- **Homes with young kids also spend much more time each day watching SVoD and other non-linear forms of TV with viewing patterns that show significant usage of SVoD between 9am and 5pm, as well as during primetime.**
- **Catch-up TV is becoming increasingly important for homes with younger kids, particularly in primetime, while online video is used heavily throughout the afternoon and into primetime.**
- **Generally there remains significant opportunity to produce more original content for SVoD, with SVoD platforms still heavily skewed to acquisition over commission for kids content.**
- **Content wise, there looks to be notable opportunity for licensing and production of teen and tween content for SVoD as well as for more pre-school.**
- **Live action and male-focused content also looks underserved.**
- **In terms of content development for all platforms (including linear), stories that centre on a family, team or group as the lead 'character' rather than an individual are an increasingly important area to explore.**
- **Themes of friendship and magic are growing areas for exploitation.**
- **For young boys, vehicle-based anthropomorphic characters should be a growth area.**
- **Overall there is a move to more gender-neutral content outside of pre-school across content for young kids, teens and tweens. But we expect a focus on strong female leads to also be an on-going trend.**
- **Themes of adversity or challenge or adventure/mystery that is aimed at girls or has a female lead looks like a clear opportunity.**

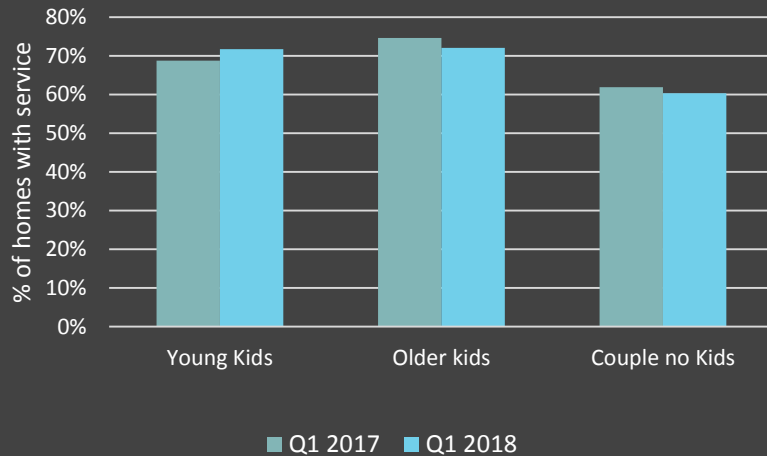
So what have we done? We've taken a three-pronged approach to predicting the future of kids TV. First, we take a look at when, where, and how kids are watching video content, considering different viewing platforms and types of content, as well as devices. We then analyse kids' original content across multiple SVoD platforms to see where streaming services have been placing their bets when it comes to spending big on original content and exclusive acquisition. Finally, we take a look at major recent (past five months) commissions of kids programming across linear TV, streaming and digital to see if any consistent trends emerge. All of this is supplemented with interviews and insight from the industry with full interview transcripts provided at the end of the report.

Note: In looking at children's home environment and viewing behaviour using our own consumer data, we have compared three sub-segments of the population in order to drill down as closely as possible to the direct influence of the in-home child. The three segments are homes with a young child (under 10); homes with an older child (between 10 and 18) and couples (married or unmarried) with no kids. All three are limited to age 18-44. This segmentation removes the impact of young childless adults living in shared homes (this is key because young adults also show particular next-generation behaviour skews which would impact a more general 'no kids' home category). All household and consumer behaviour data is based on analysis in nine European countries and the USA unless otherwise stated. Source of consumer data: Ampere Consumer Q1 2018. Source of content analysis: Ampere Analytics.

Old vs. new: What future for traditional pay TV? SVoD no longer uniquely defines, but remains key

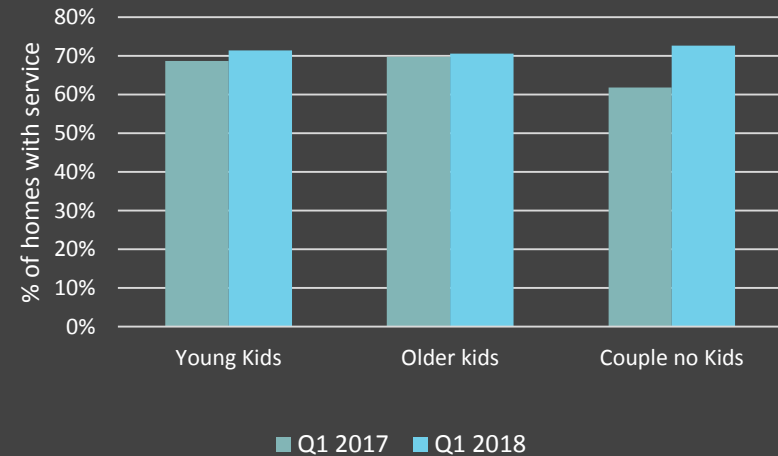
We last looked in detail at the child's home entertainment environment back in July 2016 (see MIP TV report *Kids TV and the future of entertainment*). What emerged then was that homes with children were more likely to take both SVoD and traditional pay TV services. Some of the differences back in 2016 were stark; and what is clear today is that those differences have started to level out. In our latest data (as of Q1 2018), homes with either young kids or older kids are more likely to take traditional pay TV than couples without kids, but that when it comes to SVoD, the difference has disappeared.

Evolution of pay TV uptake



Source: Ampere Analysis

Evolution of SVoD uptake



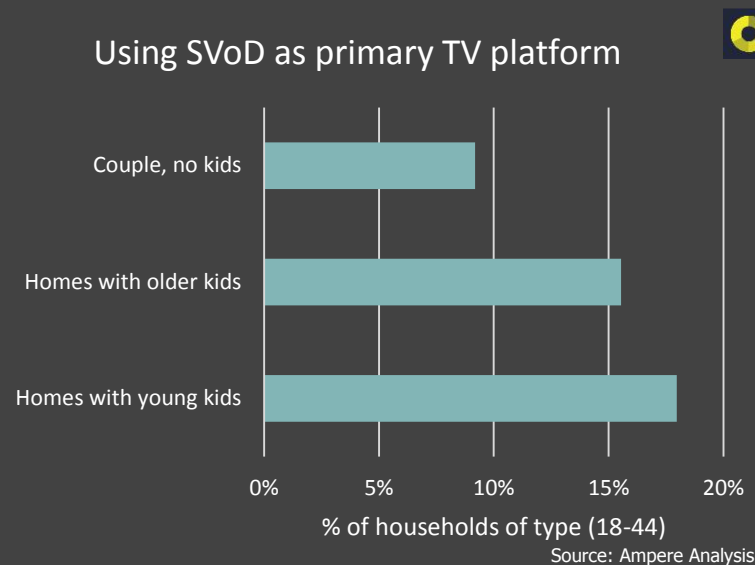
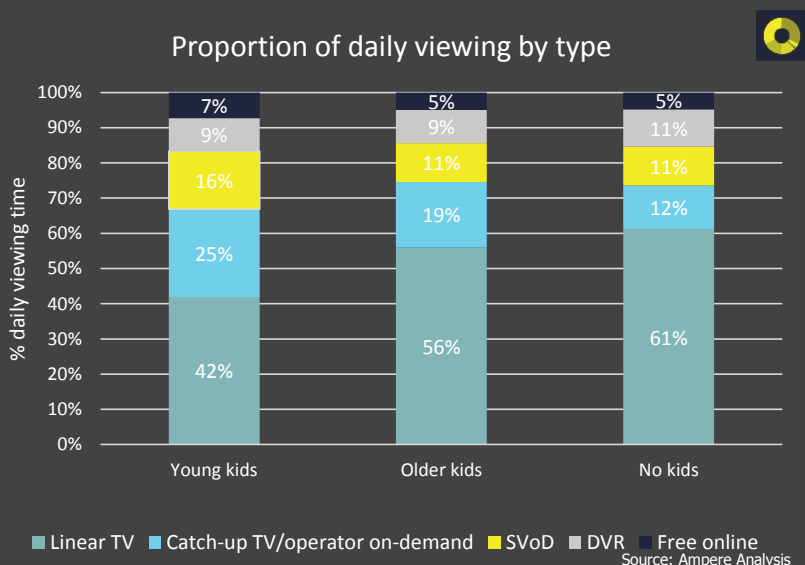
Source: Ampere Analysis

Homes without kids (couples) are about equally likely to have SVoD as homes with kids of either age. This is indicative of the increasingly ubiquitous nature of SVoD within the home entertainment environment. In the time since our last report, overall SVoD penetration has risen from 30-40% to 60-70% and the homes without kids have caught up with the early adoption of SVoD in child-driven home. So while the difference between the home environments has disappeared, the influence of SVoD remains key in the child's home.

Viewing patterns remain starkly different

More homes with young kids substituting main TV

That's because when it comes to substitution of SVoD as a main TV service (that is homes who consider SVoD services to be the main way they watch TV), homes with kids (and particularly younger kids) are leading the way. Homes with young kids are more than twice as likely to be using a streaming service as their main way of consuming TV than couples without kids (remember this is despite overall uptake now being the same among the two groups). What's also clear is that there is a stark difference in the viewing patterns and behaviour of homes with young kids, with almost 60% of viewing being on a non-linear basis, compared to 40% in homes with no kids or where an older child is present.

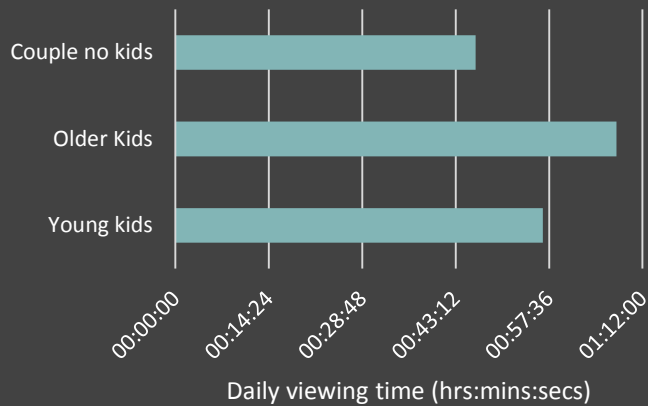


But proportional changes do not tell the whole story. Behavioural changes around engagement with TV are even clearer when we drill down at a platform level. Taking the US as an example market, homes with older kids watch the most linear TV in terms of the total time spent daily in front of a screen: a total of 20% more in terms of minutes than homes with younger kids. Couples without kids watch the least, in line with their overall much lower daily viewing time.

Older kids most focused on linear

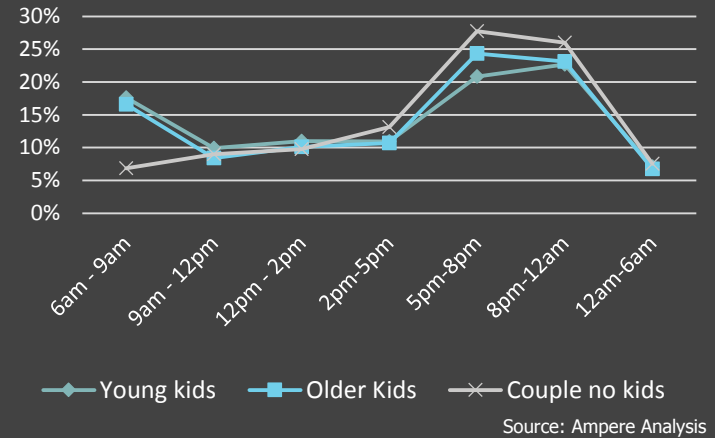
Linear and SVoD have early morning peak

Time watching scheduled TV (USA)



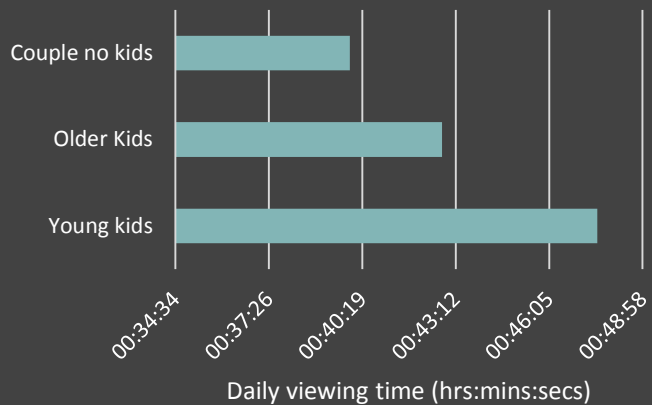
Source: Ampere Analysis

Scheduled TV viewing patterns (USA)



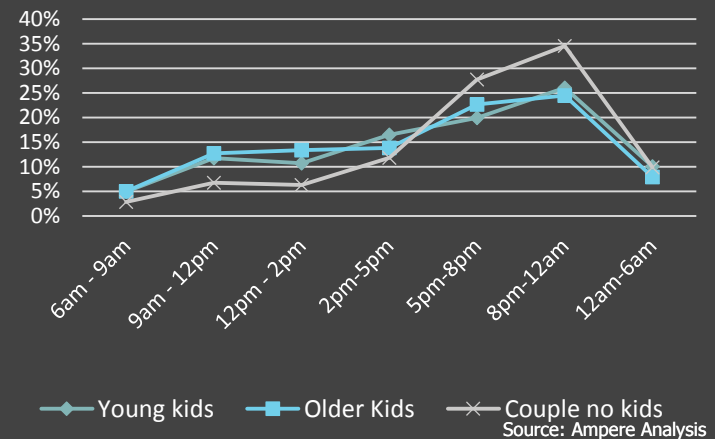
Source: Ampere Analysis

Time spent watching SVoD (USA)



Source: Ampere Analysis

SVoD daily viewing patterns (USA)



Source: Ampere Analysis

Catch-up is used throughout the day

But young kids have late afternoon peak

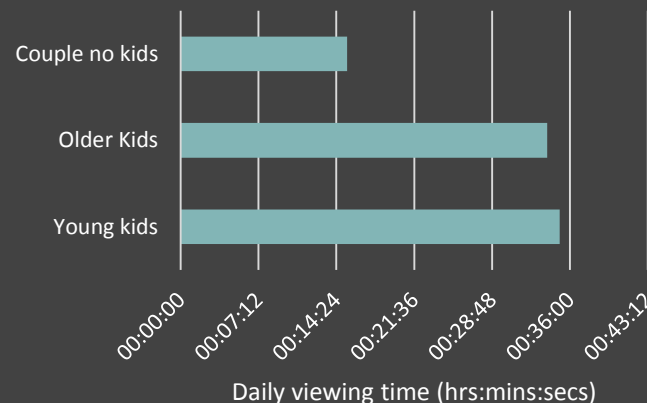
Overall viewing time backs up the SVoD substitution role identified earlier: viewing patterns in homes with young kids shows they watch the most SVoD content in terms of overall time.

Patterns of viewing throughout the day also show stark differences that help when thinking of the type of programming kids are engaging with at different times of day. There is a clear peak of activity for young kids and older kids between 6am and 9am for the viewing of more traditional scheduled TV channels, so the breakfast table and 'getting ready for school' hours are a key viewing period in homes with kids.

By contrast, while SVoD has a very definite peak in traditional evening primetime hours for homes where there are no kids, homes with either young or older children show more consistent viewing patterns throughout the day, suggesting they are watching significant amounts of SVoD during the afternoon and earlier evening.

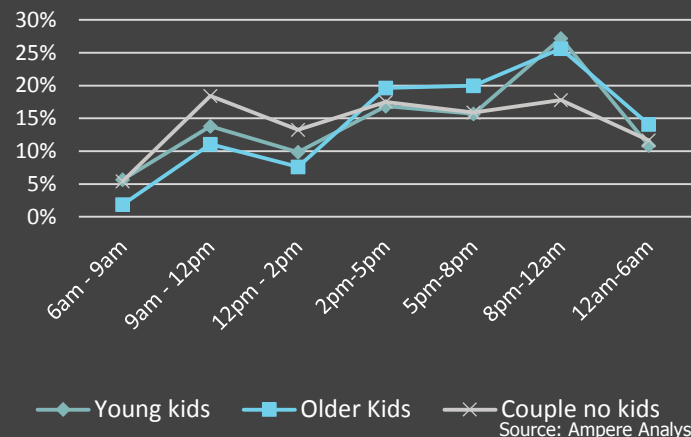
Catch-up TV shows similar patterns to SVoD for homes with kids with a fairly even spread in viewing patterns throughout the day, while in homes without kids, there is a very definite spike in the evening primetime period.

Time spent watching catch-up (USA)



Source: Ampere Analysis

Free online viewing patterns (USA)



Source: Ampere Analysis

Online used by both younger and older kids

Kids use free online content in traditional primetime

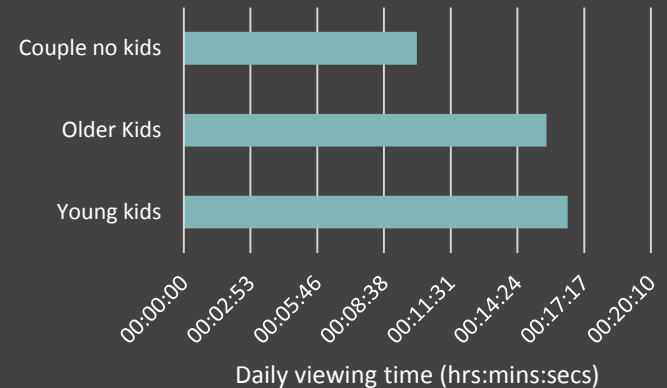
Free online video is perhaps the most telling of viewing patterns. In homes, with kids, there are viewing activity spikes from early afternoon through to the evening primetime, where as in homes without kids, online free video is more evenly spread throughout the day, and total time spent on this type of content is around half that of homes with kids.

So what does this mean for programming and content strategies:

- Linear TV remains important for old and young kids but is increasingly skewed to older kids with an important peak for viewing in the early morning before 9am for both younger and older children.
- SVoD has an important viewing window in the later morning (after 9am) that is slightly more important for younger kids.
- Both young and older kids are using catch-up fairly evenly throughout the day but young kids have a noticeable spike in activity between 5pm and 8pm.
- Free online platforms like YouTube are particularly important in the morning (after 9am) and in the later evening (8pm onwards) for both younger and older kids.

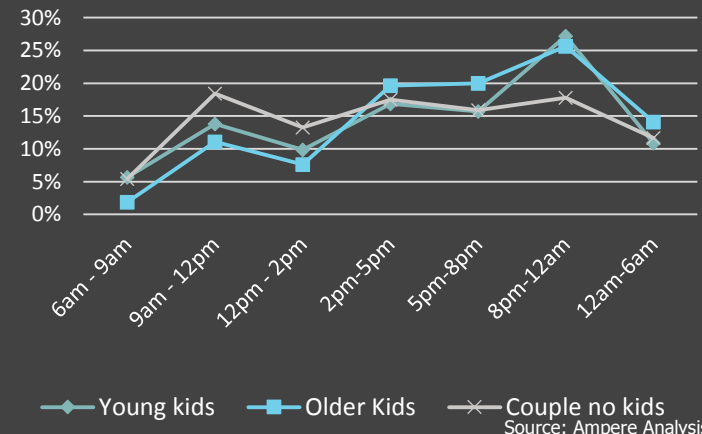
If we begin to think of this as a skew pattern, then programmers need to be thinking about addressing key or complimentary programming for these kid-specific daily windows.

Time watching free online video (USA)



Source: Ampere Analysis

Free online viewing patterns (USA)



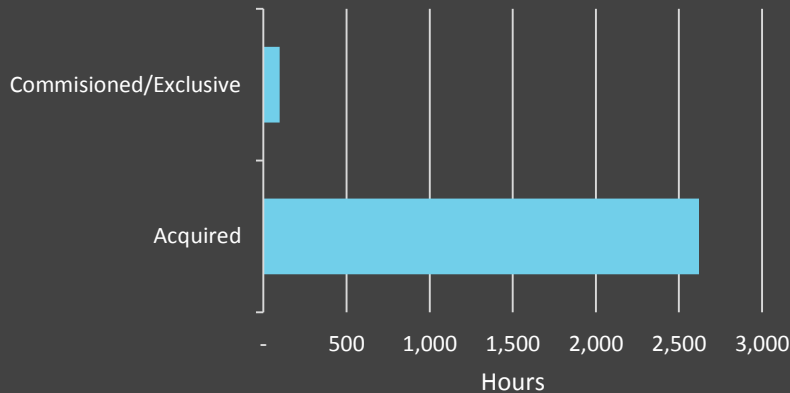
Source: Ampere Analysis

Acquisition still rules for SVoD

With young kids the core focus

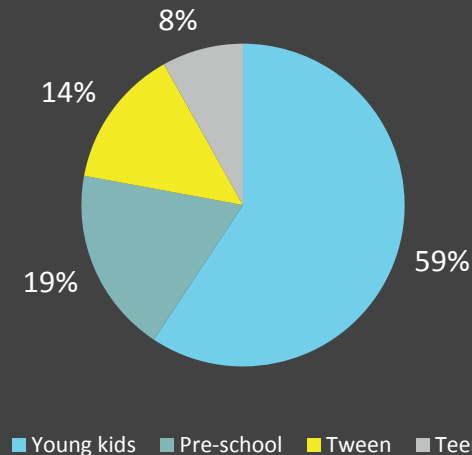
Looking for gaps in current content strategies or recent upward trends in programming aimed at kids provides another guide to what comes next in kids programming. We've looked at two distinct groupings of content: kids original production from SVoD platforms like Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, Cmore, Maxdome and others in order to see where the SVoD players are willing to put their hard cash in terms of commissions or exclusive acquisitions; and recently announced kids' commissions for linear TV & SVoD across all platforms. When it comes to the acquisition and commissioning strategies of Netflix and Amazon, ***it's clear that for kids' content, acquisition still rules.*** Combined, Netflix and Amazon added 2,718 hours of kids content in 2017, the majority on Amazon Prime. Of this total, 98 hours was original commission or exclusive acquisition. The remainder was acquired.

Netflix/Amazon: Change in volume of kids content (Jan 2017-Jan 2018)



Source: Ampere Analysis

Kids' SVoD originals (major platforms)



Source: Ampere Analysis

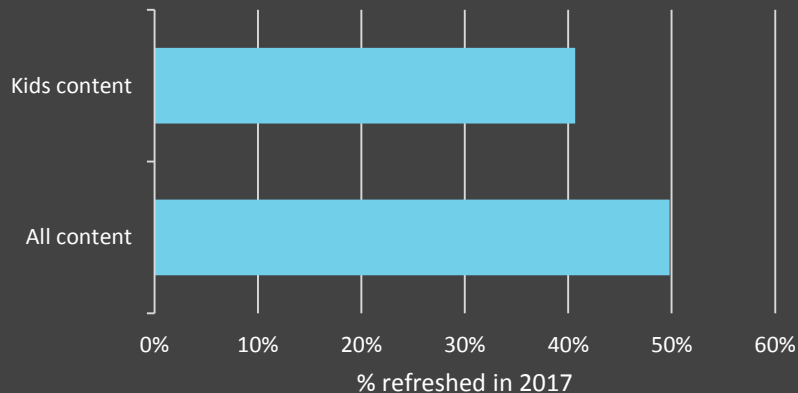
SVoD platforms continue to focus heavily on young kids, ***but are perhaps under-serving pre-school and older segments.*** It's true that across the countries surveyed, 35% of SVoD customers have a young child at home and that this segment is the highest over-index against average (meaning SVoD homes are far more likely to have young kids than the average home). But still, 25% of SVoD homes have an older child, tween or teen at home. Addressing this mismatch in focus is a key opportunity for content owners.

Kids content stays on longer

But kids content increasingly curated

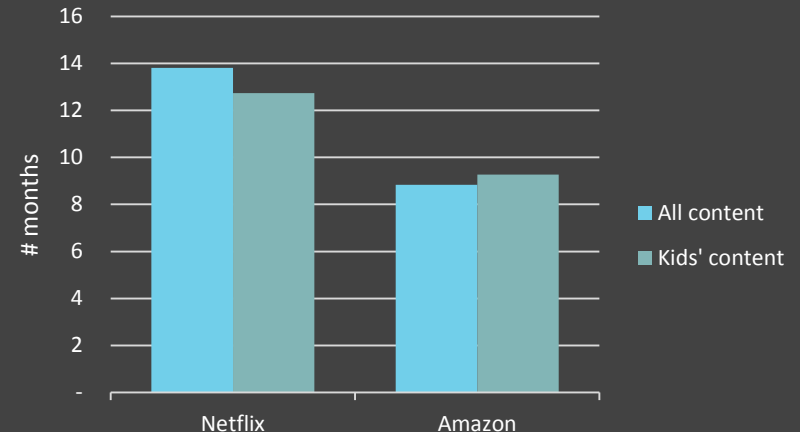
A number of interacting factors are impacting the way kids content is being used by the major SVoD players. As anyone would expect, kids' content generally has a lower refresh rate on SVoD than average...a reflection of kids' content having its own inbuilt refresh cycle caused by children ageing and changing taste and by the fact that kids like to re-watch favourite shows again and again. However, there is indication that the curation strategies of Netflix and Amazon are diverging. On Netflix, kids content that is refreshed (i.e excluding content that is long-term licensed) has a shorter license period than average, a reflection of two factors: Netflix is actively curating its kids content with more originals and content moving to long term licence periods, but shedding shorter term content that doesn't work well on platform more rapidly.

Refresh rate of kids' content
(Netflix/Amazon)



Source: Ampere Analysis

Average license period* of kids' content

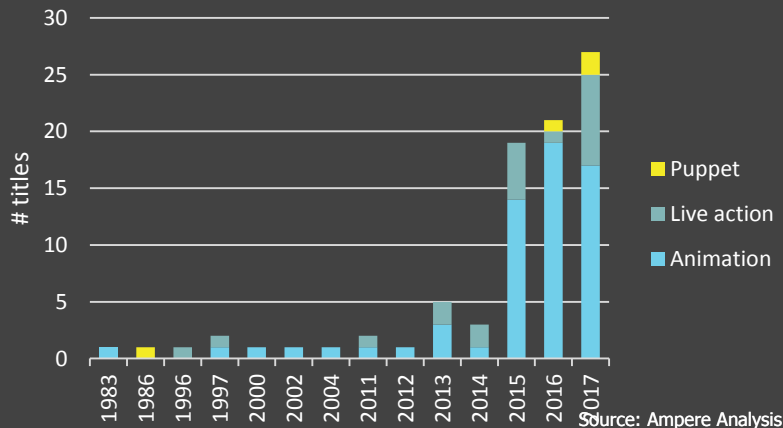


Source: Ampere Analysis

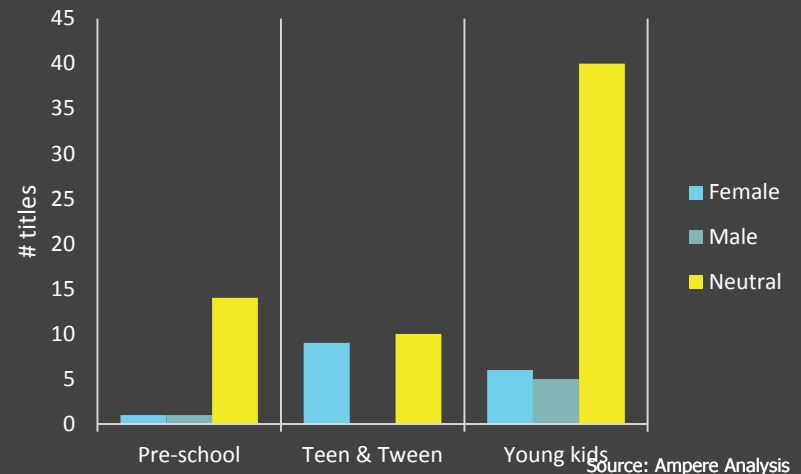
By contrast, Amazon appears to be moving towards a lower rate of curation and leaving kids content that is refreshed (i.e. not long term licensed or originals) on platform slightly longer than average for other types of content. The take away? Non-commissioned kids content is increasingly likely to be dumped off SVoD if it's not performing as expected, potentially providing more opportunity for experimentation with strong content, particularly on Netflix.

The majority of kids' SVoD originals are aimed at young kids (60%), with equal weight given to pre-school kids (20%) and the combined tween/teen audiences (20%). **Clearly, there would seem to be most headroom for new content among the pre-school and tween/teen audience on SVoD**, particularly when the second key trend is taken into account: That of the noticeable upswing in live action kids content on SVoD, particularly in 2017. **Almost all of the live action titles on SVoD are aimed at tweens or teens** with only one in five titles aimed at younger children. Within live action, roughly half is aimed at female viewers and half is largely gender neutral, **indicating a gap in male-focused live action kids' content**, as well as potentially live action for younger children.

SVoD kids' originals: Change in type over time



SVoD kids' originals: Gender focus by age



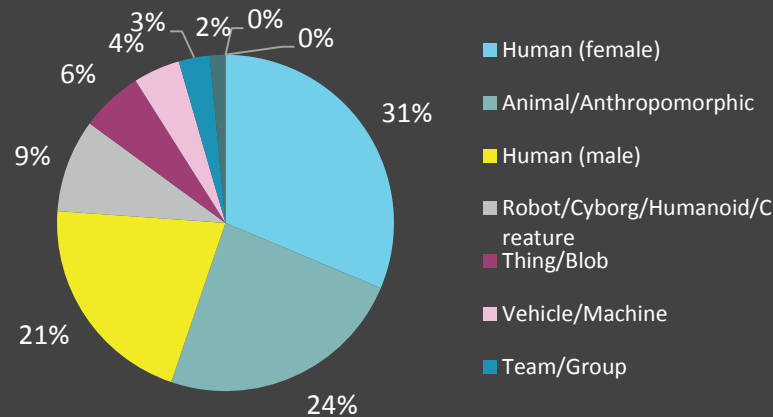
Overall, animation still dominates in the children's content market and with the increasingly global nature of commissioning, there is no reason why this should change. So Gender-neutral animation across all age categories is likely to be a core on-going focus.

Human characters dominate

But animals outweigh male protagonists

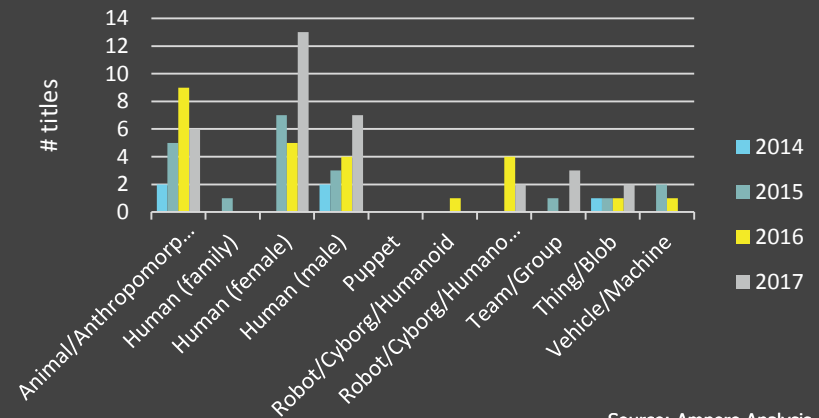
A third of current original kids content on SVoD has a female protagonist and a little under a quarter, an animal anthropomorphic character. In recent years, there has been an upswing in both male and female character leads, while animal/anthropomorphic protagonists have declined. Other key growth areas for lead protagonists in kids content (although at much smaller scale than male/female lead) are teams or groups (that is no single lead character); anthropomorphic vehicles and anthropomorphic ‘things’— that can not be identified as a know organism (such as jelly blobs) or robotic/humanoid-type characters.

SVoD kids' originals: Protagonist of recent originals (past three years)



Source: Ampere Analysis

SVoD kids' originals: Evolution of protagonists



Source: Ampere Analysis

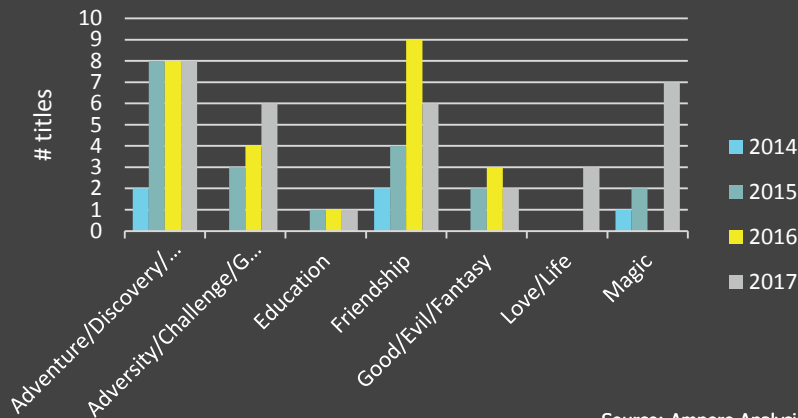
Demand is likely to continue for kids content with strong female lead-characters, a trend also reflected in our interviews with executives but, again, male lead characters appear underserved and more demand for vehicle-based (likely to appeal most to young boys) and non-human protagonists looks likely. Also **key is the emerging interest in groups or families (rather than individuals)** as the main ‘character’, a trend that also emerged in our interview work.

Adversity and challenge a growing theme

But more girls needed

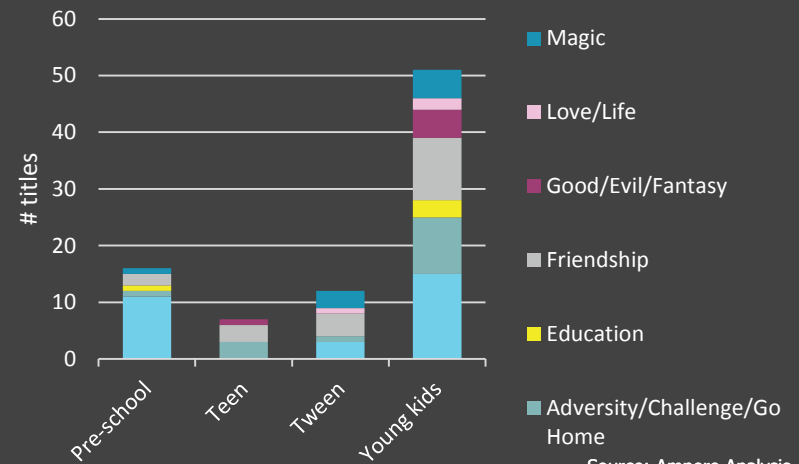
Analysis of core themes shows that the over-arching theme of adventure & discovery remain a constant, but there has been a consistent upswing in themes of adversity and challenge in the past few years (tackling adversity as a team or group also fits with the previously identified trend in group/family protagonists). Friendship has also become more prominent in the past couple of years and magic has seen a boost in the past 12 months. There is a fairly predictable age bias in themes of existing SVoD originals and exclusives: pre-school and young kids' content is focused heavily on discovery and adventure. Young kids see an increasing amount of content focused on challenge and friendship, while friendship becomes key in the

SVoD kids' originals: Evolution of core theme



Source: Ampere Analysis

SVoD kids' originals: Core themes by age



Source: Ampere Analysis

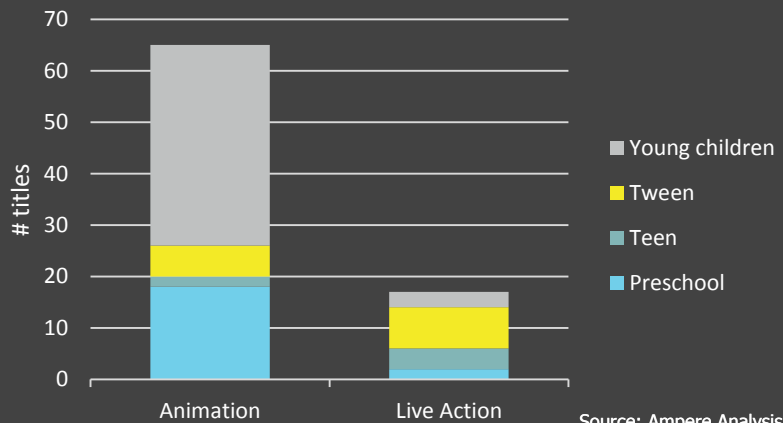
Tween/Teen content...with a smattering of magic and fantasy thrown in. **One area that appears underserved is educational content for young and pre-school children** (but note there is an educational element to much of the adventure/discovery content core to this group). Additionally, **more love/life focused content for teens and tweens is one area that may yield opportunity.** Predictable gender bias in themes is also apparent: The largest focus for female-targeted content is friendship, while both male-targeted content and neutral content focuses most on adventure. **Given the growing focus on developing strong female characters, and gender neutrality, opportunity would seem to exist in filling the adventure/mystery and adversity/challenge areas** with content aimed at a female audience or with a strong female protagonist.

Gender neutral has become key

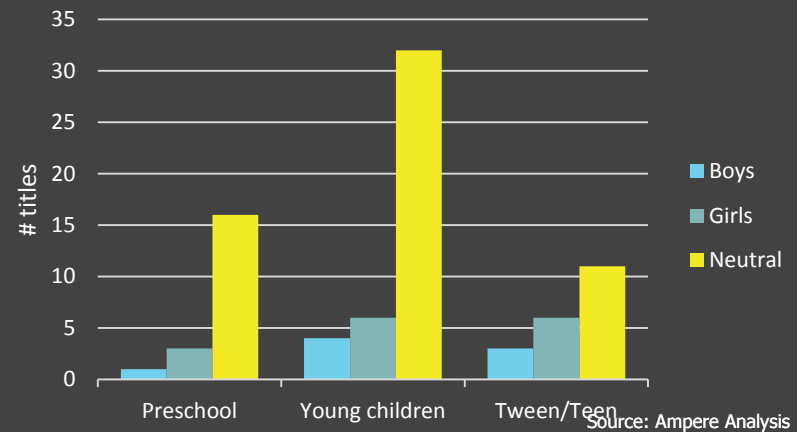
But live action teen seems like opportunity

If the sectors and segments where SVoD players have been putting their money give a good idea of recent trends and potential future opportunities, then do recent commissions reveal any additional insight or additional verification of the trends that seem to be revealed by looking at the SVoD exclusives and originals? What is immediately apparent in upcoming kids content is that gender-neutral is the largest category for all age groups, particularly pre-school and young kids. Although gender-targeted content persists *in the tween/teen category, gender neutral is now the bigger segment even for this age.*

Recently commissioned kids' shows: type & demographic



Recently commissioned kids' shows: type & demographic



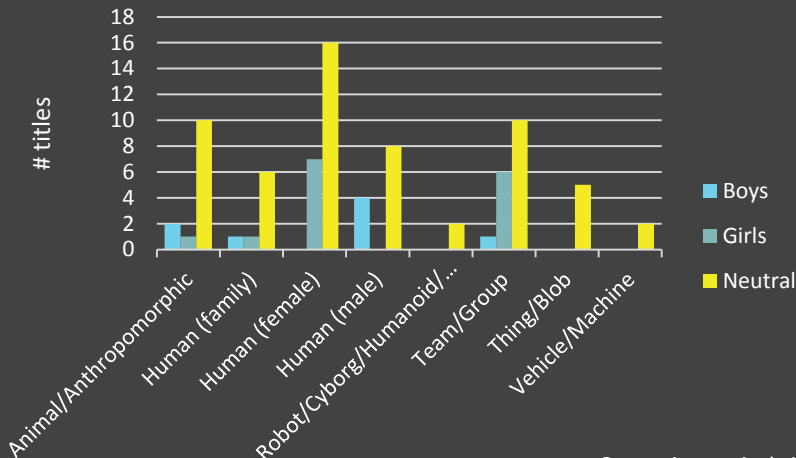
While animation is by far the biggest category across the board, it's clear that live-action is a significant sub-segment, primarily targeting tweens. *Potential would therefore seem to exist for more live action teen content* and potentially live action for younger kids. And clearly, gender neutral swing aside, boy-focused content looks a little light. However, in all categories, *it's clear that demand for gender-neutral content will continue* and so potential exists in exploring the themes currently under-served by gender neutral kids' content. Key areas would seem to be gender-neutral fantasy, diversity/challenge and love/life-themed content.

More group/team-led content emerging

With friendship and adventure key themes

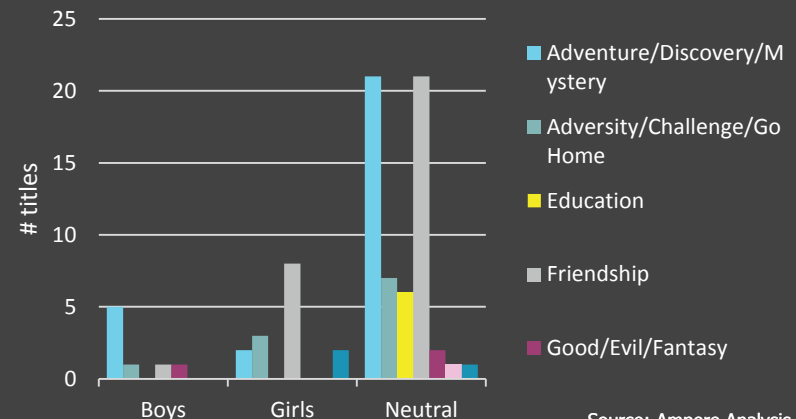
Gender neutrality is also reflected in the protagonists of recent commissions. While **gender-neutral content is most likely to have a female lead**, increasingly team or group-led content and animal/anthropomorphic or non-human/animal leads are leading gender neutral content. In upcoming content, the two biggest categories of theme are friendship and adventure/discovery, and most of these-themed shows fall into gender neutral territory. By contrast, there is a strong theme skew by gender for the remainder: girls' content skews to friendship and boys' to adventure.

Recent commissions: Key protagonist



Source: Ampere Analysis

Recently commissioned kids' shows: theme by gender



Source: Ampere Analysis

This would seem to back up the patterns and potential we highlighted in the earlier analysis. While there are key changes, emerging, there is also plenty that is 'more of the same' and **opportunity must therefore exist for mixing and matching existing and emerging trends**: that means more adventure/adversity and challenge both for girls and in gender neutral content (strong male and female partnerships as leads in adventure, perhaps?), and how about more friendship-themes for boys? (but note our earlier comments that both these themes are well-served with upcoming gender neutral content). **One area that seems to be on the up and helps with gender neutrality and cross over is the potential to use mixed-gender teams or groups rather than individuals as key protagonist.**

As always, the greatest insight into the current state of the industry comes from those working at the front line of kids' entertainment. We spoke at length to a number of executives from a range of kids sectors in preparing this report (transcripts of selected interviews follow). There was surprising unity of opinion:

- **One of the key trends that emerged both in our content analysis and in the interview work was *the importance of family* in today's kids content. This spans shows that families can watch together to characters and protagonists that are part of larger family groups or where a group rather than an individual is the star of the show:**

Viacom International Media Network's (VIMN), SVP Production & Development, Nina Hahn, notes: "we're witnessing three top passion points for kids on both a local and global level: spending time with their family, spending time with their friends and going on holiday." This view is echoed by Victoria Bolotova, Senior Media Manager at Animaccord, the company behind Russian smash *Masha & the Bear*. "I think it's very important to have a show that the whole family can enjoy in order for kids to spend more time watching together with their parents. Bringing families together is key", she says.

- ***Gender neutrality* is increasingly important in today's environment and while this arguably has always been the case for pre-school content, it's beginning to spread to other age categories:**

"Masha suits different audiences in different markets. Because Masha is a girl, many people assume it's for girls, but boys also like it. For example we recently found that Masha has 86% awareness amongst boys in Sweden", says Bolotova. VIMN's Hahn adds: "it had been a central part of Nickelodeon's DNA to create gender neutral content — it's one of the big defining characteristics that sets us apart and it's important for viewers to come to the channel knowing that they can expect this type of offering." Samreen Ghani, Head of Operations at WildBrain, says this is also reflected in searches they see on YouTube: "looking at search and the popular keywords parents look for, these tend to be more neutral, e.g. 'Cartoons for kids'. We don't see a focus on 'for girls' or 'for boys' in the way audiences search for content."

- **Educational elements have always been a part of children’s entertainment, but for today’s children, *education mixed with entertainment* is more important than ever:**

According to VIMN’s Hahn: “kids today view themselves as highly independent, curious and creative – 88 percent of kids use their free time to build new skills”. Madlene Kerry, CEO of Switzerland’s MK_Production says both safety and education are key: “animation for small children should be of course interesting, then psychologically safe (which is extremely important nowadays), and educational if possible.”

- **In common with other areas of TV production, *budgets for kids’ content head ever upwards*, meaning collaboration and co-production are increasingly common:**

This applies even in the digital-first space, explains WildBrain’s Ghani: “We are increasingly seeing a trend of YouTube or digital-first content and are being approached to work with new partners who have built their brands using YouTube, to co-finance their next series.” VIMN’s Hahn notes: “international partners have been coming together to finance shows and make, in essence, a global financing/creative quilt.” Partnerships can also be key in boosting quality of content in some markets, as Fadel Zahreddine, Group Director of Brand Management & Digital Businesses for MBC Group notes: “I personally believe in the future of the MENA region in funding and co-funding good content, and we are committed to that cause. That’s why we invite global brands to take note, correspond, talk, and create strategic collaborations for the betterment of the region when it comes to content creation, since reach hasn’t really changed, but engagement undoubtedly has.”

- **Parents are increasingly concerned about safety in the digital and mobile environment, so it’s now key for kids’ brands and content to address that overtly. *Accounting for parents concerns about safety* is crucial:**

WildBrain’s Ghani notes: “Trusted brands and channels will become more important. As will the curation of quality content that is suitable for kids, and the brands that help parents filter the good from the bad.” In the Middle East, MBC has gone a step further, launching its own child-safe environment: “the main identifier for us forging ahead, is that our brands are centred around ‘controlled’ safe content. And that’s why GOBOZ, (our new SVoD to be launched very soon) will precisely fulfil this crucial objective”, says MBC’s Zahreddine.

➤ Tastes change and *keeping up with developments in character* is important:

“Nowadays, the main popular children's areas are game educational formats, adventures, stories with magic and superpowers. And also, a special and popular genre of stories about / with monsters and zombies”, says Madlene Kerry, CEO, MK_Production Switzerland. MBC’s Zahreddine adds: “Kids content in the future should allow the kids’ avatars to be part of the narrative, and the avatar itself grows within the story, as the storyline develops as the kid gets older. That in itself is an immersive, interconnected parallel life that ultimately translates into honing kids’ knowledge, skills, intelligence, and all the meanwhile, going through an adventurous journey!”

➤ There’s no doubt that *the impact of SVoD players has been huge*, both in terms of entering the market as new buyers and in influencing through original production. But the big players can be a mixed blessing:

For VIMN’s Hahn, competition is generally positive: “If we’re not willing to evolve and adapt then we’d leave ourselves at risk, so we view the changes happening as opportunities and thrive on the healthy competition. Among all the change, there is one thing that remains constant — content.” For MBC’s Zahreddine, SVoD is also extending the longevity of kids content (a trend also reflected in our research on license period duration above): “The ulterior impact SVoD has had is the longevity of programs and series past their first runs, convenience of choice, and the far-reaching audiences they can engage”, he says. For smaller production companies, the picture is mixed: MK_Production’s Kerry says SVoD players are great, “in the case (when) they have chosen you. (But) If not, you're in trouble. But the downside is that “people hide themselves behind the successful names, forgetting about their own achievements, and this is kind of dependence on large companies, and there is almost no development among small production companies.”

➤ **YouTube has impacted content type and some of the perceptions and measures of 'success', being both good and bad:**

For linear groups, YouTube is still key. VIMN's Hahn notes: "supporting our short form business and developing content that can speak to more than one platform and different time lengths is also essential." For WildBrain, YouTube insight data is key. Says Ghani: "there are two distinct advantages to creating content for YouTube. First is the speed at which you can create. We can turn around short-form animation in as little as three months. The second is data. When we upload episodes, we can quickly monitor performance. The data we access on YouTube is anonymous but gives us an indication of where the content is working in which geographical location and with which demographic."

But MK_Production's Kerry has an alternative view, believing an industry obsession with 'likes' is wrong: "Many experts believe that if the project did not score a certain number of likes per day / week / month, then it is no longer interesting. And with this I also do not agree. That is not the fault of the Youtube or Netflix, this is the perception of the society/public and it's scary," she says.

➤ **For kids content, animation is still king, despite opportunities in live action, and like other sectors of TV creation, globalisation prevails:**

Wildbrain's Ghani notes: "Based on the data we see across our network of YouTube channels, there continues to be growth in the consumption of animated content. Year-on-year (February 2017 - February 2018) views of animated videos have increased 40% on YouTube*. There is also a lot of language-agnostic content, with high production values, which is rewarded on platforms such as YouTube because it appeals in many markets." Animaccord's Bolotova thinks some markets still remain challenging, even for pre-school content: "We cover almost the whole world (with Masha & the Bear), except for some Eastern Asian territories where we are still looking for partners and trying to understand the market needs and what is popular there. Masha is dubbed into 38 or 40 languages," she says.

*The following pages contain transcripts of some of the key interviews carried out in production of this report. Hear from **Fadel Zahreddine**, Group Director of Brand Management & Digital Businesses, MBC Group; **Nina Hahn**, SVP Production & Development Nickelodeon, Viacom Int. Media Networks; **Samreen Ghani**, Head of Operations, WildBrain and **Madlene Kerry**, CEO, MK_Production Switzerland.*

mbc

G R O U P



The regional broadcast giant
Fadel Zahreddine, Group Director
of Brand Management & Digital
Businesses , MBC Group

MBC GROUP (Middle East Broadcasting Center) is the largest and leading private media corporation and first private free-to-air satellite broadcaster in the Middle East & North Africa region.

It was launched in London in 1991 and later moved its headquarters to Dubai, UAE in 2002, with major offices in Riyadh, Beirut, Cairo and Amman. To date, MBC GROUP includes twenty TV channels that span a wide spectrum of programming and content, as well as FM radio stations, VoD Services, Gaming Apps, a content drama production company, robust CSR initiatives, as well as numerous significant online platforms and digital streams.

Arabic content is not (yet) up to par

OTT will drive boom in content creation in the region

What changes have you seen in recent years in the sort of kids' content?

Anything related to kids and teens environment seems to be the in-thing at present worldwide, with various players internationally, including the BBC who are planning to compete in the global media market in that space, which further reinforces that reality.

However, **what's key in my view are a few key changes that have sprung up, namely the notion of safety for parents in regards to the type of content kids are watching.** Likewise, there's the rise of OTT that presents a new modus operandi of the traditional way of subscriptions, as well as the notion of unboxing that's gained popularity over a short period of time, and finally the change to the whole viewing ecosystem away from linear TV that we've witnessed of late. The latter is testimony to endorsing a change in the diversification of kids' trans-media content, as well as aggregating more platforms to watch that very same content.

With the above in mind, and way ahead of the game, MBC GROUP had in effect instilled a dedicated 'Kids Hub' that answers to identifying key components of that demographic, and we're intently looking at what will and can influence both our TV and Digital grids, as well as sound investments towards this crucial segment for the future.

Are there any characteristics of kids' content made for the Middle East market, and if so, what are the reasons for the differences? There are obvious differences, but that echoes more the cultural and socio-economic disparities rather than a common denominator with the misconception of what works for kids abroad is the same for kids in the Middle East.

The main reason is that Arabic content – and I'll be very candid – is not up to par in comparison to abroad, simply because there's no sound ROI for corporations to invest in producing content, and ultimately see little return. So, the 'import' of westernized content seems to have been the standard. However, as OTT is thriving, we will in turn witness a gradual boom in proper content creation in the region. Continued...

...That being said, and especially with kids' content, there are certain strong IPs that have strong international appeal, while others don't. We tend to think that what is produced in the U.S seems to have a more universal appeal than the rest, and that in part may be true, but I'll even venture to say that ***even locally-produced content may not at times work locally, due to the diversity within the region; its dialects, customs and protocols.*** You see, the biggest fallacy is cluttering everything under one theme being the Middle East! That is not one country, but no less than twenty-two countries collaged in your question!

Do you think the way children's stories are being told has changed because of the new device environment or the emergence of platforms like YouTube?

The importance is that stories continue to be told, regardless to which platforms! Our job is incomplete if we do not create the means for which children can access their content through any of their desired ways and platforms. That's what's exciting in that there are no norms anymore, but instead, the creation of more choices.

Worldwide figures attest to the fact that young audiences are shifting away from 'traditional viewing habits' and towards on-demand viewing, and what's important is that families (and parents in particular) appreciate the engaging edutainment angle to what storytelling may present to their young ones, unlike the unboxing model which is a hard sell, and that obviously parents would not appreciate. So, the way children's stories are being told has definitely changed, given that the safety part is essential in parents' choices of what their kids watch, as well as the diversity of content choices through ancillary content and alternative platforms. ***In all, it's about the validation of on-going engagement that is key here.***

What is your approach to using kids content on YouTube and other social platforms?

We're looking at aggressive strategies forward to be implemented in what's safe, entertaining, educational and fun. And that goes in line with our existing channels such as MBC3, and SVoD channels that have permitted us to become more discerning and thorough in both our approach and the responsibility we carry in bringing the best of kids' entertainment forward, locally and regionally.

However, rather than simply identify the positives, the concern over the negative effects of technology are more predominant as Gen Zers become increasingly mobile-oriented, so the main identifier for us forging ahead, is that our brands are centred around 'controlled' safe content. And that's why GOBOZ, (our new SVoD to be launched very soon) will precisely fulfil this crucial objective.

We're launching parent-controlled SVoD service

Exclusive content more readily available in SVoD

Have you seen any innovative or new ways of financing or distributing kids content?

At MBC GROUP, and for the last 26-years, we have been spearheading quality through hard but studied choices, and with that type of responsibility as the most respected and trusted media conglomerate in the region comes an expectancy from our millions of viewers, as well as a clear internal strategy to always innovate, create and assess accordingly. Many players worldwide have come up with innovative ways that satisfy the market they serve, and for us, it's essential moving forward that we keep a listening ear to what our viewers; and essentially kids – through their parents – want and need.

With that in mind, ***we're launching GOBOZ, which is a parent-controlled kids video entertainment SVoD service*** available across all major platforms: (Web, iOS, Android) in Arabic, English and French. GOBOZ will feature an extensive library of the best curated, animated and live action films and series, responsibly selected and rated, in order to protect kids from harmful content, and of course, without forgoing quality, cultural affinity and the vast potential for learning. GOBOZ is in fact the answer to extending our distribution platforms.

I personally believe in the future of the MENA region in funding and co-funding good content, and we are committed to that cause. That's why we invite global brands to take note, correspond, talk, and create strategic collaborations for the betterment of the region when it comes to content creation, since reach hasn't really changed, but engagement undoubtedly has.

Has SVoD had any particular impact on kids' content and the way it is made or financed?

It's still in its early stages to have a tangible impact that may sway or influence the big studios and broadcasters to produce case-specific content, rather than carry forward what's readily available, and the best of what's at offer worldwide. The ulterior impact SVoD has had is the longevity of programs and series past their first runs, convenience of choice, and the far-reaching audiences they can engage.

In effect, case-specific and exclusive content will be more readily available exclusively on SVoD as the offerings intensify and demand rises with more amenities starting with safe choices, premium alternatives, easier navigation, and even personalized individual profiles. Because of changes in the family roles and specifically with kids, recent decades have seen sharp increases in kids' direct influence on spending, and that will be inclusive of parents' purchases to their choices on SVoD!

We'll continue to experiment at idea stage

What worked in past will not necessarily work in future

If you had to predict what sort of kids' content will be selling in five years' time, what would say?

Kids are much more in-tuned consumers than ever before, and the ecosystem around them is ever-changing as a consequence. What does all this mean us? ***It means that what worked in the past will not necessarily work in the near future***, and what may work today will need to be up to par to what kids expect, otherwise they'll switch off the moment they're not captivated. That's one tough customer!

Kids content in the future should allow the kids avatars to be part of the narrative, and the avatar itself grows within the story, as the storyline develops as the kid gets older. That in itself is an immersive, interconnected parallel life that ultimately translates into honing kids' knowledge, skills, intelligence, and all the meanwhile, going through an adventurous journey!

As a result, kids are a core segment we are focusing on at MBC GROUP. ***Our principal drive is to serve this restless demographic with the best of what's available in this new ecosystem***. In tandem, we'll continue to explore and experiment at the idea stage with new concepts, new technologies, development journeys, and ultimately serve content that's safe-centric, quality-based, and readily available that ultimately translates into increased and sustained engagement. That's not a predication, but more so, an effective work-plan!



VIACOM INTERNATIONAL
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VH1



The thematic channel group

Nina Hahn, SVP Production &
Development Nickelodeon, Viacom
Int. Media Networks

Viacom International Media Networks is division of Viacom Inc. and is comprised of many of the world's most popular multimedia entertainment brands, including Comedy Central, MTV, Nickelodeon, Nick Jr., Paramount Channel and Spike.

Viacom brands reach more than 3.9 billion cumulative subscribers in 180+ countries and territories via more than 200 locally programmed and operated TV channels and more than 550 digital media and mobile TV properties, in more than 40 languages.



We're witnessing three top passion points for kids

New global production models tie in well

What new trends are you noticing in terms of the type of content that is being made for kids?

Instead of focusing on content trends, we prefer to look at the trends we see in kids themselves which in turn influences the type of content we develop and produce.

In Viacom's recent Kids of the World study, our global research team spoke directly with kids across 31 countries to hear their views first hand and see the world from their perspectives. We've learned that despite today's fluid world, kids have very positive, empowered attitudes toward life. ***The support received from family is at the heart of this, and kids today are very open in sharing their lives with their parents.*** Friends are also an important source of support and fun for kids and beyond the value of having friends, being a good friend is becoming more important to them. We also found that kids today view themselves as highly independent, curious and creative – 88 percent of kids use their free time to build new skills, even though watching TV remains the top way for them to relax. Given this meaningful knowledge of our audiences' attitudes and traits, we are able to create content that speaks directly to them through broad, simple and emotional ideas that also infuse play.

Are you seeing any developments in terms of the way kids' content is financed?

In more recent years, international partners have been coming together to finance shows and make, in essence, a global financing/creative quilt. These financially frugal new global production models also align with our beliefs at Nickelodeon that great content can originate from anywhere.

Examples of local Nickelodeon shows to have expanded development for an international audience include House of Anubis which had a Dutch and then German version before an Anglo format was made, I Am Frankie which originated as *Yo Soy Franky* in Latin America and more recently *Hunter Street (De Ludwigs)* which was co-developed between Nick Holland and Nick globally using one script, one set and one crew but two separate productions back to back — one local and one global.

What about budgets overall...is there any discernible trend?

Our overall content budget has grown, and ***we are committed to experimenting with new models that maximize our investment and in particular harness the power of local to 'glocal'.*** We take a 360 approach with our content strategy and depending on the nature of the project, decide which avenues and platforms make the most sense to leverage.

It's critical that we listen to what kids are telling us We view the changes happening as opportunities

What impact have the SVoD players had on the market for kids' content and has the impact been positive or negative?

The rapidly evolving media landscape means more content, wherever and whenever kids want to watch it. ***If we're not willing to evolve and adapt then we'd leave ourselves at risk***, so we view the changes happening as opportunities and thrive on the healthy competition. Among all the change, there is one thing that remains constant — content. To continue producing great characters, great storylines and great partnerships, it's critical that we listen to what kids are telling us. Research is therefore the cornerstone of our foundation as it allows us to know what kids are thinking and feeling and guides everything we do at Nickelodeon.

What impact has YouTube and other social and digital-first platforms had on the overall market for kids' content as well as the way channel-driven kids' producers think about developing content?

Beyond the Netflix and Amazons of the world, ***the proliferation of other digital and social platforms has completely changed the type of content offerings available for kids***. Kids' producers are fully aware of this and know that while developing content to sit on our linear channels remains the priority for us, supporting our short form business and developing content that can speak to more than one platform and different time lengths is also essential.

We believe that the new landscape offers ample opportunities and are continuing to broaden our reach, scale and engagement with new audiences and creative talent around the world. Developments in 2017 included the Nickelodeon Animation Shorts Program and Writers Program and new Viacom Digital Studios - a, cross-divisional unit focused on creating and expanding short form content across Viacom and our portfolio of global entertainment brands. We also launched Nick Play and Nick Jr. Play in the UK – mobile experiences that offer pre-schoolers their favourite Nickelodeon and Nick Jr. shows, games and music in one. We have also introduced interactive, play-along episode technology for Blaze and the Monster Machines in our NOGGIN app (US, Latin America). The play-along videos allow pre-schoolers to engage with their favourite Blaze characters by tapping, touching, swiping or speaking to ***navigate through enhanced educational experiences that promote science, technology, engineering, math and social-emotional skills in a fun way***.

We take 360 approach to every piece of content

There is room in the current ecosystem for everything

When developing a kids show, how do you think strategically about each type of platform (TV channel/YouTube/SVoD) and what is the interplay between them for a given kids property/franchise?

We take a full 360 approach towards every piece of content we make and try to develop content that's platform agnostic so that kids can consume Nickelodeon content seamlessly on the platform of their choice.

Our work with break-out star and teen influencer *JoJo Siwa* is a great example of our 360 model in action. JoJo burst into the Nickelodeon family in 2016 and we, much like our audience, fell in love with her fun and vibrant personality as well as her stance against bullying. Since then, our work with her has extended into a global consumer products program, headlining performances at our tent pole events, a TV special on her life as well as co-hosting duties on *Lip Sync Battle Shorties*.

Why do you think kids' linear channels remain strong given the behavioural shifts in the younger audience would suggest a move away from linear?

TV has always been a key platform historically and will continue to be so. However, kids want their content to be accessible and we realize the importance of being everywhere our audience is. ***Our focus remains on delivering great characters, great storylines and relatable content that kids can enjoy wherever they are.***

How important is gender in young kids' programming...have there been any moves to non-gendered content for younger kids?

A central part of Nickelodeon's DNA is to create content that promotes gender parity— it's one of the big defining characteristics that sets us apart and it's important for viewers to come to the channel knowing that they can expect this type of offering. For example, some of our shows that feature empowering female characters include *Nella the Princess Knight*, *I Am Frankie* and our newest live action series *Knight Squad*.

Opportunities can come from literally anywhere

We strive to be everywhere kids are

Have there been any changes in where you look for new kids characters or development opportunities?

While our overarching creative ambition remains the same – to make the very best content we can for our audiences around the world, how we do this has been the biggest game changer. In the increasingly competitive and evolving creative landscape, opportunities can come from literally anywhere, so it's crucial to broaden where we source, create and seek inspiration. We will continue to develop great characters, great storylines, great partnerships and great research from around the world to create franchises that have the power to excite and engage kids everywhere.

Thinking about all the changes in viewing behaviour/platforms and distribution, what sort of kids' content will buyers be looking for in five years' time?

If only I knew! But what I do know is that Nickelodeon continues (as it always has) to have its finger on the pulse of what appeals to kids around the world. ***We strive to be everywhere kids are and the next five years for us will continue with that mantra*** — plus so much more!



The digital-first studio
Samreen Ghani, Head of
Operations, WildBrain

WildBrain manages and creates preschool and children's entertainment content on platforms such as YouTube, Amazon Video Direct and others. WildBrain's branded YouTube network is one of the largest of its kind, featuring more than 65,000 videos for 600 kids' brands in up to 22 languages. The WildBrain network generated over 55 billion minutes of watch time from July through December 2017.

Connecting kids' content owners with advertisers in the Advertising Video-on-Demand (AVOD) space, the WildBrain network features popular third-party brands such as *Bob the Builder*, *Fireman Sam*, *Shopkins* and *Lazy Town*, as well as much of DHX Media's world-renowned library of 13,000 half-hours of kids' and family content, including *Peanuts*, *Teletubbies*, *Strawberry Shortcake*, *Caillou*, *Inspector Gadget*, *Degrassi*, *Yo Gabba Gabba!* and many others.

WildBrain Studios also specializes in the creation of new, original content for its network, such as animated and live-action shorts; toy-play and stop-motion videos; book readings; preschool counting and alphabet videos; nursery rhymes and more. WildBrain is a wholly owned subsidiary of DHX



YouTube Kids is go-to app for parents

Screen time is now present throughout the day

What new trends are you noticing in terms of the type of content that is being made for kids in the digital space?

Based on the data we see across our network of YouTube channels, **there continues to be growth in the consumption of animated content.** Year-on-year (February 2017 - February 2018) views of animated videos have increased 40% on YouTube*. There is also a lot of language-agnostic content, with high production values, which is rewarded on platforms such as YouTube because it appeals in many markets. In our experience, we work with content in this style with episodes ranging from as short as 1-2 minutes in length.

Are you seeing any developments in terms of the way kids' content is financed, what innovative or new ways are there to get kids' content made?

We are increasingly seeing a trend of YouTube or digital-first content and are being approached to work with new partners who have built their brands using YouTube, to co-finance their next series. There are also new platforms emerging, including Amazon Video Direct, where premium original content is starting to see promising revenues.

As a destination, how does YouTube differ from other outlets for kids' content or is a distinction irrelevant to a child's mind?

From our research and network figures, it is clear that YouTube and YouTube Kids app have become go-to entertainment options for parents, seeking to quickly and easily entertain their kids. In Q1 2018: 65% of our total watch time was from mobile and tablet, with 22% from Smart TVs. TV viewing via YouTube is on the increase. The huge depth and breadth of options is compelling for parents who appear to be willing to trade seeing ads vs paying for another subscription. Children growing up today are introduced to an 'on-demand' model much earlier, and screen time is now present throughout the day – from TV and gameplay to education and learning at school.

More interest in original content for YouTube Made-for YouTube using classic brands

What can you do with kids' content on YouTube that perhaps isn't so easy on more traditional platforms?

There are two distinct advantages to creating content for YouTube. First is the speed at which you can create. We can turn around short-form animation in as little as three months. The second is data. When we upload episodes, we can quickly monitor performance. ***The data we access on YouTube is anonymous but gives us an indication of where the content is working in which geographical location and with which demographic.*** We use our own proprietary tech and third-party services, to track particular trends that are attracting audiences. We can adapt our content production schedule to include these, refining creative ideas using this direction.

What impact has YouTube and other social and digital-first platforms had on the way kids' content is made in the wider market...has it, for example, impacted duration, the way stories are told or other characteristics?

For the owners of premium content and brands, there is now more interest in producing original content for YouTube and other digital-first platforms, and finding ways to leverage existing IP, in tandem with broadcast deals. YouTube especially is being considered as an important platform to launch new IP.

One area we see having great potential is producing new made-for-YouTube series, using classic brands from the DHX Media library. Key aspects of the brand are retained, but the stories are geared towards popular topics and role models for kids today. At WildBrain, we have perfected a 2D animation production model with YouTube economics in mind, which keeps down the production costs compared to traditional production routes, and enables us to produce the volume we need for YouTube success. For instance, reinventing one of the classic IPs, with a new webisode series of 20 episodes and a modern animation style, has delivered 260 million views to date. The new content has helped to grow the YouTube channel which now boasts one million subscribers.

Trusted brands will become more important Content on YouTube continues to get better and better

When developing a kids' show or character, how do you think strategically about distribution and each type of platform (TV channel/YouTube/SVoD) and what is the interplay between them for a given kids' property/franchise, particularly for content that begins its life on YouTube?

Primarily we are developing for YouTube, with the aim of growing awareness and sustainable revenues from the series we make. Increasingly we are looking at how to take successful live action formats and characters into the animated versions. We have successfully implemented this with one of the IPs that WildBrain acquired last year, *KiddyZuzaa*, and although it is early days we are seeing some promising results across both YouTube and Amazon. As these characters and worlds become more complex and popular, we would then consider opportunities with traditional broadcast. As a subsidiary of DHX Media, we work closely with our Studios and Distribution colleagues to identify where these properties might cross-over.

How important is gender in young kids' programming...have there been any moves to non-gendered content for younger kids and have social platforms influenced the way gender is approached?

This is such an important debate, and one we continually seek to address with new characters we devise. Looking at search and the popular keywords parents look for, these tend to be more neutral, e.g. 'Cartoons for kids'. ***We don't see a focus on 'for girls' or 'for boys' in the way audiences search for content.***

Thinking about all the changes in viewing behaviour/platforms and distribution, what sort of kids' content will be getting made in five years' time...is there a 'next big thing' for kids?

Five years is a long time in the digital space! ***Trusted brands and channels will become more important.*** As will the curation of quality content that is suitable for kids, and the brands that help parents filter the good from the bad. Many of the trends that spring up on YouTube are unpredictable, but share similar hallmarks of traditional toy trends: collectable, imitable and shareable. For example, Slime or Play-doh are not new toys, but making or playing videos where kids can show their own experiments and reactions serve to inspire others. I don't think we're going to see the end of a more UGC (User Generated) aesthetic, but content on YouTube continues to get better and better.



MK_PRODUCTION
SWITZERLAND



The new producer
Madlene Kerry, CEO,
MK_Production Switzerland

Founded in 2016, Geneva-based MK_Production created and produced the pre-school animated series *Alpine Story* with the aim of moving away from stereotypical views of Switzerland. MK_Production is currently seeking a co-production partner for season 2 of *Alpine Story*.

Originally produced in French (now also dubbed to English and Russian), the story is designed to unite countries bordering the Alps and teach collaboration between children.

MK_Productions recently took on distribution of Russian kids' animation *Jingliks*.



Duration depends on the age category

Adventures, stories with magic & superpowers key

What new trends are you noticing in terms of the type of content (duration/type/story focus) that is being made for kids

Nowadays, the main popular children's areas are game educational formats, adventures, stories with magic and superpowers. And also, a special and popular genre of stories about / with monsters and zombies. Duration depends on the age category. In my opinion and from the point of view of psychologists, 3-4 minutes series are great for small children, 6 minutes episodes for pre-school age at the same time I should notice here that it is pretty complicated to respect these time frames, both for children and parents because of the great diversity of animation.

Are you seeing any developments in terms of the way kids' content is financed?

Everything depends on the country. If we consider the European market, then it more about classical schemes, used and followed for years, that are gradually adjusting/updating themselves now to the world market. We see not a progressive investment in children's content in Russia and China, which significantly affects the quality of the animation itself.

What about budgets overall...is there any discernible trend (up or down)?

Yes, of course it's growing up. I think the answer that would be common today for the main part of the companies, is that that the **budgets are growing permanently; which is normal because competition on the market is harsh** and every company want to deliver the best result possible.

What impact have the SVoD players (Netflix, Amazon etc.) had on the market for kids' content and has the impact been positive or negative?

Obviously, the large SVODs plays a significant role today and influences the entire rental market. Is it positive? Yes, in case if they have chosen you. If not, you're in trouble. And of course, everyone wants to approach them and even just to show it. Often, you have to hear from different levels of animation producers/providers what they worked for Netflix, Amazon, etc., although this is not always the case ... it is more an advertisement. They think that if they operate "big names", then I will immediately sign a contract with them. And this strategy, I believe, is fully wrong. **People hide themselves behind the successful names**, forgetting about their own achievements, and this is kind of dependence on large companies, and there is almost no development among small production companies.

What impact has YouTube and other social and digital-first platforms had on the overall market for kids' content as well as the way channel-driven kids' producers think about developing content?

As for the Youtube, I believe it's much easier for the creator/author. Generally, you upload and wait, when subscribers will pay attention to your product. And the quality does not matter here at all. You can shoot a home video with a gift opening, or a high-quality animation and the result could be the same. But there are also pros and cons. Many experts believe that if the project did not score a certain number of likes per day / week / month, then it is no longer interesting. And with this I also do not agree. That is not the fault of the Youtube or Netflix, this is the perception of the society/public and it's scary that no one and nothing is noticed, there is a limit bar and it must be respected. But anyway, at the moment, the modern media market is at the stage of development and formation. ***In two or three years, everything will look different and I believe that the result of this boom will bring the positive results.***

When developing a kids show, how do you think strategically about each type of platform (TV channel/YouTube/SVoD) and what is the interplay between them for a given kids property/franchise?

As a professional yes, I have to think about the platforms and how to match to their multiple demands with the same product but first of all I think about the quality and the story. You know, following the rules in a clever manner allows us to keep our company standards high and at the same time to comply with the platforms' rules like optimal timing for example. Regarding the platforms' interplay, in my opinion it does exist but there is no reason to overestimate its potential impact on the popularity of the product, I mean here that one product/one concept can be popular on Youtube and ...let's say ignored on the other platform.

Why do you think kids' linear channels remain strong given the behavioural shifts in the younger audience would suggest a move away from linear?

I am not sure that I agree completely here with your statement that there is a behavioural shift to move away from the linear channels to mobile TV channels for example. I think that linear channels still have better quality of the content, and anyway in my home, for example, linear channels are more popular than mobile ones.

Content should be psychologically safe New horizons will appear for development

Have there been any changes in where you look for new kids characters or development opportunities?

I can say that my vision is traditional, in my opinion the animation for the small children should be of course interesting, then psychologically safe (which is extremely important nowadays), and educational if possible. I find my inspiration in nature. For me the best opportunity for business developments is the highest quality of my animation, plus great songs and dubbing.

Thinking about all the changes in viewing behaviour/platforms and distribution, what sort of kids' content will buyers be looking for in five years' time?

What I said above, that now it is the process of media formation. And there will be new platforms, new opportunities for everyone. Schemes will be more transparent and accessible. The opportunities on existing platforms will go down, but new horizons will appear for the right development of children's content.

About the Author



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Ampere Analysis is a new breed of analyst firm founded January 2015 by an experienced team of sector-leading entertainment industry analysts. Ampere specialises in research, forecasts and insight on the content market, pay & multiscreen TV and next-generation content distribution and delivers insight through four online data services, all with global coverage:

- **Ampere Markets:** Global company-level KPIs, analysis and forecasts on the pay TV, OTT, broadband, mobile, advertising and multichannel markets covering customers, revenues, ARPU and growth, providing an informed view on the future winners and losers in the fast-evolving TV distribution space.
- **Ampere Consumer:** Insight on the TV consumption behaviour, device trends and content preferences of TV viewers in 16 key markets, including the USA. Based on regular 33,000-sample surveys, Ampere Consumer helps you to understand how your audience is reacting to the changing media landscape.
- **Ampere Analytics:** A deep-dive analysis of the content market and content licensing at a title level, Ampere Analytics' Content Track provides key metrics about the world's leading VOD and SVoD services across international markets.
- **Ampere Channels:** Analysis of the global TV channel market providing insight into carriage deals, reach & platform relationships.

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