# TV remains a key cultural bridge between UK generations despite shifting viewing habits



TV remains a vibrant and unifying medium across generations in the UK, challenging the prevailing assumption that younger audiences have largely abandoned traditional television. ITV’s recent research initiative, What Unites Generations, conducted in partnership with Crowd DNA, surveyed over 1,500 individuals aged 18 to 78 to explore how people connect across age groups. The findings revealed that TV continues to serve as an important shared cultural experience, not only for older viewers but for younger ones as well, who often consume content in ways that differ from typical industry expectations.

Despite the common perception among media professionals—particularly those immersed in fast-paced, urban environments—that younger audiences are disengaged from TV, this belief appears rooted in a proximity bias. This cognitive distortion causes individuals to assume their personal habits represent the norm, overlooking how diverse audiences use media. For example, some young people, like a 17-year-old profiled in ITV’s ethnographic research, maintain viewing rituals such as watching popular soap operas together with family members, underscoring television’s role as a social glue rather than a relic.

The research also upended stereotypes about Generation Z’s attitudes. While media often portrays them as highly socially conscious and politically active, the survey found that Gen Z participants expressed significant financial anxiety and were the most likely to feel that freedom of expression has "gone too far." Rather than being disengaged or apathetic, this generation appears pragmatic, setting their media consumption on their own terms, often blending traditional TV with digital platforms.

However, these findings stand somewhat at odds with data from national broadcasters and regulatory bodies. Ofcom reports, for example, illustrate a notable decline in live TV viewing among young adults aged 16 to 24, dropping from 76% in 2018 to just 48% in recent years. This shift is largely attributed to the rising popularity of on-demand streaming and video-sharing services like YouTube and TikTok, where younger viewers now spend more time than on conventional broadcast TV. Such statistics highlight a broader fragmentation of viewing habits that the industry must navigate.

Still, ITV’s research stresses television’s unique ability to bridge generational divides. Across respondents, many expressed a desire to learn from both older and younger generations, with TV providing organic opportunities for such exchanges. Unlike digital content tailored to individual preferences, television programmes—from family dramas to quiz shows—offer shared reference points that foster conversations and cultural understanding. The medium’s emotional impact and reach remain significant assets for advertisers and cultural commentators alike.

In sum, while live TV viewing among young people may be declining, television as a whole is far from obsolete. It persists as a medium that connects generations, anchors cultural rituals, and reflects shared societal concerns. The ITV research ultimately suggests that the true anomaly is not the enduring popularity of TV but the industry’s occasional detachment from the broader, more varied audience realities beyond the urban media bubble.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://uk.themedialeader.com/dont-let-your-london-flatmate-decide-the-media-plan/), [[2]](https://www.itvmedia.co.uk/research/what-unites-generations)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://uk.themedialeader.com/dont-let-your-london-flatmate-decide-the-media-plan/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://uk.themedialeader.com/dont-let-your-london-flatmate-decide-the-media-plan/), [[2]](https://www.itvmedia.co.uk/research/what-unites-generations)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/article/2024/jul/31/less-than-half-young-people-uk-watch-live-television-ofcom), [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crgm9z1dpkpo), [[7]](https://www.ft.com/content/bffd62d2-5e5f-4df3-bd8a-ef4596eabbe4)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://uk.themedialeader.com/dont-let-your-london-flatmate-decide-the-media-plan/), [[2]](https://www.itvmedia.co.uk/research/what-unites-generations)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://uk.themedialeader.com/dont-let-your-london-flatmate-decide-the-media-plan/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://uk.themedialeader.com/dont-let-your-london-flatmate-decide-the-media-plan/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.itvmedia.co.uk/research/what-unites-generations> - ITV's 'What Unites Generations' research, conducted with Crowd DNA, surveyed over 1,500 individuals aged 18-78 to explore how people connect across age groups. The study revealed that television remains a powerful shared experience for both younger and older audiences, challenging the assumption that younger viewers have abandoned traditional TV. The research also highlighted that Gen Z, often portrayed as socially conscious and politically engaged, expressed the highest level of financial anxiety and were the most likely to believe that 'freedom of expression has gone too far'.
3. <https://www.itvmedia.co.uk/research/what-unites-young-adults> - ITV's 'What Unites Young Adults' research, in collaboration with Crowd DNA, focused on understanding the cultural truths of young adults. The study found that 69% of young adults believe they will be worse off than their parents' generation, yet they remain hopeful. The research also highlighted a conscious prioritisation of self-awareness, self-control, and self-determination among young adults, influencing their behaviours, beliefs, and engagement with content.
4. <https://www.itvmedia.co.uk/research/what-unites-a-kingdom> - ITV's 'What Unites a Kingdom' research, conducted with Crowd DNA, aimed to uncover the evolving codes and customs of Britishness. The study identified five main codes of shared cultural DNA, including 'Everyday Magic', which 74% of respondents felt unites the nation. The research emphasised the importance of social graces, a desire to keep up appearances, and a belief in internal strength and community resilience as unifying factors in British culture.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/article/2024/jul/31/less-than-half-young-people-uk-watch-live-television-ofcom> - An Ofcom report revealed that less than half of 16-24-year-olds in the UK watch live television weekly, marking a significant shift in viewing habits. The study found that only 48% of young adults tuned in during an average week, compared to 76% in 2018. This decline is attributed to the rise of on-demand services and video-sharing platforms, with young viewers spending more time on platforms like YouTube and TikTok than on traditional TV.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crgm9z1dpkpo> - The BBC reported that, for the first time, less than half of 16 to 24-year-olds in the UK watch traditional TV each week. The Ofcom study found that only 48% of young adults tuned in during an average week, compared to 76% in 2018. The decline is linked to the increasing popularity of streaming services and video-sharing platforms, with young viewers spending more time on platforms like YouTube and TikTok than on traditional TV.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/bffd62d2-5e5f-4df3-bd8a-ef4596eabbe4> - The Financial Times reported that less than half of young audiences in the UK watch broadcast television weekly, according to an Ofcom study. In 2023, only 48% of 16-24-year-olds tuned in to regular broadcast services each week, down from 76% in 2018. The decline is attributed to the rise of video-sharing platforms like YouTube and TikTok, which are particularly popular among younger viewers, who now spend more time on these platforms than on traditional TV.