UKCCIS
UK COUNCIL FOR CHILD INTERNET SAFETY

Parenting for a Digital Future

What Do Parents Think and Do About Their Children's Online Privacy? Parenting for a Digital Future: Survey Report 3

Aims

This report, the third in a series, is based on a nationally representative survey of 2,032 UK parents of children aged 0-17 years old. It examines how UK parents view their own and their children's digital privacy, whether and how they share images of their children online, and how they negotiate new norms about parents' roles in supporting their child's safety and fostering their independence online. It aims to understand how to ensure that parents and children are prepared to navigate issues to privacy online.

Key Findings

- Online privacy is the top barrier for parents' internet use – while overall, parents report few barriers that limit their use of the internet, among those who do report barriers, privacy is the top concern – 12% of parents say this. Most parents (89%) go online 'almost daily' or more, and 11% of them say privacy concerns lead them to limit their internet use. Low frequency users are even more concerned about privacy – 17% say this, although their main barrier is lack of time.

- Parents' investment in new technology is growing, despite privacy concerns – this now includes smart home devices (e.g., Amazon Echo, Google Home), wearables and Virtual Reality devices, although these parents (more often younger parents and those from higher socio-economic status households) are still in the minority overall.

- Digital privacy skills are not universal amongst parents or children – while 58% of parents say they can change their privacy settings and 53% say they can decide which information to share online, these skills are not evenly spread. Mothers report greater ability to change privacy settings than fathers, for instance, even though fathers report that they are more concerned about privacy (and though fathers report greater creative digital skills like coding and editing). Parents report that children's skills increase with age, although there are still considerable gaps. For instance, among parents of 9-12 year olds, only 44% think their child is able to decide which information he or she should or should not share online, compared to 56% of parents of 13-17 year olds.

- Parents who are especially concerned about privacy also share more images or videos of their child online. Although parents who are concerned about privacy share more widely and more frequently about their children, they are also more likely to have asked their children for permission or to have shared at their child's request. It seems that, for them, the benefits (for example, keeping in touch with family and friends) outweigh their concerns. A few parents (5%) report they later regretted sharing images or videos of their child online.

- Privacy is a difficult balancing act for parents – both checking on their children online and encouraging their independence. Only 14% of parents of 9-12 year olds, though 48% of parents of 13-17 year olds, judged their child as old enough to have privacy from them online. On average, parents check their child's friends or messages on social media 'sometimes,' sometimes also 'friending' or 'following' them on social media.

Policy Context

Debates about personal data and online privacy often make assumptions about parents' digital skills and sharing practices, how they view their children's online privacy, and whether parents have the skills to translate concerns about privacy into practical action. This report shows that policy-makers need to ensure that parents and children are better prepared to navigate issues of privacy online, and that developers take seriously concerns about privacy, so that parents and children do not sacrifice personal privacy for the sake of much-valued services and opportunities to connect online.

Methodology

A nationally representative survey was carried out of 2,032 parents of children aged 0-17. Participants were recruited via an online panel, supplemented with a sample of low or non-internet users interviewed in-person. Participants were representative by region across the UK, representative by ethnic background, socio-economic status (SES), gender, and inclusion of parents with low or no internet use. The data were collected in 2017. Questions for the survey were based on findings from our previous in-depth qualitative interviews and fieldwork with parents, carers, educators, children and young people from 73 families and in learning sites across London, and our review of the relevant literature. For the full methodology, including a definition of socio-economic status (SES) categories, data tables and the full survey questionnaire, see www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/research/research-projects/preparing-for-a-digital-future.

Background

Researchers in the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science conducted a three-year research project on Preparing for a Digital Future supported by a grant from the MacArthur Foundation from 2014-2017, of which this study is part. The research includes qualitative case studies and a quantitative UK-wide study of how children and their parents, carers, mentors and educators imagine and prepare for their personal and work futures in a digital age.

Source

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http://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/assets/documents/research/preparing-for-a-digital-future/P4DF-Report-3.pdf

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