

The Experiences of Children Aged 11-12 on Social Networking Sites

Aims

Social networking is one of the most popular online activities among children. Large numbers of children in the UK have a profile on at least one social networking site. The NSPCC wanted to find out what kinds of experiences children were having on social networking sites, and in particular what sort of experiences they found upsetting. Many sites have a minimum age of 13, and so this Research Highlight focuses on examining the experiences of children aged 11-12 to determine how many are using these services below the specified age limit.

Key Findings

- Based on our research, half of all 11-12 year olds in the UK have a profile on a social networking site where the minimum age is 13.
- The most popular sites with 11-12 year olds are: Facebook (63%), YouTube (45%), Moshi Monsters (30%), Club Penguin (28%), Twitter (28%), GooglePlus (15%), and Instagram (8%).
- Almost a quarter (23%) of 11 and 12 year olds who have a profile on a social networking site say that they have been upset by something on it over the last year.
- 11-12 year olds were more likely to have experienced something that bothered them when they were using sites aimed at an older audience. For example, 23% experienced something which upset them on Facebook compared to 6% who experienced something upsetting on Club Penguin, which requires parental verification for children under the age 13.
- The most common upsetting experience was 'trolling', experienced by 45% of children aged 11-12.
- Other upsetting experiences were: aggressive or violent language (23%), being excluded from a social group or friendship (23%), being sent unwanted sexual messages (22%), being asked to send personal information or had it used without permission (17%). A greater proportion of 11-12 year olds reported being upset by these experiences compared to 13-16 year olds.
- In the majority of cases (62%) the person/people responsible was someone the child only knew online, a complete stranger, or they didn't know who it was at all. Twenty per cent identified the person responsible as 'a complete stranger'.
- Negative experiences on social networking sites are experienced frequently by some children. Sixty per cent of younger children said it happened at least once a month and 20% said it happened every day or almost every day.
- Younger children felt particularly distressed about these experiences, reporting that they felt ashamed, embarrassed, humiliated, vulnerable, threatened and betrayed. Around a fifth (18%) of 11-12 year olds felt upset or scared for weeks or months after the incident occurred.
- When they have been upset or bothered by something on a social networking site, 11-12 year olds were significantly more likely than children aged 13-16 to stop using the website for a while (34% vs. 19%), to stop using the internet for a while (14% vs. 3%), and proportionately more likely to shut down their account completely (12% vs. 8%). They were less likely to change their privacy or

contact settings (12% vs. 20%) or to block the person or people from contacting them in the future (18% vs. 34%). Only 10% chose to report the experiences that upset them to the social networking provider.

- Younger children were more likely than older children to disclose their experiences to someone else (30% vs. 19%). The majority of younger children (81%) would talk to a parent or carer. Therefore, younger children may be receptive to messages from their parents about the benefits and risks of online social networking.

Methodology

In December 2012, the NSPCC conducted an online self-completion survey of 1024 11 to 16 year olds in the UK. Interviewees were recruited by a market research agency, ResearchBods, who had a pre-existing panel of over 45,000 children. Interviewees received a written explanation of the research aims before signing a consent form. Their parents had previously given their consent for their child(ren) to be part of the online panel, and were given the opportunity to opt-out of this particular survey due to its sensitive nature. Each interviewee received a modest honorarium. Questionnaire completion lasted an average of seven minutes, and comprised of a series of questions presented online. Twenty eight per cent of the sample was aged 11 and 12. For results based on this group, we can say with 95% confidence that the error margin attributable to sampling and other random effects is +/- 5.86 per cent.

Background

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) is here to end cruelty to children in the UK by fighting for their rights, listening to them, helping them and making them safe. We do this by seeking to influence legislation, policy, practice, attitudes and behaviours for the benefit of children and young people. This is achieved through a combination of service provision, campaigning, lobbying and public education. Our services include the NSPCC Helpline, for adults worried about a child, and ChildLine, the UK's free, confidential helpline for children and young people. To that end we work in partnership with the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), UKCCIS (The UK Council for Child Internet Safety) and a range of other charities via CHIS (the Children's Charities Coalition on Internet Safety). We are also a member of the European NGO Alliance for Child Safety Online (eNACSO).

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Full report from http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/resourcesforprofessionals/onlinesafety/younger-children-report_wdf99929.pdf

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RH#60 has been produced by the NSPCC for the UKCCIS Evidence Group