

The Experiences of Children Aged 11-16 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. This Research Highlight focuses on the experiences of children aged 11-16.

Key Findings

- Facebook is the most popular social networking site amongst 11-16 year olds, with 84% of respondents using it regularly. Other popular sites were: YouTube (60%), Twitter (50%), Instagram (19%), GooglePlus (17%), Club Penguin (15%), tumblr (15%), and Moshi Monsters (11%).
- Young people's favourite aspects of social networking sites were speaking to friends, keeping up to date with gossip, sharing photos and all their friends being on there. They enjoy learning new things via social networking sites and opportunities to be creative, as well as the feeling of belonging to a community of people.
- The things they disliked most about social networking sites were adverts (29%), spam (18%), spending too much time on there (18%), and people being hurtful and rude without realising (17%).
- More than a quarter of young people (28%) who used social network sites had had an experience which had upset or bothered them in the last year. Twenty four per cent of Facebook users experienced something upsetting. For other popular sites the figures were: YouTube (16%), Twitter (14%), Instagram (7%), GooglePlus (9%), Club Penguin (7%), tumblr (18%), and Moshi Monsters (6%).
- The most common upsetting experience was trolling (37%), followed by being excluded from certain social groups (22%), aggressive or violent language (18%), feeling pressure to look or act a certain way (14%), cyber stalking (12%), unwanted sexual messages (12%), racism (10%), being asked to send personal information or had it used without permission (8%), and being asked to send or respond to a sexual message (8%).
- Over a tenth (11%) reported it happening every day and over half (55%) reported it happening at least once a month.
- Many children (19%) reported that upsetting experiences affected them for a few days (19%), whilst some felt this way for weeks or even months (10%).
- Only 2 out of 10 children (22%) spoke face to face with someone about their experience, most often a parent or carer (66%), and/or a friend (51%). Others (7%) shared it with someone online, but the majority tried to deal with the problem themselves.
- Over half of 11-16 year olds (58%) believed the person responsible for the behaviour which had upset or bothered them was either a complete stranger, someone they only knew online, or they didn't know who it was at all.

- Half of children and young people felt that social networking sites took their safety seriously and would take action if they reported abuse. Over a quarter of children (26%) who used the report or help button said that no action was taken in response.
- Girls were more likely to be upset by an online experience than boys (32% vs. 24%). Although a smaller proportion of boys than girls reported being upset when using social networking sites, those boys who were upset, were upset more often than girls – with 16% of boys vs. 8% of girls being upset every day.

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. For results based on the total sample, we can say with 95% confidence that the error margin attributable to sampling and other random effects is +/- 3.06%.

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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