

Net Aware Report 2017: “Freedom to Express Myself Safely”

Aims

The Net Aware Report 2017: “Freedom to express myself safely” aims to provide a snapshot of young people’s online lives. It explores the opportunities they benefit from alongside the risks they face on a daily basis. Using data from the NSPCC and O2’s 2017 Net Aware research with 1,696 11-18yr olds, this report seeks to amplify the voices of children and young people – exploring what they like about the online space, as well as highlighting the factors that prevent them from using it safely. Children and young people are experts in their own online experiences, and this report allows us to learn from them and gain better insight into their digital reality.

Key Findings

Young people are motivated by enjoyment in their exploration of the online space. They value opportunities for:

- Fun: Respondents are enthusiastic about the potential for fun and enjoyment online; this includes sharing funny videos, posting photos and playing games.
- Communication: The social opportunities provided by the internet serve a range of purposes for respondents including keeping in touch with friends and family, school work and employment advice, testing boundaries, and building communities and social groups.
- Self-expression, self-representation and creativity: Scope for self-expression is found in the imaginative nature of games, the potential for exploration and freedom, and the creative functionality of some platforms.
- Online autonomy: Young people feel empowered when sites offer effective tools to keep them safe online. They praise robust privacy settings, and effective reporting and blocking mechanisms.

However, these positive experiences are too often tainted by negative ones – one in four (997 out of 3,975) reviews stated that the platform being reviewed was risky. This was across all sites included in the research. The primary risks identified were:

- Interaction with strangers: This includes unwanted friend requests and sexual or offensive messages, as well as fears about lack of privacy.
- Inappropriate content: This is particularly prevalent on sites and apps with live streaming functionality.
 - Violence and hatred: One in three (1,194 out of 3,975) young people’s reviews reported seeing violent and hateful content. This may be in user-generated content, footage from the news or fictional violence in games.

- Sexual: One in five (815 out of 3,975) young people's reviews reported seeing sexual content including accidentally finding it, being sent sexual messages, or being encouraged to share sexual content themselves.
- Bullying: Just under one in five (772 out of 3,975) young people's reviews reported seeing bullying. Some noted bullying within a social group, while others indicated that the opportunity to be anonymous on some platforms was facilitating bullying behaviour.

Based on what these young people have told us, we propose a series of recommendations for government, industry and parents to ensure the internet can be a place for fun, communication, self-expression and creativity, and not a place of unnecessary risk.

Policy Context

Whilst most sites, apps and games have their own codes of practice, there is a lack of transparency about the effectiveness of their safety and reporting features, and no consistency across platforms. The current system does not ensure the safety of children and young people online: there is a need for greater protections, such as the introduction of consistent minimum standards upheld by all sites, apps and games used by children and young people.

Methodology

This research was conducted to feed into the NSPCC and O2's [Net Aware](#) guide, a parent-facing website and app about the most popular sites, apps and games used by young people. The 2017 sample consisted of 1,696 11–18 year olds who were engaged through schools across the UK and Childline's engagement platforms (e.g., Facebook). Young people were asked to complete a survey that included general questions about their online behaviour and knowledge around online safety, as well to conduct detailed reviews of specific platforms. The data collection ran from December 2016 to February 2017. The NSPCC and O2 also consulted with 674 parents and carers through the research firm, YouGov.

Source: Net Aware Report 2017: "Freedom to express myself safely"

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/services-and-resources/research-and-resources/2017/net-aware-report-freedom-to-express-myself-safely>

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