



# Children's online behaviour: issues of risk and trust

## Qualitative research findings

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## Section 1

# 1. Executive summary

## 1.1 Introduction

Sherbert Research was commissioned by Ofcom to conduct qualitative research on how children think about and manage online risks, and if and how they decide what sources to trust online. Ofcom has a statutory duty to further the interests of citizens in relation to communications matters, and is guided by a regulatory duty to promote media literacy, including among children. Ofcom conducts regular research on how children use telecommunications services. To date, there has been little in-depth research on children's critical thinking skills online, and this research furthers understanding in this important area.

The research was designed to address the following core questions relating to children's critical thinking:

- Do children understand the issues and risks around their personal data and their wider online activity and what, if any, strategies do they employ to manage these issues and risks?
- How do they decide which external information sources to trust online, and what authentication approaches do they use?

The study focused on a cross-section of children and young people aged 8 to 17 across the UK. A triangulation-based research approach was used, consisting of groups of three friends (termed 'friendship triads' in this research), one-to-one 'accompanied surfs' and filmed, unmoderated sessions<sup>1</sup>. In total, 54 individual respondents took part in 36 research sessions. Fieldwork was conducted in February and March 2014.

Throughout this report, 'younger children' refers to those aged 8-11, 'tweens' to those aged 11-14 and 'teenagers' to those aged 14-17.

## 1.2 Key findings: online risks<sup>2</sup>

### **Children's theoretical understanding of online risks was relatively good, and stems mainly from parents and school**

All children and young people who participated in this research recognised that there was some degree of risk associated with going online.

Parents were a key source of information about risks, as well as mediators of online behaviour.

In addition, many children recalled receiving formal education at school about the risks of the online world, and this appears to have made a marked impact on their understanding of online risks. A number of specific school initiatives were mentioned, including being shown information videos and attending annual talks designed to raise awareness of the biggest issues.

The media also played a role in developing awareness and understanding of risks. A number of sources of online safety messages were cited, ranging from news to dramatisations of real events and 'edutainment' programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> A complementary qualitative methodology developed by Sherbert Research conducted among a small group of friends, comprising a number of structured discussion tasks, all filmed by a static camera and without the presence of an external (adult) moderator to facilitate a more candid conversation within a friendship group.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that this research did not ask children explicitly about "risks". Rather, the methodology was designed to capture the children's own views of their online behaviour and possible issues arising, which at analysis stage were categorised as risks or otherwise.

### **Contact risks were perceived to be the most serious, particularly by younger children**

Overall, the online risk of which children and young people were most aware was ‘stranger danger’ or malicious contact from strangers online. While direct experience of this risk was negligible, there was a high level of concern expressed, particularly by younger children who tended to associate this with potentially extreme consequences, such as being kidnapped.

Among tweens and teenagers, girls highlighted the possibility of receiving unsolicited male contact online. The experience of this type of contact risk was relatively common among this cohort and while of concern to some, it appeared that others accepted this as a normal part of the online environment.

There was also high awareness, across all age groups, of the risks of cyberbullying. It was understood that being bullied online could cause substantial emotional distress in the same way as offline bullying. The risk of personally experiencing cyberbullying was a worry, particularly to younger children.

In addition, there were mentions of the risk of having online accounts and profiles ‘hacked’. Hacking was of concern, particularly to younger children, due to the perceived potential for manipulation or even blackmail by someone pretending to be them. Tweens and teenagers also identified fraudulent activity as a potential repercussion of hacking, along with the possibility of getting viruses which cause damage to devices.

### **Content risks were also of concern to younger children, while older groups tended to be less concerned about exposure to inappropriate content**

While contact risks were considered the most serious overall, younger children also had concerns about exposure to inappropriate content. Swear words were the most top-of-mind inappropriate online content among this age group. Younger boys were also aware of the existence of graphic scenes in video games. At this age, many worried about seeing such content accidentally.

Tweens, and particularly teens, had greater awareness of the range of visually inappropriate material that they might encounter, including graphic scenes of crime, violence and pornography. However, for older children the existence of such graphic content online appeared to be fairly normalised. Although most claimed that they would not deliberately seek out such content, they were less concerned about the prospect of seeing it inadvertently.

### **Children were aware of how to avoid the most serious risks online, but these approaches were not always consistently practised**

The majority of children and young people were able to cite examples of risk-taking behaviour online and the sorts of actions that they knew they should avoid. These included:

- Revealing publicly where they live or exactly where they are at any given moment
- Sharing their passwords
- Communicating with anyone they don’t ‘know’
- Seeking out content unsuitable for their age
- Visiting websites detected as ‘unsafe’
- Uploading rude or risqué photos

In addition, all age groups appeared to be aware of some common approaches to managing online risks, such as the ability to block and report rude or aggressive users on social networking and virtual world sites, use PayPal to make online purchasing ‘safe’ or run virus detection software to check whether sites are safe to use.

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However, these techniques were not always applied or used consistently. For some, this was because risks were not top-of-mind in their day-to-day internet use. There were also some countervailing influences which encouraged risk-taking, particularly among older children, as reported below.

### **The propensity for risky conduct online was higher among older children**

Many younger children were aware of unintentional conduct risks such as accidental spending via in-app purchasing or inadvertently seeing inappropriate content online.

However, engagement in risky conduct online appeared to increase during the tween and teenage years. Some tweens were beginning to experiment with some risky behaviour in the online world and, for teenagers, risk-taking behaviour of varying degrees had become normalised. The main risky behaviours reported included illegal downloading and communicating with unknown people. There were also some mentions of peers who were 'sexting' although none admitted doing this themselves.

### **Image management was a key driver of online risk-taking, and some features of the online environment facilitated this**

Most teenagers were concerned with their image, whether on- or offline, and there was also a natural tendency, both on- and offline, to assert independence and to experiment. These factors were key drivers of online risk-taking.

Some intrinsic aspects of the online environment served to facilitate risk-taking by teenagers for the purposes of image management. For example, interacting online provides greater anonymity and enables image enhancements to be made in order to project a more confident, or otherwise idealised version of their real-life selves.

Other online features that potentially aid risk-taking include the ability to:

- privately communicate with 'strangers' or people who were 'met' online;
- view inappropriate content in a covert way; and
- purchase goods from unfamiliar and untested retailers.

### **There was some active trading-off of risk versus reward**

It was apparent that some young people were weighing up the possible repercussions of risky behaviour to determine whether an online risk would be worth taking. In doing so, the perceived benefit (e.g. fun, popularity, accessing the latest brands etc.) was often felt to outweigh any potential negative outcomes.

### **Consideration of long-term repercussions of online risks was negligible**

The perceived repercussions of risks were mostly fairly immediate, and most participants had not considered any longer-term potential consequences. Future reputational issues related to online conduct were a consideration only among the oldest teenagers, for whom 'the future', in terms of post-secondary education or entering the workforce, was a much closer and more tangible reality. 'The future' seemed to be a trigger that made some older teens more mindful about how they should manage their online conduct, so as not to damage their opportunities in the 'adult' world.

## **1.3 Key findings: trust and opinion formation online**

### **Children had little conscious consideration of which sites and content could be trusted online**

Trust was not raised spontaneously by children in discussing the internet, and particularly not in the context of online sites and content, indicating that it was not a top-of-mind consideration. Instead, children and young people visited sites and accessed content online without actively thinking whether or not they could trust what they saw and read.

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When specifically asked about trust, younger children considered this predominantly in the context of their personal safety and whether they would be protected from unwelcome contact and inappropriate content online. For tweens and teenagers, trust was understood as a more multi-dimensional concept that incorporated reliability, credibility and security – but it was still not an overt consideration in their internet use.

### **There was no spontaneous concern about authentication of online sources**

When prompted, children and young people did not regard checking whether a website was trustworthy as a problem, since parents and other trusted people could, in theory, be consulted if they had any doubts. However, seeking advice in this way did not appear to be common.

The low levels of concern about authenticating online sources also related to a lack of appreciation by young people of how they could be influenced by the content they are exposed to online, a point which is discussed further below.

### **However, trust did affect online behaviour to some extent, even if this was not always consciously acknowledged**

Younger children's concerns about the potentially extreme consequences of certain types of online behaviour meant that they tended to use only sites that the adults in their lives trusted as being age-appropriate, and their internet use was also closely moderated. This age group were comfortable with such close monitoring, and indeed expected it to be in place.

By contrast, for older children trust was not a prerequisite for the appeal of online sites and content. Teenagers, in particular, tended to be complacent about authenticating the validity of sites, despite claiming that they knew it was important to do so.

However, trust was more important to older children when the risks and repercussions were perceived to be high. For example, they regarded the authenticity and security of online retailers as important if they were spending significant amounts of money. In addition, young people prioritised the reliability of news and gossip about favourite celebrities or sporting teams if they felt there was a risk of embarrassment from sharing inaccurate news among their peers.

Older children were more likely to express concern about the safety of websites more generally, and to look for verification before using new sites (e.g. via virus protection software).

### **The sites most readily deemed trustworthy were from brands with an established presence in the offline world**

The BBC was the most universally trusted news source online, as well as one of the most top-of-mind trustworthy sites *per se*. This was based on familiarity with the brand and its reputation in the offline world. Similarly, the online retailers perceived to be most trustworthy were those with a familiar presence on the high street. This was both due to general brand familiarity and also because of practical considerations such as ease of exchange or return.

That said, having only an online presence was not seen as a barrier to purchase among the tweens and teenagers, and many reported buying from online-only retailers. In addition, many young people took note of news and gossip from other media and user-generated websites, despite not knowing whether they were credible sources.

### **Google was perceived to be a way of accessing trustworthy information, but there was more uncertainty about Wikipedia**

All children and young people relied heavily on Google as a gateway to information. There was a common belief that the most trustworthy sources would be found in the links nearest the top of a Google search, and most reported not looking beyond the first page of search results. Younger children tended not to give any consideration to the commercial motives of sources identified via Google. Tweens and teenagers were conscious of sponsored links which they perceived were designed to advertise rather than simply to provide information; there was a tendency to avoid them for this reason.

Apart from mainstream media websites (such as those from British newspapers and commercial broadcasters), Wikipedia was the most widely used information website among children and young people. However, they knew that it was edited, and some of their teachers had advised against using it, which led to some confusion about its trustworthiness.

### **Teenagers claimed to triangulate different online sources when they particularly needed to obtain accurate information**

Teenagers said that they carried out a further process of filtering and cross-referencing across sites; for example, if the information was to be used for important school work. In these cases, they sometimes consulted parents and peers about the authenticity of online information, for additional reassurance.

### **The process of authenticating unknown sites and content was largely visual**

Children did not have any standard way of determining the trustworthiness of new sites that they had not used before. Instead, they took a number of elements into consideration including overall layout, font style and headings, the amount and type of advertising, and presence of key cues such as security symbols.

Video content was regarded as inherently more trustworthy, since this was seen as an authentic primary source of real world events. The abundance of video footage online meant that some young people sought this out to confirm information they had read or heard about, either online or offline.

### **Young people claimed not to model their opinions on what they see online**

Young people acknowledged that online content provided them with sources of inspiration and aspiration, but did not think that this content influenced their opinions. They felt that their real-world relationships were more influential, referring to parents as particular opinion-formers, and among older children, their close peers.

That said, the internet seemed to have a ubiquitous influence on children's lives, and there was a tendency to blur online and offline activities and behaviour. There were several indications of the online environment directly influencing the opinions of children and young people involved in this research. This was particularly in shaping perceptions of what is 'normal', such as in the area of image management, as referred to previously.

## **1.4 Key findings: online critical thinking overall**

### **A number of factors influenced children's and young people's online critical thinking skills**

The child's age and developmental stage had the largest bearing on their online critical thinking skills. This research identified three core groups, based on children's and young people's common attitudes and behaviours related to both risk and trust: younger children aged 8 to 11, tweens aged 11 to 14 and teenagers aged 14 to 17.

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Gender differences in perception of risks were also evident, aligning with children's behavioural differences in the online world. For instance, girls in their tween and teenage years were more likely to feel exposed to contact risks, as communication was a dominant part of their online activity, whereas boys appeared relatively more aware of the risks of seeing some of the 'darker' content that can be found online.

Beyond these differences, personality type had the most significant impact on the attitudes, feelings and behaviours of children and young people in relation to online risks and trust. Personality differences emerged more clearly by about age 10 or 11, and three main types of children were identified by this research: 'cautious', 'considered' and 'impulsive'. The attitudinal differences had a clear impact on the propensity for children to apply critical thinking skills and authentication strategies in the online environment.

The home environment, particularly in terms of the extent of parents' involvement in monitoring their child's internet use and informing them about risks, also appeared to be important. This was largely determined by the parents' own understanding and relative confidence in the online world. The parents' socio-economic status appeared to have less impact.

Finally, peer groups were influential, particularly on children's and young people's propensity for online risk-taking, by increasing both their awareness of risk-taking possibilities and their confidence online.

### **Some clear gaps were identified in children's and young people's critical thinking skills overall**

As mentioned previously in this section, there was relatively widespread and comprehensive understanding of online risks among children and young people. But their behaviour did not always match this awareness, and they were inconsistent in their risk management and risk-taking behaviour. Such inconsistency is, of course, not unique to the online environment; we would expect it to be consistent with offline risk-taking.

However, it is of note that children and young people showed little appreciation of the long-term consequences of risks taken online, particularly around the management of their reputation. Consideration of this issue was only a factor for older teenagers, for whom the future (beyond childhood) was more imminent.

Overall, children and young people had relatively high awareness of the specific risk of being exposed to inappropriate or harmful content. However, they thought, and knew, far less about how to determine which online sites and content they could trust, or the possibility of encountering inaccurate or misleading content.

Although children and teenagers often questioned new online contacts about their motives for getting in touch, they were less likely to question or challenge the motives of brands and organisations operating online. For example, they rarely considered how brands might present themselves in a biased or embellished way, or otherwise aim to influence the behaviour of online users.

### Section 2

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Background

Media literacy empowers people with the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary to make full use of the opportunities presented by both traditional and new communications services. It also enables individuals to manage content and communications and protect themselves from the potential risks associated with using these services. The promotion of media literacy is a responsibility placed on Ofcom by Section 11 of the Communications Act 2003, and Ofcom discharges this duty primarily through the provision of research into the media use and attitudes of adults and children.

The evolution of digital technology has led to fundamental changes in the way that children and young people behave online. For example, Ofcom's 2014 *Communication Market Report*<sup>3</sup> highlighted how young people have high levels of functional confidence online and in the use of various types of communications services.

With unprecedented access to news, information and other media in the online world, children and young people are required to play a more active role in filtering to identify suitable and age-appropriate content. Indeed, Ofcom media literacy research in 2013<sup>4</sup> highlighted how new technology brings new risks as well as opportunities, and that children may need help to assess the potential risks and unintended consequences of their media use, and to make informed decisions about online activities and services.

Therefore, Ofcom commissioned this qualitative research in order to gain understanding of children's capacity for critical thought in the areas of understanding online risk, trust and opinion formation.

### Research objectives

The aims of this research were to understand:

- children's perception and management of risks online; and
- their approaches to filtering and authenticating online information and sources.

The specific objectives within these areas were to explore:

- a) Children's perception and management of risks online
  - Overall perception of risks
    - How significant do they feel the risks to be and how concerned are they?
  - Understanding of repercussions
    - To what extent do they understand the link between risks and possible outcomes?
  - Approaches to risk management
    - What, if any, strategies do they have to avoid potential pitfalls?
    - What level of consideration do they give to the future, in terms of personal reputation and any other longer-term outcomes?

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<sup>3</sup> Ofcom *Communications Market Report* (2014) [http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/cmr/cmr14/2014\\_UK\\_CMR.pdf](http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/cmr/cmr14/2014_UK_CMR.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ofcom *Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report* (October 2013)

<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/media-literacy/october-2013/research07Oct2013.pdf><sup>5</sup> A complementary qualitative methodology developed by Sherbert Research conducted among a small group of friends, comprising a number of structured discussion tasks, all filmed by a static camera and without the presence of an external (adult) moderator to facilitate a more candid conversation within a friendship group.



- b) Children's approaches to understanding and authenticating online information and sources
- The overall influence of online versus offline sources in influencing opinion
  - How children evaluate different types of online information, ideas and communication
    - To what degree do children question or seek alternative sources of information and points of view in the online world?
  - The role that trust plays in making judgements online
    - What are the methods used to check the validity of different sources?
    - How do children identify trustworthiness of information sources, brands and services?
    - How are trust and beliefs formed in the online world?

## 2.2 Research approach

A mixed methodology was employed for this research; this consisted of 18 friendship triad discussion groups, each consisting of three children, followed by 12 'accompanied surf' in-depth interviews with one child from each year group (two per year group among 8 to 11 year olds in school years 4, 5 and 6) and 6 unmoderated <sup>5</sup> peer-to-peer sessions, one per year group among 11 to 17 year olds in school years 7 to 12.

Individuals are known to be unreliable witnesses of their own behaviour and motivations, particularly since they are not always fully conscious of these. The triangulation-based approach enabled the research to go beyond rationalised responses, and delivered the following benefits:

- It allowed comparisons to be drawn between claimed versus actual online behaviour
- It allowed comparisons to be drawn between claimed versus actual understanding of the online world
- It enabled understanding of both individual and typical group behaviour online, the latter including the role of peer group influence

The focus of this study was on children and young people aged 8 to 17, with equal weighting on age and gender groups so that key transition points in attitudes and behaviour could be identified. The research spanned all UK nations and had urban, suburban and rural coverage as well as an even split across socio-economic groups B, C1, C2 and D. A mix of low, medium and high users of the internet were represented across the sample, determined according to 'usage norms' identified quantitatively by Ofcom's 2013 media literacy research. In total, 54 individual respondents took part in 36 sessions during February and March 2014.

Full sample details, including quotas and locations, are detailed in Appendix A. The research materials used for all sessions are in Appendices B-F.

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<sup>5</sup> A complementary qualitative methodology developed by Sherbert Research conducted among a small group of friends, comprising a number of structured discussion tasks, all filmed by a static camera and without the presence of an external (adult) moderator to facilitate a more candid conversation within a friendship group.

## 2.3 Report structure

This report has four main sections<sup>6</sup>:

1. **The online landscape for children and young people:** Sets the scene on what being online means for children and young people today, and how they use the internet, in order to help contextualise the later findings.
2. **Understanding and management of online risks:** Explores children's and young people's understanding and perception of different types of online risk, and how these views are formed, and examines their online risk management and risk management strategies.
3. **Exploration of trust and opinion formation online:** Focuses on how young people make judgements about online information, the role of trust, and how trust is gained online.
4. **Children's online critical thinking overall:** Sums up findings: describes children's 'critical thinking journey' and the factors that influence both risk comprehension and trust formation online<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Differences by age and gender have been routinely drawn out, but other factors have also been highlighted where relevant e.g. impact of personality, family environment and age group. Verbatim quotes are included to give a flavour of views

<sup>7</sup> Pen portraits are included in the final section to provide a more detailed example of children and young people, how the internet fits into their lives, and their critical thinking online

### Section 3

## 3. The online landscape for children and young people

### 3.1 Overview

A number of insights from this research help us understand children's and young people's critical understanding of online risk, and how they develop trust online.

These are:

- This research indicates that the internet has a ubiquitous influence on children's lives, and there is a tendency to blur online and offline activities.
- Both offline and online behaviour changes with age. The typical transition online, from a passive consumer to a more active agent, often occurs by the age of 11 but can also occur during the teenage years.
- The internet is used primarily as a source of entertainment and information by the youngest children in the research, whereas among tweens<sup>8</sup> and teenagers, online activity becomes increasingly communications-focused.
- Overall, the internet is a highly compelling environment for the majority of children and young people to spend time in. It can give young people the confidence to behave in new and different ways that are not typical of their behaviour offline, particularly in terms of how they present themselves and communicate with others.

### 3.2 Role of the internet among children and young people

This research highlighted how, as technology use has become more prevalent in everyday life, the boundary between offline and online has become increasingly difficult for children and young people to identify.

Communication has become increasingly internet-based, and online activity among children and young people is highly communication-focused. There is a wide variety of communications options in the internet environment; different applications (apps) and websites deliver different types of communication services (e.g. more private versus more public; text-based versus visual; quick versus more considered; and one-on-one versus group conversations).

In this research, regular online communication was taking place between groups of friends, even in the youngest age groups, made more accessible by free instant messaging and video calling services<sup>9</sup>. Tweens and teenagers have an even broader range of direct/instant messaging online platforms to choose from, such as those offered by social networking sites Facebook and Twitter.

Console gaming among children and teenagers (particularly boys) is mainly done 'live' and online; indeed, the latest consoles on the market connect to the internet automatically. From a gaming perspective this enables a new social dimension for competition and interaction, and creates an online forum for gamers to connect with one another about their real-time experiences.

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<sup>8</sup> 'Tween' is used to refer to those aged 11 to 14 in the early years of secondary school throughout this report

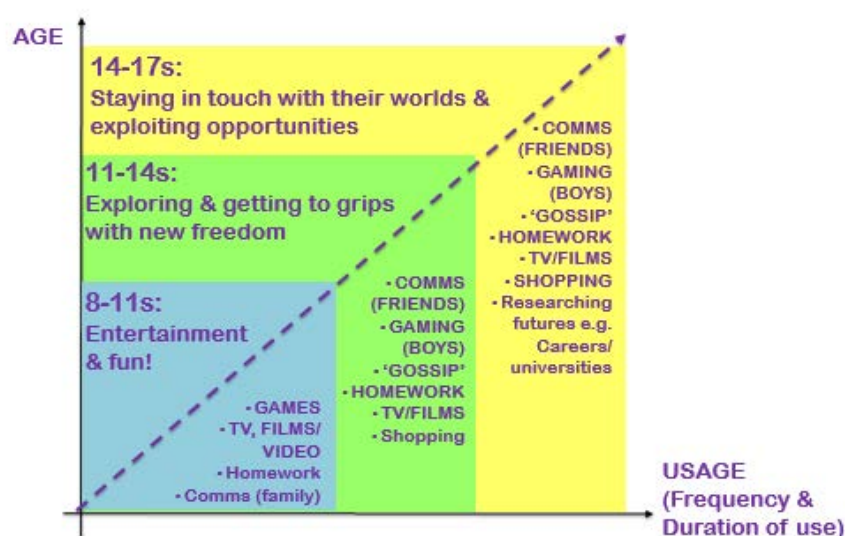
<sup>9</sup> These included free online platforms (with optional subscriptions) such as Skype, Oovo, OK Hello etc.

There is also a general blurring between apps and the internet; many young people in this research were unsure if they were online when using some apps.

### 3.3 How internet use changes with age

The diagram below depicts uses of the internet reported by children and young people at various ages. Throughout this report children and young people are grouped into age bands that reflect school years, as this tends to have a significant bearing on their attitudes and behaviour. ‘Younger children’ refers to those aged 8 to 11 in years 4, 5 and 6, typically the upper years of primary school. ‘Twins’ refers to those aged 11 to 14 and the early years of secondary school – those in years 7, 8 and 9. ‘Teenagers’ in this instance refers to 14 to 17 year olds, in years 10, 11 and 12 of secondary school. The diagram shows how internet use becomes more diverse with age, with the key transitions occurring between primary and early secondary school, and then again in the older teen years.

**Figure 1: Internet use by age: children aged 8-11, tweens aged 11-14 and teenagers aged 14-17 years old**



These differences are described in more detail below.

#### 3.3.1 Internet use among 8-11 year olds

This research indicated that children in the 8-11 age range use the internet for entertainment and ‘to have fun’. Games tended to dominate the online repertoires of both girls and boys. They played via apps and websites that were often discovered via friends or family members. The choice of what to play tended to be quite spontaneous, dictated primarily by whichever device they had access to at the time. Most had several apps and websites they could choose from, each offering different gaming experiences.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Strategy game apps tended to have strong appeal with this age group. Games such as Angry Birds, Temple Run and Flappy Bird, with multiple levels or lives, motivated them to keep playing. Multi-game websites such as MiniClip and Friv were also favoured options as they contain a large number of ‘mini games’ children can dip into for an instant, short gaming session. ‘Virtual world’ gaming websites with a social element were also popular. among this age group in this research, with brands such as Club Penguin and Moshi Monsters cited as appealing and current dominance of the online building blocks game, Minecraft. The ‘craze’ popularity of these games meant that children made a concerted effort to play them more and such titles spanned both app and website formats, helping to maximise appeal and uptake. Overall, app-play tended to feature most strongly given the current dominance of iPods and tablets among this age group.

## The online landscape for children and young people

Tablets played a role for this age group as personal TV sets, through which they watched favourite programmes and films, and discovered new video content<sup>11</sup>. YouTube, in particular, provided a wide range of entertainment across genres (such as music, humour, gaming and fashion), as well as being an educational resource that some drew upon for school work.

The most commonly-used devices by this age range were iPods and tablets, and use of these became more regular with age, increasing from two or three times a week to being used most days.

### 3.3.2 Internet use among 11-14 year olds

Young tweens (11-12) years old claimed to have a new level of freedom to explore the online world, largely due to recently-acquired smartphones and tablets. Compared with the younger group, the tweens appeared to be consuming significantly more content, ranging from gaming to communication to creativity apps.

Many in the 11-14 age group expressed an interest in online shopping, including browsing for items such as music and other media, cosmetics and accessories for girls, and games and gaming equipment for boys. Joining new social networks was regarded as a 'rite of passage' and these types of online accounts were much more prevalent among this cohort. In particular, many reported using visual communication sites or apps with a wider circle of contacts.

Boys in this age range were engaging in more 'public' online gaming<sup>12</sup>. They reported having fewer restrictions imposed by parents on communicating with other online gamers than did younger children. This meant more frequent interaction was taking place; some boys said gaming was a regular, even daily, activity to which they devoted many hours.

It was evident in this research how viewing TV and video via the web increased with age, with greater take-up of 'on demand' platforms.<sup>13</sup> YouTube continued to feature prominently in their repertoires and many considered 'YouTubers'<sup>14</sup> to be highly aspirational and celebrities in their own right. Keeping up to date with the latest video posts proved fairly time-intensive for some at this age.

Most in the 11-14 age group reported using their devices online daily; usually their phone, and at least one other device such as a tablet, laptop or computer.

### 3.3.3 Internet use among 14-17 year olds

For older teenagers, aged 14 to 17, it was common for communication to dominate their online activity, and most were using multiple social networking and messaging platforms. Older teens' communication took many different forms, and they appeared to be projecting themselves in different ways depending on the site and its perceived role<sup>15</sup>. For girls in particular, their online image appeared to play a distinct and crucial part of their overall identity by this age. They generally played close attention to managing their online image and tended to feel under some pressure to get this 'right'.

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<sup>11</sup> The CBBC website was also a popular website for both entertainment and homework across both genders. Some girls also claimed to like the Disney channel website to stay in touch with their favourite programmes and TV stars. Some boys stated they used BBC Sport and Sky Sports News websites and apps as a way of staying up to date with the latest news.

<sup>12</sup> Boys reported using popular online gaming networks Xbox Live and PlayStation Network (PSN), as well as going on forum sites such as Steam

<sup>13</sup> Such as BBC iPlayer and 4OD, as well as some with Sky and Netflix subscriptions

<sup>14</sup> YouTubers are people who regularly upload and share content on the video sharing site YouTube. Popular YouTubers often have a large following of subscribers who regularly view their channel to watch their new content

<sup>15</sup> For instance, Facebook was considered by most as a place to post photo albums and occasionally chat with friends and family, whereas Instagram and Twitter appeared to be more carefully managed and highly edited.

## The online landscape for children and young people

It was also commonplace among this age group to follow celebrities and brands via social media in order to get the latest news. This included favourite YouTubers who were considered to be just as influential as other celebrities. Online entertainment choices also expanded in this age group, with more streaming of music and media content, as well as greater access to user-generated content (UGC) entertainment sites with a social networking element. Some also developed an interest in UGC hybrid sites which provided a more edgy and less filtered view of the world, based loosely on the categories of news<sup>16</sup> and fashion<sup>17</sup>.

Interest in buying online was apparently driven by convenience as well as the ability to buy items at lower prices. Boys reported how they would buy new games online, some of which were downloaded directly to their consoles to play immediately<sup>18</sup>.

Most participants in this age range claimed to be 'connected' via their mobiles at numerous points during the day, and the most prolific users claimed to be online whenever possible, starting from the moment they woke up until the time they went to sleep. Tablets and laptops were also commonly used, and the time spent on these devices was higher than among younger cohorts, due to their use for school work as well as recreation.

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<sup>16</sup> Sites such as Reddit and LiveLeak

<sup>17</sup> Sites such as Tumblr

<sup>18</sup> From Steam or Game.

## Section 4

# 4. Understanding and managing online risks

## 4.1 Overview

This section explores two inter-related questions:

- Do children and young people understand the issues and risks around their personal data and their wider activity online?
- What, if any, strategies do they employ to manage these issues and risks?

Key findings include:

- There is a good theoretical understanding of online risks across the whole age range (8-17) covered in this research. This is related to education in schools and by parents.
- There is a perceived hierarchy in terms of the seriousness of risks. Most of the concern relates to 'contact' risks (e.g. unsolicited approaches from strangers), and there is relatively high awareness of 'conduct' risks (e.g. engaging in cyber-bullying). There is less consideration of content-associated risks (e.g. viewing inappropriate content), or the perceived repercussions of these risks.
- The majority understand what they should avoid doing to avert risks online<sup>19</sup>. However, knowledge of what to do to avoid risk does not necessarily translate into behaviour. For some, this was because risk is not top-of-mind in their day-to-day internet use. For others (particularly in older groups) there is evidence of weighing up possible repercussions to determine whether the benefit (fun, popularity etc.) is worth the risk.
- For some young people, interacting online enables them to project a more confident version of their real-life selves, particularly in their teenage years, and it becomes a platform where they can promote an idealised image of themselves.
- There are some intrinsic aspects of the internet that may facilitate and encourage risk-taking by teenagers - in particular, the potential for anonymity and the ability to promote an idealised online persona.

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<sup>19</sup> It is hypothesised that in reality there may have been some personal risk-taking behaviour that children, naturally, may have been reluctant to admit to. However, the mixed methodological approach employed in this research was designed to uncover this as far as possible, and typically, children were observed to disclose and substantiate varying aspects of their behaviour in these different research environments, (i.e. group discussion, depth discussions and unmoderated sessions).

## 4.2 Overall awareness of different types of online risk

The development of new online platforms and content over the last few years has led to a proliferation of risks that children and young people can face in the online world. These were well-documented in the Byron Review (2008)<sup>20</sup> which categorised the types of risks children face:

- Contact risks (child as participant, i.e. by engaging in communication online which places them at risk)
- Conduct risks (child as actor, i.e. by playing an active role in risk-taking)
- Content risks (child as receiver, i.e. being exposed to, or the recipient of, potentially harmful content)

At an overall level, this research found that children and young people demonstrated a good theoretical understanding of the most prominent risks in the online world. There were, however, some differences in the exact messages recalled in relation to different types of risks, among younger children in particular. This seemed likely to be due to variations in the education that children had received, and their differing ability to articulate what they had learnt.

It was also clear that there was an overall hierarchy of perceived seriousness among the different categories of risk, which is outlined below.

### 4.2.1 Contact risks

Contact risk (e.g. unsolicited contact with strangers) was perceived to be the most serious and to have the most dangerous potential repercussions, by all age groups. This perception appeared to be driven by the focus on these risks by parents and schools. The majority of children in this research had heard about actual instances (mostly from the media) such as kidnapping or abuse arising from contact initiated with a child online. Many in this research perceived that the prevalence of contact risks had increased with the increased popularity of virtual worlds (popular among younger children) and social networks (popular among tweens and teenagers).

### 4.2.2 Conduct risks

There was also high awareness of conduct risks across children and young people in this research. Based on reported experiences (their own and others'), genuine conduct risks appeared to increase during the teen years. However, younger children aged 8 to 11 appeared more anxious about inadvertently causing these, particularly via accidental in-app purchasing or by visiting unknown and potentially unsafe websites.

### 4.2.3 Content risks

By contrast, children and young people attributed lower importance to potential content risks online; particularly the effects of viewing inappropriate content. Overall, content risks were less top-of-mind, and many appeared unaware of how they could be affected or influenced by online content. The youngest children gave most consideration to content risks and attitudes, but this seemed to relax with age. According to participants, there was less focus on content risks in their school education about online safety.

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<sup>20</sup> The Byron Review (2008) - 'Safer Children in a Digital World' – an independent review by Dr Tanya Byron prepared for DCSF (now known as DfE)

### 4.2.4 Risk convergence

This research highlighted that contact and conduct risks had a tendency to converge for older children, who tended to be more active online participants in social networks and online forums. This was most evident when forming online relationships, as there was a tendency for young people to become over-confident, leading to more risky behaviour (although they did not always regard it as such).

Expanding social networks facilitates a broader circle of 'friends' in the online world. The majority of teenagers in this research claimed that it was important to have a shared link with everyone in their social network (e.g. a shared connection such as a friend of a friend or a shared experience such as a family holiday or a party).

*"I never accept people with fewer than 30 mutual friends unless I've met them on holiday. If they've got over 30, they're obviously from the same school. Then you see pictures and you know who it is. If it's a random place and there are only 10 mutual friends, I don't accept. That's how you know that they're weird." (15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

However, this real-life connection was not always present, particularly among the most risk-seeking teenagers. Some reported making or accepting new connections, particularly new 'followers' on Twitter or Instagram, without screening them first. They said that this was due to the social kudos associated with having a higher number of online connections, and it appeared to lead to complacency about safety:

*"[On Twitter...] I have ten new people following me. I don't know who they are... I have no clue....there are a lot of people from other countries that just start following you, that's what happens" (14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

Young people found the online world a fun and exciting place to form and develop relationships, ranging from mild flirtations to actual 'dating' which transitioned into the offline world. Some felt that the privacy of the online world removed some of the awkwardness that can be experienced in meeting face-to-face, and they felt they could be more open and 'themselves' online; a view that was commonly shared among many teenage boys:

*"I find it easier to talk to girls online. On the messenger thing like BBM, if you have them on your contacts, it's easier than at school. You don't walk up and start talking in the corridor. The girl I'm seeing now added me and then I started talking to her and we started hanging out. She was a mate, so it wasn't just some random person." (14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

Girls, in particular, expressed a sense of excitement from being 'pursued' by boys they liked online and this could lead to online 'relationships' escalating relatively quickly, as evidenced by behaviour such as explicit photo sharing. This type of behaviour was less identifiable to teenagers as a 'risk'.

## 4.3 Perception of biggest online risks, by age

The types of risks which children and young people perceived as most prevalent changed throughout their cognitive developmental journey; an overview of these risks can be found in the table below.

Figure 2: Perception of online risks, by age

	8-11s	11-14s	14-17s
<b>CONTACT</b> (CHILD AS PARTICIPANT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BEING TAKEN</li> <li>• PERSONAL INFO THEFT/SCAMS</li> <li>• BULLYING/RACISM</li> <li>• BEING HARASSED</li> <li>• HACKING/VIRUSES</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BEING GROOMED</li> <li>• PERSONAL INFO THEFT/SCAMS</li> <li>• UNWELCOME PERSUASIONS (GIRLS)</li> <li>• BEING HARASSED</li> <li>• BULLYING/RACISM</li> <li>• BLACKMAIL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BEING GROOMED</li> <li>• PERSONAL INFO THEFT/SCAMS</li> <li>• UNWELCOME PERSUASIONS (GIRLS)</li> <li>• BEING HARASSED</li> <li>• BLACKMAIL</li> </ul>
<b>CONDUCT</b> (CHILD AS ACTOR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ACCIDENTAL SPENDING (e.g. in-app purchasing)</li> <li>• CAUSING VIRUSES</li> <li>• BRINGING UP INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UPLOADING PHOTOS/MATERIALS</li> <li>• CAUSING VIRUSES</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ILLEGAL SHARING/DOWNLOADING</li> <li>• FINANCIAL SCAMS</li> <li>• UPLOADING PHOTOS/MATERIALS</li> <li>• GAMBLING</li> <li>• HACKING</li> <li>• COMMUNICATION WITH OPPOSITE SEX</li> </ul>
<b>CONTENT</b> (CHILD AS RECEIVER)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT (including violent, graphic, rude)</li> <li>• UNWANTED ADVERTISING</li> <li>• SPAM</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VIOLENT/ GRAPHIC CONTENT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VIOLENT/GRAPHIC CONTENT</li> <li>• PORNOGRAPHY</li> </ul>

### 4.3.1 8-11 year olds

#### Contact risks

Contact risks on social platforms and communication sites were a scary prospect for many children this age, particularly among 8 and 9 year olds. ‘Stranger danger’ was perceived potentially to have extreme consequences, with the prospect of ‘being taken’ as a result of being identified online perceived to be highly plausible. Many had learnt from parents and at school that users of online social platforms might not be who they said they were. This was claimed to be a key reason that prevented them from being receptive to contact from unknown people online, or from instigating contact with others themselves; it also meant that they largely adhered to guidance from parents.

*“My mum says that I’m not allowed to talk to people I don’t know. It could be dangerous. You could be hacked into. They could be asking you things. They could invite you to a party and they could see you.” (10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

*“If I write down all my personal details I worry I might get stolen” (8-9 year old girl, Nottingham)*

Most children this age communicated directly with friends and family members, primarily through iMessage, FaceTime or Skype, as these are free to use between groups of users. Importantly, while this communication is technically ‘online’ it is mostly private within closed groups of friends, or direct with friends or family. A minority had accounts on social networking sites, most commonly Instagram.

## Understanding and managing online risks

Others in this age group considered Instagram to be aspirational and exciting, and were keen to have it (usually those with older siblings who were already using it). However, more cautious children this age believed it would only be suitable for teenagers (indicated by the minimum sign-up age of 13). Among users of Instagram and other social networks in this age group, a degree of risk was perceived, although these were typically deemed to be safe to use, as long as their profiles were set to 'private', or limited to friends only. A private profile was believed to mean that there would be the opportunity to screen and accept any users who wanted to follow them and view their pictures. The process that one 9 – 10 year old girl in Bristol uses for vetting her follower requests is highlighted in the following quote:

*"If someone requests me on Instagram, I can choose who follows me because I'm 'private'. I check their pictures first to make sure they're okay and safe. It's OK if I think their pictures are decent, they're okay if there's just pictures of themselves, not little girls or little boys, not weird pictures." (9-10 year old girl, Bristol)*

However, using a highly visual process of vetting friends or followers had the potential to leave some children this age exposed to contact risks without realising it. Another 9-10 year old girl from Bristol appeared to be much more receptive to contact from users not known to her, but whom she believed to have interests in common with her:

*"If they have One Direction pictures, I know it's an obsessed fan, so I'd be friends with them because that's alright and they're safe. Normally the creators ban people that aren't safe. They tell you that someone's followed you who isn't safe, it will pop up, and I get them to unfollow me." (9-10 year old girl, Bristol)*

While a few interacted with previously unknown people through social networking sites, gaming websites and online console gaming were the main channels through which children this age were likely to come into contact with people they did not know. However, it was generally felt among this age group that these were not forums in which to start or join conversations with other users, but to solely interact with them for game playing.

*"It just takes you to a random person. You can't speak to them, but you just play against them. Like on Ultimate Team... you need to add them as a friend so that you can talk to them, so you don't get random messages from people you don't want to talk to, but I don't want to talk to them anyway I only speak on the microphone with people that I know." (10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

Online communication with other unknown players was typically not permitted by parents, or even desired by children this age themselves. Most enjoyed the interaction and competition with other users, and viewed it as a normal part of playing games online, but they did not consider other players to be their friends.

*"I play with people from all over the world, but they're not my friends." (9-10 year old girl, Bristol)*

However, there were some instances reported of children using the message functions on virtual world websites, and some boys who had communicated through online console gaming. In the majority of these cases this was with people they already knew, although there were occasions during game play which appeared to stimulate communication between users.

*"On Power Soccer you get into clans with other people. You can talk to them a little bit – you can tell if they're a nice person or not...he [Ben] hasn't asked me anything which is good and he can tell me stuff about the game." (9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

Some concern was also expressed by 8 to 11 year olds about 'being hacked' on gaming sites, and their personal details and 'identity' being stolen. There was some lack of clarity about the potential consequences of hacking among this age group.

## Understanding and managing online risks

*“Have you heard of The Dolly? She hacks you on MovieStarPlanet<sup>21</sup>. They go around your profile and get all the kids and stuff, they hack it, and once they find out you’re using it, they can change the password. They tell all your friends naughty stuff” (9-10 year old girl, Bristol)*

*“You just stay away from things because there’s quite a big risk of being hacked. There are quite a few unofficial things. There are advertising games, but they’re unofficial.” (10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

The possibility of online bullying was taken very seriously by this age group; this was similar to their views about offline bullying. There was significant concern expressed about the possibility of people directing hurtful or threatening language towards them online, and the emotional distress that this could cause. A few also claimed to have experienced online bullying. A preference was expressed for websites where children felt protected from the risk of online bullying.

*“Club Penguin is better than Bin Weevils because Bin Weevils I once got bullied on. It just happened once so I don’t consider it bullying but I just asked if you want a game, and someone said ‘no-one wants to play with you’ and so I left it. On Club Penguin you can’t bully.” (9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

Overall, the perception of numerous online contact risks, and the education they had received about protection from these risks, made the 8 - 11s the least inclined of all age groups to communicate with people they didn’t know online.

*“You wouldn’t give a stranger information in real life so why do it on a computer? That would be dumb!” (8-9 year old girl, Nottingham)*

*“If you don’t really talk to them at school, I just wouldn’t really talk to them online because they’re not proper friends.” (10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

### Conduct risks

Instances of undertaking risky behaviour online appeared to be minimal among this age group. They expressed greater concern about unintended actions that could lead to their being placed at risk unintentionally:

*“Yes the internet is fun but if you’re careless and give away information then it gets dangerous.” (9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

Spending inadvertently online was a concern for some; for example, by unlocking new levels or buying more credit ‘in app’ to help them progress further. Several children had been warned by parents about this, or heard about instances of this happening to other children, which for some acted as a deterrent with respect to their own behaviour.

*“You’ve heard of the boy that spent £1000 on games? I feel worried that people can spend money in these games accidentally when they need it to survive.” (9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

*“Someone in our class said that they spent £900 without their parents knowing. I don’t think he got in trouble, his mum’s credit card details were already on there. That was on FIFA. He probably didn’t mean to do it a few times. He might have bought something and it kept loading new ones up. He might have thought that his password was incorrect.” (10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

Risky online conduct, undertaken deliberately rather than inadvertently, appeared to be less common among this age group, compared with older age groups in this research. However, some children appeared more likely to push boundaries at this age. While the instances of extensive online spending

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<sup>21</sup> A virtual world website based around customisable animated movie stars

## Understanding and managing online risks

reported above were generally claimed to be accidental, it appeared that some children were spending deliberately, due to the low level of personal consequences. Furthermore, a minority of children this age admitted using social networking sites without their parents' permission. While this may not be mainstream behaviour of children in this age group, it was apparent that some children were willing to engage in risky online conduct.

There may be some correlation between having less parental mediation of online behaviour and engaging in risky conduct in this age range. For example, two 9-10 year old girls in Bristol were Instagram users who appeared to be emulating the typical online behaviours of teenage girl users.

*"My mum knows I go on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, everything like that. The more pretty you are, the more followers you get on Instagram. Normally, people don't get likes if you're plain. You need make-up to get likes. And if you look too young, you might get followed up because you've got to be a certain age." (9-10 year old girls, Bristol)*

However, it seemed that such behaviour was not prevalent among this age group, and within friendship groups not all children were the same. The remaining friend in this girls' group in Bristol had a more cautious view:

*"When you're older, anybody could see [your photos on Instagram], and they might start bullying you and stuff. If you put pictures of you half naked, they can go like, 'Prostitute'." (9-10 year old girl, Bristol)*

In summary, it appeared that some children this age were keen to role-play the online behaviour of young people a few years older than themselves, as would be the case in the offline world. However, overall, the scale of risky conduct was still relatively limited for this age group.

### Content risks

Among the 8-11 year olds in this research, unwanted online content included anything 'rude': from seeing or hearing swear-words to being exposed to more graphic visual content. Most knew that content with swearing was not suitable for their age group; indeed, this was a key reason why communication on social platforms was banned by some parents.

For some 8 and 9 year olds in particular, swearing, especially in an aggressive manner, could be very unsettling, whereas others found it less offensive but still inappropriate. The majority were happy to abide by parents' rules to minimise these types of risks in return for the opportunity to play online.

*"I'm allowed to play FIFA online as long as I keep the sound off because other players can swear a lot and my mum doesn't like me to hear it." (9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

*"The only thing that annoys me is that people can speak to people from other countries, like Somalia, and they're racist and stuff." (9-10 year old girl, Bristol)*

While some children this age, particularly boys, reported finding the graphic content of some video games aimed at older teenagers<sup>22</sup> to be 'cool' and aspirational, they were more inclined than tweens to report this kind of content as being quite shocking.

*"Once my brother was playing Call of Duty and I came in and I was watching him play and there was this thing where all of a sudden, all of these dogs came running at him and he was breaking their necks!" (9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

The restrictions imposed by parents on games with teenager ratings varied widely, so boys in this group, in particular, appeared to be exposed to different levels of online content, targeted at older age groups.

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<sup>22</sup> Video games with PEGI Ratings for ages '16' or '18' and over. It seemed in most instances games with a '12' age rating were already being consumed among this age group with the permission of parents.

While most boys accepted the content ‘rules’ dictated by their parents, it was common for them to have different experiences when visiting friends’ homes; and while sometimes exciting, these were not always positive.

*“My friend plays Call of Duty, Assassin 3 and basically all the blood thirsty games. I have to accept it if I’m at his house. He’s quite big and he hurts people a lot, in football he shouldered me in the mouth. When you’re with him he wants to do those things and so when you’re at his house you do too... he plays James Bond<sup>23</sup> – so it’s like a driving game, but [with] people shooting at you. You’ve got to dodge the bullets and stones, and go fast” (9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

### 4.3.2 11-14 year olds

In general, 11-14 year olds were able to understand how particular actions online could result in certain consequences. However, their inclination for risk-taking increased during this developmental stage, and this could lead to their making inaccurate judgements in their risk-to-reward ratios, and underestimating the potential consequences of their actions. Indeed, some of the repercussions that most concerned this age group were centred on causing damage to their devices, rather than putting themselves personally at risk.

#### Contact risks

During these years most children tended to be granted parental permission for the first time to access social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. For many, this marked the beginning of a more visible footprint online, as well as the start of a more open and public style of online communication. For some this coincided with the developmental landmark of starting secondary school, although, as they were still younger than the authorised age of 13 for using some social network sites (e.g. Facebook and Instagram), they acknowledged that this was ‘breaking the rules’.

*“A lot of people have Facebook even though they’re not old enough. They say they’re 13 just to get it... if anyone asks them about it, they’re like, ‘Whatever!’” (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

By the upper end of this age group, the majority of teenagers had their own social networking profiles, often on more than one site. The appeal of specific social platforms could be rather transient, with one or other site being particularly dominant and used by the majority of peers at any one time. Girls this age were keen to stay in touch with one another across platforms, while for boys the use of social networking platforms appeared to be driven more by not wanting to be left out, rather than a keen desire to be using these platforms specifically.

*“[Snapchat] gets around the school. As soon as it gets around, and somebody’s got it, everyone’s got it and then suddenly no one’s using it. For one period of time it’s really good and then it goes to the next thing.” (11-12 year old boy, Cheltenham)*

*“I got all those things like Instagram and Twitter because everyone has them so you just have to too.” (13-14 year old boy, London)*

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<sup>23</sup> The majority of current James Bond console games have a PEGI rating: Age 16 or over

## Understanding and managing online risks

The perceptions of contact risks among 11 to 14 year olds differed quite considerably from those of the more sheltered and cautious 8 to 11 year olds. Some in the 11-14 year old group felt they were losing a degree of control by no longer knowing everyone who was a 'friend' or 'follower' within their online networks. Typically, as the online social networks of 11-14 year olds expanded, many acknowledged the shallower nature of online friendship:

*"You see people on the internet and you comment like you're really good friends but if you saw them face to face, you'd be like... 'Hi...' " (11-12 year old girl, London)*

Girls of this age felt more at risk than boys as they became aware of the potential for unwanted sexual attention. A shift appeared to take place from the perception of potentially being kidnapped to more manipulative 'grooming' behaviour potentially taking place<sup>24</sup>. Some girls reported receiving unwanted requests to communicate, or share details or photos of themselves, with boys, and men, online.

The prospect of online bullying, or cyberbullying, was felt to be a little less 'scary' among this age group compared with younger children, although it was still considered to be a real issue. Some tweens were particularly cautious about cyberbullying and for them this risk was a deterrent (or potentially a justification) for not being on social networks too young.

*"I don't think I want social networking. It doesn't bother me. Some days I think that I would like it as loads of my friends have it. But then you have things like cyber bullying, which puts me off." (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

Children reported experiencing how fractious peer groups can be during the early years of secondary school, and cyberbullying appeared to be a core focus in the safety education they received. This served to make cyberbullying a top-of-mind issue for some.

*"[We had an assembly]...about cyberbullying and how you can stop it. About people who are affected by it. We had stuff about true stories that have happened. They had actors who acted it out. There was one that was really good and scared me. There was one girl in an advert for one, and she kept on being called names on her social networking site." (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

*"In ICT we did cyberbullying. It was showing the effects. If you post something, you might get hate for it. This girl had sent a picture of herself on Snapchat and another girl posted it on Facebook. I think she must have sent it to a load of people. The girl was fake tanning. That girl, that Snapchat thing, that's basically cyberbullying. I know it's horrible, but now she's getting hate for one photo she did ages ago." (13-14 year old girl, Cardiff)*

In this age group there was some appreciation of the fine line between online teasing and pranking on the one hand, and cyberbullying on the other. Younger children in this age group appeared to be more thoughtful about their own online conduct, to avoid the risk of 'going too far' and potentially being bullied themselves as a result.

*You wouldn't put up pictures of other people - only if they gave you their permission. Because if you put pictures up of them, people could make fun of them, bully them, and they might not see it. I don't mind. As long as no one says bad things about me [it's OK]. But if they start saying something like you look so bad, then I'd definitely try and do something. I'd go straight to my mum." (11-12 year old boy, Cheltenham)*

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<sup>24</sup> This reflects where this age group are at in their developmental journey as they are now feeling reduced separation anxiety from parents, and are embarking on their journey through adolescence (See Appendix G).

### Conduct risks

The new presence of social networking platforms in most 11-14 year olds' lives appeared to play a role in facilitating some of the more risky behaviour that young people were beginning to experiment with during these years. Most were beginning to become aware of their own image and influence online, in the same way as in the offline world. This could be a liberating and exciting experience for some, particularly those who found meeting new people in the offline world more awkward.

*"I am excited when I am online. People find me more exciting when I am online." (12-13 year old boy, Edinburgh)*

*"I find it easier to make friends online as I'm more confident and have something in common with people."  
(12-13 year old boy, Edinburgh)*

Crafting an 'online image' became increasingly important to this age group and there were two main considerations in how to present themselves - conveying popularity and attractiveness.

Popularity was signified by the number of online friends and followers on social networks, and therefore many in this age group were purposefully trying to accumulate these.

*"I like to have lots of friends – it's good to be seen to have lots." (12-13 year old boy, Edinburgh)*

Certain strategies were adopted during these years to rapidly expand social networks and, by the upper end of this age group, some had already amassed a huge online following, although this could also be quite fickle.

*"I've got 1,993 followers on Twitter. If you get a celebrity to follow you, their fans follow you so you help them get a follow from them. I had 50 new followers in a few minutes and if people follow me, I follow them back. They DM me, like, 'Can you help me get an Aston<sup>25</sup> follow?' It's annoying. They're just using you. As soon as they'll follow you, they'll unfollow me." (13-14 year old girl, Cardiff)*

Rather than being seen as an underhand tactic, there was an established culture of online reciprocity among some people this age in developing their social networks. The same 13-14 year old girl cited above went on to say:

*"They're like 'If you retweet this, I'll give you 35 free follows'. They've got saved accounts where it's like a free follow.'" (13-14 year old girl, Cardiff)*

The practice of photo-sharing online was considered to be easy and fun, and this was often the trigger for creating profiles on the visual-oriented social networking and messaging platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat. However, the pursuit of online 'attractiveness' appeared to lead to a widespread culture of image management within this age group.

Many girls at this age were starting to take a more contrived approach to creating photos, with significant editing, for the primary purpose of uploading these online. Photo-sharing was also driving some at this age to have a portfolio of social platforms as a way to enable them to create and share different expressions of their image.

*"On Instagram you take ages to get yourself ready to take the picture, but on Snapchat you just do it now and press send." (11-12 year old girl, London)*

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<sup>25</sup> Aston was a leading member of British 'boy band' JLS, who had a successful career in the music charts from 2007 to 2013

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Most boys this age, by contrast, adopted a more light-hearted approach to posting pictures; indeed, 'pranks' between friends often involved uploading unflattering photos to social networks, as well as writing on each other's profiles:

*"Probably pictures [that people put up of you] are the worst. People can make comments on it. It could be a nice picture but they add text to the phone – memes. Everyone goes on about it." (11-12 year old boy, Cheltenham)*

*"You can 'frape' them – when you go on their Facebook and post weird messages to embarrass them. It's been done to me quite a lot and embarrassed me." (12-13 year old boy, Edinburgh)*

However, there was also evidence of boys' sensitivity towards their online image, and concern for how this might affect other people's perceptions of them. Receiving 'likes' on photos was a universal signifier of peer approval, and when this was absent it caused concern for both girls and boys.

*"I don't like it if put something on and don't get many comments or likes. I might take it down if I don't get much back. I know how to take down and delete and I delete anything potentially embarrassing. [Pictures] from over a year ago can be embarrassing as I've changed so much." (12-13 year old boy, Edinburgh)*

*"I wouldn't want to put a bad photo up. I'm not trying to impress anyone, it just looks better. [Girls post photos with loads of make up on] to try and get likes - likes, boyfriends, comments. People put photos with no makeup on, I'm like, 'Why?' They think they're going to get people to say, 'You're pretty without makeup.'" (13-14 year old girl, Cardiff)*

*"I would think of deleting something if it didn't get a like within 4 minutes." (14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

Overall, this image management online, including by embellishing popularity and attractiveness, appears to have been normalised among young people. Therefore it was not acknowledged to be risky per se. That said, some felt that these behaviours were not necessarily positive.

*"It's all about appearance on Instagram because it's just pictures, they don't know your personality so they're just judging you on how you look so you want to look nice.. (11-12 year old girl, London)*

There was widespread awareness that there was a potential for harm if photos of themselves were shared by others on social networking platforms without their permission. The repercussions of these acts were perceived to be potential emotional distress, embarrassment, and a loss of control of their online image.

*"If you put a picture up and someone took a screen shot, and then you took the picture down then they have that picture and you can't do anything about that." (11-12 year old girl, London)*

*"I worry about there being pictures of me on the internet - I just don't really want other people who I don't know to see what I look like. People could recognise you in the street. That would be the embarrassing side." (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

*"If I've been tagged it's much harder, if not impossible to delete." (12-13 year old boy, Edinburgh)*

There was also some concern expressed towards the potential repercussions of participating in this kind of photo-sharing behaviour.

*"I've heard about people pretending to be someone they're not. My friend put up a picture of someone else and used it to get through to Facebook. If no one likes them, you can make their account and then get a picture of them... you can make fake accounts. Some people know how to do this and send viruses that way." (11-12 year old boy, Cheltenham)*

*"If I got Snapchat, I would probably take a picture of myself but I wouldn't send it off. I might scribble all over it. My mum says that there is somewhere they are kept. People you don't know could recognise you. You don't want that. It is*

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*sort of [tempting] to get it. Quite a lot of people I know have it... a few people at dancing and at school. You want to get into their group. I'm still hesitant.” (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

### Content risks

Most in the 11-14 age group felt less anxious than younger children about being exposed to rude or swear words. Indeed, many boys claimed to enjoy content with swearing, as a projection of their increasing desire for independence and the rejection of childhood, although this was not necessarily a view shared by girls:

*“You can’t watch some videos [on YouTube] if you’re under age. You have to give proof you’re 18. It’s good if it’s got a lot of swearing in it” (11-12 year old boy, Cheltenham)*

*“I think it is because quite a lot of people think it is really cool to watch videos of swearing and stuff. I watch films with some swearing, but I’m allowed to as I’m old enough. If I do watch a 15, it will be one of those which my dad has watched before.” (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

This cohort appeared to have lower awareness of the more extreme graphic content, such as explicit pornography. What they might happen to see online was much more low-key, and therefore they were not particularly concerned by it. Of more concern to them was the embarrassment of being found out by their parents to have viewed such material, rather than the actual content itself.

The greatest ‘risk’ among this age group with respect to encountering unwanted online content appeared to be via the social networking sites they were now using. This ranged from seeing links posted to graphic news reports or adult humour to edgy pictures uploaded by peers in their online network. However, again there seemed to be less concern about the personal effect of seeing this type of content, compared with the fear of being caught looking at it by their parents.

*“I’ve seen something I didn’t like, on Instagram – there can be loads of rude stuff on it. I was sitting next to my Dad and he was like ‘Sarah, what have you been looking at?’” (11-12 year old girl, London)*

Not only was there high potential for embarrassment if discovered by their parents; this age group was also concerned about having their devices removed, or access restricted, as a result.

### 4.3.3 14-17 year olds

By this stage, personality differences appeared to have a substantial bearing on how teenagers evaluated the risk-to-reward ratio in respect of their online behaviour. Overall, teenagers claimed to feel better able to make informed judgements about possible repercussions, through having greater experience of the online world, compared with the younger people involved in this research.

### Contact risks

14-17 year olds appeared to perceive similar types of potential contact risks as did 11-14 year olds, although they generally appeared more relaxed about receiving and instigating online contact with people that they didn’t know in the offline world. They appeared to enjoy this type of contact, and felt capable and confident about making an informed judgement about the risks associated with it.

Boys in particular were more likely to establish friendships through online gaming platforms with other players.

*“I used to talk to someone from Norway. It was pretty funny... we were playing a game on the computer. You can type stuff in the game. I didn’t give away any of my details, just had a friendly chat, spoke to him sometimes. He just said stuff online that was funny, then I found out he was Norwegian, which was interesting. I don’t know anyone who’s Norwegian.” (14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

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*“I had one friend that I met when I was playing Call of Duty, this was 3 or 4 years ago, we started to play regularly. He's from Netherlands so he lives there so I won't meet him in person. Instead of it being a one off, today I could probably go on to my computer and ask if he wants to play and we'll play for 3-4 hours. I've never met him but I know what he looks like. He's two years older than me, I believe... he could be lying to me, but he sounds it and he looks it. I've got him on my Facebook and I've talked to him plenty of times over four years enough to trust him. I don't plan on meeting him anytime soon.” (16-17 year old boy, Nottingham)*

Indeed, one teenage boy in this age group said the online environment was more conducive than the offline world to forming friendships, due to the ability to identify ‘like-minded’ people more easily.

*“It's probably easier to pick friends online. You set up a profile for yourself saying ‘these are the shows I like, the music I like etc...’ It's almost like, I don't want to say ‘dating site’ but it is.” (16-17 year old boy, Nottingham)*

Some girls this age also said they had formed relationships in the online world. Sometimes this was claimed to be with members of the opposite sex, motivated by the potential to create a romantic relationship in this way.

*“When people start talking to you on Twitter, you just talk back – but they're not friends. I met my boyfriend on Twitter and now we're going out – I don't know how he found me, I think he just likes my tweets.” (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

Interestingly, it seemed that at this age teenagers had established distinct roles for different social network platforms in terms of managing their image and communication with others. Among both boys and girls there were particular online platforms where contact from people they had not met before was readily accepted and deemed appropriate. For the majority of teenagers involved in this research, Twitter was perceived as a more ‘public’ online environment, where there was a receptiveness to online contact from new people. Facebook, by contrast, appeared to be perceived as a more personal platform where contact from ‘strangers’ was not the usual etiquette and was more likely to be rejected.

*“On Facebook I keep private, but Twitter and Instagram [people start following you]. Twitter I only use to follow celebrities, or music artists. Facebook I use to talk to friends. When random people add me I ignore them, I don't like strangers. I actually put a lot on Facebook, it feels more personal than Twitter. It's friends on Facebook and followers on Twitter. On Facebook you have to request, Twitter you just press follow. You don't have to follow back.” (14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

Among these older teens, the number of online friends and followers they had was still considered by many as an important indicator of their popularity and peer group status in the offline world. This was not only about having a large number of friends or followers, but also having more than the number that they had befriended or were ‘following’ (referred to as their ‘ratio’). It was also quite common for these older teenagers to try to manipulate these figures, with several claiming to have deliberately ‘unfriended’ new friends or followers in order to boost their own ratios on Twitter or Instagram.

*“People say you're supposed to have more followers than people you're following, I don't really mind but that gives you a better online image if you've got more followers than following.” (15-16 year old boy, Bristol)*

*“I follow someone to get them to follow me back and then you unfollow them so you have more followers than people you're following, it means you're more popular and you get more likes.” (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

However, there were some exceptions to this. In particular, some boys at this age appeared more inclined to dismiss this competitive approach to earning friends online and instead adopted a more straightforward approach.

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*“I know a lot of people have 1,000 friends, but they don’t know them. I have people in my school year that I haven’t added that’s how personal it is. I don’t know the point of having 2,000 people. I’d rather just have my mates. Rather than some idiot you don’t know.” (14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

In terms of exposure to more overt contact risks, some girls in this age group reported that they were receiving unsolicited contact from men online on a regular basis and therefore this felt quite normal to them in the online environment, although it was not welcomed.

*“You can get lots of messages from the same person. Some can be perverts, they’re weird. They’re doing it because they haven’t got their own friends. Some say rude stuff.” (14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

Furthermore, with their growing maturity, girls of this age appeared to be more aware that male attention online might have sexual motives, and therefore they felt that it was necessary to be vigilant.

*“Because of our age and stuff... and because we’re girls... we can get caught in a trap.” (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

Some girls admitted that the frequency of this kind of online contact from members of the opposite sex meant that, compared to their parents, they were blasé. They knew it was opportunistic and therefore to be ignored, in a similar way to ‘spam’ messages.

*“The weirdoes PM-ing (private messaging) you on Facebook... we just think it’s normal but my mum gets all panicky about it... I just think she’s being over-reactive [sic] as I know it happens a lot – but she gets all paranoid about it and worried. I tell her to calm down about it but she says ‘I’ll tell dad, I’ll tell dad!’” (14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

Online bullying was a less prevalent concern among this age group. Some were conscious that this could still happen, as cyberbullying featured prominently in online safety education. However, it was less top-of-mind as something they might experience first-hand. This might be because it is less prevalent, or more covert, or because young people in this age group feel better equipped to deal with it. Teenagers’ friendship groups had commonly ‘settled in’ during these years of secondary school; young people at this age were also typically becoming more mature and there was generally greater appreciation of the fine line between pranks and bullying.

*“I would never bully someone online – if I had Twitter and Steph had Twitter and there was a joke, we’d tease each other. We’re all best friends so can take the banter but I don’t think I’d ever be rude to someone on purpose.” (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

### Conduct risks

Teenagers demonstrated the most awareness of the possibility of conduct risks of all children and young people involved in this research.

They also made a distinction between online behaviour that was inherently risky and behaviour that could indirectly lead to their being put at risk.

Generally, 15 to 17 year olds appeared most aware of developing their online presence, which included conversations with ‘friends’ and ‘followers’ via social networks, publicly expressing their thoughts and opinions, as well as self-publishing of their ideas, favourite quotes, photos and images; all of these methods were part of building their online persona.

*“Instagram – I’m in love with my Instagram, I can see everything on there. It’s so cool, you can post pictures – it’s what I’m into because I’m into photography and art. We use Instagram to know people better, to see what they look like in real life, to see my friends’ photos.” (15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

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*“Facebook is older than Instagram. Instagram is the newer thing to post things on, but you still use Facebook, like a backlog.” (15-16 year old boy, Bristol)*

There appeared to be a high degree of pressure to get photos ‘right’ online by this age. Girls in particular appeared to take their image management quite seriously, perceiving that this was an important way in which they might be ‘judged’, and that they might ‘judge’ other people.

*“Yes – people are judging us. Boys and girls. The whole high school. I wish I was young, there was nothing to care about when I was young. Now there’s competition... You wonder what they might be thinking. ‘What about her hair? And her make-up?’ Judging. I don’t like it when people comment on your Facebook.” (14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

*“Likes are a big thing on Instagram. If I don’t get any likes, I’ll take the picture down. One of me in my prom dress got 30 likes, that’s the most I’ve got. I do go through and delete pictures if they’ve got no likes. There’s a boy that I like, and I like his pictures so he knows I like them.” (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

For both genders there was a desire to present themselves in an optimal way online, as this was seen to be a way to help achieve the image they ideally wanted to project to their peers in the offline world.

*“Some people use [social networking] to amplify their personality, and make them seem like completely different from what they are in real life. You can go on the Internet and be whoever you want to be, that can be good and bad.” (14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

Girls liked to be seen as pretty and popular while boys wanted to be viewed as funny, ‘random’ and laid back online - some were inclined to play pranks on their friends at this age, in order to gain social kudos.

*“There are some gay Facebook groups and they shared my name on it. And they posted my Snapchat, and lots of random people added me that I didn’t want. They were gay websites, they did it as a joke.” (14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

Among 14-17 year olds there was awareness that communication with the opposite sex had the potential to feel easier and less awkward online than off-line.

*“I love using the Facebook messenger, it makes me feel talkative.” (14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

There was also considerable awareness of the potential for online communication to become inappropriate and risky relatively quickly, in terms of the tone and content of conversations, as well as the sharing of more explicit photos. A number of instances were reported within wider peer groups in which girls had been placed at risk through boys using social media to ‘show off’ their exploits.

*“Girls aged 13 sending topless pictures to impress boys, and then boys send them pictures back. I’ve had friends send stuff because their boyfriends have asked for pictures but then they get sent around half of the year somehow. Then they say, ‘That wasn’t me’, but the girl can’t do anything about it. Some guys can take advantage of girls.” (14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

*I think the point of Snapchat was you send it to them, and it’s confidential between you and the person you send it to. You get a lot of people who found out about it with iPhones, because you can screenshot, so when people have the picture uploaded, they’ll screenshot it.” (15-16 year old boy, Bristol)*

*“Boys ask girls... some girls do it and then the photos get shared with everyone. You send it to one boy and then they’ll show their mates and then they send it to their mates.” (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

It was only towards the upper end of this age group that future reputational issues appeared to be considered as possible repercussions of risk-taking behaviour online. This seemed to be the point at which teenagers were beginning to look ahead to the next phase after school, such as moving to college, university or employment. There was awareness that social media had the potential to have an adverse

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effect on their ‘reputation’ in the immediate short-term at this stage (i.e. by potential employers and admissions teams researching online in the process of vetting applicants). Some had therefore made a conscious effort to curb evidence of any suspect behaviour in the offline world from being documented online, for example, photos showing them drinking alcohol or behaving inappropriately at a party.

*“We had a talk about it at our old school... our old Facebook pictures can turn up on Google, even ones on holiday in our bikinis and stuff. Like you wouldn’t put pictures up of you drinking or anything. Future employers would look you up – my mum told me. And because of our job... childcare... there’s more checks on us so we have to be more careful... you wouldn’t put up bad language or whatever.” (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

This age group identified risks associated with buying goods online, including scams, faulty and counterfeit goods. Some 14-17 year olds were aware of family members or friends who had had negative experiences, such as purchased concert tickets never arriving, which helped to drive awareness of these types of risks. There was a tendency to focus on the repercussions that would directly affect impact them, such as the disappointment of not receiving goods, rather than those which would be considered more serious from an adult perspective, such as being charged for something fraudulently. Some even admitted that while they were aware of risks associated with buying online, the desire to buy the product meant that they had overlooked possible repercussions.

*“If I loved it, I’d buy it, but if it was just all right, I wouldn’t trust it. I’d use that excuse. I would take the risk if I really liked it.” (15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

In addition, illegal use of age-restricted sites or content, or accessing paid-for content for free<sup>26</sup>, appeared to be relatively common, particularly by more experienced and confident internet users, and was an accepted norm of the online world. This was despite some respondents being aware of the potential risks of these behaviours (e.g. getting viruses).

*“I can’t do anything with my laptop. It’s completely ruined. I don’t go on Megashare.com much, but when I do, my computer gets slower every time. My laptop is full of viruses because of it.” (15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

A small minority of the older and more ‘techie’ boys also mentioned using proxy servers as a way of bypassing school restrictions to access sites, such as their personal email. However, this practice appeared to be very niche.

*“There are websites called 'educational games' and they’re not. I’ve used that once or twice. I think it’s like people set up these websites so you can use it at school. It’s blocked now because people have caught on.” (14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

*“You can access sites, such as Pirate Bay; they use a different network from your IP address, a ghost network. You can access to blocked sites in school. If you type in that site and then 'proxy' at the end of it, you get pages of results coming up and click on it, and it takes you to the same site. You just pick it up.” (15-16 year old boy, Bristol)*

### Content risks

Teenagers appeared to have a greater understanding of online content risks, most likely because of their greater online experience. They claimed to be more familiar with the different types of inappropriate content available online, and therefore had greater awareness of the possibility of seeing such content. This included more extreme graphic content from user-generated and uncensored news websites, which was also being shared via social networking sites.

*“You see a lot of bad things on there [Facebook]... you get people that have been in fights, and you get some gory pictures. They get put on Facebook, they’re on there for about an hour, and then Facebook deletes them. That one*

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<sup>26</sup> For example for films via sites such as Megashare.com

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*bloke who was on the floor and he'd been punched in the face repeatedly, and his face was all bloody. One with the knife, the murder. There was someone getting their head cut off as well. There's just people sharing loads of stuff, LiveLeak<sup>27</sup>, I think it's called. They put it on YouTube, and they like and share it, and immediately it'll be taken down on Facebook.” (15-16 year old boy, Bristol)*

While the presence of inappropriate content online was normalised to a large extent, there was a sense that this type of content was often unwelcome and was becoming too widely available to unreceptive internet users.

*“Speaking about safety, the problems with Facebook is that they filter anything inappropriate but occasionally things will slip through that are porno [sic] or violent that I don't want to see. They aren't supposed to allow gore videos and stuff but they get hacked and end up on Facebook ... There's a place on the internet where people go for that stuff, but when it starts invading your area of the internet it makes you feel vulnerable.” (16-17 year old boy, Nottingham)*

Among the few (mainly boys) who deliberately accessed sites containing more extreme graphic content, there was awareness that this might be inappropriate. But the main risk they perceived was being caught looking at it by parents, especially since it was not always immediately clear how extreme the content might turn out to be.

*“On Reddit, there are codenames [for certain types of content]. You think it's something else. It's the opposite of what it says. You have to click off it and forget what you've seen. If your mum and dad were to ask, it'd be hard to say why you clicked on it, but you clicked on it because you didn't know what it is.” (14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

The exact line between what is and is not acceptable for this age group to see online appeared to be quite blurred. Pornography was mentioned by some teenagers in this age group as being unacceptable. But both genders expressed the view that pornography was relatively normal in the online world, and there were indications that some young people are accessing it (reported at second hand by participants). The risk of being harmed by such exposure was not particularly apparent to them. That said, pornography was associated with the ‘darker side’ of the internet, which they knew adults would consider it inappropriate for them to see.

*“If it was porn or something like that I'm not going to watch that as I'm not supposed to be watching it, not that I want to. I think with boys it's a bigger thing but I don't know any girls that watch it but the boys all do their thing, maybe not if they've got girlfriends. I've not seen any bravado from boys talking about what they're seeing, what they're looking at [but] I think at 14 /15, they're watching it. It's so easy to access now - get it on their phones, iPads, iPods.” (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

In the same way as other graphic content, the most significant ‘risk’ young people associated with online pornography was the potential to be caught looking at it, rather than the impact of the content itself. Some boys felt keen to demonstrate to their parents that they were not accessing it, and to highlight that having this type of content available in the online world did not make them compelled to view it or automatically place them at risk.

*“My parents probably think I'm going on dodgy websites when I don't. They think I go on porn sites when I don't. Their views are very different to mine, I think the internet is alright, but they think it's dangerous.” (14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

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<sup>27</sup> LiveLeak is a UK-based video sharing website that lets users post and share videos and places emphasis on current events, politics and reality-based footage such as war scenes from various parts of the world - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LiveLeak>

## 4.4 Approaches to managing risk online

### 4.4.1 Overall

This research revealed that there was a clear trend of children and young people managing risk more independently as they got older. While there were some common strategies, used by children and young people across the age spectrum of 8 to 17, there were also some different types of behaviour among particular age and life-stage groups. Personality type was also observed to have an important influence on how children and young people perceived and responded to risks.

There was evidence that despite being aware of ways to manage risk and stay safe online, they did not always practise them consistently. The reasons for this included curiosity, complacency and, particularly among tweens and teenagers, the perception that a risk was worth taking for the potential reward it would bring.

Overall, children aged 8 to 11 were relatively more cautious and risk-averse. They were the most likely to tell a parent (or a teacher) as soon as they were exposed to any type of risk online, as they were used to parents protecting them from risks in the offline world. But even in this age range, children made a decision about the relative benefits or downsides of involving their parents, in the event of feeling at risk online.

*“If I saw something I didn’t like online I would click off it and tell my mum and dad. I’d say ‘something weird popped up’.” (10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

*“I’d talk to my parents, but not for one ‘swear’. I don’t want my mum to ban me from the game.”  
(9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

Those aged 11-14 expressed greater reluctance to talk to their parents about the instances when they felt exposed to risks online, particularly if these had occurred as a result of their own actions. They were even more concerned about having their online freedom revoked as a result of telling a parent about these experiences, and were more likely to talk to friends instead:

*“I’d probably tell my friends first if something bad happened, otherwise I’d just ignore it.”  
(13-14 year old boy, North London)*

Those aged 14- 17 were the least likely overall to tell a parent if and when they felt exposed to risks online, although this did depend on the type of relationship they had with their parents. Most regarded the online world as their personal space in which they could develop their ‘private life’. Additionally, since risk-taking behaviour was more likely to have been undertaken within groups of friends, there was a tendency to ask friends for help to resolve problems arising as a result of this. The exception to this was when a problem was felt to have escalated beyond the control of the young people themselves; in these cases, parents and sometimes schools would be consulted for help.

*“We had a situation at school where loads of people from our school were getting the odd message, and they reported it in school. There were at least five people getting asked to meet this bloke.” (15-16 year old boy, Bristol)*

### 4.4.2 Contact risks

All children and young people in this research were aware that it was necessary to keep their personal details concealed in order to stay safe online, and this was firmly established as normal behaviour. Most importantly, this included their address and telephone number, in order to prevent anyone they did not know from identifying or contacting them.

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*“You can’t put private things up. Like address, phone, anything where I could be followed or found physically or online. Or giving away your password, they could find your user name and hack you. And it’s your fault for doing it and you can’t do anything until you stop that person. I’ve had my Facebook hacked, I didn’t know who it was. I’ve played against people who’ve been hacked too.” (9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

*“There’s no need to have your address online, your phone numbers, keep that for private messages.”  
(16-17 year old boy, Nottingham)*

Even the youngest children who participated in this research were aware of the importance of not sharing their online passwords with anyone. There was a clear understanding of the serious repercussions associated with this and there were no reported incidences of this happening in this research.

*“You’d never show your passwords – because people can hack.” (9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

Many children aged 8 to 11 understood that their name was one of the personal details they should also keep concealed online; this seemed particularly to be the case for those who had yet to create social networking accounts.

*“I wouldn’t put up personal information. Where I live or what my name is.” (9-10 year old girl, Bristol)*

*“You could give your name – but it could be fake.” (9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

The perceived need to protect their identity was sometimes exaggerated by the younger age groups. This led to some confusion about the level of risk and potential repercussions which might be associated with revealing their name online.

*“When you play games online, there are other people and they know your account name. They could memorise it.”  
(10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

In the 11-14 group there was some uncertainty about whether names could be safely shared online, and the use of usernames on some commonly-used websites often meant this was not requested, or unnecessary.

*“Whenever I go on things, I make up a nickname. I never put on my real name. Not even first or last name. When I was younger, I went on Moshi Monsters, I never put my name on that. You have a username. Some sites tell you not to use your real name.” (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

As children got older, their concern about sharing their name online became determined more by the proximity of other personal identifiers. For instance, having their name and their photograph shown together was considered by some, particularly girls, to be a greater risk. This was particularly the case if the photo was taken and uploaded by somebody else, such as a friend ‘tagging’ a photo without their consent. However, for some this concern was apparently driven as much from an image management perspective as from a safety point of view.

*“We had a film put on. It was about a guy and a girl. She was with her friends and he was making her send pictures to him and he was uploading them to his friends. He found out her name. He acted like her friend. He found out different pieces of information and then worked out what school she was at and followed her.” (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

*“Some boy came over and said he knew me from Facebook. He shouted out my name. I ignored him. He had an English accent. I found out afterwards he was my cousin’s boyfriend at the time and he recognised me from her Facebook. I made my photos private after that as I didn’t like it.” (14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

## Understanding and managing online risks

Across all age groups, the most established strategies for responding to unwelcome contact on social websites were using the blocking and reporting functions. Children and young people used these in the event of experiencing extreme behaviour such as bullying or threats, when other users appeared to be rude or aggressive towards them, as well as when they received contact from people they did not know. There were variations in this behaviour by age; younger children were more likely to block anyone who made contact with them who they did not know, due to their fear of ‘stranger danger’. There was widespread awareness among younger children of the ability to block people, even if they had not done this, which helped to reassure them.

*“Once a girl asked me lots of questions and I blocked her and then deleted the whole app immediately.”  
(8-9 year old girl, Nottingham)*

*“If someone keeps adding you as a friend, you can block him or her. It has never happened to me.”  
(10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

The use of the reporting functions on social media sites also appeared to be relatively common, and was used within peer groups to censor content they did not want to see online. As these were being used so widely, there was a perception that this was an easier way to get photos removed, without having to communicate directly with the person responsible for uploading them.

*“On FaceTime, if someone makes a stupid face you take a photo [screen-grab] then put them up on Instagram. There's one girl I got really mad about. I reported her to the company. I got an inappropriate image report and they deleted it.”  
(9-10 year old girl, Bristol)*

*“You can report stuff. I'd do that if someone put a really bad photo of me on there. It gives you options for why you're reporting. I'd report friends. If you report them, they don't get into trouble. It depends what they've done. They get an email. I wouldn't make them take it down but I'd tell them to or report them. I wouldn't block them.”  
(14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

The tweens and teenagers who took part in this research perceived that the ability to block and report other users on social media sites was a fundamental part of increasing user safety.

*“It's dangerous, but not as dangerous as some people think. I think teachers think that because they're old, I don't think they really understand. If you're getting bullied online, you just block them and decline things. Cyberbullying is so easy to do but so easy to block. Now you can do it so that they can't even add you again so it's pretty good.”  
(14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

*“Facebook is getting safer every day. As a business they are increasing their budget and Facebook have to respond to everything that could be an issue. It's easy to report. It will take a lot of people to report something for them to do anything [though]. It's very thorough they'll give you the opportunity to say why you are reporting it and you have the opportunity to say you don't want to see anything else that this person posts.” (16-17 year old boy, Nottingham)*

The perceived effectiveness of reporting functions was not explored at length during this research, but overall it did seem that the majority of children and young people were aware of, and felt comfortable using these functions in order to manage the contact they received.

### 4.4.3 Conduct risks

There was often little consideration by children and young people of managing risks associated with their own behaviour in the online world. As explored earlier, behaviours that were perceived to be risky, as well as thresholds of acceptability for risk-taking behaviour, varied by age and personality.

## Understanding and managing online risks

*"If my mum found out I was using Snapchat I'd get in trouble. My mum says that there is probably still a way of people finding the pictures that have gone. My mum and dad don't want me to have stuff like that. My dad is more strict."  
(12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

*"I think watching porn is the worst thing I could do." (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

That said, younger children aged 8-11 were generally cautious in their online conduct and not likely to take risks willingly. In cases where risks had been inadvertently taken, the child usually looked to the authority figures in their lives for guidance on what action to take. Indeed, it seemed that 'disappointing' a parent was a considerable deterrent to entering into risky behaviour online.

For tweens and teenagers, unwanted exposure of their own or others' personal information and pictures on social media sites was most top-of-mind as an online conduct risk. Some claimed to manage this risk by using privacy settings and protocols, such as not posting other people's photos without first seeking their permission.

*"I put up on a few photos but I have a setting for privacy. If people aren't following you then they can't see your pictures. I don't post pics of other people who wouldn't want it. People might put bad comments on a photo and that person could see it and it could offend them." (11-12 year old girl, London)*

*"I keep my things on private so that no one can see things I don't want them to see. That would worry me – if someone recognised me just from my photos – that's really freaky. Or people could pretend to be me. That happened to a girl from school." (14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

Having a negative experience (e.g. receiving unwanted attention or contact) could be a driver to adopting a more cautious approach to social networking, including accepting only known people as friends. However, this depended on the individual; there was a perception that limiting their 'social sphere' online could dent their online popularity.

*"Like this man I was chatting to from Africa, I spoke to him for 5 minutes and then he asked me if I wanted to be his girlfriend. I didn't know what to do I was shocked, I said no and then he just said 'God Loves you'. I deleted him after that. I used to accept anyone who requested me but now I don't on Facebook, I only have people I know." (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

Interestingly, managing privacy online was not always a risk-minimisation strategy - it was sometimes motivated by the need to avoid parental supervision and get greater online freedom. This was particularly the case for some in the 14-17 age group; there were reports of not accepting relatives' friend requests, or of having a second account that their parents did not have access to.

*"I've got my uncles and aunties on mine [Instagram account] so I can prove I've got nothing to hide. I accepted my uncle for that reason but then he started going through my pictures! I don't really want them to see all my pictures!"  
(16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

In general, girls appeared to be more mindful and considered than boys about their online conduct. Even if they had started to communicate with people online whom they did not know, many knew the importance of managing situations so that they did not get out of control.

*"This person started talking to me, then it was fake. It was pictures off the Internet. I was like, 'Bye.' On Twitter you can report them. Some people are, like, 'I'm 14,' then the next day they're 18, so I just unfollow them and leave them."  
(12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

*"If people ask you to send a picture, then I won't. A boy asked me the other day and it really annoyed me."  
(16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

## Understanding and managing online risks

Most girls were also aware of the need to be more cautious in online relationships than in relationships which started in the offline world.

*“Say there was a boy that you met – you know that he’s real from his pictures and he’d know a bit about me, but it could be so different in real life.” (15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

*“We were talking for ages first. I was really scared about meeting him in case he wasn’t who he said he was but it was fine. My mum and dad met him too when he first met me, he came to the house [but] I would never say to someone ‘I love you’ before I met them. That would just be weird.” (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

There was also some awareness of ways to manage risks associated with online purchasing. PayPal was widely regarded as a safe way to minimise risks of fraud. Several children and young people were aware of the service, particularly as many had parents who were signed up to PayPal. While there was generally little clarity about how PayPal worked, there was generally a good understanding of its benefit, particularly among tweens and teenagers, in terms of helping to conceal the visibility of personal details online.

*“My dad helped me when we bought stuff on eBay, he used PayPal. PayPal is like a debit card that is full of money so you can buy stuff on the internet and it is good so you don’t have to give details or meet up with anyone and give money. It keeps all your information on it – I’ve no idea how they get the money but you can see the padlock so you know it is safe.” (8-9 year old girl, Nottingham)*

*“I always look for the green padlock that’s at the top. It means it’s secure, no one’s going to steal your bank account details. I always buy through PayPal, which adds extra security because it’s safer, it’s done wirelessly. Entering your details into the website, it’s just gone through PayPal. You just type your email address and password.” (14-15 year old boy, Leeds)*

### 4.4.4 Content risks

The main approach to managing content risks reported in this research was avoidance, which included not visiting sites with potentially upsetting content, or navigating away from content that had been seen unintentionally.

Younger children, in particular, appeared to go to greater lengths than their older counterparts to avoid content that might not be appropriate for them online. For instance, one 10-11 year old girl in Belfast reported searching for all information online with the suffix ‘for kids’ to ensure she would only see child-appropriate sites and links. This type of self-protecting behaviour was most common among 8-11 year olds; the group most likely to be proactive in avoiding content.

Younger children were also more likely to report having parental controls installed on their devices, to protect them from being exposed to harmful content. Parental controls appeared to be less prevalent among tweens and teenagers; they had a greater degree of personal control of their own devices.

*“On my tablet I’ve got a blocking mode – it blocks everything [my parents] don’t trust.” (9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

Tweens and teenagers tended to take the view that there was little that could be done to avoid inappropriate content ‘slipping through’ in an online environment, or being exposed to it inadvertently, particularly on social networking sites. In addition, the minority of teenage boys appear to have been more willingly exposed to graphic, violent or shocking content online, although they claimed that this had been driven by searching for sites with funny and amusing content, and then finding this other, more extreme content. None of the participants in this research admitted to seeking out this type of content.

There was a widespread belief that virus detection software would protect against this type of content.<sup>28</sup> Some younger children were reliant on this type of software, as well as visual symbols, to determine which sites they could safely use:

*“You can get McAfee. If there's a little green tick you know it's safe and if it has a red one then it might have viruses. You'd be putting your computer at risk if you went on it then.” (10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

*“I look for the Verisign trust sign – it means it is secure and gives you confidence that what you're downloading is safe.” (12-13 year old boy, Edinburgh)*

*“I've got McAfee on mine so I think it tells you. If it's a tick or a cross then you know if you can go on it or not. If it's a cross or question mark I won't go on it.” (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

However, this was not a universal behaviour. In some instances children and young people did not have virus protection software (some claimed that it did not work on their machines), while some had the software but claimed they were still willing to take a chance on unverified sites. Some teenagers in particular were willing to be exposed to risks of viruses in order to download free content, such as films and music from illegal sharing sites. It seemed there might be greater willingness to be exposed to risks in this way when using older devices, whereas having a new laptop, in particular, appeared to deter this type of behaviour.

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<sup>28</sup> McAfee Secure seemed to be particularly well-known and associated with identifying safe websites.

## Section 5

# 5. Trust and opinion formation online

## 5.1 Overview

This section addresses the second main objective in this research, which was to explore the area of trust and opinion formation among children and young people online. In particular, this included an exploration of the following questions:

- How do children and young people decide which information sources to trust online?
- What authentication approaches do they use?

Key findings in this section include:

- Overall, it appears that children and young people think and know relatively little about what sources they can trust in the online world, in contrast with their understanding of potential risks, especially related to online contact and conduct. Despite this, it was evident that trust does influence online behaviour, albeit often subconsciously.
- The understanding and role of trust in the online world changes in line with children's developmental needs and becomes more complex for older children.
- Online trust tends to be driven by familiarity, so brands which are known in the offline world are trusted most readily, with the BBC emerging as the pre-eminently trustworthy source. Beyond this, the endorsement of websites and online content by peers, parents and teachers played a key role in influencing trust formation.
- In addition to the BBC, Google and Wikipedia are primary online sources of trusted information for children and young people. Often, the information found via Wikipedia or the top information source on Google were felt to suffice when carrying out everyday homework and information-searching tasks.
- When accurate information is a real priority, tweens and teenagers are more likely to triangulate between a number of sources to validate trustworthiness.
- When visiting websites for the first time, children and young people use visual methods of authentication; trustworthiness is typically determined by a combination of familiar cues and layout.
- In terms of opinion formation, online content provides a source of inspiration and aspiration, but young people do not appear to recognise how much they model their attitudes and behaviour directly on what they see online. Younger children in particular are more conscious of their parents' influence, whereas friends are more influential in the transition from tween to teen. There are indications that the online environment influences the opinions of children and young people, particularly in shaping young people's perceptions of what is 'normal'.
- There are gaps in the critical thinking skills of children and young people; they appear less likely to consider, or challenge, the accuracy of online information, or to challenge the commercial or editorial motives of brands and organisations, than to challenge new personal contacts online.

## 5.2 Defining trust online

Exploring trust in the online world is relatively complex. Trust was not a concept that children spontaneously articulated as being important to them in the online world; for the majority, determining the trustworthiness of a source was not a conscious consideration in their online behaviour. In particular, the youngest children (8 – 11s) did not really engage with the concept of online trust, and relied on adults' guidance rather than making their own decisions about this.

The meaning of ‘trust’ changed according to children’s age and cognitive development stage. A key element of the methodological approach was to allow children and young people to define what trust meant to them in the online world.

In this section these differences are explored in detail.

### 5.2.1 8-11 year olds

Among the youngest age group, trust online was primarily associated with safety, and they felt that being able to trust particular websites (and to a lesser extent apps) meant they would be ‘protected’ from all types of risks. They learnt to trust different websites as a result of guidance from parents and teachers, who would point the children to approved sites and away from potentially risky sites. Many children were able to recall what they had learned from their parents and teachers about the trustworthiness of different sites.

*“Sometimes the teachers give us websites to go on. We know BBC Bitesize, we can trust them.”  
(9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

Trusting that a website was ‘safe’ meant that they would be protected from unwanted contact and content, as well as knowing that their computer would be protected from the risk of viruses. Children at this age perceived that the more established children’s websites were safer to use in this respect, and indeed, safety was regarded as a key element of their brand identity.

*“I trust the internet quite a lot, because most of the stuff is safe and everyone searches on it. Everyone who has the internet has probably searched something. Sites like Club Penguin are almost certainly going to be safe. If people are doing bad things they'll get banned. The bigger sites are the better ones, if they're not safe, loads of people wouldn't use it.” (10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

### 5.2.2 11-14 year olds

Since 11-14s were generally more confident users of the internet, concerns for their immediate safety were slightly less top-of-mind than they were for younger children. While trust was still not an overt consideration for most, when explored it was perceived as a multi-faceted concept comprising reliability, credibility and security. This reflected the different ways in which they were now using the internet in their everyday lives.

*“If you are doing homework, the internet has a lot of information. Some websites are quite reliable, but some aren't as reliable. You have to pick and choose the sources you get. You can't rely on it fully.” (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

The reliability of online celebrity news and information was highlighted as being important to tweens and young teens. They wanted assurance about the accuracy of information, since finding false information was likely to have a negative impact for them socially. Having up-to-date news about ‘their worlds’ appeared to be valuable social currency that they would exchange with peers in order to be part of the conversation; therefore, they sought to establish trustworthy sources.

*“If someone says, 'have you seen this about Miley Cyrus?' I'd go on to Miley Cyrus' Twitter account to see if it's true.”  
(13-14 year old girl, Cardiff)*

Being able to trust the credibility and security of websites and apps in the online world was another area that became important for 11-14 year olds. They reported making more online transactions and did not want to be ‘conned’. Trust, according to this age group, was now about websites doing or delivering what they said they would. Security was viewed in terms of protecting personal details and this was

considered important for undertaking transactions online. While their understanding of trust seemed relatively limited, there was greater awareness among 11-14s of the need to authenticate content and sites, as well as some familiarity with how to do this.

### 5.2.3 14-17 year olds

Among the teenagers, the meaning of trust was understood in relatively the same terms as the 11-14 year olds: it was seen to encompass the reliability, credibility and security of websites.

It was also important for 14-17 year olds to be able to trust the authenticity of people online since this was where they spent time 'socialising'. Many reported feeling confident using social networks to research people to find out more about them and evaluate their relative trustworthiness. However, this seemed a lower priority than judging people's popularity, attractiveness and influence.

*“‘Facebook famous’ people have lots of subscribers and followers and many likes on their photos. You feel excited when you see them in town. They’re hipsters. They come up on your news feed even if you don’t know them. You add them [as a friend] anyway because they’re Facebook famous and some of them are quite funny.”  
(15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

Forming relationships on the internet was acknowledged as being a risky area and many expressed a greater sense of vulnerability when it came to gauging the trustworthiness of people online, particularly new contacts. Unlike websites, people were perceived as an unknown commodity in the online world and there was widespread awareness of the potential for deception and disguise.

*“If a guy sends you a friend request, you look at who they know and where they go to school, and if you don’t know anyone they know or their school then you just know you shouldn’t trust them.” (15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

Having the freedom to interact with others in the online world seemed exciting to some teenagers, particularly because of the element of risk involved. In these instances there was often a desire to trust, coupled with a sense of over-confidence in the ability to judge trustworthiness, which appeared to potentially place a minority of teenagers in this research at risk.

*“My mate, on Friday, she missed school to go to London to meet this guy she’s never met before, but met on Facebook. They’re sleeping in a hotel together, and this bloke’s like 21. I’m just like, ‘What are you on?’ She’s sixteen.”  
(15-16 year old boy, Bristol)*

## 5.3 The importance of trust online

### 5.3.1 Overall

In addition to defining what online trust means to children and young people, this research sought to understand the importance of trust, and if and how it influences behaviour. While these perceptions were highly driven by individual personality types, they also appeared to shift in line with age.

The 8-11s placed high importance on the ability to feel safe online and for most this was a prerequisite for a positive online experience. The potential dangers and risks of internet use had been impressed upon most by parents and schools, and many were cautious internet users as a result. Many therefore accepted unquestioningly the risk management strategies they had been taught for managing these risks, and showed little inclination to deviate from them (as explored in Section 4).

*“With the computer – I don’t really trust things on there – it’s not always true all the time on there... my teacher said don’t always listen to things online because it can’t always be true and they could be trying to do something when you don’t want to.” (8-9 year old girl, Nottingham)*

*“I find out from talking to my mum but I’m probably more careful than my mum on the internet... she goes on any website. I only go on ones my friends tell me about, so I know they’re safe. They could be like a scam or a fake otherwise.” (9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

For many children between 11 and 14, trust no longer appeared crucial to having a positive online experience. This seemed particularly the case as their inclination for more risky behaviour online took over, with an increased tendency to misjudge the risk/reward relationship. While the facets of trust such as reliability, credibility and security were claimed to be ‘very important’ by many respondents, their behaviour online did not always seem to reflect this. At this stage, there was still a relatively low level of knowledge about how to establish trustworthiness online, and many ‘grey areas’ to navigate through. For example, while spending time online with one girl in this age group, it was evident she did not always try to authenticate the trustworthiness of websites she had not visited before for her school work.

*“I don’t know if it’s trustworthy, I’d just write it down and say to the teacher I got it off the internet. If it sounds like the answer I need then I’ll just write it down and the source where I got it from and hope it’s right. I don’t really ever think about where the information comes from.” (14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

Those aged 14 to 17 tended to place more importance on trust than younger teenagers. This appeared to stem from learning from their previous online experiences. They appeared to have formed a repertoire of trusted sites including news, information and retail sites that they perceived to be reliable and which had been proven through experience.

Those who reported having a negative experience of a website, for example paying for something that never arrived, learned not to use the site again. This was particularly the case where they experienced the repercussions personally, such as losing their own money.

*“We bought some tickets the other day and they didn’t come, so my mum had to complain. It was [a well-known ticket agency]. I thought they were trustworthy. I knew they weren’t because they sell their tickets on.” (15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

### 5.4 Importance of trust online, by category

This research highlighted that beyond establishing the general trustworthiness of websites as being ‘safe to use’, children and young people placed different levels of importance on the internet as a trustworthy source.

Some common themes emerged in the ways in which participants validated information or sources online. Ultimately, having a strong relationship with a brand or source in the offline world appeared to be the main way of authenticating its trustworthiness online. When this was not possible, they used other approaches to validate online sources, depending on the type of site. When in doubt, younger children reported looking to their parents for advice, while tweens and teenagers would look to older siblings or peers for reassurance.

#### 5.4.1 News

Most children and young people were likely to use the internet to find specific online news stories that were of interest to them, rather than following the news more generally. The types of ‘news’ stories of

## Trust and opinion formation online

most interest were sport (skewed towards boys) and entertainment (girls). In both cases, the reliability of the information was deemed to be important.

*“I only watch the news on TV if there are famous people on there. My dad has an app. It updates all the time at the top of this phone. I get notifications on Twitter. I’ve done this thing with One Direction so I get notifications when they tweet something. I can read it straight away.” (9-10 year old girl, Bristol)*

*“My sister has a hamster and it needs newspaper, so I just read it when I’m putting it down. When I wanted to know something I would go on the internet and say ‘What happened to the Malaysian Plane<sup>29</sup>?’ and then it would just come up.” (11-12 year old girl, North London)*

There was a consensus that online news could be trusted if it came from a source that was well-known and established in the offline world. The BBC was the most top-of-mind for all; other media outlets such as Sky News, ITV and newspaper brands were also mentioned, although to a lesser extent.

*“If I wanted to know what was actually happening I would look on the BBC... other things joke around and do sports and entertainment. BBC get their facts straight and do top stories. They are always really serious. They don’t really have a cheerful voice. They are always very straight.” (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

There was awareness of the distinction between news and ‘gossip’ (rumour) among children from 11 years up. Both news and gossip could be entertaining, thought-provoking and valuable as social currency among friends. Only when it was of particular interest or relevance to them would they attempt to authenticate the trustworthiness of the information; otherwise most appeared to be happy to enjoy the content without necessarily being sure of its authenticity.

*“There was a picture of Jennifer Aniston with a shaved head that was retweeted on Twitter and I thought it was true ... I went and asked but my sister told me it wasn’t... the picture had just been changed to look like that.” (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

## Authenticating the trustworthiness of news

The BBC online was the most trusted news site among children and young people, and it was perceived by them to be the website with the strongest association with trust in the online world more generally. Beyond the news, the BBC website was known by all participants to be a broad information resource, ranging from entertainment to education.

*“I look to the BBC if I want to know if anything is really happening – if it’s not on there then it’s probably not true.” (12-13 year old boy, Edinburgh)*

*“BBC News if it’s news related. BBC Bitesize is good for school. Other stuff I look on Wikipedia as BBC doesn’t have loads of information on it.” (15-16 year old boy, Bristol)*

The trust placed in the BBC reflected a relationship built over time, through growing up watching television on BBC channels as well as using its website and other platforms<sup>30</sup>. The BBC was regarded to be ubiquitous and authoritative, which contributed to its status as a trusted online information source.

*“I trust the BBC most because it’s well known, everyone knows it. It’s on TV, it’s online, it’s on everything.” (15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

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<sup>29</sup> The missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 featured prominently in the news during the fieldwork period – <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-26715476>

<sup>30</sup> Across the sample, participants remembered watching CBeebies and some continued to watch CBBC. Beyond this there were many other touch-points when they had engaged with the brand both online and offline, such as learning and revision resources (BBC Bitesize), radio (primarily Radio 1) and television channels (BBC One, BBC Two, and for some older teenagers, BBC Three).

*“The BBC are real life people and they know a lot about the world. I will always believe the BBC, even when I am 12.”  
(8-9 year old girl, Nottingham)*

*“The BBC are on TV every morning and my mum watches them so I trust them.” (8-9 year old girl, Nottingham)*

Overall, the strength of the BBC brand beyond the online world seemed to be the most important factor in instilling trust in it. The majority of children had learned from parents and through school that the BBC was trustworthy, and accepted this as true. Interestingly, both ITV and Sky, for those who had grown up with them, were held in similar regard as the BBC, indicating that overall familiarity was the most important thing driving trust among young people.

*“If I wanted information about the news I would look on Sky and BBC. They both have a television channel too, and it echoes what’s on the TV. You can see what they look like. You wouldn’t broadcast a lie to millions of people.”  
(10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

Newspaper brands such as the Sun and the Daily Mail online also received mentions in the discussion of trust, particularly by tweens and teenagers. Overall, it seemed that perceptions of relative trustworthiness, as well as being influenced by offline brand, were influenced by parents’ views. While the BBC was universally perceived to be trustworthy, some felt that other media could be trusted only for certain types of news, in particular, sports and entertainment/gossip.

*“BBC normally because you are guaranteed that they aren't biased and they'll give you all the info. They are a big business and so well known. You know that they are going to be careful and it's the same with ITV.”  
(16-17 year old boy, Nottingham)*

*“You do have to be careful with newspapers though, yeah I don't trust newspapers. I like reading The Sun but I don't trust it because that's for entertainment, not for information.” (16-17 year old boy, Nottingham)*

### 5.4.2 Information

Even those in the youngest age group in this research claimed that they were starting to look for information for themselves online. Many 8-10 year olds reported being guided by teachers and parents to the most appropriate and relevant websites (particularly for school work) although this was not always the case. By around 10 or 11, most children seemed to instinctively look online to fulfil the majority of their information needs, both for school and otherwise.

*“I do my homework with the Internet. It depends what it is. If I really don't understand something, I'll go online. You can watch tutorials.” (15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

*“In the past, if you wanted to know something, you had to go search for it but in the age of the internet we have everything we need either socially or intellectually at our fingertips, in our pocket.” (16-17 year old boy, Nottingham)*

All age groups appeared to place inherent trust in Google as a gateway to finding information online. It was considered a safe site to use by younger children; tweens and teenagers perceived it as an invaluable tool for finding credible information.

*“I just use Google. I'd just rather use it because I'm used to it. I think Google is more trusted. On most computers, you can go straight to Google.” (10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

For most, the outcome of Google’s searching and filtering process was the most important indicator of the relative trustworthiness of information (unless it was from a known site such as the BBC or Sky, as

mentioned above). The ‘higher’ a link appeared towards the top of the page on Google the ‘better’ it was perceived to be. No-one claimed to go beyond the first page of a Google search, as they perceived that any results from here would not be worthwhile.

Understanding varied as to why links which featured higher up the first page in a Google search were better, and understanding this did not seem to matter to them<sup>31</sup>. Overall, Google was considered to be a shortcut to finding trusted information online and the search engine played an important role in all children’s and young people’s online repertoires.

*“It’s probably to do with related words and numbers of searches on those words. It’s probably about how much each site is used.” (11-12 year old boy, Cheltenham)*

*“I don’t normally go to page 2 because I don’t really need to. The links from page 2 just seem very different. On page 1 are Amazon, eBay if I’m searching for clothes or shoes, like basketball shoes I buy all the time. On the second page the websites will have spam and they’ll have pop up ads and those I don’t really trust that much. I think it’s just because of the way that Google works it’s got the pages that people have visited the most at the top underneath, so if one page of basketball shoes has been visited a lot then that will be higher up, than one on a random Austrian website that no one trusts.” (16-17 year old boy, Nottingham)*

Wikipedia was considered by children and young people to be the default information website, although, as most participants knew it was edited, there was some confusion about its trustworthiness. On the one hand, where a Wikipedia link was one of the top shown in a Google search this intuitively suggested to most it would be trustworthy. However, some reported that their primary schools were advising them not to use Wikipedia as a reliable information source. There appeared to be differing levels of interpretation of what ‘edited’ might mean. For example, some children had interpreted this as meaning that new information could potentially be fabricated and added to existing Wikipedia pages, whereas existing information could not be doctored.

*“Some people change Wikipedia. Henry VIII had six wives but they will put he had eight wives just so you’re confused.” (9-10 year old Boy, Carshalton)*

*“[On Wikipedia] they don’t normally change the introduction. People add information. Say they’ve just seen something, they might add to it but they don’t change it.” (10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

*“I remember when Wikipedia was quite untrustworthy because anyone could post anything but now the moderation that goes into it makes it a lot more difficult.” (16-17 year old boy, Nottingham)*

Overall, while Wikipedia was used widely, on the whole it was less trusted than Google. Nonetheless, young people did not always want to question the authenticity of information on Wikipedia. Some seemed happy to take a chance; to trust that information on the site would be ‘mostly accurate’ if not completely correct, as a trade-off for the relative ease and convenience of finding it.

*“I don’t exactly trust everything that is on there [Wikipedia] as anyone can log on there and go in and write stuff.” (12-13 year old boy, Edinburgh)*

*“I don’t know if it’s because I’m lazy, but I go to Wikipedia first. Teachers say don’t go on it, but I go on it anyway. It depends who the teacher is - certain teachers will let you copy and paste. For ICT exams you can’t copy and paste, but for research you can.” (14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

*“I 100% believe Wikipedia, even though I’ve edited it before so know it can’t be trusted.” (14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

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<sup>31</sup> Reasons for places in the hierarchy in a Google search included: Most Related, Most Recent, Most Viewed and Most ‘Popular’

### Authenticating trustworthiness of information

Some of the more considered and risk-averse children and young people reported employing detailed approaches to filtering, and attempting to authenticate, information online, especially when it held greater personal importance to them (e.g. searching for facts about a favourite pop star or footballer).

*“Wikipedia is worse than some of the others. If you want to find out about a football player, the club website would be better.” (10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

When participants attempted to validate the reliability of online sources, most claimed to cross-reference between a small number of websites to look for commonalities and identify what was most likely to be the correct information. It seemed most typical for them to look at two or three website links, although a few young people claimed to review up to five or even more sources on some occasions.

*“I’d go to my mum. And then I’d use 3 different websites and if they said the same thing then I’d know it was right. But the internet’s the last resort – if I was desperate.” (11-12 year old boy, Cheltenham)*

*“I’ve gone to three or four sites and it’s all different information. I did that with the Malaysian plane story - I heard that they found the plane. I got confused so I looked on loads of different sites to see if someone matches up with the other one.” (11-12 year old girl, London)*

*“I use Wikipedia. I know people think it is quite unreliable, but I double-check on other websites and I think that most of it is all right. If it is definitions of words, I might ask my parents. If it is history, my Gran knows a lot about that.” (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

However, there appeared to be low consideration of commercial motives when reviewing website links identified via a Google search. Younger children, in particular, appeared to be least aware of sponsored links. Tweens and teens tended to be aware that these were ‘adverts’ and tended to ignore them, but apart from that, did not give the issue of commercial motives much thought.

*“I have never thought about how Google make money.” (8-9 year old girl, Nottingham)*

*“I don’t know what the ones in orange boxes mean [advertisements] on Google, I’ve not noticed them before.” (10-11 year old girl, Belfast)*

*“I don’t actually know. When someone searches they get money? It’s only on Google if someone has put it there.” (11-12 year old girl, North London)*

*“I wouldn’t click on the first link that comes up in orange on Google but the one below it. I think the top ones are more like adverts.” (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

*“The very top sells stuff doesn’t it. That always happens on Google. Yes – if you’re looking for a hat then they’ll give you adverts.” (14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

The authentication approach reported in the case of unknown websites was largely visual, and trustworthiness tended to be determined by looking for certain cues.

The overall website design, such as the information layout, colours and fonts, were all used to form an initial judgement of how ‘professional’ the site was. The more ‘cohesive’ a website looked, the more trustworthy the content was perceived to be; this implied that a degree of thought and care had been put into creating the site, and by implication, also to providing its content. The presence, and extent, of advertising, especially pop-ups, was also used as a steer on likely trustworthiness (i.e. the more adverts, the less reliable). The types of adverts were also indicative of whether a site was trustworthy and suitable for children.

*“You’re always sceptical about new websites you go on. It depends what it is... if it’s something you need, really badly want, then I would try a new website. You can’t really [know if it’s dodgy]. It’s probably the way it’s designed, it looks silly and if four pop-up ads come up. The adverts that are on it, are ones that are more like adult-aimed, you know they’re dodgy.” (14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

Among younger children, aged 8 to 11, there was widespread awareness of pop-up advertising that appeared during games and apps, and which generated some anxiety among them about the possibility of ‘accidentally clicking’ on adverts and being directed to sites that could cause a virus. The speed at which there was potential for things to ‘go wrong’ worried some children at this age. However, there seemed to be a good understanding of the commercial motives of in-app advertising overall - advertising which was generally overlooked by children, unless it appealed directly to their interests. In-app advertising for other app games seemed to appeal to them most, rather than advertising for other commercial products/services. In instances where children did click through on adverts they would still be careful to screen these, and would usually ask a parent before taking further action.

*“[In app advertising] is bad. It’s a scam. They’re just trying to reel you in. If they design it for little kids then little kids won’t know any better.” (9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

A credible and believable name (although not necessarily one that they had seen before) was also used as an indicator of likely trustworthiness. There was an assumption that sites with more straightforward and logical names would be more trustworthy. Certain language, such as the word ‘official’, could also help to instil trust, although website names were typically still evaluated in the context of overall content.

*“The name, and it might be a really blurry picture. If there’s an official website, it says that it’s official. The writing might be weird if it isn’t too.” (10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

Finally, the presence of recognisable symbols of security and credibility (such as MasterCard, PayPal etc. on sites where payment was required) gave reassurance about the integrity of websites.

*“If you see the credit card logo you know it’ll be safe.” (10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

This research found that, overall, the process of evaluating websites often came down to a judgement based on the individual user’s instinct about the credibility of the site. When doing research for homework, some teenagers said they were most likely to seek reassurance by checking the outcomes of online searches with friends, for verification. Although the internet was the primary place most would look for information, it appeared that there was still some element of uncertainty about the trustworthiness of websites, which many just accepted as the norm.

*“I would trust books more, but I use the internet more. I don’t have that many books on a specific subject. It is easier to go on the internet than to get a book. Books are edited, there might be more information on the internet.” (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

### 5.4.3 Retail

The research highlighted how the reliability and trustworthiness of retail websites became a consideration as children grew older and began to undertake more transactions online. Many teenagers were using the websites of their favourite high street stores<sup>32</sup> to keep up to date with latest fashions and to seek out limited-edition items.

*“I look online and order it into the shop because then you don’t have to pay for delivery” (14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

*“I went on the Nike ID site, I’d search for Basketball shoes. There are special ones you can’t get in the shops, you can only get them online so I might buy them online then.” (13-14 year old boy, North London)*

Indeed, the research highlighted that trust was not pre-requisite to the appeal of buying from retailers online. The most risk-taking teens were also prepared to buy from websites that were completely unknown.

*“I got shoes that are not in the shops [buying online]. At first we thought that the shoes were fake when my friend got them because we’d never seen them before and because they were from far away [but] when she got them they were real.” (14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

There were often seen to be compelling reasons to buy from sites without an established reputation, but which were highly valued by teenagers. These included getting better value for money, and accessing limited-edition or hard-to-get items.

Amazon and eBay tended to be the ‘entry-level’ online retailers that children were going to, due to their reputation, their range of stock and relative affordability. Despite their popularity, these sites were sometimes seen to have mixed reputations, particularly eBay. This was often because children had heard about negative experiences that parents, older siblings or friends had had when buying from these sites<sup>33</sup>. However, some tweens and teenagers had also personally experienced problems:

*“My dad is okay about Amazon. He doesn’t like other sites. He was happy with them.” (13-14 year old girl, Cardiff)*

*“I bought some eyelashes on eBay as they were only £1.99. They said they’d come in a week, then they didn’t turn up for over a month. It was annoying but it didn’t really matter as they were so cheap. I’d buy from them again.” (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

This research indicates that popularity and good value were the most important considerations overall for teenagers when making online purchases. Many reported using ‘online-only retailers’ such as Missguided and ASOS, which were popular as they offered current fashion at low prices. Good value was regarded as an integral part of their appeal, as it enabled teenagers to try these sites without knowing whether they were trustworthy. However, most had a positive experience, so they returned to these sites and shared their experiences with friends.

*“When we were younger, people used to screen-shot clothes they liked and post it on Instagram and ask people ‘which one should I get?’ So from that I used to see where the clothes were from and see it was Missguided.” (14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

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<sup>32</sup> These were reported to include Zara, New Look, River Island and Topshop.

<sup>33</sup> Most issues tended to be associated with eBay but some also had negative perceptions of Amazon (in particular the ‘Marketplace’ area of the site).

### Authenticating trustworthiness of retail sites

Overall, the research highlighted that having a presence in the offline world was a powerful way for retailers to establish trust with young people. This aligns with the findings about authentication of news sources, and how familiarity in the offline world is key to instilling trust at a young age. The presence of physical stores instils trust, and provides a sense of security both in terms of reputation, and specifically in the case of retail, in providing a channel through which any problems with the online purchase can be resolved.

*“Top Shop and River Island are big brands so you know things will be delivered and you could take something back to a shop. My mum would only order if there was an email address if something doesn’t turn up.”  
(14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

Word of mouth and peer endorsement also helped teenagers to authenticate sites from which they had not previously purchased. In addition, celebrity endorsement<sup>34</sup> influenced perceptions of trustworthiness of retailer websites, as did, to a lesser extent, the functionality of websites. For instance, one girl mentioned how a ‘catwalk show’ featured on a popular fashion website where she could see items being modelled, helped the clothes and the site to feel more ‘real’ and trustworthy.

*“The ASOS website has this thing where you can see the clothes being modelled by a real person so you know they exist.” (15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

Those who made a more concerted effort to authenticate retail websites reported seeking online reviews before buying from them. This behaviour was evident from quite a young age and seemed to be most likely among those whose parents also tended to use these reviews when buying online.

*“I have bought from a site I didn’t know anything about – it was cheaper on the site so I looked up reviews to find out if it was trustworthy. I typed the name into Google to check reviews.” (12-13 year old boy, Edinburgh)*

It was evident that a young person’s trust in an online retailer could quickly be lost, and this had the potential to influence perception of the brand’s offline presence as well.

*“You really have to buy from the places that actually sell the tickets. I won’t be using [a well-known ticket company] again.” (15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

#### 5.4.4 Social networking

##### Peer-to-peer

Among tweens and teenagers in this research, little concern was expressed about the trustworthiness of social networking websites, either with respect to user-initiated content or the behaviour of the host platform. No one spontaneously expressed anxiety about what might happen to their personal data online or the ‘posts’ they uploaded.

*“I think it’s probably fine, everyone wouldn’t be using it [Facebook] if they did bad things with your details.”  
(13-14 year old girl, Cardiff)*

However, in viewing content uploaded to social networking sites by others, there appeared to be some filtering by young people who claimed that they did not believe everything they saw. There was some awareness among social media users (again, mostly tweens and teenagers) and even cynicism about the

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<sup>34</sup> An example cited included Missguided recently advertised by X Factor judge, Nicole Scherzinger.

## Trust and opinion formation online

ways social media could be used by others to project a manipulated self-image, particularly if this was also seen to be age-inappropriate.

*“My pictures aren’t inappropriate so I don’t mind. Some girls put pictures on there that are inappropriate i.e. showing their boobs, or underwear. Some people do it on Twitter but it’s more on Instagram. One girl in our year has done it – although it was a picture that she shared with someone and it got sent on to us.” (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

There was also some wariness expressed about private communication via social networks. Teenagers felt it was important to filter any direct contact from people they didn’t already know, and to scrutinise their motivations for contact, rather than trusting everyone without question.

As explored earlier in Section 4, teenage girls were aware of the possibility of receiving unwanted attention from unknown males online. It appeared fairly common to dismiss this type of contact in the same way as commercial spam, particularly when the messages seemed generic rather than addressed to them personally.

However, there were also occasions in which girls admitted to being more trusting of male contact; these tended to be when the contact they received was more personal, complimentary and from someone they ‘fancied’ and would like to know. In these instances it appeared that girls would generally attempt to verify and establish the trustworthiness of the contact (if unknown) before entering into a conversation. This verification process tended to be based on an assessment of the contact’s connections and online activity.

*“This boy sent me a message, he’d found me on Facebook as he was a friend of my friend and he looked really cool. We knew loads of the same people too.” (13-14 year old girl, Cardiff)*

## Celebrities

It was regarded as important to establish the ‘trustworthiness’ of celebrities and famous people that young people ‘followed’ online, since social media was a primary way to stay in touch with favourite celebrities and to feel a connection with them.

*“Twitter is all about celebrities. You follow them. You send tweets. My friend is on it and she is always talking about it because she likes One Direction.” (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

Teenagers in particular claimed that they would be likely to scrutinise celebrities’ posts on sites such as Twitter to determine whether they were genuine and ‘official’, particularly if these came from accounts which had recently been set up.

Establishing authenticity was partly seen to be about determining whether social media posts were personally uploaded by the celebrity, or by someone posting on their behalf. In addition, receiving any kind of acknowledgment from famous people via social media, such as a retweet, was considered exciting and conveyed that the famous person had genuinely established contact with them.

*“You do feel like you get to know them [celebrities] and I have tweeted them a bit and they sometimes get back to you – not all of them. When they did reply back I was quite excited.” (12-13 year old boy, Edinburgh)*

Some teenagers also claimed to verify celebrities’ online authenticity by comparing celebrities’ posts across different social media platforms and with their typical behaviour in the offline world as reported in the mainstream media (i.e. by triangulating sources). Social media accounts which appeared to be ‘too managed’ were generally not as appealing and there were a few instances where young people claimed they had recognised ‘fake posts’ as these had not appeared to fit with the behaviour they expected.

*“I saw it on Twitter but I did think it can’t be true. Newspapers definitely do that, and magazines definitely twist things – particularly like celebrities and stuff. It’s better to look at the celebrities’ websites, the bigger ones have them [for information you can trust].” (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

Teenagers who followed celebrities online were particularly interested in seeing their photos, particularly ‘selfies’, uploaded on sites such as Instagram and Twitter. This was not only because these photos gave young people a glimpse into celebrities’ aspirational lifestyles, but also because photos were considered to have particular authenticity. This contrasted with how young people sometimes felt about the photos uploaded by their peers which, as mentioned, could be seen as manipulated and idealised.

*“My role model is Beyoncé... I follow her on Twitter and I want to be like her. I’m jealous, I want her body. She’s got a really nice figure. It’s just perfect. And she has a perfect husband and baby too.” (14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

### User-generated content sites

The issue of trust on user-generated content sites such as YouTube, Tumblr and Reddit, as well as individual blog websites, was not a spontaneous concern among children and young people. The overlap with social networking sites in terms of the types of content posted meant that respondents regarded user-generated content sites in largely the same way. As a genre, these sites tended to be used for entertainment, humour and inspiration rather than to provide the kind of objective ‘fact’ expected from a news or information site<sup>35</sup>. Some teenage boys in this research reported accessing sites that delivered uncensored news<sup>36</sup> with the intention of being entertained (potentially by graphic or violent content) rather than informed. Therefore, trustworthiness did not typically appear to be high on children and young people’s radar when consuming this type of content.

*“I wouldn’t trust Reddit for news. It’s like, there are no rules on it, anyone can post. There are things from the news, like funny pictures and videos. Sometimes even celebrities come on it, and you can ask personal questions. It calls itself ‘the front page of the Internet’.” (14-15 year old boy, Belfast)*

*“I’m on Reddit a lot. It’s really amazing. I could talk about Reddit for days. It’s basically like a forum, social networking and a forum put together. People post pictures and jokes... it means that you don’t have to browse the internet for amusing stuff.” (16-17 year old boy, Nottingham)*

YouTube, in particular, was perceived to be a dual-purpose channel; it was used as a primary source of video footage of ‘real-world’ events and as a source of entertainment from its creative content.

When using YouTube as a primary information source, children and young people in this research were mostly viewing video footage of entertainment (such as celebrity interviews) and sports (such as football highlights)<sup>37</sup>. Witnessing these types of events first-hand meant that they were able to verify what was reported, since ‘seeing is believing’; they perceived that secondary reports of such events could be distorted.

The younger children in this research had started to use YouTube as a resource for school work, as well as for general information and expertise, for example on the subject of game play<sup>38</sup>. Some teenagers had begun following individual YouTubers and many expressed a sense of pride and ownership, particularly over those YouTubers they felt they had discovered. The ability to gain an insight into these individuals’ lives meant that teenagers were more likely to feel a personal affinity to them and to aspire to their

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<sup>35</sup> The concept of UGC sites such as Tumblr and Reddit is to deliver a twist on the conventional, either stylistically or humorously, often in the format of memes and gifs.

<sup>36</sup> E.g. LiveLeak

<sup>37</sup> E.g. the most recent One Direction interview, or highlights from a recent Premiership football match, cited during the research sessions

<sup>38</sup> They had already identified particularly influential YouTubers such as StampyLongNose, who regularly posted videos on the popular topic of Minecraft

lifestyles. Popular YouTubers' uploaded content, such as make-up and hair tutorials for girls, was also starting to be noticed.

*"I want to be like Stampy. He's a famous YouTuber." (8-9 year old girl, Nottingham)*

*"Candice. She's a model. Everybody just thinks that I aspire to be her because I want to look like her, but her personality is amazing. It's not just her looks that inspire me. I love her. I just think she's the most amazing girl. She's been big the past year and a half. If somebody doesn't think she's that great, I keep showing her to him or her until they agree with me. I'm obsessed with her. I could talk about her for days." (15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

*"YouTubers – the travelling ones – I'm really passionate about travelling and I'd like to be them"  
(15-16 year old girl, Carshalton)*

### **Authenticating trustworthiness of social networking and user-generated content**

Children and young people tended to prefer video communication online because it was assumed to provide an authentic window into any given topic.

*"I really want a dog, a pug. So my mum and I look up really cute videos of them." (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

*"You can download videos on YouTube about the latest news.... Sometimes I watch some Leeds stuff. If you want to know something about a game I will." (10-11 year old boy, Leeds)*

While there was some awareness that even video has the potential to be manipulated and edited, most felt confident they could identify what was and was not genuine content on YouTube, again largely through cues such as video quality, channel logos etc.

*"YouTube, when you actually see them there. There are interviews, they're what I watch, when you really get to know a celebrity. I have to see it to believe it. Some pictures are edited. It showed a picture of him speaking to a microphone and that could be anything. Then I saw something on YouTube that Justin Bieber is retiring, and after watching it, I believed it." (15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

Young people reported how online communication had become increasingly visual through apps and websites, both because advancements in digital technology make it easier to do and because of the popularity of images which make for a more enjoyable, immersive experience online<sup>39</sup>. Photo and video content on social networking and user-generated content sites were described as being particularly powerful in their ability to drive trust of the site.

*"Our favourite social networking sites are all about pictures and videos - Snapchat, Instagram, Vine which has 6 second videos were people play stupid stuff over and over, YouTube, Twitter for celebrities and Tumblr for pictures and stuff about bands." (13-14 year old girl, Cardiff)*

*"If I see it in video form I'd think it was real because it must be real if they've been there to film it happening." (9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

### **5.4.5 Email**

By contrast, email appeared to play only a limited role in the lives of the children and young people. They perceived its benefits as being minimal in comparison to the convenience and instant exchange of other forms of communication. They reported forgetting login details, having multiple email accounts and becoming annoyed when their phones became 'littered' with emails since they rarely checked them.

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<sup>39</sup> This has also led to the rising trend of more transparent communication where online users are given 'access all areas', backstage and after-party footage as well as coverage of any main event

*“I don't use it that more. I got it last year for my birthday. I went on it about two times and got really bored because people don't check their emails as much as their texts, when I emailed my friend and I would say like, 'How was your weekend?' and then she wouldn't reply for like a week. It would be really annoying!” (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

However, email did play a functional role for some in this research. Tweens and teenagers reported receiving emails from school, typically to notify them of their homework, as well as registration emails from new sites which they had joined. In this respect, email was perceived to be a secure format through which to receive this type of communication. However, there were reports, even from the youngest age group, about the volume of spam and potentially counterfeit emails they could receive.

### Authenticating trustworthiness of email

There was therefore little importance placed on ascertaining the trustworthiness of email communication from unknown sources by children and young people in this research. The general view was that much of this type of email contact from unfamiliar sources could simply be ignored.

## 5.5 Understanding opinion formation

The final subject explored in this research was opinion formation online. This was the least tangible of all the areas explored, largely because it is likely to happen at a subconscious level and therefore was not always recognised. The majority of children and young people were initially dismissive of the potential for the internet to influence their personal opinions; they claimed it was wrong and even embarrassing to simply ‘copy’ from the online world. Teenagers in particular believed they were not influenced in this way.

*“I think I'd probably just go with what I believe, because you take into consideration what you've read on the internet and then think about what you think and come to a conclusion.” (15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

Despite this, there are indications that the online environment influences the opinions of children and young people. The high level of consumption of online content, and particularly visual content, indicated that this could well be shaping and influencing young people's perception of what is ‘normal’.

The research indicates that YouTube is one of the most significant potential influences on young people's opinions. While young people's relationship with YouTube typically begins in their primary school years, with passive viewing of TV programmes and videos, this evolves over time to become more intensive and interactive. For example, as previously mentioned, some teenagers claimed to be regular followers of up to 50 YouTubers, and the sense of connection felt to these individuals was more personal than was the case with traditional celebrities. YouTubers often endorse certain brands or behaviour (e.g. in gaming, fashion, travel etc.) and such endorsements were likely to make it more acceptable to be influenced by these opinions. As such, these endorsements appear to be particularly influential on the young people in this research.

The research also indicates that social media can influence opinions. This was particularly by virtue of providing ready access to a variety of viewpoints, including those which are potentially controversial or extreme.

*“[...] is my favourite celebrity. I follow him on everything. He's into politics now. He explains things, so I've learnt things from him. Before, it was just because I thought he was really funny.” (15-16 year old girl, Leeds)*

## Section 6

# 6. Children's online critical thinking overall

## 6.1 Overview

This final section draws together children's comprehension of online risks and their trust formation online to provide analysis of the overall extent of their critical thinking skills online. It also explores some factors other than age which appeared to influence these critical thinking skills.

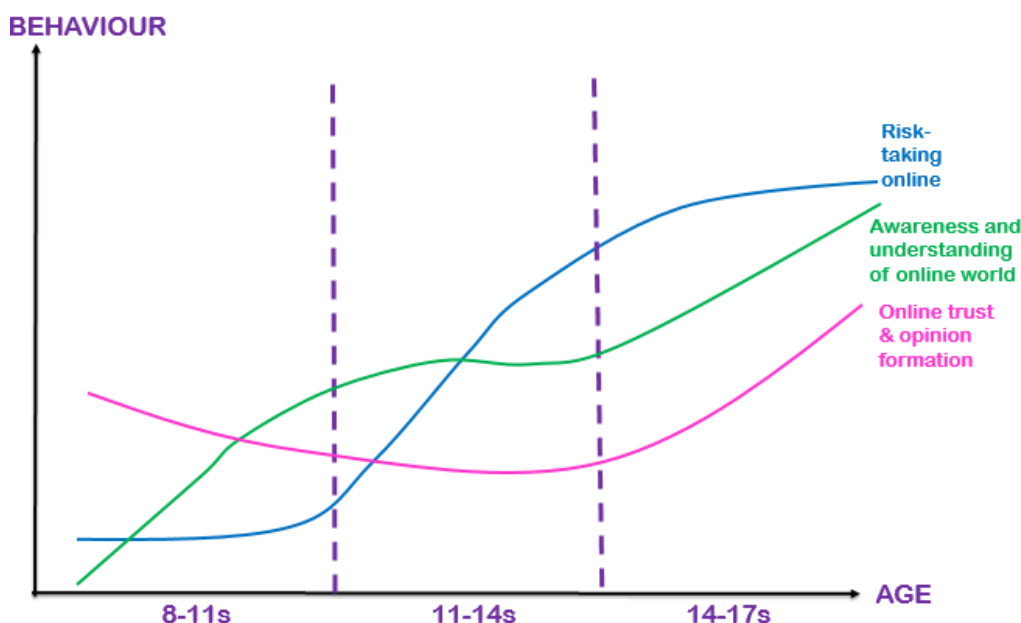
The key findings in this section are:

- Children's and young people's capacity for critical thought in the online world appear to mirror their developmental journey and behaviour in the offline world and to be influenced by the same physical, emotional, social and cognitive factors.
- Personal risks online are learnt about from an early age, primarily via parents and teachers who make considerable efforts to make children aware of contact risks such as cyber-bullying and the threat from strangers. Other sources, such as the media and word of mouth, also play a role in driving awareness.
- Due to the prominence of messages about risk, children and young people in this research understood the presence of risks in the online world. But there are gaps in their risk management - even where risks were understood, they were not always acted upon, particularly in the teenage years when experimentation and risk-taking behaviour began to emerge, both online and offline.
- Notwithstanding the gaps in risk management mentioned above, children could articulate what they knew about risks more readily than they were able to explain who, and particularly what, they trusted.
- Trustworthiness was not a key criterion by which young people evaluated the appeal of a new website or app. Instead, trust tended to be developed through becoming familiar with sites and apps, and having had positive experiences with them.
- The spectrum of personality types in this research reflected the general population: it ranged from those who were risk-averse to those who were more inclined to take risks. Respondents' personality type also influenced the importance they placed on trust online.

## 6.2 Children's critical thinking journey

This research indicated that the critical thinking journey for children and young people mirrors development in the offline world, and is influenced by the same physical, emotional, social and cognitive factors.

Figure 3 - Children's and young people's critical thinking journey, by age



### 6.2.1 Awareness and understanding of the online world

The majority of children aged between 8 and 11 appeared to be aware of the need to be careful when online. The majority reported that they kept to the rules outlined by parents and teachers for using the internet; these were the authority figures in their lives that were most trusted and influential.

While parents were typically responsible for initially raising awareness of possible online risks, it appeared that the level of detail and specificity of the guidance they gave varied considerably. Most children reported that this was largely due to their parents' own online competency and awareness of risks. There was little indication that parents were making use of any 'resources' in teaching their children about different types of online risks.

Children's awareness and understanding of the internet and its potential risks appeared to increase with age, primarily due to education at school. Between 8 and 9 years old (year 4 of primary education) was when many reported that they had started to receive formal education about these issues, which also coincided with the internet starting to play a more regular role in their lives.

As mentioned earlier, there did not appear to be a standard approach to teaching internet safety in schools, and the reported depth, duration and frequency of teaching on these topics was varied. Some of the primary school 'e-safety' or internet safety education initiatives mentioned by respondents included:

- Annual talks; some with members of the police and/or NSPCC representatives.
- Information videos: CBBC's Newsround videos on *Internet Safety and Cyberbullying* appear to have been particularly popular. Similarly we heard about a resource featuring the popular animated character Garfield teaching children about being safe online, including the 'YAPPY'

## Children's online critical thinking overall

mnemonic, instructing which details to keep safe online (Your name, Address, Password, Phone number and Your plans).

- E-safety pupil representatives.
- Take-home 'contracts' to share with parents to agree terms of safe internet use.
- Internet awareness weeks, held once a year, comprising a number of the above 'events'.

*"We saw a video on CBBC about a girl and 1Direction and she gave out her details and didn't realise."  
(8-9 year old girl, Nottingham)*

*"I am eSafety rep at school and we help to tell [others] how to be safe online." (8-9 year old girl, Nottingham)*

*"At school, you see videos of people that used to get bullied. What happened was, she talked to a man online, and she flashed to him. He took a photo of her and posted it online, on all her Facebook accounts, tagging her, and she started getting bullied, and it just kept happening." (9-10 year old girl, Bristol)*

*"We watched a video about cyberbullying at school and how you can stop it. There was one that was really good and scared me. There was one girl in an advert for one, and she kept on being called names on her social networking site, like 'you're a pig'. It was really creepy. When she was told that she looked like a pig, she believed it and then when she looked in the mirror, she saw a pig." (12-13 year old girl, Cheltenham)*

In addition, many children and young people in this research identified mainstream media as playing a role in raising their awareness of online risks. This included seeing news coverage of children who had been victims or had been placed 'at risk' online, as well as dramatisations of both real and fictional online events involving children and young people.

*"On Netflix, there's this thing called Cyberbullying, it's a film. A girl gets a new laptop and goes online, and her brother hacks her account and puts rude stuff on it. At her school she gets bullied a lot. People aren't friends with her and she tries committing suicide, but her brother caught her." (9-10 year old girl, Bristol)*

This type of media exposure appeared to play an influential role in children and young people's impressions of risks, since they created a more tangible and lasting impression of their presence and potential severity. This was particularly the case when stories were told in a narrative way as these played a dual role of 'edutainment' (education and entertainment)<sup>40</sup>.

*"The programme on MTV – Catfish – it's all about fake profiles and people who make up their identities, but it's in America. It's a watchable programme... it is interesting." (16-17 year old girl, Carshalton)*

Coverage of real events appeared to have been used by parents and schools to help educate children about the potential dangers of online use. One example of material used by parents, largely as a case study to illustrate the risk of 'stranger danger', was the hoax surrounding the 'Talking Angela' app<sup>41</sup>. This shows the potential for social media to over-inflate perceptions of online risk.

*"The 'Talking Angela' app was on the news – there was a man behind the camera who could see everything you could do and he would try and speak to you. It was really scary." (8-9 year old girl, Nottingham)*

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<sup>40</sup> A small number of teenagers reported following an MTV series called *Catfish* which appeared to have gained cut-through as an entertainment show about teenagers' online relationships where one or other 'participant' creates a false identity to pretend to be someone else. 'Catfish' is a colloquial term used to refer to the deceitful partner in these instances (although this was not referenced by teenagers in the course of this research).

<sup>41</sup> The 'Talking Angela' app became infamous among children all over the country in 2013 when it was claimed that this fun talking cat app was actually designed to extract personal information from children and to facilitate direct with them by paedophiles. This widely reported story was in fact a hoax, but many children are still unaware of this and continue to uphold the app as an example of why online safety is so important (a perception potentially upheld by parents for this reason)

## Children's online critical thinking overall

*“People can stalk you. Like in the game, Talking Angela, it asked what school you go to, where you live. Even on ‘child mode’ some people say you could see a man on a chair looking at it [the camera]. My cousin’s friend tried it and she could see it. There’s a whole article on Facebook, Wikipedia and Yahoo. It warned parents and children, ‘do not download Talking Angela’. That’s what Facebook is for, that’s how I found out.” (9-10 year old girl, Bristol)*

*“Do you remember that Talking Angela game that if you got it then people could see what you’re doing? There was an online camera and it talks to you asking your name and your age and where you live and it’s like, ‘I’m coming to kill you’.” (11-12 year old girl, North London)*

Once children had established a fundamental understanding of the online environment in their primary school years, their ‘learning curve’ about the online world seemed to plateau during their tween and early teenage years from 11 - 14. They were still aware of the potential dangers of being online, but as they became more confident and frequent internet users the perceived significance of these dangers tended to subside and there were indications that these could be overlooked in their online behaviour.

Teenagers’ understanding of the online world continued to develop during the years from 14 to 17, a result of their increasingly diverse use of the internet, as well as learning through word of mouth from friends and family members. Experiences with the internet at this age range were often mixed, with both positive and negative anecdotes reported. Not surprisingly, young people’s capacity for critical thinking also appeared to be most developed by the ages of 14 - 17, as demonstrated by the ability to analyse previous experiences and apply this learning to subsequent behaviour online.

### 6.2.2 Attitudes to risk-taking online

From ages 8 to 11, most appeared to be relatively compliant with the rules they were given about internet use<sup>42</sup>. However, some were demonstrating an increasing interest to try new things online as they were growing up and aspiring to greater independence.

The most marked attitudinal shift in attitudes toward risk coincided with the move to secondary school, which for most was at the age of 11. This research found that children developed a new level of online independence at this stage, mirroring their growing independence in the offline world. The developmental changes that the majority reported at this stage appeared to play a role in this shift<sup>43</sup> and included:

- Emotional influences: the onset of puberty and hormonal changes
- Social influences: changing friendship groups within a new school environment and a desire for greater privacy from parents

Many claimed to feel a new level of confidence about being online, and had a more relaxed attitude to what they had previously considered to be risky online behaviour. However, their relative inexperience of the online world, and willingness to experience new types of excitement and ‘reward’, exposed some to online risks. Online confidence appeared to exceed competence among some tweens; indeed, the greatest risk appeared to be in circumstances where the child’s inclination to take risks outweighed their judgement.

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<sup>42</sup> It is hypothesised that in reality there may have been some risk-taking behaviour that children, naturally, may have been reluctant to admit to. However the mixed methodological approach employed in this research was designed to uncover this as far as possible, and typically children were observed to disclose and substantiate varying aspects of their behaviour with these different research environments; group discussion, depth discussions and unmoderated sessions.

<sup>43</sup> They are also experiencing the physiological impact of an under-developed pre-frontal cortex, which facilitates reasoning and effective decision-making versus a strong desire to experience immediate rewards. The pre-frontal cortex area of their brains is developing all the time during their teenage years and young people are gradually becoming better at calculating risk/reward ratios in all aspects of their lives. (Tanya Byron 2014, keynote speaker at Mumstock, the marketing-to-mums conference from Mumsnet, 23 April 2014)

## Children's online critical thinking overall

*“On my laptop I have one of those parental lock things on it but on my iPhone I don't and my parents don't know what I do on it.” (12-13 year old boy, Edinburgh)*

*“My parents think I should only go on the internet for a limited amount of time after I've done my homework – but I don't follow that.” (12-13 year old boy, Edinburgh)*

Those aged 14 – 17 appeared to be more aware of online risks. Some admitted they had learnt from experience, which had made them less prone to taking risks than they had been previously. Even those with more risk-taking personality types appeared to have calculated the potential consequences to a greater extent than those in the 11-14 age group.

*“I don't think you can trust every website, but if you really want something, you just use it. I follow what my mum and dad do. If they've bought off it, I would.” (14-15 year old boy, Leeds)*

### 6.2.3 Trust formation online

The way children and young people authenticate sources and form opinions about what to trust online in less tangible behaviour, and more difficult to explore in the research, particularly as the concept of trust was not top-of-mind or easy to articulate, especially for younger age groups.

For children aged 8 - 11, the most trusted websites were those that had been endorsed by, or met the approval of, parents and teachers; the trustworthiness of online sources and sites was initially 'learned' in this way. Trust appeared to be important to children at this stage since sticking to well-known and established websites provided reassurance that they would not be placing themselves at risk and they would be complying with the rules outlined by adults.

During their tween and early teen years from 11 - 14, children's propensity to visit a wider range of sites was heavily influenced by peers and current trends, rather than by authority figures. This marked a considerable change from how they had thought and felt just one or two years earlier, and indicated the point at which where there appeared to be a shift, in terms of the overall importance placed on 'trustworthiness' online. Most claimed they were using social networking sites and apps, and viewing more youth-oriented content, with which (they believed) adults were less familiar and accepting.

Teenagers aged 14 - 17 seemed to make judgements about the relative trustworthiness of sites and content most easily of all the age groups. They were beginning to appreciate the importance of establishing trust online, particularly when they had directly experienced or heard about sources being 'untrustworthy' (e.g. inaccurate, unreliable etc.). For this group, trusting a site was more likely to influence their future use of the site, than for younger children.

## 6.3 Key factors influencing online risk comprehension and trust formation

This research identified a number of key factors other than age that might influence children's understanding of risk and their critical thinking skills online:

- Influence of family environment
- Peer group effect
- Personality type

### 6.3.1 Influence of family environment

#### Parents

Parents appeared to play a substantial role, particularly in shaping perceptions of online risk, for children in this research. Their degree of influence can be attributed to two important (and inter-related) factors:

- a) Parents' own level of online competence and confidence
- b) The extent of parents' awareness of, and involvement in, their child's internet use

#### a) Parents' own level of online competence and confidence

Children and young people who said that their parents were experienced internet users tended to be more aware of the risks of the online environment. They reported that their parents had played an active role in educating them about risks.

Furthermore, some (particularly teens) admitted that having parents who were more informed about the internet acted as a deterrent to risky or unacceptable behaviour, as there was a good chance that their parents could detect what they had been up to.

#### b) The extent of parents' awareness of, and involvement in, their child's internet use

Those who had parents who took an active interest in their online activity appeared to be more conscious of the need to act carefully and responsibly. They appeared to have a greater sense of their online world being regulated by their parents than those children who felt their parents were less aware of which websites and apps they were visiting and using.

Younger children (8 to 11 year olds) tended to report that their parents had greater involvement with their internet use than did tweens and teenagers. For many of the younger children, the most damaging repercussion of any potential risky behaviour was the possibility of a parent finding out what they had done.

Some teenagers reported that their parents were continuing to take an active interest in their online behaviour, for instance by making friends with, or 'following', them on social networks. Sometimes this had been made a condition of use of social networks by their parents. This supervision seemed to play a role in curbing risky behaviour, as teenagers were keen to avoid their parents witnessing any potentially unacceptable conduct and the possibility of their online freedom being revoked.

#### Presence of older siblings

Those with older brothers or sisters at home showed a greater awareness of, and interest in, experiencing some of the things that their older siblings were already doing online. As such, this seemed to increase younger siblings' appetite for risk-taking as they expressed greater curiosity and confidence to visit new sites and try new things.

Those with older siblings also tended to believe that their parents were more relaxed about their online behaviour, compared to parents of their friends who were first-born children. They believed they had a greater degree of freedom online and more opportunities for risk-taking.

### Socio-economic group

This research found socio-economic group (SEG) to be a less influential factor [than the others listed above](#) in terms of influencing children's perceptions of risks and trust formation online within the family environment. [That said](#), children in higher socio-economic households tended to report higher [levels of parental mediation](#) compared with children from lower socio-economic households.

### 6.3.2 Peer group effect

Peers also appeared to play a key role in driving awareness and appeal of websites and apps. Word-of-mouth recommendations, particularly from more influential peers, seemed to be powerful in creating a wave of new followers. Instances were revealed where this peer-to-peer advocacy was not always of appropriate or 'safe' sites, thereby placing some children 'at risk' through this type of endorsement.

In a group scenario, peer influence seemed to inspire greater confidence online among children and young people<sup>44</sup>. While it was reported by some that risk-taking behaviour tended to be encouraged in the peer group environment, it is important to note that this was not always the case. Among some of the older teenagers it was clear that their groups quite commonly consisted of a mix of personality types, with different propensities for risk-taking.

While the presence of peers was in some instances the catalyst to conduct more risky behaviour, it also seemed to be acceptable among older groups not to bow to 'peer pressure' among close groups of friends. The teenagers in this research seemed to have quite varied perceptions of what they deemed to be risky and acceptable.

### 6.3.3 Personality type

Finally, the research highlighted how personality type had a key bearing on young people's perception and management of risks online, as well as on their critical thinking skills with respect to authenticating sources. This was underlined by the friendship triad methodology employed, since within groups of friends with similar levels of online awareness and education there was often a mix of attitudes about online risks and authentication of sources.

During the tween and early teen years most young people reported that they had become more active participants in the online world, and noticeable differences emerged in their inclination to take risks online. This was both an extension of their behaviour offline and also, for some, because the internet provided a new channel to compensate for a perceived image deficit or lack of popularity in the offline world. The internet allowed some teens in this research to assume an idealised online 'persona' and it facilitated behaviours that they were less inclined to have in the offline world (e.g. some reported being more confident and to being more able to communicate with members of the opposite sex).

Three main personality types were observed among the teenagers in this research: Cautious, Considered and Impulsive. Overall, it appeared that the Considered typology was most prevalent in this research, but all three were present to some degree. The typical hallmarks or traits of these different personality types are summarised below, along with some verbatim quotes and illustrative pen portraits:

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<sup>44</sup> Children and teenagers in this research admitted they were more likely to take risks when surrounded by their peers because they feel more confident and lacked the counter narrative of parents or other authority figures to intervene.

## Children's online critical thinking overall

### a) Cautious

- Avoid risks where possible, the most guarded and careful online
- Deliberate over online interaction, focus on potential negative outcomes
- Trust is most important; integral to their online behaviour
- Seek reassurance of trustworthiness before using sites, particularly for the first time
- Most focused on potential pitfalls as a result of visiting untrustworthy sites e.g. viruses, scams etc.

*"I don't buy from an unknown site as they might be scamming you – they could take your credit card details and scam you." (13-14 year old boy, North London)*

*"Since I got older I am more wary on the internet now, but I'm definitely more sensible on my own than with my friends." (13-14 year old boy, North London)*

#### **Matthew<sup>45</sup>, 9-10, Carshalton**

The internet is fairly important in Matthew's life and he spends much of his weekends gaming, although during the week he does his homework before using the computer or his Xbox.

He does everything his parents tell him, in order to keep safe online, and he is aware of the risks (thinking most about being conned, ID theft and cyberbullying).

He understands the threat of people not being who they say they are online, and that buying goods online can be a risk – he might be scammed and things might never arrive; so he buys only from known and trusted websites. Matthew is more likely to trust recommendations from friends than what he has read online, and he tries to avoid online content that he isn't comfortable with (e.g. swearing or rudeness).

#### **Lauren, 16-17, Carshalton**

Lauren is in her first year of college and is surrounded by friends who are online on their smartphones all the time; she thinks that *"if you don't have a phone you don't have a social life"*.

Her mum is cautious, and informed about the internet, and so is quite protective. She warned Lauren that she should leave Twitter and Instagram because she wasn't getting her coursework done. Lauren reports that at first it was really hard for her to leave the sites, but later she agreed it was the right thing to do - she felt she had been "addicted".

Lauren doesn't buy anything online from sites she doesn't know. Her parents are safety-conscious about buying online and she agrees with them.

She uses social media minimally, and all her accounts are set to private so only her friends can see her posts; she doesn't talk to anyone online she doesn't know. She worries about people not being who they say they are online. She has seen bad things happen to people in her year group (embarrassing personal photos being leaked/sent round the whole year group) and this has stopped her sharing photos of herself with anyone.

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<sup>45</sup> Please note that all names have been changed.

**b) Considered**

- Most level-headed online, take measured risks by weighing up possible outcomes
- Compliant with rules and guidelines given by parents and teachers and stick within the realms of mainstream behaviour
- Trust is moderately important online
- Make effort to check authenticity of information; cross reference a number of sites (average 3-4) to identify trusted sources
- Happy to accept visual trust cues that signify authenticity

*"I've got a game which my friend told me about. I'd seen a video trailer about it but wasn't sure, so I waited until someone told me about the game and then I'd know it was safe. It has to be a close friend. And McAfee [Secure] helps – it gives a tick or a cross or a question mark if they haven't tested it. It's a site advisor." (9-10 year old boy, Carshalton)*

**Chloe, 15-16, Leeds**

Chloe uses the internet every day – in the mornings before school and after school, but she claims not to be 'obsessed' and doesn't normally use the internet during the day when she's at school. In the evenings she uses it for homework, as well as to check for updates on social networking sites. The only people she talks to online are 'actual' friends, although she is very aware of her online image, so she consciously puts up 'nicer' photos of herself in order to gather likes and comments.

Her aspirations are relatively mature: *"there are celebrities who are really pretty who I follow on Instagram, but I don't aspire to be like them. I just think, 'I like her dress.' It's not 'I want to be her.'"*

Chloe realises that not everything she reads online is true, so when it is important to find accurate information, she looks for more 'evidence' to support what she has read - especially for her school coursework.

She knows that photos that she sees online aren't always what they claim to be, so she usually asks her older sister to check whether or not stories are true.

**Josh, 11-12, Cheltenham**

Josh likes the internet and gaming, but is also interested in sports and relaxing with his friends; he likes having a good mix of activities.

He uses YouTube quite a bit to watch videos about gaming and follows a few YouTubers who regularly upload gaming videos. He understands how YouTubers become popular and make a living; he also understands that they talk about and recommend brands because they make money from it, not because it's what they really think.

On social networking sites he doesn't usually accept friend requests from people he doesn't know, unless the person has lots of friends in common with him, and their photos/posts confirm that they are who they say they are. If he decides they are reliable he will accept the request, but not until he's checked them out first. He is careful about what he posts as he knows: *"you can't get rid of it, even if you upload it and half a second later you delete it it'll still be there"*.

Josh uses Wikipedia, but he doesn't always believe what he reads, particularly about football, as *"people can just make it up"*, so he also searches elsewhere on the internet for information.

**c) Impulsive**

- Most receptive to risk-taking, most confident and curious online
- Tend to act first, and think later, focus on positive possibilities
- Trust online is least important to them
- Less inclined to check the validity of online sources and sites
- Base judgement more on instinct
- Accept that not everything they see online may be correct

*"I don't really think a tweet or putting something up on Facebook is going to be harmful... it doesn't even cross my mind. I haven't had a bad experience. But if it did it would make you more wary." (14-15 year old girl, Edinburgh)*

*"Obviously everyone acts up a bit on the internet, we all do that." (16-17 year old boy, Nottingham)*

**Courtney, 16-17, Carshalton**

Being connected is really important to Courtney; she doesn't want to miss out on new postings on Instagram and Twitter – *"people our age who don't have phones are those that don't have so much of a social life or loads of friends"*.

She's heavily involved with social media – her profiles are nearly all set to 'public' rather than private. She is open to interacting with like-minded people online, even if she doesn't know them, and she met her current boyfriend on Twitter. She feels as though her use of social media is different to that of her friends, and peers in her age group, which sets her apart: *"It's not that common, but some people meet on social media"*. She knows her friends wouldn't be as open as her online but she knows not to go 'too far' - to put herself in danger by speaking to people she doesn't know online.

She's happy to post comments about someone online that she wouldn't say face to face, as an 'indirect' way of communicating – *"say if you want to say something to someone but you don't want to say it to their face, you can put a quote up or a few words on social media"*

Courtney likes shopping online for bargains. She doesn't always know the sites that she buys from, but if a friend has used a site already she is willing to take the risk, and is not very concerned about losing small amounts of money *"I once ordered make-up brushes that were coming from Hong Kong and that didn't turn up – they were meant to be here in a week and they took 2 months... I could have just bought some rather than waiting for them!"*

**Dylan, 14-15, Leeds**

The internet is very important in Dylan's life – he uses it mainly for social networking and entertainment, viewing YouTube and on-demand films and programmes. His friends are more interested in gaming, but he prefers his phone: *"I use my phone for homework. I do have a laptop but I'm more dependent on the phone as I can get an internet connection all the time so I use it most of the day"*.

He usually checks Facebook and Twitter first, talks to his friends, and then goes on YouTube. He likes finding and posting funny pictures online, rather than posting photos of himself – he thinks that's more what girls do. He thinks girls can be a bit 'over the top' on social networking sites, putting up pictures of themselves and deliberately trying to increase their numbers of friends / followers. He isn't interested in that.

Dylan has online friends that he doesn't know in the offline world, whom he usually meets via the gaming site Steam. He finds it interesting to talk to people from other countries: *"If someone adds you, you want to find out who they are. This one guy just sent stuff online that was funny, then I found out he was Norwegian, which was interesting. I don't know anyone who's Norwegian"*

In the past Dylan had bought from a gaming site online which he had never heard of before. He had difficulty logging in, and saw a few 'dodgy' adverts that were aimed at adults, so he realised that it was a fake site. However, he wanted the game so much that he was willing to take the risk; fortunately, it did turn up.

# Annex

## A Full sample breakdown

### Overall sample

#### 18 x 1.5 hour friendship triad 'Bedroom Hangout' sessions

Triad	Year/Age	Gender	Internet use	Follow up session	Location
1	8-9 (Year 4)	Boys	Low	Acc surf	Cardiff
2	8-9 (Year 4)	Girls	Med	Acc surf	Nottingham
3	9-10 (Year 5)	Boys	High	Acc surf	Carshalton
4	9-10 (Year 5)	Girls	Low	Acc surf	Bristol
5	10-11 (Year 6)	Boys	Med	Acc surf	Leeds
6	10-11 (Year 6)	Girls	High	Acc surf	Belfast
7	11-12 (Year 7)	Boys	Low	Acc surf	Cheltenham
8	11-12 (Year 7)	Girls	Med	Unmoderated	North London
9	12-13 (Year 8)	Boys	High	Unmoderated	Edinburgh
10	12-13 (Year 8)	Girls	Low	Acc surf	Cheltenham
11	13-14 (Year 9)	Boys	Med	Acc surf	North London
12	13-14 (Year 9)	Girls	High	Unmoderated	Cardiff
13	14-15 (Year 10)	Boys	Low	Unmoderated	Belfast
14	14-15 (Year 10)	Girls	Med	Acc surf	Edinburgh
15	15-16 (Year 11)	Boys	High	Acc surf	Bristol
16	15-16 (Year 11)	Girls	Low	Unmoderated	Leeds
17	16-17 (Year 12)	Boys	Med	Unmoderated	Nottingham
18	16-17 (Year 12)	Girls	High	Acc surf	Carshalton

- Within each triad all were in the same school year and all were good friends with each other
- Each session was held in the lead respondent's bedroom
- All completed a pre-task before attending the group
- During the sessions respondents shared with us their social network sites and profiles.
- All brought their favourite device (phone, tablet, iPod etc.) to the session
- All BC1C2D – split evenly across the sample (within each area 1 x BC1 group, 1 x C2D)
- Mix of low/medium/high internet users across the sample:

#### 8-11 years:

- **Low** internet use = 0-5 hours per week
- **Medium** = 6-10 hours per week
- **High** = more than 10 hours per week (average is 9 hours)

#### 12+ years:

- **Low** = 0-10 hours per week
- **Medium** = 11-20 hours per week
- **High** = more than 20 hours per week (average is 17 hours)
- All were into 'popular culture' e.g. all used the internet, watched TV, read magazines
- All had and used the internet regularly and were comfortable with using the internet and able to navigate themselves around websites
- Across the sample there was a mix of those with parental controls – those who have no control vs. those who are very strict when it comes to internet use i.e. have limits on use and sites they're not allowed on etc.
- Sample reflected the ethnic mix of the areas researched and included Black and minority ethnic (BME) respondents
- Within triads, to be a mix of devices to access the internet e.g. smartphones, tablets etc.

**6 x 1 hr unmoderated peer-to-peer sessions**

Triad	Year/Age	Gender	Location
1	11-12 (Year 7)	Girls	North London
2	12-13 (Year 8)	Boys	Edinburgh
3	13-14 (Year 9)	Girls	Cardiff
4	14-15 (Year 10)	Boys	Belfast
5	15-16 (Year 11)	Girls	Leeds
6	16-17 (Year 12)	Boys	Nottingham

**12 x 1.5hr follow-up accompanied surfs**

Depth	Year/Age	Gender	Location
1	8-9 (Year 4)	Boys	Cardiff
2	8-9 (Year 4)	Girls	Nottingham
3	9-10 (Year 5)	Boys	Carshalton
4	9-10 (Year 5)	Girls	Bristol
5	10-11 (Year 6)	Boys	Leeds
6	10-11 (Year 6)	Girls	Belfast
7	11-12 (Year 7)	Boys	Cheltenham
8	12-13 (Year 8)	Girls	Cheltenham
9	13-14 (Year 9)	Boys	North London
10	14-15 (Year 10)	Girls	Edinburgh
11	15-16 (Year 11)	Boys	Bristol
12	16-17 (Year 12)	Girls	Carshalton

## B Respondent pre-task



Hi there!

Thanks for agreeing to take part in this research project! We hope it'll be fun...so let's get started.

What we'd like you to do to before coming along to the group discussion, is EITHER:

**A. Complete a collage** of "Me and My Life" (on the A3 paper provided). To make the collage, please use anything you like – pictures from magazines, photos, words, food wrappers etc. You name it, you can use it!

**B. OR fill in the questionnaire** we've provided in as much detail as you can

You can do whichever one you'd like to do (instructions are on the next page) – as long as you remember to bring it with you to the research session because we'll need to take it away with us

That's it – and we're really looking forward to meeting you in a few days! Any problems, please just email us at [sherbert@sherbertresearch.com](mailto:sherbert@sherbertresearch.com).

Love from the team @ Sherbertx

SO, IF YOU FANCY DOING A COLLAGE...

A. What we'd like you to show us in your "Me and My Life" collage is:

- Things that are important to you e.g. people, possessions, pets etc
- Brands or makes that you like e.g. if you like consoles, tell us which make of console
- What you look for in a friend – what qualities should they have
- A description of how you look vs. how you would like to look
- What you think your future might be like or what you'd like it to be

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF COLLAGES PEOPLE HAVE DONE IN THE PAST!



OR B. IF YOU'D PREFER TO DO THE QUESTIONNAIRE, JUST FILL IN BELOW:

1. Things that are important to you e.g. people, possessions, pets etc

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2. Brands or makes that you like e.g. if you like consoles, tell us which make of console?

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3. What you look for in a friend – what qualities should they have?

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4. A description of how you look vs. how you would like to look

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5. What you think your future might be like or what you'd like it to be?

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## C Discussion guide – Friendship triads



SHERBERT RESEARCH LTD

Lighterman House  
26-36 Wharfdale Road  
London N1 9RY

t: +44 (0)20 3077 2200

f: +44 (0)20 3070 0950

[www.sherbertresearch.com](http://www.sherbertresearch.com)

VAT Reg. No: 820 2894 39

Company no.: 04661518

## Project Critical Thinking Triad guide (1.5 hrs)

March 2014

## Objectives for these sessions are to understand:

### A. CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE RISKS THEY FACE AROUND PERSONAL DATA AND ACTIVITY ONLINE

- Are children aware of the risks and repercussions around their personal information and activity, in the short and longer term?
- What do children know about how their personal information could be used and by whom (online vs. offline), and how do they feel about this?
- How do they perceive their online identity/identities, versus reality?
- How significant do they feel the risks to be and how concerned are they about these – both for themselves and for others?
- What if any strategies do they have to manage potential pitfalls? Do they have strategies for dealing with future reputation issues?
- What degrees of anonymity and/or disclosure do they consider when they're online i.e. do they consider anonymity strategies as positive (i.e. means of protection of identity) or negative (i.e. means to hide)?

### B. HOW CHILDREN FILTER AND AUTHENTICATE DIFFERENT SOURCES OF INFORMATION ONLINE

To find out:

- How online information influences children's options vs. offline sources
- The degree to which children question or seek alternative sources of information
- The extent to which children are "filter bubbles" – i.e. information and activities reinforce their own worlds, rather than offering different views
- The methods they use or don't use to authenticate the validity of different sources of information
- Related to this – the role that trust (their own judgement and that of their peers) plays within the information sources, brands and services used. And how are trust/beliefs formed (e.g. role of social norms etc.)

## Introduction to this guide:

The aim of this discussion guide is to:

- Suggest a flexible format
- Ensure we cover all the issues outlined in the guide, in a way that is natural to the children we're talking to
- Prompt the moderator as to the questions that need to be covered, without restricting the order or flow of their questioning

THE TRIAD SESSIONS: within these sessions we will be concentrating mostly on the peer group dynamic when talking to the children/teens. Questions will be initially posed and then we'll be surfing/looking online, but the focus will be on them explaining current attitudes, behaviours and feelings as well as observing their behaviour. We have written one guide but highlighted in red where we will make allowances for the under 12s.

### 1. Moderator introduction and scene setting (5 MINS)

- We will explain purpose of the research and audio recording
- Reassure about confidentiality, code of conduct etc.
- Outline structure for, and duration of the session

- Explain that we are independent research agency and that anything they say will not ‘affect’ us and is confidential, we just want to understand what they think and why and that it should be fun and interesting!

## 2. Introduction and warm up (10 MINS)

- Introduce themselves and to tell us a bit about them and their families
  - Ages and genders of their brothers and sisters if they have and who lives with them

We want to know a bit about you and your friends...

- Those of you here today - how do you know each other? And for how long?
- How important is online/the internet to you all?
  - Do you all think and feel the same about online/the internet and if no, how come?
  - What are the main differences about how you all feel?
  - Why do you think you’re not all the same/are all the same?
  - Does it matter or affect your friendship in any way that you have different points of view?
- How does the time you spend online/on the internet compared to other forms of media? How much time do you spend in a typical week on the internet/online versus...
  - Watching TV/movies?
  - Reading books/magazines?
  - Playing on games consoles?

MODERATOR TO OBSERVE DYNAMIC HERE – IT’S IMPORTANT THE ‘LESS INTERNET SAVVY’ IN THE TRIADS ARE NOT LEFT OUT OF THE CONVERSATION

Now, what about ‘friends online’

- Do you have friends that are only online friends?
- Are these different to the ones we’ve just talked about (offline – ones you see face to face?)
- Is the way you make friends different online versus offline?
- What do you find easier? Is one easier than the other? Tell me about the difference?
- How do you make friends online – how does it differ to making friends offline?
  - *Exactly how* does this tend to happen i.e. is there a usual process that happens? *Where* do you tend to make them?
- Do you behave differently with friends online? If so how? Are you more honest? Do you tell them more or less than offline friends; is it different as you don’t see them face to face? Do these online friends know the “real you”?
- What is the difference between a friend on Facebook vs. a follower on Instagram or Twitter
- Do you follow any YouTubers? If so which ones and how well do you feel you know YouTubers you follow?

**FOR UNDER 12s** - this section may be much quicker if they do not have online friends in the same way but we will talk about friends they have made via sites like Moshi Monsters, Club Penguin or Movie Star Planet and discuss in the same way as above but will simpler language:

- Do you have friends on any sites you go on?
- Did you know these friends before?
- How did they become your friends?
- What do you talk about online?
- Do you know anything about them?
- Do they feel like your other friends you get to play with at all?
- If so how and if not how are they different?

### 3. Role models and influencers (10 MINS)

MODERATOR TO ASK ALL THE KIDS WHO THEIR INFLUENCERS ARE – NOT JUST MORE TALKATIVE AND PROBE IF WHY IF THERE ARE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION THROUGHOUT GUIDE

- Where do you think you get your opinions from? (People, places, online/offline?)
  - *Probe to understand level of parents' and schools' influence here*
- Are there people who you would say you really look up to and admire?
- Who are they, are they online or offline?
- Would you call them a role model, or something else?
- What kinds of people, or qualities (good things) about people do you like?
- When you see people with these qualities online, how does it make you feel?
- And when you see photos/videos/stuff about these role models it changes the way you think, feel or behave?
- Has this ever happened to you?

Now, thinking about role models/influencers and trust:

- If a celebrity says that something is good, do you believe them; if they are into saving animals do you think your friends/you are more likely to be into saving animals? Can you think of any examples where you have seen a celebrity into something and then you wanted it/to be like it?
- Do you find it hard sometimes to give your own opinion on something if your friends and your role models think differently?
- Who are the people in your life that you tend to believe all/most/some of the time?
- And any that you definitely don't believe and why?

**FOR UNDER 12s** - we will need to use more straight-forward language where needed and the word "influencers" might not be understood – we will use language like 'who do you look up to, who are the people and celebrities in your life that you'd like to be like, like to meet and believe what they stand for and say'... we can use the above and if they are struggling in any way it is important that we ask the questions in an more simplistic way (we are used to doing this at Sherbert and will need to be aware of those who need extra help of questions simplifying – or also potentially realising that some of the questions may not be relevant to the younger age ranges).

### 4. Trusted information (5 MINS)

- In general where do you go for information that you trust (can be online or offline)
- Who do you trust, where would you go for the following types of things:
  - Information on or buying new clothes or for ideas
  - Buying tickets for a concert/comedy etc.
  - News
  - Personal issues and worries
  - Gossip/celebs or for a school assignment (probe all)
- Do you go to lots of places or just one or two?
- Are some more trustworthy/valid than others?
- How do you know which places are best?
- How do you think this changed over time as you've got a bit older? How do you identify a trustworthy source now? How does that compare with when you were younger?
- Do you know who / what you can't trust in the offline and online worlds? How do you know this?
- Do you discuss this with friends at all?

### 5. Favourite devices (5 MINS)

- You've brought along your favourite devices – let's have a look at them quickly

- Which devices have you all bought and why?
- What are all the things you like to do on/with it?
- What makes them your favourite?
- What can you do with this device that you couldn't with one of the others mentioned i.e. why is it so great?
- How long have you had this device?
- What about if you didn't have it – how would you feel? If it went for a few days, a month, forever?

### 6. Favourite sites and apps (5 MINS)

- What are your favourite top of mind apps and sites?

Moderator to get a sense of all their activities in the online world for probing later e.g. playing, watching content, shopping, communicating via social media sites, finding information including for school and personal use etc.)

- How often do you go on them/how much time spend on them?
- Why do you like them so much? What makes them favourites?
- What do these apps/sites – bring to your day to day lives? Could you live without them?
- Looking overall at the apps/sites you are going on most, what are you spending most of your time doing? *Probe to understand overall balance between communicating vs. gaming, vs. research/homework etc.* What proportion of time would you say you devote to each in a typical day/week?
- WHAT DEVICE DO YOU NORMALLY LOOK AT EACH SITE/APP ON? (include media player use e.g. iPlayer, Netflix etc)
- How do you find out about new sites/apps?
- How often do you get or find new ones?

### 7. Mobile devices (5 MINS)

- Thinking about your use of your mobile phones, how often do you text? Versus make calls? Versus go online/use the internet?
  - What proportion of your usage would you say is spent on these things?
  - What do you most / least of?
- Why do you text, call, send pictures? How do you decide which to do?
- Is it different for certain friends, family, etc?
- Take us through what goes on when you are away from home or your friends and you're 'keeping in touch'?
- Ever been any issues within your friendship group?
- If so can you tell us what happened?

**IN THIS SECTION WE HAVE 40 MINS TO EXPLORE AS MANY OF THESE DIFFERENT SITE TYPES AS POSSIBLE:**

### ROTATE ORDER ACROSS FIELDWORK

OVERALL, MODERATOR TO OBSERVE DYNAMIC AND HOW BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES BETWEEN LEADER AND FOLLOWERS IS DIFFERENT.

THE FOCUS IS COVERING ALL PROBES WITH THE TRIADS – TIMINGS ARE RATHER TIGHT SO HAVE LESS TIME FOR SURFING THE INTERNET (THIS WILL BE COVERED IN DEPTHS AND UNMODERATED SESSIONS).

### **8a. Looking in more detail at a favourite... 'SEARCH' SITE/ENGINE e.g. Google, Bing, Yahoo or Ask**

- What do you use sites like this for?
- Do you use them differently if it's for school vs., personal use

R:

- Do you ever see other people's internet searches – is this something you/your friends are happy to share? If not, why not
- Does anyone see yours – what do you think we could understand about you if we were to look at your internet searches?
- How and why do sites like this exist – is this something you think about
- Do you have any idea how they might make money?

T:

- Do you know if there are any rules for what they can and can't say/put up on sites like this?
- Do you think all the pages and links recommended are equally as good – or are some better than others (moderator probe trust)?
- How do you normally choose which ones you should look at?
- How far down the page/on to next pages would you go?
- How many links would you look at when searching for something?
- If you don't find what you're looking for – what do you do next?

### **8b. Looking in more detail at ... 2 FAVOURITE SOCIAL MEDIA SITES e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Vine, Snapchat, MovieStar Planet, Moshi etc.**

**FOR UNDER 12s** - we need to be aware in this section that they may not have been on any social media sites (and even if they have we need to be aware that some aren't appropriate for their age range and therefore make sure we look at age appropriate sites within the session and should the discussion be about those not aimed at them we can continue – but we won't look at these sites with them)

- Do you know the term social media? (if not we will explain)
- How many social media accounts do you have?
- How many have you signed up for vs. how many do you use? (probe why more than one if they have)
- Do you have a preference for mainly photos/pictures or mainly text sites? If so why?
- What are you using these different sites for? Do they play different roles in your life, what are they?
- To what extent are you following famous people through social media sites i.e. celebrities, sports people etc.? How does this compare with people you actually know personally?
- Have you ever set up your own website/channel?
- When did you first set up this account(s)? Do you remember?

R:

- How often do you put up posts (visual or text based)?
- What about commenting on other people's pictures or comments?
- And videos, how often do you do that?
- What kinds of things do you like putting up on a site like this?
- What difference is there, if any, in how you feel about putting up a text/status update online versus a picture? How do they differ?
- Which do you enjoy putting up more and why?

- Is there anything you wouldn't put up, or you'd be cross or disappointed at your friends if they put up?
- What are the good things about sites like these?
- Do you know how or why sites like this exist – how do you think they make money?
- Do you know if there is an age limit on this site?
- What would you do, if you saw something you didn't like – what would you do or what do you think people should do?
- Some social media sites can tag your location – what do you think about that?
- Has what you put on sites like this changed over the last year or so? If so how and why?
- How much do you think about you might come across to other people on social media? How does this influence the types of things you might put up?
- How open/honest are you with the details you share i.e. do you always use your real name, unaltered/non-photo-shopped pictures etc.? Why/why not?
- Do you know if you can delete old photos or posts if you don't want them on the internet any more – how easy is it to do this?
- How do you think you'll feel about your Facebook or Instagram photos in the future? Is this something you ever think about? Talk with your friends?
- What might happen if these photos or posts stayed on the internet for 20 years – ever thought about how could that affect you when you are older?
- Is there anything in particular that you do because of this, or that you think you might do differently in the future? What/why?

T:

- For the different people you follow, do you question what they are saying?
  - Do you trust or believe what they say?
  - Probe different user-groups and entities they are following, to see the degree of trust for official or semi-official sources/brands
  - Do you trust/believe the celeb pages/feeds you look at and read i.e. if they believe they are written by the celeb, have any ulterior purpose, etc
- Do they know if there are there rules for what they can and can't say/put up on sites like this?
- Do you think young people your age always believe what they see and read on sites like this?
- What information do you share with people on this site, or let them see?
- Who gets to see what – what are the different 'levels' you have (if any)?
- What happens to the information that gets put up on sites like this – do you know or ever think about this?
- Where does the information 'go'? Who is able to access it?
- Do you know if there are there any differences between what happens to photos and text online?
- Is this something you have ever checked out before?
- If so was it important for you to find this out before you went on? For what reasons?
- What enables you to know that these sites are safe for people like you to use?

#### EXERCISE:

Sort card exercise of 'who can see what information' e.g. we'll ask respondents their different types of online friends/followers and then prompt with cards of different types of things you're able to post e.g. photos, locations, thoughts, feelings etc. typically found on social media accounts – then prompt with questions

#### 8c. Looking in more detail at a favourite... INFORMATION SITE (E.g. Wikipedia, a blog, sites you've found on Google etc.)

- What are the different places online you'd go to get more information or facts on something?
- What are the different times you might look to different sites to 'find stuff out'?
- Allow spontaneous and then probe difference:
  - Between for school work (e.g. learning, revising, for a topic when you don't know something etc)
  - For personal use (e.g. looking for information about favourite interests and hobbies, when you have any questions to answer, or when you hear about something in the news etc)
- Do you use them differently if it's for school vs. personal use?
- Moderator to probe if the BBC is mentioned and ask:
  - What kind of information site is the BBC?

R:

- How do sites like this exist – how do you think they make money

T:

- Do you think there are there rules for what they can and can't say/put up on sites like this?
- Do you think the information on these sites is right or correct? What makes you think this?
- Do you think people should believe the information sites like this give you?
- Who do you think writes this information on this site?
- How many places or sites would you look at when searching for information on something?
- If you look at different places – what different places would you pick and why?
- Do you ever get different information from different places on the same topic that doesn't 'match' / tell you the same thing? What do you then? How do you know what's right?

#### **8d. Looking in more detail at a favourite... NEWS SITE (e.g. BBC, Sky, Newsround, ITV etc.)**

- Do you ever go to news sites? If so which ones and why?
- What reason would you visit them for and how often is this typically?
- Why do you think you go to this site more often?
- What do you use sites like this for typically e.g. learning, interest, revising, in conversation when you don't know something?

R:

- What would you do, if you saw something you didn't like – what would you do or what do you think others your age do if they see something they wish they hadn't?
- Do you ever share or talk about this type of information? With online or offline friends?
- Do you feel ok about talking about news with friends – do you share same opinions or have different views?

T:

- Do you think news sites tell us about everything that happens all over the world – do you believe what they say or do you think they sometimes leave out some information?
- Why do some news sites tell/write different stories – how come they're not the same? (Is this something they have seen/watched are even aware of?)
- Do you think there are rules for what they can and can't say/put up on sites like this?
- Do you think people your age, you and your friends believe what they see and read on sites like this?
- How do these sites decide what to put up and in what order – who decides what is most important do you think?
- And how do you decide what's most important when looking at a news site?

**FOR UNDER 12s** - we will take their lead here as to what sites they look at – as it maybe that they don't visit news sites and/or if they do they are more aimed at their own age group)

**8e. Looking in more detail at a favourite... RETAIL SITE (e.g. eBay, Amazon, Topshop, ASOS, Argos etc.)**

- What are your favourite sites where you browse or buy items from (if applicable?)
- Do you visit these to browse, get inspiration or actually buy clothes/shoes/items from?
- How frequently do you buy things online (vs. just looking or ordering, but not buying)?
- Who pays for things – you or your parents?
- How do you pay – who enters the details/are they stored somewhere?

R:

- Can anyone get hold of your details and so what do you think they could do?
- If buying a brand, do you go to their site or somewhere else?
- If so, why?
- What do you think of buying something from less well known sites – what are the positives or negatives?
- Has anything you've bought ever not arrived or heard this has happened to someone you know?

T:

- What sites do you buy from all the time/or have bought from before?
- What about a site you've not bought from before – if there was something you wanted from there, would you buy from them?
- Where do you think the information you've put in (name, address, card details) goes – who do you think uses them or 'keeps' them? Something you have ever thought about?
- Who do you think uses it/has access to it?
- Why do you think they need all the information they take?

**EXERCISE:**

*Sort card exercise – we'd show the kids/teens different icons they might see on a retail site to see if they know what each of them mean*

**8f. Looking in more detail at a favourite... USER-GENERATED SITE e.g. YouTube, Blogger, Tumblr, Facebook, Instagram, Vine**

IF THEY PICK SAME SITE AS ALREADY DISCUSSED, SEE IF THEY USE ANOTHER SITE; IF NOT COVER THESE PROBES TOO FOR SAME SITE.

- Do you ever go on sites where people your age/or another age, put up their own photos, videos or comments?
- Which sites are these?
- What do you normally do on these sites – just browse, or upload yourself, or comment?
- Are there any people you follow regularly, or look at their sites regularly?

R:

- Ever thought how sites like this exist – how do you think they make money?
- What are the good things about sites like this?
- What about the not so good – have you got any examples?

- Do you know if there is an age limit on this site?
- Why do you think there might be an age restriction?
- Have you heard about any issues with this site?
- Can you delete old videos if you don't want them on the internet any more – how easy is it to do this?
- Do you know/think it is possible for someone to find a video of you in the future even if you'd deleted it?
- As we asked earlier – what do you think might happen if these videos stayed on the internet for 20 years – how could that affect you?
- Some sites can tag your location – what do you think about that

T:

- Do you know if there are rules for what they can and can't say/put up on sites like this?
- Do you think people your age believe what they see and read on sites like this?
- Do you know or ever think about who are the most influential people on this kind of site?
- What kind of effect do you think these influential people can have on people your age, or younger (probe positive and not positive impact)?
- What information do you share with people on this site, or let them see?
- Do you know who gets to see what – what are the different 'levels' you have (if any)?
- How often do you put up posts (visual or text based)?
- What about commenting on other people's videos, how often do you do that?
- What kinds of things do you like putting up on a site like this?
- What about what you wouldn't put up, or you'd be cross at your friends if they put up?

EXERCISE:

*Let's see if we can 'discover' a new YouTuber/cool video – ask kids or teens how they might go about it, and probe as they search and find a new user generated site – where they're searching, what they're searching for, how they pick which videos to watch, how they filter out other videos/other YouTubers etc.*

### 8g. Looking in more detail at a favourite... APP

- We discussed earlier some of your favourite apps – thinking about your current favourites:
- Where do you hear, find out about new ones?
- What happens when you find one you want – do you go and download it, or would you do anything else beforehand?
- Who typically pays (if it is one that costs) for apps if you download them – are these details automatically stored or do you have to enter new details each time?

R:

- How do you think apps make money (especially the free ones) or why do people make them?
- What are all the things you would look for when first downloading an app?
- What about the permissions they ask just before you download – have you ever been asked about whether you have permissions to download something? Do you read them if you are?
- Do you notice them – how do you feel?
- Have you ever had any issues when downloading or using apps?
- How has the way you look for new apps changed as you've got older?

T:

- Do you know if there are rules for what apps can be released/put on the apps store?
- Do you know if anyone make an app and put it up on the app store?

## **8h. Looking in more detail at a favourite... EMAIL/COMMUNICATION SITE (E.g. instant messenger, Skype, Yahoo, Gmail, Hotmail etc.)**

- Do you have and/or use an email account?
- How long have you had this email account(s) – when did you sign up?
- Who do you typically email and how frequently? And who do you get emails from?
- Why use email vs. texts or messaging apps?
- How does your email use compare to your instant messages, mobile texts or app texts that you send?
- Which do you use for what?

R:

- Do you know what do people mean when they say “spam” or “junk” mail?
- Have you ever got emails from someone you don’t know?
- Why do you think people send emails to people they don’t know?
- What do you do if you get mail from someone you don’t know?
- Has anyone used your email without your permission?
- Does anyone know your password? What could happen if they did?
- Do you ever think about your email being seen by someone else? In the future?
- Have you ever wished you hadn’t sent some emails? If so why?

T:

- How do you know the email you get is from the person they say they are?
- Do you ever think “xxx might not have written that email”?
- How do you know if it’s really your friend who wrote the email?
- What might happen if it’s not your friend?
- What kinds of information might you not write on an email – is there anything?

## **9. Summing up (10 MINS) FILMING FOR VOX POPS**

MODERATOR TO ASK EACH OF THE KIDS/TEENS TO ANSWER A DIFFERENT QUESTION TO CAMERA, WITH THE VIEW OF THE ‘GROUP’ (BUT THEY CAN SAY THEIR THOUGHTS/BEHAVIOURS IF THEY’RE DIFFERENT TOO IF THEY WANT TO)

Just to recap on the things we’ve talked about today, could you remind me what you thought about:

- What do you think of the internet in general?
- How much is it a part of your life and why?
- What is important to you when it comes to your own personal information?
- How do you protect your information when on the internet?
- What kinds of things do you do to stop people finding out too much about you?
- How much you trust the internet? And how do you know who or what to trust?
- How far you go to look for different views on things online?
- How do you decide if you believe something or not when on the internet?

**Thank and close 😊**

## D Discussion guide – Accompanied surfs



Lighterman House  
26 – 36 Wharfdale Road  
London N1 9RY  
t: +44 (0)20 3077 2200  
f: +44 (0)20 3070 0950  
[www.sherbertresearch.com](http://www.sherbertresearch.com)  
VAT Reg. No: 820 2894 39  
Company no.: 04661518

### **Project Critical Thinking DEPTH SURFS GUIDE (all ages) 1.5hrs**

March 2014

**Objectives for these sessions are to understand:**

**C. CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE RISKS THEY FACE AROUND PERSONAL DATA AND ACTIVITY ONLINE**

- Are children aware of the risks and repercussions around their personal information and activity, in the short and longer term?
- What do children know about how their personal information could be used and by whom (online vs. offline), and how do they feel about this?
- How do they perceive their online identity/identities, versus reality?
- How significant do they feel the risks to be and how concerned are they about these – both for themselves and for others?
- What if any strategies do they have to manage potential pitfalls? Do they have strategies for dealing with future reputation issues?
- What degrees of anonymity and/or disclosure do they consider when they're online i.e. do they consider anonymity strategies as positive (i.e. means of protection of identity) or negative (i.e. means to hide)?

**D. HOW CHILDREN FILTER AND AUTHENTICATE DIFFERENT SOURCES OF INFORMATION ONLINE**

To find out:

- How online information influences children's options vs. offline sources
- The degree to which children question or seek alternative sources of information
- The extent to which children are "filter bubbles" – i.e. information and activities reinforce their own worlds, rather than offering different views
- The methods they use or don't use to authenticate the validity of different sources of information
- Related to this – the role that trust (their own judgement and that of their peers) plays within the information sources, brands and services used. And how are trust/beliefs formed (e.g. role of social norms etc.)

THE DEPTH SESSIONS: here we will be concentrating on the individual as well as the influence of their close family. We'll be spending more of the session observing surfing and online behaviours, with the young people showing us their current behaviours (similar to the day before but looking for any differences).

We'll also use these sessions to dig further into issues uncovered in the Triads – so depth of exploration on each of the topics covered will be greater.

Many of the questions you'll see are similar to the triad sessions but we will be looking at different sites and 'delving deeper' to ensure we get more individual feedback when it is just one of them! And it will allow us when doing the triads to know if we don't manage to ask all the questions that we will have the depths to do this

Where appropriate we will adapt the language needed for the younger audience and at certain times it will be clear that some sections may not be relevant to the under 12s.

WE WILL HAVE ALREADY MET THESE KIDS/TEENS THE DAY BEFORE SO WE WON'T NEED TO SPEND AS LONG ON THE INTRODUCTION SECTION – JUST QUICK RECAP AND WE WILL TELL THEM THIS IS WHAT WE ARE DOING SO THEY UNDERSTAND WHY WE ARE REPEATING SO MANY OF THE QUESTIONS – AND THAT IF THEY ANSWER DIFFERENTLY THEN THAT IS OK!

### 1. Them and their family (10 MINS)

- Quick recap about them and their families
  - Ages and genders of their siblings

Tell me a bit about YOUR FAMILY and how they feel about technology generally:

- What technology devices do you have in your house and what different devices does everyone own or use?
- Who uses their devices the most/least?
- What about your feelings about the internet – can you tell us about the different opinions in your household? How does everyone feel about it and how do opinions differ?
- Why do you think there might be differences of opinion?
- Does anyone limit your use of the internet or control what you do?
- And if so how do you feel about that? And why is this do you think?
- Do you think you understand more or less than your parents when it comes to computers, tablets and the internet and why?
- If you do understand more than your parents, what kinds of things do your parents not understand? How come?
- What about you, what things do you find tricky or not quite ‘get’/understand?
- Do you think your parents re: more cautious/careful on the internet than you?
- Why do you think that might be?
- Do they do different things online to you?
- How does the time you spend online/on the internet compared to other forms of media? How much time do you spend in a typical week on the internet/online versus...
  - Watching TV/movies?
  - Reading books/magazines?
  - Playing on games consoles?

### 2. Role models and influencers (5 to 10 MINS)

- Where do you think you get your opinions from? (people, places, online/offline?)
  - *Probe to understand level of parents’ and schools’ influence here*
- Do you find it hard sometimes to give your own opinion on something if your friends and your role models think differently? Has this ever happened – can you think of any examples?
- Who are the people in your life that you tend to believe all/most/some of the time

### 3. Trusted information (5 MINS)

- When you need information about anything where will you tend to go to find it online?
- Are some sites more trustworthy/valid than others? How do you know this? How do you know/decide which places/sites are best?
- If you hear about something at school or from a friend do you sometimes go and check it out online? (got any examples of comments, stories etc. everyone is talking about amongst your friends, at school now or in the past?)
- How do you think this changed over time as you’ve got a bit older? How do you identify a trustworthy source now? How does that compare with when you were younger?

### 4. Favourite devices (5 MINS)

- Of all the devices you own, get to use regularly, remind us what is your favourite one and why?
- How long have you had this device? Is there a better version of it?
- What about if you didn’t have it – how would you feel (for a week, a month, forever?)

## 5. Favourite sites and apps (5 MINS)

- Remind us of your current favourite apps and sites?
- Why do you like them so much?
- What does this site/app bring to you/your friends' lives?
- Anything you don't like about it or you'd do to improve it?
- Looking overall at the apps/sites you are going on most, what are you spending most of your time doing? *Probe to understand overall balance between communicating vs. gaming, vs. research/homework etc.*

## 6. Mobile devices (5 MINS)

- Thinking about your use of your mobile phones, how often do you text? Versus make calls? Versus go online/use the internet?
  - What proportion of your usage would you say is spent on these things?
  - What do you most / least of?
- How often do you text? Versus make calls?
- Why do you text, call, send pictures? How do you decide which to do?
- Is it different for certain friends, family, etc?
- Take us through what goes on when you are away from home or your friends and you're 'keeping in touch'?
- Ever been any issues within your friendship group?
- If so can you tell us what happened?

**IN THIS SECTION WE HAVE 50-55 MINS TO EXPLORE AS MANY OF THESE DIFFERENT SITE TYPES AS POSSIBLE:**

**ROTATE ORDER ACROSS FIELDWORK**

FOR ALL DIFFERENT SITES DISCUSSED WE'D LIKE TO VISIT AT LEAST ONE EXAMPLE FOR EACH AND PROBE WHILST LOOKING AT THE ACTUAL SITE. PROBE ALL ELEMENTS OF THE PAGE, AFTER ASKING FOR SPONTANEOUS THOUGHTS AND REACTIONS - IDEALLY WE'D LIKE TO VISIT DIFFERENT SITES TO THE ONES WE LOOKED AT THE DAY BEFORE!

### 7a. Looking in more detail at a favourite... 'SEARCH' SITE/ENGINE e.g. Google, Bing, Yahoo or Ask

BROWSE SITE TOGETHER AND PROBE ALL SYMBOLS, SECURITY ICONS, ADVERTS, SEARCH RESULTS ETC.

- Let's look together at a search engine site... which is top of mind for you?
- What do you use sites like this for?
- Do you use them differently if it's for school vs., personal use?
- Shall we try to find some information out? Show me what you do when you need to look up something... (we can give ideas to them if they don't have or can't think of something)

Whilst surfing we will ask the following types of questions as well as allowing time to just observe behaviour and let them 'play/look'.

R:

- Do you ever see other people's internet searches – is it something you'd share?
- If not, why not?
- Does anyone ever see yours?

- What do you think we could understand about you if we were to look at your internet searches?
- How do you think sites like this exist? Ever thought about how they might make money?

T:

- Do you know if there are rules for what they can and can't say/put up on sites like this?
- Do you think all the pages and links recommended are equally as good – or are some better than others (moderator probe trust) – how do you decide when looking up which link to go to?
- How far down the page/on to next pages do you tend to go?
- How many links to you tend to look at when searching for something?
- If you don't find what you're looking for – what do you then do?

EXERCISE:

*Search for something they typically look for on a regular basis and tell them “imagine I’m an alien (or an old non-techie person for the older kids who might find this a bit patronising) , and I’ve never even heard of the internet, and never seen a website – tell me what is on each page... what’s along the top, what’s down the side, what’s being listed out. And I want you to tell me why you think it’s there on the page”.*

*Moderator to probe: personalized advertising (without asking directly), ranking of results, different search results, sponsored advertising, why some pages come in above others and degree of trust.*

## **b. Looking in more detail at ... 2 FAVOURITE X SOCIAL MEDIA SITES e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Vine, Snapchat, MovieStar Planet, Moshi etc.**

BROWSE SITE TOGETHER AND PROBE ALL SYMBOLS, SECURITY ICONS, ADVERTS, SEARCH RESULTS ETC.

**FOR THE UNDER 12S** - we will ask a few questions to decide if this is a section we will continue with or not – they may or may not have any social media sites or might be on sites like Movie Star Planet, Moshi Monsters etc. – we will also know this from the session the day before to know whether it is an area to continue to explore or not.

- Remind us how many social media accounts do you have?
- Do you know how many have you signed up for vs. how many do you use?
- Do you have a preference for mainly photos/pictures or mainly text sites?
- What are you using these different sites for? Do they play different roles in your life, what are they?
- To what extent are you following famous people through social media sites i.e. celebrities, sports people etc.? How does this compare with people you actually know personally?
- Have you ever set up your own website/channel?
- When did you first set up this account(s) – do you remember, when and why you set it up?

R:

- How often do you put up posts (visual or text based)?
- What about commenting on other people's pictures or comments – how often do you interact, comment?
- What makes you comment?
- When was the last time you commented? Can you show us?
- What about video? How often do you watch, put up videos? What are they about?
- What other kinds of things do you like putting up on a site like this?
- What difference is there, if any, in how you feel about putting up a text/status update online versus a picture? How do they differ?
- Which do you enjoy putting up more and why?
- Is there anything you wouldn't put up or you'd be cross/upset at your friends if they put up?

- What are the good things about sites like this?
- Have you ever thought about how and why sites like this exist? And ever thought about how they might make money?
- Do you know if there is an age restriction on any of these sites?
- Ever seen something you didn't like on any of these sites?
- What would you do if you did or did you do? Any advice for others if they were too?
- Some social media sites can tag your location – what do you think about that? (do they get what this means?)
- Has how you have used the site changed at all over time? If so how and what's changed?
- How much do you think about you might come across to other people on social media? How does this influence the types of things you might put up?
- How open/honest are you with the details you share i.e. do you always use your real name, unaltered/non-photo-shopped pictures etc.? Why/why not?
- Do you know if you can or how you delete old photos or posts if you don't want them to be there any more – how easy/difficult is it to do this?
- How do you think you'll feel about your photos and videos you've put up in the future? Something you ever think about?
- What might happen if these photos or posts stayed on the internet for 20 years – how do you think this might affect you?
- Is there anything in particular that you do because of this, or that you think you might do differently in the future? What/why?

T:

- Tell me about the people you follow and for all of these - do you always trust or believe what they say?
  - Probe different user-groups and entities they are following, to see the degree of trust for official or semi-official sources/brands
- Do you trust/believe the celeb pages/feeds?
  - Do you know who writes their pages? (i.e. do they believe they are written by the celeb, have any ulterior purpose, etc)
- Do you know if there are rules for what they can and can't say/put up on sites like this?
- Do you think people your age believe what they see and read on sites like this?
- What information do you share with people on this site, or let them see?
- Who gets to see what – what are the different 'levels' you have (if any)?
- Do you have any idea what happens to the information that gets put up on sites like this? Where does it 'go'? Who is able to access it? Is this something you ever think about?
- Do you know if there are any differences between what happens to photos and text online? Is this important to you? If so why and if not why not?
- What enables you to know that these sites are safe for people like you/your friends to use?

### **c. Looking in more detail at a favourite... INFORMATION SITE**

**(E.g. Wikipedia, a blog, sites you've found on Google etc.)**

BROWSE SITE TOGETHER AND PROBE ALL SYMBOLS, SECURITY ICONS, ADVERTS, SEARCH RESULTS ETC.

- What are the different places online you go to get more information or facts on something? Show us...
- When might you go online to 'find stuff out'? Looking for spontaneous first then probe difference:
  - Between for school work (e.g. learning, , revising, for a topic when you don't know something)

- For personal use (e.g. looking for information about favourite interests and hobbies, when you have any questions to answer, or when you hear about something in the news etc.)
- Do you use them differently if it's for school vs. personal use? If so how and show us if you can?
- Moderator to probe if the BBC is mentioned and ask:
  - What kind of information site is the BBC?

R:

- Ever thought why sites like this exist? How do you think they make money?

T:

- Do you think there are there rules for what they can and can't say/put up on sites like this? If so what do you think they are?
- Do you think the information on these sites is right or correct – do you believe everything to be true? What makes you think this?
- Do you think people should believe the information sites like this give you?
- Who do you think writes this information on this site?
- How many places or sites would you look at when searching for information on something?
- If you look at different places – what different places would you pick and why?
- Do you ever get different information from different places on the same topic that doesn't 'match' / tell you the same thing? What do you then? How do you know what's right?

EXERCISE:

*Let's pretend you've been asked by school to find out more about the history of the Winter Olympics (or an idea of their own) ... where would you go. Show us all the different places you'd look and what information you'd take from each site visited (if multiple). Probe here about any Russian sites, and the extent to which they trust them.*

**WITH THE UNDER 12s** - we might make this task a little easier and ask them to look up information on a famous person of their choice)

#### **d. Looking in more detail at a favourite... NEWS SITE (e.g. BBC, Sky, Newsround, ITV etc.)**

BROWSE SITE TOGETHER AND PROBE ALL SYMBOLS, SECURITY ICONS, ADVERTS, SEARCH RESULTS ETC.

- How interested are you in the news?
- Do you ever go on news sites?
- What reason would you visit them for how often do you reckon you do this?
- Why do you think you go to this site more/most often?
- What do you use sites like this for typically e.g. learning, interest, revising, in conversation when you don't know something?

R:

- Have you ever seen anything on a site like this that you wish you hadn't? If so can you share what it was with us?
- Do you ever share or talk about this type of information? With online or offline friends?
- Do you feel ok about talking about news with friends – do you share same opinions or have different views? If different is this ok?

T:

- Do you believe certain news sites over other ones?
- If so how come?

- Which part of stories do you look at – do you read the headlines or look at the top 10 most important/read stories?
- How do you decide what's most important?
- How does the site decide what's most important?
- Do you think the news sites you look at tell you everything that happens all over the world? Or do you think they might leave out some information? And if so why?
- Why do some news sites tell/write different stories – how come they're not the same?
- Do you think there are rules for what they can and can't say/put up on sites like this? If so what do you think some of these rules are?
- Do you think people your age, you and your friends believe everything that they see and read on sites like this?

**e. Looking in more detail at a favourite... RETAIL SITE (e.g. eBay, Amazon, Topshop, ASOS, Argos etc.)**

BROWSE SITE TOGETHER AND PROBE ALL SYMBOLS, SECURITY ICONS, ADVERTS, SEARCH RESULTS ETC.

- What are your favourite sites where you browse or buy items from (if applicable?)
- Do you visit these to browse, get inspiration or actually buy clothes/shoes from?
- How frequently do you buy things online (vs. just looking or ordering, but not buying)?
- Who pays for things – you or your parents?
- How do you pay – who enters the details/are they stored somewhere?

R:

- Do you know if anyone can get hold of your details and so what do you think they could do with these details?
- If buying a brand, do you go to their actual site or somewhere else to get products?
- If so, why (this might need explaining a little to the younger under 12s)
- What do you think of buying something from less well known sites? Any good or bad experiences, stories they may have heard?
- Has anything you've bought ever not arrived or heard this has happened to someone you know? Why do you think this may have happened?

T:

- What sites do you buy from all the time/or have bought from before? (you, your family, friends)?
- What about a site you've not bought from before – if there was something you wanted from there, would you buy from them?
- Do you ever do any 'research' before buying from a new site?
- Where do you think the information you've put in (name, address, payment details) goes (ever even thought of this?) – who uses them or 'keeps' them?
- Who do you think uses it/has access to it?
- Why do you think they need all the information they take?
- How did you or do you know that what you've bought will actually turn up in the post/or arrive? (Something you ever think about before buying online?)

**f. Looking in more detail at a favourite... USER GENERATED SITE e.g. YouTube, Blogger, Tumblr, Facebook, Instagram, Vine**

BROWSE SITE TOGETHER AND PROBE ALL SYMBOLS, SECURITY ICONS, ADVERTS, SEARCH RESULTS ETC.

- Do you ever go on sites where people your age/or another age, put up their own photos, videos or comments? If so which sites?

- What do you normally do on these sites – just browse, or upload yourself, or comment? Are there any people you follow regularly, or look at their sites regularly?

R:

- Ever though how sites like this exist – how do you think they make money?
- What are the good things about sites like this?
- What about the not so good – have you got any examples?
- Do you know if there an age restriction on this site, and if so why?
- Have you heard about any issues with this site?
- Would it be possible for someone to find a video/picture of you in the future even if you'd deleted it

T:

- Do you know if there are rules for what they can and can't say/put up on sites like this?
- Do you think people your age believe what they see and read on sites like this?
- Any idea who are the most influential people on this kind of site?
- What kind of affect do you think these influential people can have on people your age, or younger (probe positive and not positive impact)?
- What information do you share with people on this site, or let them see
- Who gets to see what – what are the different 'levels' you have (if any)?
- How often do you put up posts (visual or text based)?
- What about commenting on other people's videos, how often do you do that?
- What kinds of things do you like putting up on a site like this?
- What about what you wouldn't put up, or you'd be cross at your friends if they put up?

**g. Looking in more detail at a favourite... EMAIL/COMMUNICATION SITE  
(E.g. instant messenger, Skype, Yahoo, Gmail, Hotmail etc.)**

BROWSE SITE TOGETHER AND PROBE ALL SYMBOLS, SECURITY ICONS, ADVERTS, SEARCH RESULTS ETC.

- Do you have and/or use an email account and if so remind us how often you use it? How long have you had this email account(s) – when did you sign up?
- Why use email vs. texts or messaging apps?
- How does your email use compare to your instant messages, mobile texts or app texts that you send?

R:

- What do people mean when they say "spam" or "junk" mail?
- Have you ever got emails from someone you don't know?
- Why do you think people send emails to people they don't know?
- What do you do if you get mail from someone you don't know?
- Has anyone used your email without your permission?
- Does anyone know your password? What could happen if they did?
- Do you ever think about your email being seen by someone else? In the future?
- Do you wish you hadn't sent some emails?

T:

- How do you know the email you get is from the person they say they are, how do you make sure it is from who they say they are?
- What might happen if it's not your friend

## h. Looking in more detail at a favourite... NEW SITE NOT VISITED

BROWSE SITE TOGETHER AND PROBE ALL SYMBOLS, SECURITY ICONS, ADVERTS, SEARCH RESULTS ETC.

Now we want to look at a site that you've never seen before, just to get your opinion on it. We want you to find the new site – how do you think you'd go about it? How would you find an interesting new website?

- How often do you visit new sites? Why do you go to new sites?
- How do you find out about new sites?
- What kinds of things would make you want to visit a new site you knew nothing about?  
[MODERATOR TO UNDERSTAND WHAT MOTIVATES KIDS/TEENS TO VISIT NEW WEBSITES AND HOW THEY GO ABOUT FINDING A SITE ALL THEIR FRIENDS ARE TALKING ABOUT]

R:

- Is there an age limit on this site – do you know, how can you tell
- Why do you think there might be an age restriction

T:

- Do you think that everything on this site will be correct or accurate
- Do you think you should trust what you're reading
- What helps people feel they can trust a website like this

EXERCISE:

*As part of this exercise we'd ask respondents to FIND and visit this new site with us, and again, talk us through everything they're seeing, as though explaining it to an alien/ 'old non techy' person who had never seen a website before. Without prompting, ask kids what the security/trust symbols on the websites mean and whether they look out for these or not to determine the things they look out for*

## 9. Summing up (10 MINS)

### FILMING FOR VOX POPS

Just to recap on the things we've talked about today, could you remind me what you said about:

- The differences between you and your family when it comes to technology and the internet specifically
- How your parents do/don't place limits on your use of the internet and why they might/might not do that

RECAP WHAT THEY PERSONALLY THINK ABOUT:

- The importance of the internet to them and their lives/worlds?
- What is important to you when it comes to your own personal information?
- How do you protect your information when on the internet?
- What kinds of things do you do to stop people finding out too much about you?
- How much you trust the internet? And how do you know who or what to trust?
- How far you go to look for different views on things online?
- How do you decide if you believe something or not when on the internet?

MODERATOR TO PROBE ON INTERESTING AREAS REVEALING DURING THE INTERVIEW – WE WILL ADD TO THIS SECTION AS WE PROGRESS THROUGH FIELDWORK AND ONCE WE HAVE CONDUCTED THE TRIADS.

**Thank and close ☺**

## E Research stimulus (friendship triads and accompanied surfs)

### Things they could share on social media (show cards)

Photos of you  
Photos of friends  
Share a story you've read somewhere else  
Like a post or a picture  
Share a list you've read somewhere else  
Share a video you've seen somewhere else  
Comment on a post or picture  
Status update  
Video of you  
Video of friends  
Messages  
Events (e.g. a party you're going to)  
Location  
Who you're following  
Friends list  
Personal info e.g. real name, age, address etc.

### Icons and logos seen online (show cards)

Average Customer Review  
★★★★☆ (3 customer reviews)

Proceed to Checkout



## F Unmoderated session tasks

Please note that this is the word copy version of the tasks. The research participants were given a more visual set of tasks.

### Hello!

Thanks so much for helping us with our research. We hope you have lots of fun taking part.

To complete your task, you have the following items:

- 4 numbered task envelopes for you to do together - they must be opened in number order!
- A flip cam and instructions (the small camera)
- Panasonic HD camera (the bigger one) – this should be on the tripod and placed somewhere where we can see you all in shot (we'll have sorted this for you by the time you're reading this!) – please don't touch this after we've set it up (unless you move about a lot and then you need to check everyone is in view)! Make sure the red light is on and it records all the time!
- You need to complete each task together (as a group), with both cameras filming you - the camera on the tripod to get you all as a group, the flip cam for you to film close ups (of you and what you're doing) – but you don't need to use this one all the time! (again we will have explained) 😊

### Some filming tips:

It's really helpful if you can tell the camera when you're starting a new task (show task envelope to camera) and remember if there's anything you don't want to be filmed then you can turn the camera off briefly BUT don't forget to start it up again!

- Don't forget to leave the lights on in the room at all times during filming - we need to see everyone! 😊
- Make sure there is very little background noise during filming if possible.
- Close doors and try to stop other people coming in as this will interrupt what you're doing.
- When you use the flip camera, film them and also show us what you are talking about on screen etc

With most of the tasks it will probably help if one of you asks the questions, a bit like an interviewer but that doesn't mean that person mustn't answer too! Ask the questions and then have a chat amongst yourselves, please try not to have one word answers. It should feel like a normal chat you have with your mates. Say what you want and don't hold back!

We'll be on hand to help you if you get stuck, via BBM, Whatsapp or you can call us too on our mobiles.

Before we leave we will make sure we are connected!

Most importantly enjoy the hour!

### Timings are important!

WE DON'T WANT YOU TO RUN OUT OF TIME SO...

USE THE STOPWATCH ON ONE OF YOUR PHONES FOR EACH SECTION – GOING OVER BY A COUPLE OF MINUTES IS OK BUT KEEP A CHECK!

AND ALSO MAKE SURE YOU KEEP CHATting FOR THE AMOUNT OF TIME SUGGESTED

AND PLEASE DON'T GET DISTRACTED BY USING YOUR PHONES DURING THE SESSION! (Except for where we ask you to 😊)

### **Task one: Getting to know you (5-10 mins)**

#### **We would like each of you to introduce yourself to the main camera**

Please make sure you each get close enough to the camera that we can really see you! We want close ups of everyone!

#### **One by one, tell us...**

- Your name
- Your age
- And what you like doing when you're not at school

#### **Then tell us how you know each other and what it is that makes you all friends together**

How would you describe your personalities when you're together (e.g. who's the leader, who's quieter, who does everyone go to for advice, who jokes around, who's the most open about sharing personal issues)

Tell us what it's like being your age - the best bits and the worst bits...

### **Task two – Online (15-20 mins)**

#### **Question 1**

Tell us which technology devices you have and what you use them all for and for each device: (phones, laptops, tablets, games consoles etc)

- Say why you like it?
- Why you use it?
- What you use it for?
- Anything you don't like about this device?

Any advice or concerns for someone who hasn't seen one before or wants to use it? Who is this device best for? Anyone who shouldn't use it? And if so why?

#### **Question 2**

What sites and apps do you go on most on your device? (Don't forget to show us which sites/apps and what you do on them!!)

AS YOU ARE DOING THIS ONE OF YOU SHOULD BE THE INTERVIEWER AND CONSTANTLY ASKING EACH OTHER QUESTIONS AS IF YOU ARE DOING A SHOW FOR PEOPLE WHO KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THE INTERNET (Take it in turns to be the interviewer and person talking)

#### **Question 3**

- Do you know what your parents' views are on the internet?
- How different are their views to yours?
- Discuss this between yourselves and everyone must join in!
- Do you know what your school's view is on using the internet? While at school and also for homework / coursework tasks?

### **Task three – Your identity (15 mins)**

Discuss the following as a group: make sure everyone speaks and don't worry if you have different opinions this is great for us to see!

**Question 1:** Do you ever think about what people know about you in the real world (face to face) and then what they know about you online? What are you happy for people to know about you in both worlds?

**Question 2:** Meeting face to face

What if you were meeting a friend of one of your friends for the first time... what would this conversation be like?

How do you make conversation with them? What questions do you ask and what do you answer?

- How do you feel in this situation?

- What would you tell them about yourself? What wouldn't you want to tell them? Why
- What would you want them to think about you?

### Question 3: Meeting online

What if you were meeting someone for the first time online...is this a different type of conversation? In what ways?

- How do you feel in this situation?
- What do you talk about? What do you and don't you tell them?
- How does this differ to meeting face to face, and why is that?
- What would you want them to think about you?

### Task four: opinions (15mins)

#### Question 1:

- When you're on the internet how do you go about finding information that you believe is true/or trust will be good/ok?
- Which sites in particular would you go to AND who do you trust most?

#### Question 2:

In the small envelope there are some different things to discuss and have a conversation about, taking each one out one by one.

For each, answer the following to the camera:

- Which sites in particular would you go to with this in mind?
- Who do you trust and why, when looking for this information?

Where possible, show us what you would do on your device...

#### Question 3:

- If there are lots of different views on something, how do you decide which you believe?
- What or who do you trust most and why?
- Do your family/friends influence your decision?
- Do you ever find it hard to make up your mind?
- Is there someone in your class/group of friends that most of you tend to follow the views of?
- Do you ever wish you could say you think differently but can't/don't?

### And the final question:

Please sum up before you go and all say to camera your thoughts on:

1. HOW IMPORTANT IS THE INTERNET TO YOUNG PEOPLE YOUR AGE?
2. HOW ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERNET FOR YOUNGER BROTHERS AND SISTERS OR THOSE YOUNGER THAN YOU
3. WHAT ARE THE MAIN THINGS TO BE AWARE OF ON THE INTERNET
4. WHAT ARE THE POSITIVES AND NEGATIVES OF BEING ONLINE FOR YOUR AGE?!

#### THAT'S IT!

Thanks so much for taking part – you've been amazing 😊

We will come get the camera from you tomorrow...

#### TASK 4, QUESTION 2 PROMPTS:

- New clothes for an important party!
- You want to get concert tickets for a big concert by your favourite band
- A big news story that you are interested in and you want to know as much about it as possible
- A big school project on something like – The Second World War

Your favourite band are rumoured to be breaking up – you want to find out more! But how?

## G Summary of developmental stages from 8 to 17

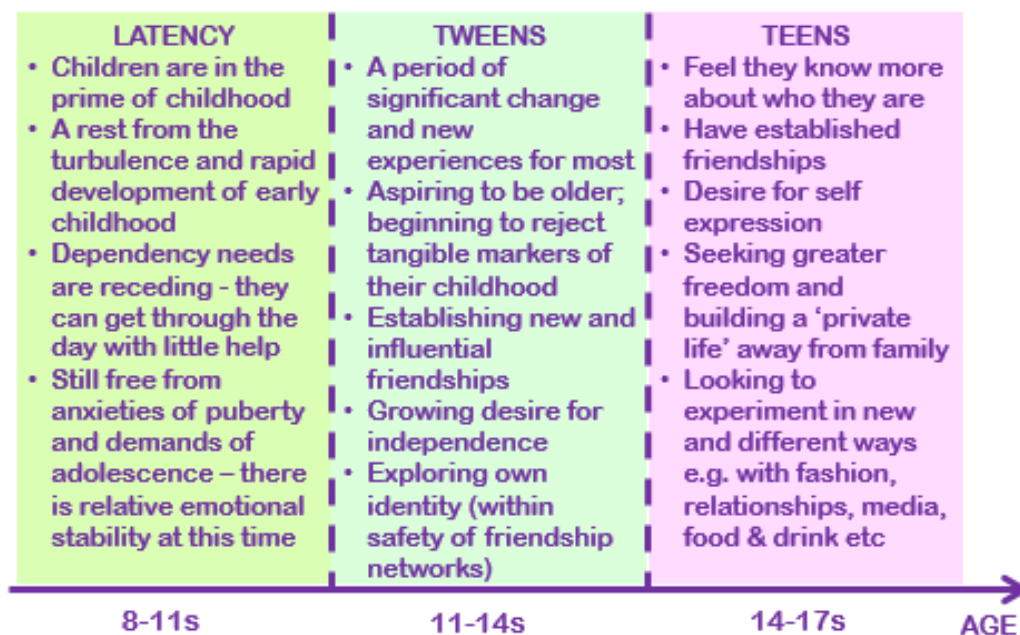


Figure 4 Summary of developmental stages from 8 to 17

## H Device ownership and internet use

### Differences by age

The research found that through the ages of 8 to 17 children change dramatically on a number of levels including physically, emotionally, socially and cognitively. The ownership and use of technology devices also tended to increase with age and as young people gain independence. This research also revealed how device ownership also tended to be skewed according to gender, in line with the particular activities which generally appealed to boys and girls.

#### 8 – 11 year olds

The youngest children in this sample were at the upper end of primary school in years four, five and six. Many of these children personally owned an iPod Touch with WiFi connectivity. Several also had access to a tablet at home, some of which were personally owned while others were shared with parents and / or siblings. Most boys in particular owned or had regular access to a games console, most commonly an Xbox or PlayStation; and nearly all had access in the household to a family pc or laptop.

The most commonly used devices by this age range in this sample were iPods and tablets and use of these was becoming more regular and established, starting from two or three times a week on average and increasing to using most days. Despite the portability of these devices, children reported that internet access was primarily restricted to home due to the WiFi connection required, although it was not uncommon for these children to report looking for WiFi hotspots and asking for access when they visit the homes of friends, family members or even in restaurants.

#### 11 – 14 year olds

On the whole there tended to be a marked increase in device ownership during these years among children in this sample. Coinciding with the transition to secondary school, the majority seemed to acquire their first smartphones early in these years signalling their new level of independence. Beyond this, many reported they had been given or bought laptops for school work and some had tablets of their own. Some boys in the sample who were particularly into gaming received their own desktop gaming PCs during these years while it seemed girls tended to be more likely than boys to have Kindles, although these tended to be in the minority.

Most in this age group reported using their devices daily; their phone and usually at least one other device. Being mobile meant the internet was becoming a more regular feature in their lives; with around one or two hours a day spent online on average initially with this tending to increase as they got older. Gaming for boys in this sample appeared to be an activity forming a regular part of their leisure and relaxation time and on which could take up one to two (or even more) hours per day alone.

#### 14 – 17 year olds

The biggest change among this age group was reported to be increased importance and prominence of their smartphones in their lives. Mobile technology now appeared to be essential for keeping up with their rapidly-changing worlds, the most convenient format of which was their smartphone. Older teenagers tended to take their phones everywhere with them, including to school or college. The girls in this sample stated that at no point in their day would their phones be far from reach.

Young people this age claimed to be 'connected' via their mobiles almost whenever it was possible, and for some this started from the moment they woke up until the time they went to sleep. Indeed, some shared that being part of an online conversation could even prevent them from going to sleep at night and they felt they needed to keep checking their phone in case they missed anything important that was

happening in their social lives. Some boys in this sample admitted to being heavy users of games consoles as they tended to spend more time ‘socialising’ this way online.

### Further differences in internet use

In addition to age, this research highlighted some other factors which also influenced how important internet access was in children and young people’s lives.

#### Environmental factors

This research reinforced that type of environment in which a child grows up tends to have a considerable bearing on their lifestyle and the ways they spend their time, particularly in the years before secondary school. Typically among the children involved in this research, those who lived in more urban and built up areas such as North London, Nottingham and Leeds tended to spend relatively more time indoors compared with children who lived in more rural areas. This led to greater use and value placed on the internet by children from a younger age as a source of entertainment and way to communicate with their friends.

Where children had greater access to ‘safe’ outside space, which tended to be the case in the more rural communities we visited such as Carrickfergus in Northern Ireland, Cheltenham and Brunstane area of Edinburgh, they appeared to be greater priority given to outdoor play. Compared to children at the same age in more built-up areas, they often placed lower importance on the internet and appeared to use the internet less regularly and to spend less time online.

#### Socioeconomic grade factors

There appeared also to be a correlation between socio-economic group (SEG) and children’s use of technology. The difference was less pronounced in terms of ownership since the presence of technology devices in households appeared to be equally distributed across all socio-economic groups. However, there was an indication of difference by SEG with respect to levels of parental mediation of their children’s internet use (frequency, duration and content choice). Children in higher SEG (A/B) households tended to report higher parental involvement compared with those in lower SEG (C2/D) households. In the households where parents were reportedly less involved, children tended to believe that their own technical knowledge of the internet exceeded that of their parents.