



# Children's use of social networking sites: Risks, benefits and outcomes

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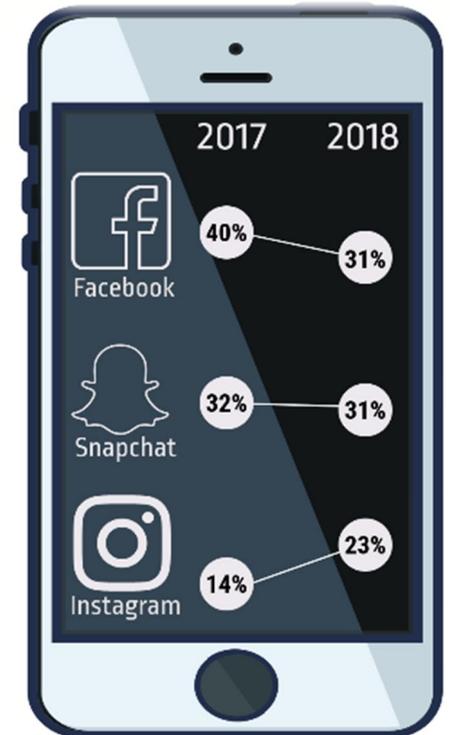
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# Children and social media



Adolescents (12-15)	Children	
	(8-11)	(5-7)
Social media profile <b>87%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>30%</b>
Interacting on YouTube <b>99%</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>96%</b>

Ofcom (2021)



Ofcom (2019)



# Children and social media

## Online self-disclosure



### Social capital

Maintaining friendships  
(bonding)  
Making new friends  
(bridging)

### Self- presentation

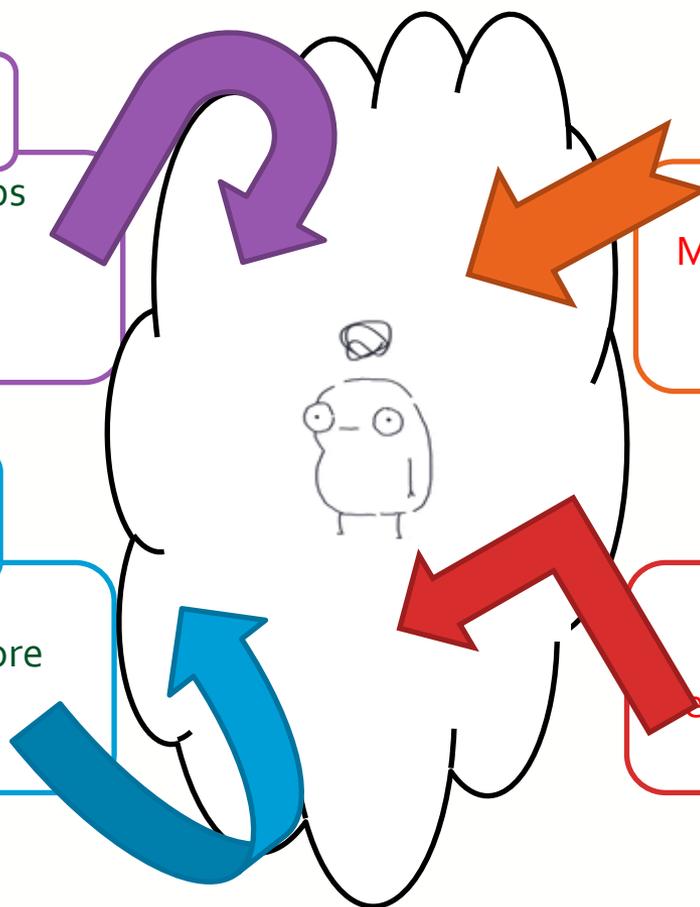
Ease & freedom to explore  
identity

### Over- disclosure

Misjudging trustworthiness of  
online friends

### Cyberbullying

Becoming a cyberbully or  
being a victim of cyberbullying



# Children's behaviours



- 901 participants  
( $M= 10.08$ ,  $SD= 1.13$ ; 52% female).
- Online survey: self-disclosure, social capital, self-presentation, cyberbullying, self-esteem, digital literacy.



- Online self-disclosure predicted cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation.
- Online self-disclosure also predicted bridging social capital (making new friends).
- Online self-presentation predicted bridging social capital (making new friends) and bonding social capital (strengthening pre-existing friendships).

Lots of benefits for children using social media. Main risk is around over-disclosure. Children need to learn about safe online disclosure.



# Children's, parents' and teachers' perceptions



- 15 children ( $M= 9.60$ ; 40% female).
- 14 teachers ( $M= 35.69$ ; 64.3% female).
- 13 parents ( $M= 38.69$ ; 84.6% female).
- 1:1 semi-structured interviews.



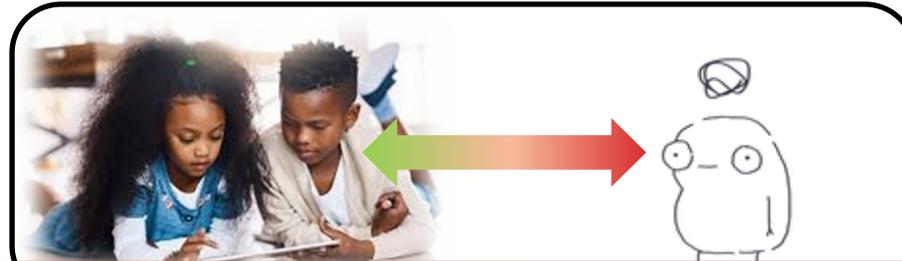
Adults very concerned.  
Mediation behaviours  
often restrictive as a  
result.



Children knowledgeable  
about strangers but lack  
understanding of more  
"realistic" risks.

Adults' mediation behaviours shape children's online use but focus on stranger danger detracts from more likely risks which children lack understanding of.

# Mental health & wellbeing



- 258 participants  
( $M= 9.76$ ,  $SD= 1.19$ ; 46% female).
- Online longitudinal survey (Jan & July): self-disclosure, social capital, self-presentation, cyberbullying, self-esteem, mental health disorders, wellbeing.

Self-esteem

Presenting the false self was associated with higher self-esteem.

Mental health

Bonding social capital associated with poorer mental health.

Wellbeing

Bridging social capital associated with greater wellbeing.

# Take-home points



- Despite age restrictions, younger children are using social networking sites.
- Adults are fearful of stranger danger and this shapes their internet mediation behaviours. This means, though, that children are aware of stranger danger but less aware of more “realistic” risks such as fall-outs with friends.
- Children’s online behaviours are associated with risks and benefits, particularly cyberbullying and social capital.
- Exploring and playing online, such as presenting different selves and making new friendships, are associated with greater self-esteem and wellbeing. In fact, maintaining friendships is associated with poorer mental health.
- **Adults need to shift their perceptions of the risks and benefits of social networking sites and help children to use them safely.**



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